

Disentangling Ethnicity in East Africa, *ca.* 1 – 2010 CE:  
Past Communities in Present Practices

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*For my wife Patience,*

*Subira kuvuta heri*

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### **Abstract**

This dissertation examines how Bantu-speaking communities in eastern Kenya adapted their shared linguistic heritage over the past two millennia to create the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups whose members claim ownership over the region's coastal and inland landscapes, respectively. It documents the integrative connections across this geographical contrast by discerning the social strategies and practices that residents of the region compiled over several centuries and which they now embed in celebratory rituals to distinguish the ethnic identities they have created. Exploring rituals as compilations of symbols that refer to older social strategies disentangles the practices of the past from the modern ethnicities that they legitimate.

Residents of eastern Kenya began to regard the fluid and complementary categories of earlier strategies as elements of rigid ethnic identities and organize their communities as the constituents of ethnic groups only in the twentieth century CE. Rather than extending these colonial categories backwards in time by narrating the history of either the Swahili or Mijikenda ethnic group, the dissertation disentangles the social strategies that eastern Kenya's residents adapted to collaborate as Swahili or Mijikenda from the original contexts in which the forebears of these ethnic groups innovated these strategies. Examining the shared linguistic heritage of Swahili and Mijikenda communities balances the recent emphasis of historians on the modern creation of ethnic groups with an appreciation for the historical depth of the ancestral practices that people draw upon to naturalize and imagine current ethnic identities. Documenting the genealogies of practices that index ethnicities as "things of the past" thus resolves the conundrum that historically constructed ethnicities appear to be primordial.



### Note on Terminology, Spelling, and Languages

Although this dissertation makes use of much linguistic data, I avoid technical linguistic terminology whenever possible. So, for instance, I substitute vocabulary for lexis, grammar for syntax, form for morphology, and sounds for phonology. However, a few conventions of historical linguistics are necessary to understand the data as presented. First, the linguistic data that I present in tables is spelled with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) alongside the standard Latin alphabets used by native speakers to demonstrate slightly different pronunciations that the Latin alphabet obscures. However, since IPA notation is probably unfamiliar to most readers and subtle pronunciation distinctions are usually unnecessary to follow the narrative and understand the arguments of the dissertation, I use standard spellings in the main text almost exclusively. These standard spellings include the following conventions to represent the few sounds in East African languages which have no corollary in English:

ng' (IPA ŋ)      pronounced as “ng” in English “*sing*”

gh (IPA ɣ)      pronounced as “ch” in Scottish *loch*

ph or y (IPA “β”) a voiced bilabial (double-lipped) “b”

' (IPA ʔ)      glottal stop: a silence between sounds

An IPA table is included as Appendix 1; <http://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/ipa/> provides audio samples for each character.

The Bantu languages which are the main focus of the dissertation have a complex system for augmenting the meaning and number (i.e. plurality) of a noun, such as these examples from Kiswahili: m-tu (person), wa-tu (people), ki-tu (thing), vi-tu (things) u-tu

(humanity), *ji-tu* (giant person) *ma-jitu* (giant people). To lessen the confusion of the system of pluralizing nouns, I use nouns' singular forms and append "s" to pluralize them. All non-English words in the text are italicized and listed in the glossary (Appendix 6).

Though many of the "speakers" who are the subject of this dissertation almost certainly mastered several languages and dialects simultaneously, it is convenient to refer to languages one at a time in order to identify which features are shared among languages and which are unique. Linguists use shared linguistic features to group modern languages into language families, such as Northeast Coast Bantu, a group of about fifteen languages in East Africa. When linguists compare the language features shared by the members of these language families they can reconstruct a proto-language, such as Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu, that represents an approximation of the language spoken by the linguistic forebears of modern languages (see Chapter 2). I follow standard conventions of historical linguists by marking reconstructed words with an asterisk and indicating the language or proto-language with the abbreviations listed on the page *xi*. So, for instance, "*\*-nyamal-*, 'be silent' PNEC" indicates that the Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu verb "be silent" has been reconstructed while "*-pik-*, 'cook' St. Sw." indicates that *-pik-* is the verb for "to cook" in the modern dialect of Standard Kiswahili spoken today. Adjectives and unconjugated verbs are preceded by a hyphen. Trailing hyphens on verbs indicate a variable ending that indicates mood (e.g. subjunctive vs. indicative). Finally, I use the following linguistic symbols to demonstrate how vocabulary is inherited or borrowed among languages:

>	=	produces (as in <i>*pik</i> CB > <i>-pik-</i> St. Sw.)
<	=	derived from (as in <i>-pik-</i> St. Sw. < <i>*pik</i> CB)
~	=	cognate ( <i>mlango</i> , “door” St. Sw. ~ <i>muriango</i> , “gate” Rab.)
´	=	High Tone (only marked when available in source material)
`	=	Low Tone (only marked when available in source material)
/x/	=	phonemic transcription
[x]	=	phonetic transcription

## Abbreviations

### Languages

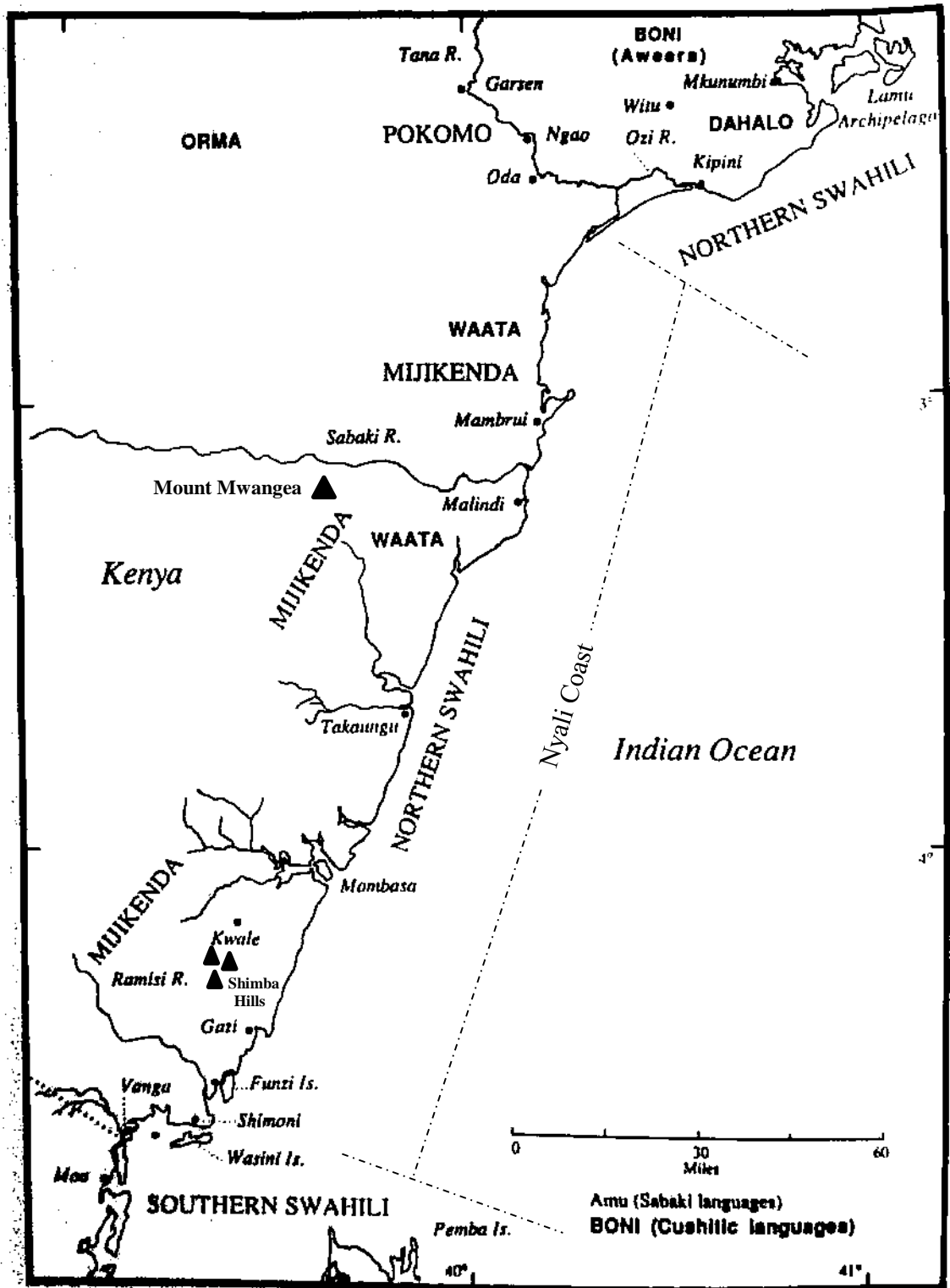
BLR3	Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3 (Tervuren)
CB	Common Bantu (Guthrie)
CK	Central Kenyan Bantu
Dah.	Dahalo
Dig.	Chi-Digo
EB	East Bantu / Mashariki
Gir.	Ki-Giriama
Jom.	Chi-Jomvu
LP	Lower Pokomo
Lug.	Luganda
MK	Mijikenda Dialects
NC	Northern Cushitic
ND	Northern Swahili Dialects
NEC	Northeast Coast Bantu
NESB	Northeast Savanna Bantu
NMK	Northern Mijikenda Dialects
Oro.	Oromo
Pat.	Pate
Pem.	Pemba
PNEC	Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu
Pok.	Pokomo
Port.	Portuguese
PR	Proto-Rift
PSA	Proto-Sabaki Bantu
PSW	Proto-Kiswahili
Rab.	Chi-Rabai
SC	Southern Cushitic
SD	Southern Swahili Dialects
SMK	Southern Mijikenda Dialects
Som.	Somali
St. Sw.	Standard Swahili (Kiunguja)
Tum.	Tumbatu
Ung.	Unguja
UP	Upper Pokomo
Vum.	Vumba

### Pottery Wares

ETT	Early Tana Tradition Ware
LTT	Late Tana Tradition Ware

Archives

CMS	Church Missionary Society (Microfilms)
KNA	Kenya National Archives
RRD	Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum, Audio-Visual Department, Mombasa, Kenya



Map 1: Eastern Kenya and Nyali Coast  
 (Adapted from Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 42;  
 permission granted by authors)

## Chapter 1

### Introduction:

#### **Integrating the Historical Landscapes of Eastern Kenya**

*We all came from Singwaya,  
but we separated here.*

-Pembe wa Bembere<sup>1</sup>

Bantu-speakers began making their homes along the coasts and hills of East Africa near the beginning of the Current Era. Their early communities resembled the scattered hamlets and villages where most of their modern descendants live today. However, while most East Africans now affiliate with an ethnic group, their ancestors organized their communities through lineages, clans, title societies, and age-sets—a set of strategies that they accumulated and modified over millennia. This dissertation examines how the communities that Bantu speakers formed in eastern Kenya adapted these strategies to meet the particular challenges that eventually came to focus their economic and political activities on the coastal town of Mombasa.

Modern Mombasa is an island, a city, and a district of Kenya whose influence extends far beyond its gazetted borders. While Mombasa's patricians have sometimes claimed authority over communities in the Lamu Archipelago and the off-shore

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation: the Mijikenda of Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1981), 54.

Tanzanian island of Pemba, they usually limited their ambitions to the Nyali Coast. From Mombasa the fertile but narrow coastal plain of Nyali stretches northward to the town of Malindi and southward to the Uмба River near Kenya's border with Tanzania. To its west, a steep escarpment from Mount Mwangea in the north to the Shimba Plateau in the south joins the coastal plain to an arid scrub-brush plain known as *nyika*, or "bush." Though the residents of these inland hills and valleys have entangled themselves in Mombasa's affairs for centuries, they generally flourished as autonomous communities until British administrators in the twentieth century began employing many of their elders as local officials in the colonial government.<sup>2</sup>

Most residents of Mombasa's coast and inland who are native to the region claim affiliation to the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups, respectively. But archaeological, linguistic, and documentary evidence demonstrates that the original settlers of the area entered the region with shared material cultures and languages that they diversified over the past two millennia as they filled eastern Kenya's frontiers with their settlements. Residents in the coast and escarpment of eastern Kenya drew on their common heritage to organize the gradually increasing scales of their communities as they cultivated, excavated, and otherwise transformed the distinctive landscapes where they settled. As settlers adapted to physical variations in their landscapes they established differentiated communities by adopting distinct routines and rituals of mobility, exchange, and remembrance. The local landscapes of Mombasa Island and Rabai—a community of

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<sup>2</sup> Though modern political boundaries do not correspond precisely with the extent of Mijikenda communities in Kenya, their communities generally lie within modern Kenya's counties of Kwale and Kilifi.



hamlets a half day's walk to the west of the island—suggest some of the ways that the residents of eastern Kenya distinguished their communities from one another over the past two millennia.

### **Past but Present: Abandoned Towns and Ruined Fields**

Looking eastward from the deserted hill-top site of the nineteenth-century town of Mudzi Muvya in Rabai, Mombasa is a white blur against the horizon. Rabai is located about ten miles west of the island in the middle of the “*kaya* complex”—the Mijikenda communities that stretch north to south for 120 miles along the forested hills of the coastal escarpment.<sup>3</sup> The word *kaya* “town” (MK) refers to deserted settlement sites located within forest clearings on the tops of the hills. Local oral traditions claim that only foragers occupied the hills inland from Mombasa until a few centuries ago, but material remains in past settlements suggest that iron-using cultivators have occupied these and other parts of Mombasa's hinterland continuously since the beginning of the Current Era.

While no one has lived in Mudzi Muvya for generations, it is not abandoned. Rabai's residents maintain the forest that encloses Mudzi Muvya through dutiful neglect. The climb to the top of the hill is strenuous, and most residents of Rabai have never

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<sup>3</sup> The term “*kaya* complex” comes from Thomas T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978). Henry Mutoro analyzed the distribution of *kayas* to suggest that those around Rabai were the most likely sites for interactions that included all hinterland communities. My own consultants indicated that Kaya Fungo of the Giriama, which Mutoro considered to be within the Rabai area, has hosted pan-Mijikenda conclaves for elders a few times in the twentieth century. Henry Mutoro, *A Nearest Neighbour Analysis of the Mijikenda Makaya on the Kenya Coastal Hinterland* (Nairobi: Dept. of History, University of Nairobi, 1985); George H. O. Abungu and H. W. Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland,” in *Archaeology of Africa: Foods, Metals, and Towns*, ed. T. Shaw et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 694–704.

personally set foot in it or any other *kaya*. Those few people who visit may enter only through dedicated paths and must observe taboos when reaching the clearings in the forest, such as removing their footwear. Occasionally the elders who maintain the *kaya* call upon the members of specific clans to maintain the paths and clearings in the forest. But residents and visitors are forbidden otherwise to collect firewood from the hilltop. Although the initial settlers of each *kaya* adapted them to local topography, most *kayas* include a central *moro* “meeting place” (MK), *fangos* “protective charms” (MK) buried near the entrances to the clearings, a few well-marked paths, and separate *lwandos* “clearings” (MK) for the clans by which people distinguish themselves with regard to these shared sacred places.<sup>4</sup> Regarded as the ancestral homes of the surrounding residents, these *kayas* are the distinguishing heritage claimed by the Mijikenda ethnic group whose members reside throughout the hinterland of the Nyali Coast.<sup>5</sup>

Water in the hills is relatively scarce, but a number of reservoirs, ponds, and streams, as well as a small number of water pipes, are sufficient for most daily needs. Wells are still a luxury for most residents, and they depend on the long and short rainy seasons each year to produce successful harvests from the patchwork of maize and rice fields, vegetable gardens, and coconut groves with which the residents of Rabai have covered the hillsides and valleys.<sup>6</sup> Residents also shape the landscape by leaving portions

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<sup>4</sup> Kaingu Tinga, “Spatial Organisation of a Kaya,” *Kenya Past and Present* 29 (1997).

<sup>5</sup> David Parkin, *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual Among the Giriama of Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Kaingu Kalume Tinga, “The Presentation and Interpretation of Ritual Sites: The Mijikenda Kaya Case,” *Museum International* 56, no. 3 (2004): 8–14.

<sup>6</sup> Henk Waaijenberg, *Land and Labour in Mijikenda Agriculture: Kenya, 1850-1985* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 1993).

of it untouched; they abandon fields to brush in order to allow the land to recover its fertility, and they set aside other areas as places for celebration and recreation.<sup>7</sup> Residents of most hamlets also reserve a few *pangas* “groves” (MK) of medicinal trees and plants that serve as pharmacies. Like the *kayas*, some of these groves are protected by taboos from destruction and set aside as sacred places for the meetings of *kaya* elders. By custom, residents also mark the graves in their homesteads by erecting carved wooden posts, placing small cairns of stones, or planting customary trees.<sup>8</sup> Recently, wealthier residents have built cement dwellings; fewer still are wired to the nearby power plant. But from atop Mudzi Muvya, one sees mostly mud, wattle, and thatch buildings lit by candle light and gas lamps. When abandoned, as they are meant eventually to be, these homes leave hardly a trace. But archaeologists can sometimes discern remains of baked mud daub as well as midden heaps of discarded pottery, beads, and tools in the soils of former settlements.<sup>9</sup>

Coastal communities throughout East Africa have left acres of visible ruins to explore, in contrast to the seemingly ephemeral settlements of the hills to their west. Since around 1000 CE, wealthy residents employed workers to build public buildings and

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<sup>7</sup> For an interpretation of open spaces in early coastal settlements see Jeffrey Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, “Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices,” *African Archaeological Review* 29, no. 2–3 (2012): 171–207.

<sup>8</sup> Kate Parsons, “The Aesthetic and Spiritual Contexts of Giriama Vigango in Kenya and Their Relationship to Contemporary Sculptural Form,” vol. 35, *Azania* (Nairobi: British Institute in East Africa, 2000); Pekeshe Ndeje, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, May 23, 2010, In author’s possession.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Fleisher and Adria LaViolette, “Elusive Wattle-and-Daub: Finding the Hidden Majority in the Archaeology of the Swahili,” *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 34, no. 1 (1999): 87–108, doi:10.1080/00672709909511473.

later their residences with mined coral blocks, mortared with lime, and artisans to decorate these framings with carved plaster ornamentation. Modern urban planners over the past century have paved over the ruins, groves, and fields of Mombasa Island with asphalt and cement, preserving space for vegetation only in cemeteries and a few private and public gardens. But Pate Island, which many patricians and merchants abandoned in the nineteenth century for the more prosperous mainland ports of Lamu and Mombasa, suggests what Mombasa may have looked like before modern residents built over the ruins of their forebears. Pate's soil teems with potsherds, and banana plants and vines grow alongside disintegrating plaster niches that once held Chinese porcelain and other imported luxuries. The huge blocks of former coral walls lie on the ground where they tumbled. Closer to Mombasa, many ruined structures at Gede have remained upright since the town was abandoned in the early 17th century, including most of the outer wall, wells, mosques, tombs, and a patrician's home complete with indoor privies.

Mombasa's own grand buildings were razed by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and again by rival local island factions in the nineteenth century. Most of the older buildings standing today were built during the early colonial period (*ca.* 1890-1920) by Indian merchants or British administrators, though a few older houses hide within the city's winding alleys.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the Portuguese explorers who burned Mombasa's early towns also built modern Mombasa's most enduring monument—Fort Jesus. The massive walls of this fort have towered since 1596 over the entrance to Mombasa's northern

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<sup>10</sup> Each building in Old Town has been catalogued and mapped by the Mombasa Conservation Office, a branch of the National Museums of Kenya located at Leven House in Old Town Mombasa.

harbor. A few mosques, including the al-Mandhry Mosque of Old Town, have also endured for three hundred years or more, though worshippers have several times rebuilt and remodeled the mosques. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Muslim communities and charitable foundations have sponsored the construction of dozens of mosques all over the island.<sup>11</sup>

As seen from the sea, Mombasa is an attractive port, located about half-way between the Red Sea and the southern reaches of the Indian Ocean monsoon winds that sailing vessels rely upon to reach this area from the north and then return when the trade winds reverse in direction following a reliable annual cycle. The nearly land-enveloped island currently harbors modern ocean freighters in the deep channel on its south side known as Kilindini, but the sailors of *dhow*s and *mtepes* who dominated trade in the western Indian Ocean until the early twentieth century preferred the shallower north harbor, now called Old Port. Partly because of its complementing pair of protected harbors, the island is one of the places along the East African coast of longest continuous habitation. Merchants there have sold food, ivory, resin, and, at times, slaves to visiting Indian Ocean traders since at least the twelfth century CE, when the Arab geographer al-Idrisi recorded Mombasa on his maps as “Manbasa.”<sup>12</sup> Archaeologists have dated one site on the island back even earlier, to at least 1000 CE.<sup>13</sup> Potsherds in Mombasa’s canal bed

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<sup>11</sup> F. J. Berg and B.J. Walter, “Mosques, Population, and Urban Development in Mombasa,” *Hadith* 1 (1968): 47–100.

<sup>12</sup> Hamo Sassoon, “Excavations at the Site of Early Mombasa,” *Azania: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa* 15 (1980): 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

may suggest occupation as early as 600 CE, and the settlements that archaeologists have identified along the adjacent coasts date to eras much earlier still.<sup>14</sup>

European visitors from the Portuguese onward falsely assumed that immigrants from Persia or the Arabian Peninsula had transplanted their urban architecture and lifestyle to build the ports of East Africa in their search for commodities and markets. Instead, most immigrants from Arabia, India, and other parts of Asia who came to East Africa before the Portuguese joined with established coastal communities instead of founding new settlements of their own. The coastal communities welcomed these Indian Ocean traders, but they also maintained inherited ties to the inland communities as they balanced their commitments to their suppliers in the interior and their creditors from the sea. Although the trading communities all along the eastern African coast developed extensive relationships with communities in their respective hinterlands, only in eastern Kenya did they maintain a shared linguistic heritage with their hinterland neighbors that stretches back uninterrupted for two millennia.

Yet, scholars of eastern Kenya's past have usually told the histories of communities at the coast and in the hinterland independently of each other. As archaeologists Matthew Pawlowicz and Adria LaViolette have recently emphasized, the scholars who identified most of East Africa's coastal settlements as Swahili placed them within the clear stream of a relatively familiar history of the Indian Ocean and the Islamic

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<sup>14</sup> Colin Breen and Paul Lane, "Archaeological Approaches to East Africa's Changing Seascapes," *World Archaeology* 35, no. 3 (2003): 479.

Middle East while relegating the hinterland settlements to the murky waters of a pre-historical past.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, many histories of eastern Kenya project a modern ethnic contrast between the coastal Swahili and the inland Mijikenda onto past times when residents organized their communities around mutual collaborations among dozens of *ad hoc* alliances such as clan confederations and age-sets. Although the communities ancestral to modern Swahili and Mijikenda had distinctive experiences, the modern ethnic strategies with which they shape their engagements with one another and the wider world draw on collaborative strategies that their common ancestors innovated centuries ago. As several scholars have demonstrated, residents of the Mombasa region began to regard variations in these strategies as ethnic and organize their communities as parts of contrasting ethnic groups only in the twentieth century CE, when imperial and capitalist projects offered people incentives to identify themselves as members of single, homogenous, hence mutually exclusive and competing groups.<sup>16</sup> Local communities (and those who study them) have justified these recent affiliations, and conflicts, by attributing their ethnic distinctions deeper into the past, thus encouraging historians and other scholars interested in eastern Kenya's past to develop distinct historiographies for the two groups. By

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Pawlowicz and Adria LaViolette, "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective: Bridging History and Archaeology, and Coast and Hinterland," in *The Death of Prehistory*, ed. Peter R. Schmidt and S. Mrozowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Justin Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Randall Pouwels, "Oral Historiography and the Problem of the Shirazi of the East African Coast," *History in Africa* 11 (1984): 237–67, doi:10.2307/3171636; Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (January 1, 1993): 211–39, doi:10.2307/2083387; Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

integrating the experiences of the forebears of eastern Kenya's modern ethnic groups, as linguistic cousins, this dissertation challenges ethnic claims to enduring and irreconcilable cultural differences that project modern identities into the past.

### **Inter-Disciplinary Tales: Integrating Prehistory and History in Mombasa**

The pioneer historians of East Africa established this artificial, and ahistorical, divide by describing the coastal settlements as part of an alien Muslim civilization, complete with monumental architecture, literary traditions, urbanization, trans-oceanic trade, and other seemingly non-African characteristics which reached its greatest florescence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They considered the histories of inland communities to have been isolated, rural, and relatively inaccessible given their lack of written records or permanent architecture. In fact they transposed the contrasts in the accessibility of their sources into an imagined historical contrast. Further, early scholars considered hinterland communities relevant to coastal communities only insofar as they provided the ivory and slaves that enabled residents of the coast to orient themselves sea-ward to other Indian Ocean communities through trade.

#### *Swahili History: The Rise of Civilization and Debates over Ethnicity*

The methodologies prevailing in archaeology and history during most of the twentieth century led scholars to focus on monumental architecture and written documents, thus favoring analysis of the coastal communities, in splendid isolation. "Stone towns" on the coast drew early attention from archaeologists since they were more archaeologically accessible than inland and coastal settlements built of mud, wood, and grass. Meanwhile, historians could refer to records written by visitors to the coast,



from the anonymous Greek merchant who wrote the *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* in the 1st century CE to the chronicle of the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta in 1331 CE, and correspondences between Portuguese explorers and their sovereign beginning in the sixteenth century. Since coastal dwellers had adopted the Arabic script along with Islam, they had also occasionally set their oral chronicles and poems to paper.<sup>17</sup> Inland communities, on the other hand, left no written records.

The racist tenor of colonial scholarship that inaugurated the study of East African history also colored scholarly approaches in the region. For instance, J. S. Trimingham, a renowned scholar of Islam, argued that East Africans “display a lack of ability to organize . . . on any wider social organization than the family.”<sup>18</sup> After extolling the achievements of Swahili civilization, he found it inconceivable that Africans could have constructed the urban societies and commercial networks in which coastal communities participated. Like Trimingham, the pioneers in East African history and archaeology elaborated upon Portuguese assumptions that Southwest Asian visitors built the coastal cities, though they noted that the descendants of these immigrants had incorporated Africans into the lower classes of their communities and adopted some aspects of local culture. The traditions of many Swahili families who claimed Shirazi (Persian) or Arab

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<sup>17</sup> However, this practice was often prompted by requests from European scholars and colonial officials in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Thus most Swahili records are properly understood as transcribed oral traditions. For example, W.E. Taylor transcribed much of Muyaka’s poetry from recitations by poets in Mombasa in the early twentieth century (Mohamed Hassan Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry* [Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979]).

<sup>18</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in East Africa* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1962).

descent stretching back to the time of Caliph ‘Uthman (r. 644-656 CE) lent support to these histories of Asiatic colonization.

East African nationalists seeking independence in the 1960s turned this Asiatic interpretation on its head by asserting that Swahili communities were primarily African. In Mombasa, local politician Hyder al-Kindy wrote of tensions among Swahili-speaking Arabs and “true” Swahili in the early- to mid-twentieth century that occasionally led to violent encounters but more often resulted in strategies of social distancing such as refusals of marriage proposals by those who claimed pure Arab descent and refusing to share a common Friday Mosque.<sup>19</sup> In Zanzibar, the Swahili nationalist rhetoric culminated in the deposition and exile of the British-supported sultan of Omani Arab descent.<sup>20</sup> Though still holding to claims of Shirazi (Persian) descent, nationalists asserted their African identities in common cause with other colonized people throughout the continent who were pressing for immediate release from colonial rule.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the oversimplifications of the complex history of the region in nationalist rhetoric, linguists Derek Nurse and Thomas Hinnebusch confirmed its basic premise in the following decades, when they formally confirmed the Kiswahili language as a member of the Northeast Coast (NEC) Bantu language group. They further divided their classification of NEC Bantu into the language groups of Seuta (e.g. Bondei—in the

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<sup>19</sup> Hyder Kindy, *Life and Politics in Mombasa*. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> Abdul Sheriff, “Race and Class in the Politics of Zanzibar,” *Africa Spectrum* 36, no. 3 (January 1, 2001): 301–318.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathon Glassman, “Sorting Out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar’s Newspaper Wars,” *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (2000): 395–428.

immediate hinterland of modern Tanzania), Ruvu (e.g. Gogo, more southerly and further inland), and Sabaki, the northerly group of languages consisting of Kiswahili, Mijikenda, Pokomo, and Elwana in Kenya as well as the outlying Comorian of the islands off the shore of southern Tanzania. Previous scholars had emphasized the large number of Arabic loanwords in Swahili dialects, but Nurse and Hinnebusch demonstrated that the majority of these words had flooded into the language only after Seyyid Sa'id, the Sultan of Oman, relocated his capital, court, and commercial partners to Zanzibar in the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

Archaeologist Mark Horton added weight to the linguistic evidence for local roots of coastal culture when he excavated some of the foundations of an island settlement at Shanga in the Lamu Archipelago of northeastern Kenya. He showed that local craftsmen had developed the stone architecture previously attributed to Arab inspiration from local building techniques *in situ* beginning in the 9th century CE.<sup>23</sup> Modern Swahili communities, which invariably practice Islam, have taken Horton's further identification of an early mosque at the site to infer that they are the descendants—or at the least the inheritors—of East Africa's coastal civilization. However, Horton in fact had pointed to similarities between the spatial arrangements of structures in Shanga and settlement patterns of the mostly non-Muslim Mijikenda communities inland from Mombasa.

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<sup>22</sup> Derek Nurse and Thomas Hinnebusch brought much of their complementary research together in *Swahili and Sabaki: A Linguistic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); but they outlined the basic argument in numerous papers in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Horton, Helen W. Brown, and Nina Mudida, *Shanga: the Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa*, vol. 14 (London: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1996).

While the debate continued over whether the early builders of coastal settlements were “Arab” or “African,” scholars began exploring how the modern residents of these towns articulated “Swahili” as a single, shared ethnic identity.<sup>24</sup> A major focus of their research was to describe how Swahili communities had incorporated the many strangers who had come to their shores over the centuries—including foreign merchants, Islamic scholars, and slaves from as far in the African interior as Lakes Malawi and Tanganyika.<sup>25</sup> Jonathon Glassman and Laura Fair, for instance, described how captives enslaved in the Omani era and former slaves in the post-slavery British era helped create modern Swahili ideologies and identities. Although the enslaved had accepted some practices from slaveholders—fluency in Kiswahili, manners of dress, and conversion to Islam—they had also introduced other local traditions, such as female puberty rites.<sup>26</sup>

Randall Pouwels, in complementing contrast, focused on the educated Muslim patricians of East Africa’s coastal communities to suggest that they had articulated their distinctiveness as Swahili to counter the influence of immigrating Omani and Hadrami

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<sup>24</sup> Enslaved workers who spoke Kiswahili were probably the first to use “Swahili” as an ethnonym to distinguish themselves from newly enslaved immigrants without a command of the coastal language; see Jonathon Glassman, “The Bondsman’s New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coasts,” *Journal of African History* 32 (1991): 277–312; for academic debates about whether the coastal communities constituted an ethnic group, see Carol M. Eastman, “Who Are the Waswahili?,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 41 (1971): 228–36; Ahmed Idha Salim, “The Elusive ‘Mswahili’: Some Reflections on His Identity and Culture,” in *Swahili Language and Society*, ed. Joan Maw and David J. Parkin (Vienna: Afro-pub, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Carol M. Eastman, “Women, Slaves, and Foreigners: African Cultural Influences and Group Processes in the Formation of Northern Swahili Coastal Society,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, no. 1 (1988): 1–20, doi:10.2307/219888.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry and Rebellion on the Swahili Coast, 1856-88* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995); Laura Fair, “Identity, Difference, and Dance: Female Initiation in Zanzibar, 1890 to 1930,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 17, no. 3 (1996): 146–172.

Muslims. When Sultan Seyyid Sa'id integrated the trading economies of the coast into a single commercial empire sustained by customs on trades ivory, spices, and slaves, he also created a wide set of political relationships through which parochial town elites cultivated wider identities as Swahili.<sup>27</sup> In reviewing Swahili claims to Shirazi origins, Pouwels argued that these claimed pedigrees in ancient Persia and Arabia helped them counter the growing influence of *arriviste* Omani Islamic practices, as well as the populist forms of Islam brought by a flood of Hadrami immigrants from Yemen who were attracted to the newly prosperous region in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Drawing on broadly recognized cultural similarities, patricians began to conjoin regional identities that had been expressed as allegiance to one of the prominent coastal towns into a pan-coastal Swahili identity that emphasized East African versions of Islamic practices. Glassman and Willis later explored how British administrators encouraged formalization of these incipient identities into legally ratified categories.<sup>29</sup>

Although historians in the last quarter of the twentieth century recognized the local foundations of Swahili communities, they remained focused on the contours of coastal history primarily as they related to the Indian Ocean. As part of this trend, a number of scholars offered fine-grained dissertations of individual Swahili towns that

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<sup>27</sup> For the political and economic contexts of Omani economic imperialism see Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (London, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Pouwels, "Oral Historiography and the Problem of the Shirazi of the East African Coast."

<sup>29</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*; Glassman, "Sorting out the Tribes."

recognized competition and variation among them, though few of these were published.<sup>30</sup>

While some of these scholars, such as F. J. Berg, demonstrated tight political and economic relations among coastal towns and their local hinterlands, scholars who wrote surveys of the entire coastal continuum tended to ignore hinterland communities or examine them through Swahili stereotypes.<sup>31</sup> They emphasized instead the common cultural traits that bound coastal communities together as Swahili across these regions; though noting Swahili origins in Africa, scholars rarely explored the more varied relationships they formed with other Africans in detail.

John Middleton's *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* is the classic revision and refutation of the old Asiatic colonization model. Middleton focused on kinship patterns and life-cycle rituals but tailored his analysis to emphasize how Swahili communities adapted their expressions of these strategies to engage in commercial trade.<sup>32</sup> His anthropological perspective was enriched by historical and

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<sup>30</sup> Marina Tolmacheva, trans., *The Pate Chronicle*, African Historical Sources 4 (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1993); F. J. Berg, "Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate: The City and Its Hinterlands in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1971); Howard W. Brown, "A History of Siyu: The Development and Decline of a Swahili Town on the Northern Kenya Coast" (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1985); Marguerite Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century: Land, Trade, and Politics* (Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1979); Peter L. Koffsky, "History of Takaungu, East Africa, 1830-1896" (PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1977); Esmond Bradley Martin, *The History of Malindi: A Geographical Analysis of an East African Coastal Town from the Portuguese Period to the Present* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Literature Bureau, 1973); William F. McKay, "A Precolonial History of the Southern Kenya Coast" (Dissertation, Boston University, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> See Carol M. Eastman, "Waungwana Na Wanawake: Muslim Ethnicity and Sexual Segregation in Coastal Kenya," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 5 (1984): 97–112; Randall Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800-1900* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili: An African Mercantile Civilization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Middleton later collaborated with Mark Horton to incorporate new archaeological

linguistic narratives of the entire Swahili coast by Randall Pouwels, who focused on documentary evidence and oral traditions, and by the collaborative work of Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear which integrated linguistic, archaeological, and documentary evidence to focus on the emergence and consolidation of a single coastal civilization from the ninth to fifteenth centuries.<sup>33</sup>

Recently, scholars from all disciplines have sought to balance the characterization of Swahili civilization as homogeneous with studies that are sensitive to regional variation, the experiences of non-elite coastal dwellers, and the influence of hinterland neighbors on the towns of the coast. For example, anthropologists Roman Loimeier and Rudiger Seesemann presented the plural “global worlds” of the Swahili in a collection of regional studies that directly challenged Middleton’s vision of Swahili culture as cohesive. Contributors to the volume applied a trend of describing ethnicity as shifting, multiplistic, and transitory to the coastal context in order to show how people have used their Swahili identities to interface with and experience modern global discourses.<sup>34</sup> Mohamed Bakari, a western-trained linguist of Swahili descent, has also emphasized the need to understand modern Kiswahili in terms of its distinctive regional dialects.<sup>35</sup>

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research in an updated survey: Mark Horton and John Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Derek Nurse and Thomas T. Spear, *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*.

<sup>34</sup> Patricia Caplan and Farouk Topan, *Swahili Modernities: Culture, Politics, and Identity on the East Coast of Africa* (Africa World Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Mohamed Bakari, “Swahili Civilization,” in *International Conference on the Indian Ocean* (presented at the Zanzibar Indian Ocean Research Institute, Zanzibar Town, Zanzibar, 2008).

The interest in defining the “Swahili” identity remained high among my Swahili consultants in 2010, who occasionally admitted to some confusion about their own identities since many had at least one parent of Hadrami or Omani origin. This uncertainty has promoted a vibrant local intellectual tradition of defending the “real” Swahili identity against the interpretations of Western scholars. Local intellectuals such as Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany claim the ruins and relics of the coast that Western scholars have unearthed as their distinctive heritage, and they reject scholarly interpretations of Swahili-ness as a multiplistic and variable ethnicity with recent roots in the colonial past.<sup>36</sup> Many of them recognize that Swahili is a recent ethnonym and prefer the old practice of identifying themselves according to local town names, but they also view the Swahili ethnic group as the sole and exclusive heir of the old coastal civilization. Ali Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff, two Swahili historians with careers at Western universities, have expressed these local claims to cultural continuity in *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People*.<sup>37</sup>

While anthropologists and linguists have begun to understand the varied aspects of Swahili ethnicity in contemporary times, archaeologists have also started challenging the degree to which communities along a thousand miles of Indian Ocean coast

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<sup>36</sup> Personal Conversations with Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany; Hussein Soud el-Maawy, *Waswahili Na Utamaduni Wao* (Lamu, Kenya: Self-published, 2009); Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, “Utawala wa Waswahili Waislamu Mwambao wa Pwani [Rule of Muslim Swahili at the Coast and Shore],” Self-published articles (Mombasa, Kenya, n.d.); Kai Kresse, *Philosophizing in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam, and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast*, International African Library (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse, *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Alamin M. Mazrui and Ibrahim Noor Shariff, *The Swahili: Idiom and Identity of an African People* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1994).



constituted a single civilization distinct from a similarly amalgamated culture attributed to their hinterland neighbors. Adria LaViolette and Jeffrey Fleischer, for instance, have called attention to the numerous mud and wattle dwellings that residents built within and around coastal “stone towns.” They suggest that these semi-permanent dwellings represented the living situation of most coastal residents and that it was in comparison to these temporary structures that individuals who built the stone houses that attracted the attention of earlier generations of archaeologists could display the respectability and honor they claimed.<sup>38</sup> And in a number of articles, Stephanie Wynne-Jones has analyzed the widespread correspondences in the material cultures of hinterland and corresponding coastal communities to suggest that people on both sides of the alleged divide had used similar practices of identification—including feasting, adornment with beads, and methods for making and using cooking wares.<sup>39</sup>

Pawlowicz and LaViolette argue that oral traditions confirm the artificiality of setting boundaries between historical and pre-historical communities.<sup>40</sup> In particular, coastal communities near the Ruvuma River in southern Tanzania developed patterns of production and exchange that shared more with communities in their immediate hinterland and interior than with other coastal communities to the north. Local oral

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<sup>38</sup> Fleischer and LaViolette, “Elusive Wattle-and-Daub.”

<sup>39</sup> Sarah Croucher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, “People, Not Pots: Locally Produced Ceramics and Identity on the Nineteenth-Century East African Coast,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 39, no. 1 (February 2006): 107–124; Stephanie Wynne-Jones, “It’s What You Do with It That Counts: Performed Identities in the East African Coastal Landscape,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 7, no. 3 (October 1, 2007): 325–345.

<sup>40</sup> Pawlowicz and LaViolette, “Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective.”

traditions in the region similarly reflect this westward engagement away from the coast. Their interpretation challenges the wide-spread assumption that all coastal communities were socially and economically oriented to Indian Ocean communities.

*Mijikenda “Prehistory”: Migration and the Kaya Complex*

The relatively few scholars who have studied the people residing in the escarpment of eastern Kenya described the communities there as “pre-historical”—though archaeologists have routinely applied the designation, teleological as it is, to any non-literate culture.<sup>41</sup> In the 1970s, Africanist historians first began examining the past of eastern Kenya’s inland communities to dispel notions that history could not be written without documents. Cynthia Brantley and Thomas Spear were the first professionally trained historians to collect Mijikenda oral traditions, though some colonial anthropologists and missionaries had recorded oral traditions in the late nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

Cynthia Brantley bridged documentary history and “pre-history” by using oral traditions to understand how the Giriama clan confederation of the Mijikenda organized their communities and their politics before British interventions and then examining colonial archives for the policies and actions that spurred the “Giriama Resistance of

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<sup>41</sup> However, note recent efforts to challenge this practice in Peter R. Schmidt and S. Mrozowski, eds., *The Death of Prehistory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Alice Werner, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate* (London: The Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1915); Arthur Mortimer Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*, ed. John Middleton (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland, 1967); C. W. Hobley, *Ethnology of A-Kamba and Other East African Tribes* (Cambridge, UK: Cass, 1971); Johann Ludwig Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa*, 2d ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1968); Charles New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours in Eastern Africa*, 3d ed. (London: Cass, 1971).

1917.” She demonstrated that Mijikenda-speaking communities organized their politics through a gerontocratic (elder-led) system that British imperial policies had eroded.<sup>43</sup> Specifically, she argued that demands on youth labor by the British administration drew the rising generation away from their hinterland communities by offering them alternative paths towards prosperity outside the age-sets that previously maintained social order.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas Spear focused more directly on reconstructing Mijikenda “pre-history” by collecting and interpreting oral traditions from each of the nine Mijikenda groups as well as from some neighboring communities, such as the Waata, a foraging community that claims to be the original inhabitants of the region. He followed one of the first iterations of Jan Vansina’s comparative method for analyzing oral traditions in which scholars treated variants of transcribed oral traditions as susceptible to literary methods of criticizing and authenticating texts. Taking cues from the application of philology to medieval chronicles, this methodology assumed that elements shared among modern variants indicated older and relatively accurate information about the past, while the variable aspects of the traditions revealed anachronisms introduced by later generations.<sup>45</sup>

After Spear compared the variants of the traditions, he used named age-sets called *rikas* (i.e. generations) as a guide to the chronology of the former circumstances he had

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<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 3 (1978): 248–64.

<sup>44</sup> Cynthia Brantley, *The Giriama and Colonial Resistance in Kenya, 1800-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>45</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Traditions as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

identified. He dated the ancestors of the Mijikenda as having migrated in shifts from a place in southern Somalia called Shungwaya to southeast Kenya around 1600 CE. The first migrants to arrive settled around the Shimba Plateau south of Mombasa to become the Digo clan confederation, while later migrants settled at various points to the north: the northernmost settlements of the Giriama clan confederation in the hinterland of Malindi represented the limit of Mijikenda settlement.<sup>46</sup>

Though Mijikenda communities currently live in dispersed homesteads owned by clans who define themselves today by unilineal descent, each of the nine Mijikenda clan confederacies claimed to have settled first in one of nine *kayas*: hence the name Mijikenda (*miji*, towns; *kenda*, nine) which they adopted in the twentieth century to replace the derogative epithet *wanyika*, “bush people” (St. Sw.).<sup>47</sup> Spear named these shared Mijikenda political, cultural, and economic institutions the “*kaya* complex.” David Parkin, an anthropologist with years of field experience among the Mijikenda has similarly emphasized the *kaya* as a distinguishing, shared, central symbol of modern Mijikenda identity.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, nearly all subsequent scholars accepted the basic premise that the “*kaya* complex” of the Mijikenda was a cultural zone distinct from the coast.

Spear noted that the migrations he attributed to these Mijikenda *kayas* were likely a “cultural” overturning of previous local practices rather than a mass movement of populations. However, critics of his work generally gloss over this important

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<sup>46</sup> Spear, *Kaya Complex*.

<sup>47</sup> The nine groups from north to south are as follows: Giriama, Jibana, Kauma, Chonyi, Kambe, Ribe, Rabai, Duruma, Digo.

<sup>48</sup> Parkin, *Sacred Void*.

acknowledgement of local continuity.<sup>49</sup> For instance, Fred Morton critiqued Spear's migration thesis by arguing that the trope of Shungwaya origins was borrowed from a Swahili tradition recorded in the *Kitab al-Zunuj* (Book of the Zinj), written in Kiswahili in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> He noted that missionaries who lived among hinterland residents for decades during the nineteenth century never recorded any mention of Shungwaya, despite recording numerous other speculations about the origins of the *wanyika*.<sup>51</sup> And he hypothesized that the coastal slaveholders who wrote the *Kitab al-Zunuj* included the Shungwaya tradition to defend in British colonial courts their practices of lending grain to rural cultivators who gave their own children as pawns for security on the loans. He suggested that the Shungwaya tradition spread as Mijikenda individuals attended these court proceedings.<sup>52</sup>

Spear responded by defending the historical accuracy of oral traditions in general. For Spear, it seemed unlikely that the Shungwaya trope could have become ingrained in Mijikenda traditions so rapidly without a powerful motivation, especially considering the

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<sup>49</sup> Spear, *Kaya Complex*; Thomas T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation: The Mijikenda of Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> R. F. Morton, "The Shungwaya Myth of Mijikenda Origins: A Problem of Late Nineteenth-Century Kenya Coastal History," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, no. 3 (1972): 397–423; R. F. Morton, "New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 4 (1977): 628–43. The Kiswahili tradition of Singwaya was reported among the "Swahili" communities of Kilindini and Jomvu in the nineteenth century, though they pronounce the place Shungwaya (Charles Guillain, *Documents Sur l'Histoire, La Geographie, et Le Commerce de La Cote Orientale d'Afrique*, 3 vols. vols. (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1856); Richard F. Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860); Richard F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872).

<sup>51</sup> Morton, "New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins," 629–633.

<sup>52</sup> Morton, "The Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins." The implication is that they attended court to reclaim pawned children, though Morton stops short of suggesting this possibility and offered no documents from any specific court cases to support these claims

many variants of the trope, which marked the tradition as very old according to the methods of interpreting oral traditions which prevailed at the time. This argument also undercut Morton's suggestion that coastal landowners promoted the adoption of Shungwaya discourse among hinterland clients because it seemed unlikely to him that they could have had such pervasive and consistent influence over so many hinterland communities. And contrary to Morton's expectations, Spear pointed out that the Shungwaya trope was first recorded among Mijikenda communities in places far from colonial influence, rather than near the courts, where Mijikenda individuals might have heard the invented tradition. Spear also asserted that the term "Mozungullos" in Portuguese sources that referred to residents inland from Malindi provided written documentation of the time depth of settlement, of at least four hundred years, that he had extrapolated from the oral traditions. This date also coincided with documented invasion of militant Oromo communities from Somalia in the seventeenth century, which the Mijikenda traditions suggested had prompted their ancestors to move south. Though the chronology did not directly confirm Shungwaya as an original homeland, it seemed to confirm the validity of the traditions as framing the general context of the time. Furthermore, Spear cited linguistic research by Derek Nurse suggesting that Southern Somalia had been the point of divergence among the Sabaki group of languages, including the Mijikenda languages and Kiswahili. Thus, Spear concluded that Morton would need to provide more than negative evidence to dismiss the traditions.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Spear's response to the critiques of Morton and other scholars is laid out in the introduction to *Traditions of Origin*.

Thomas Hinnebusch, a linguist, was not convinced. He pointed out that the two successive migrations anticipated by Spear, first a northward movement of Sabaki speakers through Kenya to Southern Somali, followed by a southerly migration by Mijikenda-speakers to Mombasa, violated the “least-moves” rule of parsimony by which historical linguists account for the sequential flowering of modern languages.<sup>54</sup> He proposed that the intervening region between Taita Hills and Mt. Kilimanjaro would be the most economical hypothesis as the point of divergence between the Sabaki (northern) and Seuta (southern) language groups. This point of origin would also indicate that the Proto-Mijikenda and Proto-Swahili communities had separated further south than Spear’s location of the split in Southern Somalia.<sup>55</sup>

Justin Willis challenged Spear’s identification of “Mozungullos” with the Mijikenda to add another dimension to the critique of his migration thesis. He argued that earlier historians had projected the modern Mijikenda ethnicity into the past without recognizing the recent colonial context in which distinct inland communities had united.<sup>56</sup> Willis also provided an internal motivation for the rapid and anomalously variable adoption of the Shungwaya trope, the unexplained features that had stymied Morton’s critique. Willis demonstrated that inland residents had adopted claims of common origin

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hinnebusch, “The Shungwaya Hypothesis: A Linguistic Reappraisal,” in *East African Cultural History*, Foreign and Comparative Studies/Eastern Africa Series, XXV (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1976), 1–42. Specifically the features shared by Sabaki and Seuta are 1) uniform loss of the class 5 prefix 2) the aspiration of consonants preceded by nasal sounds (\*NC/ > (N)C<sup>h</sup>).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*.

in Shungwaya to unify themselves to bolster specific political claims under colonial rule, similar to the way that Swahili communities had unified to engage with Omani and British imperialism. He thus provided the local context that would have motivated inland communities to construct a single ethnicity contrasting with the coastal Swahili ethnicity (established around the same time). He also provided a reason that they might have adopted the myth from their coastal neighbors. Willis suggested that the variability of the Shungwaya traditions among the Mijikenda was a result of novelty and the context of heterogeneity among the communities that adopted it rather than longevity and the erosion of a single ancient tradition.

Willis also challenged Spear's relatively literal interpretation of Mijikenda oral traditions to conclude that the modern *kaya* complex had descended from nine original *kayas*. Willis identified over forty *kayas* in the Mombasa region (archaeologists have since identified many more); some could be classified as daughter communities of the original nine primary *kayas*, but this complex and changing landscape did not fit Spear's description of nine distinct communities continuing unchanged from a single migrating population long ago.<sup>57</sup>

Richard Helm's archaeological surveys and excavations in 1996 and 1997 confirmed this more complicated picture of historical changes and also showed how oral traditions accurately distinguished among settlements that he classed as *pre-kaya*, *kaya*,

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<sup>57</sup> Justin Willis, "The Northern Kayas of the Mijikenda: A Gazetteer, and an Historical Reassessment," *Azania* 31 (1996): 75–98.



and post-*kaya* based on his objective analysis of these sites.<sup>58</sup> While Helm's local consultants had relied on Spear's dating of about four hundred years for his settlement sequence, Helm's archaeological data show that the hills of Eastern Kenya have been occupied continuously since at least 100 CE by iron-working, cultivating communities who had shared historical changes in settlement densities and distributions with the coastal communities in the region. While the presence of these early technologies is not conclusive evidence of the languages that these early communities spoke, the parallels in the archaeological and linguistic evidence suggest a strong correlation. Given the correlations between the pattern of settlement described in oral traditions and attested by archaeological evidence, Helm argued that residents retained knowledge about the occupation sequence of local sites in their social memories far longer than scholars normally recognize, perhaps because the stable physical features of the landscapes serve as effective mnemonics among otherwise shifting populations.

Helm's work confirmed the accuracy of oral traditions in terms of the settlement sequences and patterns they revealed, but he simultaneously challenged their narrative content by disputing the notion of a north to south migration from Shungwaya to the Mombasa hinterland. This tension between archaeological local continuity and the narrative of arrival from elsewhere can be resolved by Spear's original proposal that the story of "migration" may have denoted cultural rather than demographic innovation. Just as Swahili communities of largely local descent emphasize the migration stories of their

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Helm, "Re-evaluating Traditional Histories on the Coast of Kenya: An Archaeological Perspective," in *African Historical Archaeologies*, ed. Andres M. Reid and Paul J. Lane (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2004).

relatively few Arab or Persian ancestors, so too could Mijikenda oral traditions have emphasized a few apparently influential migrants from the north among populations of similarly local backgrounds.

Adding weight to this interpretation of a cultural migration led by prominent individuals rather than large-scale demographic shift, anthropologist Martin Walsh has identified scores of words related to politics, warfare, cattle husbandry and other prestigious activities that Mijikenda-speakers borrowed from a Central Kenyan Bantu language.<sup>59</sup> The adoption of vocabulary, but no other linguistic features, from one or more Central Kenyan Bantu languages suggests the influence was within the last few centuries. Indeed, alongside the Mozungulos that Spear associated with the Mijikenda, the Portuguese recorded the recent arrival of cattle-keepers identified as the “Mosseguejos” who were known for military prowess.<sup>60</sup> In contemporary times, some of their descendants still identify as Segeju. Though Segeju communities now speak a dialect similar to the Mijikenda dialect of Chi-Digo, they originally spoke a Central Kenyan language related to Kikuyu to the west and Daiso to the south in Tanzania.<sup>61</sup> Walsh has suggested that as Segeju-speakers migrated down the Sabaki River and down the coast to their current location among the Digo Mijikenda, they influenced Mijikenda-

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<sup>59</sup>Martin T. Walsh, “The Segeju Complex? Linguistic Evidence for the Precolonial Making of the Mijikenda,” in *Contesting Identities: The Mijikenda and Their Neighbors in Kenyan Coastal Society*, ed. Rebecca Gearhart and Linda Giles (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>61</sup> The name “Daiso” is in fact cognate with the name “Segeju”, Derek Nurse, “Segeju and Daisū: A Case Study of Evidence from Oral Tradition and Comparative Linguistics,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982): 175–208, doi:10.2307/3171605.

speaking communities, perhaps by joining local clans. Although Mijikenda traditions often describe the Segeju as servants that simply took care of their cattle, they also clearly adopted political strategies from a Central Kenya Bantu language similar to Segeju—such as a word for elder (*mutumia*, MK).<sup>62</sup>

In the midst of this still unresolved debate over Mijikenda migration history, scholars brought the unique features of the “kaya complex” into clearer focus.<sup>63</sup> Thomas Herlehy relied mainly on ethnographic observations and oral traditions to examine the vibrant nineteenth-century palm-wine economy of Rabai. He demonstrated that Rabai’s communities devoted many resources to local exchanges with other inland communities besides the better documented commerce with coastal communities and their Indian Ocean suppliers.<sup>64</sup> David Sperling studied the rapid and widespread conversion of Chidigo speakers to Islam in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. His research highlighted that in most recent eras, they cultivated tighter relationships with their coastal neighbors than Mijikenda communities located in the less accessible hills to the west of

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<sup>62</sup> See chapter six for a full discussion; Walsh, “Segeju Complex,” 43.

<sup>63</sup> In addition to those discussed below, see Celia Nyamweru et al., “Kaya Forests of Coastal Kenya: ‘Remnant Patches’ or Dynamic Entities,” in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics & Social Change*, ed. Michael J. Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru (Oxford: James Currey, 2008); Diane Ciekawy, “Witchcraft in Statecraft: Five Technologies of Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Coastal Kenya,” *African Studies Review* 41, no. 3 (December 1998): 119–41, doi:10.2307/525356; Henk Waaijenberg, “Mijikenda Agriculture, Kenya, 1850-1985: Tradition and Change,” in *Origin and Development of Agriculture in East Africa: The Ethnosystems Approach to the Study of Early Food Production in Kenya*, ed. R.E. Leakey and L.J. Slikkerveer, Studies in Technology and Social Change 19 (Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1991), 302; Bettina Ng’weno, “Inheriting Disputes: The Digo Negotiation of Meaning and Power through Land,” *African Economic History*, no. 25 (1997): 59–77.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas J. Herlehy, “An Economic History of the Kenya Coast the Mijikenda Coconut Palm Economy, Ca. 1800-1980” (PhD Dissertation, 1985); Thomas J. Herlehy, “Ties That Bind: Palm Wine and Blood-Brotherhood at the Kenya Coast during the 19th Century,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17, no. 2 (1984): 285–308.

Mombasa.<sup>65</sup> And Fred Morton similarly highlighted the local dynamics and social fissions among the Rabai Mijikenda by untangling the complex relationships among runaway slaves, Muslim slave holders, Christian missionaries, and elders in Mijikenda communities. Morton emphasized that enslaved migrants used Christianity and colonial patronage to escape slavery, a thesis which challenged Frederick Cooper's explanation that enslaved laborers affirmed Islamic values of coastal slaveholders and accepted subordinate roles in the coastal economy as squatters after the British colonial government outlawed slavery. He thus revealed the diversity of experiences not only among the nine Mijikenda groups but also within them.<sup>66</sup> All of these historians' also examined relationships among hinterland and coastal communities, but they retained the premise of cultural contrast to describe the engagements in terms of cross-cultural interactions, rather than variations of a common heritage.

Anthropologists working in the region have been the most active in emphasizing enduring relationships among coastal and hinterland communities. David Parkin centered much of his research on individuals raised in the mid-twentieth century as Mijikenda, who began identifying themselves also as Swahili when they converted to Islam to pursue personal advancement in independent Kenya.<sup>67</sup> In "Swahili Mijikenda: Facing Both

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<sup>65</sup> David Colton Sperling, "The Growth of Islam Among the Mijikenda of the Kenya Coast, 1826-1930" (PhD Dissertation, University of London, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> R. F. Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873 to 1907* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> David Parkin, *Palms, Wine and Witnesses: Public Spirit and Private Gain in an African Farm Community* (London: Chandler Publishing, 1972); "Along the Line of Road: Expanding Centres in Kenya's Coast Province," *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 49 (1979): 272-82; "Swahili Mijikenda: Facing Both Ways in Kenya," *Africa* 59, no. 2 (1989): 161-75; *Sacred Void*.

Ways” he examined how individuals signal their affiliation to Swahili or Mijikenda ethnicities situationally, though not simultaneously. Jeanne Bergman and Janet McIntosh have also explored how Mijikenda and Swahili individuals use stereotypes about one another to articulate the boundaries of their ethnic identities. Bergman noted that the Duruma incorporated Swahili figures into their local practices of spirit possession.<sup>68</sup> And Janet McIntosh found that Mijikenda healers incorporate Swahili practices into their treatments, such as Arabic or Arabic-like utterances based on passing familiarity with the Swahili healers’ use of Arabic.<sup>69</sup> McIntosh drew on her observations to argue that Mijikenda and Swahili communities in the vicinity of Malindi experience their relationships as an “ethno-religious” boundary. She emphasized that Swahili individuals assert hierarchical superiority in cross-ethnic relationships because they are considered by both ethnic groups to be more successful.<sup>70</sup> These anthropological approaches documenting situational adaptability in terms of group identification in the Mombasa region have increased the saliency of Willis’s critique of projecting these contemporary Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic identities into the past.

### **Chapter Outline**

Rather than narrating the past in eastern Kenya as a history of interactions between differentiated Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups, this dissertation examines

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<sup>68</sup> Jeanne L. Bergman, “A Willingness to Remember: The Persistence of Duruma Culture and Collective Memory” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> Kiswahili-speaking children learn to recite the Quran in Arabic on the coast from a young age.

<sup>70</sup> Janet McIntosh, *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

celebratory rituals that current residents of the region use to embody these distinctive ethnicities in order to discern integrative connections between the Kenyan coast and its hinterland, or—from the inland perspective—between the people of the hills and their coastal horizon. These rituals include practices that residents of the area once used to indicate membership in communities of smaller scale and of greater diversity. Although most of the ways that earlier residents of the region used such practices are probably unrecoverable, their descendants regarded some of them as so useful, or satisfying, that they continue to draw on them—and the places, practices, and objects that they use to symbolize them—to articulate, rationalize, and experience ethnicity and other imagined communities, such as nations and religions. They preserved and adapted these strategies because they enabled successful responses to the local challenges that they faced in a sequence of identifiable, distinctive historical eras.

This introduction has introduced the physical and historical landscapes of eastern Kenya, arguing that historians separated their analyses of communities there into two separate historiographies because of their reliance on ethnic identities of identifiably modern contraction to shape the contours of their thinking about the past. The remaining chapters challenge the premise of ethnic contrast that has shaped these historiographies by presenting a history of differentiated communities of differing sorts over the past two millennia, from the settlement of Bantu speakers in eastern Kenya's frontiers near the start of the Current Era (1 CE), to their establishment of commercial dealings and military alliances with Portuguese and Yarubi Omani representatives, as well as Mossguejo immigrants, in the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, and their struggles with imposed

political overrule by Busaidi Omani and British imperial administrators in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter Two, *Embodied Genealogies*, explains how to discern the past contexts in which residents of eastern Kenya articulated and developed shared collaborative strategies. Although they organized contemporary ethnic communities over the past century, they draw on residual elements of past strategies that they have preserved and embedded in the celebrations of community. A description of two New Year celebrations—one nominally “Swahili,” the other nominally “Mijikenda”—demonstrates that these current contrasting communities draw on a common reservoir of symbols and practices to commemorate the founding of their communities as distinct from each other. The method distinguishes these new uses of older elements in a manner parallel to Helm’s identification of stable landscape mnemonics in variable narrative formulations. By correlating the linguistic aspects of these performances with datable archaeological data, one can sequence the components of the past retained in ritual and spatial mnemonics to generate a linear narrative in the mode of modern historical discourse. In addition, it is possible to draw on the oral narratives of modern rituals for rich interpretations of archaeological and linguistic evidence that are more pertinent to the historical contexts of eastern Kenya than are the social science modeling of contrasting cultures grounded in Western experiences of Africa.

Chapters three through six examine how the Bantu speakers of eastern Kenya adapted four shared historical strategies of collaboration over the past two millennia. All of these strategies are rooted in a deep Bantu tradition with correlates throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but the residents of eastern Kenya emphasized different strategies to

meet their contemporary challenges at different times. The scope of each successive chapter narrows since evidence about present eras is more complex and detailed than evidence in more distant times. Thus, chapter three narrates the initial settlement of iron-using cultivators throughout northeastern Tanzania and southeastern Kenya who articulated Northeast Coast Bantu languages in the first centuries of the Current Era, chapter four describes how Sabaki speakers consolidated their frontiers in eastern Kenya and the Comoros Islands, chapters five and six narrow the focus further to describe how the immediate forebears of Mijikenda and Kiswahili speakers established regional strategies of exchange and warfare in eastern Kenya, and chapter seven emphasizes colonial developments within southeastern Kenya.

Chapter three, *Collective Claims*, examines how Bantu speakers in East Africa elaborated descent groups to claim people and land, both of which they considered scarce as they entered the region around 100 CE. The *malози* celebrations that mark successful negotiations over bride-price elegantly capture how Bantu concepts of kin guarantee the reproduction of their communities through successive generations. Examining the linguistic genealogy of the central image of the *malози* ceremony—the threshold of the bride’s maternal home—demonstrates that early settlers in Eastern Kenya differentiated their communities as unilineal descent groups and affiliated with other descent groups through marriage alliances. These alliances sustained preferential patterns of pairing the lineages that claimed productive land. Chapter three then examines how organizing their communities through lineages and marriage alliances shaped the ways they moved into the frontiers of East Africa between 300 BCE and 600 CE, particularly as they



encountered autochthonous foragers and pastoralists who organized their communities differently.

Chapter four, *Consolidating Sabaki Frontiers*, demonstrates that speakers of Proto-Sabaki Bantu (a later branch of Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu) innovated the strategy of clanship to collaborate more effectively in exploiting a greater range of natural resources than any lineage could do independently. Between 500 and 1000 CE, Bantu-speaking cultivators in eastern Kenya learned to exploit wider ranges of resources in their environments, articulated Proto-Sabaki dialects around their distinguishing strategies, and began organizing their settlements into spaces that their descendants have preserved through their clans. I draw on Mijikenda traditions about *uganga* (“proprietary knowledge”) to theorize that Proto-Sabaki speakers elaborated the concept of clans from marriage alliances. However, they expanded the strategy of clans to embrace more flexible strategies to incorporate knowledgeable autochthones since their expansive understanding of the local environment helped them experiment with new cultivation techniques and settle in unfamiliar places. This expanded economic base enabled Proto-Sabaki speakers to support the larger populations who left their languages to today’s heirs. I also reinterpret linguists’ sequence of Sabaki language divergence to a four stage historical model that reflects recent archaeological finds and locates the Proto-Sabaki homeland between the Tana River and Mount Mwangea in eastern Kenya.

Chapter five, *Domesticating Commerce*, examines how succeeding generations of residents in eastern Kenya organized economic exchanges around a hierarchy of anchor towns, country towns, and villages to facilitate commerce among their communities and

with growing numbers of Indian Ocean traders. As more people filled eastern Kenya's landscapes with commercially oriented settlements, wealthy men cultivated a new status as patricians by distributing imported products to assemble followers in their lineages and clans as well as clients from surrounding villages. The patrons of these exchange networks gradually established clan confederations that enabled members to rely upon one another for mutual support and safety as they moved to trade with other clan confederations throughout the region. Patricians also organized councils and title societies, each with different and well-defined responsibilities and membership. By drawing membership from several clans, these associations ensured that members guarded the interests of the entire clan confederation. The feasts sponsored by (and required of) initiates to these associations demonstrated their commitment to their communities and dissuaded wealthy individuals among them from seeking autonomy or personal power.

Chapter six, *Dancing with Swords*, examines the martial heritage of eastern Kenya that is recalled in Swahili sword dances to shift emphasis from the assemblage of commercially-oriented clan confederations to their members' efforts to defend them, first from one another, and secondly from Portuguese and Omani mariners at the turn of the sixteenth century. Clan confederations in eastern Kenya adopted the resources, people, and strategies of militant immigrants from Portugal, Oman, and the upper Tana River who entered eastern Kenya in the sixteenth century—particularly the strategies of extracting customs and taxes from defeated communities and organizing youth into age-sets that supported military alliances among clan confederations. While foreign invaders

escalated the violence among these rivals by introducing new methods of subordination and tilting the balance of power through offers of protection, local communities maintained their autonomy as they rivalled each others efforts to consolidate political authority over eastern Kenya.

Chapter seven, *Discourses of Difference*, describes how clan confederations in eastern Kenya articulated discourses of cultural and religious difference in the nineteenth century to new Omani overlords and in the early twentieth century persuaded British administrators to formalize these distinctions in policy and law. Specifically, the centralized political strategies of the Omani and British regimes disrupted the commercial and military alliances between coastal and inland clan confederations by assigning them different legal statuses depending on their adherence to Islamic law. While Omani immigrants encouraged disassociation of respectable coastal Muslim communities from the disdained “kaffir” (non-Muslim) hinterland, these distinctions remained imprecise and permeable until British rule. In response to these colonial classifications of religion, coastal communities adopted Swahili as an ethnic name that emphasized both their claims to local autochthony, Southwest Asian descent, and Muslim status, while hinterland communities emphasized their descent from ancestors in the towns that they had gradually deserted since the sixteenth century and replaced the derisive *wanyika* epithet with Mijikenda (“nine towns”).

Chapter eight, *Transcending Ethnicity?*, draws on the dissertation’s identification of compiled social strategies to consider modern Kenyans’ ongoing project to transform ethnic diversity into a resource for national reconciliation. It describes how Swahili and

Mijikenda communities who embrace Kenyan nationalist rhetoric ironically extend the saliency of their ethnic identities even as they aim to transcend ethnicity in the future. The conclusion also reviews how this history of compiled social strategies reconciles conundrums raised by scholars of ethnicity and other social strategies such as nationality and racism—including the simultaneous participation of individuals in multiple “mutually exclusive” communities and the apparent primordialism of ethnicity despite its relatively recent innovation in the colonial era. By tracing the genealogies of practices, rather than ethnic communities, regional linguistic histories informed by archaeology and local interpretations found in rituals and traditions can transcend the anachronistic ethnic boundaries that are projected onto Africa’s past.

## Chapter 2

### Embodied Genealogies: Reading Rituals Historically

*A ritual is not a journal or a memoir  
 . . . . It is a cult enacted.*<sup>1</sup>

-Paul Connerton

Just after daybreak on Sunday, July 18, 2010, about sixty men, a dozen women and half a dozen boys gathered in Mombasa to celebrate Siku ya Kibunzi, the Swahili New Year. The organizers of the ceremonies intended to assemble everyone on a lawn facing the grave of Shehe Mvita, a Swahili martyr whom they regard as their ancestor.<sup>2</sup> But a morning rain drove the participants inside the auditorium of Alidina Visram High School, whose campus near Mombasa's northern creek surrounds the grave. The grave marker was made of shaped concrete with a Swahili inscription in Latin characters stenciled in black. But two fragments from an earlier time which lay atop the grave were inscribed with Arabic characters. One participant claimed they have celebrated Siku ya Kibunzi on the same site for "a thousand years, maybe two."

In addition to a communal prayer for peace and prosperity, Siku ya Kibunzi is a reunion of the Wamiji—the descendants of Mombasa Old Town's original residents. As

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> My consultants claimed Shehe Mvita was killed by the Portuguese in 1583, as suggested on his grave marker. However, Mbarak Ali Hinawy cites Portuguese sources that Shehe Mvita was killed during his raid on Malindi by the town's Mosseguejo allies (Mbarak Ali Hinawy, *Al Akida and Fort Jesus Mombasa* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970).

participants arrived in their tuk-tuk taxis, old friends greeted one another in the traditional manner: a handshake accompanied by a kiss on the backs of their clasped hands. A videographer circulated through the crowd and conducted spontaneous interviews for a promotional video about the holiday. Most of the men and boys wore the cylindrical Swahili hats known as *kofia* and gleaming white *kanzus*, tunics that stretch from neck to mid-calf. But a few men appeared in slacks and tattered shirts, dressed for labor. The women wore modest black *bui-buis* that mostly covered their colorful *kanga* wraps, blouses, and hair; like many Muslim women in Mombasa, they left their faces unveiled.

As the participants arrived, the men who were dressed for work dug a hole and set out large tin cooking pots for the afternoon feast of bread and stew. They tied up the chicken, goat, and brown cow that would be slaughtered for the stew. Inside the auditorium, participants finished preparing for the celebration by pushing away chairs, rolling out large plaited mats, and distributing a *maulidi* “lit. birthday” (St. Sw. < Ar.)—which in this case indicated an Arabic text that narrates the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad.

A handful of the more eminent men, including a former Chief Kadhi of Kenya and a *sharifu*, sat cross-legged or crouched on the short stage facing the assembly.<sup>3</sup> The other men sat on the floor, a few with their sons. Several yards behind the men, a dozen women sat on another mat, though a few of the older women opted to sit in chairs. Once most of the participants had settled into their places, the men on the stage took turns with

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<sup>3</sup> A kadhi (Arabic: qadi, قاضي) is an Islamic judge; a sharifu (Arabic: sha:rif, شَارِف) is a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad; see glossary.

a microphone as they led the participants in reciting the *maulidi*. At occasional breaks in the recitation they paused to sing Kiswahili *qasida* “poetry, religious songs” (St. Sw. < Ar.) from memory. Everyone stood for the final song as young men circulated through the audience to sprinkle the participants with rosewater and apply perfume to their wrists. One of the men, after returning to a seated position, gave a short speech. Then a *muezzin* “prayer caller” (St. Sw. < Ar.) took the microphone to give the Islamic call to prayer in Arabic.

Meanwhile, the men outside had laid the cow on the ground next to the hole they had prepared to catch the blood that would flow when it was slaughtered. As soon as the call to prayer was complete, a butcher skillfully slit the animal’s throat with a long sharp knife, after offering the requisite Islamic invocation (*bismillah*, “in the name of Allah”). Once the blood stopped running into the hole, they slaughtered the goat atop the cow’s carcass, then the chicken alongside it so that the blood from each animal would run into the same hole. The men immediately began butchering the animals in the open air and laid the meat on a clean sheet of plastic.

Back inside, one of the organizers offered another short speech then directed the attention of the assembly to the women gathered in the back who would perform a dance known as *vugo* “antelope horn” (St. Sw. ~ MK) to witness the occasion. The women clustered together and stood facing the men as they sang; their torsos moved in rhythm to the drums and antelope horns that some of the women played to accompany their singing. After a few minutes of dancing, the celebration concluded and most of the participants dispersed while the workmen prepared the afternoon feast.

Hassan Mohamed, a participant who works as an Educational Officer at Fort Jesus Museum, told me that women would have baked bread in years past to accompany the stew. Young men would circulate through the town collecting the bread and bringing it directly to the morning celebration. He likened the practice to a census, since every house in the town was expected to contribute.<sup>4</sup> But these days participants contribute to a collection to buy bread from a local Muslim baker.

A few hundred people attended the afternoon feast which organizers called a *sadaqa* (< Ar.) to emphasize that it was intended especially to benefit the poor. By three in the afternoon, the crowd had dispersed. The organizers forbade anyone from taking leftovers home. They stuffed these remains into a large red plastic sack along with the bones of the slaughtered animals. The organizers entrusted the sack to a fisherman whom they paid to heave it into the deep sea so that it would not wash back to shore.<sup>5</sup> One of the workmen told me that disposing of the remains in the sea ensured that diseases and other problems would not come to the island in the coming year.

### **Foreign Loans and Regional Resonances**

Scholars and local residents often describe the Swahili New Year celebration as a local variation of *nairuz*, the Persian New Year. Sailors in the Indian Ocean often used

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<sup>4</sup> Hassan Mohammed, interview by Daren Ray, Video (.mov), August 24, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department.

<sup>5</sup> In the past, the payment included ornaments from the jewelry from the women of the Wang'ombeni clan (P.J.L. Frankl, "Siku Ya Mwaka: The Swahili New Year [With Special Reference to Mombasa]," *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 64, Swahili Forum VII [2000]: 21).



the Persian solar calendar to track the seasons suitable for maritime trade.<sup>6</sup> And Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, a local scholar, has reported several sailor traditions in Lamu, Kenya during their New Year Celebration that strengthens this association.<sup>7</sup> However, few of the observances associated with *nairuz* in Iran are practiced among East Africa's coastal communities.<sup>8</sup> In addition, rather than following the Persian calendar, the date of the celebration is determined by a solar calendar of local invention that is divided into thirty-six ten-day periods (*muongos*, St. Sw.).<sup>9</sup> The extra five days make up an incomplete thirty-seventh *muongo*, the last day being the date of New Year's Eve, or *kibunzi* in the Mvita dialect of Mombasa. The actual date of the celebration varies among East Africa's coastal communities, and the celebration is sometimes postponed to a day more convenient than the date prescribed.<sup>10</sup> For example, in 2010, the celebration was held on

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<sup>6</sup> Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Culture of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, "Swahili New Year in Swahili Lands," Self-published articles (Mombasa, Kenya, n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> The most notably absent practice is jumping through bonfires; but the Iranian practices of buying new clothes to wear on the holiday and "spring cleaning" was practiced until recently along the Swahili Coast, though it is unclear if these were borrowed practices or local innovations. In Comoros, Iain Walker has described dances on the beach around bonfires which are possibly related to Persian traditions, but bonfires are hardly unique to the Zoroastrian rituals that form the basis of *nairuz* celebrations in Iran (*Becoming the Other, Being Oneself: Constructing Identities in a Connected World* [Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2010]).

<sup>9</sup> P. J. L. Frankl, "Siku Ya Mwaka: New Year's Day in Swahili-Land (With Special Reference to Mombasa)," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 23, no. 2 (May 1993): 126.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Sacleux, *Grammaire Des Dialectes Swahilis* (Paris: Les PP. du Saint-Esprit, 1909) mentions a method used for correcting the Swahili solar new year using the Islamic lunar year (setting the date back ten or eleven full days on the lunar calendar, i.e. if it fell on 13 Muharram one year, the following year it should fall on 3 Muharram). This mathematical calculation was probably adjusted against astronomical observation of the rising and setting of the Pleiades, which in Kiswahili is called *kilimia*, a derivation of the word "to farm." See Frankl, "Siku Ya Mwaka [2000]," 10.

Sunday rather than the calculated date of Wednesday, which would have been inconvenient for many of the participants with weekday jobs.<sup>11</sup>

Arguing against the association of Swahili New Year's celebrations with *nairuz*, Odile Racine-Issa has documented how most observances of the New Year in Zanzibar honor ancestors and local spirits.<sup>12</sup> The decidedly local character of these celebrations is evident in the variety of names for the : in Lamu they call it Mwaka wa Chonda, in Zanzibar it is Mwaka wa Koga, and in Mombasa, Siku ya Kibunzi.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the diversity of traditions associated with Swahili New Year in different coastal communities suggests that it was either practiced locally prior to the consolidation of Kiswahili-speaking culture along the East African coast or introduced in recent centuries but subject to extensive local innovation. In either case, participants consider local practices such as heaving the leftovers into the sea to be an essential component of the ritual.

Additional indications that New Year celebrations on the coast are derived from earlier local heritages are provided by solar New Year celebrations practiced by other communities in the Sabaki language group to which Kiswahili belongs: these include the Comorian *mwaha* celebration and a Digo Mijikenda *mwaka* harvest celebration in

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<sup>11</sup> Frankl records a similar adjustment in 1992 when Siku ya Mwaka fell on a Friday but was celebrated on Sunday, "Siku Ya Mwaka [2000]," 9.

<sup>12</sup> Odile Racine-Issa, "The Mwaka of Makunduchi, Zanzibar," in *Continuity and Autonomy in Swahili Communities: Inland Influences and Strategies of Self-Determination*, ed. and trans. David Parkin (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 167–75.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany, "Swahili New Year in Swahili Lands" Self-published articles (Mombasa, Kenya, n.d.); fliers for the celebration referred to the celebration as Mwaka wa Kiswahili wa Miongo (plural of *muongo*), to make explicit which calendar's New Year was being celebrated.

August.<sup>14</sup> The *mwaka muvya* celebration of the Rabai Mijikenda communities, who live west of Mombasa, follow the same method of counting the solar calendar as their Kiswahili-speaking neighbors, though they currently begin their count about three months later.<sup>15</sup> And, while celebrants in Mombasa have incorporated many Islamic practices into their New Year celebration, they also share many of their practices with celebrants of Mwaka Muvya in Rabai.

### **Mwaka Muvya: A Mijikenda New Year in Rabai**

The formal observances for Mwaka Muvya in Rabai that I attended began just before sunrise on October 24, 2010, at a private homestead in the Mwawesa sub-district of Rabai.<sup>16</sup> Most members of the homestead had spent the previous night holding vigil after their children entertained them with simple acrobatics and a dramatic presentation that they had learned and performed at primary school. At first light, the women gathered ash from the previous evening's cooking fire in a coconut shell. Then they took turns casting handfuls of it onto the exterior walls of their individual homes, which surrounded the communal yard of the homestead. Next, the younger men of the family (mostly in their thirties or forties) assembled brush from the surrounding vegetation for a temporary shrine: over a dozen thin branches, large bunches of tall grass, two long palm fronds, dozens of notched twigs and half a dozen broad leaves.

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<sup>14</sup> Ernst Dammann, *Dichtungen in Der Lamu-Mundart Des Suaheli* (Hamburg: Friederichsen De Gruyter, 1940), 366 n20.

<sup>15</sup> *mwaka muvya*, “lit. year, new.”

<sup>16</sup> The following description is based on video recordings in the author's possession: “Rabai New Year Mwaka Muvya,” 24 October 2010, Ray Research Deposit E027.

At the crossroad of two paths leading to the shared yard they arranged about a dozen branches vertically into the ground in a half circle. They stripped bark from a few saplings to tie shorter pieces around the frame as supports and bound the frame at the top to form a half-cone lattice. Then they bundled and bound the grass to the frame, leaving an opening that faced the path leading back to their yard. They wove the leaves of the palms into an attractive braid then bent the two fronds into an arch between the back of the shrine and the crossroads. While one man completed the arch, two others placed four twigs upright within the shrine, each with a crook at its top. On these, they placed crossbeams to form a miniature bed to hold the rest of the twigs that they used. The shrine was complete when they carefully covered the make-shift bed with broad leaves.

Once they finished the shrine, they sent a boy to call the women to join them. The eldest man in the compound sat near the shrine on a three-legged stool and mixed water with more ash from the previous evening's cooking fire. He had removed his shirt after overseeing the assembly of the shrine and changed from pants to a deep-blue *kaniki*, a wrap that Mijikenda men wear around the lower half of the body on formal occasions. He took handfuls of the sticky ash paste, put one gooey ball on each of the broad leaves in the shrine, and verbally welcomed his ancestors. Soon after, the women arrived, and he invoked his ancestors in prayer. After the invocation the women ululated. The elder and the women then sang together for a few minutes. After a few verses of singing, he offered another prayer and sang again with the women. As they began this final song, he led the celebrants along the path back to their yard.

On entering the compound the eldest man broke from the procession and began removing dirt and weeds from around a collection of short upright stones—grave markers—which had settled into the ground. After a few strokes, the rest of the procession joined him. He led them to four more grave markers, which they cleared of vegetation and loose dirt. This sweeping concluded the formal activities of the day. Breakfast was modest, in expectation of a larger meal later on. In the meantime, neighbors gathered to join in dancing and singing that lasted throughout the day.

### **Sabaki Symbols: Linguistic Genealogies of Practice**

To casual observers, these two New Year Celebrations hardly resemble one another. At Mwaka Muvya in Rabai, no animals are sacrificed and the remains dropped into the sea, and there are no recitations in Arabic. The stately *kanzus* worn by the Swahili are immediately recognized as formal wear common in many Muslim communities; but most observers would mistake the Rabai elder's *kaniki* skirt and the *kangas* worn by his female relatives as everyday garments. Mwaka Muvya appears to be a family celebration that commemorates the memory of departed loved ones and honored elders, while Siku ya Mwaka draws together individuals from many localities into a community defined by their devotion to Allah, their commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's life, and shared descent from a Muslim martyr.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Occasionally the chief (a government official) organizes a modest community celebration with dancing (Stephen Mutta interview by Daren Ray, Video [.mov], trans. William Tsaka, May 17, 2010, Ray Research Deposit C017, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department).

The participants in these two contrasting commemorative rituals also view them as distinctive to their ethnic groups. One of the men who participated in the celebration at Mwawesa explained that Mwaka Muvya was his favorite holiday because it belonged to the Rabai people, specifically noting Christmas and Easter as foreign holidays. His evident pride in the community celebration was similar to that of two Swahili men in their twenties who participated in the Swahili New Year at Mombasa. They come home from their work in the Arabian Peninsula only twice a year: for Id el-Fitr, the Islamic celebration at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, and Siku ya Kibunzi.

Despite this high level of commitment from some participants, Siku ya Kibunzi was almost abandoned in Mombasa before foreign donors helped revive it in the 1990s as a Swahili tradition.<sup>18</sup> This renewed celebration of the Swahili New Year has attracted the ire of Salafi—or so-called “Wahhabi”—Muslims, who seek to purify Islam. They often accuse Muslims in the Mombasa area who participate in Siku ya Kibunzi of *bid’a*—“unlawful innovation.”<sup>19</sup> Salafi opposition may explain in part why participants in the Swahili New Year celebration associate it with *nairuz*, which in parts of the Islamic world is celebrated as a secular holiday.<sup>20</sup> Salafi criticism has also led organizers to change how they celebrate the Swahili New Year.<sup>21</sup> For instance, one participant

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<sup>18</sup> Ulrich Rinn, “Mwaka Koga: The Development of Sincretistic Rituals in a Globalising World,” in *Unpacking the New: Critical Perspectives on Cultural Syncretization in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Afe Adogame, Magnus Echter, and Ulf Vierke (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 360.

<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Abdalla Saleh Farsy, *Bid-a: Sehemu Ya Kwanza* (Mombasa: Adam Traders, n.d.).

<sup>20</sup> Frankl, “Siku Ya Mwaka [2000],” 7.

<sup>21</sup> Government officials have also played a role through enforcing safety regulations. In Makunduchi, the ritual stick fighting conducted at New Year celebrations was eventually banned though it has made a recent resurgence in a new form (Rinn, “Mwaka Koga,” also see discussion in Chapter 6). Some participants at

explained that they formerly sacrificed a black bull but now avoid that color because black animals are central to some rituals of some non-Muslim Kenyans. Other public elements of ritual practices that most Swahili Muslims have abandoned include bathing in the sea, decorating the outside of homes with ash, performing the *gungu* sword dance, and leading the sacrificial bull from mosque to mosque along the main road of Old Town Mombasa before sacrificing it at the grave of Shehe Mvita.<sup>22</sup>

Not coincidentally, several of the rituals condemned by Salafi Muslims resonate clearly with the practices of their Mijikenda neighbors. Marking homes with ash initiates the formal Mwaka Muvya celebration in Rabai. And, although a sacrificial bull is not part of the Rabai New Year celebration, Rabai's elders occasionally lead a black bull through ancestral *kaya* settlements before sacrificing it as part of another ritual. After feasting on the flesh of the animal, they also throw the remains of the bull into the creek near Rabai that leads into the sea.<sup>23</sup> A survey of practices associated with Swahili New Year celebrations elsewhere in East Africa reveals other resonances. For instance, during Swahili New Year as practiced in Makunduchi in the south of Unguja Island (Zanzibar), participants build a small grass shrine almost identical to the shrine that Rabai celebrants construct at crossroads near their homes.

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the 2010 New Year's celebration in Mombasa told me that they stopped leading the bull through the streets because it would require a permit that officials were unlikely to grant.

<sup>22</sup> Frankl details a route that passes six mosques in Old Town Mombasa before arriving at the grave, "Siku Ya Mwaka [2000]," 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Personal Communication with William Tsaka.

Figure 2.1: New Year Huts in Makunduchi and Rabai<sup>24</sup>



However, Makunduchi celebrants, instead of using the shrine to offer ash to the ancestors, burn it down to force a participant who is waiting inside to run for the safety of the forest. In Tumbe, on the island of Pemba in Tanzania, celebrants of Swahili New Year pause at crossroads and other places where spirits reside. There they offer the *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer.<sup>25</sup> The form of the prayer is Islamic, but they share the practice of praying at crossroads with their linguistic cousins in Mijikenda communities. So, celebrants of New Year in Mombasa and Rabai share symbols and practices from the common past evident in their languages, although they have innovated and borrowed new

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<sup>24</sup> Makunduchi photo on left from Racine-Issa, "The Mwaka of Makunduchi, Zanzibar," 178 <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00346342/>; Rabai photo on right by author.

<sup>25</sup> Rinn, "Mwaka Koga," 351.



practices as they have engaged increasingly differentiated circumstances and reassembled these elements in distinctive configurations.

### **Reading Rituals Historically: Theoretical Roots and Compiled Traditions**

Correlating historical linguistics with archaeological evidence allows a more precise examination of how Swahili and Mijikenda speakers and their ancestors and forebears compiled ritual practices in Mombasa and Rabai, including those related to New Year celebrations. In some cases the distribution and form of words in distinct languages and dialects can also indicate which practices were inherited from the Sabaki era, before Swahili and Mijikenda languages diverged, and which practices have been borrowed since that time from other speech communities. Thus linguistic data associated with these rituals can produce a roughly datable, or at least a firmly sequenced, genealogy of the practices that speakers of languages descended from Proto-Sabaki have integrated in their communities as symbols of subsequent, including current, collaborative strategies.<sup>26</sup>

Rituals are sets of “restored behavior” which are recognizable and meaningful in the present because participants attribute them to their forebears in the past, in effect restoring themselves to harmony with, or even presence in, another normative time.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This genealogy of practices is presented in the conclusion since the intervening chapters provide the framework for sequencing the contexts and development of each practice.

<sup>27</sup> See Richard Schechner, “Restoration of Behavior,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 441–458, and Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 22. Rituals may be defined broadly to include all rule-governed practices such as speech, or more narrowly, as practices which participants distinguish formally from normal spontaneous activities (Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [New York: Oxford,

Participants in rituals thus embody the genealogies of their putative ancestors—through reciting lists of people and generations, visiting places where they lived, wearing clothing styles inherited from earlier times, and manipulating objects, as well as through dances, gestures, and trances.<sup>28</sup> Rituals are embodied genealogies also because participants draw on practices and symbols that their ancestors compiled over many generations. They often present the traditions, body-habits, and physical objects that they received from earlier generations as the undifferentiated heritage around which contemporary ethnicized groups gather.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the rich semantic fields available in rituals enable linguistic historians to identify the precise ways in which modern individuals invoke their ethnic identities by resurrecting elements of the past in practices of the present.<sup>30</sup>

In some cases, historians may trace these elements to the times and places, or historical contexts, of their innovators. By focusing on the components assembled today in ritual practices—rather than the contemporary meanings of the assemblage—scholars can read rituals to discern collaborative communities of the past lurking in practices that

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1992]). I generally focus on rituals that participants differentiate from day-to-day routines, such as celebrations of calendrical ceremonies, weddings, engagements, initiations, and funerals.

<sup>28</sup> For the relationship between spirit possession and collective memory among Duruma Mijikenda communities, see Bergman, “A Willingness to Remember: The Persistence of Duruma Culture and Collective Memory.”

<sup>29</sup> Many Swahili, for instance, group all non-Islamic traditional practices as *mila*, “tradition” St. Sw. For an example in one field of Swahili practice, see Mayvilynne Alice Hechanova Poblete, “‘This Is Traditional, This Is Not Islamic’: Perceiving Some Swahili Childbirth and Child-Rearing Beliefs and Practices in Light of Mila (custom) and Dini (religion)” (M.A., Anthropology, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Richard Jenkins argues that rituals are “potent markers and statements of ethnic identification” because they must be recognized by others, (*Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008).]: 68).

participants today rearrange to emphasize modern ethnic homogeneity.<sup>31</sup> The New Year rituals that participants identify as Swahili or Rabai draw on strategies that predate both of these ethnic identities by centuries.

As the descriptions of the New Year celebrations above demonstrate, participants elaborate ritual symbols and practices to appeal to all the bodily senses, making their individual provenances—and subsequent developments—relatively difficult to discern, but participants fortunately also encode many of these elements in language. As Jan Vansina has demonstrated, the translation of concepts, practices, and things into words means that scholars may excavate modern African languages for information about the past. In *Paths in the Rainforest*, Vansina traced modern distributions of words, and their semantic innovations, to discern the historical elaboration of a single dynamic ancient political tradition into the hundreds of Bantu-speaking communities living today in Equatorial West Africa. Vansina identified a semantic core in the modern political vocabularies in this area and traced sequences of phonetic shifts from a very early “Proto-Bantu” and parallels in semantic extensions and borrowings that explained the process by which languages and political practices had diversified over more than three millennia:

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<sup>31</sup> This historical approach to reading rituals thus builds upon but contrasts sharply with those anthropological approaches that focus on discerning the meaning of rituals by identifying the relationships among all the symbols of a contemporary ritual to understand social organization. See Victor W. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

[Traditions] inform the understanding of the physical world and develop innovations to give meaning to changing circumstances in the physical realm, and do so in terms of the guiding principles of the tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Inevitably, people introduce elements without precedent and abandon others practiced by their ancestors. Yet, they must also retain at least those elements that make their novelties intelligible—and attractive—to others. By assembling inherited and novel elements together, innovators apply the “guiding principles of tradition” (in Vansina’s terms) to ever-changing contexts in the present.

For example, English speakers accepted and repeated the words coined by Shakespeare and other wordsmiths because they were accompanied by other grammatical, semantic, visual, and performative cues that conveyed their meanings. Furthermore they had to “sound” like English or risk being regarded as a foreign loanword—another common method of linguistic innovation. Sometimes, documentary and material traces may alert researchers to the timing of these innovations in the past, even some of which were subsequently abandoned. As an ubiquitous method, and product, of collaboration, languages are unparalleled resources for accessing the cognitive understandings of the physical and social world that speech communities share among themselves and bequeath to their descendants.

Vansina’s excavation of Equatorial West Africa’s political tradition—in the sense of the cognitive schema that successive generations inadvertently retained as they built

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<sup>32</sup> Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

historical innovations out of it—was an outgrowth of his earliest works, which set the study of oral traditions on a firm footing within the discipline of history as evidence. While anthropologists and scholars of religion often interpret the narrative levels of oral traditions as charter myths that mediate among the various components of the contemporary society that tells them, Vansina also recognized the markings of the past in the genealogies, migration stories, and origin myths that he viewed as narratives passed on in oral traditions.<sup>33</sup>

Initially, Vansina focused on comparing contemporary variants to distinguish anachronisms in the same way that philologists read medieval chronicles. Vansina's first efforts to interpret oral traditions thus recognized that narrators disrupted the diachronic integrity of their "historical" traditions with novel elements that served contemporary needs. Soon, however, Vansina and his collaborators realized they could not read oral traditions for the content expressed in the same way as written documents, in part because the dynamic that made oral traditions effective as community-sustaining myths was the creative performances contextualized in present audiences rather than in reconstructable continuities in narrative. Thus, he and his collaborators eventually extended their analysis of oral traditions to all the elements that narrators assemble, including the strategy of telling narratives about the past.

Anthropologists and performance theorists also explored the limits of detecting elements from the past in mid-twentieth-century cultural practices. Clifford Geertz, who

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<sup>33</sup> For a brief overview of the controversies over Vansina's method see David Newbury, "Contradictions at the Heart of the Canon: Jan Vansina and the Debate over Oral Historiography in Africa, 1960-1985," *History in Africa* 34 (January 1, 2007): 213–54.

emphasized that ethnographers should use the method of “thick description”, recognized that even careful transcriptions of ritual performances never record more than a sampling of the many experiences of even shared practices.<sup>34</sup> Ethnographic observers are limited by their initial ignorance: they must attempt to identify the most important things to record at the same time that they are acquiring the cultural competency that their observations are supposed to convey. For Geertz, any object of inquiry that could provide information about a culture could be read as a “text.” But even if it were possible to render a complete transcription of a ritual that accounted for every word, posture, action, tone, object, and spatial relationship among the participants and observers, the record would be incomplete on this level and entirely devoid of the experiences of the participants. Recording equipment can capture a single performance in greater detail, but participants alter their performances when they know they are being recorded because the recording, and observant recorder, are components, even prominent ones, of the performance itself. And even with recording equipment, no two performances are precisely the same, introducing the additional complication of situational, strategic improvisation to the challenges of defining and interpreting what even thick description might describe.

For instance, performance theorist Richard Schechner described a film production that aimed to preserve the Hindu ritual of *agnicayana* before it fell into disuse. He noted that time constraints, participants’ ignorance of how the ritual had been conducted in the

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<sup>34</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977).

past, recording technology, and the presence of an outsider at a performance of belonging combined to thwart an accurate reproduction of the ritual.<sup>35</sup> In addition, participant-observation, ethnographic interviews, and audio-visual recordings are limited in time and space: they cannot fully account for previous and subsequent variations and their contemporary and historical meanings. Thus the aim of thick description and audio-visual recordings is not to provide a transcript, per se, of a tradition or ritual, as if it were a discrete object whose parts could be analyzed to understand the whole, but a partial inventory of the possibilities of motivation and expression that participants in ritual call upon in many contexts. Just as linguists can use utterances to discern the syntax of past and present languages but not predict every possible conversation, these research methods can discern the rules and elements with which past and contemporary performers assemble their rituals but not every possible performance. Although ritual participants do not represent past practices in exactly the same way as their forebears, they can reassemble elements from the past—gestures, dances, clothing, utterances—to authenticate their rituals as an authentic part of their ancestral heritage.<sup>36</sup>

Several scholars have shown how to reconstruct the contexts of the elements that participants draw upon to create their rituals and traditions. Joseph Miller and other Africanist historians have argued that the performers of oral traditions and their audiences, or rather co-participants, formally encode the meanings of episodes, or eras, in the past in clichés, dramatic and hence memorable “core images”, and other mnemonic

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<sup>35</sup> Schechner, “Restoration of Behavior.”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

devices. Much of the variation observed in rituals appears as performers apply these clichés to make analytical arguments and aesthetic statements in contemporary contexts.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while people adapt the core elements of their traditions to contemporary contexts, these traditions also contain interpretations of, and hence information about, the past. In literate cultures, rituals are often bound by written liturgies from the past that are of no direct relevance to their invocation in the present. But even in oral cultures, scholars argue that clichés rarely change because participants evaluate the authenticity and effectiveness of oral traditions and other rituals by their faithfulness to these core images.<sup>38</sup>

Extending these insights on the continuing or stable elements in the transmission of traditions beyond the analysis of discourse, historian Paul Connerton argued that the manner in which clichés are conveyed through bodily practice is an essential part of making rituals “work”:

For if the ceremonies are to work for their participants, if they are to be persuasive to them, then those participants must be not simply cognitively competent to execute the performance, they must be habituated to those performances. This habituation is to be found . . . in the bodily substrate of the performance.<sup>39</sup>

Connerton emphasized embodied practices in tying rituals authoritatively, that is, beyond cognitive doubt, to the past. But most historians have followed Vansina and Miller in

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph C. Miller, *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1980).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

<sup>39</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 70.



focusing their methodological discussions about performative evidence on the verbal component of performances of traditions.<sup>40</sup> They have paid less attention to the body-habits, spatial patterns, and material culture that participants also make use of in rituals.<sup>41</sup>

In order to apply these distinctions between enduring elements and *ad hoc* assemblages in oral traditions to this wider range of performative evidence, I draw on Rosalind Shaw's notion of *memory-scape*. Focused initially on Temne divination in contemporary Sierra Leone, Shaw described modern practices, spaces, bodies, and spirits as non-discursive embodied memories of the era of the slave trade. Shaw noted that European travelers in the sixteenth century described how Temne-speakers maintained spirit shrines that pervaded the landscape, suggesting that they pervasively animated their environment with spirits. But during Shaw's field work in the late twentieth century, she noticed only a few shrines. She also realized that the rituals Temne-speakers used to protect their homes from robbers adapted rituals for protecting their bodies against malevolent spirits who resided in the wilderness on the edges of towns. Except for rare "domesticated town spirits", the "cohabitating benefactors" of the wilderness in the past had turned into "destructive assailants."<sup>42</sup> The environment had ceased to be a resource to be nurtured and had become the abode from which raiders emerged in search of captives.

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<sup>40</sup> Miller, *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History*.

<sup>41</sup> But see T. J. Desch Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008) which explores bodily practices and forms.

<sup>42</sup> Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 56.

Besides the abandonment of the spirit shrines, Shaw pointed to other features of the Temne landscape to show that their divinatory practices are memories of the slave trade: fortified settlements built by slave raiders and hidden settlements built by those seeking to avoid enslavement. She argued that past communities developed these strategies of closure and concealment in response to the dangers of the slave trade era. Not coincidentally, these old principles of closure and concealment serve as the most important principles in modern Temne rituals of protection, providing a direct link between past traumas and present remedies. Shaw distinguishes these rituals as a tradition carried forward from the era of the slave trade, rather than from the intervening stages of conversion to Islam and colonial rule, which contributed different social memories among the Temne-speakers of today.<sup>43</sup>

Shaw's concept of memory-scape provides direction for deconstructing rituals to identify the historical sources from which their elements are assembled. First, it asserts that social memories are compilations of many eras of the past, which may be discerned in contemporary practices and distinguished from one another. Second, it calls on scholars to recognize residents' cognitive organization of their physical landscape into meaningful places as a source for understanding historical change. However, as Shaw emphasized, she was concerned more with social memory—the ways in which the past is

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<sup>43</sup> Nicolas Argenti similarly interprets the mask dances performed by youth in the Central Grasslands of Cameroon as a living heritage of the slave trade era—a strategy of dealing with trauma and expressing dissatisfaction with the social and political order in Nicolas Argenti, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

assembled and evoked in the present—than constructing a historical narrative from elements employed as authoritative survivals from the past.

### **Memorialization and Historical Method**

In order to incorporate the insights afforded by Shaw’s memory-scape into a narrative history of eastern Kenya—rather than a discussion of memories about the region’s past—I adopt a multi-disciplinary approach that correlates evidence from the distinct, independent, but complementary disciplines of historical linguistics, archaeology, ethnography, and history.<sup>44</sup> Jan Shetler has demonstrated the potential of this multi-disciplinary method in her history of the Western Serengeti. A key to her analysis is the study of “core spatial images”, like the core clichés of discursive traditions, that relate different visions of and practices in the Serengeti landscape to different historical communities. Even without documentary records, the multiple sources on which Shetler draws enabled her to identify the contexts of earlier communities in the Serengeti and the life-ways they followed.

As Shetler has outlined in her own work, weaving local traditions and evidence collected from different disciplinary perspectives is problematic if one seeks only direct correlations—such as a shared time-frame for camel bones dated through chemistry and a new word for camel whose provenance is estimated through linguistic dating methods.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jan Bender Shetler, *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Katherine de Luna provides a comprehensive description of “direct correlations” in “Surveying the Boundaries of Historical Linguistics and Archaeology: Early Settlement in South Central Africa,” *African Archaeological Review* 29, no. 2–3 (September 18, 2012): 209–251; also see Christopher Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

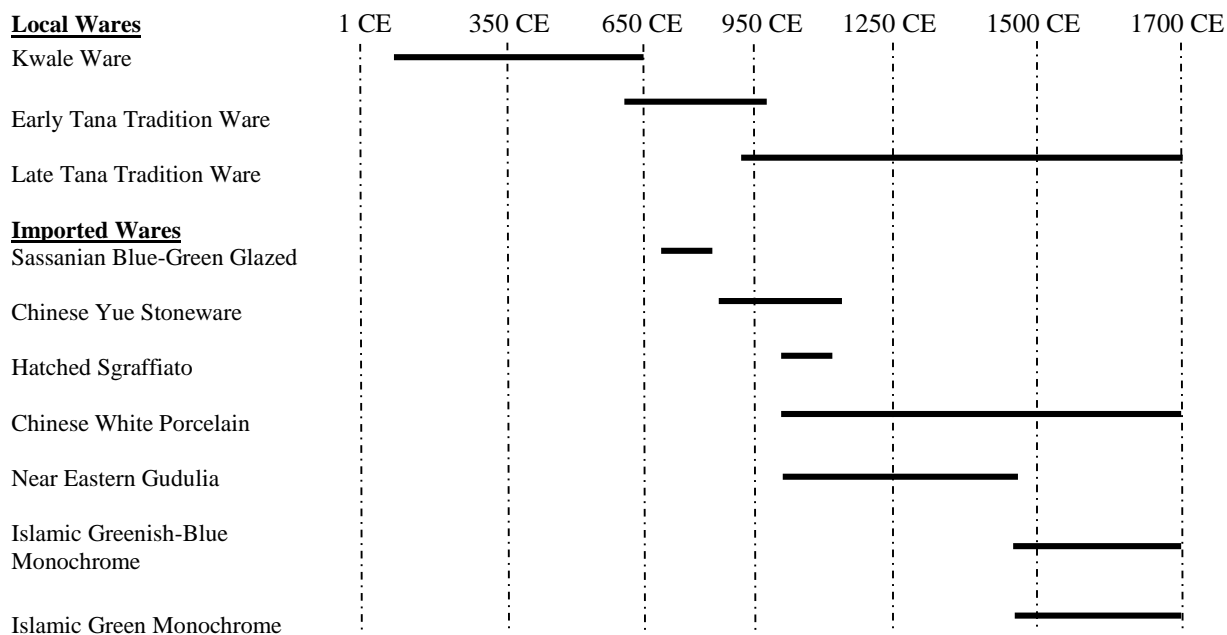
Each unique telling presents complementary, if sometimes contradictory, insights into the history of communities. For instance, in eastern Kenya archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence all emphasize that the forebears of its current residents shared many experiences before coalescing their many communities into contrasting Mijikenda and Swahili ethnic groups in the colonial era. Some oral traditions also offer support for a historical relationship between the forebears of these two ethnic groups but correlate poorly with regard to chronology and claimed geographical origins. Despite inconsistencies regarding timing and sequence, evidence from archaeology, linguistics, ethnography, and oral traditions all support documentary evidence that describes the kinds of strategies people used to collaborate with one another as they exploited their environments over two millennia of settlement history.

First, archaeologists have calibrated relatively accurate calendar dates for a succession of distinct ceramic traditions in East Africa, including locally produced and imported pottery.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> These dates are arrived at primarily through carbon-14 dating of charcoal found in the same stratigraphy (level of soil) as samples of wares at a number of different sites. Alternate dating techniques include measuring the thermo-luminescence of potsherds or relying on the independent dating of imported pottery with dates established through documentary evidence or independent carbon-14 dating at the sites of origin. Chart adapted from Jeffrey Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, "Ceramics and the Early Swahili: Deconstructing the Early Tana Tradition," *African Archaeological Review* 28, no. 4 (2011): 245–78, doi:10.1007/s10437-011-9104-6; Richard Helm, "Conflicting Histories: The Archeology of the Iron-Working, Farming Communities in the Central and Southern Coast Region of Kenya" (PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol, 2000).

Figure 2.2: Estimated Chronology of Pottery Wares in Eastern Kenya



The types, numbers, and distributions of these locally produced wares at particular settlement sites can thus indicate when their creators and users occupied an area with reasonable certainty, as well as an indication of their involvement in oceanic commerce.<sup>47</sup>

The physical remains of these past settlements—including material cultures, spatial arrangements, distributions of sites across space, and ecological features—are thus viable sources for understanding how people exploited their ecologies.

Second, I rely on linguists' estimates for the divergence of new languages from older ones in the Mombasa region. Historical linguists use a statistical method called glotto-chronology to provide a rough estimate for the rate at which languages change, in

<sup>47</sup> Chapurukha M. Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 1999); Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Ceramics and the Early Swahili."

relation to surrounding languages. Specifically, linguists count the percentage of words shared among different modern languages. They take care to distinguish words which have been borrowed among speakers of the target languages in recent times from cognates. Strictly defined, cognates are words in related contemporary languages that are derived from a single word in an earlier language. For instance *homme* “man” (French) and *hombre* “man” (Spanish) are both derived from *homo* “man” (Latin). This method takes advantage of the fact that as daughter languages diverge through time, they gradually acquire new words by invention or borrowing that replace some of their cognates. While Latin is attested in written documents, linguists also use the features and cognates shared among contemporary languages to reconstruct languages without written documentation: these hypothesized reconstructions are known as proto-languages.

Since it is impractical and statistically unnecessary to compare the entire vocabularies of many languages, linguists focus on a set list of one hundred words that are common to most languages as a first step for testing hypotheses about relationships among languages. For instance, the relationships among the Sabaki language family of eastern Kenya is summarized in Table 2.3, which summarizes the number of cognates (out of one hundred) shared between each of the five major Sabaki languages. So for instance, the higher cognate counts between Comorian and Swahili suggest the possibility they may be more related to each other than Comorian is to Mijikenda, which has a lower cognate count.

Figure 2.3: Sabaki Cognate Retention Rates

Swahili	55			
Mijikenda	54	56		
Comorian	56	<b><u>63</u></b>	<b><u>58</u></b>	
Pokomo	59	61	59	57
	Elwana	Swahili	Mijikenda	Comorian

Linguists then painstakingly test their hypotheses by reconstructing the changes in sounds, word structures, syntax, and vocabulary features of earlier proto-languages.<sup>48</sup> Once linguists have sequenced these sound changes they can more accurately distinguish cognates from loanwords and revise the statistics accordingly. In addition, they omit the cognation rates of geographically adjacent languages from the averages of the whole set in order to account for the higher frequency of cognates among neighboring communities. These adjustments result in cognation retention rates between 67% and 74% for each paired language in the Sabaki language group.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the sequence of sound changes linguists suggest that Comorian is actually more closely related to Mijikenda and Pokomo than it is Swahili—thus demonstrating that cognation rates can only provide provisional hypotheses. The history that linguists have reconstructed for

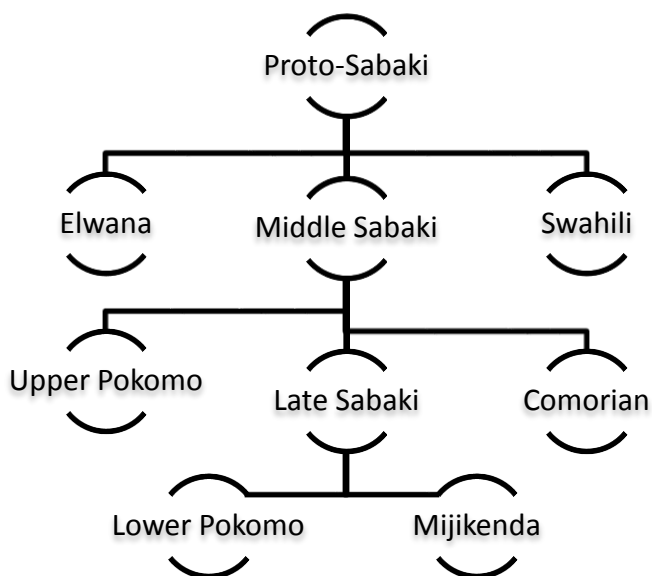
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<sup>48</sup> Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 114; see Appendix 4.

Proto-Sabaki is summarized in Figure 2.4 as a language tree that demonstrates the divergence of contemporary languages from earlier proto-languages over time.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 2.4: Sabaki Language Tree



There are two basic methods for translating these sequences arrived through cognation rates and sound changes into calendar dates. First, linguists who study written languages have compared their hypothetical reconstructions of proto-languages to dated documents in the corresponding language (i.e. Proto-Latin compared with written Latin) to generate estimates for the rate at which cognates are lost. Second, Africanist linguists rely on direct correlations between reconstructed vocabulary and material culture, since speakers of most African languages made few written documents until the last two centuries. For instance, to expand on the direct correlation mentioned earlier, the first

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 4 for a full discussion of this linguistic history.



archaeological evidence of camel husbandry in East Africa dates to *ca.* 800 CE in the Lamu Archipelago. Linguists have also determined that the first people in East Africa to adopt the word for camel spoke a proto-language they call Proto-Swahili, thus correlating the language with the material remains suggests the Proto-Swahili was spoken approximately 800 CE. Using a survey of similar correlations throughout Africa, linguist Christopher Ehret has estimated rough calendar dates for generic rates of shared cognition, subject to further refinement on a case by case basis, as summarized in Table 2.5. Applying these approximate calendar dates to Sabaki cognation rates (67-74%) suggests that the daughter languages of the Proto-Sabakibegan to diverge between 500 and 1000 CE. Closer comparisons among the members of the Sabaki language group indicates that the Kiswahili and Mijikenda languages whose speakers are the focus of this dissertation diverged into distinct northern and southern branches around 800 CE and 1000 CE respectively; finer divisions into localized dialects continued afterwards and will be noted throughout the dissertation.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 2.5 Estimated Dating for Cognate Retention Rates<sup>52</sup>

Approximate Calendar Date	Cognate Retention Rate
1500 CE	86%
1000 CE	73%
500 CE	63%
1 CE	53%
500 BCE	46%

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 3 for a complete summary.

<sup>52</sup> Chart adapted from Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 127.

1000 BCE	39%
2000 BCE	29%
3000 BCE	21%
4000 BCE	15%

Though archaeologists and historical linguists can correlate material culture and the historical terms for them to identify quite reliably what people in the past did, their methods do not reveal the collective names with which these speech communities of the past identified themselves. Thus, until the sixteenth century, when Portuguese documents report names for some of the communities in eastern Kenya, I will refer to people not by a collective name but rather according to the things they may be shown to have done: e.g. settlers, cultivators, Proto-Sabaki speakers, and so forth. In addition to avoiding the projection of ethnic identities onto the past, this practice recognizes that neither common material culture nor speech necessarily correlates with ethnic or political communities, even in the exceptionally mono-lingual and nationalist polities of the twenty-first century.<sup>53</sup> Such assumptions are equally out of place in all earlier eras of eastern Kenya's history. Referring to past communities by what they did is also analytically relevant to historicizing this past since history consists of identifying, contextualizing, and sequencing acts to infer why and how people acted, and how they provoked others to react.

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<sup>53</sup> Herman Ogoti Kiriama, "Iron-Using Communities in Kenya," in *Archaeology of Africa: Foods, Metals, and Towns*, ed. T. Shaw et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 485–98.

In contrast to archaeological and linguistic data, ethnography and oral traditions are reliable for dating only very recent events, if even then. Comparing ethnographic reports on kinship, rituals, and other practices may indicate cultural similarities, but cannot independently demonstrate whether similar practices in the present were inherited from a specifiable moment in the past or merely borrowed more recently. However, analyzing culturally specific vocabulary against the timeframes suggested by linguistic analysis and archaeology sometimes provides a framework for associating specific practices with specific times past and thus a clearer picture of how communities have adapted and adopted these.

As for oral traditions, both Shetler and archaeologist Richard Helm have shown that communities use landmarks as mnemonics for retaining information about how earlier residents used the land. However, correlating the events narrated in oral traditions with calendar dates is seldom workable, in part because of the great cultural diversity in the ways that people mark and record the passage of time. While solar and lunar years are common everywhere around the globe, some communities without literacy only mark the human life cycle or seasonal changes.

These cultural distinctions in marking time are particularly important in Mijikenda historiography. As briefly described in the previous chapter, Thomas Spear attempted to extrapolate a Western solar chronology for the founding migration recalled in Mijikenda traditions by counting a limited (seven to ten) sample of remembered generations. Even if his estimates of the duration (in solar years) of an average generation were suggestive, his informants noted that the concept of named generations was a

novelty introduced after the migration event that Spear was trying to use generations to estimate. Thus, the Mijikenda method of “dating” their history could not extend to the earliest migrants who did not use a similar dating strategy. However, as with ethnography, key words (such as *rika*, “generation”) in these oral traditions can be analyzed using the methods described above to give a rough estimate of when they entered the set of languages in which they occur now, or when older terms acquired new meanings. In short, the individuals and groups of people recalled in oral traditions cannot usually be securely dated beyond the immediate past, but the kinds of activities and strategies they innovated and remembered can be discerned if correlated with linguistic and archaeological data.

Though ethnographic interviews and oral traditions do not provide much information relevant to dating historical developments, they are invaluable for the providing local interpretations about collaboration and competition, settlement strategies, and the ritual meanings of various places in the landscapes of eastern Kenya. Traditions preserve strategies of the past as elements in narrative assemblages, similar to the way that languages preserve words in utterances. Rather than viewing these traditions as literal descriptions of the past, I draw upon them as reservoirs of the kinds of relationships and strategies that past communities used to collaborate with one another—as an inventory of the syntax with which modern communities perform rituals. Communities coined new names for new strategies they developed as group dynamics changed, but they retained earlier strategies that they considered relevant to the novel circumstances. Thus, traditions may be analyzed in the same way that linguists determine

semantic shifts: new contexts call for new meanings, but they are always drawn from earlier semantic pools of meaning. These traditions should not be taken to directly represent the voices of past people. However, they provide a relevant perspectives on local motivations and rationalities that are largely derived from the experiences of those who settled and lived in East Africa long ago. Thus I often rely on them to interpret the behaviors and motivations of communities in the past instead of drawing solely on concepts reflecting the experiences of Euro-American communities.

In addition to examining Mijikenda oral traditions collected by Thomas Spear, Cynthia Brantley, and Justin Willis, I and colleagues from the National Museums of Kenya conducted just over fifty consultations with local experts that between January and August 2010. I conducted a second set of ten interviews in May 2011. Nearly all the consultants were recommended to me by staff at the National Museums of Kenya, who also made introductions, set up appointments, and assembled indexes of the consultations. Muhammad Hassan in Lamu, William Tsaka in Rabai, and Amira Msellem of Mombasa each attended several consultations and often contributed their own questions.

Except for a few early consultations in Rabai, we conducted open-ended interviews without the aid of questionnaires in order to focus on the specialized knowledge of our consultants. Before each consultation, we identified the role of the consultant in their community. Then we discussed with the consultant a brief outline of the types of questions we would be asking. Each consultation usually included a brief biography and history of the consultant and their family, a discussion on their particular

expertise (regarding celebrations, neighborhood history, divination, etc.), and ended with questions on other topics that arose during the consultation that we hoped they could expand on. Thus, rather than collecting oral traditions, we focused simply on eliciting local interpretations of history and culture.<sup>54</sup>

We explained to each consultant that we were researching the relationships between the Swahili and their neighbors, or the Mijikenda and their neighbors, but asked consultants at each research site to focus on particular topics. So, in Lamu, almost all of the consultations focused on the Maulidi celebrations in February 2010 (i.e. the Swahili month of Mfungo Sita which corresponds to the Islamic month of Rabi al-Awwal). In Mombasa, we asked our consultants to focus on the history of various neighborhoods (*mtaas*) of Old Town, Swahili celebrations, and mosques, as well as a general history of Mombasa. Our consultants in Rabai discussed more varied topics including how communities used local religious sites, the relationship between Christianity, Islam, and *dini ya kienyeji* (local religion), and marriage and funeral rites.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> My use of oral traditions and local expert knowledge thus engages Henrietta Moore's critique that considering members of other cultures to be "producers of local knowledge" rather than "producers of social science theory" inevitably reproduces Eurocentrism. (Quoted in Kai Kresse, *Philosophizing in Mombasa: Knowledge, Islam, and Intellectual Practice on the Swahili Coast*, International African Library [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007], 26). While Kresse's projects specifically demonstrate that some "local philosophers" develop universalist philosophies akin to social science, I draw on "local knowledge" to interpret the particular history of eastern Kenya.

<sup>55</sup> Following an Institutional Review Board protocol approved by the University of Virginia, before each interview we informed the consultants about their rights in regard to the study and gained their permission to record and disseminate the consultations for educational and research purposes. Independent audio and video recordings exist for most of the consultations. DVDs of the video recordings dubbed with high quality audio are deposited in the RISSEA library at Mombasa while the original audio (.wav or .mp3) and video files (.mov) are available on an external hard drive at the audio-visual department

### **Tales of Two Migrations: Reconciling Shungwaya Myths and Histories**

Several communities in eastern Kenya have shared oral traditions that remember their ancestral homeland as a place called Shungwaya where they lived with pastoralists who spoke a different language and their perceived linguistic cousins before separating and developing distinctive languages.<sup>56</sup> The Shungwaya tradition was first recorded by Guillain, a French traveler to East Africa in the early nineteenth century. He wrote that the Wakilindini, one of the leading Kiswahili-speaking clans in Mombasa, claimed to come from Shungwaya in the north. The *Book of Zinj*, written at the end of the nineteenth century, provided more details about Shungwaya, including a list of several clan confederations which once resided there with the Wakilindini but are now affiliated with the Mijikenda ethnic group. Since the early twentieth century, the Wakilindini and other Swahili communities have preferred to emphasize their descent from communities in the Arabian Peninsula, so the Shungwaya tradition is now promulgated almost exclusively among Mijikenda communities and Western academic scholars. The following analysis of Shungwaya traditions published by Thomas Spear demonstrates how I read oral traditions as compilations of elements that narrators assemble from many historical experiences rather than a single coherent tradition passed down intact through

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of Fort Jesus. In some cases, making a video recording was inconvenient and only an audio recording is available.

<sup>56</sup> The Mijikenda pronunciation is Singwaya, but Shungwaya is the most common reference in academic literature.

generations with few changes. It also demonstrates how I map the core images of the tradition onto chronologies established by archaeological and linguistic evidence.

Following the nearly universal pattern of oral traditions, the Shungwaya tradition narrates three broad periods: the distant and mythical origins of the peoples of eastern Kenya, their migrations to eastern Kenya, and the founding of their distinct communities within eastern Kenya. In the beginning, the Shungwaya tradition memorializes a period of peaceful relations among the ancestors of Mijikenda, Oromo, and Swahili communities, among others.<sup>57</sup> Otherwise, narrators do not dwell on conditions in Shungwaya, except to make the vague geographical determination that it was to the north. They usually identify the protagonists according to the name of their personal affiliation to a clan confederation, but then explain that the name should be taken to indicate all Mijikenda, since they had not yet separated into distinct communities. Other narrators assert that the nine modern Mijikenda groups were distinct even in Shungwaya and describe them as the children (and grandchildren) of Muyeye and his two wives, Mbodze and Mutsedzi. Thus, they assert that all Mijikenda originally belonged to the same lineage. A few narrators also identify the pastoralist Oromo as the owners of Shungwaya, which entitled the Oromo, in their eyes, to sleep with Mijikenda brides before the consummation of their weddings.

Narrators of Shungwaya traditions suggest that the friendship of the Mijikenda with the Oromo was shattered for one of two reasons: either the Mijikenda killed a young

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<sup>57</sup> Mijikenda narrators describe the pastoralists as Galla (an epithet for Oromo-speakers) or Kwavi (a subgroup of the Nilotic-speaking Maasai); the Swahili are sometimes identified as Bajuni, the name of Swahili communities on the mainland of northern coastal Kenya and Somalia.



Oromo in retaliation for sleeping with his bride, or the Mijikenda sacrificed the son of an Oromo friend as part of the *mung'aro* ritual, which was a prominent feature the rituals that inaugurated new age-sets in the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Not surprisingly, the murder caused a deep rupture between the communities and inaugurated an era of violent confrontations that prompted Mijikenda ancestors to build new styles of defensible houses and settlements. Some narrators suggest that the hardened clay foundations known as *murikwa* (MK) in the vicinity of Mount Mwangea are remnants of that time. Narrators also argue that this war caused their ancestors to abandon Shungwaya and migrate south towards eastern Kenya. The disorder and confusion that attended the migration is recalled to explain why communities in eastern Kenya now speak different languages. For instance, the Pokomo are said to have remained at the Tana River because their mother was pregnant and could travel no farther.<sup>59</sup> The rest continued on. Two groups, the Digo and their Segeju herders moved directly to the plains south of Mombasa, while a northern group stayed in the vicinity of Mount Mwangea for a time before Oromo raids forced them to continue southward. However, narrators often contradict this image of a rapid flight by explaining the movement as the natural process of younger men starting villages upon achieving adulthood.<sup>60</sup> Narrators use the names of generations as a mnemonic to recall the various stages of the migration—but, as noted above, they acknowledged that the practice was not institutionalized at the time they left Shungwaya.

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation: The Mijikenda of Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1981), 41, 47-48, 59, 62; see Chapter 6 for more on *mung'aro*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 57, 79.

After reaching eastern Kenya, they made friendships with foraging communities who showed them dense hill-top forests where they built fortified villages known as *kayas*. The towns of the nine clan confederations that affiliate as Mijikenda today are remembered as founded during this period. In contrast to the named generations and mythical lineage that organized the earlier episodes of the tradition, from the Mount Mwangea period onwards, narrators emphasize the histories of specific clans and famous leaders when detailing the founding of the various *kayas*. This summary demonstrates that Mijikenda oral traditions use a chronological narrative to interpret contemporary differences through divergence into distinctive descent and residential communities from a single ancestral community.

The sequential chronology in which oral traditions present their core images does not necessarily conform with the order in which they were actually innovated. Instead, the tropes of friendly tenancy and frantic flight can be interpreted to represent a range of strategies that the Bantu-speaking ancestors of the Mijikenda pursued as they engaged with pastoralists in all eras of interaction, as can the description of their dealings with foragers, with whom the ancestors of the Mijikenda traded and whom they invited to join their communities to share their knowledge. While the sequence in which the Shungwaya tradition presents these core images correlates strikingly well with archaeological and linguistic data, there are a few elements that contradict objective evidence.

Archaeologists and historians have identified several possible locations of a settlement known as Shungwaya in southern Somalia or north of the Tana River in

Kenya.<sup>61</sup> But a narrative of migrating ancestors whose memory is consciously recalled in oral traditions cannot be directly correlated with the imperceptible linguistic changes that thousands of speakers introduced over millennia. Indeed, the two kinds of evidence do not agree: the Shungwaya tradition indicates the Mijikenda and related communities moved south, linguistic evidences suggests that the ancestral communities of the Swahili and Mijikenda moved north. The efforts to associate a single settlement and discrete ancestral community with the numerous and heterogeneous settlements of a linguistic group that expanded in many directions from southeast Kenya is misguided.

Oral traditions indicate accurate historical details over a few centuries only, while linguistic evidence is most accurate for discerning historical developments beyond five centuries. Clarifying the relevant time depths of these distinct types of evidence is the first key to resolving their discrepancies. Assuming both are accurate, they indicate two different kinds of migrations. First, linguistic evidence indicates there was a gradual expansion northward from Tanzania (probably through the Taita Hills rather than the coast) of the linguistic features associated with Proto-Sabaki speech that emerged around 500 CE before diverging into the dialects spoken by Mijikenda and Swahili communities. This linguistic expansion was marked by increasingly intense collaborations with Cushitic-speaking pastoralists during the first half of the first millennium CE, as

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<sup>61</sup> Neville Chittick, "An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Southern Somali Coast," *Azania: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa* 4 (1969): 115–30.

determined by linguistic borrowing among the two language groups and archaeological evidence found in the clustered settlements that they developed after 500 CE.<sup>62</sup>

Second, the evidence from the oral traditions suggests a period of cultural innovation in recent centuries that was prompted by individuals and communities leaving areas tormented by Oromo raiders in northern Kenya and southern Somalia. The more detailed memories associated with the images of warfare and corporate migration correlate best with the dramatic migration in the sixteenth century of Central Kenyan Bantu-speakers identified as Mosseguejos by Portuguese writers. Thus, the correlation between oral traditions, linguistic innovations, and archaeological evidence suggests that the Shungwaya trope combines two distinctive episodes: the intensification of cross-cultural collaborations with Cushitic-speaking agro-pastoralists in which most speakers of Sabaki dialects participated and a more recent and detailed episode of warfare with specialized pastoralists that a smaller set of their descendants experienced generations later.<sup>63</sup>

This description of two subsequent migrations by distinct populations challenges the prevailing theory of two successive migrations by a single population northward to Somalia in the fifth century then southward back to eastern Kenya in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Derek Nurse argued that a few loans from Proto-Somali to the

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4 for details; Derek Nurse and Thomas Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki: A Linguistic History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> The transition to a mobile way of life focused on cattle from a mixed subsistence strategy (in which cereal cultivation supplemented a diet based on pastoral products) in East Africa is dated to the seventeenth century CE (Thomas T. Spear and Richard Waller, *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1993).

Kiswahili dialect of Mwiini (in Brava Somalia) that are also present in Mijikenda and Pokomo dialects was spoken in Southern Somali during the early second millennium CE. However, this hypothesis was developed prior to archaeological surveys in the hills of eastern Kenya that demonstrated evidence for continuous occupation since the middle of the first millennium CE, with no evidence of a significant change in material culture that would indicate a migration. In addition, the few Proto-Somali loanwords could be explained by a migration of a relatively small number of influential refugees who introduced new practices to their host communities in the south—just as linguists explain Arabic loanwords in Kiswahili. As an alternative, Martin Walsh and Richard Helm have suggested that eastern Kenya was included in the original heartland of linguistic innovation that gave rise to Swahili, Mijikenda, and Pokomo dialects, among others.<sup>64</sup> This interpretation accords better with the gradual transition between different types of pottery in eastern Kenya’s archaeological sites, as well as language features that residents in eastern Kenya share with speakers of other languages to the south in Tanzania.<sup>65</sup> Most importantly, it also avoids the problematic assumption that the region was simply passed over in early centuries, only to be claimed later—a violation of the linguistic principle of parsimony known as the “least moves rule.”<sup>66</sup> Correlating the core images of the

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<sup>64</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 47; Martin T. Walsh, “Mijikenda Origins: A Review of the Evidence,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992): 1–18.

<sup>65</sup> Kwale and Early Tana Tradition Ware are the relevant pottery wares, see Helm, “Conflicting Histories.”; Hinnebusch, “The Shungwaya Hypothesis: A Linguistic Reappraisal.” Hinnebusch apparently revised his critique of the northern hypothesis when working closely with Derek Nurse who has long championed the northern origin thesis for Sabaki languages.

<sup>66</sup> In other words, the Southern Somalia theory violates the “least moves rule” of parsimony.

Shungwaya tradition to historical sequences derived through linguistic and archaeological evidence suggest that the Shungwaya tradition accurately portrays relationships and events narrated in the two distinct eras of interaction between speakers of Bantu and Cushitic languages: an era of relatively peaceful cooperation in the first millennium of the Current Era followed by more combative relationships in sixteenth century CE.

### **Conclusion**

As Jan Shetler and Richard Helm have demonstrated, the core images recalled in oral traditions are not necessarily restricted by the mnemonic devices that narrators use to remember details as old as five hundred years. As long as a strategy has remained relevant to a community, they continue passing it on to their descendants. For example, as discussed in the following chapter, Bantu speakers developed thousands of years ago the strategy of lineal descent that narrators of the Shungwaya tradition use to emphasize the close relationship among modern Mijikenda clan confederations. Participants in the rituals of eastern Kenyan communities routinely embody similar images developed by ancestors who lived far beyond the range of conscious “memory” but still remain relevant in the rituals that sustain contemporary communities.

For example, the residents of eastern Kenya today celebrate the local solar New Year for a variety of reasons: to pray for peace, honor their ancestors, socialize with beloved family members and friends, partake of a free meal, express joy, and so forth. Although they have embraced many elements introduced by foreigners, they also continue to share motivations and strategies that their ancestors developed in several different historical eras. Rather than attempting to identify when New Year celebrations

might have originated as an integrated, persisting ritual, the following chapters outline how residents of the region adapted strategies for organizing their communities that they also embedded as elements in modern rituals. As these practices are sequenced and matched to the contexts in which they emerged by their linguistic and material aspects, it will be clear how the celebrants of local New Year's rituals in Mombasa and Rabai today embody their shared genealogies from a common past.

### Chapter 3

#### Collective Claims: Descent Groups and Marriage Alliances,

*ca. 300 BCE – 600 CE*

*We are all descended from Mbodze and  
Mutsedzi, the co-wives of Muyeye.*

-Bukardi Ndzovu

The women shouted *hunayo!*—“we have it”—as their sister accepted the bride-price for her daughter. Their accompanying ululations signaled the success of the marriage negotiations to those waiting outside the mother's modest concrete home in Rabai. A few minutes later, the prospective bride and two attendants entered to greet and thank her future in-laws with a handshake. Then she crouched at the doorway and asked the ancestors of her mother for a blessing as she poured a few drops of palm wine from a wooden cup onto the threshold. Her father—absent during the negotiations—entered to finish off the cup of palm wine in a single gulp with all the dregs. He drained a second serving with a home-made straw to filter out the fibers in the locally distilled alcohol. Once the participants completed these formalities, the eldest maternal uncle of the bride, who had conducted the proceedings, invited all the members of the groom's delegation to introduce themselves for the first time.

While the uncles of the bride and father of the groom had met earlier to arrange this bride-price negotiation (*malози*, Rab.) the interactions between the two families had been strictly regimented. When the groom's delegation first arrived in the morning, the



bride's family and friends lined up to give each of them a firm handshake, then sent them to an isolated corner of their homestead to visit among themselves and await an invitation to begin. And, they were forbidden to enter the house where negotiations would take place until the bride's maternal uncle formally received them by presenting a live goat to the groom's family, who was represented by his father and grandfather.<sup>1</sup> As guests, the delegation representing the groom followed the customs of their hosts. Even though both families belonged to Mijikenda communities, they spoke different dialects, and they conducted the negotiations in Chi-Rabai, the mother-tongue of the bride's family. So, the groom's delegation hired a Rabai man to act as their spokesman. He conducted negotiations on their behalf and ensured they followed the customary procedures to avoid the disfavor of the bride's family. Until the formal agreement was made, the families regarded each other as strangers.

Though the bride-price was settled prior to the negotiation that I attended in April 2010, John Kariuki, writing for the *Standard* newspaper in Kenya, playfully described some of the antics that accompany the final payments of bride-prices before the bride attends her wedding.

“A woman emerges from the house screaming. ‘Wuui, wuuui! . . . You thieves want to steal my daughter! . . . You must pay for the earthenware pot that my daughter broke.’ By the time the bridal party gets to the living room, they have

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to William Tsaka, director of the Rabai Museum, for arranging my participation in the *malози* and for many of his keen observations of the interactions among the participants. For photographs and videos see Ray Research Deposit E014 Rabai Malози Ceremony, April 17, 2010; also see Wycliffe Tinga, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, April 10, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department; Alfred Mwandzala Muta, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, April 10, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department.

paid for many small fines ranging from being late, a fee for opening the door and charges for flower vases, spoons, and knives the bride allegedly broke or lost.

Then in a strange twist a turbaned woman makes a declaration. In the presence of the girl's parents, she announces: 'In this family we demand Sh100,000 [~\$1250] for any girl who has seen the door of a university before releasing her to tie the knot.'"<sup>2</sup>

The contemporary exchange of bride-price for a bride, and particularly the last-minute demands of aunts, continues two dynamics that extend deep into the history of Mombasa. First, descent groups in Bantu-speaking communities (and elsewhere) carefully guard their collective claims over one another. They value their members not only as bearers of children or as laborers but also for the knowledge and skills they contribute. While marriage may help descent groups secure advantageous alliances with in-laws, they require compensation to part with their daughters, or release their rights to her children. And, as the shouts of "we have it" indicate, this compensation belongs to all the members of the bride's descent group, not just her mother.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, a groom can afford bride-price only if his descent group allocates their collective resources, a privilege his relatives grant only if they are confident that he has and will contribute to their interests.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Kariuki, "Fleecing Grooms Is the New Sport," *Standard Digital*, August 14, 2010, Online edition, [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000016190&story\\_title=Fleecing-grooms-is-the-new-sport](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000016190&story_title=Fleecing-grooms-is-the-new-sport). This story specifically relates to Kikuyu marriages, but I was told of similar fines and fees that the families of brides demand of her groom's associates in Rabai.

<sup>3</sup> Since Rabai families arrange marriages through their mothers' kin, the bride-price is not paid to her father, which is the norm in patrilineal communities, see below for a discussion on lineage.

<sup>4</sup> During the negotiation, a list of those who contributed and pledged future contributions, along with their thumbprints, was passed around the room.

Second, the wariness enacted in the bride-price negotiations highlights that encounters with strangers are fraught with danger and uncertainty. Even Mijikenda communities with similar customs depend on brokers to handle these sensitive matters. The prohibition on intermingling before the conclusion of the negotiations protects the parties from learning information that might give one party an upper hand.<sup>5</sup> And, the site of negotiation is guarded to prevent any mischief. The accusation of stealing a daughter, even in jest, reveals the underlying tensions between a family who gives a daughter and the family who takes her. Bride-price negotiations provide a venue for resolving these tensions, as well as a framework for resolving future disputes.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, the payments to the bride's family must be returned if the marriage ends in divorce, so they have a compelling incentive to ensure the couple remains together.<sup>7</sup>

### **Naming and Claiming Kin: A Genealogy of Descent among Bantu Speakers**

Anthropologists have observed basic patterns into which they classify strategies for organizing kinship to enable cross-cultural comparisons. These models distinguish unilineal (children assigned to the descent community of one parent), cognatic (assigned to either parent), and bilateral (both parents) descent. As an example of a more specific model, matrilineal descent groups follow unilineal descent rules by tracing inheritances

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<sup>5</sup> Kariuki also related that one man called off his engagement when his fiancée's family learned he worked at a bank and planned to demand a higher than customary bride-price; "Fleecing Grooms Is the New Sport."

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, bride-price negotiations can take place after the couple has begun co-habiting, though in this case an additional fine is often levied against the groom's family.

<sup>7</sup> Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*. Kenya enacted new marriage laws in 2012 that removed bride-price from consideration in civil cases related to marriage and divorce but do not expressly forbid it if families choose to continue the practice.

(of land, houses, “blood”, food taboos, customary dues, community responsibilities, and so forth) through the maternal relatives of one’s mother, one’s mother’s mother, and so on up the single line of female ancestors among the growing fan of progenitors through the generations. Patrilineal descent follows the same logic of defining singular, unambiguous group membership by assigning descent to only one parent but chooses the father and his paternal kin rather than the maternal line. Another variation on unilineal descent is double descent, in which individuals trace unilineal descent from both parents, but for different purposes. So for example, Rabai individuals depend on their mother’s kin for assistance with health problems and marriage negotiations, but inherit land through their father’s kin.

Individuals strategically form communities bound by common claims to a shared ancestry known generically as lineages as they adapt their choices of descent to meeting their particular challenges. These strategies are not always uniform among speech communities. For example Horton and Middleton note that wealthy Swahili communities often rely on unilineal descent to pass on precious resources such as permanent stone houses while Swahili communities in more impoverished circumstances prefer the greater flexibility of cognatic descent, which allows simultaneous participation in many descent groups.<sup>8</sup> And, in the marriage negotiations that opened this chapter, the maternal uncles of the bride represented a clear and coherent group of kin, with a shared interest in their offspring, because they (along with most Rabai communities) follow matrilineal

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<sup>8</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*. Also see Patricia Caplan, *Choice and Constraint in a Swahili Community: Property, Hierarchy and Cognatic Descent on the East African Coast* (London: Oxford, 1975).

principles for marriage. However, the groom's family was represented by his father and grandfather because he came from a community that follows patrilineal principles (as do most Mijikenda communities to the north of Rabai). Through time on the scale of centuries, unilineal descent groups may form around either of the two alternatives, depending on the gendered claims to property or other inheritances that pass between generations.

While models of kinship facilitate broad comparisons among different cultures, such analyses create abstractions that convey an impression of kinship systems (and cultures) as closed and static structures rather than dynamic, flexible, and thus resilient, strategies of collaboration. As Wyatt MacGaffey argues, no folk or academic theory of kinship accounts for the varied descent claims with which people pursue varying interests. Writing of folk models of Kongo kinship strategies, MacGaffey noted:

This model is not, however, a true description of what exists in real life now or at any time in the past. Nor is it an idealized or approximate description, except perhaps in the sense that if, in the view of any given elder, there were any justice in the world, then society would be so ordered, and to his advantage. In short, the model is an agreed formula for making political claims.<sup>9</sup>

Similar to the Kongo communities to which MacGaffey refers, Mijikenda and Swahili communities in eastern Kenya make idealized claims based on agreed formulas, of contestable application, for normative behavior using rhetoric about the claims and

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<sup>9</sup> Wyatt Macgaffey, "Changing Representations in Central African History," *The Journal of African History* 46, no. 2 (2005): 189–207, doi:10.2307/4100679.

responsibilities of their kin and affines.<sup>10</sup> Claiming kinship relationships for oneself and assigning their obligating complements to others is essential to applying these formulas to daily interactions and collaborations.

Arthur M. Champion, a colonial-era ethnographer, reported in 1914 a naming ceremony practiced by Giriama Mijikenda communities that demonstrates how descent groups claim kinship relationships with individuals (that is, children) by assigning them names. When Giriama children are about one year old their paternal grandfathers give them their *dzina la nyumbani* “name of the house” (Gir.) by laying them on their back across the *mriango* “doorway” (MK) of their home.<sup>11</sup> They then pour a few drops of water on their lips, hold their ears, and enjoin them to hear and guard the names of their fathers. Next, they give them their personal names and the house names of their fathers.<sup>12</sup> For example, Pembe wa Bembere, could be glossed as “Pembe son of Bembere.”<sup>13</sup> Today Mijikenda parents often give their children the name of a grandparent or another ancestor, and grandparents often call their grandchildren by the titles *tsawe* “grandfather” (MK) or *hawe* “grandmother” (MK) to emphasize that their grandchildren (particularly those who share their name) re-personify them in the upcoming generation. Though parents who

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<sup>10</sup> Marc J Swartz, *The Way the World Is: Cultural Processes and Social Relations Among the Mombasa Swahili* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Parkin, *Sacred Void*.

<sup>11</sup> Alice Werner notes naming conventions among the Pokomo that also include formal house names, father’s names, and mother’s names, in addition to nicknames, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate* (London: The Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1915).

<sup>12</sup> Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Note a further complication: Bembere can be analyzed as Be Mbere (father of Mbere) as Mijikenda men are often referred to as the “father of [first born son]” after becoming a parent. Mijikenda women do the same, so Mekatilili wa Menza (see Chapter 5) is the “Mother of Katilili, daughter of Menza.”

have converted to Christianity or Islam have supplemented the stock of family names with English and Arabic names, the recycling of names from preceding generations helped descent groups distinguish themselves from one another and, internally, emphasized descendants' responsibilities for maintaining their integrity by honoring their ancestors' memories and reproducing their characteristics.<sup>14</sup>

Swahili communities—committed as they are to Islamic principles that deprecate ancestor veneration to focus on the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad—do not place as much emphasis on formal relationships between alternating generations; but, like Mijikenda communities, grandparents and grandchildren often enjoy *utani* "joking" (NECB) relationships in which they share each other's genealogical standing.<sup>15</sup> In addition both Mijikenda and Swahili families practice the tradition of "bringing out the child" (*kombo za ndze* [Rab.]).<sup>16</sup> After an initial period of seclusion inside the home following the birth of a child, the mother or her mid-wife brings the newborn outside for the first time to introduce the baby to neighbors in and near the homestead, most of whom are related by blood or marriage. Also on these occasions, parents give their

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<sup>14</sup> One consultant's name illustrates how conversion to Islam and Christianity has affected his family's naming practices: Ali John Juma (= Given Name, Father's Given Name, Grandfather's Given Name). Ali John Juma, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. Daniel Mrenje, August 30, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department. Another of my consultants, Daniel Mrenje, a Rabai teacher, could readily identify which clan an individual belonged to just by their name. He also detailed how a child's birth order determined which ancestor's name the child should receive (Field Notes). Alice Werner reports similar naming conventions in *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate*, 340.

<sup>15</sup> James McGivney, "'Is She a Wife or a Mother?'" Social Order, Respect, and Address in Mijikenda," *Language in Society* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1993): 19–39.

<sup>16</sup> One causative variant of *kombo* in Kiswahili is "redemption," but *kombo* itself means to "scrape out" in both Mijikenda and Kiswahili.

children a gift signifying their ideal gender roles, such as a doll for girls and a miniature bow and quiver, or a dagger for boys.<sup>17</sup> In another newborn ceremony practiced by Swahili women, mothers embed their infants in the household by taking them from room to room and explaining the purpose of, and hence their children's' eventual responsibilities, in each place.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly, these ceremonies are not for the exclusive benefit of the infant, who is more concerned with mother's milk than gendered gifts, lengthy introductions, and guided tours. Rather, communities introduce children to the people who will shape the most intimate contexts of their lives in order to claim stewardship and rights over them. Parents thus also demonstrate their commitment to teaching their children the responsibilities of a member of the household to ensure its continuation. When a grandfather tells a newborn to honor the name of his or her father, he claims the child as a member of his patrilineage and assures its future.

Of course, descent groups' occasionally disagreed on whose claims held precedence, particularly when they reckoned descent along different lines. Champion's early twentieth-century informants explained that just a few generations earlier, the "name of the house" which Giriama Mijikenda grandfathers gave their children came from their mothers' family, suggesting that the mother's descent groups previously

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<sup>17</sup> Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari, *The Customs of the Swahili People: The Desturi Za Waswahili of Mtoro Bin Mwinyi Bakari and Other Swahili Persons*, trans. J.W.T. Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), also Mbarak Ali Hinawy, "Notes on Customs in Mombasa," *Swahili (Kiswahili)* 34 (1964): 17–35.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Donley, "House Power: Swahili Space and Symbolic Markers," in *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 63–73.



claimed all her children.<sup>19</sup> This shift from the mother's descent group to the father's descent group emphasizes that descent is a strategically malleable strategy for organizing communities.<sup>20</sup> For the Giriama Mijikenda, this general shift in reckoning kin likely accompanied a greater desire to control cattle beginning around the sixteenth century, which men successfully claimed as their exclusive property. The double descent practiced by Rabai Mijikenda similarly may have emerged as men claimed ownership over coconut trees and the land on which they grew in the nineteenth century. In addition, the incorporation by both groups of slave women (who had no kin to claim their children) in the nineteenth century would have strengthened their ability to assert patrilineal principles.<sup>21</sup> While Champion's informants may have considered the emphasis on patrilineage to be a novel strategy, Bantu-speaking communities have a long history of blending patrilineal and matrilineal strategies.

#### *Classifying Kin and Affines: Complementary Strategies*

Some of the terms that Swahili and Mijikenda communities in eastern Kenya use to classify their kin have remained stable for millennia, though their forebears have adapted their descent strategies to the unique contexts that each generation faced. This

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<sup>19</sup> Champion does not indicate whether the names would be from the mother's uncle or brothers.

<sup>20</sup> Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*. Werner also records a thirteen generation genealogy that abruptly switches from father's names to mother's names seven generations into the past (Werner, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate*).

<sup>21</sup> Anthropologists have documented a general association of cultivation (specifically extensive horticulture) with matrilineal strategies and a nearly universal association of pastoralism with patrilineal strategies in Clare Janaki Holden and Ruth Mace, "Spread of Cattle Led to the Loss of Matrilineal Descent in Africa: A Coevolutionary Analysis," *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 270, no. 1532 (December 7, 2003): 2425–33.

resilience of the rules, and their flexibility in practice, indicates that the kinship strategies they have inherited are very successful at forging relationships that foster collaboration among descent groups and across their generations. The continuities achieved through time allowed each generation to construct their daily collaborations around their legacies from the past and thus preserve the elements of language and practice that modern researchers can use as trace elements of the past to reconstruct a genealogy of descent among earlier Bantu-speaking communities.

Bantu-speakers innovated many strategies for claiming people and exchanging them with other communities long before speakers of the Proto-Northeast Coast (PNEC) branch of Bantu dialects began settling in northeast Tanzania and southeast Kenya about two thousand years ago. Linguists designate the related dialects clustered in this region as Northeast Coast Bantu since they are located at the far northeastern edge of the Bantu language continuum that stretches across most of Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa.<sup>22</sup> Their comparative analysis suggests that speakers of Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu dialects distinguished their speech from other Bantu speakers of the time by pronouncing the Common Bantu prefix \*dɪ- as \*ɪzɪ- (PNEC) before vowel stems and \*ɪ- (PNEC) before most consonant stems.<sup>23</sup> Most Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers also began

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<sup>22</sup> Linguists divide Northeast Coast Bantu further into Sabaki, Seuta, Ruvu, and Pare; for a history of one of these language groups in Tanzania (the Ruvu) see Rhonda M. Gonzales, *Societies, Religion, and History: Central-East Tanzanians and the World They Created, C. 200 BCE to 1800 CE* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> A form of this prefix precedes Class 5 Nouns in most Bantu languages. The immediate predecessor of *ɪzɪ-* is unclear since Common Bantu is a survey of Bantu language features rather than a proto-language; but most other languages in the region retain /jɪ/ as a reflex of the Common Bantu \*dɪ. Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 187–196.

aspirating some consonants, for example they began pronouncing /p/ as /f/ when it preceded \*i (PNEC), but retained the original /p/ pronunciation before \*i (PNEC).<sup>24</sup> So for example, Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers began pronouncing the word \**pingo* “charm” (Proto-Bantu) as \**fingo* “charm” (PNEC).

Figure 3.1: Bantu Spirantization and Vowel Assimilation

Stage 1	p i n g	p > f (before i)	f i n g
Stage 2	f i n g	i > i (all contexts)	f i n g

Linguists refer to this pronunciation change as Bantu Spirantization, a widespread tendency among Bantu languages which is also associated with the merging of the vowels /ɪ/ with /i/ and /ʊ/ with /u/ to reduce the seven vowels inherited from Proto-Bantu (ca. 3000 BCE) to five.<sup>25</sup> Linguists have determined that settlers made these changes after arriving in East Africa because Spirantization also alters the pronunciation of some of the words that Bantu-speakers borrowed from East African agro-pastoralists. These earlier residents spoke a variety of Southern Cushitic languages and had preceded Bantu speakers in the region by nearly four thousand years.<sup>26</sup> Dahalo is the only surviving

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<sup>24</sup> For a full table of changes associated with Spirantization see *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>25</sup> Koen Bostoen, “Bantu Spirantization: Morphologization, Lexicalization and Historical Classification,” *Diachronica* 25, no. 3 (2008): 299–356. They probably made these changes unconsciously, though speech communities also alter their pronunciation to distinguish themselves from other communities. Bantu Spirantization did not affect the NEC Bantu dialect continuum equally; in particular early dialects that developed into Kiswahili were not affected until much later (Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 501).

<sup>26</sup> Pastoral Neolithic Ware associated with pastoralists date back as early as 4000 BCE along the Sabaki (Galana) River, though specialized forms of pastoralism emerged in the region around 1300 BCE; David Wright, “New Perspectives on Early Regional Interaction Networks of East African Trade: A View from

variant of these languages spoken today in Kenya, though migrants also interacted with speakers of Proto-Southern Cushitic dialects in the Great Rift Valley that stretches into central Tanzania.<sup>27</sup> Bantu Spirantization is no longer an active process in Northeast Coast Bantu languages, so it does not alter words borrowed from Cushitic languages in recent times. Therefore, the Bantu speakers must have borrowed the Southern Cushitic words during this early era of contact.<sup>28</sup>

The distribution of words related to descent and kinship among these and other Bantu languages suggests that settlers in eastern Kenya drew upon a heritage extending back to forebears who lived around the Great Lakes and spoke Proto-Northeast Savanna Bantu (*ca.* 500 BCE).<sup>29</sup> Some kinship relationships were defined even earlier, as the words for them were first coined by speakers of Proto-East Bantu (PEB, *ca.* 1000 BCE) and even Proto-Bantu (PB, *ca.* 3000 BCE).<sup>30</sup> Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers in

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Tsavo National Park, Kenya,” *African Archaeological Review* 22, no. 3 (2005): 113, doi:10.1007/s10437-005-8041-7.

<sup>27</sup> These include Mbuguan, Asa, Kw’adza, Alagwa, and Burunge; see Christopher Ehret, *The Historical Reconstruction of Southern Cushitic Phonology and Vocabulary*, Kölner Beiträge Zur Afrikanistik 5 (Berlin: Reimer, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 465.

<sup>29</sup> Proto-East Bantu includes the following zones identified by Guthrie in his survey of Common Bantu: E, F,G, L, M, N, P, S, and the J zone proposed by linguists at Tervuren. J zone includes the Proto-Northeast Savanna grouping identified by David Schoenbrun. Malcolm Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to the Comparative Linguistics and Prehistory of the Bantu Languages*. (Farnborough, Gregg, 1967); Jeff Marck and Koen Bostoen, “Proto Oceanic Society (Austronesian) and Proto East Bantu Society (Niger-Congo), Residence, Descent and Kin Terms Ca. 1000 BC,” accessed June 12, 2013, [http://www.academia.edu/1571550/Proto\\_Oceanic\\_society\\_Austronesian\\_and\\_Protto\\_East\\_Bantu\\_society\\_Niger-Congo\\_residence\\_descent\\_and\\_kin\\_terms\\_ca\\_1000\\_BC](http://www.academia.edu/1571550/Proto_Oceanic_society_Austronesian_and_Protto_East_Bantu_society_Niger-Congo_residence_descent_and_kin_terms_ca_1000_BC); David Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary: Etymologies and Distributions*, SUGIA Supplement 9 (Cologne, Germany: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Proto-Savanna Bantu is a grouping proposed by Christopher Ehret as a linguistic branch coordinate with several Bantu languages whose speakers remained in Equatorial West Africa. Christopher Ehret, “Bantu Expansions: Re-Envisioning a Central Problem of Early African History,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 35?; Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and*

eastern Kenya and Tanzania drew on these inherited words to articulate relationships among kin and affines to make collective claims over individuals in unfamiliar frontiers.

Figure 3.2 Chronology of Bantu Proto-Languages

3000 BCE	Proto-Bantu
1000 BCE	Proto-East Bantu
500 BCE	Proto-Northeast Savanna Bantu
1 CE	Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu

Specifically, Bantu speakers use a vocabulary of unilineal descent that distinguishes between a child's maternal and paternal relations, as well as the sex and generation of the relative or affine. Speakers have retained the terms for addressing one's own mother (*\*mààmá* [PB]) or father (*\*bààbá* [PB]) with few changes in thousands of years. These terms are also used to address the same-gender siblings of one's parents. Thus, Swahili and Mijikenda individuals call both their mothers and her sisters by the title of *mama* or *mayo* (St. Sw., MK), and fathers similarly share the title *baba* or *aba* with their brothers, from the perspective of the succeeding generation. These distinctions between the brothers and sisters of both parents are reinforced in most modern Northeast Coast Bantu languages and many Bantu languages.

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*Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998). Only a few features of Proto-Bantu have been reconstructed, primarily related to sounds, tones, and forms (morphology), but also a large number of words, see Colin Flight, "Malcolm Guthrie and the Reconstruction of Bantu Prehistory," *History in Africa* 7 (January 1, 1980): 81–118, doi:10.2307/3171657; Derek Nurse and Gérard Philippson, *The Bantu Languages* (London: Routledge, 2006).

However, they have introduced subtle changes in the forms or meanings of other kinship terms inherited from Proto-Bantu, and the minor variations in vocabulary enable linguists to reconstruct the terms used by their forebears.<sup>31</sup> For example, later generations speaking dialects of Proto-East Bantu (*ca.* 1000 BCE) speakers formed two compound words that classify the opposite-gender siblings of their parents as affines: *\*cé-n-kádi* combined the roots for “father”, “mine”, and “woman” to give the meaning of “paternal aunt (lit. my female father)”, while *\*máá-dómè* combined “mother” and “male” to give the meaning “maternal uncle (lit. male mother).”<sup>32</sup> Proto-East Bantu speakers also formed the compound words *\*cé-biáá* and *\*nìà-biáá* which mean “father of cross-cousin” and “mother of cross-cousin” respectively; but they used the same pair of terms to indicate also their “fathers-in-law” and “mothers-in-law.” Taken together, these words indicated a preference for marrying cross-cousins (i.e. opposite-gender children of affines from preceding generations).<sup>33</sup> An individual’s “male mothers” and “female fathers” helped them find suitable partners within the descent groups into which they themselves

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<sup>31</sup> Bantu languages also include a few gender-neutral terms for distant and ambiguous relationships that indicate no more obligation than familial loyalty. Gender neutral terms include *ndugu* “sibling, relative, friend” (Mv / Rab) and *mwamu / mulamu* “spouse of sibling” (Mv / Rab). NB: Bantu languages do not mark male/female gender grammatically, only through context and the adjectives *-uke* (female) and *-ume* (male).

<sup>32</sup> The first person singular is the common citation form for “mother’s brother” while the third person singular is the common citation form for “father’s sister.” It is unclear whether this reflects the methods of collecting data or a difference in the degree of intimacy between mother’s brothers who would have played a strong role in matrilineal but not patrilineal societies and father’s sisters who would have lived among another descent group in either matrilineal or patrilineal societies and thus more likely to be referred to in the third person (assuming virilocal residence).

<sup>33</sup> Jeff Marck and Koen Bostoen note that linguists cannot determine the degree of separation (1st, 2nd, 3rd) that makes cross-cousins eligible for marriage; “Proto Oceanic and Proto East Bantu Residence, Descent and Kin Terms,” 10n7.

had married. These kinship terms that distinguish between a father's people and a mother's people show evidence for lineage groups, but cannot distinguish whether such descent groups are patrilineal, matrilineal or double lineal strategies, though they align with a classification system that anthropologists often associate with strategies of matrilineal descent.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, based on their reconstruction of these terms, Jeff Marck and Koen Bostoen argue that the Proto-East Bantu speakers first articulated matrilineal principles during an era of frontier expansion in which men would have spent much of their time hunting and warring with autochthones with whom they competed for land desirable for farming or proximity to rivers. As men spent more time away from home, their wives leveraged their husbands' absences to live with their kin instead of their husbands' kin. Marck and Bostoen argue that their wives' matrilocality would have prompted men to pass their property to nephews rather than their sons in order to prevent their in-laws from taking possession of it while they were away on extended journeys; as maternal uncles became more important in the lives of the rising generation, they articulated a distinct title for the relationship.<sup>35</sup> As men continued leaving their properties with their sister's sons rather than their own children, they would have reinforced matrilineal principles. Later, as frontiers closed and men journeyed less often, their commitment to these principles would have encouraged them to live with their matrilineal kin in order to have greater

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<sup>34</sup> The technical term is bifurcate-merging terminology; Marck and Bostoen, "Proto Oceanic and Proto East Bantu Residence, Descent and Kin Terms."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

influence over their sister's sons, thus forcing their wives to relocate from their own maternal homes. Marck and Bostoen also repeat the common assertion that matrilineage is dominant throughout the wide Bantu continuum of languages—claiming that only the societies near the Great Lakes and in southern Africa which elaborated strategies of ownership over cattle followed patrilineal principles prior to European colonization.<sup>36</sup>

However, David Schoenbrun's analysis of the kinship term *\*jipúá* (PB)—later pronounced *\*mwihwa* (PEB)—indicates a preference among the earliest Proto-Bantu speakers and their descendants for patrilineal descent along the father's line. He glosses *\*mwihwa* as “child of a female clanmate” but adds that the term refers to “children that the wife's people (*bazaara*) considered ‘lost’ to them and gained by their son-in-law (*muko*).”<sup>37</sup> Such children would belong to the son-in-law and thus trace descent through their father rather than their mother, thus marking the patrilineage as the primary kinship group.

Like the Lakes Bantu whom Schoenbrun studied, speaks of Northeast Coast Bantu languages also use variants of the term *\*mwihwa*. While Schoenbrun's analysis emphasizes the loss of a daughter's children to the patrilineage of her husband, maternal kin in modern Pokomo communities still ensured that *mwihwas* upheld obligations to

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<sup>36</sup> But note that Wyatt MacGaffey challenges the scholarly assumptions of Euro-American scholars that identifies any society as “matrilineal” and particularly critiques the notion of an African “matrilineal belt” in “Changing Representations in Central African History”; Wyatt MacGaffey, “A Note on Vansina's Invention of Matrilinearity,” *The Journal of African History* 54, no. 02 (2013): 269–80, doi:10.1017/S0021853713000303.

<sup>37</sup> David L. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998), 97.



them.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, Janice Irvine reported that men were expected to contribute to the funerary expenses of the men in their mother's lineage and generation. They referred to these men as *abos*. The obligations of a *mwihwa* to his *abos* lasted for only a single generation, as opposed to patrilineal relationships that descent groups perpetuated over many generations. In other words, a *mwihwa* fulfilled his duties to his *abo* but did not have the same obligations to his *abo*'s forebears or descendants. The root meaning of *mwihwa*—\**-pua* “to wither away” (CB)—suggests that Proto-Bantu speakers had precisely the limitation of relationships between a mother's male relatives and her sons' descendants to a single generation in mind when they coined the word \**jipua* “man's sister's son” (PB). The word thus reveals a patrilineal perspective; if early Bantu speakers had practiced a matrilineal system, the relationship between men and the children of their sisters would be reproduced across generations.

Instead of positing solely matrilineal or patrilineal strategies for early Bantu-speaking descent groups, Marcus Ruel has pointed to Bantu kin terms that demonstrate how matrilineal and patrilineal strategies complement each other.<sup>39</sup> In particular, he emphasized kinship terms that classified relatives into alternating generations. For instance, Proto-East Bantu speakers referred in conversation to their grandparents, grandfathers, and older siblings with the term \**kààká*. Since \**kààká* can mean either

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<sup>38</sup> Janice Irvine, “Exploring the Limits of Structural Semantics” (Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1980), 244. Irvine emphasized that Lower Pokomo speakers in the late-twentieth century used *mwihwa* to refer to the child of a woman who was part of their lineage group but not the child of their full sister—whom they called *mwana* “child” (LP).

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Ruel, “The Structural Articulation of Generations in Africa (L'articulation Structurelle Des Générations En Afrique),” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 42, no. 165 (January 1, 2002): 51–81.

“grandfather” or “grandmother” in a wide variety of Bantu languages, grandparent was likely the original meaning in Proto-Bantu times (ca. 3000 BCE). They would have narrowed the meaning of *\*kààká* from “grandparent” to “grandfather” or “grandmother” as they adopted strategies of unilineal descent while occupying the rainforests of Equatorial West Africa. The new meaning allowed them to precisely distinguish the grandparent who claimed trusteeship over prime forest clearings or fishing camps that were difficult to establish.<sup>40</sup> The third meaning—*\*kààká*, “older sibling”—perhaps reflects the longevity of naming one’s oldest son after their grandfather; younger siblings would have classed their oldest siblings with their grandparents since both shared the same name and the oldest sibling would eventually be heir to their grandfather’s land.<sup>41</sup> Although this sequence seems to imply patrilineal descent, the strategy of alternating generations (i.e. naming boys after their grandfathers) made inheritance possible even in matrilineal contexts.

Proto-East Bantu speakers also coined complex nouns to create kinship terms that expressed novel attention to the relationship between grandfathers and grandsons, such as *\*céékódó* “his grandfather” (PEB). In this word they combined the roots *\*cé* “his father” (CB) and *\*kódó* “great, important” (CB) to give the literal meaning “his important father”; speakers used it in conversation to specify their father’s father or their mother’s father. Bantu speakers also applied *\*kódó* to elder siblings who, from the point of view of

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<sup>40</sup> Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, 105–106.

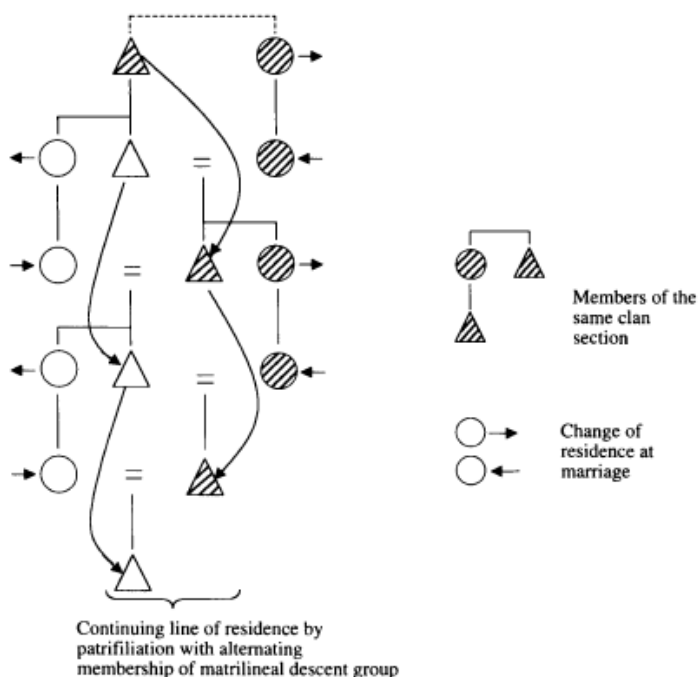
<sup>41</sup> Practices of naming oldest children after one of their same-gendered grandparent suggest the direction of this semantic shift.

the rising generation, expressed claims to lead the lineage once the intervening generation (one's parents and their peers) passed away, particularly since eldest siblings shared the name and kinship term of their grandfather. The adjective *\*kódó* also forms part of *\*jìjòkòdò* "grandchild." The term *\*céékódó* is attested in the Northeast Coast Bantu as *\*isemukulu* and *\*jìjòkòdò* appears as *mudzukulu* in Mijikenda and *mjukuu* in Standard Kiswahili, thus presuming the preservation of the concept, and strategy, among emigrants settling to the east of the Great Lakes.

Christopher Ehret glosses the verbal root *\*-kód-* as "to grow up", but Ruel suggests that the speakers who included *-kód-* in these generational titles held "elaborate notions of achieving a social maturity not through one's age, or one's children, but through one's children's children and their descendants."<sup>42</sup> From the perspective of junior kin, these innovations reinforced the seniority of elders while introducing expectations that eldest sons should sustain the legacy of the grandfather for whom they were named. The innovation was more revolutionary for senior kin, who distinguished grandchildren from other descendants in order to meet matrilineal obligations while also building patrilineal ties to their descendants. Ruel's visualization of this multi-generational strategy among Kongo communities illustrates an idealized expression of the strategy.

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<sup>42</sup> Ruel, "The Structural Articulation of Generations in Africa (L'articulation Structurelle Des Générations En Afrique)," 73.

Figure 3.3 Patrification through Preferential Marriage among Matrilineages<sup>43</sup>

Working from the top (most senior generation) to bottom (most junior generation) a father, acting in the capacity as a *\*máá-dómè* “mother’s brother” arranges the marriage of his niece to his son.<sup>44</sup> The offspring of this union traces their lineage through their mother—and thus belongs to their paternal grandfather’s matrilineage. This affiliation means the grandson can continue remaining at the residence shared by his grandfather (and incidentally his father), but the granddaughter must eventually leave the residence for her own marriage. In this way, each man ensures their grandson shares his matrilineal affiliation, something that is impossible with his son, who traces descent through his

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> NB: the “niece” could be either the daughter of his sister or any of the daughter’s same-generation female cousins in the matrilineage, which anthropologists refer to as classificatory sons, nieces, daughters, etc.

mother. As each succeeding generation repeats the pattern, the residence remains in the possession of an unbroken line of fathers and sons—a patrilineage in practice that the Kongo communities on which this model is based refer to as *kitaata*. Men who marry outside of their grandfather's matrilineage effectively dissolve their *kitaata*.

As *\*máá-dómè* “male mothers,” men would also be able to attract their sister's sons to live with them, though they would be in competition with their brothers to do so. One way they could recruit their nephews would be to arrange marriage partners for them. For instance, among the Lela of Nigeria, men could gain the right to arrange the marriage of the first born daughter of each of their own daughters, a right otherwise reserved to their daughters' *\*máá-dómè* “maternal uncles.” By marrying their granddaughters to young men in their matrilineage they could consolidate members of their descent group in a single residence, a feat that presumably increased their honor as well as their ability to organize people for collaborative efforts like cultivation and warfare. Organizing descent groups that included two succeeding generations allowed grandfathers (and grandmothers) to work the lands they claimed and defend them against other descent groups similarly differentiating themselves.

The potential for establishing patrilineal inheritances through preferential marriage patterns even in the context of matrilineal descent groups demonstrates the flexibility of lineal practices. While the classifications of kin in Proto-East Bantu suggest a preference for enduring matrilineages and more ephemeral patrilineal groupings, people did not always follow the principles. For example, in modern Comorian communities, men often use Islamic courts to circumvent the claims of matrilineal kin. Since Islamic

law adjudicates property claims on the basis of patrilineal descent, fathers have used the religious courts to bequeath homes or lands to their own daughters in preference to their sister's sons.<sup>45</sup> Even centuries after Comorian speakers began practicing Islam they continue varying their preferred lineage strategies according to which ones best serve their interests. Thus, it is misguided to rely on kinship vocabulary alone to determine which kind of unilineal strategies past communities used to claim kin.

### *Descent Groups*

With the notable exception of Ruvu, modern Northeast Coast Bantu speakers did not consider the distinctions by parental kin meaningful enough to retain separate words for patrilineages and matrilineages because they consider their relationships with one parent's family more important than that of the other. Thus, they generally retain one word for "unilineal descent group" but apply it to either patrilineal or matrilineal descent as their preferences changed. However, the variations and distributions of terms for descent groups among Bantu languages in East Africa suggest that their ancestors organized their communities into at least three kinds of descent groups, including *\*lukolo* "marriage alliance", *\*mulyango* "lineage, door", and *\*nyumba* "immediate maternal family, house" (PNEC). Some modern speakers relate these terms to one another in a hierarchy: each *\*lukolo* is composed of several *\*mulyango* which in turn are composed of several *\*nyumba*, but each is organized according to a distinctive logic of descent.

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<sup>45</sup> Walker, *Becoming the Other, Being Oneself*, 101.

Today the tight cognitive links among doors, houses, and descent groups is evident through naming ceremonies, such as the Giriama one reported by Champion, and the bride's ceremony of placing palm wine in the doorway to receive a name at the conclusion of the bride-price negotiation described at the beginning of this chapter. She asks for the witness of her mother's ancestors as well as the living witnesses in attendance by offering prayers and palm wine on thresholds. Champion also reported that Giriama Mijikenda regard a portion of the bride-price to be for the express—patrilineal—purpose of transferring a woman's potential offspring from her own descent group to that of her husband.<sup>46</sup>

The development of the semantic associations between ancestors and doorways dated to languages created over several millennia shows how speakers took centuries to weld together these strategies and concepts. Proto-Northeast Coast speakers derived *\*mulyango* “lineage, door” (NEC) from *\*dongo* “a line, row” (PB).<sup>47</sup> Proto-Bantu speakers long ago had begun to regard *\*dongo* as a metaphor for lineage, because lineage members succeed one another, generation by generation, in order through time.<sup>48</sup> Around 1000 BCE, some Proto-East speakers, who pronounced *\*dongo* as *\*longo*, merged this lineal meaning of lineage with *\*liango* “doorway” (PEB), another inherited word.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> He retains these rights regardless of whether he is the biological father unless the bride-price is returned to him, Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*.

<sup>47</sup> *\*dongo* “a line, row” (CB) is itself derived from *\*-dong* “to heap up, arrange” (CB). For an analysis of the kinds of associations people assembled to assist in opening up new frontiers see Kathryn M. de Luna, “Affect and Society in Precolonial Africa,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2013): 123–50.

<sup>48</sup> cf. English “line” + “age.”

<sup>49</sup> Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400* suggests that speakers of Northeast Savanna Bantu (his term is late Kaskazi) innovated the doorway as

Their merger of lineage with the entryway to a house indicates that they started organizing their “houses” according to descent as a way of excluding outsiders from privileges or property held communally—such as the relatively scarce land suitable for the water-fed gardens that sustained early Bantu-speaking settlers in coastal East Africa.<sup>50</sup> Modern examples of such privileges include sharing in wedding feasts and bride-price payments.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 3.4: Semantic Merging of Lineages and Doorways

Phase 1 PROTO-BANTU

- 1) \*-dong “heap up, arrange” > \*mudongo “line, row” > \*ludongo “lineage”
- 2) \*mudiango “doorway, door”

Phase 2 PROTO-SAVANNA BANTU

- 1) \*-loongo “lineage”
- 2) \*-liango “door”

Phase 3 PROTO-EAST BANTU

- 1) \*-loongo “lineage”
- 2) \*-liango “doorway” as metaphor for “lineage”

Phase 4 PROTO-NORTHEAST COAST BANTU

- 1 & 2) \*mu=lyango “doorway” and “lineage”

Proto-East Bantu speakers may have merged words for doorway and lineage as they developed a new residential strategy. The \**kumus* “big men” who led earlier Proto-

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lineage metaphor by reworking an older metaphor between lineages and houses. Other Bantu languages more commonly use words for “belly” or “house” as a metaphor for lineage. However the Bantu Lexical Reconstruction Project suggests the distribution is wider and older.

<sup>50</sup> There is some evidence that \**longo* and \**liango* merged in meaning at an earlier date or that \**liango* is actually derived from \**longo*, but Ehret demonstrates that the coincidence of meaning is largely restricted to Northeast Savanna Bantu.

<sup>51</sup> Walker, *Becoming the Other, Being Oneself*, Irvine, “Exploring the Limits of Structural Semantics.”



Bantu communities assembled followers into *\*gandas* “houses (also, town quarter)” in *\*gi ~ \*ji* “nucleated villages.”<sup>52</sup> Later generations, who left the forests of Equatorial West Africa and entered the woodland plains and savannas of central Africa, added dispersed *\*ka* “homesteads” to the strategy of residing in villages (*\*gi ~ \*ji*). These homesteads were more conducive to the extensive strategies of cultivation and husbandry of small livestock that they adopted in their new environments, though they never fully displaced villages. In particular, Schoenbrun described the new *\*ka* homesteads as relatively isolated residences for multi-generational families, surrounded by fences with prominent gates that led to domestic areas differentiated into gendered and aged spaces.<sup>53</sup> While lineage members in villages would have been dispersed among several physical structures, their consolidation within a fence would have made the gate that separated the lineage from outsiders an appropriate symbol of their kinship.

Five hundred years later, speakers of Northeast Savanna Bantu articulated the word *\*nyumba* “house” (NESB), which similarly combines the senses of house and descent—but especially matrilineal descent. This association of aspects of reproduction with a residential structures is suggested by other words that Proto-Northeast Savanna speakers coined from the root *\*-umb-* “create” (Proto-Bantu), including *\*-umb-* “to be

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<sup>52</sup> There is a long debate running between Jan Vansina and Christopher Ehret about whether “houses” or “lineages” came first. The distribution of *\*liango* and coincidence of meaning with lineage and doorway is wider than that of *\*ganda*, thus favoring Ehret’s preference for a very early commitment to unilineal rather than cognatic descent practices. Vansina specifically connects the development of lineage to permanent villages composed of many houses in which the original Houses assume authority based on their autochthony; see *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, 105.

<sup>53</sup> Schoenbrun, *A Green Place*, 92–93.

pregnant” and *\*tumbo* “stomach, belly.” In addition, *\*ilumbu* “sibling of one’s mother” was an innovation among later Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu communities and indicates that the kinship groups to which they referred as *\*nyumba* consisted of mothers and their direct offspring who resided in houses separate from those of the women married to other men in the homestead. For men wealthy enough to arrange polygamous marriages, the *\*nyumba* could also differentiate among their wives.

As Ruel suggests, rather than indicating exclusive use of matrilineal strategies, the classification of *\*nyumba* as the domain of mothers distinguished “mother-derived groupings within a wider patrifocal and . . . patrilineal grouping.”<sup>54</sup> So, as Proto-Northeast Savanna Bantu children grew up and established their own families, they could use the word *\*nyumba* to collectively refer to their full siblings and their full sibling's children without including half-siblings and cousins to whom they were related only through their father's line.<sup>55</sup> Specifying *\*nyumba* would have distinguished relatives in the wider patrilineal *\*liango* affiliations defined by common residence. If these *\*liango* were assembled through preferential marriage patterns and alternating generations similar to those described above for the Kongo and Lela, sons would have belonged to different matrilineal descent groups than their fathers. Thus, differentiating the distinct matrilineages as *\*nyumba* allowed later generations to continue tracing descent narrowly

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<sup>54</sup> Ruel, “The Structural Articulation of Generations in Africa (L’articulation Structurale Des Générations En Afrique),” 70.

<sup>55</sup> Speakers of Pokomo and Mijikenda languages also incorporated *\*nyumba* into the kinship title *banyumba / mwananyumba* “husband of wife’s sister” (PK / MK), which could be interpreted as “father of the house” or simply “of the house.” Ethnographic research might suggest why the affine of an affine would merit a unique kinship title.

through their mother's line for certain privileges, as do modern Comorian and Swahili communities, who traditionally pass stewardship over houses (the structures not the groups) along maternal lines.<sup>56</sup> Modern speakers generally use *\*nyumba* in its concrete meaning as “residence,” but other words derived from the same root maintain the sense of matrilineality, such as *tumbo* “belly, matrilineage” (Mv).<sup>57</sup>

Christopher Ehret has argued as a linguistic historian that *\*nyumba* also distinguished a new style of rectangular houses that supplanted earlier round houses, known as *\*ganda* “house” (PEB < *\*ganda* “village quarter” [PB]).<sup>58</sup> In later generations as the Great Lakes region became more populated and Proto-Northeast Coast speakers moved eastward, they tended to favor *\*nyumba* over *\*ganda*. Ultimately, Kiswahili speakers narrowed *\*ganda* to mean “shed, out-building” (*banda*), while one descendant community of Proto-Lakes made *\*ganda* an essential part of their shared identity by using it as the term for clans (*ganda*), which spoke a language they called Luganda and composed the nineteenth-century Buganda polity of the *kabaka* “king.” Finally, in a complex collaboration between European missionaries, British officials and Bugandan intellectuals, the Great Lakes polities subordinated to British rule became the colony of Uganda

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<sup>56</sup> Linda Donley, “Life in the Swahili Town House Reveals the Symbolic Meanings of Space and Artifact Assemblages,” *African Archaeological Review* 5 (1986): 181–92; Walker, *Becoming the Other, Being Oneself*.

<sup>57</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*.

<sup>58</sup> Earlier speakers had already used *\*ganda* to replace *\*jobo*; Ehret suggests the transition to a new housing style based on a distribution patterns of house architecture in Africa rather than specific linguistic features (Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400.*).

While Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers used the patrilineal *\*mulyango* to signify their relationships formed through patrifocal residence and the maternal house *\*nyumba* to reference enduring relationships of matrilineal descent, the roots of *\*lukolo* imply affinal relationships established by marriage. For instance, the leading group of Bantu linguists at Tervuren suggest that Bantu speakers derived *\*koi* “relative by marriage, affine” from the root *\*-ko-* (or *\*-koo-*) “to give bridewealth.” The more immediate root of *\*lukolo* is *\*-kol-* “to take” (< *\*-kod-* “take” PB), which might include the meaning “taking a wife” if understood in relation to the glosses for *\*koi* and *\*ko*, as well as widespread customs of marriage by capture in East Africa.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the Pokomo word for “to marry” (*-hwaa*) also means “to take.” Thus *\*lukolo* could be glossed as “non-relatives from whom a man’s lineage takes wives” or “marriage allies.”

Anthropologist Iain Walker’s report of Comorian *ndola ya kubadili* “exchange marriage” illustrates how groups of lineages could use endogamy to avoid withering away for lack of progeny. Exchange marriages could complement the preferential marriages patterns described earlier that created patrifocal groups out of matrilineal descent. However, the emphasis of exchange marriage is to ensure there would be descendants to reproduce the matrilineage (or patrilineage), rather than ensure continuous occupation and ownership of land. In exchange marriage, two lineages take turns, by generations, providing wives for each other’s men. First, a woman from lineage A is married to a man from lineage B. In the next generation, lineage B provides a woman to

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<sup>59</sup> Francis-Xavier Sserufusa Kyewalyanga, *Marriage Customs in East Africa: With Special Reference to Selected Tribes of Kenya*, 2nd ed. (Hohenschäftlarn: Renner Publication, 1978).

marry a man from lineage A. Or, as Comorian speakers explain, “then they give us a wife back.”<sup>60</sup> This alternating exchange of women as wives helps ensure that the children born to a daughter will not be “lost” since her children will return to the lineage through a future marriage. Extending the logic of these exchanges beyond two lineages created *\*lukolo*, or sets of intermarrying lineages, for whom the offspring of all are considered the common children of the *\*lukolo*. For Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu settlers who lived in relatively isolated communities, the marriage alliances available through affiliation with a *\*lukolo* would have expanded the range of marriageable partners to ensure that their lineage would continue in perpetuity and provide larger numbers of affines to help during labor bottlenecks (such as harvest time) or provide hospitality for travelers moving beyond the range of their direct marriage-alliance affines better than relying solely upon their lineages.

The Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers who settled in eastern Kenya and Tanzania were concerned with laying claim to prime settlement sites, which they considered to be very scarce given the limits of their cultivating technology. To ensure that such land was managed well, Proto-Northeast Bantu speakers entrusted the stewardship over the land to an *\*-éné*, “lineage head.” While they had abandoned several honorary terms that their forebears in the Great Lakes had used to organize dense populations into complex social groupings, they retained *\*-éné* “lineage head.” The *\*-éné* would have been a maternal uncle or grandfather for those who affiliated according to the

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<sup>60</sup> Walker, *Becoming the Other, Being Oneself*, 118.

logic of matrilineality but a father, paternal grandfather, or paternal uncle in patrilineages. The \*-éné would also have authority over newcomers to the claimed land even if not related—hence the need to distinguish between owners and grandfathers. When the \*-éné died his descendants retained the land claims of the lineage and continued claiming descent from the same ancestor, though one of his descendants would take over as his living embodiment, preserving the lineage. If growing numbers in a successful lineage frustrated ambitious younger members competing for the position of the \*-éné, they could attempt to find and establish homesteads elsewhere, though this option was increasingly difficult until they developed new cultivation strategies after 500 CE. Through this process of segmentation they gradually extended the settled frontier. Mijikenda oral traditions similarly explain their ancestors’ settlement of the Mombasa region as a series of lineage segmentations prompted by disagreements between fathers and sons or anti-social behaviors that are punished with banishment.<sup>61</sup>

Around 300 CE Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu settlers also added the meaning “land-owning lineage” to \*-éné.<sup>62</sup> Modern reflexes of \*-éné include *mwenyeji* “sons of the soil, town owners” (St. Sw.), *enye itsi* “ad hoc land adjudicating council” (Rab.) and

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<sup>61</sup> Family quarrels which resulted in “sons mov[ing] elsewhere to live” instead of staying on the “family” land is a common theme in Mijikenda traditions, see for examples Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 45. However, note that derivative settlements, if following more recent strategies, would have retained links of respect with each other, honoring the settlement from which it came by deferring to it in ritual matters, such as waiting to begin initiation ceremonies until the “parent” settlement begun their own ceremonies. The Ribe, for instance, claim this privilege over the Giriama.

<sup>62</sup> Ehret suggest the time frame for this innovation to be post-4<sup>th</sup> century CE; Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400*.

possibly *hinya* “land owning matrilineage” (Com.).<sup>63</sup> The meaning of “lineage head” or “trustee” is also preserved in the remembered names of Mombasa’s named lineages, each of which is called by the name of an eponymous founder whose name is prefixed with *mwinyi* (< \**mu* + \**éné* “landholder, cf. seigneur in medieval Europe”).<sup>64</sup> In addition, when Rabai individuals enter someone’s homestead or residence, the first word they speak is *enye* “owner” to seek his permission to enter the domain.<sup>65</sup> The addition of \**enye* “land-owning lineage” to earlier terms for groups formed through descent emphasizes also that descent groups in eastern Kenya were not simply a natural development of population growth, but communities that people assembled to protect the limited land that was available for cultivating root crops and other garden vegetables.

To review, \**mulyango* “lineage, doorway” was a strategy of immediate lineal descent that can be identified as long ago as Proto-Bantu times (ca. 3000 BCE); it acquired more definitive patrilineal features and association with a common residence in the Proto-East Bantu era when settlers of the central African plains established differentiated homesteads (ca. 1000 BCE). Around 500 BCE Proto-Northeast Savanna speakers articulated \**nyumba* “maternal household” and \**lukolo* “endogamous clan, marriage allies.” The innovation unique to Proto-Northeast Coast speakers (between ca. 1 and 300 CE) in distinguishing among different strategies of mobilizing personnel by descent was the addition of “land-owning lineage” to the meaning of the title \**-éné*.

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<sup>63</sup> *Hinya* most likely derives from \**inya* “mother of” instead of -*éné*, but the similarity of meaning to confirmed reflexes of \**éné* is suggestive; the initial /h/ would need to be accounted for in either possibility.

<sup>64</sup> Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> Only males may own land in Rabai according to customary law.

Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu cultivators adapted the terms for descent groups that they inherited from their Proto-Bantu forebears to reorganize their communities—first to settle scattered pockets of the best lands during the intervening centuries before they encountered the autochthonous communities of East Africa and then, running out of an open frontier (in hills they favored a short distance from the Indian Ocean coast) to intermarry with them in order to gain access to knowledge and dependents that would enable them to exploit new environments, and thus solve the problem of increasingly scarce land. In the following section, I explore archaeological evidence that demonstrates how the early Bantu speakers who entered eastern Kenya collaborated with these autochthonous communities.

### **Early Encounters in the Search for Soil**

A few centuries before the Current Era (c. 300 BCE), some of the cultivators who lived hundreds of miles west of eastern Kenya in the Great Lakes region decided it was time to move on.<sup>66</sup> Their recent ancestors had successfully integrated agriculture and husbandry of small livestock, and their new abilities to exploit most of the available environments in the region produced population densities that may have seemed crowded and unmanageable to those who departed. The emigrants may also have been motivated by a long Bantu tradition of seeking out new places to homestead on the edge of their

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<sup>66</sup> These migrating cultivators spoke dialects of Proto-East Bantu (also called Mashariki by Ehret); it has several main branches, including Kaskazi (north), Kati (middle), and Kusi (south). A smaller subset of Kaskazi, called Northeast Savanna Bantu, is the only branch whose coherence is well established, though linguists are fairly confident that they are all related to one another; Nurse and Philippson, *The Bantu Languages*.



known worlds because venturing out on one's own was part of maturing into respected adulthood.<sup>67</sup> The people who remained in the Great Lakes region adapted to their perceptions of scarce land and higher populations by innovating novel strategies for organizing their complex claims to kin, land, and livestock.<sup>68</sup> But those who began venturing southward and eastward abandoned some of their ancestors' social strategies. As they crossed wide savannas that they did not know how to cultivate, they dispersed in communities smaller than those of their cousins who remained behind near the Great Lakes.

David Schoenbrun notes that “the greatest challenges to reproducing the homesteads and settlements built by [Great Lakes communities] lay in securing access to people—children and followers—not in controlling access to land.”<sup>69</sup> Like their cousins to the west, Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers also used kinship to manage low population densities that attended high rates of infant mortality and disease. However, as they entered the relatively drier climes of eastern Kenya, they also adapted descent groups to claim prime settlement sites, which they considered scarce given the limits of their cultivating technology.

As they dispersed, several Bantu-speaking communities crossed the relatively dry plains of central Tanzania rapidly before gathering around 1 CE along the wetter hills and

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<sup>67</sup> de Luna, “Affect and Society in Precolonial Africa.”

<sup>68</sup> Schoenbrun, *A Green Place*.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

valleys several miles from the East African coast.<sup>70</sup> Some settlers also drifted north in the early centuries of the Current Era into the eastern regions of modern Kenya. They may have taken generations to travel from the Great Lakes to Eastern Africa and most migrating descent groups moved east independently of one another. Though their particular stories are lost, the search for suitable soil is a recurring theme in local oral traditions. For example, a Chonyi Mijikenda consultant to Thomas Spear named Thomas Govi explained:

The Chonyi were magicians and they tested the land by using *uganga* [“proprietary techniques”]. When the *waganga* [“experts”] carried out their examinations, they told the people that they had not yet reached the land they wanted. So they moved on . . . . [L]ater they moved into the *kaya* [town]. They examined the soil and decided it was fertile and suitable for their crops.<sup>71</sup>

Archaeologists have confirmed that cultivators established their early settlements in eastern Kenya in areas with fertile soil types and relatively reliable rainfall.<sup>72</sup> And linguists have reconstructed words for many of the foods they cultivated, including a variety of yams, onions, peas, gourds, groundnuts, oil palms, and millet.<sup>73</sup> These remnants from the past emphasize that cultivators looking for new places to settle in the

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<sup>70</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*.

<sup>71</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 72. The translations I give for *uganga/waganga* substitute English functional equivalents for the colonial-era (and still surviving) glosses of these terms as “witchcraft/witches.”

<sup>72</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 97.

<sup>73</sup> See Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400*; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*; Yvonne Bastin et al., *Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3*, Macintosh and Windows (Leiden, The Netherlands: Leiden University, 2003), <http://linguistics.africamuseum.be>.

region were deeply concerned with locating sites with soil that was suitable for the gardens and fields on which they depended to sustain their communities.<sup>74</sup>

At first, the arriving groups of kin kept to forested hills along the coastal hinterland where familiar canopies and moist soils could sustain gardens of yams, roots, and vegetables that formed the majority of a diet supplemented with protein from hunted game, fish, and shellfish. But generation by generation, they grew in numbers, and some of them also explored and settled unfamiliar landscapes where they experimented with new crops, caught unfamiliar fish, and located well-watered places to homestead. Although they brought with them many of the tools and strategies with which their linguistic forebears had shaped the landscapes of coastal Tanzania, the fertile plains and forests that surround Africa's Great Lakes, and the rainforests and rivers of Equatorial West Africa, they also needed new techniques to exploit local resources if they wished to prosper in the lands they entered. So, in addition to exchanging resources, commodities, and people with other Bantu-speaking communities they also sought the expertise of the autochthonous foragers, who visited them in the forests and at the sea, and agro-pastoralists in the neighboring dry plains.

Marrying locals was an effective strategy for expanding a descent group's shared pool of knowledge. As they brought women into their villages and sustained wider social connections, cultivators learned and elaborated strategies attuned to the distinctive places they settled. And they passed these strategies for prospering in eastern Kenya's

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<sup>74</sup> Helm provides detailed ecological descriptions of each of these zones, including soil type, topography, vegetation, and average rainfall in "Conflicting Histories," 81–90.

landscapes through the languages and rituals they taught their children. As Bantu-speaking communities settled in different places and interacted more with distinctive autochthonous communities than with their linguistic siblings, their previously similar dialects began to diverge into new languages.<sup>75</sup>

Correspondences between linguistic and archaeological data present a relatively clear picture of the substance of these exchanges among the iron-working Bantu cultivators who initiated permanent settlements in eastern Kenya and the foragers and agro-pastoralists who preceded them. Archaeological evidence provides little information, however, about the negotiations that attended their exchanges or the ways in which these early communities organized their collective claims over people.

#### *Exchanging Iron, Ceramics, and Women*

Archaeologists have identified some early first millennia CE settlements scattered along the Tanzanian and Kenyan coast that indicate occupation by cultivators with knowledge of iron-production. For example, the Tanzanian site of Limbo, settled sometime between 150 BCE and 293 CE, is the earliest iron-producing site within twenty-five kilometers of the coast.<sup>76</sup> The investment in time and resources required to prepare a site for iron-production would have dissuaded the residents of Limbo from

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<sup>75</sup> For a summary of archaeological literature about shared technological innovations see Wright, “New Perspectives.”

<sup>76</sup> These are the outside ranges of carbon dates provided by Felix A. Chami and Paul Msemwa, “A New Look at Culture and Trade on the Azanian Coast,” *Current Anthropology* 38 (1997): 674. Also see variations in Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*, 91; Felix A. Chami, “The First Millennium AD on the East Coast: A New Look at the Cultural Sequence and Interactions,” *Azania: Journal of the British Institute in Eastern Africa* 29–30 (1994): 232–38; Felix A. Chami, “A Review of Swahili Archaeology,” *African Archaeological Review* 15, no. 3 (1998): 199–218, doi:10.1023/A:1021612012892.

relocating; and the amount of iron slag at the site suggests they produced enough to provide their metal products to other communities. Since this complex metallurgy was not known to the earlier residents, who spoke languages outside the Bantu family, evidence of iron-production in early coastal East African settlements suggests that the inhabitants of such sites spoke a Bantu dialect. The low recovery rate of material artifacts outside of iron-producing sites like Limbo suggests that most Bantu speakers in East Africa practiced shifting agriculture, in which communities relocated their fields and residences after depleting the nutrients in the soils they cultivated.<sup>77</sup> The distribution of these limited sites indicates that most of the iron-using cultivators who settled in eastern Kenya travelled through the inland mountains and hills of Pare, Usambara and Taita rather than moving northward directly along the Tanzanian coast, a finding that corresponds with linguistic evidence.<sup>78</sup>

Archaeologist Richard Helm has identified twelve small sites (.12 – 3.0 hectares) that cultivators occupied in southeast Kenya before 500 CE. His survey indicates that cultivators favored environments previously frequented by autochthonous foragers, whose microlithic stone tools are found in the upland forests of the southeast Kenya region located between the Shimba Plateau in the south and Mount Mwangea in the north.<sup>79</sup> As would be expected of cultivators, the few sites that archaeologists have

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<sup>77</sup> The low recovery rate for early settlements may also reflect older archaeological research paradigms which focused almost exclusively on “stone towns” from later eras.

<sup>78</sup> Hinnebusch, “The Shungwaya Hypothesis: A Linguistic Reappraisal.” Pare, in particular shared a shift from PNEC 121- to iji- with Proto-Sabaki dialects, Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 194–195.

<sup>79</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 133.

identified are restricted to the areas with fertile soils most suitable to agriculture. For instance, the site of Kivinja near the Rufiji Delta of modern Tanzania was located at the mouth of a small river and was occupied from as early as 361 CE to as late as 668 CE.<sup>80</sup> Archaeologists have also found imported ceramics and glass at Kivinja similar to those produced in the Near East and found also in Egyptian Greco-Roman sites.<sup>81</sup>

These imports at Kivinja corroborate some of the details that an anonymous Greek merchant described in his first-century trading guide, now known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.<sup>82</sup> Though the author of the manual does not mention Mombasa by name, he described places on the coast to its north (the Pyralaoi Islands) and south (Menuthias Island and Rhapta). Modern residents know the Pyralaoi Islands as the Lamu Archipelago in northeastern Kenya, which has a channel between the islands and the mainland as described in the text. The second place, Menuthias Island, is described as a large offshore island, suggesting either Pemba or Zanzibar. And Rhapta could be anywhere along the Tanzanian mainland south of modern Dar es Salaam.<sup>83</sup>

The Greek trader noted that these coastal communities in East Africa offered ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell, and palm oil to Arabs and other Indian Ocean merchants in return for imported metalwares—lances, hatchets, daggers, awls—and

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<sup>80</sup> Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*, 91.

<sup>81</sup> Felix A. Chami and Paul Msemwa, “The Excavation at Kwale Island, South of Dar Es Salaam,” *Nyame Akuma* 48 (1997): 45–56; Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*, 91.

<sup>82</sup> Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 139–142.

glass.<sup>84</sup> Merchants also shared wine and grain to foster goodwill among local trading partners, but these victuals were not in demand for trade, suggesting that residents were cultivators.<sup>85</sup> The text also described how residents along the East African coast caught turtles and other sea animals in traps and fished from dug-out canoes and sewn-boats.<sup>86</sup>

The author described the local residents as “very big-bodied men” and intimated that a single language was common throughout the area when he noted that Arab captains and their agents had learned the language after marrying into the local communities.<sup>87</sup> Apparently, a sultan in Arabia tried to collect tariffs through his representatives along the coast, but each trader behaved “each in their own place, just like chiefs”, corroborating linguistic and archaeological evidence that residents tended to prefer egalitarian strategies.<sup>88</sup> These details also provide evidence (however slender) that East Africa’s residents fished, farmed, spoke a common language, and participated regularly in trade with overseas merchants at the beginning of the Current Era.

In addition to imported ceramics and glass, archaeologists have recovered a coherent set of locally produced pottery in East African coastal sites associated with

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>85</sup> Jan Vansina has suggested this indifference to grain imports may indicate that residents were farming communities, rather than foragers or pastoralists. He also noted that elsewhere in the *Periplus* the author almost invariably noted whether communities did not cultivate crops. Since the author made no similar comments for the communities along the coast, Vansina suggests that these communities practiced cultivation, which the Greek author would have considered unremarkable. Jan Vansina, “Slender Evidence, Weighty Consequences: On One Word in the Periplus Maris Erythraei,” *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 393–97.

<sup>86</sup> Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 59–61.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

artifacts from early Indian Ocean trade. They argue that the stylistic features and distribution of the locally made pottery indicate that residents along most of the East African coast shared methods of production and exchange from about the beginning of the current era to 600 CE.<sup>89</sup> Archaeologists named this pottery tradition Kwale Ware after the settlement site where they first excavated it—about twenty kilometers southwest of Mombasa Island. They dated the pottery at Kwale to 155 – 385 CE.<sup>90</sup> The pottery finds at Kwale offer direct evidence that the cultivators who settled southeast Kenya within a century of the descriptions in the *Periplus* shared a basic material culture with cultivators in Tanzania.

Archaeologists have unearthed Kwale Ware in sites ranging from Brava, Somalia to Chibuene, Mozambique, and the earliest versions of the pottery tradition have been found in the hinterland of Tanzania.<sup>91</sup> But southeast Kenya was probably a major distribution point for the pottery tradition.<sup>92</sup> Archaeologists have found it in the Taita Hills to the southwest of Mombasa, near the upper Tana River to the northwest, and north along the East African coast into southern Somalia. They have also identified another variant of the pottery tradition in the Eastern Highlands of Kenya, near Nairobi, known as

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<sup>89</sup> Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Ceramics and the Early Swahili,” 249.

<sup>90</sup> Robert C. Soper, “Kwale: An Early Iron Age Site in Southeastern Kenya,” *Azania* 2 (1967): 1–17; the carbon date for Kwale is estimated to have +/- accuracy of 115 years. For the relationship of Kwale Ware to Urewe Ware (eastern side of Lake Victoria) see Helm, “Conflicting Histories”; Wright, “New Perspectives.” Kwale Ware is sometimes included as a sub-classification of Early Iron Ware, which includes a number of variant wares derived from Urewe Ware in other regions.

<sup>91</sup> Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Ceramics and the Early Swahili,” 252.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas T. Spear, “Early Swahili History Reconsidered,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 257–90.



Kwamboo Ware.<sup>93</sup> These distributions of Kwale Ware likely represent one of several several pottery traditions whose makers derived them from an earlier pottery tradition found east of the Great Lakes that archaeologist call Urewe Ware.<sup>94</sup>

While archaeologists have hesitated to identify Kwale Ware with any specific speech community, the first cultivators to venture northward into eastern Kenya, and who made Kwale Ware, probably spoke dialects of Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu.<sup>95</sup> The articulation of a distinctive material culture in the mid-first millennium corresponds to linguists' estimates for the emergence of Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu during the same period—as does the report of a widely distributed common language in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.

Oral traditions suggest that settlers may have selected sites appropriate for cultivation by collaborating with the foragers who already occupied East Africa.<sup>96</sup> Some

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Charles Diblasi, "Iron Age Settlement and Ceramics in the Ithanga Hills of Central Kenya: Behavioral Inferences from Archeological and Ethnohistorical Evidence" (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 1986); Helm, "Conflicting Histories," 53.

<sup>94</sup> Wright, "New Perspectives," 128. East African cultivators probably used Kwale Ware to replace Urewe Ware, which iron-working cultivators residing east of Lake Tanzania used before some of them migrated to the coast and Central Highlands of Kenya. Archaeologists date Urewe Ware from around 400 BCE – 500 CE, thus overlapping with Kwale Ware in some places.

<sup>95</sup> It is possible that people speaking other Northeast Savanna Bantu languages preceded Proto-NECB speakers into the region. But if so, they rapidly adopted NECB features in their languages and left few traces from their own dialects, much of which can be interpreted as developing in a later era. Christopher Ehret has argued that speakers of Uplands Bantu (in which he includes Thagicu, Chaga, Taita) were the first to settle in Eastern Kenya; but his linguistic categorization is based primarily on loanwords rather than the more definitive evidence provided by language reconstruction. The latter suggests Thagicu belongs to Central Kenya Bantu, while Chaga and Taita belong to the Kilimanjaro-Taita cluster of Northeast Savanna languages. Kwamboo Ware and a few loan words suggest some sort of interaction among communities in these regions, but the timing and extent of interactions is disputed.

<sup>96</sup> See discussions of relationships between Bantu cultivators and autochthones in Equatorial West Africa in Kairn A. Klieman, *The Pygmies Were Our Compass": Bantu and Batwa in the History of West Central Africa, Early Times to C. 1900 C.E.* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*.

of the well-watered places suitable to foraging and hunting would have also been attractive for gardens. Reporting similar strategies among cultivators and foragers in more recent times, Giriama Mijikenda elder Bukardi Ndzovu explained to Thomas Spear:

The Laa [a foraging community] told them. The Giriama originally were not men of the forest, but they had made friends with the Langulo [a foraging community]. A Langulo would come, ask for a ram, and then he would show you a nice area in the forest where he hunted.<sup>97</sup>

Other traditions emphasize that foragers provided cultivators with forest products, such as honey, wild game, and poisons.<sup>98</sup> But foragers also may have taught the first cultivators in the region how to collect food from the sea.<sup>99</sup> Early cultivator settlements often include remains from shellfish, fish, and turtles that show how they exploited nearby marine habitats. The difficulty of securing fresh water near the sea probably restrained more extensive exploitation of marine resources until their descendants developed techniques for digging deep wells. Though their iron tools would have enabled digging wells from the beginning, they did not learn techniques for digging wells until the eight century, when agro-pastoralists showed them how.<sup>100</sup> Until then, the settlers

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<sup>97</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 45.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 162–163.

<sup>99</sup> Bantu-speakers have a long tradition of fishing from rivers, but the settlers of the eastern Kenya developed a distinctive vocabulary for harvesting the sea.

<sup>100</sup> See Chart 4.1 for possible derivations of “well” and “to dig a well.” George H. O. Abungu notes that wells at the coastal settlement of Ungwana share architectural similarities to wells in the interior, particularly those at Elwak and Wajir, which are now inhabited by Somali speakers, an Eastern Cushitic language. However, the direction of influence is unclear. George H. O. Abungu and H. W. Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland,” in *Archaeology of Africa: Foods, Metals, and Towns*, ed. T. Shaw et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 701. Another possibility is that they learned the technique from overseas traders, though the linguistic evidence suggests an African innovation.

chose sites with access to natural fresh water and sometimes occupied these continuously for centuries.<sup>101</sup> Language evidence from early foraging communities is unavailable, since their descendants all adopted Bantu or Cushitic languages over the past millennium.

Early encounters of Bantu-speaking cultivators with Cushitic-speaking agro-pastoralists may have influenced the settlers to expand their use of small domestic animals for food.<sup>102</sup> The previous residents also introduced them to new crops that could thrive in the soils of East Africa’s savannas, despite relatively low rainfall and irregular droughts. Specifically, the migrants added Southern Cushitic words for sorghum, chicken, and pigeon to their vocabulary.

Figure 3.5 Southern Cushitic Loanwords in Northeast Coast Bantu<sup>103</sup>

English Gloss	Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu	Proto-Southern Cushitic	Distribution
sorghum	*mutama	*t <sup>y</sup> aam- “*-t <sup>y</sup> aam- “stalk, stem grain, millet, maize”	NECB
chicken	*Wutitiri	*ʔitir-	NECB
rooster	*ʔijogolo	*sak <sup>w</sup> -	NECB
pigeon	*mpugi	*pug-	NECB
donkey	*mpunda	?Burunge – puncu (goat whether)	NECB
sheep	*ngonzi	*gondi/gondu (PR)	NECB

<sup>101</sup> Kusimba, *The Rise and Fall of Swahili States*.

<sup>102</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 306.

<sup>103</sup> “?” indicates doubt that the two words are related. Note that *puncu*, “donkey” is a word in the Southern Cushitic language Burunge, not reconstructed, hence the hesitancy in assigning its provenance. “W” in Wutitiri is capitalized because its reconstructed phonology is in doubt; originally a reflex of Common Bantu \*b during the PNEC Bantu stage it was likely the labial dental approximant \*v or simply the labial approximant \*w

waterbuck	*(n)kulo	*kuul-	NECB
gazelle	*(n)swala	tʻaawad-	NECB
leather garment	*-guni	*gʌn- (skin, foreskin) (Tale: *gun-)	NECB
chest (non-human)	?*kidari	*gida	NECB
bark	?*igome	*gən-	NECB
arrow	*ncaale	?Central Sudanic	NECB
rope bed	*-sagi	Burunge: sagay (sleeping place)	NECB
barren	?*-tasa	*dzaa'-	East Bantu
finger, toe	?*kidole	nTod- (Ma'a dole)	NECB
go away, go out	*laW	tlaʔ “run away”	NECB
pieb crow	?*nkunguulu	?*x <sup>w</sup> ar-	East Bantu
put forth, give,	*lavy	tlaʔ “run away”	NECB
few	*-cace	?*ty'atyok- “narrow”	NECB
twist	*suuk	*-sook	NECB
war, quarrel	*nkondo	*-kund-	East Bantu Bantu Zone K

The word now used for “chicken” may have referred then to a different species of domesticated fowl and they probably did not start cultivating sorghum themselves until a few centuries later, when they adopted words for processing and winnowing grain (see Figure 4.1). They may also have borrowed words for donkey, sheep, and rooster. Since the settlers also borrowed Southern Cushitic words for wild animals and “a leather garment” they likely obtained some animal products from autochthonous pastoralists, perhaps in exchange for their garden produce.

Despite these exchanges, the small number of early Cushitic loanwords in modern NEC Bantu languages indicates that relationships among the autochthonous agro-pastoralists and in-coming cultivators did not run very deep, probably since they preferred to site their camps and settlements in different environments.<sup>104</sup> Like other migrants from the Great Lakes region, speakers of Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu dialects chose settlement sites within forests or in lightly wooded savannas that could sustain them.<sup>105</sup> In contrast, the Southern Cushitic speakers they encountered kept largely to the drier plains, where they could avoid the tsetse flies that inhabited woodland environments and carried diseases fatal to the cattle they valued.

The material remains at these sites suggest that the settlements of this initial era supported only small populations. Thus they would have abandoned some of the strategies for organizing larger communities that their ancestors had developed in the more densely populated and integrated communities around the Great Lakes.<sup>106</sup> But they still needed to ensure that they had enough people with the proper knowledge to plant, harvest, forage, hunt, fish, make pottery, forge iron, and otherwise manage their settlements.

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<sup>104</sup> For a similar discussion of interactions among Southern Cushitic speakers and the Ruvu sub-group of Sabaki see Gonzales, *Societies, Religion, and History*.

<sup>105</sup> Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400*.

<sup>106</sup> This “flattening” of society is suggested by the loss of titles for the kin authorities *\*-ami* and *\*-kumu*, though they retained the verb *\*kum*, to be honored (Ibid. p. 248-249). Ehret argues the idea of a clan chief was resuscitated in the word *\*-éné* (owner, chief) after the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, see discussion of *\*éné* above.

*Recruiting Residents*

While it is clear that the Northeast Coast Bantu-speakers who settled eastern Kenya around the beginning of the Current Era organized their communities through strategies of unilineal descent, it is difficult to discern how their descent strategies influenced their interactions with autochthonous communities. While modern Southern Cushitic agro-pastoralists organize themselves into patrilineages to direct transfers of cattle across generations, scholars have yet to scrutinize the linguistic record for confirmation that their ancestors followed a similar strategy two thousand years ago. The evidence for how the autochthonous foragers might have grouped themselves or dealt with the Bantu-speaking cultivators is even sparser, because in recent centuries they have adopted the Cushitic or Bantu languages of their neighbors. While Bantu-speaking lineages occasionally would have adapted their descent strategies to accommodate marriage exchanges with local groups, their relatively permanent settlements and productive cultivating strategies were probably more important than strategies of unilineal descent for their success at recruiting locals to join their communities, exchange products with them, and learn language features and words from local languages.

Anthropologists have developed models based on observations of contemporary foragers throughout the world that suggest early foragers may have used strategies similar to their modern successors, despite differing historical circumstances.<sup>107</sup> According to anthropologist David Riches, foragers tended to live in mobile bands smaller than one

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<sup>107</sup> David Riches, "Hunter-Gatherer Structural Transformations," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 679–701, doi:10.2307/3034956.

hundred people tied to tracts of territory within which they confined most of their activities. However they regarded themselves as the customary occupants of the territories rather than the owners and did not exclude outsiders. In addition they divided their bands into task groups which individuals could join according to their personal interests and skills.<sup>108</sup> While some of the members of these *ad hoc* groupings could exert influence on others through their leadership skills or relevant expertise, they did so without any mantle of authority or ranking beyond the moment, and certainly not between generations.<sup>109</sup> They shared responsibility for rearing children and exchanged women and men flexibly when they met other bands.

Foraging communities who have adopted lineal descent in recent centuries do not compromise the validity of the model in earlier times because they did so in recent times when state governments constricted their movements and subsistence strategies to ever-shrinking territories and put access to livelihood at a premium. Their increasingly limited access to foraging and hunting resources prompted them to adopt strategies of inheritance and ownership from their cultivating and pastoralist neighbors.<sup>110</sup> The very flexibility with which they grouped and regrouped according to circumstances thus explains how individual foragers might have moved in with cultivating communities in need of their familiarity with local environments new to them. Presumably foraging groups in eastern

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> James Woodburn, "Egalitarian Societies," *Man* 17, no. 3 (September 1, 1982): 431–51, doi:10.2307/2801707.

<sup>110</sup> Dadi Saidi, from the Wataa (former) hunting community explained "when the Game Reserves were established we were forced to leave the forest as we were not allowed to kill animals anymore. Thus we began to cultivate maize," Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 160.

Kenya tried to arrange similarly flexible arrangements with the Bantu-speaking descent groups who entered their territories in the first millennium CE.

Dadi Saidi, a former forager who was forced to settle near Gedi in the 1940s, expressed the flexibility of forager interactions with cultivators in eastern Kenya, represented in this quote by the Langulo and Giriama, respectively:

We didn't sell tusks to the Giriama; we gave them to them out of friendship. A Langulo, as the Giriama called us, would go to a Giriama village and make friends. The Giriama would then kill a sheep or two for the Langulo. Then, when he left, the Langulo would offer to help the Giriama, usually by providing ivory as bridewealth for his sons. One tusk could be worth as much as three dowries. . . . The Giriama and the Langulo have always been friendly. The Giriama got ivory from us and we got meat from them. After one Giriama slept with Bajila's wife, however, we refused to give them any more ivory.<sup>111</sup>

Though Dada Saidi's explanation of forager-cultivator relationships refers specifically to the recent past, each of the strategies he describes was also plausible in the early eras of Bantu expansion into eastern Kenya. The forager would have initiated friendship by visiting the village of cultivators who would host them as guests. The relative permanence of the village would make it another stop in foragers' regular cycles of gathering and hunting, and potentially several foraging groups would frequent the same village. Grateful for the hospitality of cultivators, the foragers would offer resources that their new friends would appreciate, such as ivory for those involved in the coastal trade to first-century Arab merchants. Dada Saidi's emphasis that their gifts contributed

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 160.



to bridewealth suggests that cultivators who made such friendships with foragers could gain significant advantages in the competition over dependents that motivated their descent strategies. In return for this material and social capital, the cultivators could provide some of their domesticated animals as meat to foragers who otherwise depended on hunting. The concluding complaint that a cultivator slept with a forager's wife suggests that cultivators sought to recruit women away from their foraging communities, presumably for their reproductive potential. Taking a forager's wife (presuming earlier foragers formalized marriage) would risk the friendship, though unmarried foraging women could have joined cultivators at will. Since foragers did not claim children with unilineal strategies, their husbands' would have no competition from her group over her children, though they would likely be welcome to join her former group at will (though it would probably reform several times in different configurations before they came of age).

Allowing that these assumptions about the prevailing social strategies of autochthonous foragers may yet be found wanting, they help to explain why the Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu speakers who settled in the Mombasa region would have found matrilineages organized as *\*nyumba* advantageous on frontier where they came into regular contact with forager groupings that did not reckon unilineal kinship. The matrilineal strategies associated with *\*nyumba* would have allowed a man to maximize his descendants by claiming both his sister's offspring and the children of outsider women, whose original foraging communities did not reckon descent to make collective claims over offspring. While men following patrilineal strategies could also maximize their descendants by arranging polygamous marriages with forager women, they would

not also have claims over their sister's offspring. Thus, over generations those who could cultivate relationship with foragers that yielded daughters for marriage as well as claim matrilineal descendants could be more demographically successful than those who did not. In contrast to the ease with which Bantu-speakers would have incorporated forager women, they found it more difficult to reconcile matrilineal strategies with the patrilineal strategies of Cushitic-speakers. Cultivators focused their descent groups on maintaining their inheritances of productive land, while agro-pastoralists used descent to claim rights over cattle, so these marriages would not threaten the corporate property of descent groups. In addition, when matrilineal cultivators married their sister's sons to the daughters of patrilineal pastoralists, neither descent group would have clear claims to the offspring. In this situation, men could use their marriages to pastoralist women to maximize their descendants in the same way as those who married foragers, since his wife's kin would regard her offspring as belonging to him and his own kin would acknowledge his claims over his sister's children. This incorporation of pastoralist women is suggested by the Southern Cushitic word *\*kòðkó* "grandmother" which is evident in many Northeast Savanna and Northeast Coast Bantu languages, though its presence in a few western Bantu languages suggests it may be inherited, making the word a rare coincidence of sound and meaning.

However, when men in matrilineal communities married their sisters' daughters to the sons of patrilineal agro-pastoralists, the descent groups of both parents would claim the offspring of this union. Such an impasse could be resolved through negotiations over where the new family unit would live. Southern Cushitic men who came to live in the

matrilineal villages of their wife's maternal uncles would need to honor their claims over his children, while Bantu women who moved with their husband's mobile patrilineage would need to honor his father's and grandfathers' claims over her children. Those who chose to pursue these marriage alliances may have decided the potential conflicts were worth gaining outlets for excess population when gardens fared badly—a cultivating matrilineage facing famine could send some of its children to their mothers' foraging or pastoralist affines. Conversely, the competing claims may have dissuaded such unions and contributed to the limited engagements among Bantu-speaking cultivators and Southern Cushitic-speaking agro-pastoralists in the first several hundred years of living among one another in East Africa.

This distinction between patrilineal descent groups who claim offspring through wives and matrilineal descent groups who claim offspring through daughters indicates that patrilineage would only be successful where men could amass enough transferable wealth resources (such as cattle) to form polygamous descent groups. Without the resources needed to induce other descent groups to relinquish claims to their daughters, patrilineages would be less successful at recruiting offspring than matrilineages who were limited only by the number of daughters they bore.

### **Conclusion: Lineage as Ethnic Metaphor**

Jane Guyer and Samuel Belinga have noted that African strategies of affiliation emphasize that people are valuable because of the unique and diverse knowledge, skills,

and abilities they can contribute.<sup>112</sup> So, descent groups and marriage alliances are effective strategies of collaboration not only because they aggregate many people to achieve common goals but also because they can mobilize diverse skills in a larger group of people. Expanding the scope of kin beyond blood ties through marriage with outsiders would have circulated women or incorporated men. These unions enabled lineages to incorporate new knowledge into the “family” and bind lineages to one another to offer support when needed. By formalizing exchanges of women, foodstuffs, hides, ivory, wild honey, medicines through marriage alliances, patrilineages, and matrilineages, the Northeast Coast Bantu-speaking settlers and their descendants in eastern Kenya established enduring but adaptable descent groups to carry their knowledge forward through time. It should also be noted that all of the preceding discussion about the circulation of women between descent groups adopts patriarchal perspectives that elide the strategies that women would have themselves pursued. As intimated in the bride price negotiations that opened this chapter, the women played important roles in ensuring the prosperity of their descent groups and their daughters. Though men conducted the actual proceedings, women served as official witnesses and took charge of the money immediately after the negotiations concluded.

Descent is such an intuitive and persuasive concept among Northeast Coast Bantu communities that they also use the language of descent and lineage as a core image for extemporaneous explanations of the relationships among ethnic groups in modern times.

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<sup>112</sup> Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, “Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 91–120, doi:10.2307/183256.

When telling the story of Mijikenda origins, for instance, many of them assert that they are descended from a man named Muyeye and his two wives, named Mbodze and Mutsedze. Joseph Denge explained to Thomas Spear:

“Muyeye had two wives. Mbodze and Matsezi. They were not sisters; they were co-wives. Mbodze is our mother . . . Matsezi is the mother of the Bajun [Swahili] and the Arabs.”<sup>113</sup>

Bukardi Ndzovu, another of Spear’s informants, offered an interpretation of this tradition that used the language of descent to explain how Mijikenda communities determine the order in which they perform their rituals:

We are all descended from Mbodze and Mutsedzi, the co-wives of Muyeye. When we try to trace the background of Muyeye we are not able to discover who his father was. We are all children of Mbodze and Mutsezi. Mbodze was the first wife and she gave birth to the Digo and the Ribe. Since the Ribe were born of the first wife, *we cannot carry out our customs until we consult the Ribe*. Matsezi, the second wife, gave birth to the Pokomo, the Giriama, the Taita, and the Gunya [Swahili].

Thus Mijikenda traditions draw on both patrilineal and matrilineal principles to describe relationships among the components of both their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups with whom they claim historical ties. In particular they draw on the logic of patrilineage (*\*mulyango*) to assert their descent from a common male ancestor and maternal households (*\*nyumba*) to assert descent from common female ancestors. They then use the division of the ethnic groups into the various maternal households to

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<sup>113</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 35.

explain contemporary relationships among the various components of the Mijikenda ethnic group. They can thus claim a common heritage by asserting common descent back to a single male, while also accounting for contemporary differences by drawing on the symbolism of co-wives, whose competitions on behalf of their children evoke both familial tension and loyalty.

While Swahili communities do not claim shared descent with the Mijikenda from Muyeye or his wife Matsezi, they similarly use lineage to express their own Swahili heritage, even though they have largely abandoned descent as a strategy for organizing their contemporary communities.<sup>114</sup> Swahili traditions generally delineate the ruling dynasties of coastal towns rather than the entire Swahili ethnic group scattered in communities along the East African coast. For instance, the Pate chronicle traces the descent of Nabahani Sultans through patrilineal lines of Arab immigrants with high standings as Muslims. However folk stories and songs about Fumo Liyongo in the same region balance these claims to foreign descent with matrilineal traditions. Indeed the conflict between Fumo Liyongo and his maternal uncle's son Fumo Mringwari can be read as a competition over whether matrilineal or patrilineal principles of descent should be given precedence, with Liyongo claiming succession as the late ruler's sister's son and Mringwari claiming descent as his father's son. Kiswahili speakers use such traditions of

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<sup>114</sup> Swartz notes that nuclear families rather than descent groups are now the norm among the Swahili communities of Mombasa. Swartz, *The Way the World Is*.

matrilineal descent in stories that emphasize that their ancestors were the original residents of the coast who welcomed Arab into their communities.<sup>115</sup>

The genealogies of descent that can be traced back to Proto-Bantu speakers suggest that the Bantu speakers that Mijikenda and Swahili communities claim as their ancestors rarely relied exclusively on either patrilineal or matrilineal descent. Although communities used unilineal strategies to differentiate mutually exclusive descent groups, careful manipulations of marriage alliances also enabled them to collaborate across the theoretical boundaries to constitute their communities as they saw fit. Modern ethnic communities thus continue using strategies of unilineal descent to claim collective rights over kin and affines and also to articulate relationships among their ethnic groups because of their adaptability.

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<sup>115</sup> This claim is contested by interior ethnic groups, such as the Taita, who claim the Swahili are merely Arabs who mixed with the Mijikenda.

## Chapter 4

### Consolidating Sabaki Frontiers: Assembling Clans and their Knowledge,

*ca. 500 – 1000 CE*

*A lot of uganga must be done  
to make a peaceful home.*

*- Thomas Govi*

When my colleague William Tsaka and I introduced ourselves to Gona Dzoka, he was muttering instructions to a handful of twigs. After a few minutes he handed them to his wife and requested her to make some tea before turning his attention to us. Gona Dzoka was performing a common incantation that most eastern Kenyans would classify under the broad heading of *uganga* (pl. *uganga*) (PB). Though usually glossed as “medicine”, *uganga* might be described more accurately as “technical knowledge”: it refers to techniques of iron working, healing, rain making, and other socially valuable skills, such as clearing paths, communicating with ancestors, negotiating peace, leading a war party, composing songs, carving grave markers, and moving sacred drums.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Gona Dzoka told us he could make an amulet that protects its wearer from lion attacks and charms that safeguard crops from theft. Furthermore, he described *uganga*

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<sup>1</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 55, 72–75, 109–111. Peter Probst and Brigitte Buhler similarly equate medicine and other kinds of specialist knowledge with political authority in “Patterns of Control on Medicine, Politics, and Social Change among the Wimbun, Cameroon Grassfields,” *Anthropos* 85, no. 4/6 (January 1, 1990): 447–54, doi:10.2307/40463570.



that made the enemies of Rabai see an ocean instead of their forest settlements. He claimed that those who denied the vision by entering the forest would drown.<sup>2</sup>

Some men and women known as *waganga* “healers” (PB) make a living by treating the sick and those afflicted by spirits with a combination of incantations, prayers, herbal treatments, and dances.<sup>3</sup> They inherit their *uganga* from their ancestors or purchase it from another *waganga*.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these specialists, most residents in eastern Kenya learn amateur or lay *uganga* that provides daily enrichment and protection as they grow up, such as Gona Dzoka’s tea and amulets. However some *uganga* is regarded as too valuable or powerful to be commonly available, so they also entrust proprietary knowledge to their clans. As Thomas Govi, a Chonyi Mijikenda elder, explained to historian Thomas Spear:

Each clan had its own *uganga*. Some had the *uganga* of starting or leading a war; others had the *uganga* to render an arrow harmless by slowing it down. There were many different types of *uganga*. . . . A lot of *uganga* must be done to make a peaceful home. There was *uganga* to evade an epidemic, *uganga* to stop an

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<sup>2</sup> Gona Dzoka also offered another version of this drowning. When small groups of Maasai warriors entered Rabai, residents invited them to a meal of gruel. When the gruel was piping hot, women would offer a sip to the warriors then tip the pot over their heads, thus scalding them and obscuring their vision while the rest of the household pounced on the intruders. Gona Dzoka, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, August 16, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department.

<sup>3</sup> Price Tsaka insisted that blessing medicine was essential to its efficacy; see Price Tsaka, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, June 28, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department; Munga Kombo Kunya, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, July 19, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department..

<sup>4</sup> Konde Washe, famed for the lyrics he writes for popular Mijikenda music, similarly described his skills as a musician as an inherited skill; see Konde Washe, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. William Tsaka, August 16, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department. Also see McIntosh, *The Edge of Islam*.

epidemic from spreading further, *uganga* for starting war, *uganga* to win a war, *uganga* to evade a war, and *uganga* to stop a war. You cannot divide all these by a few clans; people of the same clan were given two or three different types of *uganga*.<sup>5</sup>

Though Thomas Govi mentioned *uganga* that recall the legacy of warfare and disease in eastern Kenya, he emphasized that knowledge of many techniques is necessary to make a “peaceful home.” Since no single clan has a monopoly on all necessary knowledge, they collaborate with one another to achieve success in complex ventures.

In eastern Kenya, modern Bantu speakers’ concept of clans as the trustees of *uganga* extends their forebears’ appreciation for the distinct contributions of communities and their specialized proprietary knowledge to the common good.<sup>6</sup> Until recently, many of them organized their settlements around this strategy of composed complementarity: the members of each clan maintained their own neighborhood while also contributing their unique skills and knowledge to the entire settlement.<sup>7</sup> Early Bantu cultivators in eastern Kenya articulated these links among specialized knowledge, clans, and space between 500 and 1000 CE as they expanded their subsistence base, began building nucleated settlements to maximize specialties, and articulated the Sabaki languages that are now distributed throughout the valleys and hills of eastern Kenya, along the East

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<sup>5</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*.

<sup>6</sup> Neil Kodesh has described clans as communities that ensured health and provided healing in the Great Lakes region in “Networks of Knowledge: Clanship and Collective Well-Being in Buganda,” *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 02 (2008): 197–216.

<sup>7</sup> During my visit to Jomvu in May 2011, the local *imam* told me in an informal conversation that Jomvu’s clans retained stewardship over certain responsibilities, such as cleaning graves.

African coast, and onto the Comoros Islands. Those who succeeded in contributing via clanship prospered in new environments and overcame the limits of land-extensive subsistence strategies that had prevailed in the forest environments where earlier generations had lived.

### **Assembling Clans: Cultivating Complementary Knowledges**

Western scholars beholden to universal models of social evolution previously considered clans to be a mere expansion of lineage on a larger scale. However, as Jane Guyer, Samuel Belinga, and Neil Kodesh have argued, clans are better understood as compositions of corporate knowledge than as extensions of the descent logic of lineages that is focused on reproduction.<sup>8</sup> They are strategies of a different order, contingent rather than reproductive, and specifically designed to allow people not related by descent to collaborate in defined times of need.

The cultivators who succeeded with clanship in eastern Kenya spoke dialects from the Sabaki branch of Northeast Coast Bantu. Sabaki speakers developed the strategy of clanship to retain a secondary degree of collaboration as they diverged from one another in numbers growing though time and in space, and so they developed idiosyncratic understandings about how clanship related to lineage as they proceeded. Some Sabaki speakers today use the same word for clan and lineage, suggesting that they

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Keech McIntosh, *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kodesh, "Networks of Knowledge"; McIntosh, *Beyond Chiefdoms*.

too consider clanship a natural elaboration of lineality.<sup>9</sup> Others considered clans to be synonymous with marriage alliances and extended the older word *\*lukolo* “marriage alliance” to the new meaning “clan.” Other Sabaki communities innovated or borrowed novel words for clan, such as *gosa* (El), *keti* (Pk), *mbari* (MK), and *taifa* (Sw), depending on the historical contexts within which they needed to distinguish them.<sup>10</sup> For example, *taifa* in Kiswahili interpreted the concept for Arabic-speaking gentry in the coastal towns by asserting an analogy with its Islamic counterparts; and *mbari* in Mijikenda translated the strategy for Central Kenyan Bantu-speakers who entered eastern Kenya after 1500 CE.<sup>11</sup> However, regardless of terminology, most Sabaki speakers distinguished the marriage alliances—with which they managed trans-generational claims over children and land—from social organizations (glossed here as clan) whose members embodied their contemporary compositions of specialized knowledge relevant to their times. They designed clans to solve present problems, leaving the task of reproduction to their lineages.

Around 500 CE, Bantu-speakers had claimed most of the areas in eastern Kenya conducive to their inherited forest-based techniques of yam cultivation and vegetable

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Mijikenda speakers use the generic *mbari* “group” for both; *\*mlango*, which was introduced in chapter 3 as lineage, is also used by some Northeast Coast Bantu speakers as clan.

<sup>10</sup> While *keti* is an innovation peculiar to the Pokomo branch of Sabaki, *mbari* is a loanword from Central Kenya Bantu languages which Mijikenda and some Swahili speakers adopted between 1000 and 1500 CE (see Chapter 5). Swahili speakers adopted *taifa* from Arabic during the nineteenth century (see Chapter 6). These later loanwords replaced earlier terms for clan and thus obscure how their Proto-Sabaki ancestors conceived of clanship, as does the tendency of modern Sabaki speakers to regard clans as a form of kinship similar to a lineage.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 6 for the entrance of these migrants to eastern Kenya. Note *taifa* (ta’if, طائف) is productive in Arabic for wide variety of social groups, from Sufi brotherhoods to the Muslim principalities in Andalusia (Spain).

gardens. In response to perceived shortages of land, some of them began to assemble their lineages into larger settlements instead of continuing to move out and segment in search of virgin soil. These growing population densities meant that successful (and expanding) generations of Bantu-speaking cultivators found it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves using the tried and true techniques of their parents. So, they began looking for alternative resources in both familiar and novel environments. Lineages under duress might have led many experiments with alternative food sources and the first forays into places that their ancestors had considered uninhabitable. Though their efforts surely built on individuals simply curious enough to try out new techniques.

As Bantu speakers filled in these frontiers in eastern Kenya, they succeeded by compiling diversified knowledge of the resources available in several ecologies. Over five centuries they assembled lineages into clans whose members had knowledge about a variety of subsistence techniques and access to land in different micro-ecologies—regardless of their particular kinship relationships or marriage alliances. Clans specialized in this manner could then exchange their products with other clans similarly constituted. Clans thus provided their members with access to the resources, products, and services of their clanmates without requiring everyone to acquire knowledge of them personally.<sup>12</sup>

Bantu-speaking cultivators reaching the limits of yam cultivation would rightly have regarded new subsistence techniques as valuable *uganga*, since they arranged marriages to acquire it. However, as the women whom lineages acquired through

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<sup>12</sup> Kodesh emphasize networks of healing in his narration of the Otter clan history, but also notes branches of the clan from different ecologies (e.g. river versus island) and professions (e.g. blacksmith) Kodesh, “Networks of Knowledge.”

marriage alliances taught their children, some techniques gradually became widely known. Thus clans could not secure their claims to any particular technique indefinitely because lineages and individuals shifted their clan memberships as they saw fit—and carried their distinguishing knowledge with them. As clans readjusted their memberships over the centuries to diversify their inventories of particular knowledges, they spread techniques for manipulating a variety of natural resources widely across clan boundaries.<sup>13</sup> For example, while only certain clans in the Swahili-speaking communities of Lamu know how to tap coconut trees, all men of means in the Mijikenda-speaking community of Rabai know how to tap coconut trees, regardless of clan affiliations.<sup>14</sup> The precise configurations of knowledge suggest the historical values of different subsistence strategies with which communities have prospered.

Despite the gradual erosion of clans' exclusive rights to the *uganga* around which their ancestors had grouped themselves, the complexity of the ecology in eastern Kenya precluded any single clan from mastering the techniques to access all the available resources. So, as clans interacted with one another they began to specialize in different productive techniques in order to ensure the desirability of the commodities they exchanged with one another. For instance, some descent groups increasingly specialized

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<sup>13</sup> Swahili and Mijikenda individuals sometimes expressed frustration that people no longer know how to make traditional dishes that relied on a greater variety of foods—many of which have been displaced by maize or rice.

<sup>14</sup> In Lamu, tapping is associated with poorer clans who are hired by tree owners (Ylvisaker, *Lamu in the Nineteenth Century*). In contrast, tapping is an honored activity in Rabai, where coconut toddy became a major source of revenue for entrepreneurs in the nineteenth century (Thomas J. Herlehy, "Ties That Bind: Palm Wine and Blood-Brotherhood at the Kenya Coast During the 19th Century," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 17, no. 2 [1984]: 285–308).

in gathering marine resources, adding fish and eventually sharks to the foods available to the wider community.<sup>15</sup> Lineages of various clans also began to settle with one another to facilitate and systematize their collaborations. These locally diversified settlements may have begun as seasonal markets where dispersed and differentiated groups met, but eventually these clan segments remained permanently in place and established claims to spaces within a settlement seen as shared.<sup>16</sup>

### **Social Foundations: Clustering Clans in Complex Spaces**

The consolidation of differentiated clans coincided with new strategies for organizing settlement spaces, today shared by most Sabaki speakers, despite variations related to the different environments in which they settled, the people whom they encountered in these places, and personal ingenuity. Before 500 CE most Bantu cultivators in East Kenya resided in small, dispersed *\*miji* “villages” (PSA), where *milyango* “lineages” of a single *\*lukolo* “marriage alliance” (PNEC) lived together.<sup>17</sup> They built their *\*nyumba* “homes” (PNEC) in familiar, often forested, environments where they could site their settlements and surrounding gardens with minimal interference—except from other *\*lukolos* “marriage alliances” (PNEC) with whom they

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<sup>15</sup>For an idea of the complexity of ocean resources see Mark Horton and Nina Mudida, “Exploitation of Marine Resources: Evidence for the Origin of the Swahili Communities of East Africa,” in *Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns*, ed. Thurston Shaw et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 673–93.

<sup>16</sup>Roderick J McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup>Proto-Bantu speakers may have used *\*miji* to referred to villages in general, while *\*ikaaya* referred to one’s home village. Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 271.

competed for sites with increasingly scarce soils.<sup>18</sup> As Proto-Sabaki speakers expanded their knowledges of the various ecologies in eastern Kenya, they drew on wider ranges of resources that could sustain more people in a defined settlement. But, instead of simply building larger versions of the villages where their ancestors had resided—with houses lining a single ridge or pathway—they built clusters of homes. Each cluster encircled a yard and they arranged the clusters around large comunal enclosures at the center of each settlement.<sup>19</sup> Archaeologists refer to this site pattern as a nucleated or a multi-component settlement.<sup>20</sup>

The coincidence of innovative nucleated settlements and an expanding subsistence base between 500 and 1000 CE suggests that they sustained these larger settlements by collaborating with segments of the other clans with whom they resided and which pursued diverse subsistence techniques. They also claimed particular places for their clans that embedded their social strategies in the physical landscape and made their associations more durable. While the lineages owned homes in villages and controlled access to fertile land around them, clans established claims over

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<sup>18</sup> Agro-pastoralists preferred the drier savannas for their cattle, and, while foragers favored similar environments, they harvested the landscape without making any claims to ownership. Many modern Sabaki lineages continued living in small, dispersed settlements until recent times because it allowed them to easily relocate in response to the frequent variations in rainfall that characterize eastern Kenya and Tanzania and periods of warfare.

<sup>19</sup> These enclosures have difference names in each Sabaki language, including *fumboni* (Com), *moro* (Mk, Pk), *uwanja* (Sw); Elwana speakers did not traditionally live in nucleated settlements, supporting the association of this strategy with Sabaki speakers after 500 CE, when the Elwana diverged (see below).

<sup>20</sup> Parker Shipton, “Lineage and Locality as Antithetical Principles in East African Systems of Land Tenure,” *Ethnology* 23, no. 2 (April 1984): 117–132; Richard Helm, “Conflicting Histories: The Archeology of the Iron-working, Farming Communities in the Central and Southern Coast Region of Kenya” (PhD Dissertation, University of Bristol, 2000).



neighborhoods within them (known as *\*mutala* “village quarter” [PSA] or *\*luwanda* “clearing” [PSA]) and gravesites in and around the nucleated settlements.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as Proto-Sabaki-speaking cultivators settled the frontiers of eastern Kenya, they literally built the enduring ethic of complementary diversity into their settlements, which their descendants have used to sustain collaborations among clans down to the present.

A detailed excavation at Shanga in the Lamu Archipelago off the coast of northeastern Kenya demonstrates the series of steps through which Bantu speakers in this era transformed a small village into a large clustered settlement over the course of one hundred and fifty years. When residents first settled at Shanga around 760 CE, they lived together within an enclosure bordered by a wooden fence that was centered on a well and a large tree. Within it they built rectangular and circular structures with wooden posts that may have been houses for the lineages that resided together. Between 780 and 850 CE, they built at least three larger buildings within the enclosure, probably to accommodate more settlers who had joined them. The orientation of two of these new buildings indicates they were probably mosques built in succession when more residents adopted Islamic practices of worship.<sup>22</sup> Residents also built a hall of three rooms set within a

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<sup>21</sup> The archaeological evidence for these more complex settlements and the clan spaces within them date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, but linguists have also reconstructed words that imply Proto-Sabaki speakers began organizing their settlements into spatial configurations around 500 CE. See discussion below as well as Mark Horton, Helen W. Brown, and Nina Mudida, *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa*, vol. 14 (London: British Institute in Eastern Africa, 1996); Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices”; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*.

<sup>22</sup> Chapter Five explores how coastal communities adopted Islam as one of their distinguishing knowledges in the second millennium CE; Shanga and the surrounding Lamu Archipelago were among the first to practice Islam.

smaller enclosure. The fence they built around this enclosure would not have been sufficient for defensive purposes, but the single gate they built into it suggests they restricted access to the halls, perhaps for their elders to deliberate privately or to hold powerful talismans shared by the entire settlement, such as drums and war trophies.<sup>23</sup>

Between 850 and 920 CE, residents moved their living quarters outside the original wooden fence, thus preserving the entire area of the original settlement as a central enclosure for communal gatherings in the mosques and around the hall. They also rebuilt the earlier structures with heavier timbers. In part of the larger enclosure, they added kiosks to the central enclosure for producing or displaying crafts; they even minted silver coins locally to facilitate their exchanges, evidently with contacts in the commercial world of the western Indian Ocean. Continuing an earlier practice, they buried people within the central enclosure, but started orienting some of them towards Mecca, reflecting their commitment to Islam. The privilege of burial within the enclosure may have been reserved for community leaders or the descendants of the original settlers, since residents also began burying most of their deceased in the shared yards they maintained outside the enclosure or in a cemetery that they established to the northeast of the settlement. They continued expanding the number of structures and, in addition to their expanding marine diet, some residents (or perhaps seasonal visitors) began eating beef.

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<sup>23</sup> This speculation is supported by Mijikenda practices of holding war trophies and other powerful objects in sheds within a building in the central enclosures of their communities, Thomas T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978).

Shanga's residents rebuilt the buildings within the enclosure with coral after 920 CE and added another hall on the eastern side of the enclosure.<sup>24</sup> Subsequent in-building over the following three centuries obscured the primacy of the central enclosure, but the patterns of streets leading to the main mosque of Shanga, the variation in human and material remains throughout the city, and the grouping of graves in the cemetery outside of the settlement suggest that at least seven communities with differing diets and craft specialties eventually shared the site.<sup>25</sup> They may have adapted the clan designations for rural environmental specializations to the occupational groupings that elaborated this increasingly complex and commercialized coastal community. Though it is impossible to directly correlate a complex social strategy such as clanship with similarly complex

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<sup>24</sup> There is evidence for an earlier timber-built hall on the east of the enclosure in earlier times, but it fell on the very edge of the excavated area (Horton, et al., *Shanga*).

<sup>25</sup> Mark Horton, who excavated Shanga, speculated that Shanga's residents adapted a strategy for organizing settlements that is preserved in Mijikenda *kayas* to the less wooded environment of the Lamu Archipelago. Mijikenda *kayas* seem to have preserved very similar patterns into modern times—with sets of clustered residences in clan clearings (\*lwanda) that surround a central enclosure (\*moro) that was reached by a limited number of guarded paths. In the nineteenth century, J. L. Krapf reported that residents maintained gates into the settlement and young men guarded them when the forts were occasionally occupied; Johann Ludwig Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa*, 2d ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1968). Since *kayas* are usually located within forests, thick undergrowth protects their perimeter—making a fence unnecessary. Also see L. T Chiro, *Kaya Rabai: A Description of the Structural Arrangement of Kaya Rabai*, Unpublished, 2007; Kaingu Tinga, "Spatial Organisation of a Kaya," *Kenya Past and Present* 29 (1997).

Horton suggested that the paths and gates that led to the central enclosure in Shanga may have been under the stewardship of the resident's various social groups—in particular noting the "coincidence" of meaning between lineage (*mlango*) in some Swahili dialects and gates (*lango* < *mlango*) (Mark Horton, "Swahili Architecture, Space and Social Structure," in *Architecture and Order*, ed. Michael Parker-Pearson and Colin Richards [London: Routledge, 1994], 147–69.) When archaeologist George H. O. Abungu excavated the coastal town of Ungwana (occupied c. 950-1600 CE), he similarly suggested that clusters of house groups there might correspond to *mitaa* (< \**mutala*, "village quarter" PSA), clan wards that composed Swahili settlements in the recent past (e.g. Berg and Walter, "Mosques, Population, and Urban Development in Mombasa.") However, Abungu was more wary than Horton of speculating that modern spatial concepts might apply to past settlements (Abungu and H. W. Mutoro, "Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland," in *Archaeology of Africa: Foods, Metals, and Towns*, ed. T. Shaw et al. (London: Routledge, 1993), 694–704.

spatial strategies, nucleated settlements were strongly associated with clanship in later eras. Marking distinct neighborhoods and clanship thus probably emerged in tandem with one another.<sup>26</sup>

As evident at Shanga, Sabaki speakers organized their nucleated settlements into meaningful places where they exchanged people, commodities, products, and services; produced tools and instruments; deliberated in public and private; and celebrated and worshipped together. The organization of these spaces suggests that Sabaki speakers defined at least three social groups through spatial differentiation: they established the central enclosure as a common area shared by all the clans belonging to the settlement; they marked off neighborhoods to distinguish the spaces of each clan; and they walled in private yards for the exclusive use of the lineages which resided in the surrounding homes.<sup>27</sup> Only their Mijikenda and Comorian descendants continued to maintain central enclosures (known as *moro* “central (sacred or restricted) clearing” and *fumboni* “central town square”), respectively. But they and most of their Sabaki cousins associated neighborhoods with clans and houses with lineages.<sup>28</sup>

The differentiation of spaces in these clustered settlements provided opportunities for regular collaboration among people who were not related by blood, marriage, or clan

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<sup>26</sup> For the complexity of Sabaki spatial practices see Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, “Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices.”

<sup>27</sup> The establishment of a town also provided an opportunity to break out of a lineal logic of authority. Hence oral traditions recall that the Giriama Mijikenda claimed authority over the town of Murikwa because they founded it, while the Ribe Mijikenda used their recognized status as a senior lineage to claim authority. The resulting conflict led to the expulsion of the Ribe, but they continued claiming authority to initiate Giriama rituals (Gona Kazungu, “The Agiryama: The Rise of a Tribe and Its Traditions” (Senior Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1973), 75–76.

<sup>28</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*.

affiliation. While the logic of unilineality and preferences for cross-cousin unions preserved lineages and marriage alliances through time regardless of where people lived, physical mnemonics in the built environment like a clan house or neighborhood boundary unified clan members without necessarily requiring them to understand precisely how they were (or were not) related. But the claims of clans to communal lands in their nucleated settlements were stable only insofar as lineages belonging to the clan maintained the sites. Once a clan abandoned a site, they either established new clan neighborhoods and gravesites or disbanded altogether as the departing lineage components sought new clans with which to affiliate. However, since clans also buried their deceased members in gravesites reserved for their members, they often transformed these places into memorials where they performed periodic pilgrimages to honor ancestors. Though these visits focused on honoring lineal ancestors, they also renewed contacts with fellow clan members that could sustain the clan through the generations. Thus gravesites and other meaningful places associated with clans (including groves outside of towns) helped to sustain clans even as their members dispersed into new settlements.<sup>29</sup> The result was a patchwork of clan lands, residences, and graveyards scattered in different micro-ecologies throughout the landscape that gradually promoted cooperation on regional scales.<sup>30</sup>

The clans whose members resided in nucleated settlements lived primarily on the products of their own labors—some clans even introduced food taboos (against shellfish,

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<sup>29</sup> Pekeshe Ndeje, interview.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 5 for these strategies of regional exchanges.

for instance) that expressed clan identities during daily routines. However, sharing the same clustered settlements also eased exchanges among clans whose members had developed proprietary subsistence, craft, or healing techniques. Most importantly, if one subsistence strategy faltered for a season due to drought or other disaster, those affected could turn to the other clans with whom they resided for assistance by promising reciprocation in the future, including through the exchange of women or children.<sup>31</sup> Thus the clans which constituted these nucleated settlements could benefit from a wider array of techniques for shaping and harvesting the land, rivers, and ocean than dispersed lineages could achieve on their own.

### **Articulating Proto-Sabaki: Fruits of Multi-Linguistic Collaborations**

Over the centuries, the clans who lived with one another fought the same enemies, followed the same hunting trails, and celebrated a set of shared rituals. These collaborations promoted the articulation of shared diets and dialects—but enterprising lineages continued developing new techniques that differentiated their clans' *uganga*. Some of these innovations included deep sea fishing, cattle husbandry, and the breeding of crops such as new varieties of bananas, sorghum, millet, and coconuts. Later generations also added rice, cassava, and maize in the second millennium of the Current

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<sup>31</sup> Abungu and Mutoro make the same point: “It appears that the juxtaposition of a number of distinct ecological zones, within the northern coast of Kenya and southern Somalia, stimulated regional symbiosis; this, in turn, provided a strong economic basis for the foundation of these island and mainland settlements”; Abungu and Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland,” 703.

Era.<sup>32</sup> In all of these efforts they depended on the expertise of the autochthones they found in eastern Kenya.

Although clan histories often use descent metaphors to assert that clan members are related to one another, clanship has long been an *ad hoc* strategy of mobilization among Bantu speakers in eastern Kenya: individuals (and often their lineages) may join and sometimes found new clans without regard to their personal pedigrees or marriage commitments.<sup>33</sup> This flexibility enabled Bantu-speaking clans to incorporate autochthonous pastoralists and foragers, who offered expertise in harvesting and cultivating resources outside the forests and other well-watered environments that earlier Bantu-speakers preferred. Indeed the verbal contributions of autochthones to the cultivating communities of eastern Kenya is the primary feature that distinguishes the Sabaki branch of later Northeast Coast Bantu languages from its Pare, Seuta, and Ruvu sisters in Tanzania, who lacked these contacts.<sup>34</sup>

Autochthones, whose own ancestors had bequeathed to them an extensive knowledge of local plant and animal life and seasonal cycles, shared some of their knowledge about the environment for those Proto-Sabaki speaking pioneers who were curious enough to try something new. For the great majority of foragers and pastoralists,

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the linguistic evidence for New World and Asian crops entering through East Africa see Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*.

<sup>33</sup> For example, the list of clans that Mijikenda informants give to western researchers has changed dramatically in the past hundred years, with several clans disappearing and new ones formed; Ray Field Notes, Werner, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate*; A. H. J. Prins, *The Coastal Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu (Pokomo, Nyika, Teita)* (London: International African Institute, 1952); Champion, *The Agiryama of Kenya*.

<sup>34</sup> Proto-Sabaki is named after the local name of the Galana River, which meets the Indian Ocean at the center of Kenya's coast.

organized around mobility and minimal productive effort in relatively large spaces, settling down in one place would have been an unthinkable prospect. Foraging bands and pastoralist communities who chose to collaborate extensively with Bantu-speaking cultivators, perhaps only a few, camped seasonally before moving on to other stations.<sup>35</sup> While their distinct social strategies and commitment to mobility prevented the establishment of enduring cross-linguistic marriage alliances, some individual pastoralists and foragers (including men and women) took the opportunity during these sojourns to join local clans by adoption or to make an *ad hoc* marriage into a constituent lineage. Pastoralists and foragers contributed many innovations to cultivators' techniques of production as they helped their adopted communities adapt new techniques of husbandry, hunting, and foraging to a relatively sedentary lifestyle.<sup>36</sup> However, their relative isolation within the cultivating communities they joined led them, and their children, to speak Proto-Sabaki Bantu dialects, enriched with words for the things they had added.<sup>37</sup>

Proto-Sabaki speakers (including the autochthones who adopted their speech) retained most of the sounds and grammar from their Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu forebears and maintained detectable, though less intensive, contacts with their linguistic

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<sup>35</sup> Mijikenda traditions suggest that foragers (often identified as the "Laa") were split amongst the many clans in a settlement because their knowledge was too important to be confined to a single clan; Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 55. The implication is that foragers joined clans as individuals instead of joining settlements as discrete communities, a logical extension of foragers' *ad hoc* strategies of community organization (see Chapter 3).

<sup>36</sup> See Roderick J McIntosh, "The Pulse Model: Genesis and Accommodation of Specialization in the Middle Niger," *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 2 (January 1, 1993): 181–220; McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger*.

<sup>37</sup> One expects that some Bantu-speakers also joined up with pastoralists and foragers as they moved on, perhaps adding their own knowledge to complementary synergies embedded in Cushitic languages, though the languages of most foragers have been lost.



cousins in the adjacent regions to the south.<sup>38</sup> And, Proto-Sabaki speakers replaced Kwale Ware pottery around 600 CE with a new style of pottery called Early Tana Tradition Ware developed about a century earlier by their southern linguistic cousins.<sup>39</sup>

Adding to this linguistic legacy, speakers of the northernmost Proto-Sabaki dialects learned to distinguish between consonants articulated with teeth from those which are not from Southern Cushitic-speaking agro-pastoralists, a development of dentality likely prompted by marriage to pastoralist women whose children would adopt such fine distinctions, though men adopting a life of cultivation could similarly have influenced the pronunciation patterns of their children.<sup>40</sup> They also added a number of Southern Cushitic words that distinguished them from other Northeast Coast Bantu languages to the south.<sup>41</sup> Some of these words suggest the novel techniques that allowed

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<sup>38</sup> John Ludwig Krapf a missionary linguist who lived in the Mombasa region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggested the Tana River area, now inhabited by the Pokomo, as the original linguistic heartland of Mijikenda, Pokomo, and Kiswahili Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours*. Most scholars have followed oral traditions and evidence that most Swahili dialects dispersed from nearer the Lamu Archipelago to suggest that all Sabaki language diverged from Southern Somalia (see Chapter 2).

<sup>39</sup> The earliest finds of Early Tana Tradition (ETT) Ware are in Tanzania about 30km from the coast and date to 400 CE; correlating these pottery finds with linguistic data provide a rough resource for mapping the divergence of Sabaki languages across physical space. Thomas Spear, “Early Swahili History Reconsidered,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 2 (2000): 257–290; Jeffrey Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, “Ceramics and the Early Swahili: Deconstructing the Early Tana Tradition,” *African Archaeological Review* 28, no. 4 (2011): 245–278.

<sup>40</sup> Dentalized consonants are not distinguished in English and therefore difficult to illustrate. Basically, speakers distinguish between matched pairs of consonants in which the tongue articulates on the teeth and the alveolar ridge, respectively; Nurse and Hinnesbusch date this change to around 750 CE Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 488. 488). It is an areal change after the break-up of Middle Proto-Sabaki that influenced only Late Proto-Sabaki (Pk/Mk), Elwana, and Proto-Northern Swahili.

<sup>41</sup> Among the morphological distinctions between Proto-Sabaki and other NECB language groups are the loss of an active Dahl’s Law, the replacement of the class 16,17, and 18 noun prefixes with the locative - (i)ni suffix, a new relative suffix marked as \*-o (e.g. linakuao), which was also incorporated in a pre-stem position (e.g. linalokua), the association of the pre-stem prefix \*-na- as a progressive tense, and the replacement of the suffix \*-aga with two-word compounds involving \*-ki- or \*-ka- in the second word (Ibid., 449–460). Proto-Sabaki speakers also abandoned some grammatical suffixes common to other

Proto-Sabaki speakers to draw on additional ecologies (see Table 4.1). For instance from Southern Cushitic-speaking pastoralists they added words related to pastoralism (milk, sheep), grain cultivation (to pound grain) and the natural environment (dew, animal and plant species).

These borrowings suggest that Proto-Sabaki speakers were among the first Bantu-speakers in eastern Kenya to cultivate sorghum, a rain-fed crop that required close attention to the timing of local weather patterns. The routines associated with producing this new crop are also reflected in the ways they classified the lands they cultivated. For instance, they coined the word \**Wucelo* “cleared ground for planting grain” (PSA) from words for \**lucelo* “winnowing tray” (PSA), \**mucele* “grain” (PSA), and \**cèd* “sift” (CB). The extension of the ancient Bantu word for general “sifting” to the specific process of winnowing in this semantic chain suggests some of the routines, skills, and tools involved in the new techniques of growing food. Mastering the routines and seasons for sorghum in particular allowed some lineages to venture out into drier plains while other lineages in their clans maintained the yam and vegetable gardens in the wetter forests preferred by their ancestors. Alternatively, entire clans may have eventually specialized in sorghum, exchanging their harvests for other products as they desired. While loanwords suggest that some Proto-Sabaki speakers may have begun experimenting with cattle husbandry, most probably left the raising of cattle to amenable pastoralists who provided them with beef, milk, and hides in exchange for grain as a

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Northeast Coast Bantu languages and added others, though there are no obvious motivations for these innovations.

supplement to their diets—hunting game remained the primary source of protein until the middle of the second millennium CE.<sup>42</sup> Proto-Sabaki-speakers likely learned some new hunting techniques (or at least the names of local plants and animals) from foragers; but, as noted, their influence is difficult to identify in modern languages since modern foraging communities have adopted Bantu or Cushitic languages. Figure 4.1 presents loanwords that are traceable back to Proto-Sabaki; since Sabaki is sometimes difficult to distinguish from Northeast Coast languages phonetically, the table also notes in some cases the wider distribution of these words. These wider distributions are usually explainable as adoptions from Sabaki dialects, particularly Kiswahili.

Figure 4.1: Southern Cushitic Loanwords in Sabaki<sup>43</sup>

English Gloss	Proto-Sabaki	Proto-Southern Cushitic	Distribution	Alternative Derivations
banana	*IZIGU	*ʔarig(w)	NECB (East Bantu loan)	
be tired	?*- cok-	*tleʔtoʔ	Sabaki	
bushbuck (species)	*mbaWala	*babaʔa		CB *-bàbàdá “antelope, bushbuck”
chest, breast (human)	?*kidari	?*gida “belly” (Dahalo gid'are)	Sabaki	
dew	?*Wumande	*-mant- “mist”	Sabaki	
dove (species)	?*mpugi	*pug-	Sabaki (loan to Ruvu?)	
honey-guide bird	?*nceW-	* ntsw-	Sabaki	

<sup>42</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories.”

<sup>43</sup> Chart adapted from Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki.*; question marks indicate the reconstructed form is in doubt. The capital “W” is an uncertain phoneme in Sabaki that may have been pronounced variably as b, v, or w (Ibid, 91).

knuckle, ankle	?*nguyu	?*kung- “knuckle”	Sabaki	
lice	?*Wutitiri	*ɔtir-	Sabaki	
mainland, country	?*ibara	?*baad'a		?CB *-bàdà “open space, land” ?Arabic, Persian barr,
milk	*IZIwa	ɔliba	Sabaki	CB *dìbà East Bantu
pierce, etc.	?*-tor-	*taar-	Sabaki and Central Kenya	
pound grain	?*-sool-	*-fool- “pulverize”	Sabaki	
slip	?*-syel-	*fereh-/fedeh- (Dahalo - sereh-)		CB *-tèd- ~ -tedid- “slip”
stir	?*-bulug-	*-birik- “turn over”	Sabaki	
warthog	?*-gwase	*gu'aat'	Sabaki	
waterbuck	?*nkulo	*kuul- “male of large herbivore”	Sabaki	
well	*kisma	*-sim- “dig well”		?CB *-tímá “well, pool”

### Sabaki Sisters: Stretching Out and Settling In

From 500 to 1000 CE, the combination of social strategies and productive techniques that Sabaki-speakers developed enabled them to increase the number and size of their settlements as they moved into new frontiers along the Tana River, the East African Coast, the Comoros Islands and the hills of the Mombasa hinterland.<sup>44</sup> As settlers

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<sup>44</sup> There is some evidence that East Africans in the hinterland of Tanzania developed Early Tana Tradition (ETT) Ware as early as the fifth century, and archaeologists have found it in sites associated with other Northeast Coast languages. But ETT Ware is most plentiful between 600-900 CE and corresponds well

adapted their Sabaki heritage to new environments along these frontiers, they articulated the roots of five new sister languages: Elwana, Kiswahili, Comorian, Pokomo, and Mijikenda. While linguists Nurse and Hinnebusch differentiate only between Early and Late Proto-Sabaki, their data suggest four stages of linguistic divergence over five centuries as Sabaki speech communities moved in and out of contact with one another and with speakers of Cushitic languages, as summarized in Figure 4.2.

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with Proto-Sabaki's divergence from Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu around 500 CE. While all Sabaki-speaking communities probably used ETT Ware, its presence at a site does not necessarily indicate its former inhabitants spoke Proto-Sabaki unless current residents speak a modern Sabaki language and there is no evidence of linguistic displacement. The following narrative assumes that Proto-Sabaki speakers and other Northeast Coast Bantu transitioned from Kwale Ware to ETT Ware around 600 CE. This assumption is not without controversy; some archaeologists have suggested that Kwale Ware was Cushitic rather than Bantu, while others have rightly emphasized that potsherds cannot diagnose the language of those who formed, used, and discarded them (Herman Ogoti Kiriama, "Iron-using Communities in Kenya," in *Archaeology of Africa: Foods, Metals, and Towns*, ed. T. Shaw et al. [London: Routledge, 1993], 485–498). Wynne-Jones and Fleisher conducted a thorough re-evaluation of ETT Ware finds in storage facilities throughout East Africa and concluded that while there is significantly more variation than is sometimes assumed, found deposits of pottery largely support the hypothesis that East Africa's coastal and hinterland residents shared a single pottery tradition from at least 600-950 CE (Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Ceramics and the Early Swahili"). ETT Ware exhibits similar decorative patterns as Kwale Ware and, more persuasively, potsherds from both traditions sometimes intermingle within the same well-stratified layers while samples from the Kwale and ETT Wares are isolated in lower and higher strata, respectively (David Wright, "New Perspectives on Early Regional Interaction Networks of East African Trade: A View from Tsavo National Park, Kenya," *African Archaeological Review* 22, no. 3 [2005]: 111–140; Felix A. Chami and Paul Mwemwa, "The Excavation at Kwale Island, South of Dar Es Salaam," *Nyame Akuma* 48 [1997]: 45–56). These mixed distributions strongly imply cultural continuity, rather than population replacement. Linguistic historian Ehret finds this evidence unconvincing. He hypothesizes that Central Kenya Bantu speakers used Kwale Ware before being replaced by NEC Bantu who used ETT ware; Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400*.

Figure 4.2: Stages of Sabaki Divergence

Stages	Dialect Clusters	Approximate Location	Date
Early Proto-Sabaki	Core Innovative Group Peripheral Communities Elwana Kiswahili	?Mount Mwangea  ?Upper Tana River Mainland near Lamu	<i>ca.</i> 500 CE
Middle Proto-Sabaki	Core Innovative Group Peripheral Communities Upper Pokomo Elwana Kiswahili	?Mount Mwangea  Upper Tana River Upper Tana River East African Coast	<i>ca.</i> 700 CE
Late Proto-Sabaki	Core Innovative Group  Peripheral Communities Kiswahili Comorian Upper Pokomo Elwana	?Mount Mwangea  East African Coast North Kenyan Coast Comoros Islands Upper Tana River Upper Tana River	<i>ca.</i> 800 CE
Post Proto-Sabaki	Mijikenda Lower Pokomo Northern Swahili Southern Swahili Comorian Upper Pokomo Elwana	Mombasa Hinterland Lower Tana River Kenyan Coast Tanzanian Coast Comoros Islands Upper Tana River Upper Tana River	<i>ca.</i> 1000

The earliest Proto-Sabaki speakers lived in a cluster of adjacent settlements between the Tana River and the southern border of modern Kenya, an area that includes the highlands around Mount Mwangea.<sup>45</sup> Around 500 CE, some speakers of Early Proto-Sabaki moved west to the upper Tana River area, south of Garissa in Kenya. As they cultivated and hunted along the upper river valley, they collaborated with Southern

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<sup>45</sup> This claim is controversial, Nurse and Hinnebusch prefer a homeland north of the Tana River.

Cushitic speakers and borrowed a large number of words from them.<sup>46</sup> By the 12th century they also came into contact with speakers of Central Kenya Bantu who were expanding eastwards from the region around Mount Kenya.<sup>47</sup> In recent times these Sabaki speakers began referring to themselves collectively as Elwana. Contemporary Elwana speakers, in spite of borrowing much vocabulary from speakers of Cushitic and Central Kenya Bantu languages, have retained many basic features of Early Proto-Sabaki that their linguistic cousins abandoned.<sup>48</sup> For instance, they retained seven vowels in their language, a feature unique among all modern Sabaki and Northeast Coast languages, except for a few isolated dialects.<sup>49</sup>

Around 700 CE, a few centuries after Sabaki Bantu cultivators had begun to articulate Proto-Elwana along the Upper Tana River, another group of Early Proto-Sabaki speakers moved near them. However, these newcomers maintained their own communities and articulated distinct dialects that linguists have named Upper Pokomo.

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<sup>46</sup> The data for contacts between Elwana and Cushitic languages is extensive and available in Derek Nurse, “South Meets North: Ilwana = Bantu + Cushitic on Kenya’s Tana River,” in *Mixed Languages*, ed. Peter Bakker and Maarten Mous (Amsterdam: IFOTF?, 1994), 213–22; Nurse, “Segeju and Daisū”; Derek Nurse, *Inheritance, Contact and Change in Two East Africa Languages* (Cologne: Ruediger Koeppel Verlag, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Nurse, “Segeju and Daisū”; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 488; Martin Walsh, “The Segeju Complex? Linguistic Evidence for the Precolonial Making of the Mijikenda,” in *Contesting Identities: The Mijikenda and Their Neighbors in Kenyan Coastal Society*, ed. Rebecca Gearhart and Linda Giles (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, In Press). Derek Nurse argues that Dahalo speakers were absorbed in great numbers by the Elwana.

<sup>48</sup> It is a perhaps counter-intuitive dynamic that speakers of dialects who isolate themselves from their linguistic cousins tend to be more conservative than the speakers of dialects who remain in contact. The latter folk continue innovating their languages in efforts to maintain the distinctiveness of their respective dialects, while the “isolates” remain distinct from neighbors with obviously different languages without innovating.

<sup>49</sup> The retention of seven vowels in isolates like Elwana are key to reconstructing seven vowels in Proto-Bantu.

Speakers of Upper Pokomo refer to Elwana speakers as Malakote, which refers to their practice of living in small hamlets (*mo:zi*, El < muji “village” PSA) in the bush rather than in the nucleated settlements that other Sabaki speakers adopted.<sup>50</sup> This cultural distancing suggests that other Sabaki speakers developed this novel nucleated settlement strategy described earlier in this chapter after the forebears of the Elwana had left, between 500 CE and 700 CE.<sup>51</sup>

During the same period that the forebears of Elwana and Upper Pokomo speakers settled along the Upper Tana River, other Early Proto-Sabaki speakers had begun settling along the Kenyan coast and its offshore islands, where they began drawing intensively on marine resources.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the first millennium they were venturing to off-shore reefs to hunt large sea animals such as whales and dugong as well as sharks.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps because of their unique orientation to the sea, they made many innovations in vocabulary but did not share some of the sound changes articulated by the other speakers of Early

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<sup>50</sup> Bernd Heine and W.J.G. Mohlig, eds., *Geographical and Historical Introduction: Language and Society*, 2 vols., Language and Dialect Atlas of Kenya (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1980). Archaeologists have conducted a few site surveys along the Tana River, but their excavations have targeted settlements closer to the coast. H. Kiriamia, Henry W. Mutoro, and I. Ngari, “Iron Working in the Upper Tana Valley, Kenya,” in *Aspects of African Archaeology*, ed. Gilbert Pwiti and Robert Soper (Harare, Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe, 1996), 505–7; Abungu and Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland.”

<sup>51</sup> Elwana is distinguished from the other Sabaki languages by retention of glides, the full form of the mu-prefix (in noun classes 1 and 3), and retention of /l/, /p/, and /t/ without weakening or palatization—all of which suggest early isolation from other Sabaki languages. For innovations that Elwana speakers articulated independently of other Sabaki speakers, see Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 496–498.

<sup>52</sup> The ETT ware that archaeologists have recovered from the creeks around Mombasa Island suggests they may have settled on the Island as early as 600 CE. The earliest settlement date on the island confirmed by carbon dating is 1000 CE; Hamo Sassoon, “How Old Is Mombasa? Recent Excavations at the Coast General Hospital Sites,” *Kenya Past and Present* 9 (1978): 33–37.

<sup>53</sup> Horton and Mudida, “Exploitation of Marine Resources: Evidence for the Origin of the Swahili Communities of East Africa.”



Proto-Sabaki and other Northeast Coast Bantu communities who were still in contact with one another.<sup>54</sup> By the seventh century CE, coastal communities had distinguished their speech from other Sabaki dialects sufficiently that linguists describe them as Proto-Kiswahili, the short-lived precursor of the modern Kiswahili dialects today spoken throughout East Africa.<sup>55</sup>

Proto-Kiswahili speakers' mastery of the ocean technology enabled them to expand rapidly north and south along the East African coast. Because of these mariners' rapid geographical expansion, their descendants developed many more distinctive dialects of Kiswahili than speakers of other Sabaki languages.<sup>56</sup> Northern communities along Kenya's coast maintained closer contacts with one another than with communities to the south along Tanzania's coast.<sup>57</sup> The northern branch settled throughout the Kenyan coast and stretched into southern Somalia; they remained coherent as a dialect group that linguists classify as Northern Swahili.<sup>58</sup> But, as other speakers of Proto-Kiswahili established settlements to the south, the distance between them and their Proto-Northern Swahili cousins, as well as one another led to less frequent collaborations; thus, they articulated more lexically distinct dialects.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, these southern dialects share

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<sup>54</sup> For instance p-lenition (widespread among Northeast Coast languages) and t-lenition (widespread among Sabaki languages) did not affect Kiswahili (Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*).

<sup>55</sup> In particular, Proto-Kiswahili speakers innovated a new past tense (-ali-) and a new future tense (-taka-) from their verb for "to want" (-cak-); *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>58</sup> Northern Swahili dialects (ND) expanded the use of the past tense "-ali-" to the near past, innovated a habitual tense marked by \*nku-, and began using \*yu- as a prefix to indicate a third person singular subject; *Ibid.*, 505.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

enough grammatical features that linguists classify them together as Southern Swahili. Their unique inflections of grammar and pronunciation arose as they collaborated more with hinterland neighbors and with other speech communities on the Tanzanian coast who spoke dialects from other branches of Northeast Coast Bantu.<sup>60</sup>

The areas surrounding Mombasa are the only places along the East African coast with communities that speak dialects from both branches, suggesting that the speakers of Proto-Northern and Proto-Southern Kiswahili went their separate ways from the vicinity of Mombasa Island sometime between 800 and 1000 CE.<sup>61</sup> The Mvita dialect of Mombasa Island and the dialects spoken along the adjacent coast are dialects of Northern Swahili; the Vumba dialect spoken to the south of Mombasa is a Southern Swahili dialect. Several innovations distinctive to the ChiFundi (a.k.a. Shirazi) dialect of Northern Swahili spoken to the south of Mombasa on the coast adjacent to Wassin Island suggest that its variants have been spoken in the area south of Mombasa since the turn of the second millennium CE, though it later received much influence from Vumba and other Southern Swahili dialects.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately the success of Kiswahili as a trade language in the nineteenth century and a state-sponsored language in the twentieth century makes it difficult to determine the precise relationships among Kiswahili and Tanzanian languages.

<sup>61</sup> This claim is controversial. See Chapter Two for placing and dating of “Shungwaya.” The Mombasa region possesses the greatest diversity of Kiswahili dialects and is the only place where both primary branches of Kiswahili are located. As a simple matter of historical linguistic method, places where the greatest dialectal diversity is found are the most likely origins for a given branch of any language—though a case has been made for the center of the Northern Dialect branch in the Lamu Archipelago, a similar number of dialects are present in Mombasa, but often grouped together.

<sup>62</sup> See Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 135: Stage 1 Strengthening, in which certain skewing of sound derivations result from the effects of the deleted *l-* prefix for class 5 nouns; this is also attested in Comorian and Mvita, suggesting both languages may have been in the same area before later separation.

As speakers of Proto-Northern Swahili settled along Kenya's north coast and the Lamu Archipelago, they developed closer relationships with Southern Cushitic agro-pastoralists that affected how they articulated dental consonants, perhaps evidence of intermarriage in which children acquired the accents of their "foreign" mothers or fathers.<sup>63</sup> These pastoralists must have predominated in the areas where Proto-Northern Swahili speakers moved, as they introduced them not only to words for curdled milk ([i]gururu) and buttermilk (*kirori*), and a kind of cereal porridge (*bodo*) peculiar to pastoralism, but also to the region's natural wildlife: honey badgers (*kiharehare*), marabou storks (*babulona*), bee-stings (*damari* ~ *tamari*), antelope (*dandari* ~ *dindiri*), a kind of spinach (*dewere*), and pelicans (*hajawa*).<sup>64</sup> Pastoralists may have even joined some early Northern Swahili communities in the tenth century. For example, while Proto-Northern Swahili speakers relied primarily on fish for animal protein, some residents at Shanga in the Lamu archipelago also discarded many cattle remains, suggesting the presence of pastoralists, who resided in a separate neighborhood of the settlement.<sup>65</sup> The adoption of a sedentary lifestyle for pastoralists would have been a dramatic adjustment on their part, though it is possible that they resided seasonally at Shanga.

As the forebears of Elwana, Upper Pokomo, and Swahili speakers followed waterways to move into new territories, those who remained behind in the hills and forests around Mount Mwangea articulated Middle Proto-Sabaki dialects. But sometime

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<sup>63</sup> Derek Nurse, "The Swahili Dialects of Somalia and the Northern Kenya Coast," in *Etudes Sur Le Bantu Oriental*, ed. Marie-Francoise Rombi (Paris: SELAF, 1982), 73–121.

<sup>64</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, p.299-300.

<sup>65</sup> Horton, Brown, and Mudida, *Shanga*.

between 700 and 800 CE, some of their descendants gradually made their way hundreds of miles south to the Comoros Islands.<sup>66</sup> At least some of these communities enjoyed close contact with speakers of Proto-Swahili as they transitioned to life at the coast, where they learned to build ships or canoes and successfully harvest the sea. Some of the few features they share exclusively with Kiswahili dialects suggest that they first settled among Proto-Northern Swahili speakers along the northern Kenyan coast, then moved on south to Tanzania's coast, where they lived in close contact with Proto-Southern Swahili speakers, before some of them moved on to the Comoros Islands.<sup>67</sup>

The Sabaki speakers who remained articulated the few additional sound changes that distinguish Late Proto-Sabaki before diverging a final time into the Proto-Lower Pokomo and Proto-Mijikenda communities. Late Proto-Sabaki speakers replaced /r/ with /h/ in many words, and borrowed a few words from Southern Cushitic languages that other Sabaki languages did not, such as *lala ~ yaa* “honeycomb” and “*linyaho ~ nwaho*” “nipple” (the latter again suggesting the incorporation of pastoralist women as marriage partners).<sup>68</sup> Late Proto-Sabaki also share grammatical innovations with Elwana and

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<sup>66</sup> Archaeologists have dated Early Tana Tradition Ware sites on the Comoros Islands to as early as 800 CE, suggesting this date as an early time-frame for their settlement there (Claude Allibert, “Early Settlements on the Comoro Archipelago,” *National Geographic Research*, August 1989, 392–93; Henry T. Wright, “Early Islam, Oceanic Trade, and Town Development on Nzwani: The Comorian Archipelago in the XIth-XVth Centuries AD,” *Azania* 27 (1992): 81–128; Henry T. Wright, “Early Seafarers of the Comoro Islands: The Dembeni Phase of the IXth-Xth Centuries AD,” *Azania* 19 (1984): 13–59. The sequence of their migration is suggested by the greater similarity of Comorian dialects to Middle Proto-Sabaki languages than to Elwana or Kiswahili dialects.

<sup>67</sup> This movement is suggested by successive linguistic borrowings from the Northern Swahili dialects then the Southern Swahili dialects. Comorian speakers also have a tradition of coming from the “Mrima” – signifying the entire East African coast. Kiswahili speakers use *mrima* to refer only to the coast of Tanzania. Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 535.

Upper Pokomo speakers, suggesting that all of these speech communities may have come into significant contact with one another once again during this era.<sup>69</sup> Pokomo and Mijikenda communities also claim they lived together in former times and point to similarities among their languages as proof of their oral traditions.<sup>70</sup>

Around 1000 CE, the Late Proto-Sabaki speakers who were the forebears to Lower Pokomo speakers began to establish a string of settlements along the banks of the lower Tana River until they reached the territories of the Sabaki-speaking cousins who had preceded them. While they maintained grammatical differences, Proto-Lower Pokomo speakers adopted much vocabulary from the speakers of Proto-Upper Pokomo, indicating intense collaborations as they adapted to the riverine environment.

Along the Tana River they also encountered Southern Cushitic agro-pastoralists, who feature prominently in oral traditions as competitors and allies. Pastoral Neolithic pottery along the Tana River dating from the same period as Early Tana Tradition Ware and Kwale Ware confirms that Bantu-speaking cultivators and agro-pastoralists occupied adjacent spaces at the same time. In addition, some late samples of Pastoral Neolithic pottery share decorative motifs with Kwale ware, and some archaeologists have

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<sup>69</sup> Sometime before Proto-Lower Pokomo and Proto-Mijikenda speech communities diverged, they began using a new nonpast tense (/na(ku)-/), a new negative verb prefix (/nta-/), and several other grammatical innovations; *Ibid.*, 533–536.

<sup>70</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 72.

suggested that Early Tana Tradition and Pastoral Neolithic wares share some similarities in form.<sup>71</sup> These visual similarities suggest that the communities of eastern Kenya not only shared subsistence techniques and exchanged resources, but also influenced one another's aesthetic sensibilities. They also support linguistic evidence that Bantu-speaking cultivators had more extensive interactions with agro-pastoralists in the more arid regions of northern Kenya than in the wetter climates of Tanzania to the south.

The Proto-Late Sabaki speakers who were the forebears of Mijikenda speakers expanded south from Mount Mwangea near the end of the first millennium CE and gradually occupied the hills and escarpment to the west of Mombasa.<sup>72</sup> Archaeologists have shown that the number of settlements there doubled in number, from twelve to twenty-four sites, as residents adopted Early Tana Tradition Ware in preference to the older Kwale Ware.<sup>73</sup> While the settlements associated with the Northeast Coast Bantu speakers in southeast Kenya who used Kwale Ware were invariably small (0.12 – 3.0 hectares), the Sabaki speakers who used Early Tana Tradition ware established

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<sup>71</sup> Abungu and Mutoro, "Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland"; Wright, "New Perspectives"; Chami and Msemwa, "The Excavation at Kwale Island, South of Dar Es Salaam."

<sup>72</sup> Proto-Mijikenda speakers distinguished their speech from other Late Proto-Sabaki speakers by pronouncing [l] as /r/ in front of vowels and replacing the /i/ at the beginning of word stems with /a/ or /e/. For example, they pronounced the inherited word *mulyango* "door" as *muryango* and *-inula* "lift" as *-enula* ~ *anula*. Though the timing of these innovations is unclear, the degree of difference between the basic vocabulary of Mijikenda dialects and other Sabaki languages suggests that Late Proto-Sabaki diverged into Proto-Lower Pokomo and Proto-Mijikenda sometime around 1000 CE (Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*).

<sup>73</sup> Helm distinguishes the sites according to pottery tradition and the dates associated with them. Thus, sites with Kwale ware date to pre-600 CE while sites with Early Tana Tradition Ware date to post-600 CE.

settlements in southeast Kenya that varied in size from 0.16 hectares to a large 7.56-hectare site at Mtsengo. Furthermore, they settled in a greater variety of ecologies distributed over the northern Shimba Plateau, the hinterland ridge on the eastern edge of the arid *nyika* plains, the hilltops around Kaloleni, the uplands near Kwale, and the coastal plain.<sup>74</sup>

As they founded new settlements in these areas, they abandoned their ancestors' sites around Mount Mwangea. One possible motivation for moving on was the arrival of new agro-pastoralists groups; archaeologists have found a distinct pottery tradition whose producers decorated wares with wavy-lines. The ceramics are distributed on the coastal plain from north of the Sabaki River to as far south as Gedi.<sup>75</sup> Pastoralist raiders are, of course, the motivation expressed in the Shungwaya oral traditions. However, unlike the migration tradition, those who moved from Mount Mwangea came to places that were already occupied, probably by people speaking similar dialects from the wider NECB language family. Although they often settled on virgin lands, they also joined pre-existing communities and introduced them to the new techniques they had learned for making pottery and sowing grain.

Since Proto-Mijikenda speakers built their settlements with perishable materials, it is difficult to determine whether they resided in nucleated settlements similar to the ones that their Proto-Northern Swahili cousins built at Shanga. However, the range in settlement sizes matches those of coastal settlements during the same period, as does their

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<sup>74</sup> Helm, "Conflicting Histories," 282–288.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

willingness to reach out and settle in varied ecologies. In addition, among modern Sabaki speakers, the traditional Mijikenda settlements known as *kayas* are the most similar to the early phases of Shanga before it was rebuilt in stone. It is thus reasonable to assume that the modern assembly of clans in *kayas* retains the social and spatial strategies that Proto-Sabaki speakers innovated to combine specialized knowledges about novel subsistence techniques.

### **Conclusion**

The evident population growth behind the movements of Proto-Sabaki speakers throughout eastern Kenya and beyond reflects the success of clanship and shared residential spaces as a strategy for productively organizing knowledge. While the wider range of foodstuffs probably helped the demographic expansion of Proto-Sabaki speakers through natural reproduction, particularly in the options available to them in times of shortages, they also expanded by converting autochthones and speakers of other similar Bantu dialects to their successful ways of life. Whether in the hills, along the rivers, or on the seas, assembling clans with diverse proprietary knowledge allowed Proto-Sabaki speakers to cultivate the complementing technologies that allowed them to settle in previously uninhabitable environments. While Bantu-speaking lineages incorporated individuals with local knowledge about the landscape through marriage alliances, the novel strategy of nucleated settlements allowed all residents to benefit from the collective skills and knowledge—the *uganga*—of other clans and autochthonous communities without sacrificing their collective identities maintained through intimate bonds of kinship.



Archaeologist Roderick MacIntosh has suggested similar synergies that enabled demographic growth along the Inland Niger Delta of West Africa as well. Manding-speaking communities there promoted specializations that helped them navigate inevitable droughts, epizootics, and other natural disasters in a fragile landscape. Today, Manding-speaking West Africans organize their specialties into a social organization that western travelers and colonial officials translated very loosely as “caste”—a reference to social institutions in South Asia they had helped formalize.<sup>76</sup> Based on linguistic and documentary research, Tal Tamari defines castes as “endogamous ranked specialist groups” and argues that Manding-speakers organized castes no later than 1300 CE.<sup>77</sup> Like castes in South Asia, the range of professions Manding-speakers could pursue was theoretically determined by their castes; but like clans, castes are defined by the knowledge they control at least as much as descent.

Both the Sabaki clans of East Africa and the Mande castes of West Africa improved the productivity of their economies enough that some communities could focus on developing craft specialties and supplying urban populations with food. In West Africa, Manding-speakers mined salt and gold that they distributed and sold throughout the region, and even beyond the Sahara desert to the north. In East Africa, ocean-going commerce had stalled with the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries but resumed in earnest after 1000 CE under Arab initiative.

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<sup>76</sup> Nicholas B Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> Tal Tamari, “The Development of Caste Systems in West Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 1991): 221–50, doi:10.2307/182616.

The Sabaki speakers—positioned by then in every ecological niche of eastern Kenya and beyond—were poised to collect commodities that the visiting merchants wanted to buy: such animal products as ivory and ambergris and such plant products as mangrove poles and gum copal (a tree resin). In return they obtained imported goods that they used to symbolize prestige in their communities. As will be explored in the next chapter, they organized the clans they had formed into clan confederations with one another to facilitate these commercial exchanges. As once-novel techniques of hunting, cultivating, and husbandry became commonplace and Sabaki speakers came to value the commodities they could sell instead, clans shifted their strategies accordingly. Instead of seeking out new sources of food, they sought contacts with lineages with knowledge about and access to commodities that they could sell for foreign goods. The clans they had created to succeed in settling the area before 1000 CE became their successors' means to meet later historical challenges requiring complex collaboration. Bantu speakers in eastern Kenya today, the heirs and preservers of these legacies, continue to organize clans so they may retain and acquire the full range of socially valuable *uganga* that protects and enriches their communities.

**Chapter 5**  
**Domesticating Commerce:**  
**Confederations and Councils, ca. 1000 – 1500**

*All matters of the country  
were dealt with in the kaya.*

-Johnstone Muramba

On Kenya’s inaugural Mashujaa Day in October 2010, I witnessed Joseph Mwarandu shake hands with the contemporary embodiment of the anti-colonial heroine of the 1910s, Mekatilili wa Menza. This act publically demonstrated his ascension to the council of *kaya* elders who are the traditional leaders of the Giriama section of the Mijikenda ethnic group.<sup>1</sup> The previous evening, Mwarandu—a human rights lawyer who promotes the revival of Mijikenda culture—had knelt with his head bowed before a *kaya* elder to receive instructions and regalia at Bungale, the neighborhood on the outskirts of Malindi where Mekatilili was buried.<sup>2</sup> At dawn, he dressed in the finery of a *kaya* elder—striped cloth wrap over his lower body, bare chest, thin forked staff, and a headdress decorated with tufts of monkey hair and cowry shells. Then he joined a festive procession to Uhuru Park within Malindi to install a statue of Mekatilili. Around mid-morning, he led a stately procession of men along the Malindi waterfront to meet a living proxy for

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<sup>1</sup> Lit. Heroes Day (St. Sw.); Kenyans celebrated the holiday for the first time on October 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Mwarandu is the Secretary of the Malindi District Cultural Association (MADCA) maintains a Facebook Page and a website (<http://www.makayakenya.com/madca.htm>) with pages dedicated to Mekatilili and Mepoho (see below).

Mekatilili, who wielded a sword as she led her own procession of women in a stately march.<sup>3</sup> Meeting directly in front of the museum, the two leaders ceremoniously clasped each others right hands and raised them up and down three times before facing the museum and proceeding inside for a short respite. A few hours later, Mwarandu returned to Uhuru Park, where he represented his Mijikenda community on television and implored all Kenyans to adopt Mekatilili as a national heroine. Mwarandu's symbolic parlay with Mekatilili and his meeting with the national press publicly affirmed the expectations of the Giriama Mijikenda that as a *kaya* elder he would mediate on their behalf with both ancestors and outsiders.

A month later, Mwarandu completed his initiation as a *kaya* elder in private ceremonies within Kaya Fungo—a mostly abandoned settlement in a forest clearing north of Rabai in the hills of southeast Kenya which is the ancestral town of the Giriama Mijikenda. Like other places Mwarandu visited during his initiation, Kaya Fungo was named after a prominent *kaya* elder in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Mwarandu also celebrated his final induction with well-wishers at a shrine to the prophetess Mepoho in Kaloleni.<sup>5</sup> Although Mwarandu already enjoyed great respect and influence as a national political activist and cultural revivalist, *kaya* elders validated his leadership among the Giriama Mijikenda by inviting him to be a member of their council and giving him access to the

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<sup>3</sup> The living proxy was Ruth Njoroge Ngesseni, a Kikuyu. The Malindi District Cultural Association and the Mau Mau veteran's association (mainly a Kikuyu organization) work together to promote the "Mashujaa [Heroes] Project."

<sup>4</sup> It had previously been called Kaya Giriama.

<sup>5</sup> She is said to have prophesied the coming of the whites before vanishing into the ground; Mekatalili used the *kifudu* dance to convince people to resist the ways of the whites.

official regalia, secret knowledge, and sacred places that they preserve as their cultural heritage.<sup>6</sup>

While in this case *kaya* elders approached Mwarandu to join their council, they also occasionally grant similar requests from regional and national politicians who wish to be initiated as elders. The politicians hope that these initiations will guarantee votes and political support from the large Mijikenda ethnic bloc.<sup>7</sup> For their part, Mijikenda councils of *kaya* elders often see value in initiating a sympathetic politician as a potential patron on the national stage. In recent years, however, some Mijikenda communities have criticized this arrangement as corruption. They accused some elders of selling their secret knowledge for personal gain, initiating politicians without the consent of their peers, and withholding their initiation fees from their peers on the council. As a result of this public embarrassment, most *kaya* elders marginalized the accused elders and refused to honor the initiations they performed—effectively stripping them of authority in retaliation for acting out of concert with their peers and threatening the moral authority of *kaya* elders as a collectivity.<sup>8</sup>

These modern controversies over *kaya* elders' wealth, morality, and authority to dispense privileged knowledge continue tensions that have shaped politics in eastern Kenya since 1000 CE, when clans first began to draw on their shared resources to acquire imported products. The imported cloth, porcelains, and bronze acquired from overseas

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<sup>6</sup> Parkin, *Sacred Void*.

<sup>7</sup> Janet McIntosh, "Elders and 'Frauds': Commodified Expertise and Politicized Authenticity among Mijikenda," *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 79, no. 1 (2009): 35–52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

merchants in that era were rarely plentiful enough to be shared by all. So, as local communities came to value these products, the local brokers who controlled access to, and the circulation of, these items acquired the high social status previously reserved for the trustees of clans and lineages who held stewardship over their corporate land, animals, people, and proprietary knowledge. As the brokers succeeded in making imported products desirable to all classes of people, the distinctive objects that they reserved for display in their own homes, at places of worship, and on their bodies materialized their authority.<sup>9</sup> Yet, instead of imposing their will upon their co-residents, who could (and often did) migrate or find other patrons if they felt slighted, they formed councils with representatives from each clan to ensure consensus.<sup>10</sup> Following the example of these brokers, trustees, and other high status men cultivated a patrician identity by establishing patron networks that stretched beyond their lineages and clans to unrelated clients in their towns and settlements in the surrounding countrysides. In addition to distributing gifts to their own followers and clients, patricians avoided charges of witchcraft and corruption by hosting feasts that balanced their conspicuous consumption with conspicuous generosity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption and the Politics of Feasting on the Eastern African Coast, AD 700–1500," *Journal of World Prehistory* 23, no. 4 (2010): 195–217, doi:10.1007/s10963-010-9041-3; Jeffrey Fleisher and Stephanie Wynne-Jones, "Authorisation and the Process of Power: The View from African Archaeology," *Journal of World Prehistory* 23, no. 4 (December 2010): 177–93, doi:10.1007/s10963-010-9038-y; Stephanie Wynne-Jones and Jeffrey Fleisher, "Coins in Context: Local Economy, Value and Practice on the East African Swahili Coast," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 22, no. 01 (2012): 19–36, doi:10.1017/S0959774312000029.

<sup>10</sup> Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Authorisation and the Process of Power," 185, 189.

<sup>11</sup> Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption." Stephanie Wynne-Jones, "Remembering and Reworking the Swahili Diwanate: The Role of Objects and Places at Vumba Kuu," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 3 (October 2010): 407–27.

### Clan Confederations: Commercial Contexts for Regional Collaborations

Most scholarship on East African history between 1000 and 1500 CE emphasizes the stone architecture and Islamic character of the coastal civilization that Kiswahili speakers elaborated.<sup>12</sup> These features are distinctive to the ways that brokers in coastal towns domesticated commerce. However, brokers throughout eastern Kenya, speaking languages besides just Kiswahili, also focused the efforts of their clans and lineages on gaining access to imported products. Their complementary commercial strategies diversified regional exchanges and transformed settlement patterns inland and at the coast in similar ways. Specifically, the patronage relationships into which brokers drew their relatives and clients consolidated relatively isolated settlements into clan confederations—networks of towns and villages composed of the same sets of clans that shared residence in large towns that were their core sites of assembly for feasts and other rituals.<sup>13</sup> They referred to their larger towns as *mjis* (St. Sw.) or *kayas* (MK), while smaller villages were *kijjis*.<sup>14</sup> Since many *kijiji* residents aspired to expand their villages into centers of confederation, there were also many “country towns” in transition between

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 1 for an overview.

<sup>13</sup> Both Wilson and Helm remark that 1000 CE- 1500 CE is a period of marked differentiation among settlement sizes throughout eastern Kenya, Morton emphasizes the reciprocal exchange relationships that likely bound these settlements together in different zones of interaction. Thomas H. Wilson, “Spatial Analysis and Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast,” *Paideuma* 28 (1982): 201–19; Helm, “Conflicting Histories”; Henry W. Mutoro, “An Archaeological Study of the Mijikenda ‘Kaya’ Settlements on Hinterland Kenya Coast” (Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Here I follow the distinction made by my informants in Rabai. Middleton and Horton note that Swahili speakers refer to both urban towns and rural “towns” as *miji*, reserving *kijiji* for sections of a rural town, which is really an expansive village, the urban corollary being *mtaa* “quarter.” Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, 126.

these two conceptual categories.<sup>15</sup> This hierarchy of settlements distinguishes the era from both the urban-rural divides of later centuries and the less differentiated settlement sizes of earlier centuries.

The brokers who promoted the consolidation of eastern Kenya's differentiated settlements into clan confederations gathered followers from among their lineages and clan mates and also clients, debtors, and slaves from unrelated groups who tilled fields and extracted resources in the countryside on their behalf. Through these patronage networks, brokers received food and commodities that they needed to host overseas merchants. Then they sold commodities to overseas suppliers in return for imported products that they could then distribute to their followers as gifts. In later centuries these strategies culminated in densely-populated urban centers supported by a rural hinterland, but in the early stages of developing commerce, these brokers' towns were simply the most important centers of patronage (among many) where brokers and other patricians competed with one another.<sup>16</sup> While the *kayas* of the Mijikenda are today regarded as forests or rural settlements, when I asked Daniel Begerero (a *kaya* elder in Rabai) to define *kaya*, he responded "*makaya ni miji / a kaya is a town.*" Spear's informant Johnstone Muramba expanded on this definition to emphasize its role in organizing collaborations among clans:

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<sup>15</sup> Archaeologists also refer to the towns in this intermediate category as "commoner towns" or "secondary towns."

<sup>16</sup> Mutoro, *A Nearest Neighbour Analysis of the Mijikenda Makaya on the Kenya Coastal Hinterland*.



“A kaya is a town. People think it means forest, but it is the capital town of all the clans. In the kaya were all the leaders who organized people both inside and outside the kaya. All matters of the country were dealt with in the kaya.”<sup>17</sup>

The concept of a “capital city” implies a formal administrative center and centralized territorial state that is inaccurate for this early era of eastern Kenya. Instead, I prefer the term “anchor town” to emphasize both the role of the largest coastal towns in harboring the ships of traders and the way that all large inland and coastal towns anchored the activities and collaborations of surrounding communities in a ritual center.

Brokers in coastal towns from Mogadishu to Mombasa were the first to take advantage of the resumption of trade along the Indian Ocean corridor after 1000 CE, which had dropped off significantly after the division of the Roman Empire in the third century CE.<sup>18</sup> Mogadishu was the maritime gateway through which Arab and other mariners from the north approached the entire East African coast on their way to Kilwa, which was positioned at the furthest southerly reach of seasonal trade winds, which expired a few hundred miles before the gold-exporting port of Sofala.<sup>19</sup> Most Indian Ocean traders preferred to make their exchanges at Kilwa rather than risk being stranded for a full year in Sofala. Local brokers at other well-placed ports along the route, such as Mombasa, Malindi, Pate, and Shanga, also enriched their communities as they welcomed travel-worn traders and exchanged local commodities such as ambergris, iron, and ivory

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<sup>17</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Gensheimer, “At the Boundaries of Dar-Al-Islam: Cities of the East African Coast in the Late Middle Ages” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 102.

<sup>19</sup> Since the gold supply was located beyond the reach of the trade winds, merchants had the option of making their trades at Kilwa or waiting an entire year before returning.

for products such as glazed pottery, worked bronze metal, glass beads, and textiles from abroad.<sup>20</sup> While these coastal brokers kept and consumed most of what they obtained from Indian Ocean traders in their local communities, they exchanged some of the imports with partners residing in the hills to their west who gathered the ivory and other locally extracted commodities that attracted the maritime traders to their ports.

From 1000 to 1200 CE coastal and inland residents between Mogadishu to Mombasa expanded the number, size, and density of settlements at a faster rate than their cousins further south and the local brokers drew more and more followers and clients into towns.<sup>21</sup> Randall Pouwels suggests that Kilwa's strict control over the gold trade was a decisive factor in preventing other southern towns from participating in coastal trade on the same scale as their northern linguistic cousins.<sup>22</sup> As these northern communities engaged more often with oceanic traders and with one another than their linguistic cousins to the south, the languages and material culture of the two regions became even more distinct.<sup>23</sup> Potters in eastern Kenya innovated what archaeologists now label Late Tana Tradition Ware; their counterparts in eastern Tanzania innovated so-called Plain Ware. Both styles of pottery were distinguished by less intricate decorations than the Early Tana Tradition Wares that they discarded.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the vibrant colors and glazes

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<sup>20</sup> Buzurg ibn Shahriyar related a sailor's tale about such transactions along the East African coast in the mid-tenth century CE, see Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 9-13.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, "Spatial Analysis and Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast."

<sup>22</sup> Chami, "A Review of Swahili Archaeology," 213; Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 26. See also Mathew Pawlowicz and Adria LaViolette who argue that southern towns were oriented more towards mainland groups than the sea, "Swahili Historical Chronicles from an Archaeological Perspective."

<sup>23</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 297–298.

<sup>24</sup> Helm, "Conflicting Histories," 225, 288.

of imported wares overshadowed the efforts of local potters who compensated by making greater quantities of plainer wares. Another possibility is that variations in pottery decoration marked the clans and lineages that created them; as they started using imported wares to mark these distinctions, the local wares became more utilitarian. As a sign of the great value placed in imported wares, they used glazed china to decorate the tombs of high-status individuals.<sup>25</sup> After the twelfth century CE they also began to import large serving vessels that archaeologist Jeffrey Fleisher has associated with a growing emphasis on hosting feasts.<sup>26</sup> This hypothesis is consistent with patricians' needs to share the material wealth they were accumulating, and to do so prominently.

Felix Chami has suggested that northern coastal communities developed larger, commercial-oriented communities earlier than their southern cousins because they adopted Islam sooner. Hosts participating together with visiting traders in Islamic worship and honoring the same commercial guidelines of Islamic law would have engendered trust.<sup>27</sup> While al-Mas'udi mentioned only a few scattered Muslim communities in East Africa in the tenth century CE, by the fourteenth century Arab travel writers described the entire region as Muslim.<sup>28</sup> This widespread adoption of Islam took centuries to accomplish and was limited to coastal communities.<sup>29</sup> The central mosque of

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<sup>25</sup> Gensheimer, "At the Boundaries of Dar-Al-Islam," 306.

<sup>26</sup> Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption."

<sup>27</sup> This is specifically Felix Chami's thesis ("A Review of Swahili Archaeology," 213).

<sup>28</sup> For accounts by al-Idrisi, al-Fida, Ibn Battuta, and al-Mahasin see Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 19, 23, 27, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 83.

Shanga in the Lamu Archipelago, for instance, was expanded to accommodate more worshippers gradually over two centuries. Builders originally located the mosque in an enclosure alongside structures designed to restrict easy access, indicating that they may have been reserved for the private meetings of clan leaders.<sup>30</sup> Placing the mosque in the same enclosure as these clan structures suggests that Islam was received on the coast as one more of the many kinds of exclusive knowledge that residents organized groups to promote and protect. While, Muslim identities increasingly became important for claiming preferential status under foreign governments, prior to 1500 CE Islam fit within the range of distinguishing practices that all Sabaki communities used to differentiate clans and clan confederations, hence Muslims avoided proselytizing to their neighbors in order to preserve their monopoly on Islamic knowledge.

While adopting Islam certainly helped coastal brokers consolidate business relationships with visiting Muslim merchants, the local brokers also innovated local methods of exchange that domesticated commercial transactions that had the potential to destabilize close-knit communities by allowing individuals to prosper at the expense of (or simply independently of) others. Unlike many littoral communities elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, East Africa's coastal residents rarely built public markets for facilitating exchanges with strangers from the sea.<sup>31</sup> The relatively uniform quality and limited variety of local products attractive to overseas traders would have disadvantaged local merchants if they competed openly with one another. Instead, as Ibn Battuta reported for

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<sup>30</sup> Horton, Brown, and Mudida, *Shanga*.

<sup>31</sup> Gensheimer, "At the Boundaries of Dar-Al-Islam," 198.

Mogadishu, local brokers invited traders to be their guests before they even had a chance to disembark from their ships. These brokers housed them, fed them, and purchased their goods with the commodities they had gathered from their followers and clients.<sup>32</sup> The broker's servants even brought food directly to the ships in order to entice travelers to their patron with tasty dishes. Thus, instead of pursuing commercial strategies that maintained a distance between buyers and sellers, coastal brokers assumed the roles of patrons to acquire and then distribute imported products.<sup>33</sup> Instead of competing over the quality or variety of commodities that brokers offered, they competed over the quality of their hospitality.

Such competition may have helped encourage brokers throughout the coast started to invest their wealth starting around 1320 in houses made of mined coral blocks. Though they had started rebuilding wooden public mosques, tombs, and clan houses in coral nearly two centuries earlier, the innovation of masonry that used lime as an effective mortar prompted a wider application of the stone building techniques to personal residences.<sup>34</sup> Several architectural features of these "stone houses," likely patterned on earlier wooden structures, suggest their significant role in domesticating trade. The well-preserved stone houses at Gede to the west of Malindi, for example, include store rooms

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<sup>32</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 27–28.

<sup>33</sup> Horton, Brown, and Mudida, *Shanga*.

<sup>34</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, 116–117. Lime helped bind the bricks together permanently so that the walls would literally last for centuries. They likely made earlier attempts at constructing residences in stone, but the lack of a suitable binding agent would have meant the buildings did not last long enough or needed too much maintenance to merit the expense. Mosques and other public buildings, meanwhile, would have had the entire communities resources at their disposal to maintain them.

located to prevent casual access; owners built their houses with porches and stepped courtyards to entertain guests and added niches to display imported porcelain and pegs to hang imported textiles.<sup>35</sup> Although the wealth of brokers was apparent to everyone in the towns in their massive stone homes, they restricted their most ostentatious displays to private interior spaces.<sup>36</sup> Outward ostentation could threaten the careful balance both among the clans who shared the town and between the relatives and clan mates on whom brokers depended for their wealth.

Brokers passed their stone houses as patrimonies to succeeding generations in their lineages.<sup>37</sup> Since lineages from the same clan resided together in the same quarter (*mtaa*) of the towns, these assemblages of stone houses reflected the marriage alliances among lineages that bound clans together. Upper-story bridges connected stone houses across the alleys, and gates guarded open-air courtyards. In the Comoros Islands, clans claimed these courtyards as *fumboni* where they could hold marriage and circumcision feasts, as well as debates over clan politics. The courtyards likely served similar functions in other stone-built towns on the mainland. Stone houses thus materialized and perpetuated the recruitment of clan members and clients that organized life in the towns.

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Fleisher and Adria LaViolette, “The Changing Power of Swahili Houses, AD Fourteenth to Nineteenth Centuries,” in *The Durable House: House Society Models in Archaeology*, ed. Robin A. Beck, Occasional Paper, No. 35 (Carbondale, IL: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2007), 175–97; Gensheimer, “At the Boundaries of Dar-Al-Islam.”

<sup>36</sup> Usam Ghaidan, *African Heritage: The Stone Houses of Lamu* (Lamu: Lamu Museum, 1971); Fleisher and LaViolette, “The Changing Power of Swahili Houses, AD Fourteenth to Nineteenth Centuries.”

<sup>37</sup> In the nineteenth century, many stone houses were made *waqfs* (Islamic trusts) for the perpetual support of the lineages that owned them; this strategy transformed the individual ownership assumed as the default standard in Islamic law to corporate ownership, with some limitations. Even if families chose to live elsewhere, they could rent out rooms in the conveniently located houses for a small income.

The immense resources and back-breaking labor required for building stone houses meant they were out of reach for most people. Access to imported goods, and the social capital they enabled, would have been necessary to motivate teams of men to mine, shape, mortar, and plaster heavy coral into multi-story buildings.<sup>38</sup> Thus, most coastal dwellers continued residing in the temporary mud, grass, and palm leaf homes similar to those of their inland neighbors.<sup>39</sup> For their part, inland brokers declined to invest in the transport of heavy coral inland and uphill to build residences, thus distinguishing coastal communities.

Since stone houses were expensive, they became one of the most important markers of patrician status at the coast. In some towns, the wealthy clans who lived in stone houses even built walls to separate these quarters from the more temporary houses. The segmented nature of this collaborative effort is suggested at Gede, where the irregularity of the walls' paths through the site suggests that each clan within the settlement may have been responsible for erecting the portion of the town wall that enclosed their residences.<sup>40</sup> In other places, like Songa Mnara near Kilwa, the town wall included areas with mud and daub structures, though it is also possible that the area

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<sup>38</sup> Porites coral remains an important building material in Lamu. When I resided there in 2010, young men pushed wheelbarrows laden with bricks of coral from the beaches near Shela to building sites in the town nearly every day.

<sup>39</sup> Fleisher and LaViolette, "Elusive Wattle-and-Daub"; Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices."

<sup>40</sup> Gensheimer, "At the Boundaries of Dar-Al-Islam."

represents one of the few market spaces in East Africa since, like Shanga, the daub remains may have come from kiosks and workshops rather than residences.<sup>41</sup>

The wealth that brokers accumulated through patronage of the maritime traders heightened distinctions among towns as well as between the better- and less-well-connected people within them. In contrast to the dense arrangements of permanent houses in anchor towns like Pate, Shanga, and Mombasa, country towns featured only one or two stone houses, or in some cases only a single stone tomb.<sup>42</sup> Those who could afford stone houses in these country towns were probably brokers who had organized the transfer of neighborhood resources to the anchor towns. The tombs may also have honored men from the countryside who had accumulated wealth in the town and returned. In accordance with local customs, he would have been buried in his place of birth, but in the style of the grandee broker he had become.

Archaeologists working at Pemba have noted that country towns were common between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. In northern Pemba, for instance, patricians established five country towns, where they exported rice to Mombasa in exchange for imports and sponsored the construction of mosques. By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, the country towns were abandoned, as the mysterious alchemy of transforming food and ivory into cloth, porcelain, and cloth gradually escaped middlemen aspiring to become patricians. As the volume of trade goods to East Africa increased, patrons from Mombasa, for instance, took the one-day ocean journey to Pemba to

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<sup>41</sup> Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Finding Meaning in Ancient Swahili Spatial Practices."

<sup>42</sup> Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*.



negotiate rice purchases, a prestige dish they developed a taste for as they served it to visiting Indian Ocean merchants. Though initially dependent on local middle-men, these patricians from the anchor towns gradually cultivated a wider clientele that included producers of the commodities they wanted. Thus commoners gained direct access to the patricians of anchor towns. Jeffrey Fleisher has argued that the ostentatious ornamentation in a mosque at the country town of Chwaka in Pemba was an effort to cling to the last vestiges of power associated with maintaining control over trade relationships.<sup>43</sup> By the sixteenth century, the settlement hierarchy of anchor towns, country towns, and villages was replaced by a simpler distinction between towns and villages.<sup>44</sup>

The hierarchical differentiation of earlier settlements into anchor towns, country towns, and villages that prevailed between 1000 and 1500 CE in eastern Kenya certainly began at the coast, where imported products were more readily available, but inland brokers similarly used imported products to induce clients to join them in their own burgeoning country towns whose brokers aggregated resources for export from smaller settlements nearby. Coastal brokers built upon earlier routines of regional exchange in iron and pottery as they induced inland clients to supply them with ivory, gum copal, and animal skins that supplemented the commodities their own kin and clients produced.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption," 210–213.

<sup>44</sup> Adria LaViolette and Jeffrey Fleisher, "The Urban History of a Rural Place: Swahili Archaeology on Pemba Island, Tanzania, 700-1500 AD," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 42, no. 3 (October 2009): 433–55.

<sup>45</sup> Abungu and Mutoro, "Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland"; Mutoro, "An Archaeological Study of the Mijikenda 'Kaya' Settlements on Hinterland Kenya Coast."

Their inland clients in turn became brokers who consolidated their own clan confederations through patronage. Several interior settlements larger than four hectares indicate that inland country towns were comparable in size to many coastal towns. When clan confederations at the coast established towns in the thirteenth century that were purposely located to take advantage of convenient anchorages, their reorientations toward commercial opportunities were mirrored by inland confederations who established settlements near resources valued for export.<sup>46</sup>

Although Kiswahili-speakers and Mijikenda-speakers established dozens of new towns in order to facilitate trade between 1000 and 1500 CE, they also founded settlements to improve the strategies of mutual sustainability that had earlier prompted them to assemble in towns as mutually exclusive clans. In some cases they founded new villages to move away from land shortages around their growing towns.<sup>47</sup> Spear's informant Bukardi Ndzovu explained a dynamic that may have motivated the founding of inland towns in earlier eras:

Originally all the Giriama lived within the *kaya* [town] and went outside only to cultivate. Since they were few, they all farmed in the immediate area of the *kaya* [town], but as the population increased they had to farm farther away, . . . where they built *kayas* Kidzini and Jorore.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Wilson, "Spatial Analysis and Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast"; Helm, "Conflicting Histories," 287–290.

<sup>47</sup> There was steady expansion of settlement "from the early second millennium into the less agriculturally productive regions to the west" (Helm, "Re-Evaluating Traditional Histories on the Coast of Kenya: An Archaeological Perspective," 78.).

<sup>48</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 44.

This expansion into new areas accommodated demographic expansion and laid the foundation of affiliated settlements through which brokers expanded their patronage networks beyond their town towns to organize confederations upon the earlier social foundation of lineages and clans.

Residents in these affiliated villages modeled their settlements on the more densely populated anchor and country towns and maintained links with them through their clans and lineages, which accommodated the many people whom wealthy men drew to the towns and affiliated villages with generous promises to share their wealth. Others continued experimenting with new technologies that enabled them to live in the more arid scrub-brush to the west of the inland ridge and other less attractive ecologies, perhaps because they were crowded out of the more attractive sites reserved for cultivation.<sup>49</sup> While cultivators generally chose areas with good soil to found settlements, they could not control the highly variable distribution of rainfall in the region, with droughts that threatened their communities recurring about once a generation. To minimize their exposure to the risk of crop failure they established settlements at different elevations and locations. Those who retreated to more arid areas were also the first Bantu-speakers in eastern Kenya to raise cattle, sheep, and goats intensively for the first time, rather than acquiring animal products from pastoralists or hunting.<sup>50</sup> In 1505 Hans Meyr described how almost every house in the town of Mombasa was attached to a cattle stall. The town

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<sup>49</sup> There was steady expansion of settlement “from the early second millennium into the less agriculturally productive regions to the west” (Helms, “Re-evaluating Traditional Histories,” 78).

<sup>50</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 288.

residents probably acquired the cattle from mainland traders since the island was not large enough to support grazing herds of cattle. Ibn Battuta noted other regional exchanges of food, such as “grain” that Mombasa’s residents imported, probably referring to the rice from Pemba or millet from the Lamu archipelago.<sup>51</sup> These regional exchanges of food enhanced the sustainability of towns and diversified the diets of the communities throughout eastern Kenya.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to finding new places to settle, eastern Kenyans expanded the earliest sites that were established in prime locations for exploiting local resources. Benyegundo Hill, for instance, is located ten miles west of Mombasa Island. At two hundred seventy meters elevation, it overlooks Tudor Creek, a tidal inlet that connects the hill directly to the coast. Residents first occupied the hill around 600 CE but abandoned it within one or two centuries. Around 1000 CE residents resettled the hill and made good use of the waterway. They produced a limited amount of iron, some which they exchanged for marine shells and imported glass beads and pottery, if not also other more perishable goods not visible now to archaeologists. The site remained occupied continuously thereafter until the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup> As observed by Thomas Wilson some of earliest settlement sites in eastern Kenya became larger than towns better situated to receive

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<sup>51</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> Abungu and Mutoro, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Coastal Hinterland”; Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 290.

<sup>53</sup> The Early Tana Tradition pottery found at Kaya Mudzi Mwiru suggests settlers lived there as early as 600 CE; and a thermoluminescence analysis of another pottery sherd found among the middle layers of occupation suggested it was made around 1000 CE. Later layers suggest it has been occupied almost continuously since; Mutoro, “An Archaeological Study of the Mijikenda ‘Kaya’ Settlements on Hinterland Kenya Coast.”

overseas traders. The aspiring patricians who established country towns in locations they hoped would attract trading partners in many cases could not overturn the superior loyalty that villages had to the towns located for their productive potential. Their continued success at attracting lineages and clans as residents, despite poor harbors, indicates that access to the local resources that earlier generations focused on remained important for attracting clients along with imported products.<sup>54</sup> Though some anchor towns endured into the twentieth century, others were abandoned as the better harbors, or perhaps better terms of trade, induced overseas merchants to favor their rivals. For example, the backwater of Lamu gradually displaced Pate as the preeminent port in the north, and Gede was abandoned because its wells dried up and the creek that provided its outlet to the sea changed course when silt accumulated.<sup>55</sup>

While brokers could use imported products to induce followers to live in ever denser towns, they also relied on their patronage over producers in the scattered towns and villages that affiliated with the capitals where they lived. Thus the networks of exchange that brokers sustained, rather than geographical boundaries, effectively defined the clan confederations in eastern Kenya. However, over centuries of collaboration, the clan confederations of eastern Kenya elaborating distinctive areal dialects that marked later linguistic boundaries. Obviously, the extant clan confederations in the twentieth century that linguists used as a baseline for their linguistic surveys omits dozens if not hundreds of the earlier *ad hoc* political associations whose collaborations shaped

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<sup>54</sup> Wilson, "Spatial Analysis and Settlement Patterns on the East African Coast."

<sup>55</sup> Wilson provides a helpful overview for the occupation dates of most coastal towns; *Ibid.*

linguistic variation over the past millennium. However, the particular compositions of clan confederations would have varied from decade to decade, the geographical footprint of each dialect reflects distinct zones of regional collaboration among eastern Kenya's communities. For example, Rabai has no less than five distinct *kayas*, each of which could have been the center of a distinctive patronage network in its own time. While the particular networks that sustained these *kayas* attenuated, they all drew on the same resources available the surrounding valleys and hills. While some lineages and clans would have moved in and out of Rabai over centuries, most of the population would have remained in place, and thus distinguish their own dialects in contrast to populations in other distinctive geographic zones. In other words, variations in language reflect the strategies of productions and exchange more directly than the political fortunes of particular patricians and clan confederations.

A brief overview of the mutual influence of dialects on one another in communities surrounding Mombasa reveals the regional interactions sustained ocean-going commerce. The Kimvita dialect spoken at Mombasa is one of about two dozen Kiswahili and Mijikenda dialects that communities articulated over the course of second millennium CE. Speakers of Mvita and its neighboring Kiswahili dialects influenced the divergence of Proto-Mijikenda into northern and southern dialect groups. Southern Mijikenda speakers adopted a large number of Kiswahili words in favor of inherited vocabulary.<sup>56</sup> In turn, Southern Mijikenda speakers influenced the pronunciation of

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<sup>56</sup> Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 333.

certain sounds in the Vumba and Chifundi dialects of Kiswahili south of Mombasa. And Kiswahili speakers living on the mainland around Mombasa adopted the Proto-Mijikenda habit of palatalizing \*k as /č/ before /i/ or /a/ (e.g. chinga vs kinga).<sup>57</sup> The residents of Mombasa Island, however, did not adopt this new pronunciation from the interior; perhaps their direct involvement in ocean-going trade motivated them to favor and emulate the language of other coastal merchants at Lamu and Pate, rather than their neighbors in the hinterland and adjacent coasts.<sup>58</sup> Other dialectical variations derive from the development of mutually-exclusive clan confederations within language groups. So, for instance, some differences between Northern Mijikenda dialects Southern Mijikenda dialects cannot be ascribed to the influence of Kiswahili. Instead they emerged as the communities in the hilly escarpment to the west and north of Mombasa collaborated with one another more often than with Mijikenda speakers living at the Shimba Plateau and the coastal plain south of Mombasa.<sup>59</sup> More detailed linguistic surveys that account also for areal distinctions within the major dialects might reveal finer levels of collaborations. For example, Krapf reported that residents in Ruruma area of Rabai used *mbingu* “heaven, God” (Rab.) while other Chirabai speakers to their south preferred *mulungu* “heaven, God” (Rab.).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> The most restricted set of northern dialects (ND3 = Siu, Tikuu, Amu) greatly influenced Uguja and all the earliest extent Kiswahili around or before 1700 CE; Ibid., 564.

<sup>59</sup> Derek Nurse, “The Proto-Sabaki Verb Systems and Its Subsequent Development,” *SUGIA - Sprache Und Geschichte in Afrika* 5 (1982): 536.

<sup>60</sup> Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1887), 247.

As Sabaki speakers filled in the terrain less-favorable for cultivation and other previously overlooked spaces in eastern Kenya after the tenth century, they funneled their local resources to coastal patrons who supplied them with products imported from overseas. Hans Meyr's description of Mombasa in 1505 gives a small taste of the wealth that these novel strategies of exchange enabled patricians to accumulate:

Mombasa is a very large town and lies on an island from one and a half to two leagues around. The town is built on rocks on the higher part of the island and has no walls on the side of the sea; but on the land side it is protected by a wall as high as the fortress. The houses are of the same type as those of Kilwa: some of them are three storeyed and all are plastered with lime. The streets are very narrow, so that two people cannot walk abreast in them: all the houses have stone seats in front of them, which makes the streets yet narrower. . . . The town has more than 600 houses which are thatched with palm leaves; these are collected green for this purpose. In between the stone dwelling-houses there are wooden houses with porches and stables for cattle. There are very few dwelling houses which have not these wooden houses attached.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the expensive investments in stone buildings, Mayr described how Portuguese soldiers pillaged silk, gold-embroidered clothes, carpets “without equal for beauty,” rice, honey, butter, grain, “countless camels,” cattle, and two elephants. Finally, he estimated the population to be ten thousand, including three thousand seven hundred men.<sup>62</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century, the patricians who domesticated commerce

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<sup>61</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 108–9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 109–111.



had transformed the isolated towns and villages of eastern Kenya into a complex of clan confederations oriented towards the crowded capitals scattered throughout eastern Kenya.

As the patrons of overseas merchants, coastal brokers had a distinct advantage over their inland counterparts. They could withhold imported goods that were only available at selected anchor towns on the coast, while inland brokers drew on resources that were widely available in the interior. Over the centuries, coastal brokers attempted to turn the inland territories into a hinterland beholden to the needs of the urban coast; they tried to attract clients who would bring local resources directly to the coast rather than aggregate them at inland country towns. The difficulty of hauling heavy ivory and the convenience of visiting a local country town within walking distance of one's farms and pastures would help inland brokers maintain their place as middlemen longer than their counterparts on Pemba Island who lost their clients to better located patricians at coastal anchor towns. While it is possible that some individuals in eastern Kenya calculated such opportunity costs and tried to find a patron that would bring them the best return for their labor, most continued relying on the more subjective evaluations of patronage through which they chose the heads of their clans and descent groups. Thus, aspiring brokers needed to cultivate the intimate ties that protected knowledge and kin as well as secure access to beautiful textiles and other desirable products from overseas.

### **Contingent Consensus: Authoritative Associations and Exclusive Knowledge**

As patricians sought to balance one another's influence in the capitals of eastern Kenya, they did so by elaborating upon older strategies designed to mediate conflicts among clans as they competed to distinguish themselves from their peers and to maintain

the goodwill of their followers. Patricians rarely used violence to enforce their interests, since their competitors could simply move away and found a new town. For example, speaking for the Kambe in what follows, Spear's informant Dahlu wa Mombare explained:

The Ribe were always fighting for leadership in the town. The Kambe, being very peaceful people, not only gave them the leadership but gave them the whole town and went to search for a new one. They left them with these words: "We shall see whether you will be able to run it" and they haven't been able to run it since. In fact, when we left that town the Ribe also had to leave and settle outside it.<sup>63</sup>

As this tradition suggests, town leaders relied not only on their own clans but also on the knowledge of rival clans. They could "run the town" only if they could organize consensus among the resident clans. Therefore, they relied more upon the distribution of gifts than armed thugs to sustain the flow of local resources to their overseas suppliers.

For instance, patrician sponsored elaborate feasts more frequently as the material wealth that they accumulated after 1000 CE distinguished them from commoners. They even designated particular parts of their towns as sites for these feasts. A site at Vumba Kuu south of Mombasa includes an area with enormous numbers of fish bones and almost nothing else, suggesting it was reserved for special feasts of fish.<sup>64</sup> While earlier community celebrations probably included foods contributed by every clan, the large

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<sup>63</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 104.

<sup>64</sup> Wynne-Jones, "Remembering and Reworking the Swahili Diwanate"; Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption."

imported bowls and platters mentioned above that Pemba's patricians imported could hold copious amounts of food.<sup>65</sup> These porcelain vessels gradually revealed intricate interior designs (and thus their owners) as the meal was consumed. Though documentary evidence is limited from this era, Ibn Battuta reported lavish dining at the port town of Mogadishu—however, he described meals taken with the sheikh's court rather than a feast for the entire town.<sup>66</sup>

Beyond these tantalizing clues to the strategic generosity of coastal patricians, I rely on other strategies that more recent communities in eastern Kenya have used for reaching consensus to theorize why patricians would expend so much effort to display and give away their wealth. These strategies are reported in early modern documents (*ca.* 1500 onward) and modern ethnographic reports (*ca.* 1850 onward). The strategies practiced by their descendants suggest that feasts helped protect the standards of respect and reciprocity that bound clans together in towns and confederations by defusing tensions over the social inequality enabled by material wealth. Specifically, patricians organized councils, factions, and societies to compete with one another over the titles and offices that constituted them. Feasts and other public expressions of generosity turned political rivalries into displays that ensured the entire community shared in the wealth that patricians enjoyed. Patricians benefitted from sharing their wealth since generosity

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<sup>65</sup> Note that at Pemba, local potters made very small amounts of decorate feasting ware that drew on old styles of decoration but were whose level of finish and size were likely inspired by imported vessels. Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption," 207.

<sup>66</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 27. Fleisher distinguishes between patron-role feasts hosted by patricians for their followers and empowering feasts that involved the entire community; but such feasts reproduced social relationships but also provided opportunities to challenge inequality; Fleisher, "Rituals of Consumption," 202.

defused accusations of witchcraft and corruption that their competitors could use to discredit them as greedy and selfish hoarders of the comforts they enjoyed.

Some patricians may have worked exclusively as brokers with the maritime traders, while others acquired their wealth by relying on their stewardship over clan and lineage resources. Most patricians mixed part-time brokerage with a vocation that capitalized on the proprietary knowledge they acquired as a member of a clan. Such knowledge included techniques for extracting local resources for export—such as gum copal (a tree resin), ivory, turtle shells, and mangrove poles—or for cultivating various kinds of grain, fishing, hunting, or making crafts like pottery and iron tools.<sup>67</sup> They could also contribute their specialized knowledge to the welfare of the wider community. Johnston Muramba, the Giriama Mijikenda elder quoted earlier, explained that if the elders wanted to rebuild the gates which once stood at the entrance of their town, they would consult with the Ngowa clan, because they were very good carpenters.<sup>68</sup> In addition to technical knowledge related to subsistence and artisanship, clans specialized in various divining techniques, healing various categories of spiritual maladies, and leading specific components of community rituals. For example, the Waziri of Lamu controlled a large carved ivory horn known as a *siwa*, as well as a servant trained to play it. The horn became so desirable among patrician families for proclaiming marriage and

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<sup>67</sup> For instance, residents of Mudzi Mwiru in Rabai worked iron and excavations at Mombasa Island revealed a workshop where laborers shaped the porites coral used in construction. Both sites date to around 1000 CE. Mutoro, “An Archaeological Study of the Mijikenda ‘Kaya’ Settlements on Hinterland Kenya Coast”; Sassoon, “Azania.”

<sup>68</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 51.

circumcision ceremonies that patricians reserved its use to lineages deemed to have sufficiently high standing in the community. As Salim Heri, one of Randall Pouwel's informant in Lamu, emphasized, "Even if a person paid 100,000 shillings they would not blow it for him."<sup>69</sup> This distinction between status based on descent versus that acquired through commercial wealth suggests again the tensions that accompanied greater engagement in commerce.

Making the special knowledge of one's clan indispensable for communal ceremonies did not always guarantee prosperity. Although the clans that first settled a town usually held precedence as "owners of the land," newcomers occasionally supplanted this position of respect. For instance, oral traditions in Lamu explain that Arab settlers at the nearby Hidabu Hill conquered the Wayumbili who had first settled Lamu. After this defeat, the newcomers forbade the Wayumbili from wearing shoes or turbans, markers of Muslim respectability, required them to wash the dead and dig graves, and forced them to confine their vocations to artisanal pursuits. However, because the Wayumbili clans held proprietary knowledge of local resources that the Hidabu did not, they retained some ritual authority. For instance, the Wayumbili retained the right to slaughter the ox in the rituals that symbolically cleansed the town each New Year and appoint a *khatib* "preacher" for the weekly prayer at the community's Friday mosque, an important concession of Islamic recognition.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Since knowledge was well-guarded by the clans who depended upon it for their livelihoods and political standing in confederations, and since the knowledge to run a town was too diverse for any one person or clan to master, brokers could not simply purchase comprehending authority. They needed to assemble allies from all the clans who contributed to the proper functioning of the town—from leading prayers to harvesting coconuts, mining coral, and repairing ships. As Randall Pouwels has argued, the status of a patrician was defined by a mixture of wealth, knowledge, and reputation for morality, though each of these virtues also enhanced opportunities to develop the others.<sup>71</sup> So, the class of patricians who represented their clans' interests in councils, and thus their clan confederations as wholes, also included men who asserted their authority by virtue of knowledge and stellar reputations for reconciling conflicts rather than wealth. Though Pouwels's observations focused on coastal patricians, the term "patrician" could include also high status men from inland clans since the clans chose the trustees who represented their interests to outsiders through similar criteria of wealth, morality, and knowledge.

In practice, patricians facilitated collaborations among their respective clans in their capital town by organizing councils, thus constituting its confederation. By drawing their membership from individuals whose lineages could afford to purchase the position and actively seeking members from every clan, the councils prevented any single person

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–96.

from gaining an advantage over his peers.<sup>72</sup> Patricians saw the fees they paid to ranking members of the councils as an investment in authority to arbitrate conflicts over land, as well as honor and access to powerful knowledge (*uganga*) that was held by the council rather than any particular clan.<sup>73</sup> In nineteenth century Mombasa, at least one category of fees had a direct relationship to commerce. By paying six hundred Maria Theresa dollars and hosting a feast, as many as twelve patricians could purchase the right to represent the Mombasa interests of specific inland clan confederations, which supposedly numbered twelve at the time.<sup>74</sup> Similar arrangements for representing the interests of trading partners from separate clan confederations may have facilitated regional exchanges among clan confederations in the centuries from 1000 to 1500. The relatively uniform distribution of locally made potteries and imported products throughout eastern Africa in that era suggests regional exchanges of some sort happened.<sup>75</sup>

As members received fees from new initiates or members seeking special privileges, they could redistribute them within their own clans, thus deflating jealousy

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<sup>72</sup> Gona Dzoka claimed that the Rabai council had asked him to join several times, but he refused. RRD C045 Consultation with Gona Dzoka, 16 August 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Pouwels makes a similar distinction between publically available knowledge accessible to all and specialized knowledge held by clans and other closed associations (*Horn and Crescent*, 5).

<sup>74</sup> Krapf, "Journal," 25 Mar 1845, 571. Twelve is a common "round" number for estimating clans, at Mombasa, Lamu, and Rabai. Almost invariably, however, the list of twelve clans/confederations that consultants name vary until recorded in writing. It is possible that the significance of the number twelve was borrowed from Islam's "twelve tribes of Ishmael", itself a patterned response to the "twelve tribes of Israel" from Hebrew scriptures.

<sup>75</sup> This uniformity is a distribution in style, but not in pottery "fabric" or numbers. Imported pottery was more plentiful at coastal sites and locally made pottery usually remained close to the area of production. Croucher and Wynne-Jones, "People, Not Pots."

and rivalries in the community.<sup>76</sup> While lineages might invest a great deal of their wealth to secure a position for their trustee as their clan's representative on the council, they would gradually recoup their investment by ensuring that their interests were protected. It was probably within this context of redistribution that patricians sponsored regular feasts that the entire community could enjoy together, such as the New Year feasts common throughout eastern Kenya and coastal East Africa. As John Ludwig Krapf observed of nineteenth-century inland communities, "the established feasts . . . unite them more closely and stronger than anything else."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the English traveler Charles New said a few decades later that the "chief occupation" of the councils he encountered was feasting on the dues, fees, and fines collected in the form of livestock.<sup>78</sup> However, patricians also organized more exclusive feasts for their peers on the council and for personal dependents.

There is no common word for "council" among Sabaki languages, despite such associations being a widespread strategy for reaching consensus within Sabaki-speaking communities; but there are a variety of specific titles and named organizations that fulfilled the functions just described.<sup>79</sup> For instance, in nineteenth-century Lamu the

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<sup>76</sup> In Rabai, members of the "parliament" who violate taboos are also required to pay a fine to their peers, providing yet another means of redistribution.

<sup>77</sup> Krapf and Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary*, 167.

<sup>78</sup> This observation applied to *chama* dance associations at the coast as well as the inland "societies"; see New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 108; R. Skene, "Arab and Swahili Dances and Ceremonies," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 47 (1917): 413–434, doi:10.2307/2843346; Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry and Rebellion on the Swahili Coast, 1856-88*; Terence O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours*.

<sup>79</sup> The strongest candidate is *k'ambi* (Mv) = *kambi* (Rab.), *ngambi* (Di), which means council, or ruling age-grade. It has several correlates in other East African Bantu languages, usually rendered *ngambi*, which



*yumbe* “large house, government” (Am.) met in a council chamber known as the *nyumba ya ezi* “house of power” (Am.). In addition to drawing membership from each clan, the clans were grouped into two moieties, or mutually exclusive sections, known as *mkaos* “people sitting together” (Am.) or *chama* “association” (St. Sw.).<sup>80</sup> Both of these terms imply a loose voluntary association and thus emphasize that these factions were contingent political associations.<sup>81</sup> Factions organized competitions in the form of dance and poetry competitions (*ngoma* and *mashindano* respectively), in which the compositions mocked the alleged failures and missteps of rivals.<sup>82</sup> But they also used these opportunities to present diverse opinions in the hopes of working through them toward a consensus among the entire council.<sup>83</sup>

The political dynamic throughout eastern Kenya tended to pit factions of the “owners of the land” against factions of newcomers trying to establish themselves by gaining control of the council, most of whom would have started as clients of the patricians whom they sought to replace.<sup>84</sup> However, as towns attracted more people and

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suggests *gamba* “to slander” (Mv) = *gamba* “to say” (Mk) a possible root. Note also the following related words: *jambo* “matter, affair”, *kigambo* “[judicial] case”, *-jigamba* “to brag, boast”, *mgambo* “a public proclamation” (St. Sw).

<sup>80</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, 159. Note that *kikao* is a rotating feast, in which members take turn hosting one another, usually in times of famine and hardship.

<sup>81</sup> *Chama* is the generic word for political party in Standard Kiswahili but also for self-help organizations in which members contribute money each week until it is their turn for the whole pot.

<sup>82</sup> Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*.

<sup>83</sup> A famous Gungu dance in which Lamu’s patricians debated whether to resist political domination from Mombasa is described in Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*.

<sup>84</sup> A. H. J. (Adriaan Hendrik Johan) Prins, *Didemic Lamu: Social Stratification and Spatial Structure in a Muslim Maritime Town* (Groningen: Instituut voor Culturele Antropologie der Rijksuniversiteit, 1971).

clans reassembled to accommodate natural increases and shifting marriage alliances, clans once regarded as newcomers claimed status as “original owners.” In nineteenth-century Lamu, the older Suudi and Zena factions united as the Mkomani faction against a new faction they termed Langoni. The latter name (meaning “at the gate”) reflected both a physical manifestation of their rivalry and derogation of the newcomers as outsiders; the original Mkomani residents had built walls around the section of the town in which they lived to emphasize their priority as the original owners of the town.<sup>85</sup> Henceforth, the clans residing within the wall, rather than within a particular quarter of the town, claimed the respect owed autochthones.

At Mombasa, a similar dynamic of uniting to exclude newcomers is reflected in the many names for the area known primarily as Mombasa: Nyali Kuu, Kongowea, and Mvita. Each name reflects the name of an older community who drew together and defined themselves as such when challenged by newcomers. Nyali Kuu and Kongowea merged against Mvita. Then Kongowea and Mvita merged to counter the establishment of the rival Kilindini town on Mombasa Island. As the towns attracted clans from elsewhere on the coast, Mvita town constituted a clan confederation called the Tissia Taifa (Nine Tribes), while Kilindini town formed the Thelatha Taifa (Three Tribes), each name specifying the numbers of clans in the respective confederation.<sup>86</sup> Finally, in the

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<sup>85</sup> The distinction is apparent in Kiswahili: the “owners of the town” considered themselves Waamu (Lamuans) while other residents were Watu wa Lamu (people of Lamu).

<sup>86</sup> Note that the Thelatha Taifa confederation at Kilindini was more numerous in population than the Tissia Taifa confederation at Mvita (Berg, “Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate”); the higher number of clans in the latter may reflect a capitulation to refugees who desired to assemble as new clans rather than join local clans. Since the Tissia Taifa is composed almost entirely of wealthy refugees from other coastal

twentieth century, they combined as the Ithnashara Taifa (Twelve Tribes) to defend their shared interests against the flood of immigrants from the interior but still preserved their earlier factional identities. Today, most of Mombasa's Kiswahili speakers have collapsed these clan and clan confederation affiliations into a single identity that distinguishes them from recent arrivals by emphasizing their heritage as town founders: *wamiji* "townspeople." The name distinguishes Mombasa's original population from other Kiswahili-speaking immigrants as well as immigrants from the interior and hinterland.

In addition to factions to claim priority, patricians organized exclusive title societies among council members.<sup>87</sup> These "title societies" taught knowledge that enabled selected council members to mediate sensitive disputes. Among coastal communities, *ijaza* certificates certified that pupils had mastered a particular Islamic text, and eventually their mastery of Islamic laws entitled them to settle disputes when other mediating methods failed. While Islamic practices distinguished coastal communities from inland neighbors, such esoteric knowledge was one of many categories of exclusive *uganga*.

Among nineteenth-century inland communities, the most valued knowledge was guarded by the *vaya* society. Instead of the written certificates that denoted learning at the coast, they received special regalia that marked membership after presenting the members

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towns, they may have been more emphatic in retaining their status as a distinct clans than the poorer peoples who joined the three Kilindini clans, which remained constant in number for centuries.

<sup>87</sup> *Kambi* is the generic name for these councils among Mijikenda communities, but I avoid the term as it became conflated with system of age-grades that complemented the council system in later eras (See Chapter 6).

of the title society with prestige goods and hosting a feast.<sup>88</sup> The *vaya* society charged its members with administering the “hyena oath” (*kirao cha fisi*), a trial by ordeal of poison used primarily to determine guilt for such heinous crimes as murder.<sup>89</sup> To keep so powerful an oath in the hands of responsible and trustworthy individuals, established members of the society required candidates to demonstrate their commitment to the community by redistributing their personal wealth in lavish feasts.<sup>90</sup> *Vaya* members were also responsible for drowning deformed infants and thus determining if such extreme measures were warranted in particular cases. Not many aspired to make such risky decisions over life and death, but *vaya* members who did were honored with invitations to exclusive feasts and special funeral rites.<sup>91</sup>

While modern oral traditions often recall the hyena oath as a fearsome ordeal, J.L. Krapf’s description of it in the nineteenth century suggests the transitory nature of these societies and the oaths which they protected. He notes:

[T]he transgressor was supposed to howl like a hyena when going to die. Such a case being very rare, it was thought *the oath was not much dreaded*, and it was therefore *superseded* by the Musafuma [another oath].<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui, “Expressing Power and Status through Aesthetics in Mijikenda Society,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (June 1998): 91; Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government,” 253.

<sup>89</sup> Spear, *Kaya Complex*.

<sup>90</sup> Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government,” 256.

<sup>91</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 66.

<sup>92</sup> Krapf, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 178.

Krapf also recorded that the hyena oath had replaced a previous *kirao cha kidudu* “insect oath.” The succession of these oaths indicates that each “title society” was effective only so long as its knowledge was respected. In order to ensure that councils maintained their authority over the life and death decisions with which they were charged (along with their privileges), they innovated new societies and oaths to meet the needs of each generation. In addition to the *vaya* society, the early twentieth-century Giriama Mijikenda organized *habasi*, *kinyenze*, and *gohu* societies. These societies were not arranged in a hierarchy, candidates did not progress through each society in a prescribed order, but could seek membership in any society they desired. Thus there were usually several title societies operating simultaneously, each, despite their overlapping memberships, negotiating with the others over various responsibilities of mediation.<sup>93</sup> Sometimes, different clan confederations organized “title societies” with the same names and oaths, but they were considered separate societies, rather than a network that overlapped confederation boundaries.

As part of their mediating responsibilities, title societies ensured that independent diviners and healers were held accountable for their uses of healing, divination and other techniques, which were understood to have the power to curse as well as to heal, in which case the *uganga* “medicine” (St. Sw. = MK) was regarded as “witchcraft” (*uchawi* [St. Sw.] ~ *utsai* [MK]).<sup>94</sup> Sustained droughts, epizootics, epidemics, and other widespread

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<sup>93</sup> Orchardson-Mazrui, “Expressing Power,” 90-91; Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government,” 255-56.

<sup>94</sup> Cynthia Brantley, “An Historical Perspective of the Giriama and Witchcraft Control,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 49, no. 2 (1979): 112–33.

calamities were taken as a sign that witchcraft was rampant in the country. If the members of the title societies who had the most powerful medicines could not halt the problems, they became under suspect themselves, either as witches or ineffective stewards of the powers entrusted to them. In addition, members who violated expectations of generosity and morality could be challenged with accusations of practicing witchcraft, the very crime against which they were charged to protect the community.

For example, one of Spear's Mijikenda informants accused the *vaya* of witchcraft because "they used to hold their meetings in the bush and ate their feasts there" or because "they were very evil people who deprived others of their things unlawfully."<sup>95</sup>

For example, they would march together singing to warn people that they were approaching. Everyone had to go inside or hide so as not to see them. Anyone who remained outside was seized and his relatives had to give the *vaya* a calabash of palm wine and two *reale* [dollars < Portuguese coins] before they would free him. If no one came to his rescue, the *vaya* would sleep with [their victim] whether [their victim] was a woman or not.<sup>96</sup>

Ostensibly, the title societies granted membership to those who demonstrated generosity and leadership to the community. But this obvious outsider's account, clearly associates witchcraft—not generosity—with the members of a title society.

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<sup>95</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 64, 89.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

Such accusations of witchcraft suggest the fundamental contradiction of the title societies and the councils from which they drew their members. Members distributed their wealth to gain admission in order to deflect charges of witchcraft and thus avoid conflict within the confines of the town. But since qualification for membership required one to first acquire vast amounts of wealth, it also depended on an ethic of individual accumulation. Although patricians could deflect accusations of witchcraft, they themselves contributed to suspicions by emphasizing the affluence of single individuals. Playing up this inherent contradiction enabled succeeding generations and competing patrons to innovate new title societies and *uganga* to replace the earlier societies and patricians by charging them with corruption.

To avoid charges of witchcraft and to prevent the mischief of wicked diviners, vengeful ancestors, and capricious spirits, title societies and councils took periodic proactive measures to cleanse their communities. The New Year ceremonies described in Chapter 2, for instance, symbolically cleansed communities of pollution and appeased ancestors and other spirits. Similarly, modern *kaya* elders in Rabai make a medicine from plants found in the forests surrounding the abandoned site, circumambulate a spot of bush that represents all of Rabai, then deposit the medicine in four water sources on the borders of Rabai.<sup>97</sup> In times past, council members also travelled from town to town

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<sup>97</sup> This ritual was described to me by William Tsaka of the National Museums of Kenya. He works closely with the *kaya* elders on community development projects; ashes were apparent on the path when I visited the site on 19 July 2010 and I visited each of the four water sources in August 2010; they include the two creeks that form the northern and southern border of Rabai, a flooded mining pit to the west, and a pond near the base of the hill leading to Kaya Bomu. Note that the southern ritual borders at Msapuni Creek does not correspond with the Rabai District's southern border closer to Mazeras.

during epidemics calling people together to partake of medicine.<sup>98</sup> Similar ministrations to the collective welfare in the past likely united the villages and towns of a clan confederation together as much as their material exchanges.

Title societies represented degrees of collective authority more exclusive than membership in a faction or a council; some men also secured offices denoting specific responsibilities held exclusively by their individual holders. In Lamu, a *mwinyi mui* “town trustee” presided over the town council, but the office rotated between the two factions every few years. Instead of rotating the offices in Mombasa, the Tissia Taifa and Thelatha Taifa in the eighteenth century both appointed a *tamim* to represent their interests to the Omani *liwalis* to whom they were becoming subordinate. These and other offices tended to be hereditary within particular lineages, though other offices also required special expertise among the eligible candidates. So, for instance, Pouwels noted that most coastal towns had a “guardian of the soil” who determined the proper time to plant crops through the keeping of a solar calendar.<sup>99</sup> A *mkuu wa pwani* “grandee of the beach” (St. Sw.) who divined the proper time to set sail on trading expeditions was also common. Coastal councils often included a *qadi* “Islamic judge” (Ar.) with whom they consulted to resolve difficult disputes, as Ibn Battuta reported at Mogadishu in the

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<sup>98</sup> They would have been gathered with an *mbiu ya mgambo* “public proclamation horn,” usually a water buffalo horn. Frederick Johnson, *A Standard Swahili English Dictionary: (founded on Madan’s Swahili-English Dictionary)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 11; under entry for *amba*.

<sup>99</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 91. The title varied from location to location, *mvyale* “native (lit. person who has been born)” in Zanzibar, *mwizi* “powerful person” in Pemba, *mwinyi mkuu* “grand trustee” in Tumbatu, and *jumbe la wakulima* “chief of farming” in Pate.



fourteenth century.<sup>100</sup> Among inland communities the *mwana ngira* or simply *nangira* “child of the path” (MK) was remembered as a nickname for the clan who removed fallen trees from paths in the town.<sup>101</sup> But Spear also suggested it was an office for an ambassador who represented the interests of their confederation to other clan confederations along the ways thus opened.<sup>102</sup>

The most venerated offices included *shehe* “sheikh” (St. Sw.), *mfalme* “king” (St. Sw.), and *mwana* “queen” (St. Sw.), and *kubo* “king” (Dg). One lineage at Vumba Kuu even dominated local politics enough to shift the meaning of *diwan*, connoting authority, from “council” to “hereditary leader.” Such traditions of centralized authority may have been the exaggerations of proud descendants of the claimants. Al-Mas’udi, who mentioned the *wafalme* in the tenth century wrote “he is chosen to govern them justly. If he is tyrannical or strays from the truth, they kill him and exclude his seed from the throne.”<sup>103</sup> Thus while each of these “royal” offices were hereditary, they likely indicated the honor accorded to the founding lineages of towns rather than centralized political authority.<sup>104</sup> Even sultans at Kilwa and Mogadishu, entrepôts where they used their control over commercial exchanges to claim singular authority over dealings with ancestors, and pass it along to their lineal descendants, rulers depended on their councils

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<sup>100</sup> While Ibn Battuta does not mention *qadis* at the other port towns, he describes the residents of Mombasa as Muslims who follow that Shafi’i rite. This observation could suggest the way in which worshippers held their arms during prayer or the presence of *ulama* capable of discerning between the four legal traditions (*maddhabs*) of Islamic Law.

<sup>101</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 44.

<sup>102</sup> Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 72.

<sup>103</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> Horton and Middleton, *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*, 175–178.

in local mediations. Portuguese sources suggest that aspirants to the office of Sultan in Kilwa who failed to garner wide support often suffered exile in Mombasa or another accommodating distant town.

Councils, factions, titles, and offices, each more exclusive than the preceding ones in this listing, represent just some of the strategies with which patricians distinguished themselves from their peers and their followers. These associations maintained their authority through their ability to achieve consensus, as symbolized in feasts, dance competitions, and annual ceremonies that acknowledged the clans' distinct contributions to their clan confederations. The exclusive offices that initiated cycles and planting, sailing, and other activities drew on the propriety knowledge of clans that ensured a livelihood for clan members and sustainability for the clan confederation. But patricians also acquired new forms of knowledge such as Islamic laws and the oathing ordeals through which they mediated disputes among clans. The associations they assembled to guard this knowledge embodied their authority not only as representatives of their clan to outsiders but also as the guardians and patrons over their clan confederations.

## **Conclusion**

As settlers filled the landscapes of eastern Kenya with new commercially oriented towns and villages after 1000 CE, they adapted their lineages and clans to adjudicate competing claims to increasingly scarce land. The trustees who protected access to the clans' corporate resources of knowledge directed their gains into investments into the community, and local brokers helped translate local resources into prized products imported from overseas. These trustees and brokers acquired the privileged status of

patricians as they used their stewardship over local resources to accumulate material wealth. But, continuing their ancestors' commitment to expertise as complementary rather than competitive, they organized councils whose members were drawn from several of the custodians of inherited clan knowledge. The feasts sponsored by (and required of) these councils demonstrated the commitment of clan members to the communities of which they were parts and dissuaded wealthy individuals among them from seeking autonomy or personal power. Only by joining the councils could they acquire the regalia and knowledge that other clans also acknowledged as authoritative. In addition, these distributions of responsibilities and privileges helped bind multiple settlements together in clan confederations whose members could rely upon one another for support and safety as they moved with trade goods throughout the region to engage communities otherwise unrelated to their own.

When town patricians and their followers expanded the reach of their clan confederations beyond their capitals, they inevitably clashed with other patricians who were also in the process of consolidating their own clans into confederations. As clan confederations competed over land onto which they could establish affiliated villages, conflicts became more common and settlers situated towns and villages with a greater concern for security, even as they continued to seek productive land. Coastal communities built walls of coral around their towns or moved to nearby islands, while those in the interior began situating their settlements in dense hill-top forests with good

views out over the surrounding terrain.<sup>105</sup> While people clustered in these newly fortified towns as refuges in times of war, they did not abandon the scattered towns and villages whose resources sustained the regional networks of exchange.

The strategies that patricians in the coastal towns elaborated to achieve consensus while also competing with one another reflect strategies of governance throughout Africa.<sup>106</sup> Though the clans in the same town occasionally united to raid or declare war against neighboring clan confederations, coercive violence was rare among themselves. Instead, patricians formed associations that drew their memberships from each clan and benefitted from the proprietary knowledges of all. These associations of multiple complementing contributions normally prevented any single individual from acquiring power. Fees too expensive to pay without the support of one's clan or lineage guarded the exclusive knowledge of councils and title societies and channeled the competition for prestige and influence towards attaining ritual and mediating responsibilities that were valuable for the community. Those who violated the trust placed in these associations by seeking personal gain were rightly condemned as "witches" for threatening the common interests of the clan confederation. Thus, instead of accumulating and hoarding personal wealth, patricians redistributed it to reinforce the patronage networks that constituted the clan confederation. Although the "stone houses" that concealed material wealth at the coast and the groves where the *vaya* society assembled for private feasts violated these principles, they also reinforced an ethic that obvious distinctions in wealth should be

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<sup>105</sup> Helm, "Conflicting Histories."

<sup>106</sup> Fleisher and Wynne-Jones, "Authorisation and the Process of Power."

hidden. Instead of adopting the competitive ethics and procedures of commercial markets, patricians domesticated their contacts with Indian Ocean commerce by bringing overseas merchants into their homes and distributing imported products to their followers as gifts.

Although clan confederations competed with one another, they also developed partnerships that ensured that inland commodities reached the coast and imported products reached them in return. However, the physical proximity of coastal merchants to the Indian Ocean and their commitment to Islam gave them preferential access to foreign merchants, most of whom were Muslim, and the products they carried. Shared Islamic practices provided opportunities for coastal patricians and foreign merchants to forge relationships of trust. In contrast, exchanges with the communities inland from Mombasa were founded on extended relationships conceptualized in terms of kinship. For example, these historic ties of kinship are recalled in the modern Mijikenda ethnonym for Swahili speakers: *Adzomba*, the Kiswahili term for “maternal uncle” that implies the respect due to an affine. Thus kinship and longstanding friendship, rather than religious communion, served as the foundation and motivation for inland communities to do business with Muslim patricians at the coast.<sup>107</sup>

Military posturing helped ensure that distant relations remembered their obligations of respect, particularly as coastal towns increasingly oriented themselves away from inland communities and towards their Indian Ocean suppliers after 1500 CE.

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<sup>107</sup> Mutoro and Abungu, *Coast-Interior settlements and social relations in Kenya*, 699.

Instead of the gradual divergence of languages that accompanies population drift into new ecologies, coastal communities—by then distinguished by Kiswahili dialects, stone architecture, superior access to imported products and commodities, and the potentially unifying practices of Islam—started assembling communities that pointedly excluded their inland counterparts. This process of differentiating the coast as a coherent and distinct cultural group was first intimated by their identification of inland peoples as *kaffirs* “unbelievers” (St. Sw. < Ar.) to fifteenth-century Portuguese explorers. However, instead of uniting against the inland communities on whom their commercial strategies depended, coastal clan confederations competed with one another. Only under pressure from imperial governments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did coastal communities begin to distance themselves from inland alliances and draw on their shared Muslim identities to imagine their coastal communities as a single civilization.

## Chapter 6

### Dancing with Swords:

#### Military Alliances and Age-Sets, ca. 1500 – 1837

*Mviṭa, what an awesome place it is /  
it has warlike men who spoil for a fight.*

- Muyaka bin Mwinyi Haji

The bright clang of swordplay in the square of Riyadhha Mosque added to the festive din that drew thousands of Muslim pilgrims to Lamu's Maulidi celebration in March 2010. Dressed in white *kanzus* and rubber sandals, two men wielded swords passed down for generations in a mock fight. The younger of the two bounded across the square towards the elder, timing his strides to the beat of accompanying drums and horns; just before they met, they paused for a few moments before striking their swords together. Then the young man retreated to the edge of the roped-off square for another round. To the side of the swordsmen and drummers, men and boys stood in a line wearing *kanzus* and *kofias* and swayed to the directions of their chorus leader in a graceful dance.<sup>1</sup>

The Maulidi festival at Lamu celebrates both the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and the life of Habib Swaleh, a Sufi saint of Comorian and Hadrami descent who broke

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<sup>1</sup> Videorecordings of these dances are available in E010 Lamu Maulid Activities Sponsored by Riyadhha Mosque, Ray Research Deposit, Audio-Visual Department, Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, Kenya.

local patricians' monopoly over Islamic sciences in the late-nineteenth century by teaching them to the poor.<sup>2</sup> In memory of this saintly reformer, Muslim men from throughout East Africa followed his family in a *ziyara* "visit" (St. Sw. < Ar.) to his grave, then performed dances and songs in praise of the Prophet Muhammad as they returned to Riyadhha Mosque.<sup>3</sup> In the late evening, the boisterous square with clanging swords became an extension of the crowded mosque as the men gathered for a communal reading of a *maulidi* text that narrated the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Though Habib Swaleh and his followers had little use for violence in their day, Lamu's residents took up swords a few generations earlier to defend their town against the combined forces of Mombasa, Giriama, and Pate. Perhaps because there are no celebrations or speeches to commemorate Lamu's past victories, men with vague notions of their military heritage often find ways to insert some swordplay into other celebrations. For instance, young Swahili men enjoyed a game of stick fighting outside a wedding when I visited Pate in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Drummers accompanied the bout as sparring partners circled each other in long sideways strides. Each combatant held his left arm against his stick to steady it against his opponents' blows while looking for his own opportunity to

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<sup>2</sup> Anne K. Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925*, Indian Ocean Series (New York: Routledge, 2003); Anne K. Bang, "Islamic Reform in East Africa c. 1870-1925: The Alawi Case," in *Reasserting Connections, Commonalities, and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Indian Ocean Since 1800* (presented at the Reasserting Connections, Commonalities, and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Indian Ocean since 1800, Yale University, 2000); Enseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Sufi Muslims make such visits in order to partake of the *baraka* "grace, spiritual power" of their saints. For a discussion of East African perspectives on *baraka* see Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 68–72.

<sup>4</sup> Video recording available in "E016 Pate Island Tour," Ray Research Deposit, Audio-Visual Department, Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, Kenya.



strike a hip or shin. The play was temporarily interrupted when an older man angrily seized the drum, but the young men managed to take it back from him and continue their fun. Later, at a museum-sponsored cultural festival in Malindi, young Swahili men dressed in *kanzus* appeared near the end of the festivities with their sword length sticks to conduct a mock melee battle. Their sudden appearance in the evening had the air of spontaneity—the dancers from other ethnic groups had performed all day in the field, separated into designated squares and called one by one to perform.<sup>5</sup> In Makunduchi, Zanzibar such stick fights were a vital part of their Swahili New Year celebrations until the British advisors of the Sultan banned the practice in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> In recent years participants have resumed the fights but substitute long palm frond braids for their sticks as they fight local rivals in mock battles during the festivities.<sup>7</sup> At Mombasa, men also used to perform a sword dance called *diriji* at weddings, circumcisions, and Swahili New Year.<sup>8</sup>

The sword dances and games that Swahili men inherited from their ancestors are reminders of the regional rivalries over supremacy in eastern Kenya that clan confederations pursued from the fifteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> Clan

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<sup>5</sup> E013 Malindi Cultural Festival, Ray Research Deposit, Audio-Visual Department, Fort Jesus Museum, Mombasa, Kenya.

<sup>6</sup>Rinn, “Mwaka Koga.”

<sup>7</sup>Ulrich Rinn, “Mwaka Koga: The Development of Sincretistic Rituals in a Globalising World,” in *Unpacking the New: Critical Perspectives on Cultural Syncretization in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Afe Adogame, Magnus Echter, and Ulf Vierke (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 363.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Mirza and Margaret Strobel, *Three Swahili Women: Life Histories from Mombasa, Kenya* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 58; Swartz, *The Way the World Is*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Classic treatments of this era focus on foreign actors; Michael N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, Portugal in the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, eds., *History of East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

confederations in Mombasa, Malindi, Pate, and Lamu had initiated their feuds in previous centuries as they competed to attract visiting merchants and the imports they carried. Their raids on one another for trade goods prompted many communities to relocate to more defensible positions or build fortifications. For example, most of the clans residing in Malindi relocated to Mombasa in 1624, and Pedro Barretto de Rezende of Portugal reported in 1634 that the residents of Mombasa Island built a wall to guard the northwest crossing point from the mainland at Makupa.<sup>10</sup> The serpentine wall surrounding the ruins of Gede may have served defensive purposes as well as distinguishing wealthy town patrons from their clients. Mijikenda oral traditions also recall wars among inland clan confederations that prompted refugees to seek shelter among other clans.<sup>11</sup> Although captives from these raids occasionally suffered exile through enslavement to ocean-going merchants, they also relied on kin to ransom them or joined the lineages and clans of their captors.<sup>12</sup>

Clan confederations began to draw foreigners into their local conflicts at the end of the fifteenth century, and the newcomers' involvement escalated the scale of violence and introduced novel strategies of governance. From the sixteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries CE, local oligarchies adapted Portuguese and Omani methods of

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1968); Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders: From Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1938).

<sup>10</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 177.

<sup>11</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*.

<sup>12</sup> Freeman-Grenville noted the startling lack of slave exports north of Kilwa on the East African coast until the eighteenth century; in any case the trade in slaves did not warrant enough attention from Portuguese officials to collect customs on. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, "The Coast, 1498-1840," in *History of East Africa*, ed. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 152–155.

extracting customs and taxes from defeated rivals in other towns. And local elders adopted age-set strategies from Mosseguejo immigrants from the interior to control younger men and formalize alliances with other clan confederations. The contribution of Oromo migrants, who spoke unintelligible dialects, depopulated villages, and stole cattle, were more complex. As refugees from Oromo raids joined communities throughout eastern Kenya, they named the invaders “Galla” and the “Galla threat” became a widespread trope that elders coopted to shore up support for the clan confederations that they led. Tales of Galla atrocities thus helped promote a shared regional identity among the differentiated confederations of eastern Kenya besieged by the violence of the immigrants, and strategies introduced by immigrants that promoted new inequalities.

### **Settled Towns and Shifting Countrysides**

Although the residents of eastern Kenya endured (and waged) much warfare during the early modern era, they continued to make substantial investments in founding and sustaining settlements. However, after 1650, most inland residents left their towns and began living in groups of homesteads (*lalo* “location” [MK]) distributed throughout southeast Kenya, including the dry *nyika* plains to the west of the inland ridge.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, residents at the coast continued their earlier practice of establishing small villages between the anchor towns. Villagers specialized in fishing, trapping shellfish, harvesting seaweed and mangroves, or producing crafts that they could bring to towns for

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<sup>13</sup> Helm, “Conflicting Histories,” 291.

trade.<sup>14</sup> Although towns on the coast were sometimes larger compared to those inland, the distinction between an urban coast and a rural hinterland took hold only in the twentieth century. Until then, cultivators farmed fields and tended fruit trees on Mombasa Island, and inland towns continued to flourish as densely populated centers of patronage.<sup>15</sup>

While many residents moved out to live in small villages or homesteads, they continued to affiliate with the clan confederations whose towns loomed large in the landscape. Among the thirteen collective names listed in the Mombasa Chronicle collected by Captain William Owen in 1823, eight of them survive as the names of the clan confederations that constitute the modern Mijikenda ethnic group.<sup>16</sup> Residents had articulated some of these names centuries earlier. For example, Portuguese visitors to Mombasa in the sixteenth century occasionally mentioned a location called “Arabaja,” a clear transliteration of Rabai.<sup>17</sup> The enduring commitment of modern communities to these places and names is a testament that they located their towns at strategic locations

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<sup>14</sup> Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*, 58. Middleton refers to these settlements as country towns and distinguishes them as satellites to the urban stone towns focused on commerce with hinterland and Indian Ocean traders.

<sup>15</sup> Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, 40–41; Karim Kassam Janmohamed, “A History of Mombasa, c.1894 - 1939: Some Aspects of Economic and Social Life in an East African Port Town During Colonial Rule” (PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978), 266–269.

<sup>16</sup> Owen’s list (and their modern designations) include Muta, Tiv, Ribah (Ribe), Shuunt, Kaambah (Kambe or Kamba), Cauma (Kauma), Jibaana (Jibana), Rabayi (Rabai), Jiryamah (Giriama), Darumah-Mutawi (Duruma), Shibah, Lughuh, and Diju (Digo); other Portuguese accounts name Chone (Chonyi). Thomas Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia: Performed in His Majesty’s Ships Leven and Barracouta from 1821 to 1825 Under the Command of Capt. F.W. Owen, R.N.*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1835).

<sup>17</sup> Today, Rabai refers to both a district of Kenya and the people who live there (called Arabai). Some other sixteenth-century place names Portuguese pronounced /j/ as /y/ (e.g. Cajamorca = /kayamorca/, hence Arabaja = /arabaya/ < arabai ). Antonio Boccardo, *Decada 13 Da Historia Da India*, vol. I (Lisbon, 1876) quoted in R. F. Morton, “The Shungwaya Myth of Mijikenda Origins: A Problem of Late Nineteenth-Century Kenya Coastal History,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, no. 3 (1972): 404.

that allowed them to prosper despite political, economic, and ecological challenges over the past four centuries. Residents even named their dialects after these enduring towns, Kimvita for Mombasa (Mvita), ChiJomvu for Jomvu, Chirabai for Rabai and so on.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to these town names, sixteenth-century Portuguese writers identified Mosseguejos who allied with the clan confederations of Malindi. This name has been retained today by Segeju communities, a small ethnic group which straddles the Kenya-Tanzania border. The ancestors of modern Segeju communities spoke a Central Kenya Bantu language, but their descendants have since adopted southern Mijikenda dialects. Their documented presence near Malindi in the seventeenth century and around the Tanzanian-Kenya border in the twentieth century suggests that they are at least partly responsible for the wide distribution of Central Kenya Bantu loanwords that the speakers of Mijikenda dialects adopted in recent centuries.<sup>19</sup> Kamba speakers, the only other Central Kenya Bantu group resident in eastern Kenya, arrived later in the nineteenth century.

While several collective names from this era have endured into the present, others have been replaced or forgotten. For instance the earliest Portuguese writers referred to inland residents as Mozungullos, a name without a modern equivalent. The name may be derived from the Kiswahili verb *-zungulia*, “to go around for someone or something,” a derivation that accords with the documented propensity of rural residents frequently to

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<sup>18</sup> The rate of vocabulary change among Kiswahili dialects suggests about a four century time-scale for the divergence of Northern Kiswahili into modern dialects; more data is necessary to determine the divergence into Mijikenda’s modern dialects. See Appendix 3.

<sup>19</sup> Walsh, “Segeju Complex.”

relocate their homes.<sup>20</sup> European missionaries recorded in the nineteenth century that residents often abandoned small settlements only to reoccupy them in succeeding years. Missionaries noted that some inland towns were left unoccupied during the farming seasons when residents dispersed to homesteads close to their fields. For example, on entering Chonyi, Charles New remarked:

This was a large township containing several hundreds of huts, and all in good repair. But it was empty. . . . [At sunset] a couple of young men made their appearance. They informed us that the people were all living in their plantations, and that they only visited the *kaya* on special occasions.<sup>21</sup>

Frequent resettling was a long-standing practice that residents used to mitigate the disruptions of droughts and replenish exhausted soils. The practice may have intensified as cultivators adopted techniques and crops from new immigrants to the region. Mosseguejos helped Mijikenda speakers elaborate their techniques for cattle husbandry, Portuguese introduced maize and cassava from the Americas, and Arab migrants popularized the consumption of rice among wealthy merchants at the coast—though most of the rice they consumed was produced on Pemba Island rather than on the mainland.<sup>22</sup>

The relatively rapid addition of maize and cassava to their crop inventories after 1500 CE

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<sup>20</sup> The verb is derived from the root *-zungu-* “to go around” and the prepositional suffix *-li-*, which implies the verb is done on behalf of someone, for an intended purpose, or toward a particular location. The idea of a ceaseless wanderer may be precisely what early speakers meant when they referred to Europeans as *Wazungu*, based on the same root. *Wazungu* is now taken to mean “white person.”

<sup>21</sup> New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*.

<sup>22</sup> Walsh, “Segeju Complex”; Sarah Croucher, “Plantations on Zanzibar: An Archaeological Approach to Complex Identities” (PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 2006).

also encouraged the cultivators who supplied the towns to farm new areas as they experimented with different soils in which the new crops could flourish; maize in particular exhausted soils faster than earlier crops of sorghum and millet and would have required more frequent relocation.<sup>23</sup>

The adoption of new settlement patterns in the seventeenth century coincided with these innovations in food production. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries some residents began occupying the arid *nyika* plains to the west of the inland escarpment, since the drier climate was unfavorable to disease vectors that threatened cattle in moister areas. Their mastery of the *nyika* environment and its resources prompted the adoption of a new generic name for all inland clan confederations as *Wanyika* “people of the bush”; the Portuguese spelled the name “Vanikat” and regarded it as a synonym for Mozungulos.<sup>24</sup> Portuguese descriptions of penned cattle on Mombasa Island suggest that herders not only accumulated cattle for their own needs but also exchanged them with coastal communities. However, they continued cultivating fields as well, unlike the several Maa-speaking communities to the southwest, who abandoned cultivation in favor of specialized pastoralism. Cattle provided a means for lineages to accumulate wealth, but the wide range of cultivation techniques their ancestors had developed ensured sustainability for their wider clan confederations.

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<sup>23</sup> Waaijenberg, “Mijikenda Agriculture, Kenya, 1850-1985: Tradition and Change.” Centuries of experimentation have led farmers to adopt inter-cropping techniques that mitigate the nutrient losses in soils.

<sup>24</sup> The Mortier map of Mombasa directly associated the Mozungulos with the Nyika in 1700, labeling the inland as “Mozungulos ou Nyika.” *Supplement to the Neptune Francais*.

The expanded husbandry of cattle was sustained by demand for beef throughout eastern Kenya that the trustees of clans exchanged for rights to land and which they consumed during the communal ceremonies that reinforced their authority. According to a Kiswahili chronicle that narrates the founding of Rabai, incoming settlers paid the nearby community of Jomvu ten cows, a few hundred *reales* (Portuguese coins), four measures of ground rice, and twenty coconuts for permission to reside on the five hills overlooking the tidal creek. At the conclusion of a procession to the hills the new settlers slaughtered three additional cows, one of which they fed to the elders of Jomvu who had accompanied them to show the way. The writer of the chronicle even claimed that the name Rabai is derived from *kurabiwa* “to be ruled over (literally ‘to be overlorded’)” in reference to the fees that they paid as tokens of their status as newcomers.<sup>25</sup>

Although the residents of Rabai deny that they purchased their land from Jomvu—as it would imply that the Jomvu residents retained some privileges as the original owners of the land—the chronicle suggests one of the strategies that residents in eastern Kenya used to establish peaceful relations with their neighbors as they founded towns, villages, and homesteads in increasingly dense areas, even as they distinguished one another’s communities according to the order in which they arrived. The Kiswahili chronicle of Rabai also notes that the migrants were seeking a new place to settle in order

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<sup>25</sup> Midani bin Mwidada, “The Founding of Rabai: A Swahili Chronicle,” trans. Lyndon Harries, *Swahili* 30 (1960): 140–49. Since this chronicle was first written in the nineteenth century this strategy of exchanging land for animals, cash, and food may not date to the early modern period, but an increasing ritual and exchange value for cattle would partially explain why some Mijikenda-speaking communities began focusing on cattle husbandry.



to avoid fighting with foraging communities, known as Ndorobo and Lawa.<sup>26</sup> Although many residents started moving out to countryside homesteads or seaside villages to experiment with new production techniques, they maintained their affiliations with clan confederations in fortified towns to ensure they could trade and find refuge in times of war.

Unfortunately, towns were also a convenient focus of attack, particularly at the coast, where merchants hoarded trade goods in expectation of future exchanges rather than redistributing them immediately to clients. In addition to the occasionally hostile Mosseguejos and Mozungullos, Portuguese visitors reported that “cannibals” whom they called the Zimba sacked Mombasa in 1589. Portuguese mariners seem to have conflated these attackers with other putative cannibals whom they had encountered in Mozambique hundreds of miles to the south; more likely, local inland warriors assisted in sacking and looting Mombasa—as the Mozungullos often threatened to do if not supplied with what they deemed a sufficient quantity of textiles.<sup>27</sup> Inland traders arranged most exchanges in coastal towns through their ties of clientage with merchants there. However, when personal patrons failed inland merchants, they also used the resources of their clan confederations to make collective demands backed up by military force.

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<sup>26</sup> In Mijikenda traditions the Ndorobo and Lawa, or Laa, feature as foraging communities who directed them to good locations for their towns (Thomas T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation: The Mijikenda of Kenya* [Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1981], 49).

<sup>27</sup> James Kirkman, “The Muzungulos of Mombasa,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 73–82, doi:10.2307/217913; in 1634, Pedro Barretto de Rezende reported that the Portuguese contingent gave the Mozungullos twenty-five score of linen cloth” annually (Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 180, 185).

The Christian missionary John Ludwig Krapf—though writing in the nineteenth century—described a practice known as *heshima* “respect” (St. Sw. < Ar) that illustrates well how traders could rely on the military potential of their clan confederations to assure parity with their trade partners.

The Wanicas were accustomed of old, to receive a stranger whom they had not seen before, with a great *heshima*, i.e. with show and shouting, with giving him a present and receiving another in return. . . . all the great merchants of Mombas[a] always resigned themselves to this custom.<sup>28</sup>

In another note, Krapf records that they “displayed their *heshima* by shouting, dancing, *brandishing their swords and bows*, and all the show of joy, which they manifest on extraordinary occasions.”<sup>29</sup> Clearly, the *heshima* showcased the military power of the clan confederations: the young warriors met strangers outside the palisaded gates of the fortified town displaying weapons and shouting warnings, and the traders presented their gifts as if they were appeasements, thus acknowledgements of local authority. But strangers, presumably if they had gifts to exchange, were also given presents before being led into the town. In this way, the residents of a town signaled their right to deal lethally with whomever might approach their refuge but also invited and encouraged exchange relationships on the basis of the mutual wariness appropriate with strangers. The

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<sup>28</sup> J.L. Krapf, “Revd Dr Krapf’s Journal,” 25 Sept 1844, Church Missionary Society Archive (CMS), Microfilm, Section IV, African Missions, Part 16, Reel 317, p. 497; pagination follows the original copies with some later dates preceding earlier dates.

<sup>29</sup> Krapf, “Journal,” 25 Sept 1844, 500, emphasis mine; also see New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 79.

occasional sieges and raids against Mombasa that Portuguese visitors recorded suggest that clan confederations did not limit their warriors to defensive activities.

Though it is difficult to determine exactly when the local practice of *heshima* began, Krapf noted that the same coastal traders who endured *heshima* in the Wanyika towns never bothered presenting gifts to the Kamba, Central Kenya Bantu-speakers who entered eastern Kenya in the nineteenth century as caravans in search of ivory established regular routes between the coast and the interior.<sup>30</sup> This exclusion of the recent Kamba from the formalities otherwise observed if one visited the Wanyika suggests *heshima* was an older custom. In addition, Krapf notes that the Wanyika had articulated a verbal form of the word (*-ishima* “to honour”). This adaptation of an Arabic word into the local system of grammar suggests they had adopted the concept a relatively long time before Krapf came to the region. Since they had little direct contact with Arab traders, it would have been borrowed indirectly through Kiswahili speakers. In addition, loanwords take time to be altered to fit the borrowing language’s grammatical system, the amount of time varying by the extent to which borrowers use the word. Exchanging gifts with potential partners from other communities likely established a framework for personal trust among the clan confederations of eastern Kenya long before Krapf observed the practice. These exchanges among clan confederations and the alliances they established did not necessarily reduce violent skirmishes in the region; rather, clan confederations drew upon

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<sup>30</sup> Krapf, “Journal,” 30 Jan 1845, 589.

their widening military alliances to pursue more ambitious projects of political consolidation.

### **Introducing Hierarchies and Inequalities: Tributes, Rulers, and Age-sets**

The migrants who entered eastern Kenya militarily in the sixteenth century from Oman, Portugal, and Southern Somalia disrupted the dynamics of exchange and patronage among the region's clan confederations and soon acquired reputations for violence. Omani immigrants are remembered as exploiters who alienated land from locals and introduced chattel slavery; the Mombasa poet Muyaka taunted them as vermin.<sup>31</sup> Portuguese records describe the Mosseguejos as bloodthirsty warriors; an ironic observation from Portuguese captains whose own soldiers razed and pillaged Mombasa on three occasions.<sup>32</sup> The sternest accusations are levelled against Oromo-speaking immigrants known pejoratively as "Galla": they accosted women on their way to fetch water and stabbed spears through the walls of grass huts while people slept.<sup>33</sup> Although the exploits of these militant immigrants disrupted trade and forced expensive investments to relocate or rebuild towns, clan confederations also enlisted these newcomers in their rivalries with one another.

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<sup>31</sup> Randall L. Pouwels, "The Battle of Shela: The Climax of an Era and a Point of Departure in the Modern History of the Kenya Coast (La Bataille de Shela, Apogée D'une Époque et Début de L'histoire Moderne de La Région Côtière Du Kenya)," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 31, no. 123 (January 1, 1991): 379n59; Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 132.

<sup>32</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 70, 75.

Clan confederations welcomed the additional personnel, novel and effective military strategies, and superior weaponry and tactics that migrants provided. In particular they adopted hierarchical methods of rule over subordinate communities. Documentary evidence suggests that Portuguese and Omani migrants introduced customs on trade and taxes on land and slaves as methods for extracting regular payments from defeated rivals. Clan confederations then continued to collect these taxes for their own benefit after they escaped the patronage of foreign benefactors in the mid-eighteenth century. In addition, loanwords and oral traditions suggest how Segeju-speaking migrants from the interior introduced a formal generational hierarchy known as *rika* “age-sets.” The rankings according to generation meant that membership in the ruling age-set became a requirement for joining the associations that organized and directed the collective efforts of clan confederations, alongside the previous requirements of personal generosity (as an expression of wealth and social commitment) and membership within a constituent clan. Elders also coordinated the timings of initiations into these age-sets with allies to formalize their alliances with one another. These alliances generally implied a senior-junior ranking; for example, the Ribe confederation insisted that the Giriama confederation receive their approval before commencing initiations.

Meanwhile, the foreign dialects and frequent hostility of the Oromo-speaking pastoralists fostered a wider sense of shared identity among elders, just as they were attempting to organize wider political alliances with one another. The distinction between a local “son of the soil” and foreigners was nothing new; however, with the arrival of Oromo intruders, clan confederations in eastern Kenya recognized that they held more in

common with one another as the invaders entered the lands of all. Elders lauded those who held to the common customs centered on the towns and lambasted the ungrateful and foolish men who sought autonomy in the countrysides.

Thus, the violent arrivals from overseas and from the interior introduced new dynamics marked by political subordination among inland and coastal communities. The resulting rivalries, three of them in particular, led local communities to request alliances of protection with the immigrants: the Malindi-Mombasa rivalry gave Portugal a foothold on the coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Pate-Mombasa rivalry of the eighteenth century experimented with innovations for consolidating political and economic control over subordinate communities, and the Lamu-Mombasa rivalry in the early nineteenth century opened the door to Omani imperial rule over the coast. Though documentary evidence details the coastal dimensions of these rivalries, they also affirm that the military alliances included inland communities as well: the merchants of Lamu Island and their Bajuni clients on the mainland fought together against Mombasa's patricians and their Wanyika partners. The alliance centered on Mombasa nearly achieved its goal of regional consolidation in the early nineteenth century. But Omani Sultan Seyyid Sa'id squashed their ambitions by incorporating their dominions into a wider patronage network that extended from Lamu in the north to Kilwa in the south.

#### *Overseas Customs*

Notwithstanding the purported abuses of the Portuguese captains and Omani governors who claimed to rule the coasts of East Africa from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, their local allies often regarded them as legitimate protectors. The

clans of Malindi relied in the sixteenth century on Portugal to defend them against Mombasa's raids and profited from their loyalty in the form of shared bounty by Portuguese captains and, later, a portion of customs revenues from their southern rival. Mombasa called upon Yarubi Omani Imams in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to regain their autonomy from Portuguese occupation. And Lamu escaped Mombasa's dominion with the assistance of Busaidi Omani sultans in the nineteenth century. Kiswahili chronicles reserve the term *himaya* "protection, guardianship" (< Ar. حماية) to describe how overseas rulers protected coastal towns, while they use the idioms *chini ya taa yake* "under his light" or *katika taa yake* "in his light" to refer to the influence of the patricians who successfully claimed singular authority as sultans or sheikhs over the councils that governed local affairs, at least in chronicles written centuries after the supposed dynasties had lapsed.<sup>34</sup>

The merchants of Mombasa rebuffed the first Portuguese ships under Captain Vasco da Gama that reached East Africa in 1498. Their correspondents in Kilwa had apparently warned Mombasa that the Portuguese ships had nothing of value to trade and had kidnapped someone to serve as a pilot. When Captain Dom Francisco D'Almeida returned in 1505 and demanded tribute on behalf of the king of Portugal, Mombasa's residents refused, only to have the Portuguese pillage their towns as they fled to the mainland. Although they soon rebuilt the town, they submitted to annual extortions for twenty years by the Portuguese, who asserted their demand for tribute and tried (mostly

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<sup>34</sup> Alice Werner, "Swahili History of Pate," *Journal of the African Society* 14 (1914): 148–61, 278–97, 392–413; Shaibu Faraji bin Hamed al-Bakariy al-Lamuy, "Khabar al-Lamu: A Chronicle of Lamu," trans. William Hichens, *Bantu Studies* 12 (1938): 1–33.

without success) to monopolize trade to the exclusion of other merchants. Mombasa's residents challenged Portuguese demands in 1528 by limiting the size of their landing party and refusing to pay tribute, but Captain Nuño da Cunha responded by razing Mombasa again. For the following six decades, Mombasa merchants paid the tributes without a major incident. Meanwhile, Portuguese appointees focused their efforts on siphoning revenue from the gold trade at Kilwa and establishing a colony in India at Goa; their visits to Mombasa were short and their monopolies ineffective, so their impact on daily life in Mombasa was minimal.

The Portuguese captains' brazen provocations against Mombasa endeared them to the clan confederation of Malindi, Mombasa's rival to the north. They always provided a safe harbor to Portuguese ships and treated Portuguese enemies with hostility. Malindi dutifully paid tributes as a vassal of the Portuguese crown, and Portuguese captains occasionally shared booty with them from their exploits along the East African coast.<sup>35</sup> Malindi also counted on the Portuguese for protection from other coastal towns such as Pate, Lamu, and Kilifi that did not share Malindi's enthusiasm for them. Like Mombasa, these towns were unsuccessful at preventing the Portuguese from extorting tributes. Though raiding expeditions played some part in local rivalries, they had focused most of their efforts on attracting visiting merchants with favorable terms of trade; they could not resist the firepower of ship-mounted cannons.

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<sup>35</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 104.



Although the foreigners relied on violence to enforce their collection of tribute, they also relied heavily on their purported subjects, who retained much of their autonomy. The Portuguese captains, and Omani *liwalis* of Mombasa often found (or hoped to find) willing allies on the mainland; as when Portuguese soldiers received much needed supplies from the Chone (i.e. Chonyi) clan confederation inland from Mtwapa.<sup>36</sup> Even on Mombasa Island, where Portuguese captains and commandants asserted their authority through violence more successfully than elsewhere along the coast, residents generally carried on with their business while allowing their ostensible rulers to siphon off some of their profits through paying custom dues.

The Pate Chronicle identifies custom dues as a Portuguese innovation, though the Arabic-derived term *forodha* is now more common in Kiswahili than the Portuguese-derived *fandika*.<sup>37</sup> The centralized customs regimes imposed first by Portuguese and Omani rulers interfered in the flows of local commodities and foreign imports through the coastal brokers' patronage networks. Previously, brokers managed private trades conducted in their elaborate stone houses. They collected commodities from their inland partners to store, then hosted visiting merchants in their foyers. After brokering an exchange of their ivory, foodstuffs, or gum copal for their guests' cloth, porcelain, brass, or other finished products, they kept some of their acquisitions for their own lineage and distributed a part to their inland partners to assure further resources to sell or discharge

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<sup>36</sup> Kirkman, "The Muzungulos of Mombasa," 80.

<sup>37</sup> Alfandagani is the name of a port in Pate, which more clearly demonstrates the Portuguese loan of *al-fandaga*, "customs" (Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 256; Werner, "Swahili History of Pate," 279).

their debts to inland suppliers. Brokers with aspirations to join councils for community leadership beyond their clan or lineage used imports to acquire the necessary fees (in the forms of livestock and other sundries) to host feasts, arrange marriage alliances, and seek seats on the local council that managed diplomacy with other towns. Collecting customs on imports introduced a strategy of extraction in which the Portuguese captains and Omani governors of Mombasa could profit personally without taking any of the risks inherent in commerce or investing in the relationships upon which brokers depended. The customs revenues collected at Mombasa were rarely sufficient to cover the costs of Portuguese operations on the coast, but by collecting them the Portuguese asserted their authority over Mombasa's external affairs.<sup>38</sup>

The first threat to Portuguese supremacy in the region came from Mirale Bey, a Turkish corsair who in 1588 offered Ottoman protection to the Muslim towns of East Africa. Predictably, Portugal's ally, Malindi, rejected his offer and tried to burn his boats; Mombasa welcomed the prospective alliance against the Portuguese. However, Mirale Bey did not have the support or resources of the empire he claimed to represent. When a Portuguese fleet arrived at Mombasa in March 1589, they burned his four boats and razed the town again. The Portuguese soldiers were assisted in their assault on Mombasa by the purported Zimba cannibals, who happened to be besieging Mombasa when the Portuguese ships arrived. Some sources suggest that the Zimba had depopulated the island. However, the Mombasa town of Mvita was in fact occupied and confident enough

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<sup>38</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 185.

to launch a raid on Malindi the following year, perhaps in an effort to reclaim some of the riches that the Portuguese captains had shared with their vassal. The outing ended in tragedy, as Malindi's Mosseguejo allies killed the town's eponymous leader Shehe Mvita.<sup>39</sup>

The immediate consequence of the Ottoman corsair's failure was continuous Portuguese occupation of Mombasa Island; they started building the massive Fort Jesus in 1593 and completed it three years later.<sup>40</sup> The fort and its cannons, located southeast of the main harbor at Mvita town, commanded the entrance to the harbor. Around the same time, a new clan confederation established the town of Kilindini on the southwest side of Mombasa Island, possibly at Portuguese urging; their protection would have been necessary to secure a settlement on the island outside the control of the island's established residents.<sup>41</sup> They claimed to be refugees from Oromo raids further north, and the French traveler Charles Guillain reported in the eighteenth century that they claimed origins in a place called Shungwaya.<sup>42</sup> Kilindini town soon rivaled Mvita town in population, suggesting that the number of refugees flooding into eastern Kenya was substantial. Mvita town's interests often conflicted with those of Kilindini, but they also

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<sup>39</sup> F. J. Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900," *The Journal of African History* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 1968): 45. The celebrants at Swahili New Year's Day at his grave instead consider Shehe Mvita to be a Muslim martyr executed by the Portuguese for rebellion.

<sup>40</sup> Reginald Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders: From Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Saidd*, England: Clarendon Press, 1938), 57-59.

<sup>41</sup> Berg suggests Kilindini town was established either in 1593 or 1632, once they could be sure that Mvita did not have the strength to push them off the island (Berg, "Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate," 41).

<sup>42</sup> Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900," 47n41.

cooperated with one another against Portugal, Oman, and other coastal towns in later centuries.

Both towns organized their clans into loose confederations headed by councils with representatives from each clan.<sup>43</sup> In the nineteenth century, when the influence of Omani Arabs was highest, they adopted the Arabic-derived names of the *Theletha Taifa* (Three Tribes) and *Tissia Taifa* (Nine Tribes).<sup>44</sup> The membership of the Kilindini confederation likely remained constant at three clans: Kilindini, Tangana, and Changamwe. But Mvita's membership fluctuated over the centuries as they incorporated several more clans, each named after their original homes: the original Mvita and Jomvu clans were joined by immigrating clans from Mtwapa, Kilifi, Pate, Shaka, Faza, Katwa (Somalia), and Bajun.<sup>45</sup>

Some clans from Malindi also relocated to Mvita town in 1593; like the Kilindini they relied on the Portuguese soldiers who occupied the island to protect them from local rivals. Hasan bin Ahmed, a leading elder in Malindi secured Portuguese recognition of himself and successors in his lineage as the "Shaykh of Malindi and Mombasa," a position which entitled him to one-third of the custom revenues that the Portuguese collected on trade. After a dispute in 1614 with the local Portuguese commandant over

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<sup>43</sup> Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900."

<sup>44</sup> The novelty of the names in the nineteenth century is suggested by Muyaka's poems; he prefers *wazyambo* "those who have land" or *mwana nti* "sons of the soil" to *Tissia Taifa* and *Theletha Taifa*, jointly known in the twentieth century as the *Ithnashara Taifa* (Twelve Tribes). For examples see Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 121, 152.

<sup>45</sup> Berg, "Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate," 69–73; Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 154–155. There are several discrepancies in the lists provided by Berg and Abdulaziz, despite the fact that both researchers relied on the same informant, Sheikh Hyder Mohamed al-Kindy.

dividing this revenue, he fled to Rabai seeking refuge; instead, his hosts murdered him to collect a bounty of 2000 pieces of cloth from his Portuguese rival. The long-time Mombasa partners of the Arabai may also have encouraged them to remove the shaykh, who, after all, was a rival who had gained his position by assisting the Portuguese intruders.

The Portuguese royal court at Lisbon attempted restitution for the murder of their Malindi vassal by funding the education of his son Yusuf bin Hasan in Goa, where, after baptism into the Christian faith, he took the name Don Jeronimo Chingulia. But when Yusuf bin Hasan returned in 1631 to replace the regent for Mombasa appointed in his absence, the Portuguese residents accused him of practicing Islam after they found him praying at the grave of his murdered father.<sup>46</sup> The Muslim residents of Mombasa similarly disapproved of his conduct, later accusing him of forcing them to violate the Islamic taboo against eating pork.<sup>47</sup> Sensible of his precarious position, he organized on the occasion of a Christian feast a massacre of the Portuguese soldiers and priests with assistance from a few hundred local and inland allies.<sup>48</sup> While he weathered one Portuguese assault on Fort Jesus, he lost local support and abandoned Mombasa in 1632. For a short time he fomented rebellion against Portuguese rule in Pate and then lived as a

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<sup>46</sup> The Portuguese association of praying at a gravesite with Islam is striking, considering that many modern Muslim communities in Kenya often criticize praying at gravesites as possible ancestor worship. Sufi Muslims, however, routinely make pilgrimages to the graves of saints for prayers.

<sup>47</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 218–219.

<sup>48</sup> Tome N. Mbuia-Joao, “The Revolt of Don Jeronimo Chingulia of Mombasa, 1590-1637: An African Episode in the Portuguese Century of Decline” (PhD Dissertation, Catholic, 1990).

pirate in Yemen, where he died in the port of Jiddah.<sup>49</sup> After the departure of Yusuf bin Hasan, Portuguese soldiers retook and repaired Fort Jesus but did not appoint a new *shaykh* for the town.

While the Ottoman challenge to Portuguese navies in the Indian Ocean was short-lived and ineffective, Sultan bin Seif al-Yarubi, the Imam of Oman, succeeded in routing the Portuguese from Muscat in 1650. Hearing of his success, Mombasa's merchants sought al-Yarubi's assistance, and he responded by sending a navy in 1652. They raided Portuguese stations in Pate and Zanzibar, and in 1660 they briefly captured Mombasa town, though not Fort Jesus. After a thirty-year hiatus the Omani Imam's successor, his son Seif bin Sultan al-Yarubi, resumed the campaign against the Portuguese occupiers, laying a long, successful siege against Fort Jesus from 1696 until 1698. The Portuguese held on with support from local allies in Faza (near Pate) and Chonyi (inland from Mtwapa), again demonstrating that some local clan confederations regarded their interests as aligned with them. The Portuguese Crown finally sent relief ships, but they arrived too late. The Imam of Oman had already garrisoned mercenaries at the fort under the command of a Baluchi *amari* "commander" (Ar.); he later appointed a succession of *liwalis* "governors" (Ar.) to represent Oman's interests to the people in the island.<sup>50</sup>

Thirty years later, the Portuguese returned and regained Fort Jesus for the last time from 1728 to 1730, only to be driven out again by Omani forces. The Omani

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<sup>49</sup> Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*, 219.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Amin Bin Ali al-Mazrui, *The History of the Mazru'i Dynasty of Mombasa*, trans. J. McL. Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders: From Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*.

soldiers, though occupied by succession disputes at home, came in response to the invitation of a delegation from Mombasa and their *wanyika* allies—the *wanyika* epithet likely emphasized their residence and knowledge of the *nyika* environment, where plentiful ivory that sustained Mombasa’s commercial activities could be obtained.<sup>51</sup> The inclusion of the inlanders in the delegation suggests that their commercial interests motivated Mombasa’s residents to rid themselves of their Portuguese protectors at least as much as religious differences. Portuguese failure to keep Fort Jesus in 1730 demonstrated that the crown in Lisbon had exhausted its resources and was unable to sustain its competition with Arab and other European—Dutch, French and English—rivals who were forcing them out of Indian Ocean commerce. Portuguese settlers continued investing and building at Mozambique Island, far to the south, and Goa, across the Ocean in South Asia, but they ceased pursuing interests farther north along the East African coast.<sup>52</sup>

Though united against the Portuguese, Mombasa’s residents and their inland allies quarreled with one another. For example, as they awaited Omani assistance in 1730, the Mvita clans drove the residents of Kilindini off Mombasa Island. Once, Mohammed bin Uthman al-Mazrui, arrived in 1735 to take up residence in Fort Jesus as an Omani *liwali*

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<sup>51</sup> The Mortier map of Mombasa directly associated the Mozungulos with the Nyika in 1700, labeling the inland as “Mozungulos ou Nyika.” *Supplement to the Neptune Francais*. Lieutenant Emery referred to the inland communities as Whanika in his logs during Britain’s short-lived Mombasa Protectorate from 1824-1826. James Emery, “Early 19th Century Trade and Politics at Mombasa: Lieutenant James Emery’s Diary 1824-1826,” n.d., D/4/3, University of Nairobi Research Project Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Allen F Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution: the Zambesi Prazos, 1750-1902* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1972).

(governor), he invited the outcasts to return to the island and secured promises that the residents of Mvita would not expel them again.<sup>53</sup>

Shortly after Mohammed bin Uthman al-Mazrui's departure for Mombasa, a member of the Omani Busaidi clan replaced the Yarubi Imam who had appointed the *liwali*. Instead of relinquishing his position or coming to an accommodation with the new Imam, al-Mazrui took the opportunity to declare his autonomy in Mombasa.<sup>54</sup> So the new Busaidi Imam—Ahmed bin Said—in 1743 arranged the *liwali*'s assassination, the arrest of al-Mazrui's relatives and associates in Fort Jesus, and the appointment of a new *liwali* loyal to the new rulers in Oman.

The Kilindini residents did not forget al-Mazrui's help in returning them to their town on Mombasa Island. They arranged the escape of his brother Ali bin Uthman from Fort Jesus and spirited him away to the mainland. Then they and their inland allies helped Ali bin Uthman remove his Busaidi-appointed rivals in 1745. Despite asserting Mombasa's independence from Oman, Ali bin Uthman retained the title of *liwali*, which gradually came to imply possession and occupation of Fort Jesus and, thus, authority over Mombasa's dealings with foreigners. Though the al-Mazrui *liwalis* nominally ruled Mombasa as the representatives of Oman, Mombasa became an autonomous island when they rejected the authority of the Busaidi Imams in the Arabian Peninsula.

Mombasa's residents, particularly those in Kilindini town and the Malindi clan confederation in Mvita town, embraced the Mazrui *liwalis* as mediators on the island and

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<sup>53</sup> Berg, "The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900," 52.

<sup>54</sup> al-Mazrui, *The History of the Mazru'i Dynasty of Mombasa*.



offered men to fight alongside the Omani immigrants in raids against other towns. They married their daughters to Mazrui men and such other Omani Arab families as the Basheikh clan. They taught Omani immigrants to speak Kiswahili, worshipped with them, and gradually induced them to abandon Oman's Ibadite sect of Kharijite Islam in favor of the Shafii branch of Sunni Islam.<sup>55</sup> Inland communities also sought the favor of the Mazrui *liwalis*. For example, the Arabai received a chair, a ring, and a staff that symbolized their friendship, and "the two latter were taken to Mombas[a] whenever a matter of importance was to be discussed."<sup>56</sup>

The rivalry among the Portuguese, Ottomans, and Omani for supremacy over the seas during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries touched the ports and occasionally intruded on commercial enterprises, but by the eighteenth century clan confederations of eastern Kenya had escaped the protection of foreign rulers and turned their attention on one another. The Mazrui *liwalis* considered themselves the rulers of Mombasa and sought to extend their influence beyond the island; but the Nabahani clan of Pate had similar designs. Like the Mazruis, the Nabahani were recent immigrants appointed around 1700 CE by the Yarubi Imam Seif bin Sultan.<sup>57</sup> They too had organized resistance against Portuguese rule and welcomed the greater autonomy of the eighteenth century. After

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<sup>55</sup> They generally reserved their own daughters for marriage within their clan and other clans from Oman. Ibadhism is descended from the *kharajiyya* movement that was the first splinter movement within Islam, though it is often considered a branch of Shia Islam, Ibadhis do not have the same devotion to the rightful rule of Ali's lineage, emphasizing that an Imam should be exemplary in his piety, observant of Islam, and have the consent of the Muslim community; see Ahmed Hamoud Maamiry, *Oman and Ibadhism* (New Delhi: Lancers Publishers, 1980).

<sup>56</sup> Krapf and Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000); Pouwels, "The Battle of Shela," 377n50.

decades of raiding and unsuccessful claims to tribute, the Mazrui neutralized their Nabahani rivals during a succession dispute in Pate in 1807. They helped Ahmed bin Sheikh become Sultan of Pate, and he returned their favors by acknowledging the supremacy of Mombasa over Pate.<sup>58</sup> After uniting their interests, Pate and Mombasa turned their sights on Lamu, which had given asylum to the rivals of Pate's new sultan.

Lamu had previously submitted tribute to Pate, and one of the two Lamu factions supported submission to the new Pate-Mombasa alliance. However, the other faction, led by Sheikh Zahidi bin Mngumi, eloquently argued in verse that submission would corrupt the bonds of fidelity between the Lamu town patricians and their clients who cultivated their families' ancestral farms on the mainland immediately adjacent to the Lamu Archipelago.

We have farming lands of old, we do not know their boundaries  
 All of us slaves farm it, we share the harvest.  
 There is an elegant slave driver, he intends to flog us; . . .  
 He eats the tribute of Pemba, and he wants to eat here, . . .<sup>59</sup>

The reference to Pemba Island reflects the poet's concern that Lamu would become subordinate to Mombasa, as the more southerly island had in recent generations. Randall Pouwels has argued that the poem refers to a land tax on local production known as *'ushr* and a tax on slaves known as *kikanda* that Mazrui governors had introduced in Mombasa and Pemba.<sup>60</sup> Portuguese migrants had previously introduced plantations

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<sup>58</sup> Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 117.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 118; my translation adapted from Abdulaziz.

<sup>60</sup> Pouwels, "The Battle of Shela."

worked by the forced labor of slaves in the seventeenth century to the islands of Pemba and Zanzibar.<sup>61</sup> When Mombasa laid their own claims to Pemba in the eighteenth century, some of Mombasa's Kiswahili-speaking patricians and recent Omani immigrants moved to Pemba, alienated and demarcated land through purchases validated by Islamic law (but not local custom), and imported slaves whose labor they exploited to recoup their investments. While the taxes that the Mazrui *liwali* collected on these investments did not necessarily promote slave-worked plantations, they are a sign that this novel method of investing in private production, rather than relying on inland suppliers, was a growing trend supported by the leading patricians of Mombasa. The term *shokowa*, alternately translated as “tribute” or “forced labor” in the poem, suggests the suffering that Mazrui rule entailed for the local communities of Pemba.

Pouwels makes Zahidi bin Mngumi's reference to the land taxes clearer by translating the reference to “boundaries” in the first line of the poem as “gardens without fencing lines.” As a land tax, the *ushr* required demarcation of land to demonstrate individual ownership and thus conflicted with customs of collective ownership.<sup>62</sup> Placing fencing lines would call attention to the different levels of wealth in the community, instead of obscuring such distinctions in harvests shared by all. In addition, the *kikanda* tax on slaves would have established a clearly defined hierarchy between owners and slaves. Instead of the wide spectrum of relationships that included followers, clients, refugees, pawns, and purchased slaves, the tax would have forced patrons to determine

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. quoting Rezende.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 379n59.

which of their followers were “free” and which were “slaves.” Zahidi bin Mngumi emphasized instead the common interests of all the people of Lamu and their partners on the adjacent mainland who tilled the earth together and shared the harvests. The taxes would also make clients into slaves valued for their productive capacity to earn the funds to pay the taxes on them rather than the broader notions of kinship that bound refugees and other kinless dependents to the clans that accepted them, albeit as junior kin.<sup>63</sup>

Lamu’s factions overcame their differences and repelled the allied forces of Mombasa, Pate, and Giriama around 1810 at the Battle of Shela Beach. However, fearing another confrontation, Lamu’s elders sought assistance from Seyyid Sa’id, who had recently secured his position as the Imam of Oman, a title he later discarded in favor of Sultan. Lamu’s new alliance of protection ended a half century free of foreign meddling along the coast. By 1817, Oman had forced Mombasa out of Pate when the death of their ally Ahmed bin Sheikh prompted another succession dispute. In a bid to counter Omani protection over Lamu and Pate, Mombasa persuaded Captain William Owen of the British Navy to extend his formal protection in 1824 over their towns in return for making the slave trade illegal.<sup>64</sup> But Seyyid Sa’id shrewdly convinced the British Government in India that Mombasa, being ruled by a *liwali* of Omani descent, was in a

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<sup>63</sup> The transition between notions of slavery as perpetually junior kin and chattel has attracted many scholars; see particularly Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); Glassman, “The Bondsman’s New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coasts”; Frederick Cooper, “Islam and Cultural Hegemony: The Ideology of Slaveowners on the East African Coast,” in *The Ideology of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (London: Sage, 1981), 271–307; Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann, 1997).

<sup>64</sup> Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia: Performed in His Majesty’s Ships Leven and Barracouta from 1821 to 1825 Under the Command of Capt. F.W. Owen, R.N.*

state of rebellion and needed to be reined in. Within two years, the British Protectorate of Mombasa was abolished, and Mombasa was left to fend for itself.

Though Portuguese captains and Omani *liwalis* had established outposts in East Africa in earlier eras, Seyyid Sa'id himself relocated to the coast in 1832.<sup>65</sup> He was unable to take possession of Mombasa and Fort Jesus, so he settled in Zanzibar and proceeded almost immediately to invest in the slave-worked spice plantations that by the 1840s made the island a famous entrepôt. He briefly returned to Oman to counter the advances of the Wahhabi state of Najd; but he persuaded them to pursue other interests by sending them an annual tribute in the form of a *zakat* (alms) tax.<sup>66</sup> By 1834 he had set his eyes squarely on acquiring Mombasa.

He succeeded in taking control in 1836 after a succession dispute within the Mazrui clan over the office of *liwali*. During this crisis, Mvita had joined with allies from Pate to burn down Kilindini town. Kilindini took the assault as a sign that the bickering among the Mazrui clan was reducing their effectiveness as mediators on the island. They opted to relocate and build homes near Mvita town rather than reoccupy Kilindini and joined with Mvita residents in throwing their support behind Seyyid Sa'id. Bowing to local pressure, the newly ascended Mazrui *liwali* Rashid bin Salim made a treaty with the Sultan, in which he was confirmed as *liwali* but required to abandon Fort Jesus and live in the town. Sultan Seyyid Sa'id offered Rashid bin Salim retirement at Zanzibar or a

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<sup>65</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 103. Pouwels provides the political background in East Africa for the sultanate's relocation; for a more detailed account of the sultanate's economic influence within the Indian Ocean, see Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar*.

<sup>66</sup> Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders: From Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 278.

new appointment as *liwali* in the islands of Pemba or Mafia. When Rashid bin Salim declined, Seyyid Sa'id arrested and exiled him. Rumors suggested Rashid bin Salim was thrown overboard or starved to death. Fearful of similar treatment, most of the Mazrui clan fled to the mainland between Malindi and Mombasa, where a branch of the clan had recently established the town of Takaungu.

### *Rulers and Representatives*

The Mazuri *liwalis'* project of political consolidation and regional supremacy was quickly eclipsed by the grander vision of Seyyid Sa'id. Until his death in 1856, he consolidated the East African coast into his private patronage network by appointing *liwalis* from Pate and Lamu in the north all the way down the coast to Kilwa and Sofala in the south. The plantations he established increased demand for slaves traded from Mozambique and Tanzania; by the 1870s, coastal merchants such as Tibbu Tip pioneered caravans from Bagamoyo and Mombasa as far as the Great Lakes to purchase ivory and slaves. The enslaved captives came in great numbers to work plantations and gardens in Zanzibar, Pemba, and Mombasa; and Omani merchants reestablished Malindi town so their slaves could cultivate the long-fallow fields. At Takaungu, the Mazrui joined the trend by drawing scores of young Giriama men from inland to cultivate new homesteads as clients and junior partners. The prosperity of the growing economy presided over by Seyyid Sa'id and his successors drew Indian financiers, Hadrami laborers, and European traders to Zanzibar, as well as Muslim scholars and Sufi saints, including Habib Swaleh, who catered to their legal needs and spiritual desires.

The strategy of appointing personal representatives to collect taxes and tributes from conquered communities was the most striking innovation of Portuguese and Omani migrants. In contrast to *wenyeji* “owners of the land” or *wananchi* “sons of the soil” who organized local councils and title societies, foreigners ruled by appointment as *liwalis* of an Imam (Oman) or as vassals of a king (Portuguese). The Portuguese emphasis on allegiance to their king even led Kiswahili speakers to name them Wareno, from *reino* (“kingdom,” Portuguese). Both Portuguese and Omani governments appointed local governors to represent their interests in Mombasa and demanded tribute and taxes to support military occupation. The strategy of ruling remote communities through representatives was not a regular feature along the East African coast prior to Portuguese and Omani influence.<sup>67</sup> However, Bwana Kitini, in his version of the Lamu Chronicle, gives a folk etymology that asserts this strategy had a local history as well:

Sultan Omar [c. 1340 CE]. . . gained possession of all the towns, from Pate to Kirimba, and in each town he placed a man of his own, as judge. This is the origin of those *majumbe* who are to be found on the whole coast; and the meaning of (the word) *majumbe* is ‘slaves of the Yumbe.’ This word *yumbe* is the name of the House of the Kingdom of Pate.<sup>68</sup>

While Bwana Kitini’s folk etymology proposes a semantic extension of meaning from “chief” to “representative or judge”, his description of appointing rulers to represent

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<sup>67</sup> The lack of a similar set of Portuguese loans relating to governance testifies to their limited influence in this part of the coast, though a comparison of Omani loans in Swahili and Portuguese loans in Mozambique and South Asian languages might be instructive.

<sup>68</sup> Werner, “Swahili History of Pate,” 159.

Pate further down the coast is suspiciously similar to the Omani practice of appointing *liwali* that was in practice in the late nineteenth century when he composed the chronicle. Linguistically, the etymology is less economical than one proposed by missionary John Ludwig Krapf who suggests the word is simply an extension from “creature/creation” to “big man” then “chief,” which is the common meaning of *jumbe* in Swahili as well as its reflex *dzumbe* in southern Mijikenda dialects.<sup>69</sup> Bwana Kitini also called special attention to the strategy in an otherwise straightforward narration, suggesting that he meant this editorial aside to enhance the prestige of Pate by comparing its former glory with that of Oman. In addition, it is unlikely that the Nabahani dynasty extended as far back as the fourteenth century in Pate, since they arrived in the eighteenth century. Writing in the late-nineteenth century, Bwana Kitini was likely interpreting local history through a contemporary understanding of governance.<sup>70</sup>

When Seyyid Sa'id took possession of Mombasa in 1837, he remained in Zanzibar and ruled Mombasa and other coastal towns through resident representatives. He appointed *liwalis*, customs officials, commanders, and *tamims* (“leaders”) who

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<sup>69</sup> While *yumbe* (*jumbe* in other Kiswahili dialects) resembles *jumba*—the ampliative form of *nyumba*, “house”; it differs in replacing the final /a/ with final /e/. Krapf’s etymology suggests instead that *jumbe* was based on the root of all these words, *umba* “to create”—thus *kiumbe* “creature/creation”, then following Swahili grammar rules of amplification, *jumbe* “great or large creature/creation” and then the semantic extension “chief or ruler.”

<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, another word in Kiswahili poetry and chronicles—*muyumbe*, “messenger” —clearly conveys the meaning of representative and has a clearer morphological relationship to *yumbe* “house”, with the prefix “mu” indicating the literal translation “person of yumbe.” Johnson’s Swahili dictionary also records *ujumbe*, “message, letter.” Frederick Johnson, *A Standard Swahili English Dictionary: (founded on Madan’s Swahili-English Dictionary)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939). Unfortunately, the form follows regular patterns of semantic derivation, so it is difficult to test whether this word appeared elsewhere along the coast as a loan from Pate or whether speakers independently innovated it elsewhere as an extension of *jumbe*. Nurse and Hinnebusch identify *jumbe* as a possible proto-Sabaki innovation from the late first millennium CE based on its distribution in related languages (*Swahili and Sabaki*).



reported directly to him. As F.J. Berg argued, “The Busaidi regime was not so much a single organization as an interlocking network of organizations.”<sup>71</sup> He appointed a *liwali* from his clan to defend his interests in Mombasa, a Custom Master to remit customs to the custom house in Zanzibar, a *jemadar* to lead his Baluchi troops and an *akida* to lead his Hadrami (or Shihiri) troops.<sup>72</sup> He also selected a *tamim* from each of the clan confederations of Mombasa, thus formalizing the clan confederations as the Three Tribes and the Nine Tribes. They were then responsible for appointing the local *sheikhs* that represented each clan on a town council as well as a *kadhi* (judge) for each clan confederation. This personal patronage allowed Seyyid Sa’id and his successors to keep tight reins on each of these organizations.

The *tamim* offices was a hereditary appointment held by the al-Shirazy lineage of the Tangana clan of Thelatha Taifa and the al-Mutwafy lineage of the Pate clan of Tissia Taifa. Though formally appointed, or confirmed, by the Sultan, local tradition holds that they were nominated by their confederations and the “instruments of community consensus,” as were the *kadhis*.<sup>73</sup> Both lineages were recognized as immigrants who had married into the local clans, which may have made them more amenable to the influence of patricians from more established lineages, and thus more suitable as a representative of everyone’s interests than a patrician who could use his lineage connections to dominate

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<sup>71</sup> Berg, “Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate.”

<sup>72</sup> The potential for intrigues and rivalries among these three leaders is recorded in the *Tenzi ya al-Akida*, narrating the rebellion of the *Akida* who expelled his Baluchi rivals and secured Fort Jesus for himself until forced the Sultan of Zanzibar reasserted control; Hinawy, *Al Akida and Fort Jesus Mombasa*.

<sup>73</sup> Berg, “Mombasa Under the Busaidi Sultanate,” 106.

his peers. Their charters from the Sultan made them responsible for representing also the interests of their *wanyika* allies, though the documents refer generally to the *wanyika* rather than named inland clan confederations.<sup>74</sup> The Sultan was apparently uninterested in maintaining direct patronage over the *wanyika* clan confederations. Seyyid Sa'id's network of governors and judges drew the coastal towns into an integrated polity. Since the Sultan prevented armed conflict among them they began competing with one another for favors from the Sultan and his representatives—a new dynamic that excluded inland clan confederations and strained their alliances of patronage and security with coastal clan confederations.

#### *Inland Innovations*

While inland communities like the Chonyi and Rabai occasionally entangled themselves in the affairs of the Portuguese and Omani rulers at the coast, their distance from cannon-bearing warships allowed them to escape direct taxation or political meddling in their internal affairs. They continued expanding their investments in productive ventures beyond the constricted quarters of their towns. Inland traders made frequent visits to the coast, where they secured textiles, cowrie shells, beads, and other products for distribution through their clan confederations. Inland patrons recruited men to join coastal allies in their raids on other towns, while occasionally threatening the same partners with war to ensure a steady stream of imported commodities that their own followers expected them to provide. As suggested by Portuguese reports and Krapf's

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

description of *heshima* in the nineteenth century, the military potential of clan confederations helped them ensure equitable exchanges with their coastal partners. In addition to lending military support to allies in coastal rivalries, they faced the raids of Oromo-speaking “Galla” pastoralists from southern Somalia.<sup>75</sup> As the security of their communities deteriorated in the sixteenth century, they adopted strategies for forming and managing age-sets from Kisegeju-speaking migrants from the interior known as Mosseguejo. These age-sets improved their military organization and strengthened loyalties to their clan confederations.

Oromo-speaking pastoralists began entering northern Kenya from Somalia in the sixteenth century. As they extended their territory in search of grazing lands for their cattle they forced some coastal clans to relocate to Mombasa. For example, the clans of Malindi relocated to the island of Mombasa in 1624.<sup>76</sup> Oromo-speaking pastoralist remained in the vicinity of Malindi until the mid-nineteenth century, when the Omani planters who reestablished Malindi requested soldiers from Zanzibar to counter their raids.<sup>77</sup> It is reasonable to assume that raiders similarly destroyed inland settlements in the countryside, forcing some into fortified towns while others moved farther southward as refugees. Archaeologists have identified at least one town north of the Tana river

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<sup>75</sup> E.R. Turton, “Bantu, Galla and Somali Migration in the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment of the Juba/Tana Area,” *Journal of African History* 16, no. 4 (1975): 519–37, doi:10.2307/180495.

<sup>76</sup> Though Oromo-speaking communities in Kenya (known as Orma) now reside to the north of the Tana River, they once occupied territory as far south as Malindi. Oromo-speaking pastoralists established a better rapport with cultivators by the nineteenth century, when they regularly visited the seasonal markets in Giriama territory. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours*.

<sup>77</sup> Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*.

known as Shungwaya, though it may have been named after the referent for the myths of origin that became widespread in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>78</sup> Refugees spread the disturbing news of raids by an enemy with whom none had previously dealt and who apparently destroyed and depopulated villages rather than raiding them or demanding tribute.

The same traditions describe Kisegeju-speaking immigrants as refugees from the Oromo expansion, accounting for their appearance in eastern Kenya prior to the Oromo. Unlike the alien Oromo dialects, the Kisegeju dialects (from the Central Kenya Bantu family) would have been relatively intelligible as a Bantu language to the communities of eastern Kenya who accepted them as refugees and welcomed them as military allies. Like Arab immigrants to coastal communities, Kisegeju speakers left a cultural legacy that far exceeded their demographic presence because they provided local communities with new tactics for defending their communities and experiences with raising cattle that became a new commodity for distinguishing wealth. Unlike the overseas immigrants who feature prominently in Kiswahili chronicles, Mijikenda oral traditions assign Kisegeju-speaking immigrants only a bit part—as the herders who took care of their ancestors' cattle as they left Shungwaya. Their minor role in these oral traditions suggests that, unlike overseas migrants, they did not attempt to assert authority over inland confederations as conquerors or mediators. Nor did they have the support of remote rulers and their treasuries. Instead

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<sup>78</sup> Chittick, "An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Southern Somali Coast."

Kisegeju-speakers arrived as refugees and often joined local clans as individuals.<sup>79</sup> At least some immigrants remained separate from the local communities and may have worked as mercenaries; their descendants now identify as the Segeju and Daisu communities of southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania respectively.<sup>80</sup>

As clan confederations adopted refugees, they incorporated their *uganga* (knowledge), just as their ancestors had integrated foragers and pastoralists. They gradually acquired dozens of Kisegeju loanwords for raising cattle and conducting warfare. The clan confederations also added Kisegeju regalia to the symbolic repertoire that distinguished the various title societies from one another (see Figure 6.1).<sup>81</sup> Mijikenda speaking confederations began referring to their elders with the Central Kenya Bantu word *mutumia* and the word *mbari* replaced *\*lukolo* as the word for clan in most contexts. Ritual and symbolic innovations associated with these loanwords in title societies—as well as the Shungwaya myth of origin—might suggest that some Kisegeju-speakers leveraged their *uganga* into positions of leadership, just as Muslim immigrants did at the coast.<sup>82</sup> Alternatively, the clans they joined coopted the novel *uganga* for their own purposes.

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<sup>79</sup> For instance Mwinga wa Gunga asserted that after a long period of dispersal, the Giriama found other Giriama who had “pretended to be Segeju, Laa, and Adhegere” and then incorporated them into their clans; Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Nurse, “Segeju and Daisũ.”

<sup>81</sup> For a full inventory see Walsh, “Segeju Complex.”

<sup>82</sup> Strong, S.A., ed., “The History of Kilwa,” trans. S.A. Strong, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27 (1895): 385–430.

Figure 6.1 Central Kenya Bantu Cognates with Mijikenda

English	Mijikenda	Central Kenya Bantu
<i>Cattle husbandry</i>		
bull, male calf	ndzao (ndzau, sau)	nzauu (Kam.) njauu (Gik.)
ox, castrated animal	ndewa	ndewa (Kam.) ndegwa (Gik.)
look after (livestock, people)	-dhorima (-roroma)	-thuurima “survey, inspect” (Gik.)
mark, brand (livestock)	-βana (-mvana)	-vana “brand by cutting ears” (Kam.)
copulate (animals)	-βeka	-haica (Gik.)
to shake (the body); to churn (milk and cream)	-dhingidhya (-dhingirya, -ringirya)	-thingitha (Kam., Gik.)
<i>Warfare</i>		
capture, plunder, loot	-taβa (-tamva)	-tava (Kam.) – taha (Gik.)
conquer, defeat in war	-dhima	-thima “aim, hit the target” (Gik.)
savagery	kiβii	wiii (Gik.)
revenge, vengeance	udhu	uuthuu (Kam.) uuthuu “enmity, hatred” (Gik.)
line, line of battle, troop	mudhi(y)a	muuthia “row” (Kam.) “tip, point” (Gik.)
quiver of skin, leather	dhyaka (mudhyaka, mutyaka)	thaka (Kam.) thiaka (Gik.)
be in a violent rage, commit atrocities	-βatuka (-mvatuta)	-hatuuta “lacerate, tear off (Gik.)
become contused (broken skin after a blow)	-dhunyuka	-thuuna “form raised scar” (Kam.), “swell with pus” (Gik.) –thuunuuka “protrude” (Gik.)

<i>Age-sets, initiations, elders</i>		
circumcised youth house	aro	gaaru (Mer.)
age-set	rika	iika (Kam.), riika (Gik.)
dance performed by initiates and women possessed by spirits	kidhumo	muuthuumuu “dance of old men and women” (Gik.)
council of initiated elders	k’ambi (ngambi)	mugambi “leader, spokes-man, war-leader” (Mer., Chuka)
receive initiation honors	-dhura	-duta (Daiso) -thuura “choose, select” (Gik.) muuthuuti “elder, married man, councilor” (Gik.)
ostrich-feather head-dress	kidhumbiri	thuumbii (Gik.)
elder, old person	mutumi(y)a (mtumi(y)a)	muutumiia (Kam.) muutumia “married woman” (Gik.)
open space in center of kaya, meeting place of k’ambi, place where old men gather to tell stories in homestead	dhome (rome)	dome “toilet” (Daiso) thome “squatting place for men outside village” (Kam.) thome “path leading up to a homestead” (Gik.)
gifts for reconciliation, peace offering	βako	iivaki “bribe” (Kam.) ihaki “offering, bribe, sacrifice” (Gik.)
find paid to elder (e.g. for killing a man)	kirurumo	kilumo “groan; grunt; lion’s roar” (Kam.) kirurumo “roar of water” (Gik.)
gate of kaya, village	muβirya (mumvirya)	muuviia “gateway” (Kam.) muuhiiriiga “clan” (Gik.)

patrilineage, clan	mbari	mbaii “clan; nation” (Kam.) mbari “side; family group, sub-clan, exogamous group” (Gik.)
beg, ask for, pray	-voya	-voya (Daiso) -voya (Kam.) - hoya (Gik.)

Among the *uganga* that Kisegeju-speakers’ adoptive communities adopted was methods for organizing *rika*—groups of men near the same age who progress through age-grades with differentiated military roles.<sup>83</sup> Age-sets are widespread in East Africa among communities from Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic linguistic heritages, indicating mutually reinforcing strategies of military organization; when one community assembled their young men into military forces, their rivals made comparable innovations to avoid defeat.<sup>84</sup> Some Bantu speaking communities, including those of the Central Kenya Bantu family, inherited age-sets from as early as the Proto-Bantu era (ca. 3000 BCE). However, in the dispersion from the Great Lakes region, the low population densities of Sabaki-speakers along the East African frontiers made it challenging to sustain the complex social strategy. Thus, the Sabaki branch whose descendants settled eastern Kenya did not

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<sup>83</sup> In some Kenyan communities, notably among Gikuyu, women also have age-sets and common initiations into adulthood marked by circumcision; Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu: 1500-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). Brantley emphasizes that circumcision and initiation into age-sets did not coincide with one another among the Giriama (Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama”).

<sup>84</sup> A.H.J. Prins, *East African Age Class Systems* (Groningen, 1953); Richard Waller, “East African Age Organizations,” *African Affairs* 79, no. 315 (April 1, 1980): 257–260; Ruel, “The Structural Articulation of Generations in Africa (L’articulation Structurelle Des Générations En Afrique).”



organize themselves into age-sets until Kisegeju-speakers re-introduced the strategy in the seventeenth century.<sup>85</sup>

As regional rivalries in eastern Kenya escalated between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, age-sets became the preferred strategy for organizing young men throughout a clan confederation into a single military force.<sup>86</sup> Age-sets also offered an effective method of organizing and inspiring the martial energies and loyalty of the rising generation. And elders used the initiation rituals to formalize alliances with other clan confederations by timing their initiation to coincide. From the perspective of established clan confederations the initiations that bound men together in age-sets allowed them to instill loyalty into refugees. From the refugees' perspectives, their knowledge about how to establish and manage age-sets could secure their standing in their host communities.

W.E. Taylor described an incident that shows how age-sets intersected with these rivalries in the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>87</sup> As described to him in the late nineteenth century, "the Rika [age-set] of Nguli Kibanda," a group of eighty young men from Mombasa, absconded to the inland town of Ribe and refused a summons from the

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<sup>85</sup> The Sabaki reflex would have been *zika* if it had been inherited from NECB. There is disagreement about the dating of this loanword. Christopher Ehret, holding to an Upland Bantu classification based primarily on these loanwords, suggests a very early date of 100-400 CE; Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 BC to AD 400*. Ruel (see previous note) Ehret's finds limited data unconvincing. Given the correlation of archaeological and linguistic evidence presented in Chapter 4, Upland Bantu is not considered a valid classification, pushing the earliest date for interactions among Central Kenya and the Sabaki Bantu communities in eastern Kenya to the sixteenth century, with an earlier twelfth century date for the Elwana dialects located in the upper reaches of the Tana River.

<sup>86</sup> Oral traditions suggest that an expansion of initiation rituals associated with age-sets followed the establishment of a distinct Giriama community, as argued by Kazungu, "The Agiryama." Previously ascension to adulthood was associated with circumcision, a practice that the Ribe held to longer than other communities.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 26n16.

Mombasa commander Hemed bin Mohammad to return.<sup>88</sup> Ribe's residents rebuffed Mombasa's efforts to have them expel the young men. But eventually the young men became bolder in their mutiny and joined with Mombasa's rivals in Pate to conduct three raids against Mombasa. They reportedly carried off women and killed many people. Eventually desiring to return, they reconciled with Mombasa's military commander and joined him in an attack on Pate. The fact that the young men sought refuge and assistance from both Ribe (an ally of Mombasa) and Pate (a rival of Mombasa) to support their rebellion suggests how age-sets could manipulate town rivalries and alliances to support their interests in conflicts within clan confederations, perhaps especially generational conflicts over access to women. While most scholars have emphasized the importance of age-sets among the inland communities, this incident demonstrates that coastal communities also adopted the strategy.

Elders could mitigate the potential for generational conflict by inspiring loyalty to the clan confederation. They initiated the younger age-sets through a series of rituals that included hazing, feats of strength and endurance, and collective violence that bound the youth together and directed their efforts toward the interests of the clan confederation. Descriptions of these rituals are available only from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but they are suggestive of the kinds of strategies eastern Kenyans may have used to inaugurate and sustain age-sets in earlier times. In Cynthia Brantley's description of Giriama age-sets, men moved through three basic age-grades as they and their peers

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<sup>88</sup> Although *rika* has acquired the broad meaning of "generation" in modern Kiswahili, Taylor explains that in this context it was "the name adopted by all who were circumcised [initiated] at the same time" (Ibid.).

aged together: first they are *ahoho* (children), then *nyere* (youth), and finally *kambi* (elders).<sup>89</sup> The *kambi* led their communities and made strategic decisions about when to conduct war, while the *nyere* trained for and fought in the battles and raids. The prospect of eventually leading the community and solidarity with one's age-mates helped assure commitment to the clan confederation.

Gona Kazungu emphasized that initiation ceremonies were designed to renew the community through cleansing rituals, installation of new elders, and the creation of new protective and empowering talismans.<sup>90</sup> Among the Giriama, for instance, initiates participated in the ceremonies of *mwanza m'kulu* "great drum", *mung'aro* "shining one [dance]", *sayo ra mudhanga* "dance of clay pot" and *kirao* "oath."<sup>91</sup> Brantley's description of the progression between these grades among the Giriama emphasizes the significant durations of time between these ceremonies:

First, every three years or so, young males [around the age of ten] were placed into sub-*rika* through a ceremony called *Mwanza M'Kulu*. Second, some time after the entire *rika* of thirteen sub-*rika* was completed, its members were installed as the ruling *rika* by means of an elaborate ceremony called *Mung'aro*, which also retired the old *rika*. Third, within the new ruling *rika*, members of the senior sub-*rika*

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<sup>89</sup>Cynthia Brantley, "Gerontocratic Government: Age-sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama," in *Africa*, 48: (1978), 251. "The system consisted basically of a series of ruling maximal age-sets (*marika*, s. *rika*) made up of thirteen minimal age-sets (sub-*rika*) with a specifically ordered set of names. . . . Within a single *rika* (or thirteen sub-*rika*) the members of the senior sub-*rika*, beginning with the Wulumbere, were initiated into a ruling council (*kambi*) and the junior sub-*rika* remained as youth or warriors (*nyere*), awaiting their turn to become councilors." In addition to the set names the age-sets were given a collective related to important events of the time when initiated as *nyere*; they keep the name when they become *kambi*.

<sup>90</sup> Kazungu, "The Agiryama."

<sup>91</sup> Clay pots are often used as a symbol of an oath. For instance, breaking a clay pot is part of a ceremony for renouncing a blood brotherhood.

Wulumbere, were initiated into *kambi* . . . . The initiation into *kambi* involved two major steps, each celebrated by a different ritual *Sayo ra Mudhanga* and *Kirao*. . . . It is uncertain how long the training [between *Sayo ra Mudhanga* and *Kirao*] lasted, but in some cases it extended over several years.<sup>92</sup>

Mijikenda speakers describe making a new age-set as “cutting the *rika*.” Around the age of ten, young boys would be gathered together to participate in *mwanza m’kulu*. If the boys were among the first to be initiated in a *rika* they would wait nearly forty years until performing *mung’aro* and becoming *kambi* “elders”; if they were among the last to be initiated in a *rika* they would be inducted almost immediately as *kambi* “elders” but unable to qualify for *Sayo ra Mudhanga* or *Kirao* until they were older and prosperous enough to pay the requisite fees with their sub-*rika* age-mates. As Spear’s informant Thomas Govi explained, “if a boy was born on the day when a *rika* was cut, he would be marked and would be in the *rika*, but if he was hidden, he would be in the next *rika*.”<sup>93</sup> As the youngest members of the ruling *rika*, such children would risk being subordinated for the rest of their lives, thus accounting for the practice of hiding new-borns during initiations.<sup>94</sup> Those born (or hidden) the day after the *rika* was cut would be the eldest “youth” during the next cycle and best positioned to assume leadership of the *rika* after the previous elders retired.

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<sup>92</sup> Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama,” 252–53.

<sup>93</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 74.

<sup>94</sup> Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama,” 252.

The *mwanza m'kulu* ceremony takes its name from a large friction drum that is taboo for the uninitiated (that is women, young children, and strangers) to see. The boys would be brought into the forest to see the drum and were taught how the sound was made (that is, by passing a smooth rod through a hole in the leather drum head to create a deep vibration). It makes a frightful noise that sounds like a hyena and was played at the funerals of men belonging to the *vaya* “hyena” title society. Gona Kazungu suggested that the drum was formerly an emblem of a title society that a Giriama man named Baya Thosha adapted for the creation of Giriama age-sets. While Baya Thosha introduced the drum to the Giriama clan confederation, it is said he adopted it from someone “who is not remembered by the Giriama,” opening the possibility that he acquired it from Kisegeju-speaking refugees without sufficient standing in the community to promote the instrument and its associated rites. In any case, the drum became ubiquitous among inland communities.

In addition to formalizing inequalities among elders, youth, and boys, the *mung'aro* required initiates to make a sharp distinction between allies and enemies. In order to prepare for their assumption of elder status, the ascending *rika* would leave the town and gather as clans near a body of water such as a river or pond. “Before new *kambi* could dance *mung'aro*, they had to strip off their clothes and cover themselves with mud.”<sup>95</sup> Then they would participate in various tests of physical strength and prowess, such as carrying a heavy load on one’s head or jumping up to bring down an animal skin

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<sup>95</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 111. Some of Spear’s informants suggested an animal (usually a chicken) was sacrificed and its blood mixed with the mud to make it the consistency of porridge.

from a branch using only one's teeth.<sup>96</sup> Most descriptions assert that “before they could dance *mung'aro* and cut a *rika*, . . . a person had to be killed.”<sup>97</sup> One description suggested that “if one hated another man he could kill him then,” hence the purpose of gathering as clans for protection.<sup>98</sup> Another suggests “wrong-doers condemned to death by the elders were killed” at the body of water in association with the *mung'aro* dance.<sup>99</sup> The most common assertion was that the ascending generation needed to kill a victim from another community before returning to dance *mung'aro*. As Gona Kazungu describes:

His blood would be used for making the new charms of the Kaya and cleansing or re-consecrating the old ones. It is alleged too that they would pluck out his genitals and his hands. The hands would be used for beating some drums during the 'inner' ceremonies at which only the eligible few would be in attendance.<sup>100</sup>

John Ludwig Krapf also reported regalia associated with the *mung'aro* initiation, such as a large wooden serving tray known as *chano* that was used during the initiation feasts but then retained always in a sacred hut.<sup>101</sup> These instruments and talismans thus symbolized the ascension of a new *rika* as the ruling body of the clan confederation.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 69–70.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>100</sup> Kazungu, “The Agiryama,” 45.

<sup>101</sup> Krapf and Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary*, 22.

The collective violence of killing a person by the ascending *rika* demonstrated their capability as warriors and willingness to take up arms to ensure the interests of their community. Selecting an appropriate victim must have also forced the initiates to discern the boundaries of their communities and alliances. Instead of pursuing and defending the interests of their respective clans, they needed to consider the needs of the entire clan confederation from which their age-set drew its members. As Godfrey Muriuki observed for the similar *riika* strategy among the Kikuyu, age-sets were a “counterpoise to the introvert tendencies of the *mbari* [clan] and the other fissiparous forces.”<sup>102</sup> In eastern Kenya, age-set initiations also served to formalize alliances among clan confederations. So for instance, the Giriama Mijikenda reported that they timed their *rika* initiations to coincide with those of the Ribe Mijikenda, no small matter for a ceremony that came only once every generation and involved years of preparation.<sup>103</sup> Presumably, clan confederations that coordinated their *mung'aro* celebrations to coincide as a symbol of their alliance would not have targeted one another for their sacrifices. The consequences of such a betrayal are clear from traditions that attribute the Galla hostilities to a *mung'aro* sacrifice of a Galla boy. The traditions claim the Galla, once considerate neighbors, evicted and hunted down the forebears of the Mijikenda to avenge the murder.

The “Galla threat” was a powerful and convincing trope throughout eastern Kenya, but especially among the inland communities whose settlements adjoined the

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<sup>102</sup> Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu: 1500-1900*, 116.

<sup>103</sup> This preparation stymied colonial officials eager for a new generation of elders to be initiated; they felt it should take only three months to accomplish (“Proceedings of Duruma Baraza (Kambi),” 16 Nov 1923, Kenya National Archives, District Commissioner, Kwale District, 3/1/196-7).

pasture lands of the Oromo-speaking pastoralists. Although local rivals continued to be the most frequent perpetrators of raids whose reprisals could escalate into war, the “Galla threat” was salient enough that the oral traditions of the Mijikenda single them out as the “others” against whom residents needed to unite for protection.<sup>104</sup> In contrast to the detailed accounts of specific alliances and conflicts remembered among local clan confederations, Mijikenda traditions stereotype the Galla of the past as a homogenous and ever-present threat.<sup>105</sup> Since the generic Galla threat was common to all the communities of eastern Kenya, it transcended local rivalries to create a nascent regional identity.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the practicality of hiding from marauders in a fort, retreating to the towns helped residents arrest the evident dissolution of their communal values as growing commercial opportunities promoted and satisfied aspirations and opportunities for private accumulation. The dispersal into homesteads would have been jarring for those whose lives previously revolved around living together in towns. Elders who repeated tales about threatening Galla promoted an anti-Galla sentiment that came to be shared widely by Kiswahili and Mijikenda speakers.<sup>107</sup> The onset of Galla incursions coincided with the

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<sup>104</sup> Justin Willis has suggested that the alleged destruction occasioned by the Galla has been overstated in Mijikenda traditions and parroted by historians, see Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*. Gona Kazungu records four wars among inland clan confederations, “The Agiryama,” 75–83.

<sup>105</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 75.

<sup>106</sup> A similar negative stereotype operates in Kenyan national politics today as many citizens vote against the Kikuyu, but not necessarily for their own ethnic candidates, Michael Bratton and Mwangi S. Kimenyi, “Voting in Kenya: Putting Ethnicity in Perspective,” *Journal of East African History* 2, no. 2, Special Issue on Kenyan Violence (2008): 272–289.

<sup>107</sup> Berg, “The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500-1900”; H.E. Lambert, *Chijomvu and Kingare Subdialects of the Mombasa Area*, Studies in Swahili Dialect 3 (Kampala, Uganda: East Africa Swahili Committee, Makerere College, 1958).



era when more and more individuals were leaving the towns to establish independent homesteads. The timing is suggestive. For elders trying to dissuade people from setting out on their own, the warlike Galla from the north became a compelling argument for remaining safely within the collective ethos of the towns.

The elders who composed the *kambi* age-grade but also held titles in the exclusive societies described in Chapter 5 likely directed such efforts at less successful elders and at youth chafing under prohibitions against marrying and acquiring access to land. Both groups would have considered the increasingly apparent differentiation by wealth, titles, and by degrees of unfettered control over dependents as unfair, and the youth would have longed to establish homesteads of their own. Disagreements over leaving or staying in the towns are preserved in variants of Mijikenda oral traditions. While most traditions connect the Galla raids to *mung'aro* sacrifice, other traditions dwell on more intimate conflicts of “power of men over other men; men’s power over women; and men’s power over other men’s access to women.”<sup>108</sup> For example:

At Singwaya [Shungwaya], when a Giriama married, a Galla had first to sleep with his wife. One time a man married for the second time and this wife was much more beautiful than his first. He decided that he would not allow a Galla to sleep with her first. But because it was the custom, a Galla youth forced his way into the house and slept with the new bride. The husband took a knife and killed the Galla.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 41.

Justin Willis argues that these traditions are commentaries on the efforts of young men to leave the towns.<sup>110</sup> Like the tradition of Galla rights over women, these local traditions use the same grievances about control over women against local rivals to explain why individuals, families, and clans left particular towns. With the coming of the Galla, elders trying to defuse such grievances within their clan confederations had another persuasive example to argue that leaving would expose youths to the same abuses—or worse—at the hands of the Galla and without the support of the towns’ consensus-building mediations.

These motivations for leaving the town are also suggested by Mijikenda oral traditions that register mixed assessments of residence within the tight confines of a town. Besides reciting common stories about parties defeated in internal power struggles and leaving to found new towns, Krapf’s informants closely associated the words *dendana* “to ridicule one another” (MK) and *fomorerera* “to demolish to or for another” (MK) with the time when their ancestors had lived in towns. For *dendana* he notes that “this is said to have been much the practice in former times, when they lived more together in their kayas [towns]”, and concerning *fomorerera*: “this happened especially when one built his hut on the *chansa* [cleared area] of another in the kaya [town].”<sup>111</sup> While “ridicule” indicates the enmity that would cause some residents to leave and establish a new town, the image suggested by *fomorerera* (that people would build their huts on forest land

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<sup>110</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 35.

<sup>111</sup> Krapf and Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary*, 38, 83–84.

cleared by another resident, who would then cause someone to tear down such huts on his behalf) is a visceral representation of the tensions of living in close quarters.

Grievances about the tensions of town living certainly predated the threat of the Galla, but their raids which began in the sixteenth century and reached their most intense period in the seventeenth century coincided with the appearance of opportunities to leave the towns in pursuit of commercial patrons, or creditors. The threat to an idealized community posed by individuals leaving the towns to establish private homesteads was not completely forestalled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, partially because the Galla were not as great a threat as elders argued. For those with other means and outside connections, the title societies of the towns were enough incentive to continue returning, but less prosperous elders and youth opted to maintain their affiliations to the towns not because of the opportunities provided there, but because of the danger of not having a refuge to return to if hard times came.<sup>112</sup> They evidently understood the risks of commerce and going it alone. The threatening caricature of the Galla in oral traditions reminded hinterland residents that safety lay in maintaining the towns, even if they no longer felt compelled to reside there.

## **Conclusion**

Most scholars have described the sixteenth through early-nineteenth centuries in East Africa as a period of decline, emphasizing Portuguese brutality, disruption of commerce, and religious conflict between Christian rulers and their Muslim subjects. Yet,

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<sup>112</sup> Willis and Gona, "Tradition, Tribe, and State in Kenya: The Mijikenda Union, 1945-1980."

the clan confederations of eastern Kenya prospered during this era as they adapted innovations in subsistence, governance, and military organization from Portuguese, Omani, and Mosseguejo immigrants. Despite the violence perpetrated by these invaders, local communities increased their populations, adapted new subsistence and production methods to their environments, and succeeded in forming military alliances based on age-sets that fostered enduring networks of patronage throughout the region.

Kiswahili-speakers expanded their settlements to fill in the spaces between the coastal towns, and Mijikenda-speakers ventured into the dry *nyika* plains to the west. Together, they pioneered caravan routes into the interior in search of ivory and captives. Ships from Arabia and India came to the coast less frequently after the Portuguese conquests, but they eventually returned alongside European ships that carried novel goods. And, although Sultan Seyyid Sa'id is credited with the grain and clove plantations that brought new fortunes to the coastal towns, his success was founded on the eighteenth-century experiments in spice and food production grown by enslaved men and women, which motivated Lamu's resistance to Mombasa.

The residents of Mombasa rebuilt their city three times from the ashes that Portuguese captains left to smolder in the sixteenth century. But, by the early nineteenth century, Mombasa's clan confederations could enforce their interests throughout eastern Kenya and promoted their town as an "awesome place" with "warlike men who spoil for a fight." They spoke proudly of their military valor, and their poets referred to their

battles as dances.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the metaphor is still enacted in dances and games that train men to move in concert with one another and literally strengthen the arm muscles required for wielding swords.<sup>114</sup>

Mombasa's project of political consolidation was spurred in part by the militant migrants who invaded eastern Kenya in the sixteenth century. Oromo pastoralists destroyed rivals such as Malindi and drove refugees south. Speakers of Central Kenyan Bantu dialects like Kisegeju who fled the Oromo brought knowledge of organizing men into age-sets. The precarious position of incoming refugees and the subordination of youth introduced new inequalities that favored established clans and the elders who led them. At the coast, where ports and warehouses made custom houses viable, patrians adopted centralized methods of extracting customs and taxes. As they invested their wealth in plantations, more opulent mansions of stone, and slaves, they introduced greater distinctions in status and stricter control over their dependents than their forefathers had enjoyed.

However, the success of Mombasa's elders and the inland clan confederations with which they allied during the eighteenth century was quickly overshadowed by the savvy politicking of Sultan Seyyid Sa'id. His regime allowed them to build on their wealth, but they were unquestionably his subjects. Mombasa's poet Muyaka, distraught at

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<sup>113</sup> Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 146–47.

<sup>114</sup> Skene, "Arab and Swahili Dances and Ceremonies." Skene notes that some Swahili dances adapted from Omani precedents were actually training exercises. For instance the *razha* dance was intended to strengthen the sword arm, and the *chama* dance was patterned closely after it, but adapted for competitive dances between town factions.

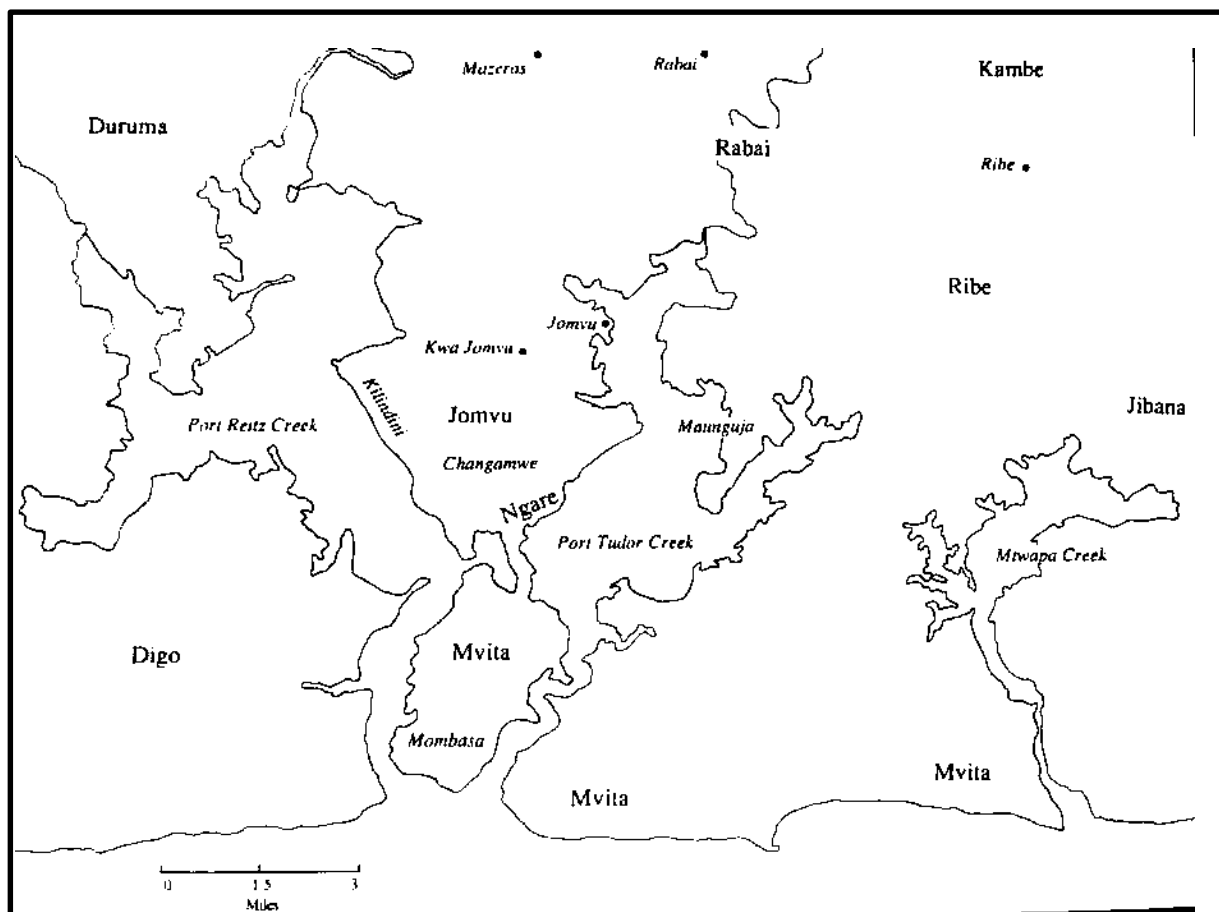
the victory of the Busaidi Omani whom he had taunted as rats, lambasted the elders who now rushed to receive gifts from the Sultan and share his feasts.<sup>115</sup> In a telling refrain that emphasizes Mombasa's subordination, he notes that "those who used to call the council, are the ones to be called today."<sup>116</sup>

Increasingly, those councils would be held in Zanzibar and exclude the non-Muslim clan confederations that jointly petitioned for Omani help in the eighteenth century and helped Mombasa secure many its victories. While the clan confederations organized alliances that stretched across the ecological, linguistic, and religious variations of eastern Kenya, the investments of coastal merchants in the plantations and slaves that drove the late-nineteenth century economy drew them away from their inland partners. In order to remain relevant in Seyyid Sa'ids new Islamic patronage network, coastal patricians soon emphasized Arab or Persian descent and unimpeachable Islamic credentials more than the common trope of Shungwaya origins and the Galla threat that united eastern Kenya. Meanwhile, inland residents abandoned their towns in favor of rural homesteads, thus attenuating the collective military strength that had ensured their parity with the wealth of coastal towns. The inland and coastal communities of eastern Kenya had long pursued distinctive economic specializations in their respective ecologies that shaped their dialects and politics; but as their lifestyles, commitments, and interests diverged further in the nineteenth century they began articulating their differences in terms of culture and religion.

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<sup>115</sup> Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 152–53.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–54.



Map 2: Mombasa and its Hinterlands  
(Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 50)

## Chapter 7

### Discourses of Difference:

#### Culture, Religion, and Ethnicity, 1837 – 1964

*They form an alien community with . . . different history  
. . . from any other component part of the district.*

- J.M. Pearson

Kenyans sometimes engage in playful banter about the various ethnic groups in their country, despite growing disapproval of such stereotyping. The Kamba are virile and fertile because of their powerful witchcraft. The Kikuyu are shrewd but greedy business people. The Maasai carry spears and believe all cattle in the world are theirs by right. The Mijikenda will sacrifice people who break their taboos. The Swahili are hospitable, but they may just as well slide you down a trap door to a waiting slave ship as allow you to share their spicy (and pungent) food.<sup>1</sup> Implicit in all of these discussions is that ethnic groups are culturally homogenous, and ethnicity is an intrinsic and immutable characteristic that people are born with. Moreover, Kenyans often consider people who reside outside the traditional homelands of their ethnic group to be perpetual outsiders.

Contrary to these popular assumptions, several historians have demonstrated that most East Africans started conceiving of ethnic groups and affiliating with them only in the twentieth century as they articulated their shared interests to colonial governments,

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<sup>1</sup> These are all tropes I heard repeated a number of times in informal situations during my field research.



often in competition with one another.<sup>2</sup> Yet Thomas Spear has cautioned against ascribing too much influence to colonial administrators, who struggled to understand, let alone control, the local politics over which they presumed to preside.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he argued that these novel identities drew on deep and widely shared traditions, else people would not have adopted them so readily and completely. Leroy Vail has described these traditions as the “cultural content” of ethnicity and recognized those who compiled and shaped these distinct heritages into ethnic ideologies as African intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> Vail focused on missionary-educated Africans who collaborated with colonial governments, often for material advantage. On the other hand, Steven Feierman’s work among the Shambaa of northern Tanzania demonstrated that African intellectuals shaped discourses of power without recourse to the colonial tools of literacy and coercion.<sup>5</sup>

As Fredrik Barth observed, all social groups maintain boundaries through their distinctive practices, but I argue that the innovators of ethnicity (as opposed to the social strategies introduced in the preceding chapters) interpreted these differences not only to those whom they sought to lead but also to foreign governments that could limit their

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<sup>2</sup> For relevant works in eastern Kenya and Tanzania see Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and Their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800-1950* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); Spear and Waller, *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa*; Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*; Justin Willis, “The Makings of a Tribe: Bondei Identities and Histories,” *Journal of African History* 33, no. 2 (1992): 191–208; Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry and Rebellion on the Swahili Coast, 1856-88*.

<sup>3</sup> Spear, Neo-Traditionalism Thomas T. Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 3–27.

<sup>4</sup> Vail, Tribalism Leroy Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

ambitions.<sup>6</sup> In eastern Kenya, the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic ideologies of the mid-twentieth century grew out of competitions and collaborations among coastal and inland patricians, Omani sultans, governors and judges, Hadrami entrepreneurs, Sufi scholars, and British officials who recruited followers for a variety of ventures. However, the slaves, clients, and other increasingly autonomous laborers insisted that these aspiring leaders support their own ambitions and thus made their own contributions to the ethnic ideologies of eastern Kenya.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, enslaved laborers in Mombasa, Zanzibar, and other coastal towns were the first promoters of ethnic groups that people joined as individuals by adopting specific behaviors. These homogenous communities contrasted with the clan confederations that people joined through membership in a constituent clan, or lineages whose elders claimed children at birth. In contrast to earlier strategies developed in East Africa, the logic of ethnicity revolves around cultural similarity, rather than descent, knowledge, or participation in particular patronage networks.

Urban laborers and their patrician patrons created the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups over four successive stages. First, urban laborers innovated a *waswahili* identity determined by personal achievement rather than descent as they aspired to become patrons themselves. Second, coastal patricians, whom British officials forced to accept the *Waswahili* label as their own, articulated a narrower definition of Swahili

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 8 for a full discussion; the foundational text for theorizing ethnicity is Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, 2d ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> East African societies classified slaves within a wide array of clients; for a summary see Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coasts."

identity defined by descent and autochthony. Third, laborers of inland origin who were unable to claim the narrower criteria for Swahili identity assembled as the affiliates of inland clan confederations to secure the necessities of urban living. Finally, inland patricians, particularly those whom British officials appointed as government “elders”, drew on the loyalties of urban laborers and their rural kin to their differentiated clan confederations to assemble the Mijikenda Union, which failed as an enduring institutional organization but succeeded in creating a sense of solidarity and kinship among the inland clan confederations.<sup>8</sup>

As intellectuals articulated these identities, they sometimes persuaded the British officials who administered East Africa from 1895 to 1964 to encode ethnicized discourses of difference in colonial law. And they found the British were particularly amenable to claims expressed in terms of religion. British officials calculated that they could often ignore claims over fallow fields and followers, but they made special efforts to protect sacred shrines such as mosques and inland *kayas*. Although Kiswahili and Mijikenda speakers share a Sabaki heritage that extends back nearly two millennia, in their competition for colonial favors, proponents of Swahili ethnicity chose to emphasize Asian ancestry and Islamic practice; the local intellectuals who articulated Mijikenda ethnicity used their stewardship of the old *kaya* towns to transform them into shrines that anchored the loyalties of urban laborers to the hinterland. British policies of “tribal”

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<sup>8</sup> Willis and Gona, “Tradition, Tribe, and State in Kenya: The Mijikenda Union, 1945-1980.”

segregation further inscribed these divisions in bureaucratic boundaries that discouraged collaboration among purportedly exclusive communities.

### **Expanding the Islamic *Umma***

The commercial slaving and provisioning economy that Seyyid Sa'id promoted along the East African coast fundamentally upset the balanced exchange relationships in eastern Kenya between the coastal and inland communities.<sup>9</sup> As suppliers and creditors of the imports that financed extractive ventures inland, the coastal clan confederations had always retained a slight advantage over their inland partners. However, the latter had mobilized their age-sets and clans to provide the military posturing, political assistance, marriage alliances, and mediation to ensure that they exchanged their crops, cattle, ivory, gum copal, slaves, and other resources for Indian Ocean imports at acceptable values. As coastal merchants invested in slave plantations along the coast for grain they also and began purchasing ivory directly from Kamba and Nyamwezi porters whose networks extended beyond the inland *nyika* into the interior where elephants and rhinoceroses were still plentiful.<sup>10</sup> These sources devalued the commodities controlled by inland patricians and their confederations without detracting from coastal patricians ability to build relationships with the Omani sultanate centered in Zanzibar.

Inland patricians tried to adapt by mobilizing their dependents to raise grain for sale to the coastal towns and to intercept ivory caravans from the interior so they could

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<sup>9</sup> For details of the coastal economy see Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar*.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen J. Rockel, "A Nation of Porters?: The Nyamwezi and the Labour Market in Nineteenth-Century Tanzania," *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 173–95.

buy the commodities for resale at the coast. However, they were also forced during famines to send surplus male and female dependents (often as pawned children or slaves) that they could no longer support to their coastal partners in attempts to salvage access to imports on credit, including life-sustaining grain.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps these patricians hoped their sons, nephews, daughters, and nieces would reinvigorate their partnerships with their coastal patrons and provide more stable avenues of exchange.

However, the increasing demand for labor at Mombasa and coastal plantations also enabled otherwise dependent youth throughout eastern Kenya greater social and physical mobility than their fathers and uncles who remained inland could control.<sup>12</sup> They attached themselves to coastal patricians who bought the cash-crops they grew on land they cleared adjacent to the coast that had been abandoned at the height of Oromo raids in the seventeenth century. For example, the branch of the Mazrui clan that had resettled in Takaungu after Sultan Sa'id's victory drew on their long association with Giriama communities to attract youthful partners, while the branch that settled south at Gazi partnered with Digo communities. Patricians put many of these men to work alongside enslaved immigrants on caravans, plantations, or in artisan workshops in Mombasa. But many of them simply wanted to establish their own homesteads and gain a greater degree of autonomy. By the late-nineteenth century, those who found positions as laborers alongside slaves in the coastal towns articulated a fluid "Swahili" identity defined by

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<sup>11</sup> Willis has described pawnship as a strategy for coping with famines but also as representative of alliances between patrons in the hinterland and the coast that curtailed potential conflicts over dependents, and perhaps over debt (*Making of the Mijikenda*, 59).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

mastery of Kiswahili, attachment to a coastal patron as an unsupervised client, adherence to Islamic practices, and styles of dress that indicated Muslim respectability.<sup>13</sup> Those men who could accomplish these feats regarded themselves as *waswahili* “Swahili people”, but the most audacious among them also claimed status as *waungwana* “patricians”, thus demonstrating their ambition to emulate their patrons.

Coastal patricians at first had little interest in this *waswahili* identity—they identified as members of clans with centuries of local standing, evidenced by the quarter of town where their stone houses nestled against those of their cousins. Instead of trying to dissuade their followers from claiming a *waswahili* identity (which at the time implied possible slave origins), patricians focused on convincing Omani political appointees and the large numbers of Hadrami entrepreneurs who flooded into East Africa after the establishment of Seyyid Sa’id’s sultanate in Zanzibar that they were social peers. Just as their slaves and clients sought respectability as *waswahili* in the eyes of their patrons by adopting *waungwana* customs and styles of dress, the coastal patricians of Mombasa’s Tissia Taifa and Thelatha Taifa adopted Arab fashions. They also abandoned *uungwana*—the Kiswahili word for “civilization” that their slaves and clients were trying to claim as *waungwana*—in favor of *ustaarabu* “civilization, lit. Arab-ness.”

One of the ways that patricians had countered the growing influence of Arab immigrants in the eighteenth century was to commission chronicles that claimed Arabic or Persian ancestry. These chronicles exaggerated when they asserted that Arab lineages

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<sup>13</sup> Glassman, “The Bondsman’s New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coasts,” 310; Parkin, “Swahili Mijikenda.”

had resided in coastal towns since the 7<sup>th</sup> century origins of Islam, but these lineages were not simply fabrications. To keep their claims to Arab descent current, patricians had long welcomed marriage alliances with immigrants from the Middle East, especially *sherifs* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad), to distinguish themselves from local farmers and fishermen. And chroniclers drew on oral traditions about the gradual accommodation of early Muslim immigrants into coastal societies that rang true with current practices.

For instance, the Kilwa Chronicle described how Sultan Ali ibn Sulaiman al-Shirazi (a Persian from Shiraz) had joined the farming community settled at Kilwa by arranging a marriage with the daughter of a local leader named Mrimba. He later purchased Kilwa Island by encircling it with colorful textiles, and Mrimba moved to the mainland. As John Middleton explains, the Persian's notion of alienable land clashed with those of his father-in-law, who considered the trader's payment to be for usufruct rights only. When Mrimba came to claim the island once more, the Persian prevailed by reading the Quran in such a way that the channel between the island and the mainland filled with water so his warriors could not cross.<sup>14</sup> The dispute over leadership and ownership was not resolved until the next generation, when the grandson of Mrimba (that is, the son of the Persian, who had married Mrimba's daughter) arranged a cross-cousin marriage with Mrimba's granddaughter. This union recognized the autochthonous rights of Mrimba's family as well as the political authority of the immigrant lineage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The magical explanation is from the Kiswahili version. An Arabic version notes instead that he simply had his followers dig the channel deeper; Freeman-Grenville, *Selected Documents*.

<sup>15</sup> Middleton, *The World of the Swahili*, 30–33.

Coastal patrician scholars, who were bilingual in Arabic and Kiswahili, transcribed most of these chronicles, originally recited orally, in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The descent claims of the chronicles suggest that town patricians commissioned them to ward off counter-claims of authority by the ever-increasing number of Muslim immigrants from Oman and the Hadramaut. The Pate Chronicle, for instance reminded newcomers that Pate's Wabarawa lineages "were Arabs and their tribe is called Hatimii, a tribe renowned in Arabia."<sup>17</sup> And the island's Nabahani sheikhs claimed that Muhammad bin Suleiman ascended to the sultanate of Pate "by right, for his father came forth from their country [Muskat] bearing the title of Sultan."<sup>18</sup> At Mombasa, the patricians with the strongest claim to recent Arabic ancestry were from the Mazrui clan and other Omani clans who had come with them in 1730. But the newly arrived Omani dismissed them as "half-castes," and Seyyid Sa'id's conquest had removed their claims to local authority as well.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the patrician families who traced their presence on the coast to pre-Portuguese times adopted the strategy of the Kilwa Chronicle by claiming Shirazi (Persian) origins, particularly on the coast south of Mombasa. As Randall Pouwels suggests: "For others who wish to create a counter-myth of equal social and cultural

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<sup>16</sup> While they were often written at the behest of Europeans, the scholars whom they consulted often referred to documents written in Arabic or Kiswahili (in Arabic script) as well as their memory.

<sup>17</sup> Tolmacheva, *The Pate Chronicle*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> However, Captain Moorsom of H. M. S. *Ariadne* who touched at Mombasa on February 28th 1824 described even the Mazrui as "half-cast Arabs," quoted in Coupland, *East Africa and Its Invaders: From Earliest Times to the Death of Seyyid Said in 1856*, 241.



worth to those who claim a distinguished Arab ancestry (especially [*sherifs*]), Persian/Shirazi legends are a logical alternative.”<sup>20</sup> For good measure, the Tissia Taifa of Mombasa asserted both Shirazi descent from Shehe Mvita and also Arabized their clan names to include the names of towns in Arabia, so for example the Jomvu became the al-Jaufy from Yumbo in Yemen and Mtwapa became al-Mutwafy from Al-Ta’if.<sup>21</sup> Such claims both bolstered the Islamic credentials of coastal patricians in the nineteenth century and demonstrated appropriate methods of incorporation through intermarriage through which immigrants could show them respect. Instead of accepting the models presented in the chronicles, immigrant Arab families often refused marriage proposal to their daughters from the patrician families of the Tissia Taifa and Thelatha Taifa, though they occasionally married the daughters of prominent local lineages. They thus continued Arab strategies of preferred marriage that ensured granddaughters would retain membership in an Arab lineage through their father.<sup>22</sup>

For centuries Mombasa’s residents had welcomed Muslim immigrants into their communities, and Omani immigrants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had acknowledged the authority, or rather the stewardship, of Mombasa’s patricians over Islamic knowledge and practice, even going so far as to abandon their Ibadhi sect in favor of Sunni Islam. However, nineteenth-century Arab immigrants built their own mosques,

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<sup>20</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 240.

<sup>21</sup> Abdulaziz, *Muyaka, 19th Century Swahili Popular Poetry*, 108; Morton, “New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins,” 639.

<sup>22</sup> Kindy, *Life and Politics in Mombasa*; Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*.

appointed their own judges, and established Islamic schools; the difference in the nineteenth century was both a matter of growing numbers and the fundamentally modern sense of a universal Islamic *umma* “community of the faithful” (Ar.) that these immigrants brought with them.<sup>23</sup>

The Busaidi regime that claimed most of the East African coast enlarged the domain in which coastal Muslims debated Islamic practices and challenged the influence of coastal patricians, who had previously considered the boundaries of the *umma* to be roughly equivalent to their clan confederations. Their New Year ceremonies focused on protecting coastal towns against malevolent spiritual forces, and they had no qualms about warring with Muslims from other clan confederations. Patricians, particularly those on the council, usually determined whether behaviors or practices were acceptable, leaving the few *ulama* “scholars” and *qadis* “judges” among them to adjudicate only difficult cases over which they could not reach an agreement. The written word of specialists was subordinate to the oral traditions maintained by town councils but could also provide an ultimate appeal to the divine authority of Islamic laws based on the Quran for those who refused the mediations of the town council.<sup>24</sup> Patricians considered Islamic knowledge beyond the basic rites of prayer and fasting to be their exclusive preserve. They invited slaves, clients, fishermen, and peasants into the mosques they built, but they

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<sup>23</sup> For the various phases of Arab immigration to East Africa, Bradford G. Martin, “Arab Migrations to East Africa in Medieval Times,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, no. 3 (1974): 367–390, doi:10.2307/217250.

<sup>24</sup> Note that the poison ordeals over which inland title societies presided followed a similar logic, since only a supernatural power (namely *Mungu* “God”) could prevent a person who took the poison from dying (see Chapter 5).

did not make efforts to educate them in the Quran and Hadith (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), let alone legal manuals.

When Seyyid Sa'id relocated permanently to Zanzibar the *liwalis* he appointed along the coast remained relatively aloof from the population; but their successors in the late-nineteenth century began to assert themselves as intermediaries in local disputes and acquire plantations to enrich themselves.<sup>25</sup> Since Omani patronage networks extended beyond Mombasa, *liwalis* did not simply consolidate their positions in the local community as previous prestigious immigrants had done. Rather they continued seeking aid from the Omani Sultans in Zanzibar as their patrons. Instead of maintaining reciprocal transfers of products and people with inland clan confederations, coastal merchants, now including Omani officials as well, opted to invest in slaves and grain plantations whose produce promised high returns at Zanzibar. The demand for grain at Zanzibar and availability of suitable land adjacent to the coast meant that profits were limited only by the amount of labor one could command.<sup>26</sup> Politically, the channeling of a new patronage system through Zanzibar forced patricians and local *qadis* to look beyond their local communities for authority and support.

In the 1870s, Sultan Bargash (r.1870-1888), inspired by reform movements in Oman that emphasized the proselytization of Ibadhi Islam to Sunni Muslims, started

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<sup>25</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 111, 123.

<sup>26</sup> While land was readily available near Malindi, Mombasa's investors relied heavily on small farms—hence Krapf's description of Swahili land-owners "encroaching" on the hinterland (Johann Ludwig Krapf, "Revd Dr. Krapf's Journal," Part 16, Africa Missions Section IV [Marlborough, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications, 1997], Reel 317, "Journal," 25 Sep 1844, 505; Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, 103). Also see New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 76.

appointing local *qadis* directly, thus breaking Seyyid Sa'id's preference of confirming the *qadi* nominations of the Thelatha Taifa and Tissia Taifa. Though he still sought recommendations from town elders, the Sultanate began paying the salaries of local *qadis* and occasionally removed *qadis* in order to "break the grip of some clans over religious offices."<sup>27</sup>

Sultan Bargash was assisted in his bid to exert more control over local affairs by the droves of Hadrambi Arab entrepreneurs who immigrated to East Africa in the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Although they rejected his Ibadhi branch of Islam, they supported the selection of local *qadis* from outside local clans. Thus Sultan Bargash could establish patronage networks that stretched back to him through *liwalis* and *qadis* beholden personally to him. Town patricians at the coast required the tacit support of the Sultan and his appointees in local politics in addition to financial support for their increasingly expensive tastes in imported luxuries and financing for their purchases of slaves, whose labor secured future profits.<sup>29</sup> Though they failed to convince Omani and Hadrami immigrants that they shared with them an Arab ancestry, the wealth they acquired from their slave plantations allowed them to keep pace with the Arab fashions and fads of the Zanzibari court.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea*.

<sup>29</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 182.

<sup>30</sup> Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*.

While the Omani sultanate challenged the authority of patricians to mediate their local affairs, Hadrami immigrants were accompanied by Sufi mystics and Sunni *ulama* (clerics) trained in the Islamic centers of Arabia who challenged their patronage over clients and slaves. Sufi brotherhoods such as the Qadiriyya *tariqa* founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and promulgated by Hadrami *sherifs* throughout the Indian Ocean actively proselytized among slaves and immigrants in East Africa to gain converts to Islam. Instead of confining knowledge and rare written texts to patrician clans, Sufis strove to extend knowledge of the Quran and other Islamic texts and practices to everyone. For a nominal fee (or none), they welcomed students of any status to learn the Quran, Hadith, and other spheres of Islamic knowledge such as astrology, medicine, and Sufi meditations. For instance, immigrants introduced folk magic “based on the employment of written material,” such as protective amulets into which Muslim doctors enclosed Quranic verses.<sup>31</sup> These challenges to patrician authority struck at the very ways elites had legitimized their status; their exclusive knowledge of Islam had secured their stewardship of the town just as inland title societies had used *uganga* to support their authority.<sup>32</sup>

By expanding education in literate Islamic sciences beyond the privileged few, Sufi egalitarian notions of Islam enabled slaves, fishermen, farmers, and others to claim a respectable Muslim identity that patricians had always denied them. Not insignificantly,

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<sup>31</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 121. Fort Jesus Conservation Lab maintains a few dozen Kiswahili manuscripts describing how to make Islamic amulets for various purposes.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter Five and *Ibid.*, 82–88.

adherence to Islam increased through incorporating the large numbers of the “Nyasa” slaves arriving from remote and dispersed regions in the interiors of Tanzania and Mozambique. As Jonathon Glassman demonstrated in nineteenth-century German East Africa, the enslaved dependents “used the rites of *zikri* and *maulid* to assert their full membership in the community of the faithful (*umma*), in ways that challenged the ritual authority” of patricians.<sup>33</sup>

As Sufi clerics provided avenues for lower-class outsiders to gain religious training independent of patrician networks, local patricians could no longer dictate the terms whereby a person could become a religious scholar or gain *baraka*—prestige associated with piety and evidenced by good fortune.<sup>34</sup> Patricians assured themselves that the poor among them could not access *baraka*, but the teachings of Qadirriya Sufis emphasized that any disciple could share “some of the spiritual power of departed saints.”<sup>35</sup> Patrician control over Islamic knowledge further deteriorated once some Hadrami immigrants became wealthy enough to send their family members to train in Islamic cities in Arabia, then return with Arabian practices of Islam that they claimed to be orthodox.<sup>36</sup>

For example, in Lamu, Habib Swaleh and his family gradually supplanted more established lineages at the turn of the twentieth century, partly because he was more

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<sup>33</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry and Rebellion on the Swahili Coast, 1856-88*, 143.

<sup>34</sup> Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry and Rebellion on the Swahili Coast, 1856-88*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

tolerant than established *ulama* of inland practices that enslaved converts incorporated into their worship. In 1909 he instituted a new *maulidi*—“commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birth”—in Lamu based on a Hadrami text written by the Yemeni Habib Ali ibn Muhammed al-Habshy but translated into Kiswahili and accompanied by frame drums played within the mosque.<sup>37</sup> When some patricians wanted to run him out of town for a breach of custom that forbade musical instruments in mosques, other *ulama* confirmed that a renowned Muslim scholar in Yemen named Abu Bakr Ibn Salim also played drums in the mosque. Habib Swaleh also challenged social norms by inviting palm tree tappers (who in Lamu were hired laborers or slaves) to perform a dance during *maulidi* celebrations called *uta* that was also practiced by non-Muslim inland communities.<sup>38</sup>

Patricians in Mombasa retained their influence, but only by accepting the new conception of their communities as parts of a universal *umma* (“community of the faithful”) and indicating their solidarity with their Muslim clients and slaves by sponsoring *maulidi* recitations. The practices of universalist Islam began to supplant local traditions such as Swahili New Year that viewed the *umma* as bounded by the town.<sup>39</sup> Patricians also retained control of religious training by expanding access to the

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<sup>37</sup> Mohsein Seyyid Ali Said Ahmad Badawy Jamal al-Layl, interview by Daren Ray, Digital Video and Audio, trans. Mohammed Hassan, February 17, 2010, Ray Research Deposit, Fort Jesus Museum Audio-Visual Department.

<sup>38</sup> I observed a similar dance among the communities in Rabai, though they used iron clamshells in place of seed pods.

<sup>39</sup> Stambouli Abdilahi Nassir emphasized that Arabs purposely campaigned against the *sadaqa* “feast” of Swahili New Year in order to diminish the influence of the Twelve Tribes, Field Notes, July 17, 2010.

literate sciences of scholars dedicated to universal Islam into the local institutions of learning which they controlled, including mosques and a growing network of religious schools. As coastal patricians contributed to Sufi projects to retain their stewardship over Islam, they also grudgingly validated the efforts of the clients and slaves who had begun styling themselves as *waungwana* and *waswahili*.

While the Omani occupation of the coast in the eighteenth century had prompted counter-claims of authority by indigenous patricians, not until the Busaidi sultans integrated the entire coast of East Africa into global trade networks of the nineteenth century did the coastal patricians lose their hold on political and religious leadership. Arab immigrants failed to honor Kiswahili-speaking patricians' claims to Arab and Persian descent that would have allowed them to assimilate. So they began sponsoring Islamic schools, mosques, and festivals to promote Muslim solidarity. While descent and wealth remained important, adherence to Islamic practices as defined by Arabian standards of orthodoxy rapidly became the most important factor in claiming membership in coastal communities.

### **Deriding Wanyika Barbarity**

Both Kiswahili-speaking patricians and aspiring *waswahili* strove to distinguish themselves from *washenzi*—an Arabic-derived word meaning “barbarians.” Patricians and *waswahili* used the derogative stereotype *washenzi* to refer to imported slaves (as opposed to slaves born at the coast who spoke Kiswahili) and immigrants from the African interior, including those in Mombasa’s immediate hinterland known since the eighteenth century as *wanyika* (“bush people”). For centuries, the name *wanyika* had held



positive connotations, as it indicated their mastery over the inland environments whose resources sustained the coastal economy; but, the stereotype acquired negative connotations in the era of Busaidi Omani rule. In addition to being *kaffirs* “unbelievers” (Ar.), the *wanyika* communities that constituted the inland clan confederations of Rabai, Giriama, Ribe and others had largely abandoned their towns in favor of rural homesteads. To the townspeople of the coast, the dispersed residences of the *wanyika* demonstrated that they lacked *utamaduni*, a word meaning “refinement” or “cosmopolitanism” that Kiswahili borrowed from an Arabic word derived from same root as *madina*, “city” (Ar.).

As coastal patricians joined in the universal *umma*, many of them also abandoned their alliances with the inland patricians, while inviting inland youth to join them at the coast as supporters against their immigrant rivals. But they forced these clients who moved from inland communities to abandon their *wanyika* heritages. John Ludwig Krapf, the first Christian missionary to live at Rabai, documented the tensions between the coastal and inland communities in the mid-nineteenth century. Krapf noted the haughtiness of coastal Muslims toward *wanyika*, even as he emphasized their continued dependence on one another:

The secular interests of the Wanicas [wanyika] are intimately connected with those of the people of Mombas[a]. Both live in peace with each other, except that the latter according to the usual

Mohamedan haughtiness look on the Wanicas as obstinate Koffas [kaffirs] or infidels.<sup>40</sup>

Krapf even described a mixed Muslim/Wanyika village in which a well-marked physical boundary separated the two polarized communities “lest quarrels arise amongst the mixed population.”<sup>41</sup> Though Krapf ascribed this animosity (in no less dismissive Victorian Christian terms) to the “usual Mohamedan haughtiness,” he also provided a clear image of the degree to which relationships between inland and coastal clan confederations were shifting toward contrastive stereotyping and how the derogatory labels *wanyika* and *kaffir* “unbeliever” both implied the other.

According to Krapf, the Omani Sultan had little interest in securing clients beyond the ports of the coast. He suggested that the Sultan’s disinterest in cultivating direct relationships with inland clients made it difficult for these communities to exchange their goods directly at the coast. In particular, Krapf’s *wanyika* informants expressed a fear of going to Mombasa because:

[T]he ‘twelve sheikhs’ who pay to represent the Wanyika in Mombasa are no longer able to provide protection and Wanyika are sometimes jailed for the debts of other Wanyika.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Johann Ludwig Krapf, “Revd Dr. Krapf’s Journal,” Part 16, Africa Missions Section IV (Marlborough, Wiltshire: Adam Matthew Publications, 1997), Reel 317, “Journal,” 15 Sept 1844, 491.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 May 1845, 543.

<sup>42</sup> “If a Wakamba or Wanika does not pay the debt which he owes to a subject of Mombas[a], the first man, whom the Muhamedan creditor can catch, is seized and imprisoned, until the relations of the prisoner’s tribe pay off the debt or until they can induce the original debtor, to settle his affairs at Mombas[a]” (*Ibid.*, 30 Jan 1845, 585).

Affiliation with an inland clan confederation, instead of protecting one's interest in Mombasa, had become a liability.

But inland patricians, by then residing most of the time in homesteads outside their towns, were not locked entirely out of the coastal economy. As before, they attempted to draw on the collective strength of their confederations in the interior to ensure viable terms of exchange through what were effectively oligopolistic combinations. For instance, Krapf noted that “the Wanicas always take vengeance on the delinquents [i.e. coastal creditors who refused to return pawned dependents] by closing their chief market places to the Mombassians.”<sup>43</sup> Though the effectiveness of this long-standing technique of pulling together for self-defense was doubtful, according to Krapf this collective strategy was commonly the recourse taken when creditors in Mombasa (including governors appointed by the Sultan), did not allow them to redeem dependents whom they had pawned for grain during famines.<sup>44</sup> Instead, the *wanyika* drew together—as the outsiders they had been declared—to complain that their wards had been sold to slaving dhows headed for Arabia. The pawning of children is yet another indication that inland patricians were finding it difficult to maintain parity with their coastal partners in the nineteenth century—though Justin Willis suggests that these incidents of sale probably exaggerated more general concerns over the voluntary departure of former dependents, who devoted their labor to coastal patrons.<sup>45</sup> These complaints, which

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Sept 1845, 506.

<sup>44</sup> In particular, pawning was a strategy for coping with famine; there were three major famines during the nineteenth century, 1837, 1884-85, and 1898-99 (Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 51).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-57.

probably represented dramatized oral versions of actual instances, demonstrate how Krapf's *wanyika* associates reciprocated the no-less exaggerated accusations of barbarism leveled against them in Mombasa with a negative discourse of difference against Muslims as "traitorous."

While such stereotypes cultivated a negative stereotype of Muslim patricians throughout the hinterland, the shared hostility towards the coast did not elicit a collective response. The nine viable clan confederations during the era of Busaidi rule pursued varying strategies, as each competed with the others to specialize in locally-valued commodities since they had lost control over commodities for export. The inland patricians responded to the hemorrhage of local clients and dependents to the coast by trying to reinforce the collective strength of their age-sets, clans, and title societies, which they hoped would provide connections through dependents to the coastal economy as it had in the past. Through initiation rituals, these strategies also provided a possible avenue to retaining the allegiance of youth otherwise headed for Mombasa in search of opportunities for themselves. If more youth were made elders and given the authority to establish homesteads for themselves, perhaps they would be more likely to remain inland and contribute to the well-being of the patricians, who were left with the towns as their principal path to prominence. Missionary Charles New noted in 1873:

Every adult expects to become a member of the Kambi [ruling age-set], and there are not many who do not attain the honour. Thus it

becomes a parliament composed of almost the entire people, but which has but little to do but to govern itself.<sup>46</sup>

By emphasizing allegiance to the age-sets of the clan confederations, the patricians protected the more exclusive title societies from which they derived their remaining (but declining) authority and prestige.

However, most productive efforts would have been organized at the clan or homestead level, since mobilizing an entire clan confederation for one's personal interests would have been beyond the capacity of any single elder, and all were still in competition with one another.<sup>47</sup> For instance, many patricians in the Rabai clan confederation specialized in making palm wine for local distribution.<sup>48</sup> While tapping palm wine was an old technique, Arabai cultivators began producing it in large enough quantities during the nineteenth century to supply most of the substantial ritual (and recreational) uses of the alcohol throughout the region.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the inland residents intercepted the Kamba and Nyamwezi ivory caravans passing through their territory from the interior. While they did not prevent all of these caravans from reaching the coast, Krapf observed that the Giriama in particular acquired most of the "Articles of trade which are brought from the Interior."<sup>50</sup> They could

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<sup>46</sup> New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> One exception was Bimboro Fungo a Giriama patricians who was so successful at gathering support that Kaya Dzangamizi (also known as Kaya Giriama) was renamed Kaya Fungo in his honor during the early nineteenth century; Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> For an extensive treatment of the development of this local economy, see Herlehy, "An Economic History of the Kenya Coast the Mijikenda Coconut Palm Economy, Ca. 1800-1980."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Krapf, "Revd Dr. Krapf's Journal," 17 Feb 1845, 598.

then sell the ivory and slaves they gleaned from the caravans at the regional seasonal markets that Krapf described or take them to the coast to sell for imports.<sup>51</sup> Also available at such markets would be local provisions for the passing porters. Krapf suggested that when the Chonyi clan confederation hosted a market, they “leased” their homes to travelers for the trading season, suggesting that people traveled for some distance to attend.<sup>52</sup> Thus, instead of relying only on the coastal economy, the inland clan confederations also promoted production and consumption in the local economy on regional scales that laid further bases for what later generations would invoke as a modern “Mijikenda” ethnic identity.

The most successful clan confederation of the nineteenth century was the Giriama; many young men cleared land for the Mazrui grain estates on the coastal plain near Takaungu, between Mombasa and Malindi. By claiming much of the land suitable for grain cultivation, the Giriama could participate in the grain trade that provisioned ships laden with slaves on the Indian Ocean, the interior caravans carrying ivory, and the enslaved populations of Zanzibar who could not subsist on the spices they were forced to cultivate. They and Duruma communities also specialized in raising cattle in numbers large enough to support extravagant feasts associated with *maulidi* recitations and dance competitions at the coast.

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<sup>51</sup> Krapf notes that “the Mombassians resort to [the Giriama region] in order to buy—for instance—slaves, ivory, copal, and Rhinoceros’ horns” (Ibid.).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., “Journal,” 13 Mar 1845, 544.

All of these activities—palm wine cultivation, grain farming, caravan provisioning, and breeding cattle—required more and more dependents to harvest the palm sap, clear land, and haul the ivory to be exchanged for provisions. However, even as patricians mobilized their followers and their clans to produce for the commercially oriented economy, the youth who made these efforts possible were seeking brighter opportunities at the coast for themselves. For example, the youth sent to cultivate grain near Takaungu also aligned themselves with coastal patrons in brazen betrayals of the parents and kin that still elicit painful memories.<sup>53</sup>

Inland patricians who claimed land along the creeks that connected the hills with the island of Mombasa sometimes attracted town dwellers seeking inland partners. For example, Krapf describes a Muslim from the coast who had joined the hinterland community of Rabai:

At first he lived in the village Rabbay amidst the pagan Wanikas, whose favour he soon had won by a prudent conduct and by accommodation to their superstitious practices. A dying [man] made him the heir of a considerable piece of ground situated near the creek often mentioned in my journals, on the foot of the hill of Rabbay. . . . A pagan family associated with him, assisted in digging the ground, etc.<sup>54</sup>

Presumably, the inland elder's dependents would have accepted the Muslim inheriting this land, well outside their claims on the legacy of the elder who had died, as a patron

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<sup>53</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Krapf, "Revd Dr. Krapf's Journal," 23 Mar 1845, 554, emphasis added.

with access to goods and credit on the coast. The particular arrangement Krapf reported was probably not unique. Although such incorporations of Muslims from the coast potentially benefitted the heirs to inland traders, entrusting land to clan outsiders was risky. Instead of being subject to arbitration by their elders and title societies, the Muslim could call upon Islamic courts at the coast to interpret and enforce the inheritance as alienated land.

While inland patricians could attract individual dependents from the coast through bequeathing land, at the expense of the dependents they had assembled, there was a stark imbalance in the expectations demanded of Muslims there and of the migrant youth in Mombasa. Muslims sometimes relocated inland to affiliate with patrons there, but they did not renounce Islam or change their style of dress when they did so. The young men seeking patrons in Mombasa, however, were expected to relinquish or at least downplay their rural roots due to the growing disdain there for individuals with *washenzi* backgrounds or habits.

The growing vigilance among coastal patricians over legitimate Muslim identities prompted slaves and youth from the hinterland seeking patrons at the coast to present themselves as “Swahili”—that is, residents on the coast with no local identities other than this generic descriptive in terms of residence and language rather than specific clan” affiliations to the Thelatha Taifa or Tissia Taifa. The universal *umma* promoted by Sufi brotherhoods also provided a way to transcend these local identities. Grasping “Swahili” as a fluid and unaffiliated identity enabled youth and slaves to shift their clientship easily from Muslim patron to Muslim patron, but it also gave the patricians in Mombasa an



advantage in attracting clients—or, rather, casual labor with little claim to the old personal obligations of patrons to clients.<sup>55</sup> In particular, most *waswahili* (of *wanyika* or slave origin) preferred the flexible wage labor arrangement known as *kibarua* that allowed them to shift from patron to patron as they saw fit. However, some *wanyika* joined the lineages and clans of their patrons to become full members of the community.

The discourses of difference that the coastal and inland patricians articulated as requirements for patronage defined which Islamic practices were acceptable and expected at the coast and which rituals were acceptable among *wanyika kaffirs* in the hinterland. Along the coast, adherence to supposedly homogeneous orthodox Islamic practices promised respect in the new broadly construed *umma* and became a requirement for acceptance as a client. In the hinterland, dependents continued to claim patrons through participation in the multiple institutions arrayed around particular towns, such as title societies and age-sets. While the *umma* demanded exclusive individual devotion to the faith (for instance recitation of the *shahada* “declaration of Islamic faith” [Ar.] and performance of daily prayers), inland communities accepted multiple and flexible strategies of affiliation; a Muslim could belong provided he participated in what struck the missionaries as “superstitious practices,” though in doing so he risked his Muslim affiliations on the coast.

These new demarcations of identity through expected and prohibited behavior marked the coast as homogeneously Muslim and the hinterland as homogeneously

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<sup>55</sup> Clients also undergirded the entire credit system of the coast, as those who could command labor also had a share in their wages, enabling them to take out loans and finance agriculture in the hinterland and their own coastal plantations; see Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 47–66.

*wanyika*, or—to the missionaries—“pagan.” The discourses contrasting town with hinterland, Muslim with *kaffir*, *waungwana* with *washenzi*, and Swahili with Wanyika, laid the foundation for a collective imaginary among all residents of the hinterland that increasingly distinguished them from coastal Muslims. Inland patricians tried to persuade less fortunate elders and youth from seeking fortunes away from their homes and traded insults with the Muslims who were enticing their youth to abandon their elders. These discourses created the boundaries that circumscribed and enabled the efforts of the next generation who articulated these differences to the British bureaucrats. In particular, they followed the preference of the imperial officials who took over the administration of eastern Kenya in the late nineteenth century to describe differences among their communities in terms of culture and religion.

### **Marking Ethnic Boundaries**

By the late nineteenth century, Zanzibar became an important trans-shipment station of the spice, ivory, and slave trades in the Western Indian Ocean and attracted consuls from Great Britain, America, Germany, France, and Italy, among other interested Europeans. From there, the Europeans explored potential investments on the mainland. Missionaries like John Ludwig Krapf went out in search of souls to save; others went in search of rubber and timber. So Charles Guillain, in addition to now-invaluable insights into coastal history and traditions, recorded notes on prices and resources.<sup>56</sup> Carl Peters of Germany went a step further and collected treaties from mainland communities that

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<sup>56</sup> Guillain, *Documents Sur l'Histoire, La Geographie, et Le Commerce de La Cote Orientale d'Afrique*.

became the legal basis for the establishment of German East Africa in 1885. Germany's claims caused a stir in Britain's government, which was opposed to funding the establishment of colonies in Africa but wary of the German foothold near Zanzibar. Furthermore, though the Germans claimed only inland territories, it seemed unlikely that they would be content to honor Zanzibar's claim to sovereignty at the coast by paying custom dues; a German assault on Zanzibar to secure the coast seemed likely.<sup>57</sup>

So, Britain worked with Germany and France to demarcate more precisely the Sultan's dominions, which they had agreed in 1862 to honor in a treaty that had separated Zanzibar and Oman into separate sultanates.<sup>58</sup> They agreed that the Zanzibar Sultanate included the East African coast and its islands from Kismayu in the north to the Ruvuma River in the south but extended inland only ten miles. They then divided the mainland into British and German "spheres of influence." The *procès verbal* they signed in June 1886 (without consulting Zanzibar's Sultan Barghash bin Said) then became the foundation for negotiations with the Sultan over his coastal dominions.<sup>59</sup>

The German East Africa Company in 1887 leased the right to collect customs from the Zanzibar Sultanate at Dar es Salaam and Pangani, two principal port towns on the mainland that they also developed into caravan stations. And in 1888, Great Britain granted a charter to the Imperial British East Africa Company to lease from Sultan Barghash a concession to his mainland dominions in the British sphere of influence,

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<sup>57</sup> John Flint, "The Wider Background to Partition and Colonial Occupation," in *History of East Africa*, ed. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 352–390.

<sup>58</sup> E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, 3rd Ed. Vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 326.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, 876.

including Mombasa and Malindi.<sup>60</sup> In return for a regular payment and a percentage of the customs collected, the concession granted the company all other customs dues and powers to govern the dominions in the Sultan's stead. They were, however, charged to uphold the religious rights of the Sultan's Muslim subjects.<sup>61</sup>

The British East African Company was a failure as a business. By the 1870s, the spice and grain markets that sustained East Africa's economy had become saturated. The price of cloves dropped, while British anti-slavery patrols increased the cost of enslaved labor, thus reducing incentives for further investments in plantations. Coastal merchants, unable to shift to other ventures, mortgaged plantations to Indian financiers to purchase more slaves and sustain their luxurious lifestyles.<sup>62</sup> Ivory remained the most viable commodity, but required expensive caravans to transport from the far interior. By the time Sultan Barghash granted the concession, custom dues barely covered the company's annual payment on the lease.<sup>63</sup>

Continued financial troubles and the death of the strong-willed Sultan Bargash in 1888 made the Zanzibar Sultanate vulnerable to British pressures. In 1890, Great Britain convinced Sultan Ali bin Said (r. 1890-93) to agree to a protectorate treaty with assurances of autonomy that were quickly dismissed when Consul-General Gerald Portal took control of the customs house and the Sultan's treasury in 1891 on behalf of the

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<sup>60</sup> Lamu and Witu were originally granted to the Germans but later added to the British sphere of influence.

<sup>61</sup> P. L. McDermott, *British East Africa; or, IBEA; a History of the Formation and Work of the Imperial British East Africa Company* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893).

<sup>62</sup> Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar*.

<sup>63</sup> Marie de Kiewiet Hemphill, "The British Sphere, 1884-94," in *History of East Africa*, ed. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 410.

British Crown. The Imperial British East African Company was now paying a lease to the government that chartered it. Despite its financial failures, the company was successful at establishing an overland route to the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro to the north of Lake Victoria. This narrow path through central Kenya established British claims to the sphere of influence they had asserted on paper. In 1895, Great Britain took over the lease from the British East Africa Company and established the British East Africa Protectorate with the agreement of a pliable Sultan, Hamad bin Thuwaini (r. 1893-96). And in 1897 they financed the building of the Uganda Railway along the route pioneered by the company.

British officials decided to administer the ten-mile wide strip of coast that the Sultan of Zanzibar had ceded to the company separately from the remainder of the East African Protectorate.<sup>64</sup> Officials were compelled by the Protectorate treaties to preserve the pre-existing Islamic courts on the coastal strip and decided to incorporate them at the lowest level of their legal system with jurisdiction over civil suits; they also asked *qadis* to act as assessors in appeal cases. In the first two decades of British administration, they relied heavily upon literate *waswahili* and Arabs men to assist them in hinterland stations, where British administrators presumed to hold court over local communities. But they gradually transferred these assistant back to the coast and relied on hinterland patricians

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<sup>64</sup> The territories to the west of the Sultan's coastal strip were acquired through purchase and conquest, both by the East Africa Protectorate and its predecessor, the Imperial British East Africa Company; for details see Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*; McDermott, *British East Africa; Or, IBEA; a History of the Formation and Work of the Imperial British East Africa Company*.

to help interpret native custom.<sup>65</sup> After 1909, the policy of separation became more explicit under the leadership of Provincial Commissioner Charles Hopley. As he wrote to a subordinate, “It is generally advisable to keep the administration of Swahili governed by Mahomedan Law and Nyika tribes who come under tribal law quite separate.”<sup>66</sup>

Although colonial officials developed distinct policies for the “Mohamedan” coast and the “native” interior, practical considerations prevented a formal demarcation of the ten-mile strip: if measured from the low-water mark of the ocean tides as stipulated in the treaty, Swahili settlements such as Jomvu would have been included in the strip because they nestled against the salt-water creek that extended inland but then retreated with the tide.<sup>67</sup> But this aggressive interpretation of the treaty language also would have included Rabai and a number of other non-Muslim communities that the British did not want to “contaminate” with Islamic law.<sup>68</sup> Thus Jomvu was originally included in a sub-district with Rabai in 1908 when it was marked out provisionally as a “Nyika Reserve.”<sup>69</sup> Although Jomvu was considered “Mohamedan,” it was closer to the district station at *nyika* Rabai than Mombasa. Furthermore, Jomvu was one of the nine communities that constituted the Tissia Taifa of Mombasa and so refused to be under the legal jurisdiction

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<sup>65</sup> The principle of separation was codified in “Native Courts Regulation of August 12 1897”, which directed that District Commissioners should court assessors in the “Mohammedan Coast Region” should be a *kadhi* while an elder should be selected in ‘non-Mohammedan’ regions “Circular, Chief Native Court, Mombasa,” 18 December 1900, KNA/AG/11/16.

<sup>66</sup> “Provincial Commissioner C. W. Hopley to E. V. Hammond, District Commissioner of Shimoni,” 10 October 1913, KNA/CC/12/15.

<sup>67</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 118; colonial officials used “Mohamedan” as a pejorative adjective for “Muslim;” note that the inconsistent spelling in quotations reflects contemporary variants.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 117–144.

<sup>69</sup> Official Gazette of the East Africa Protectorate, 1 May 1908, p. 271.

of the same Islamic official as the neighboring and rival Changamwe clans from the Thelatha Taifa.<sup>70</sup>

By 1910, District Commissioners had formed several councils of elders to perform administrative work in local communities.<sup>71</sup> Since Jomvu had previously refused to be in the same jurisdiction as Changamwe, British officials administered Jomvu as they did in other inland communities, through a local council led by an elder. This arrangement subtly transformed earlier institutions for settling claims by an *ad hoc* council of clan elders with knowledge of the lineages or land in dispute.<sup>72</sup> In severe cases, complaints could be brought to the elders of a clan confederation, or to Islamic judges in Mombasa appointed by the Sultan's government in Zanzibar. Under the British system, a permanent council of elders appointed by District Commissioners had the responsibility of collecting hut-taxes, enforcing government policies, and resolving disputes over land and marriage.

In a memorandum dated 2 May 1913, British Assistant Commissioner J. M. Pearson expressed the desire to centralize district authority at Rabai as an independent district, instead of leaving it a sub-district of Mombasa. At the time he noted that “no Arabs live in Jomvu . . . , so it should not be difficult but for the contrary influence of the

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<sup>70</sup> The official over Changamwe was a lower level Islamic judge known as a *mudir* who was under the supervision of the District Commissioner of Mombasa (“Rabai Sub-District,” n.d., KNA/DC/KFI/3/2).

<sup>71</sup> These councils were formalized as Local Native Councils in 1924, Donald G. Schilling, “Local Native Councils and the Politics of Education in Kenya, 1925-1939,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 1976): 220, doi:10.2307/217565.

<sup>72</sup> For example, see “Notes on Duruma Kambi,” 1917, KNA/DC/MSA/5/1.

Tissia Taifa [Nine Tribes].”<sup>73</sup> Apparently, Pearson felt that Islamic law need apply only to the Arab subjects of the Zanzibar Sultan. Yet the Tissia Taifa based in Mombasa were actively asserting themselves as communities of Arab descent in order to gain access to rights that the British government reserved for non-native Arabs—not incidentally the right to register individual land titles. In Jomvu, prominent individuals from the Tissia Taifa had sponsored a rival to the elder appointed by the British, which was the interference that prompted Pearson’s complaint.

In September 1913, the conflict between the British-backed council at Jomvu and the Tissia Taifa escalated when Jomvu’s council decided to evict a man named Mfaki bin Salim from Maunguja, one of three settlements that composed Jomvu. They accused him of immoral behavior, allegedly related to gambling and prostitution.<sup>74</sup> Instead of accepting their authority, he hired a European solicitor in Mombasa and contested his eviction on the grounds that the people of Jomvu ought to be subject to Islamic law, since they were Muslims. He also sought help from some prominent members of the Tissia Taifa, who on his behalf secured the assent of Provincial Commissioner Charles Hobley to halt the eviction order. Part of his petition reads:

3rd Recently the Government Mzee [elder] of Maunguja with a so called council have taken upon themselves to decide cases and have

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<sup>73</sup> “Asst. District Commissioner J. M. Pearson to Provincial Commissioner C. W. Hobley,” 2 May 1913, KNA/PC/Coast/1/3/62.

<sup>74</sup> I have not yet identified Mfaki bin Salim in any other records, though J. M. Pearson reports the following about his co-petitioners: “The objectors to the council are the young men of locations, who would equally resent any system of order and restraint . . . . These young men appear to be an idle and dissolute lot and are believed to be living on the proceeds of prostitution. They have no *shambas* [farms] nor any visible means of subsistence” (“District Commissioner J. M. Pearson to Provincial Commissioner C. W. Hobley,” 8 September, 1913, KNA/PC/Coast/1/3/62).



caused much dissatisfaction among the rest of the people of Jomvu and the powers exercised by this Mzee going even to the extent of expulsion from the Village are entirely illegal and even if such Powers are in accord with Wanyika custom they cannot be legally exercised over Mohamedans such as the Petitioners. The Wajomvu are similar to the Wachangamwe and in Changamwe there is a duly appointed Mudir [a minor Islamic judge] who decides cases according to the Mohamedan Law.

4th The Petitioners very strongly object to any return to Paganism and pagan customs such as is implied in a grant of new Powers to the Mzee and a council.<sup>75</sup>

Mfaki bin Salim's petition thus expressly associated the administrative councils of elders with paganism in order to argue for the placement of Jomvu within an Islamic jurisdiction. He even went so far as to compare Jomvu favorably with Changamwe, the rival from the Thelatha Taifa confederation to the south whose jurisdiction Jomvu's elders had previously refused to share.<sup>76</sup>

Pearson argued against Mfaki bin Salim's characterization of councils as pagan, noting that Jomvu's elders enforced Islamic law inasmuch as they understood it.<sup>77</sup>

Communities on the East African coast, such as those in Mombasa, had been incorporating Islamic law into their customs for centuries.<sup>78</sup> However, trained judges

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<sup>75</sup> "Petition to Provincial Commissioner, Mombasa," n.d., KNA/PC/Coast/1/3/62.

<sup>76</sup> Jomvu elders reasserted the higher status of their community over Changamwe in a group interview conducted by the author on 21 May 2011; recording in possession of author.

<sup>77</sup> "District Commissioner Hemsted to Provincial Commissioner C. W. Hobley," 8 September 1913, KNA/PC/Coast/1/3/62.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Battuta, *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Routledge, 1929).

were few and far between, so most communities made do with their limited knowledge of Islamic law and much more extensive communal sensibilities of justice. But Pearson's claim that councils could administer Islamic law was undercut by the same policy that contrasted the system of councils with a coastal judicial system of trained Islamic judges. Ultimately, the eviction order for Mfaki bin Salim was revoked.

Soon after this incident, Pearson submitted a new recommendation for the formation of the "Nyika Reserve and Rabai District" that recognized the people of Jomvu as "Muslims" and expressly separated it from the Nyika on the grounds of cultural and religious difference.

By this boundary it is noted that Jomvu is cut out from the Rabai District. This has been done because Rabai is to be a Nyika District with tribal organization of local councils to be supervised from the District Office, whereas the Wa Jomvu are Mohammedans alleged Arabs from Shirazi with no innate tribal organization, whose interests are with the Coast and not in the Nyika country. . . . *As it is they form an alien community with different customs, different religion, different standards of morals and conduct, different history, different temperament, from any other component part of the district.*<sup>79</sup>

Pearson's recommendation that Jomvu be moved to the Mombasa district settled the border of the coast at Jomvu—but nowhere else. Other points of the border were left unmarked, or followed the boundaries of the several plantations that Arab and Swahili landowners had registered and titled in Mombasa, showing that local residents had

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<sup>79</sup> "Rabai District Boundaries," 1 September 1913, KNA/DC/KFI/3/2.

significant influence in setting the internal (and incipiently ethnic) borders of the Protectorate.<sup>80</sup> The residents of Jomvu who opposed the council had effectively used the policy enacted by the British to formalize cultural distinctions from their neighboring communities that would align them more closely with politics at the coast. For Mfaki bin Salim, the immediate result was freedom from the authority of elders in return for lax oversight from distant Islamic judges.

For others in Jomvu, the new boundaries represented an added burden. In an effort to restrict the movements of itinerant traders across district boundaries, British officials established a pass system that required visitors and migrants to check in with the District Commissioner before conducting any business within his domain and inform government appointed tax collectors before relocating.<sup>81</sup> When women who had routinely traveled from Jomvu to Rabai to sell chickens and clay pots complained about the pass system, officials waived the requirements for them but still insisted that anyone seeking to transport and trade livestock first secure a pass.<sup>82</sup> After officials tightened the pass system with the Stock Traders Licence [sic] Ordinance of 1918, the livestock trade between districts collapsed, causing a steep rise in cattle prices in Mombasa District.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 132.

<sup>81</sup> R. F. Palethorpe, "Diary of Tour, Nov[ember] 2nd–26th 1916," KNA/PC/Coast/1/12/264, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> "P. L. Deacon, District Commissioner to R. W. Lambert, Assistant District Commission, Rabai," 2 September 1918, KNA/DC/MSA/5/1.

<sup>83</sup> "W. S. Marchant, Asst. District Commissioner of Mombasa to C. W. Hobley, Provincial Commissioner" 1 September 1919, DC/MSA/5/1.

Officials also closed the borders during epidemics and epizootics to avoid further contamination among people and livestock.<sup>84</sup>

The realignment of the district border to “cut out” Jomvu according to cultural criteria suggests how the contrasting legal regimes at the coast and inland provided residents of the Mombasa region with a new audience for their discourses of difference. By accepting the arguments offered by the Tissia Taifa, British authorities formalized the distinction between territories controlled by “pagan” councils and those subject to Islamic courts. Districts were no longer arranged simply for proximity to district stations but based on perceived cultural differences. This new strategy undercut generations of interactions among clan confederations in eastern Kenya and reframed rivalries among neighbors as contests among communities defined by culture and religion. By suppressing hundreds of local community boundaries within the borders of only a few manageable districts, British administrators helped create competing ethnicized enclaves—territories of undifferentiated legal space where all residents were assumed to be essentially the same.<sup>85</sup>

### **Troubles with Tribes**

Justin Willis has demonstrated how the ability of the British colonial state “to enforce labour and tax laws relied, as a minimum, on the ability to identify and locate the

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<sup>84</sup> For example, A. N. Bailward, Asst. District Commissioner of Mombasa, noted: “Reports received that small pox was very bad on borders of District and it was arranged with Ag. District Commissioner, Shimoni, that people should not cross the border from one District to the other until the epidemic had abated” (“Safari Diary” 22 July 1920, KNA/DC/MSA/5/1).

<sup>85</sup> For a broader narrative of the process of demarcation and its consequences, see Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda* chapter 5.

individual . . . [and] led officials to seek to identify and control individuals through their membership of a tribe”—which they understood as a culturally homogeneous, discrete group of in-marrying kin.<sup>86</sup> While British officials could create district boundaries that separated Muslim and “pagan” communities, they were frustrated at their inability to keep “tribes” separate in urban environments. Since they assigned privileges to individuals based on their group affiliation, they developed policies to prevent mixing and urban plans that segregated different classes of people. However, the *waswahili* identity of urban laborers in particular frustrated their attempts at classification, in part because they conflated language with community affiliation and so classified slaves and clients alongside their patrons. Thus, they classified any non-Arab, non-Indian Muslim as Swahili, marked primarily by mastery over the Kiswahili language. Unlike the essentialized Arab (describing the Omanis and Hadramis) and *wanyika* classifications determined respectively by recent origin and current residence, the British essentialized the Swahili as an African “tribe” adulterated by Arab overrule. They admitted the extent of their confusion over their Swahili classification in the 1914 census of Mombasa which noted that the “Swahili” column included “residents of almost every tribe in Africa.”<sup>87</sup>

One reason immigrants and former slaves adopted *waswahili* identities was that the British allowed the “Swahili” to live in town without the scrutiny they reserved for interior tribes such as the Nyamwezi. *Waswahili* wage laborers could acquire a labor contract, work for a few days, and then disappear—particularly after the British officials

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 106.

abolished slavery. The autonomy of laborers caused headaches for the British, who had difficulty filling labor requirements for their public works projects or guaranteeing it for new British plantations on the coast. British rule greatly expanded opportunities for the services of *waswahili* laborers by promoting government investments in commercial infrastructure. While the Uganda Railroad, which ran from the growing port at Mombasa through the colonial capital of Nairobi to Kampala in Uganda, was built by laborers imported for the purpose from India, a new port built at Kilindini to accommodate larger ships provided many labor opportunities for immigrants from the immediate hinterland. The labor shortage problem was compounded by high wages: in the cash-strapped informal urban economy of Mombasa, laborers could support themselves on a few days of wages per month.<sup>88</sup> The greater determinant of identity in the anonymous crowds surging into the city came to be association with urban labor gangs organized by labor bosses known as *serangis* who helped newcomers get work. They often recruited members through *beni*, *ngoma*, and *dansi* dance associations that they formed among themselves rather than attaching themselves permanently to particular patrons, though some *beni* associations were also sponsored by patricians.<sup>89</sup>

British officials' efforts to break the low-labor, high-wage supply cycle included a poll tax introduced in 1910, designed to force Mombasa residents into the wage labor market, but this strategy was frustrated by complicated housing arrangements that colonial officials found difficult to track. They struggled to locate the owners of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 96-100.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 101-2.; also see Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970*.

properties where laborers lived, let alone identify their tenants, who regularly moved from residence to residence. British exasperation over *waswahili* laborers' skill in avoiding the employment that the British wanted to impose led them to caricaturize them as "a lazy and criminal population that defied regulation" a far cry from earlier British descriptions of patricians—whom the British also referred to as Swahili because of the language they spoke—as civilized and intelligent.<sup>90</sup>

One of the problems British officials faces in solving the labor "problem" was that they could not distinguish between the new individuated and voluntary occupational identities who self-identified as *waswahili* and the coastal patricians who offered them housing and wage labor. British officials had stymied the efforts of coastal patricians to distance themselves from their *waswahili* clients by ignoring their claims to Arab descent (on the advice of Omani and Hadrami Arabs). One of the most important implication of this classification was that the protectorate government coastal forbade patricians from alienating land individually, as could "alien" (that is, non-African) immigrants. This restriction severely hampered their ability to keep pace with Omani, Hadrami, and Indian land speculators and undercut their claims of social equality. As Frederick Cooper shows, once slavery was abolished, the former slaves who remained on the plantation chose to pursue subsistence farming rather than produce cash-crops.<sup>91</sup> This left the plantation land

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<sup>90</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 110–111.

<sup>91</sup> Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters : Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

as the only asset for many coastal patricians, but they were unable to sell or mortgage it for capital.

When patricians realized they could not convince British officials that they were Arab, they explained to the British that if they must be considered Swahili instead of Arab, then surely their clients and former slaves could not be Swahili, since they did not belong to Mombasa's clan confederations. They thus tried to align their understanding of their affiliations to clan confederations with the British understanding of tribes as in-marrying kin. When they petitioned again to be regarded as Arabs, British officials offered a compromise: coastal patricians would still be classified as *waswahili*. However, if they expelled the tenants and clients who were "masquerading" as Swahili they would be accorded the same "status and treatment" as the alien Arabs.<sup>92</sup> Specifically, they would be granted the privilege to individually alienate land.

Patrician families easily drew on the strategies of differentiation based on genealogies of Arab descent that they had developed in the nineteenth century. They rigidified and dignified the boundaries of "Swahili" by distinguishing themselves from recent arrivals from the adjoining hinterland and former slaves. By 1920 British colonial censuses ceased using "Swahili" to refer to residents of the coast other than those identified as belonging to the patrician clans. In addition, the Thelatha Taifa and Tissia Taifa (now pursuing joint interests as the Ithnaashera Taifa "Twelve Tribes") helped expel their tenants from Mombasa, whose seemingly erratic residence patterns had

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<sup>92</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*, 189.



frustrated the census and poll tax policies based on the colonial government's stereotype of stable and homogenous "tribal" residence.<sup>93</sup> They even expelled from their homes clients who avoided the casual labor market in favor of attachment to a single lineage or clan.

### **Assembling Mijikenda**

The British did not object to migrant labor as a principle, provided they could channel it to their own imperial projects. Therefore, although they supported the redefinition of "Swahili" on the lines of descent endorsed by coastal patricians, they continued to encourage young men to leave inland homesteads to find work in Mombasa. While this encouragement undermined the influence of inland patricians, the British—again contradictorily—also assisted them in shoring up their authority over the rural clan confederations, for instance by encouraging them to hold new age-set initiations. Some patricians attached to the clan confederations even managed to get officially gazetted as "elders" authorized to sell communally held land (but only to European speculators vetted by the colonial government). This measure, and others, allowed them to retain a degree of control over the establishment of new homesteads in the domains thus privatized. Their role as arbiters, endorsed and protected by the British, also granted them authority over marriage and land disputes. In effect, they became landlords in possession of increasingly scarce means of basic subsistence and community bosses largely independent of their communities.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 107, 189.

While some inland patricians supported these measures, British officials generally failed to install leaders who could effectively settle local disputes according to British policies. With the consultation of those inland patricians who were willing to heed the call of British officials, they chose “paramounts” in various locations and gazetted them in the official government newspaper.<sup>94</sup> But this strategy proved ineffective because the councils they replaced were collective and collaborative strategies for balancing interests among competing groups, not authorities for enforcing compliance with any single authority’s personal mandate, least of all ones originating from the British.

The British housing policies that led patricians in Mombasa to evict their clients and tenants simultaneously bolstered the authority of inland elders in the 1920s. Mombasa still remained a place where young men earned wages for themselves, but the city provided few opportunities for establishing themselves as patrons. While the hinterland offered few better possibilities without the support of the clan confederations, without Muslim patrons to provide housing or other enabling privileges, laborers began seeking the assistance of inland elders to support their activities in Mombasa.

In recognition of the new labor arrangements, *serangi* bosses also began to cultivate relationships with inland clan confederations because the coastal patricians could no longer guarantee them all the recruits they could employ. The coastal patricians were unable to tap into new sources of labor because town planning ordinances restricted their ability to provide housing and thus to serve as patrons to migrants outside the cash

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 128–133.

economy.<sup>95</sup> In particular, the *serangis* were able to find work for their recruits in newly developed sectors of the Mombasa labor market, such as the expanded Kilindini harbor, that did not interfere with older networks of labor centered on urban construction and portage that the coastal patricians controlled.<sup>96</sup> Instead of living as tenants in the lower floors of stone houses, they erected temporary dwellings that they crowded into the few areas of Mombasa Island that remained unoccupied.

Of course, in order for migrant laborers to secure patrons among inland elders, they were forced to share their wages, and in turn elders had to find ways to support their dependents in Mombasa. Laborers started aggregating as persons affiliated with the same rural clan confederation rather than as followers of a local Muslim patron. They began organizing dance societies, such as the *kayamba* or the *sengenya*, which emphasized ties to specific inland confederations.<sup>97</sup> The earlier *beni* dance societies and Islamic practices, both strategies for emphasizing knowledge of the town and presenting oneself as Swahili, lost their appeal. The old fortified towns which clan confederations continued to use as ritual centers no longer served as refuges from and staging grounds for war, but individuals re-affiliated with the confederations in order to ensure that they could engage productively in the coastal economy. In addition, laborers from the hinterland increasingly used their inland affiliations to return in their old age, after they no longer could support themselves, alone, by performing labor for wages. Thus, instead of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 167, 178.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 178–81.

claiming *waswahili* identities, Willis argued that wage laborers began “finding casual work in Mombasa *as Nyika*.”<sup>98</sup>

Though casual laborers in Mombasa found it much more difficult to claim *waswahili* identities after 1920 (at least to British officials), their new confederation-based associations turned the colonial strategy of differentiating tribes on its head by using tribal ties to secure exclusive jobs in Mombasa; for example the Digo dominated the stevedore work at the new Kilindini harbor. Military strategies, like those promoted by age-sets, could not have swayed British policies, as demonstrated by the failure of the 1917 Giriama revolt. And councils had been subordinated to British courts. But organizing labor associations that could withhold the manpower that British desperately needed to run their imperial economy was the next step available for assuring engagement of the hinterland in the colonial economy on acceptable terms.

Although outsiders stereotyped people from the inland clan confederations together as *wanyika*, they were politically and socially fragmented in Mombasa as well as in the hinterland. When the Giriama rebelled in 1917 against British authority, none of their neighbors came to their aid.<sup>99</sup> Colonial authorities also limited the cattle rustling between the Rabai and Duruma clan confederations by placing the latter in another district. Despite their differences, inland communities shared a common orientation towards the former *kayas* that had anchored collaborations among their dispersed their clan confederations. Though rarely occupied, elders frequently held ceremonies and

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 174, emphasis in original.

<sup>99</sup> Brantley, *Giriama and Colonial Resistance*.

feasts in the abandoned towns. When they complained that coastal traders used permits issued by the colonial Forestry Office to cut timber in these places, the British authorities interpreted them as sacred forests and granted them the protection reserved for mosques at the coast. For example, the Assistant District Commissioner of Rabai wrote that he saw “no reason why the Kayas should not be entitled to the same respect as a Church or Mosque.”<sup>100</sup> The British thus interpreted the widespread *wanyika* commitment to *kayas* as a religious commitment that distinguished them from other “tribes” in the colony.<sup>101</sup>

In addition they all participated in similar institutions that represented their interests to British officials. District Commissioners used the same system of local councils of loyal elders appointed by the colonial bureaucracy among all *wanyika* communities. By the mid-1920s, the British gave up on appointing single “paramount heads” in various locations and instead organized Local Native Councils, including one that the Digo elders designated *Midzichenda* in 1924 (referring to nine towns [*midzi*] associated with the Digo confederation).<sup>102</sup> These seem to have been composed of elders who took an active interest in pursuing the assistance of the British. The local councils acted much as had title societies in the past, mediating disputes and collecting fees for their services. However, instead of keeping the fees for themselves, they were instructed to turn them over to the government and to keep track of expenditures. Later they were

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<sup>100</sup> “Assistant District Commissioner, Rabai to Provincial Commissioner, Mombasa,” November 2, 1917, KNA/PC Coast/1/7/11.

<sup>101</sup> Anthropologist David Parkin evocatively referred to abandoned towns as the “sacred void” around which Giriama cosmology revolves; Parkin, *Sacred Void*.

<sup>102</sup> Note, *midzi* is the Mijikenda pronunciation of the Kiswahili word *miji* (replacing /j/ with /dz/); the Mijikenda word for town is *kayai*.

tasked with enforcing hut taxes, conducting regular censuses, and recruiting men for government labor. The distinction between personal and official funds baffled the elders, while the propensity of claimants to move from forum to forum seeking a favorable ruling (or to force the accused to pay multiple fees) distressed the British bureaucrats intent on imposing a defined set of legal jurisdictions.<sup>103</sup>

The narrow labor associations in the cities (including Mombasa and Nairobi) and the local councils in the hinterland laid the foundation for inland patricians to form a wider ethnic group that united all of the people formerly derided as *wanyika*. While the first recorded use of *Midzichenda* in 1924 seems to have been limited to the Digo native council mentioned above, in 1925, the British gazetted two native reserves named *Midzichenda*. Like other place names on official maps, the name was likely offered by gazetted elders whom British surveyors routinely consulted. The Director of Surveys suggested that they should be distinguished by adding the prefixes *Waa-* and *Pungu-* after localities nearby, but the name suggests Digo communities in the region had started using the name *Midzichenda* to indicate a wider affiliation.<sup>104</sup> In addition Willis and Gona report that laborers started making collections known as *midzichenda* in order to transport home those unfortunate among them who died in Mombasa.<sup>105</sup> The name “*Mijikenda*”

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<sup>103</sup> C. Dundas, “Tour Diary.” March 12-15, 1915, KNA/DC/MSA/5/1 notes: “there have been cases in which a man has been hauled before the three different councils and fined by each for one and the same offence. This was confirmed by the council at Magojoni, a man was said to have paid Rs.8/- at Magojoni, Rs.12/- at Ngombeni and Rs.8/- at Tiwi.”

<sup>104</sup> “Director of Lands to District Commissioner, Kwale, Re – Digo Reserve Boundaries”, September 28, 1925, KNA/CC/15.

<sup>105</sup> Willis and Gona, “Tradition, Tribe, and State in Kenya: The *Mijikenda* Union, 1945-1980.”

gained greater currency among laborers in Mombasa as they aimed to secure jobs and other urban resources, and their associates in the hinterland adopted the name as a respectable alternative to the pejorative *wanyika*. Modern “Mijikenda” thus inverted the stereotype imposed on them by coastal outsiders into a positive affirmation of their common interests. Another designation for this modern composite that modern Mijikenda use today is *makayakenda*, thus making explicit what they consider the basis of their shared political identity in the colony—and now nation—of Kenya: affiliation with one of the nine ancestral towns (*makaya* [MK]) in the region at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1944, the next generation of inland-affiliated wage laborers organized the Mijikenda Union as a cultural association devoted to countering the divisive politics that, they claimed, had torn apart the Mijikenda nation that had occupied eastern Kenya from time immemorial. By asserting an affiliation among all inland residents whose ancestors had lived in the old towns, the organizers of the Mijikenda Union could unite all of the labor networks that specialized in different sectors of the Mombasa economy in an ethnicized grouping of proportions that the British needed to accommodate. By the mid-twentieth century, *wanyika* communities convinced the colonial government to discard the hated epithet in favor of Mijikenda (the Kiswahili variant of Midzichenda) and it became an official classification on the colonial census in 1962.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

Seyyid Sa'id ushered in an era of imperialism on the coast that splintered alliances between the coastal and inland clan confederations. In addition to effectively suppressing the coastal rivalries that sustained their military alliances, he sponsored economic innovations such as the increased use of slave-produced cash crops that surpassed the commercial value of products to which inland clan confederations controlled access. The expansion of cash crop production along the coast and on the islands expanded opportunities for commercial profits in the western Indian Ocean and attracted Muslim immigrants from Arabia. Omani sultans and the Sufi shaykhs who accompanied these migrants assembled followers from the growing population of enslaved laborers from the far interior and young men seeking opportunities away from the faltering inland confederations. They also introduced universalist practices of Islam by expanding education in Islamic sciences beyond the elite families that previously guarded more local forms of knowledge. Coastal elders joined these Omani and Hadrami initiatives and asserted their interests to the Sultan's representatives, emphasized their Islamic credentials, and distanced themselves from inland allies.

While Omani rule encouraged disassociation of respectable coastal Islamic communities from the disdained *washenzi* hinterland, these distinctions remained imprecise and permeable until British colonial administrative and legal regulations reified these cultural and religious differences. Local communities sometimes appropriated these impositions to articulate privileging differences to the authorized representatives of colonial institutions, who in turn manipulated the distinctions they created to cling to the



limited power that they exercised. Not until British officials forced *wanyika* laborers to abandon their *waswahili* identities and coastal patrons after 1920 did inland elders transform their clan confederations into labor networks that could support laborers in the coastal urban city of Mombasa, largely at the encouragement of educated wage laborer.

By 1964, when Kenya became an independent state, eastern Kenyans had abandoned many of the strategies that had centered on the inland towns, despite several attempts by some elders, with British encouragement, to revive them. Meanwhile, the councils that led clan confederations on the coast had been supplanted by Islamic judges appointed by centralized governments; and the inland title societies transformed into elders' councils whose members served as caretakers of religion and culture but whose authority was limited to specific administrative functions delegated by colonial officials.<sup>107</sup> Building from the divisions exacerbated by colonial rule, intellectuals in eastern Kenyan organized ethnic associations to mobilize support for their demands from Kenya's colonial and national governments, such as the Coast People's Party (a Swahili organization) and the Mijikenda Union. These ethnic associations pursued separate interests under imperial rule, and offered competing visions for eastern Kenya at independence. While the Coast Peoples Party argued that the ten-mile strip originally granted to the British East African Company should become part of Zanzibar, the Mijikenda Union (in alliance with KANU) argued that the coast should remain with Kenya. The military, commercial, and kinship alliances that had motivated and sustained

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<sup>107</sup> Coastal communities had consulted Islamic qadis for centuries, but they supplemented, rather than overruled, mediations overseen by lineages, clans, and councils.

collaboration among the coastal and inland clan confederations for centuries gave way to essentialized ethnic identities that divided coastal and inland communities.<sup>108</sup> British officials may have enshrined these distinctions in imperial law and practice, but local residents drew on centuries of common experiences to organize and imagine themselves as members of novel ethnic groups, as demonstrated by the rituals that draw on older social strategies to express these identities. These ethnic political communities were no less a creation of the collective imagination than their predecessors over more than a millennium.

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<sup>108</sup> Willis and Gona, "Tradition, Tribe, and State in Kenya: The Mijikenda Union, 1945-1980."

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion:

#### Transcending Ethnicity?

*I am totally against negative ethnicity  
because that will not take us anywhere.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Professor Abdullah Said Naji*

When I arrived in Kenya in November 2009, Kenyans were debating a new constitution that they hoped would transcend their ethnic divisions, reconcile the disappointments of post-colonial politics, and inaugurate a new era of national unity. The push to replace the British-drafted constitution had been simmering for decades but received renewed urgency when a disputed presidential election in December 2007 led politicians and their supporters to promote ethnicized violence against the presumed supporters of their opponents as part of post-election posturing. The targeted violence killed hundreds and displaced thousands. The danger of ethnic politicking, once considered an occasional problem in some parts of Kenya, had become a national crisis.

The reconciliation project touched every corner of Kenya, including each of my research sites. In the downtown square across from the National Archives in Nairobi, an open air photo exhibit memorialized the victims of the (mostly) young men who had been

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Research Deposit, E013 Malindi Cultural Festival.

hired to foment the post-election violence. In Lamu, the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya held public hearings in the eighteenth-century fort, where they received and recorded statements from individuals and civic organizations. The recently reconstituted, and independent, Lamu Elders Council staged a walk-out to protest Bethuel Kiplagat's chairing of the commission—he had been a part of the regimes under investigation. At Rabai, discussions at weddings and bride-price ceremonies revolved around whether the new constitution should include khadi courts for administering Islamic family law.<sup>2</sup> On the day of the constitutional referendum I encountered three young men in Mombasa debating the merits of the articles related to trusteeship over communal land. One of the young men believed the constitution allowed the government to seize such land, his companions were trying to convince him otherwise.

Meanwhile, the National Museums of Kenya with which I was affiliated invited ethnic dance troupes to perform their traditional dances at festivals throughout the country—a conscious effort to transform the ethnic heritages that divided Kenya into a resource for national reconciliation. Alongside these celebrations, they organized “intellectual sessions” for Kenyans to discuss the future of their nation. At one such meeting in Malindi, Professor Abdullah Said Naji, a chemist by training, articulated the dilemma Kenyans were facing.

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<sup>2</sup> Upland churches argued in favor of a strict separation of religion and state to curb the potential growth of Islam in Kenya.

The situation that we are in as a Swahili speaking people, *a community within the communities in Kenya*, or perhaps specifically in the Kenyan Coast—[pause] I say that because I am for positive ethnicity. Some of you may be surprised to hear me say that—that *I support ethnicity, but I want to qualify it* with positive ethnicity. I am totally against negative ethnicity because that will not take us anywhere.<sup>3</sup>

Although Professor Naji began his extemporaneous remarks with the seemingly innocuous statement that Swahili-speaking people are one of many communities in Kenya, he immediately qualified his statement because of the disastrous consequences such discourses of difference have had on Kenyan national politics. But instead of collapsing Kenya's ethnic diversity into a single homogenous national identity, he expressed the desire to retain the cultural heritage associated with ethnic identity.

Activist and politician Koigi wa Wamwere articulated the concept of negative ethnicity in *Negative Ethnicity: From Bias to Genocide*, an unfortunately prescient book that warned Kenyans in 2003 that ethnic politics would lead to mass political violence. He republished the book in 2008 as *The Path Towards Genocide: The Curse of Negative Ethnicity* to catalogue some of the post-election massacres and lay the blame for Kenya's troubles squarely on the practice of organizing politics through the recruitment of ethnic blocs of voters, a successful strategy in the winner-takes-all presidential system of the previous Kenyan constitution. He argued that these electoral practices fostered corruption, since Kenyans refused to vote against their ethnic affines. They also tempted

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Research Deposit, E013 Malindi Cultural Festival.

violence as politicians in districts with pluralities from several ethnic groups could organize their followers to target neighbors from the “wrong ethnicity” who, in all likelihood, would vote against them. This behavior was particularly relevant in the Rift Valley where Koigi wa Wamwere often stood (usually without success) for election. Though he is a Kikuyu, the largest ethnic plurality in Kenya, in the Rift Valley they are a minority. While he reserved his worst vitriol for the politicians who exploited ethnic chauvinism, he also challenged naïve Kenyans who assumed that a politician with the same ethnic identity as themselves would look out for their interests.

Both Professor Naji and Koigi wa Wamwere value their ethnic identities because they are entangled in notions of ancestry, language, religion, and culture that shape and define their most intimate associations. In contrast to ethnicity, post-independence politics in Kenya have demonstrated the hollowness of nationalist and Pan-Africanist identities that bound Kenyans together only through their common experiences under British rule. Though committed to their national boundaries, Kenyans are well-aware that their nation is a colonial creation. In contrast, most Kenyans, among others throughout the world, have naturalized their ethnic identities to the degree that relinquishing them is unthinkable. As Kenyans collaborate in projects to build a more cohesive nation, they may want to transcend their ethnic identities but few wish to abandon them altogether.

This dissertation has demonstrated how the forebears of the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups of eastern Kenya resolved similar seeming contradictions of identification by compiling their collaborative strategies into ever-larger communities.

Alice Werner, for instance observed the following of the multiplistic identities that her “Wanyika” informants articulated in the early twentieth century:

The clan organization is quite distinct from that of the kambu, or council, and this, again, from the “secret societies” or “clubs” (chama of Giriama) and the marika, or circumcision-ages. These are four different things; yet because some of them coincide in time and affect the same persons, they are apt to be confused.<sup>4</sup>

Werner does not indicate whether her informants shared her confusion or her concern with keeping straight the differences she observed between councils, secret societies, clubs, and age-sets. Indeed, those who relied on these collaborative strategies to pursue their interests were probably quite aware of such distinctions and strove assiduously to maintain them. But they also recognized that the politics of consensus that bound communities together in eastern Kenya required them to acknowledge the collaborative strategies of their ancestors, or, at least those that their associates valued. For example, though they have abandoned the relatively recent strategy of militarized age-sets, successive generations have adapted older kinship, clanship, and councils to new historical challenges.

Today, they are following in their ancestors’ footsteps as they attempt to extend their heritage of cumulative and adaptive innovation by transcending their ethnic identities—instead of discarding ethnicity, they are reconfiguring ethnic groups as constituents of their nation, just as earlier generations organized lineages into clans, clans

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<sup>4</sup> Werner, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate*, 344–345. [? Check source]

into clan confederations, and clan confederations into ethnicized groups. Although they organized each strategy for a different purpose—descent claims over land, clan claims over knowledge, and confederation claims over commerce respectively—they also conceptualized the communities formed by each new strategy as constituted by its predecessors. The proponents of ethnic groups who are also dedicated to the future project of a cohesive Kenyan nation now offer their ethnic heritages in the same additive manner. For instance, in Chapter Five, I introduced the heroine Mekatalili, whom Mijikenda intellectuals are promoting as a colonial resistance fighter who can serve as a model for all the ethnicities of Kenya—a national resource for a collective future. Women at the Swahili New Year discussed in Chapter Two similarly explained to me that the ceremony was a prayer to bring peace to Kenya.<sup>5</sup>

Even though rituals like Swahili New Year can be analyzed as expressions of contemporary relationships, they can also be understood as cumulative compilations of past experiences. The *kijoho* bread that Swahili women once made for the celebration contains seven grains, adopted over centuries of collaboration with specialists in different soils and cultivation techniques. The stew of beef, goat, and chicken also combines innovations in husbandry that eastern Kenyans articulated with help first from Southern Cushitic-speaking pastoralists and later expanded with the assistance of Segeju-speaking immigrants. Beef replaced fish as the preferred fare for communal feasts, but fishermen are still honored for their command of the sea by being asked to discard the leftovers of

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<sup>5</sup> Ray, Field notes, July 18, 2010..



an evidently acknowledged substitute in the deep ocean. The sword dances that men once performed on the occasion acknowledged the military valor of the age-sets who defended the community, while the celebrative *vugo* wedding dance that women still perform at the ceremony demonstrates how very old strategies of marriage continue to weld their communities together. The location of the celebration at Shehe Mvita's grave asserts the descent claims and common heritage of the Wamiji Foundation that organizes the event as the (rightful) trustees of Mombasa Island.

However, Swahili New Year also evokes past inequalities in eastern Kenya. The feast is sponsored for the benefit of the poor by men better able to contribute funds. While most participants sit on the floor during the recitations, another class of men acknowledged for their erudition and prestigious lineages leads them in the recitations and songs from a raised platform. In addition, the men and women participating in spotless *kanzus* and black *buibuis* leave the messy labor of slaughtering animals, digging holes, washing pots, and preparing the stew to workmen outside. Even as the ceremony strives for solidarity, it reveals distinctions in status and occupation that the ancestors of Mombasa's *wamiji* community developed over millennia as they collaborated with their linguistic cousins on the mainland. As shown by the variety of rituals introduced in the dissertation, the particular assortment of rituals compiled into Swahili New Year may be distinctive to the *wamiji*, but they draw from a regional repertoire of strategies that eastern Kenyans developed over centuries both to differentiate their communities from one another and to collaborate around their differences.

## **Ethnic Conundrums**

Just as Kenyans are experimenting with ways to transcend ethnicity without disregarding the heritage that defines it, this dissertation has demonstrated how scholars may transcend modern ethnic categories as frameworks for their examination of the past. As Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper have noted for other social identities, ethnicity is “at once a category of social and political practice and social and political analysis.”<sup>6</sup> Ethnic groups now overtly claim, interpret, argue over, and inhabit ethnic identities as ethnicity and understand their larger societies as multi-ethnic, with and without reference to academic debates about ethnicity.

At the same time that ethnicity has been crossing over into contemporary political discourses, historians have undermined abstract models for understanding ethnicity by presenting ever more specific variations. The more historians characterize as unique the processes through which people have created ethnic groups, the less effective “ethnicity” has become as an analytical concept for explaining its dynamics of social and cultural differentiation.<sup>7</sup> However, in the past few decades social scientists working in a variety of disciplines have elaborated the concept of ethnicity in the opposite way: they generalized the concept of ethnicity so much that it encompasses nearly every instance of group classification, albeit with specified sub-types.

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<sup>6</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 1–47.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar problem with the use of “community” in the social sciences see Naoise Mac Sweeney, *Community Identity and Archaeology: Dynamic Communities at Aphrodisias and Beycesultan* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011)..

Both these particularist and generalist trends have received criticism. For example, Richard Fardon expressed doubts that a "discernible set of features . . . can be generalised as ethnic."<sup>8</sup> For Fardon, communities and collective names emerged from such different processes and contexts that it is a mistake to homogenize them all as ethnicity. But few scholars went so far. Elizabeth Tonkin, though sympathetic to Fardon's critique, countered with an admittedly reductionist but pointed definition: "Named groups exist: ethnicity is real."<sup>9</sup> Tonkin's rather terse response reflected not only academic commitment to analyzing ethnic affiliation as a widely observed phenomenon but also an interest in portraying how people have experienced that phenomenon. Acknowledging the names with which people identify themselves is one way to defer scholarly abstractions of a general phenomenon in favor of local expertise. In societies where ethnicities are implicated in everyday life as well as in national politics, such as Kenya, people bristle at the suggestion that their collective identities are "imagined" or, worse, that they are merely the recent "inventions" of colonial regimes.

In the past decade some scholars have voiced similar critiques that fault historians for underestimating the agency of colonized people to shape their social worlds and downplaying the deeply embedded traditions upon which people drew to articulate their contemporary ethnicities. For example Thomas Spear argued:

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Tonkin, "Processes of Identity, Ethnicising and Morality," in *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, Meanings, and Implications*, ed. Louisa de la Gorgendiere and et al. (Edinburgh: Center of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1996), 237–259.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, "Processes of Identity, Ethnicising and Morality."

Ethnicity has . . . been continually reinterpreted and reconstructed over time in such a way as to appear timeless and legitimate, and it has been deployed by contending parties in complex processes of selectivity and representation that lay at the core of peoples' collective historical consciousness and struggles for power, meaning and access to resources.<sup>10</sup>

Spear's critique implied two closely related conundrums that historians researching ethnicity wrestle with. First, what is the temporal scope of ethnicity? Specific ethnic ideologies are demonstrably constructed in particular, recent historical contexts. But is ethnicity as a general phenomenon also a strategy that can be situated in the more distant past? Or is ethnicity best understood as a heuristic device for understanding social differentiation and categorization in human societies in all eras of world history? Second, how can scholars reconcile the attested construction of ethnic groups in relatively recent times with persuasive social memories that present ethnic groups constructed in time as timeless?

For the first problem—the historicity of ethnicity—I argue that ethnicity should be regarded as a novel kind of social ideology that communities articulated in the modern era when imperialist governments, such as those of Oman and Great Britain, forced them to defend their interests by interpreting their identities in as broad a manner as possible. The hierarchical governance strategies of imperial and colonial authorities encouraged (and their representatives often insisted upon) identification with a single communal

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<sup>10</sup> Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” 24. Spear argues for a different conundrum: “It [ethnicity] is, then, simultaneously, constructed, primordial and instrumental, and therein lies its essential problematic.”

identity that they found intelligible only as homogenous, comprehensive, and intrinsic. In particular I argue that ethnicity should be confined to instances in which people interpret local social categories to the representatives of foreign communities who assert hegemonic superiority that can severely limit the autonomy of local communities, such as occurred during Africa's colonial era but also in other contexts of military overrule.<sup>11</sup> If scholars classify all (or even most) social ideologies in the past as ethnic, meaningful distinctions would be difficult to articulate without resorting to secondary classifications. Thus the dissertation situates ethnicity within eastern Kenya's history of many collaborative strategies, between the more recent (emergent) nationalism of Kenya and the clan confederations that organized regional politics between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For the second problem of explaining the apparent primordialism, or timelessness, of ethnic groups, Africanist scholars have developed models of interpretation that attempt to balance objective observations with subjective understandings of ethnicity. I have contributed to this effort by offering a methodological approach that disentangles past practices of collaboration from the modern ethnic ideologies that compile these practices as traditions. In order to emphasize the aspects of ethnicity which are most meaningful to the members of the Swahili and Mijikenda ethnic groups, I have identified how celebratory rituals, places, and oral traditions symbolize these identities. Then I used the methods of historical linguistics to trace the past contexts in which the linguistic

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<sup>11</sup> This for instance, would include the Nguni conquerors in South-east Africa that imposed "subjecthood" on Ndauspeakers. See Elizabeth MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

forebears of Mombasa's residents innovated and developed the elements which residents have compiled into these complex assemblages of symbols. Through these methods—presented in Chapter 2—I identified how communities began collaborating as Swahili or Mijikenda in the nineteenth century by recasting inherited practices of differentiation as indicators of common ethnicized identity. Besides avoiding the danger of over-generalization, tracing the influence of local past practices on current vernacular expressions of ethnicity builds on the efforts of Africanist historians to elucidate local African logics that are elided by universalist models.<sup>12</sup> Disentangling the practices which Mombasa's residents use to collaborate as Swahili and Mijikenda ironically demonstrates that they now rely on a heritage of shared local rationales to explain their differences.

### **Developing Ethnic Models: Towards a Faithful Subjective Analysis**

As Pier Larson reminds us, both ethnic and ethnicity are words derived from the Greek *ethnos*, which in Homer's time meant "a large, undifferentiated group" but entered the Western literary tradition through biblical translations of *ethnikos*, meaning "gentile, heathen, pagan, or cultural other."<sup>13</sup> Both of these definitions initially carried over into

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<sup>12</sup> See Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. Jenkins notes that ethnicity as understood by most anthropologists was first articulated to describe the behavior of non-Western people, and only later applied to Western societies. For the importance of identifying local discourses and distinguishing them from Western concepts see Carola Lentz and Paul Nugent, eds., *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania*; Jane I. Guyer and Samuel M. Eno Belinga, "Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa," *The Journal of African History* 36, no. 1 (1995): 91–120, doi:10.2307/183256; David L. Schoenbrun, "A Past Whose Time Has Come: Historical Context and History in Eastern Africa's Great Lakes," *History and Theory* 32, no. 4 (December 1993): 32–56, doi:10.2307/2505631.

<sup>13</sup> Pier Martin Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000).

early definitions of ethnicity despite Africanists' and anthropologists' rapid adoption of the term in the 1960s as a substitute for the more pejorative "tribal." These scholars hoped that using the term "ethnic" instead of "tribal" would help to supplant connotations of backwardness, timelessness, and atavism that had become associated with African societies during the colonial era.<sup>14</sup> But the euphemism often continues to imply at least some of the simplifying assumptions of colonial administrators and anthropologists, who understood a tribe as a distinctive group of people who were biologically self-reproducing and who shared language, culture, and occupation rights to a specific territory, presumably since time immemorial.<sup>15</sup>

As they attempted to move beyond the conceptual baggage of timeless tribes, scholars developed a number of models to explain the behavior and emergence of ethnic groups and ethnicity. Though they often interchange these two terms, "ethnic group" more precisely refers to groups of individuals who perceive themselves to be related ethnically. Ethnicities are ideologies that the members of ethnic groups use to explain their understanding of ethnic relations among themselves and with outsiders. So that Zulu is an example of an ethnic group, but the criteria by which members and outsiders may determine that someone belongs in the Zulu group—Zulu-ness, perhaps—is an example of ethnicity. Confusingly, scholars also use ethnicity as an analytical category that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 25–26.

<sup>15</sup> Malinowski, quoted in Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*.

implies differentiation among social groups of any order, especially races and nations, but also routinely for any pre-historical group.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1960s, political scientists concerned with the proper integration and homogeneity of nation-states drew attention to ethnic loyalties as a differentiating and divisive "problem." They considered ethnic groups a threat to the nationalist projects of Africans who were mobilizing support for independence from colonialism. Since ethnic proponents sought to mobilize allegiances against other ethnic groups within the same political state, scholars generally regarded ethnic groups as "sub-national." Many scholars considered them inferior and detrimental to nationalist projects, which sought to unify the residents of a territorially defined state on the basis of joint resistance to European rule and "modernization."<sup>17</sup> They thus aligned themselves politically with nationalists against proponents of ethnic identities.

As scholars began to research conflicts among various ethnic groups active in independence-era African politics, they shifted their focus from describing ethnic groups as "problematic" givens to explaining how and why the phenomenon of ethnicity existed. The first scholars to analytically distinguish ethnicity from tribalism were urban sociologists who emphasized differences among rural economic strategies and urban ones that they associated with modernization.<sup>18</sup> They distinguished immigrant groups in the

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<sup>16</sup> See discussion below of Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"

<sup>17</sup> Vail, *Creation of Tribalism*. This bias for national projects over ethnic ones persists among many social scientists, especially given the association of ethnicity with violent separatist movements.

<sup>18</sup> M. Crawford Young, "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Class in Africa: A Retrospective," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 26, no. 103 (January 1, 1986): 421–495.



city as “ethnic” from tribes in rural homelands. Sociologists argued that migrants sought out individuals with whom they shared languages and other similarities in order to mitigate the feelings of isolation and disorientation that accompanied urban migration. Thus, they explained the articulation of ethnicities as a novel response to modernization but could not explain why particular ethnic groups included some migrants but excluded others. Why did certain discourses of difference prevail over others? They offered generalized assumptions that ethnic affines shared cultural characteristics brought with them from their "tribal" rural homes. But this explanation merely shifted the problem of ethnic origins to the problem of tribal origins without explaining how tribes had emerged.<sup>19</sup> They also assumed (wrongly as it turned out) that ethnic groups would fade away as national governments replaced colonial ones.

For decades, the agenda set by urban sociologists settled into a debate between primordialists, who emphasized the inherited aspects of ethnicity that people clustered around, and instrumentalists who focused on how ethnic “entrepreneurs” mobilized ethnic groups to protect and expand their self-interests.<sup>20</sup> Both tried to answer the problem of “persistence”: why did ethnic groups endure, or emerge, under the supposedly homogenizing processes of capitalist labor regimes, urbanization, and nationalism?

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<sup>19</sup> Vail, *Creation of Tribalism*.

<sup>20</sup> Instrumentalists have also been called circumstantialists and situationalists, emphasizing the variability of individuals’ ethnic identification depending on the particular circumstance.

*Barth's Model: Ethnic Groups and Boundary Maintenance*

In 1969 Fredrik Barth added an important historical dimension to understandings of ethnicity by shifting the focus from why ethnic groups persisted to how they adapted to new contexts. Barth was concerned that contemporary studies of ethnicity amounted to little more than a holdover from colonial anthropology, lists of the cultural traits which “belonged” to each ethnic group.<sup>21</sup> As Barth explained, these catalogues tended to imply “a world of separate peoples each with their culture and each organised in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island to itself.”<sup>22</sup> In order to disassociate ethnic groups from tribes, Barth proposed a model of ethnicity that described it as a historical process of organizing ever-shifting relationships among groups, instead of a thing or a structure. Sinisa Malesevic described Barth’s intervention as a “Copernican revolution.”

[I]t is not the possession of cultural characteristics that makes social groups distinct but rather it is the social interaction with other groups that makes the difference possible, visible[,] and socially meaningful.<sup>23</sup>

Barth thus introduced the analysis of "boundary maintenance," which focuses on how members of ethnic groups subjectively express distinction from others through a limited, strategically chosen set of symbols, as opposed to cataloguing inherent traits according to the observations of scholars.

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance Prins, *Coastal Tribes*; Werner, *The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate*.

<sup>22</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

<sup>23</sup> Malesevic (2004:2-3) quoted in Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, p. 24,

Although Barth refers to ethnic groups, his boundary maintenance model actually dismisses the notion that ethnic groups are “distinct ‘entities’ or ‘things’ in any sense.”<sup>24</sup> For Barth an ethnic group is an ever-shifting population of the people who share and maintain a shifting pool of marking strategies to articulate cultural commonality among themselves and thus difference from others (i.e. ethnicity).<sup>25</sup> Ethnic groups thus emerge through historical processes, not biological reproduction. And ethnicity is not concerned with the totality of cultural traits attributable to a group—just the smaller set of cultural markers that ethnic groups use to distinguish themselves from one another. Other cultural conventions may be shared across ethnic boundaries and differ within ethnic boundaries, but discourse and practice determine which traits are chosen to mark ethnic identity.

Barth was primarily concerned with accurately portraying how people constructed ethnic boundaries in contemporary times. Yet his analysis further divorced the concept of "ethnicity" from assumptions of continuities from timeless pasts carried over from "tribe" by firmly embedding the creation of ethnic groups within history. His model argued that ethnic groups persist as long as they adapt their distinguishing sets of cultural symbols to new contexts and the shifting boundaries of other ethnic groups similarly adapting around them. This solution to the problem of persistence dismissed the perceived primordialism of ethnic groups as an illusion and emphasized that scholars should study them historically instead of assuming they emerged fully formed from an inscrutable past.

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<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14; Jenkins points out similar thinking by Weber, suggesting that the articulation of ethnic and racial identities always come after apparently spontaneous collective action.

Because Barth's model suggested that ethnic groups were the products of history, it implied that ethnicity, as a process of cultural differentiation, is potentially applicable to all human societies in all eras. Recent interpreters of Barth such as Richard Jenkins and Rogers Brubaker have made these claims explicit by arguing that ethnicity—as a process of social and cultural differentiation—is “probably” universal.<sup>26</sup>

*Vail's Model: Constructivism and the Creation of Tribalism*

Scholars from most social science disciplines accepted Barth's model and still regard it as the foundation of theorizing about ethnicity. But rarely did they integrate the historical contingencies of ethnic groups that his analysis suggested until the 1980s, when historians became interested in processes of community formation.<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which examined the role of print capitalism in the formation of national identities in Europe, is the most celebrated example of this trend.<sup>28</sup> Among Africanist historians, interest in the formation of ethnic groups and ethnicity paled in comparison to studies of slavery, trade, early African states, and resistance (to slavery, colonialism, etc.) until Leroy Vail published *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern African* in 1987.

Vail was struck by the disjuncture between his graduate education that denigrated the colonial heritage of static tribes and the strong ethnic loyalties of his students and

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<sup>26</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*; Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition,” *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (February 1, 2004): 31–64.

<sup>27</sup> Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa.”

<sup>28</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed., 2nd ed. (Verso: New York, 1991).

research consultants in Malawi. As Vail familiarized himself with research on ethnicity, he noticed that social scientists gave short shrift to the historical contexts in which Africans created their ethnicities. And he argued that theoretical models focused on the present could not explain why ethnic groups in African countries persisted after independence nor why loyalties to ethnic groups varied widely across southern Africa.

Vail presented a model for the creation of ethnic groups based on empirical case studies that emphasized the novelty of ethnicity in colonial Africa. In his model, European missionaries framed the potential boundaries of contemporary ethnic groups by circumscribing the dialectical variation of local languages through “standard” versions they invented to compile dictionaries and translate bibles. Missionaries taught these standardized but reductive languages to the few African students they could attract to their schools. And these educated Africans leveraged colonial policies that favored them into successful lives as administrators, translators, businessmen, and, in the mid-twentieth century, as anti-colonial politicians. These Africans upwardly mobile in colonial contexts formed the vanguard of modern ethnic groups by claiming stewardship over indigenous cultural content such as myths, taboos, legends, and heroes. Building their ethnicities through citing shared cultural heritages helped them persuade others to recognize, expand, and adopt parallel discourses of ethnic commonality and difference. Since the cultural content also belonged to earlier communities, they came to understand ethnicities as intrinsic since there was no abrupt rejection of previous strategies of collaboration.

Since Vail’s model showed that Europeans were essential to the creation of ethnicity, he argued that the variation in the degrees of European intervention explained

the uneven distribution of ethnic loyalties throughout southern Africa.<sup>29</sup> It also accounted for the primordialism of ethnicity by demonstrating how African elites harnessed inherited “cultural content” to articulate new ethnicities in rural and urban areas. This reliance on cultural content, for Vail, also answered the “persistence question” by explaining why African elites and commoners retained their loyalty to ethnic groups after African independence. Though he cautioned against assuming the model was valid outside of southern Africa or following the colonial period, his model strongly suggested that ethnicity of this comprehending and homogeneous sort had been unlikely prior to European involvement.

Throughout the 1990s Africanist scholars elaborated on Vail’s constructivist project by examining the colonial contexts in which Africans constructed ethnic groups, usually by scouring archival documents for evidence about the emergence of multiple ethnic groups in the same colonial context.<sup>30</sup> For example, Patrick Harries described how Swiss missionaries established the linguistic map of Thonga in Zimbabwe based on administrative conveniences related to the costs of printing and translation.<sup>31</sup> At first, these missionaries underestimated the complexity of the linguistic situation in an area where small independent chiefdoms composed of migrants from disparate origins had limited interactions. Even after recognizing that many of the languages spoken in their

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<sup>29</sup> Vail, *Creation of Tribalism*.

<sup>30</sup> See Pier M. Larson, “Desperately Seeking ‘the Merina’ (Central Madagascar): Reading Ethnonyms and Their Semantic Fields in African Identity Histories,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22, no. 4 (December 1996): 541–560.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Harries, “The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa,” *African Affairs* 87, no. 346 (January 1, 1988): 25–52.

mission area were unrelated, the missionaries persisted in selecting one of the dialects and promoting it as a standardized *lingua franca*. But a few of the missionaries working nearer the coast insisted on distributing translations in the local Ronga dialect as well. In the following decades, the local Africans identified their ethnic groups with the linguistic distinctions established by these missionaries instead of retaining the panoply of languages and communities that preceded missionary involvement. Harries argued that the roots of ethnicity were thus derived from European conceptions and administrative structures established during colonialism, even if the cultural content of particular ethnic groups was indigenous.<sup>32</sup>

As Elizabeth Tonkin noted in 1996, efforts “to work out how contemporary ethnic groupings have come about” imply that ethnic groups “are all in process, [and] different degrees of ethnicisation may co-exist.”<sup>33</sup> Her explanation suggested that there was an ideal type of ethnicity (based on the models of Barth and Vail) towards which ethnic groupings were progressing and to which historians could refer to in order to determine whether a collective identity was ethnic or not. Tonkin, applied her argument to the Liberian context of the late-twentieth century, arguing that “ethnic violence” was an inappropriate term for characterizing Liberia's civil wars because ethnic groups were inchoate prior to the collapse of the Americo-Liberian regime.

Tonkin’s exclusion of ethnicity from the Liberian context highlights the tension between Vail’s constructivist model, whose arguments rely on distinguishing ethnic

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Tonkin, 238.

groups from earlier “non-ethnic” groups, and Barth’s model, which implies the ubiquity of ethnicity in all human societies. Some scholars, such as Jean-Lope Amselle argued strongly for limiting ethnicity to colonial and later eras. Prior to colonial rule, they argued, Africans did not belong to ethnic groups “but participated instead in fluid, overlapping social networks of kin, age-mates, clients, neighbors, and chiefdoms.”<sup>34</sup> For example, Justin Willis presented the pre-colonial social dynamics of the Mombasa region as a system of patron-client networks. He confined the articulation of Mijikenda and Swahili ethnic groups to the colonial labor contexts of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> These narratives portrayed the imposition of colonial rule as a profound rupture that fundamentally reordered the ways in which Africans related to one another, in part by arresting the fluid relationships of the past in fixed and regulated categories called tribes—but now politely referred to as ethnic groups.

But other historians challenged the thesis that ethnic groups are colonial (and particularly European) constructs by tracing the roots of specific ethnic groups to precolonial contexts. In summarizing the implications of ten years of such discoveries in 2003, Thomas Spear argued that strict constructivists over-estimated the power of colonial administrators to create ethnicity and underestimated the ability of colonial subjects to perpetuate pre-colonial values, including those implicated in ethnic processes.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa.”

<sup>35</sup> Willis, *Making of the Mijikenda*.

<sup>36</sup> Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” 24.



Ethnicity has endured for a long time. . . . While colonial rule often had the effect of transforming preexisting concepts, colonial authorities rarely created them from scratch, and they frequently found themselves as subject to African ethnic processes as in control of them.<sup>37</sup>

Spear's criticism targeted the limitation of constructivism to the colonial era and later, not the historical approach to the emergence of ethnic groups that was the hallmark of constructivism. He argued that to properly understand ethnicity historians should start "well before the onset of colonial rule" and continue after.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, Spear pulled together strands of thinking about ethnicity from primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist models to argue that each approach offered insights on different aspects of ethnicity that scholars should disaggregate. As a guiding example, he pointed to John Lonsdale's work on Kikuyu ethnicity as an example of how primordialist and instrumentalist models could be applied to reveal different aspects of a single ethnicity. In 1992, Lonsdale disambiguated ethnicity into internally directed and externally directed aspects. "Moral ethnicity" described internal affirmations about the meaning of group identity as debated among group members. The concept corresponds well with primordialist concerns, such as Clifford Geertz's definition of ethnicity as "social ratification of personal identification."<sup>39</sup> Lonsdale used the phrase "political tribalism" to stand for the external representation of differences between ethnic

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa."

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 43.

groups and others, corresponding with the primary focus of instrumentalists on ethnic competition.

Importantly, Spear fit Lonsdale's analysis into the constructivist paradigm by emphasizing that early forms of the collective identifications implied in Lonsdale's moral ethnicity emerged prior to colonialism, while political tribalism was an adaptation of those forms to the contexts of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Spear argued that ethnicity could be disambiguated further by distinguishing "among differing economic, social, cultural, and political aspects, each of which has its own practices and history."<sup>40</sup> As a model, he pointed to his own research about Maasai communities, who exclude some groups from economic activities but include them in cultural practices.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, the "creation of tribalism" model developed by Vail and his collaborators, which featured European actors and relied on colonial archives, could not account for the emergence of ethnic groups outside of colonial contexts. And Spear's disambiguation of ethnicity, combined with Barth's processual model of ethnic boundary making, demonstrated that fixed colonial tribes were largely a delusion of colonial administrators rather than an effective contrast with earlier social groups. Since colonial tribes could be as fluid and situational as the pre-colonial networks envisioned by Amselle and Willis, Spear argued that limiting ethnicity to the colonial era was unjustified.

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<sup>40</sup> Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," 25

<sup>41</sup> Spear and Waller, *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa*.

### **Ethno-separatist Narratives: Insights and Challenges**

Despite Spear's confidence that his flexible concept of ethnicity could be fruitfully applied to the precolonial past, the historians who identified ethnic groups in precolonial times have found that "ethnicity" as modeled by Barth and Vail does not accurately explain the social and political relationships they have discerned in earlier eras. Most scholars who adopted Vail's "creation of tribalism" model examined the construction of multiple ethnic groups in colonial contexts bringing them into competition, but scholars researching precolonial forms of ethnicity generally focused on the histories of single ethnic groups.<sup>42</sup> In addition, their approaches more often paralleled ethnohistory as developed by historians of American Indians: they supplemented archival sources with evidence from archaeology, historical linguistics, and oral traditions in order to discern the history of an "ethnic unit in its continuity over time from the present, back as far as we can identify it."<sup>43</sup> These historians often situated themselves explicitly against Vail's colonial model but generally avoided proposing new models. Instead they focused on identifying the inflection points in time at which particular ethnic groups emerged as separate ethnic communities. Thus I refer to their studies as ethno-separatist narratives.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Larson, "Desperately Seeking 'the Merina.'"

<sup>43</sup> Gene Weltfish, "The Question of Ethnic Identity, an Ethnohistorical Approach," *Ethnohistory* 6, no. 4 (October 1, 1959): 322.

<sup>44</sup> My usage differs slightly from the use of the term "ethno-separatist" to refer to the political movements organized by ethnic groups which are attempting to establish independent states, e.g. the Basques and the Uigurs. See Diane F. Orentlicher, "Separation Anxiety: International Responses to Ethno-Separatist Claims," *Yale Journal of International Law* 1:23 (1998). These movements also differ from "ethno-nationalist" groups which are often minorities in their country of residence but claim cultural affinity with a separate nation-state (see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian*

Besides forcing a reconsideration of Vail's colonial model, ethno-separatist narratives have raised several challenges to Barth's model of ethnicity. Several scholars, including Sandra Green, Allen Isaacman, and Barbara Isaacman, explicitly challenged his dismissiveness of the "cultural stuff" that is enclosed by ethnic boundaries. They demonstrated that ethnic groups consider cultural traits to be an important part of their ethnicities, even if they are not actively signaled as distinctive from other groups. In addition, the research of Pier Larson and Elizabeth MacGonagle, among others, suggests the futility of attempting to apply ethnic processes of situational differentiation, as modeled by Barth, to all human societies in the past.

Narrating the origins and development of features now defining single ethnic groups downplays interactions with neighboring groups that were the focus of Barth's model. Instead, the narrower perspective of these narratives favors analyses of an ethnic group's internal dynamics and differentiated constituents to discern how people endowed their ethnic relationships with meaning. For example, in Sandra Greene's history of the Anlo-Ewe ethnic group, she interprets oral traditions of clan histories to demonstrate that some clans are considered alien and subordinate because they are said to have been founded by immigrants. She used corroborating evidence from archival documents and historical linguistics to describe the past contexts in which such immigration probably occurred, but since immigrants came from diverse origins, Greene does not discuss at length their previous collective identities and cultural backgrounds prior to immigration.

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*Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). "Ethno-centrist" is even more laden with alternate connotations to merit consideration for classifying this historiographical trend.

So, while her analysis provided insight into how Anlo-Ewe constructed their ethnic group against later arrivals, it does not depend on describing interactions with other ethnic groups, unless the meaning of ethnicity is extended also to clans within a single ethnic group. Despite diminishing a key fixture of Barth's interactional model, her narrative is still able to offer a careful view of the meaning and processes of Anlo-Ewe ethnicity. And she does so without limiting ethnicity to those symbols which distinguish the Anlo-Ewe from other ethnic groups, though she describes the importance of such symbols in the internal debate over Anlo-Ewe identity. Greene's examination of the internal dynamics of ethnicity demonstrated the benefit of examining cultural traits that differentiate the internal organization of an ethnic group as well as those which in wider contexts distinguish ethnic groups from one another.

Allen Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman made a more pointed critique of Barth's deprecation of the internal "cultural stuff" in their narrative of the Chikunda ethnic group. In seventeenth-century south-east Africa, Portuguese slave holders in the Zambezi River valley forcibly assembled slave soldiers to conduct raids for them, and these slaves came to be known as Chikunda. Isaacman and Isaacman argue that the Chikunda identity became ethnic in the nineteenth century when the descendants of these slave soldiers developed a common language, adopted patrilineal descent, pursued distinctive occupations, established gender norms, and began to occupy territory beyond the sphere of Portuguese influence.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Allen F. Isaacman and Barbara Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond: The Making of Men and Chikunda Ethnic Identities in the Unstable World of South-Central Africa, 1750-1920* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004).

Isaacman and Isaacman described their study of the integrative aspects of the Chikunda as a corrective to studies following the Barthian approach of ethnic boundary making, which emphasizes how active differentiation between groups created ethnicities.<sup>46</sup> They were concerned with what these men from distinct backgrounds drew together around instead of how they distinguished themselves from other communities. Inter-ethnic relationships are still implied in their work: they note that the original Chikunda slave soldiers were themselves captured from dozens of other contemporary communities, that patrilineal descent distinguishes them from the matrilineal groups in the region, and that former slave soldiers who settled outside of Chikunda territories generally adopted the identities of the communities in which they settled.

The focus on internal dynamics within ethnic groups adopted by Greene and Isaacman and Isaacman may be seen as merely a shift in emphasis that applies the constructivist approach to primordialist concerns that emphasize the content of group identification rather than the instrumentalist focus on inter-ethnic relationships in multi-ethnic societies. But they also call attention to the aspects of ethnicity which ethnic groups themselves consider most meaningful, in no small part because of their insightful use of ethnographic evidence and oral traditions to discern historical sequences. Thus they are able to present indigenous interpretations of ethnicity that multi-ethnic narratives based on Vail's and Barth's models tended to elide.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

A second aspect of Barth's model that ethno-separatist narratives challenge is the assumption that ethnicity is a universal phenomenon. Though similar to Vail's method, they differ by identifying ethnic identities that preceded significant involvement from missionaries or other Europeans. Pier Larson and Elizabeth MacGonagle, for example, raise issues about whether ethnic processes as envisioned by Barth are accurate or even helpful for understanding the creation of ethnic groups in precolonial contexts. Vail's model may have erred in restricting constructivism to fixation of language and territory, missionary influence, the politics of ethnic entrepreneurship, colonial categorization, customary law, and so forth. In contrast, ethno-separatist narratives tend to be fairly idiosyncratic in how they identify the points at which groups become ethnic. Often the question turns on loose distinctions that scholars make between "culture" and some other western category of experience (politics, religion, occupation)—all of which might also be described as cultural.

Larson's research, for instance, demonstrates how muddy the concept of ethnicity can be when scholars try to distinguish cultural identities from those tied to political or economic status. He argued that highland Malagasy-speakers in Madagascar transformed their political identity as subjects into a cultural resource during a political struggle with their king. Larson argues that in doing so, they ethnicized the political identity and "became Merina"—coalescing several collective identities from previous times into a single ethnic group. These earlier identities included *hova* (commoners), *andriana* (royalty) and *andevo* (slaves). Larson argued that these prior collective names should be regarded as "status roles" rather than ethnic groups. But presumably, these distinctive

collective names referenced different habits, routines, customs, dress, economic behavior—in a word, culture. According to several travelers, the *hova* had previously considered themselves as distinct from their rulers.<sup>47</sup> Why should these distinctions be regarded as a status roles rather than ethnic groups? Since Barth’s model emphasizes subjective expressions of differentiation as the defining characteristic of ethnicity, objective markers related to the concept of tribe such as common language or occupation of a shared territory cannot be used as a justification that groups who differentiate themselves through political status are not really ethnic groups without disregarding Barth’s model.

Besides the status roles just mentioned, Larson notes that Merina was one of many terms used to express the “same overlapping unity.”<sup>48</sup> But these other names were not exactly synonyms; Larson carefully described how they implied slightly different meanings related to highland Malagasy-speakers, but perhaps differentiated but overlapping groups of Malagasy-speakers. Due to these variations, Larson admitted that “modern academic vocabulary” captures the vernacular dynamics only in very broad terms. He even suggested that Barth’s model of ethnicity may apply only in the context of modern nation states in which using a “single and frequently invoked ethnic name” to reify identity is the norm, and in fact often required to participate in activities regulated by state officials.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



Despite Larson's reservations about the academic vocabulary of ethnicity, he identified the Merina as an ethnic group in the model of Lonsdale's moral ethnicity, in which people are drawn together by mutual arguments about moral behavior, such as when Malagasy commoners confronted their errant king. Thus, the history of the Merina provides evidence that:

Africans were fully capable of expressing their cultural identities as distinct groups well before European colonization, although ethnic identity before and after colonization might differ significantly.<sup>50</sup>

But this conflation of cultural identity and ethnic identity is problematic. If, as Larson suggests, ethnic identity differed "significantly" before and after European colonization, classifying precolonial collective identities as ethnic only further obscures the particularity of local strategies by describing them as similar to broader ethnic strategies that Vail described in the colonial era and Barth described for the post-colonial era.

While Larson argues that for the Merina, a political identity became a cultural identity, Elizabeth MacGonagle argues in her research on Ndaou ethnicity that "local political identities and traditions stand out amid an overarching Ndaou cultural identity." Thus, political identities are variations on a theme of widely shared "culture."<sup>51</sup> Through ethnographic interviews and careful readings of Portuguese travel writing about South-east Africa from the sixteenth century onwards, MacGonagle identified several

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique*., 110; her description of "cultural identity" coincides with Vansina's notion of "tradition", see Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*..

continuities between the behavior of the region's residents observed in precolonial times and the symbols and practices that the Ndaou ethnic group used to express their shared identities in the late twentieth century. Following Spear and Richard Waller, she does not define ethnicity "too strictly", but argues that long-held practices such as male ear-piercing, female scarification, and associating clans with specific totems indicated a shared sense of Ndaou-ness that stretches back at least four centuries. She uses this interpretation to justify referring to people who used these practices in the distant past as Ndaou despite admitting that no one was called "Ndaou" until the Gaza Nguni designated the people they conquered in the nineteenth century as such!

While Larson argued for flexibility in applying Barth's model of ethnicity to the precolonial past, MacGonagle's treatment returns in part to the objective lists of cultural traits that Barth explicitly intended to replace. The practices MacGonagle identifies as signifying a modern ethnic group certainly have longevity in the region. However MacGonagle's projection of Ndaou identity onto the past closes the door to an analysis of alternative collective identities that past people used these practices to embrace before articulating Ndaou identities to their Gaza Nguni conquerors. It collapses all groups that might have varied the same set of signifiers to enact distinctive collective identities into a single ethnicity. Thus for MacGonagle, the practice of scarification implies Ndaou ethnicity, when in earlier eras the variations in scarification patterns themselves differentiated communities, without presuming any cohesion among the groups thus differentiated. Without corroborating evidence that these earlier communities subjectively used scarification as a criterion for differentiation from other non-Ndaou

people, MacGonagle undermines the foundation of Barth's model that subjective marking of boundaries, rather than lists of cultural traits, should define ethnicity. It thus seems to fall back into the exercise of defining peoples through objectively identifying cultural practices which "belong" to them, rather than the subjective experiences they use to define themselves.

Many scholars, including those mentioned above, carefully demonstrate how the ethnic groups they study have shifted in expression, composition, and strategic purpose over time. But even with these precautions, classifying all pre-colonial cultural groups as ethnic groups elides other communal experiences and collaborative strategies in the past. This widespread interpretation implies that just as ethnic groups dominate the political and social landscape of contemporary African nations, so too did they in the past.

### **Multi-disciplinary Perspectives and Correctives**

Social-scientists have continued to add nuances to Barth's model of ethnicity that may help correct the tendency of ethno-separatist narratives to reify ethnic groups. But social scientists also consider ethnicity, along with race and nationalism, as manifestations of the same phenomenon: the tendency of humans to distinguish themselves in groups. As Richard Jenkins writes, "It is now anthropological common sense to consider ethnicity and nationalism in the same analytical breath."<sup>52</sup> Collapsing these varying collective identities into ethnicity is less acceptable to the historians who have taken pains to differentiate non-ethnic groups from ethnic ones. But social science

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<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, 12.

theories focused on practice correspond well with historian's concepts of agency and contingency. Considering ethnicity as one of several rationales of categorization and identification is a promising direction for disentangling ethnicity from its problematic association with nation and race, along with other social strategies.

In 1984, anthropologist Anthony Cohen attempted to generalize Barth's model of ethnicity with the notion of "community" to discuss all dynamics of "self-other identification" in order to avoid "over-theoretical attempts to distinguish among ethnic, nationalistic, or other collective sentiments."<sup>53</sup> But the persuasive processual model that Barth outlined for ethnicity has encouraged most anthropologists to avoid Cohen's recommendations in favor of a taxonomy in which ethnicity is the primary classification of group identification, with race and nationalism as variations. Thus, Jenkins refers to nationalism and race as historically specific "allotropes of ethnicity."<sup>54</sup> And Rogers Brubaker argued that from a cognitive perspective, "race, ethnicity, and nationalism" should be treated together rather than separately: to avoid the repetition of the tri-partite phrase, he regularly uses ethnicity to stand for all three social categories throughout his writings.<sup>55</sup> In at least one article, he playfully offers to dispose of the term "ethnicity" altogether, thus demonstrating how pliable the term has become.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Naoise Mac Sweeney, "Beyond Ethnicity: The Overlooked Diversity of Group Identities," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 22, no. 1 (June 2009): 101–126, doi:10.1558/jmea.v22i1.101.

<sup>54</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*.

<sup>55</sup> Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition."

<sup>56</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43, no. 02 (2002): 163–189, doi:10.1017/S0003975602001066.

Since Brubaker focuses his research on nationalism, using ethnicity as a generic term establishes some analytical distance from widely-held “folk” assumptions about the primordialism of nationalism by orienting his readers to reconsider nationalism in terms of Barth’s model of ethnicity—that is, as a constantly adjusting process of communal boundary making. But collapsing distinctions between nations and races into ethnicity also invalidates meaningful distinctions between chronologically successive social strategies and order that historians of ethnicity have been at pains to articulate. If all collective ideologies are ethnic, what could we make of Vail's observation that the distribution of loyalty to ethnic groups was uneven throughout Southern Africa, Tonkin's critique that the term "ethnic violence" should not be applied to the not-yet-ethnic participants in the Liberian civil war, or the transitions to ethnic identity from non-ethnic identities articulated by Isaacman and Isaacman and Larson. In each of these cases the distinction between ethnic and non-ethnic identities is essential to the logic of their historical arguments. As Carola Lentz suggested in 1995:

Classifying the most diverse historical forms of social identity as “ethnic” creates the scientifically questionable but politically useful impression that all ethnicities are basically the same and that ethnic identity is a natural trait of persons and social groups . . . . This is not an argument which bears up to historical scrutiny. Rather, it is a nominalist operation intended to provide scholarly legitimation for ethno-nationalist ideologies.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 78.

Lentz thus offered two reasons for rejecting the universal application of ethnicity. First, the historical experiences of social groups are too diverse to homogenize as a single phenomenon. This stance does not necessarily mean that no precolonial social groups could be described as ethnic. Isaacman and Isaacman assert that “[t]here is no compelling theoretical or empirical reason to presume that all ethnic identities were simply a product of the complex and contested colonial encounter.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, one of the remarkable patterns revealed by ethno-separatist narratives is that many of Africa’s current ethnic groups were first organized during the profoundly disruptive era of the commercial slave trade. Given the formation of many ethnic groups that continue to endure under the influence of trans-oceanic slave trades, I hesitate to confine ethnicity solely to colonial contexts. But as Larson demonstrated in Madagascar, Barth’s model of ethnicity is unsuitable for extending the criteria for ethnicity to the strikingly diverse contexts of early Africa.

Naoise Mac Sweeney suggested that considering “social rationales” can help correct the common assumption by archaeologists that all past communities are ethnic.<sup>59</sup> She called on archaeologists to integrate research on the social construction of communities by considering how material remains and spatial relationships might indicate practices related to the social rationales of ethnicity, profession, gender, and

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<sup>58</sup> Isaacman and Isaacman, *Slavery and Beyond*.

<sup>59</sup> See Naoise Mac Sweeney, “Beyond Ethnicity: The Overlooked Diversity of Group Identities,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 22, no. 1 (June 2009): 101–126; Mac Sweeney’s definition of ethnicity as a social rationale that asserts commonality based on a “putative common origin,” is overly generalized—it could also include discourses of lineage, race, clan, nation, etc.

status.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the common practice of documenting social stratification in archaeological sites can indicate different status communities that also participate in a wider “geographical community” in which members experience a sense of belonging focused on co-residence.<sup>61</sup> Thus, instead of assuming a homogeneous ethnic community roughly equivalent to the settlement site or complex of sites, Mac Sweeney demonstrated how to read physical evidence to identify how group distinctions are “overlaid on top of the initial geographic identity.”<sup>62</sup>

Unlike Barth’s model, which posits boundaries between ethnic groups, Mac Sweeney’s description of social rationales can account for “over-lapping” identities that Larson identified in Malagasy texts.<sup>63</sup> Instead of simply over-lapping, Mac Sweeney’s approach suggests that communities and individuals synergistically compile multiple sets of practices to use in differing circumstances. When individuals express or experience their communities “externally”, they sometimes leave traces that archaeologists can excavate, such as the remains of feasts and the spatial separation of towns into quarters. Mac Sweeney suggested that psychological or internal understandings of community are best examined through documentary and oral evidence. These latter sources could also prove helpful in determining indigenous social rationales other than the Western-theorized rationales on which Mac Sweeney focuses.

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<sup>60</sup> Naoise Mac Sweeney, *Community Identity and Archaeology: Dynamic Communities at Aphrodisias and Beycesultan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 19; Mac Sweeney emphasizes ritual or “enactments of community” as part of this definition as well.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> For a critique of “variable” identities see Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity.’”

The second, but related, problem with generalizing ethnicity that Lentz suggested is that bestowing the stamp of primordial longevity on any one ethnic group is morally tenuous. This warning is particularly relevant when the narrow focus of an ethno-separatist narrative avoids examining the development of other ethnic groups which within modern states are potentially political competitors. As is clear in coastal Kenya, bestowing history on one ethnic group while ignoring others can provide legitimation for a wide variety of political claims, particularly related to occupation rights people use to justify ethnicized violence. Richard Jenkins countered this argument by arguing that assuming the phenomenon of ethnicity is universal throughout the past does not necessarily mean that particular ethnic groups have also endured since time immemorial.<sup>64</sup> But such complexities are lost when ethnic entrepreneurs co-opt scholarly narratives for dubious political advantages, a practice that occurs with frightening frequency.

Jenkins also argued that denying the ubiquity of ethnicity in pre-modern times risks a greater danger: “overlooking the consistency over time of the principles of collective identification and affiliation with which *we are concerned*.”<sup>65</sup> In this part of Jenkins’s rethinking of ethnicity, he seems to subordinate subjective perspectives of ethnicity, which scholars have taken great pains to understand, to the concerns of scholars interested in a global comparative framework.<sup>66</sup> If overlooking continuities is a danger,

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<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*.

<sup>65</sup> Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 79; emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> Note that Jenkins is very concerned with subjective understandings of ethnicity in other parts of his work.



equally important is the prospect of missing distinctive vernacular expressions of local experiences, which are lost when scholars fit them into pre-theorized Western classifications, such as ethnicity, politics, society, religion, and economy. If scholars are concerned with the problems of projecting ethnicity onto the past, they should be equally concerned about projecting Western experiences onto past and present people whose experiences may differ significantly.<sup>67</sup>

More importantly, scholars can examine context-specific “principles of collective identification and affiliation” without freighting their analyses with the assumptions built into models of ethnicity or unwittingly adding fuel to inter-ethnic politics. Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper, for instance, have proposed language for untangling the various ways in which scholars use “identity.” As intended, their vocabulary is easily extendable to the concept of ethnicity, nationalism, race, and other social categories. They argue that disambiguating the meanings of abstract identity into active terms such as “identification and categorization” allows scholars “to account for th[e] process of reification” without “unintentionally reproducing or reinforcing such reification by uncritically adopting [lay or “folk”] categories of practice as categories of analysis.”<sup>68</sup> As opposed to ethnic groups and ethnicities, which historians have traced to specific contexts, Brubaker and Cooper’s active terminology has the advantage of being distinct

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<sup>67</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1979).

<sup>68</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” 5.

from any actively used social category (e.g. ethnicity, nation, race) and can thus alleviate some of the concerns about becoming embroiled in ethnic rationalizing.

Furthermore, categorization is a cognitive behavior universally shared by humans that can be broadly applied to past and present contexts.<sup>69</sup> The distinction between categories and categorization helps solve the conundrum of ethnicity's historicity, since categorization is a universal human practice but the resulting categories are contextually specific. Generalizing the creation of inter-group distinctions as processes of categorization instead of fitting them into a single category of ethnicity also liberates ethnicity from analogies to community, race, and nationalism. Since that analytical work involved in understanding group differentiation can be shouldered by categorization, scholars would be free to specify the historical contexts of ethnicity without confusing them with the distinct contexts in which people articulated national and racial identities. And shifting the focus from the analysis of abstract categories to categorization of specifics can be a powerful corrective to ethno-separatist narratives that focus on the emergence and continuity of a single ethnic group through time. As Brubaker and Cooper offer:

Setting out to write about "identifications" as they emerge, crystallize, and fade away in particular social and political circumstances may

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<sup>69</sup> For more on cognitive foundation of categorization, see Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition." Also see support from a linguistic perspective in Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*.

well inspire a rather different history than setting out to write of an "identity," which links past, present, and future in a single word.<sup>70</sup>

### **A History of Collaborative Strategies in Eastern Kenya**

This dissertation, in the spirit of compiling innovations that Bantu speakers in eastern Kenyan have followed over the past two millennia, has built on the contributions all of these scholars have made to the study of ethnicity. For instance, I have applied Barth's emphasis on cultural processes of differentiation not only to ethnicity, but also to lineages, clans, title societies, and age-sets. Rather than things, I treat them as social strategies for assembling *ad hoc* communities that constantly adapted their boundaries with one another. Furthermore, I have expanded Vail's notion of ethnic ideologies' cultural content to include not only myths and values but also the social strategies that such myths and rituals commemorate and reproduce. While the social strategies that this dissertation explores are not unique to eastern Kenya, the particular ways in which they were organized are part of the particular intellectual and linguistic heritage of the region's Sabaki speakers.

I have also followed Spear's recommendation to discern the pre-colonial roots of ethnicity. As he suggests, I have shown that the cultural values, social rhetoric, and political dynamics that inform contemporary Swahili and Mijikenda ethnicity stretch back far beyond colonial contexts. And Lonsdale's differentiation of "moral ethnicity" from "political tribalism" helps discern a finer distinction between the rumors and insults

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<sup>70</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"

that prevailed during the Omani era with the collective politics under British rule.

However, as ethno-separatist narratives have demonstrated for other modern ethnicities, I have shown a clear distinction between the imagined communities created by ethnic discourses of difference directed in the nineteenth century at Omani and British imperial rulers and earlier strategies focused on the narrower, local contexts of preceding eras.

As Mac Sweeney has suggested, the strategies that prevailed in earlier eras can be differentiated by the distinct rationales that informed their innovations, rather than folded into a generic category called ethnicity. Though she focuses on the external expressions of ethnicity, gender, profession, and status, I have emphasized that eastern Kenyans innovated and adapted lineages, clans, title-societies, and age-sets in successive eras to make a variety of claims over people, land, and other possessions, but also to pursue socially useful values such as wealth, prestige, knowledge, security, and valor. As they have compiled these social strategies, so have their claims overlapped; for instance, both lineages and clans make claims over people and land. So, as Mac Sweeney called for an overarching “geographical identity” within which different social identities could be discerned, this dissertation has adopted the Sabaki language family as the framework within which to explore the finer distinctions of identity created within it. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the linguistic variations among the various branches of Sabaki, when compared with other linguistic evidence, can provide a clear chronology of when eastern Kenyans innovated each of these strategies, despite the subsequent overlapping of identities that Alice Werner observed among the Wanyika and Pier Larson noted in Madagascar.

Thus, as anticipated by Brubaker and Cooper, this dissertation has provided a history of “identifications” rather than a history of identities. Instead of charting the histories of specific lineages, clans, or ethnic groups, I have described how, when, and why eastern Kenyans started organizing themselves into lineages, clans, clan confederations, age-sets, and ethnic groups. As Barth noted, each of these categories assumes the presence of others of its kind, for without more than one lineage, there is little point of claiming land; without multiple clans, there would be no one else to exclude by guarding knowledge. Thus, Sabaki speakers innovated their social strategies in an iterative process as people re-assembled, transformed, or re-applied the innovations of the preceding generation to the problems and opportunities of their present, thus assuring that the communities of the past could be discerned in present practices.

While I limited my focus to how these strategies became compiled into the modern Mijikenda and Swahili ethnicities, the same method could be applied on a wider scale to historicize the articulation of ethnicity throughout Kenya, and elsewhere. Rather than bestowing a scholarly stamp of primordialism on ethnic groups (and thus triggering Carola Lentz’s justified concern that ethnic histories may inadvertently contribute to ideologies that promote ethnic violence), historicizing ethnicity as a product of modern colonialism sets it in a framework of historical experiences that all Kenyans share. Importantly, historicizing strategies of lineage, clanship, title-societies, and age-sets that are also widespread in Kenya also emphasizes that while ethnicity is a recent invention, the distinctive cultures that Kenyan’s celebrate are not simply colonial constructs.

Ethnicity, in other words, is persistent because it draws on the authentic heritage of historical experience.

Brubaker and Cooper suggested that understanding group identifications as history would account for identities that fade out of use as well as those which emerge. However, by focusing on the identifications that eastern Kenyans portray in their rituals, I have privileged only those strategies—and the places, practices, and symbols that symbolize them—among others which may have been salient in the past, that eastern Kenyans continue to draw on now to articulate, rationalize, and experience their modern ethnicities. While this dissertation thus makes no claims to be a comprehensive account of all the ways that eastern Kenyans have collaborated, it has taken the practices of the present as a guide to the kinds of past communities that were important enough to shape the heritage of the Mijikenda and Swahili ethnic groups.

Thus, a bride-price negotiation in Rabai inspired my examination of lineage in Chapter 3, and an elder mumbling at twigs pointed me to the relationship between clans and *uganga* that I outlined in Chapter 4. The symbolic parley between the Mijikenda heroine Mekatilili and a new *kaya* elder described in Chapter 5 suggested the tension between generosity and greed that councils have balanced for centuries. In Chapter 6, the sword dances of a culture famous for being merchants drew my attention to the martial heritage of age-sets. Finally, the informal chatter I heard about ethnic stereotypes in Kenya continued the discourses of difference I accounted for in Chapter 7. As suggested in Chapter 2, tracing the linguistic and archaeological evidence of precedents for these contemporary rituals provided the framework for outlining a history of identifications, or

collaborative strategies, that was not beholden to the ethno-separatist narratives of Mijikenda and Swahili origins that fractured scholarship of eastern Kenya into two separate streams of historiography (see Chapter 1).

To summarize the history thus compiled, the first Bantu-speaking settlers in eastern Kenya during the first half of the first millennium CE were pioneers limited by their ignorance of the landscape and by their reliance on cultivating technologies, so they retained earlier strategies of lineage to claim the relatively few places they knew how to exploit. As they gained greater knowledge of the environment, and as their population increased, they could have repeatedly hived off into new lineages; indeed some of their descendants, including Elwana speakers, seem to have done just that. But others began organizing marriage alliances to protect specialized knowledge; for instance, learning to fish off-shore reefs, identify clay suitable for pottery, or make iron tools. They gradually focused their marriage alliances on protecting valuable knowledge while continuing to use them for claiming dependents; and they started associating with, but not joining, neighboring marriage alliances. Thus they transformed marriage alliances into clans as they congregated to exchange the fruits of their knowledge with one another. These congeries of clans became clan confederations when they settled together in nucleated villages during the latter half of the first millennium CE to pursue shared interests of trade and security, but still distinguished their clans by social boundaries of kinship and physical boundaries that separated their neighborhoods.

Those who participated in these innovative clan confederations established towns throughout eastern Kenya, or at least convinced others throughout the region to follow

their example. Living together eased exchanges and provided better security against competitors. However, the stresses of living in close quarters required them to develop strategies of mediation among the diverse groupings, hence they organized councils that encouraged the most successful among the constituent clans to share their talents and resources with the entire community. At least occasionally, mediations failed to achieve consensus, and people left out settled in other towns. But their affiliations to lineages and clans in the old town often ensured continued affiliation to their earlier clan confederation. Thus retaining some of their oldest strategies required them to elaborate clan confederations into an organization that spanned a town, many villages, and the rural hinterlands that supported them. Instead of hundreds of independent city-states, between 1000-1500 CE the residents of eastern Kenya collaborated in only dozens of clan confederations. In addition, the councils that once focused on mediating local squabbles took responsibility for coordinating commercial contacts among their allied towns and neighboring clan confederations.

With the threat of Portuguese invasions after 1500 CE, many clan confederations adopted age-sets and the new rituals that accompanied them to add a dimension of defense to their alliances and to retain youth tempted by commercial opportunities elsewhere. When Omani and British governments effectively suppressed the military potential of these clan confederations in the nineteenth century, they reorganized them as labor networks in the urban economy of Mombasa. The common experiences these networks structured for men and boys from throughout the hinterland provided a basis for articulating ethnic identities that transcended the narrower confederations from which



they came. However, since both imperial governments grouped people of the coast by their religious identifications, coastal communities' commitment to Islamic knowledge as their distinguishing *uganga* for the first time separated them from inland communities as a bloc. Thus, rather than a single ethnic group drawing on their common historical experiences, they established two competing ethnic groups—the Swahili and Mijikenda. By 2010, in the wake of electoral politics ethnicized on this principle of division, the ethnic groups of eastern Kenya were organizing themselves as the constituents of the Kenyan nation, rather than as competitors with it, thus following in the footsteps of their forebears in adding new strategies of identification without discarding previous strategies that continued to be relevant.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this history is expressed similarly in the Mijikenda traditions of Shungwaya origins. The traditions to which scholars have pointed to as artful articulations of twentieth-century Mijikenda identity signified their new ethnicity by drawing on previous strategies of collaboration in an intricately woven incremental extension of the heritage of great depth that scholars of ethnicity have acknowledged but have rarely attempted to disentangle as a cumulative historical sequence. The intellectuals who crafted the Shungwaya myth for the Mijikenda ethnicity recast the lineages, clans, clan confederations, and age-sets as tropes for representing inland residents' varying degrees of relatedness to one another; the Shungwaya myth helped competitors claim kinship.

Their remarkably elegant rendering of their complex millennia-long history recalls how a father with his two wives and nine sons (read lineage), fled pastoralists

somewhere in the north. The pastoralists had used their ownership of the land to intrude on the rights of the sons over their women. After killing one of these villains (characterized as the “Galla” familiar from recent experience) during the *mung’aro* initiation ritual, or after a Galla exercised a claimed right to sleep with one of the lineage members’ wives, the nine families were separated as they fled from the threatening pastoralists.

During a flight lasting an obscuringly uncounted number of generations (thus allowing anyone to claim inclusion and no one to claim privilege), some families were separated, but they eventually rejoined their kin after learning distinguishing *uganga* “proprietary knowledge” while they had been lost. While clans guarded some of this knowledge, other knowledge was considered too valuable for any one clan to control, so the clans split the newcomers amongst the clan confederation on the premise that multiple repositories, each with the obligation to share, guaranteed the welfare of all. When these clans arrived in eastern Kenya, foragers showed them forests where they would be safe from the warlike pastoralists. It was in these forests that they cleared their refuges known as *kayas* “towns” and then reestablished contact with other families from Shungwaya who had all endured similar migrations. Later, all the descendants of all the families, separated among their respective *kayas* demonstrated their common ties to Shungwaya by “cutting their *rika* [age-sets]” at the same time.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Alternately, the *rika* are cut in descending order from the descendants of the eldest child of the original *mriango* to youngest, in which case the principle of anteriority and the perceived entry of each group into the Mombasa region determines the order. This rendering of this complex myth is streamlined, and hence incomplete and simplified. I have drawn on a variety of the traditions published in Spear, *Traditions* to demonstrate how the Mijikenda traditions treat the lineage, clan, clan confederation, and age-set strategies.

Earlier scholars counted named age-sets to date this myth to around 1600 CE; instead I have applied linguistic analysis to each of the strategies that composed the myth to distinguish their origins in succeeding eras of the past. Thus while the dating of the final composition of the myth is accurate, the elements of the myth, like the elements of Swahili New Year and other rituals, are much older. This method thus balances the emphasis of historians on the creation of ethnic groups in modern times with an appreciation for the historical depth of the practices that people draw upon to naturalize their ethnic identities. Exploring eastern Kenya's ethnicities as compilations of older social categories has disentangled the strategies from the modern ethnicities they are used to legitimate. Documenting the genealogies of the practices and symbols that index ethnicity as a "thing of the past" also resolves the conundrum that ethnicity is a historically constructed phenomenon while appearing primordial and timeless.

## Appendix 1

### THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

© 2005 IPA

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			ʀ					ʀ		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

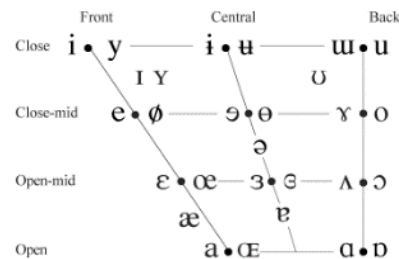
CONSONANTS (NON-PULMONIC)

Clicks	Voiced implosives	Ejectives
◌ ʘ Bilabial	◌ ɓ Bilabial	◌ ʼ Examples:
◌ ǀ Dental	◌ ɗ Dental/alveolar	◌ ɓ' Bilabial
◌ ǃ (Post)alveolar	◌ ɟ Palatal	◌ ɗ' Dental/alveolar
◌ ǂ Palatoalveolar	◌ ɡ Velar	◌ ɡ' Velar
◌ ǁ Alveolar lateral	◌ ɠ Uvular	◌ ɠ' Alveolar fricative

OTHER SYMBOLS

◌ ɮ	Voiceless labial-velar fricative	◌ ɟʝ	Alveolo-palatal fricatives
◌ ʋ	Voiced labial-velar approximant	◌ ɹ̥	Voiced alveolar lateral flap
◌ ɥ	Voiced labial-palatal approximant	◌ ɟ͡ɰ	Simultaneous ɟ and ɰ
◌ ʜ	Voiceless epiglottal fricative		
◌ ʕ	Voiced epiglottal fricative	Affricates and double articulations can be represented by two symbols joined by a tie bar if necessary.	
◌ ʡ	Epiglottal plosive		

VOWELS



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

SUPRASEGMENTALS

- ◌ ˈ Primary stress
- ◌ ˌ Secondary stress
- ◌ ː Long
- ◌ ˑ Half-long
- ◌ ˑ̇ Extra-short
- ◌ ˑ̈ Minor (foot) group
- ◌ ˑ̈̈ Major (intonation) group
- ◌ ˑ̈̈̈ Syllable break
- ◌ ˑ̈̈̈̈ Linking (absence of a break)

TONES AND WORD ACCENTS

- |          |            |          |                |
|----------|------------|----------|----------------|
| ◌ ˥ or ˧ | Extra high | ◌ ˨ or ˩ | Rising         |
| ◌ ˥̥     | High       | ◌ ˨̥     | Falling        |
| ◌ ˥̄     | Mid        | ◌ ˨̄     | High rising    |
| ◌ ˥̆     | Low        | ◌ ˨̆     | Low rising     |
| ◌ ˥̇     | Extra low  | ◌ ˨̇     | Rising-falling |
| ◌ ˥̂     | Downstep   | ↗        | Global rise    |
| ◌ ˥̃     | Upstep     | ↘        | Global fall    |

DIACRITICS Diacritics may be placed above a symbol with a descender, e.g. ɲ̥̄

◌ ̥	Voiceless	◌ ̤	Breathy voiced	◌ ̦	Dental	◌ ̧	Dental
◌ ̇	Voiced	◌ ̨	Creaky voiced	◌ ̩	Apical	◌ ̪	Apical
◌ ̠	Aspirated	◌ ̢	Linguolabial	◌ ̣	Laminal	◌ ̤	Laminal
◌ ̥̠	More rounded	◌ ̦̠	Labialized	◌ ̧̠	Nasalized	◌ ̨̠	Nasalized
◌ ̥̠̠	Less rounded	◌ ̦̠̠	Palatalized	◌ ̧̠̠	Nasal release	◌ ̨̠̠	Nasal release
◌ ̥̠̠̠	Advanced	◌ ̦̠̠̠	Velarized	◌ ̧̠̠̠	Lateral release	◌ ̨̠̠̠	Lateral release
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠	Retracted	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠	Pharyngealized	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠	No audible release	◌ ̨̠̠̠̠	No audible release
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠̠	Centralized	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠̠	Velarized or pharyngealized	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠̠		◌ ̨̠̠̠̠̠	
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠̠̠	Mid-centralized	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠̠̠	Raised	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠̠̠	(ɹ̥ = voiced alveolar fricative)	◌ ̨̠̠̠̠̠̠	
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Syllabic	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Lowered	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	(β = voiced bilabial approximant)	◌ ̨̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Non-syllabic	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Advanced Tongue Root	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠		◌ ̨̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	
◌ ̥̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Rhoticity	◌ ̦̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	Retracted Tongue Root	◌ ̧̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠		◌ ̨̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠̠	

IPA Chart, <http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.html>, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 3.0 Unported License. Copyright © 2005 International Phonetic Association.

## Appendix 2

### Partial Index of Sabaki Sound Changes

#### NEC > Pre-Sabaki

- 1) Spirantization /\_ʊ
  - a) p, t, k > f/\_ʊ
  - b) W, l, g > v/\_ʊ
- 2) Spirantization /\_ɪ
  - a) p > f/\_ɪ
  - b) W > v/\_ɪ
  - c) t > s/\_ɪ
  - d) l, g > z/\_ɪ
  - e) k > ʃ/\_ɪ
- 3) Spirantization of Causative -ɪ-/ \_V
  - a) p /\_ɪ [+causative] + V > fy
  - b) W /\_ɪ [+causative] + V > vy
  - c) t /\_ɪ [+causative] + V > sy
  - d) d /\_ɪ [+causative] + V > zy
  - e) k /\_ɪ [+causative] + V > jy

#### Pre-Sabaki > Early Sabaki

- 4) g-loss (limited)
  - g > ø
- 5) Palatal Affrication
  - c > tʃ
- 6) k-palatalization
  - a) ki > ky/\_V-stems
  - b) ki > ki/\_C-stems [retention]
- 7) W-dentalization
  - W > v /\_ [+front: a,e,i, ɪ]

- 8) W-loss Stage 1
  - W > [v]? > Ø / \_V [+round: o, u, ʊ]
- 9) y-loss in Spirantized Causatives
  - a) zy [+cause] > z [+cause]
  - b) sy [+cause] > s [+cause]

#### Early Sabaki > Middle Sabaki

- 10) Bantu Vowel Neutralization Stage 1
  - a) ɪ > i
  - b) ʊ > u
  - c) ɪ [+Cl 5 Noun prefix retained]
- 11) c-dentalization Stage 1
  - tʃ > ts [tʃ]
- 12) p-lenition Stage 1
  - a) p > φ /V \_V,
  - b) p-retention /ɪ[+Class 5 Prefix]\_
  - c) p-retention /N\_
- 13) t-lenition Stage 1
  - t > tʀ
- 14) W-loss stage 2
  - {W >} v > Ø /\_V [e, i]
- 15) nj-dentalization
  - nj > ndz
- 16) nz-affrication
  - nz > ndz
- 17) nc-affrication
  - nc > nts [ntʃ]

- 18) k-palatalization Stage 2  
 [not Lower Pokomo]  
 a) k > č/ \_\_\_y  
 b) k > č/ \_\_\_i [Giriama]  
 c) k > č/ \_\_\_e [limited Giriama]

### Middle Sabaki > Late Sabaki

- 19) t-lenition Stage 2  
 t̥ > r̥ [variable]  
 20) t-lenition Stage 3  
 (t)r̥ > /h/  
 21) j-softening variant 1  
 j > dz

### Late PSA > Mijikenda

- 22) Bantu Vowel Neutralization Stage 2  
 ɪ [+Class 5 prefix] > ø  
 23) g palatalization  
 g > j / \_e, i  
 24) Depalatalization of ʃ [+spirantized k]  
 {k/\_ɪ} > ʃ > s  
 25) m-Loss / \_f [=Rule 143 = 76]  
 mf > øf  
 26) Labial-velarization 1  
 /gw/ > [gb̥] ~ [gb̥ʷ] / \_ [+round]  
 27) Labial-velarization 2  
 /kw/ > [kp̥] ~ [kp̥ʷ] / \_ [+round]  
 28) Labial-velarization 3  
 /mw/ > [ɲm̥] ~ [ɲm̥ʷ]  
 29) Labial-velarization 4

- /bw/ > [gb̥] [Giriama only]  
 30) Nasal Devoicing / Aspiration  
 NÇ > NÇʰ  
 31) Nasal Loss = rule 140  
 NÇʰ [+ stops] > øÇʰ [+stops]  
 32) n-loss  
 ns(y) > øs  
 33) Spirantized Causative variant 1  
 {kɪ [+causative] >} ʃy > s  
 34) nonvelar nasal palatalization  
 ɲ / \_w > n  
 35) Nasal Monosyllable Stem yi-  
 insertion  
 N [+Cl 9 prefix] + CV [+M-stem]  
 > nyiCV  
 36) Glide Deletion  
 w > ø / h\_  
 37) loss of Dentalized \*W  
 v > w  
 38) \*l phonemic variation 2  
 l > [r] / \_i,e  
 l > [r] / i,e \_  
 39) ʈ selectively borrowed from ND

### Early PSA > Proto-Kiswahili

- 40) W > ʊ ~ w  
 41) j-softening variant 2 stage 1  
 j > J

## 42) Nasal Loss

- a)  $N\bar{F} > \emptyset\bar{F}$ 
  - i)  $mf > \emptyset f$
  - ii)  $ns(y) > \emptyset s$

## 43) Glide Deletion

- a)  $w > \emptyset / \_f$
- b)  $w > \emptyset / \_v$

## 44) w assimilation

$wo > o$

## 45) Initial V-loss [+Cl 5 Prefix]

- $r \text{ [+Cl 5]} > \emptyset$   
 $/ \_ [+polysyllable \text{ C-stem}]$

Areal Changes Shared with Comorian

## 46) Cl 5 Patterned Strengthening 1

- a)  $W / \_ I > /b/$
- b)  $l / \_ I > /d/$

## 47) l-loss Stage 1 [except Mwiini]

- a)  $*l > y / \_ [-stress]$

## 48) l-loss Stage 2

- a)  $\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u$
- b)  $\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u, o \text{ [-stress]}$
- c)  $\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u, o \text{ [+stress]}$
- d)  $\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u, o, a \text{ [-stress]}$
- e)  $\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u, o, a \text{ [+stress]}$

Areal Changes Shared with Mid-PSA

## 10) Bantu Vowel Neutralization Stage 1

- a)  $i > i$
- b)  $u > u$
- c)  $i \text{ [+Cl 5 Noun prefix retained]}$   
 {but see rule 46}

Areal Changes Shared with Mijikenda

## 30) Nasal Devoicing / Aspiration

$N\bar{C} > N\bar{C}^h$

## 31) Nasal Loss

$N\bar{C}^h > \emptyset\bar{C}^h$  [except Mwiini]

**Proto-Swahili > Northern Swahili**

## 49) c-dentalization Stage 2

$ts > t\check{s}$

## 50) ND g-loss Stage 1

$g > \emptyset / [-stress]$  [variable]

## 51) ND g-loss Stage 2

$g > \emptyset / [+stress]$  [variable]

## 52) Class 5 prefix loss

$r \text{ [Class 5 prefix]} > \emptyset$

## 53) l-loss Stage 3

$\{l >\} y > \emptyset / \_ u, o, a, e \text{ [+stress]}$

54) m-Loss /  $\_v$ 

$mv > \emptyset v$  [variable]

## 55) Spirantized Causative variant 2

$\int y > \int$  [not Tikuu]

## 56) Nonvelar Nasal palatalization

$\eta / \_ w > n$

## 57) nc dentalization

$nc > n\check{c}$

## 58) nasal assimilation

$my > ny$  [variable in Jomvu]

## 59) nj depalatalization

$nj > (ndz) > n\check{d}$

## 60) j-softening variant 2 stage 2

- [j > ] J > ž
- Areal Changes shared with Comorian
- 61) ND/Com Coronalization
- f > s/\_i
- v > z\_i
- fy > s
- vy > z
- 62) Depalatalization ʃ [+Spirantized k]
- {k/\_1} > ʃ > s
- 63) Glide Deletion
- w > ø /\_s
- w > ø /f\_
- w > ø /v\_
- y > ø /f\_
- y > ø /l\_
- 64) Retroflexion/rhotacization
- nd > ndr
- Areal Changes shared with Mid-PSA
- 11) c-dentalization Stage 1
- tʃ > ts [tʃs]
- 15) nj-dentalization
- nj > ndz
- 17) nc-affrication

- nc > nts [nts]
- Areal Changes Shared with Mijikenda
- 18) k-palatalization Stage 2
- a) \*k > č/ \_\_\_y
- b) k > č/ \_\_\_i [limited]
- c) k > č/ \_\_\_e [limited]
- 24) Depalatalization of ʃ [+spirantized k]
- {k/\_1} > ʃ > s
- Northern Swahili > Amu/Mvita**
- 65) t-palatalization
- t > č
- 66) z-palatalization
- nz > (ndz) > nɟ
- 67) Spirantized Causative variant 2
- {kɪ [+causative] >} ʃy > ʃ
- 68) z dentalization of Spirantized l
- {l/\_1 >} z > ɖ [except Am]
- 69) j-softening variant 2 stage 3
- {j > J > ž} > y
- 70) j-softening variant 2 stage 4
- [j > J > ž >] y > ø [variable]

The following charts demonstrate how the preceding sound change rules operated to create the current sound inventories of Mijikenda and Northern Swahili Dialects, respectively.

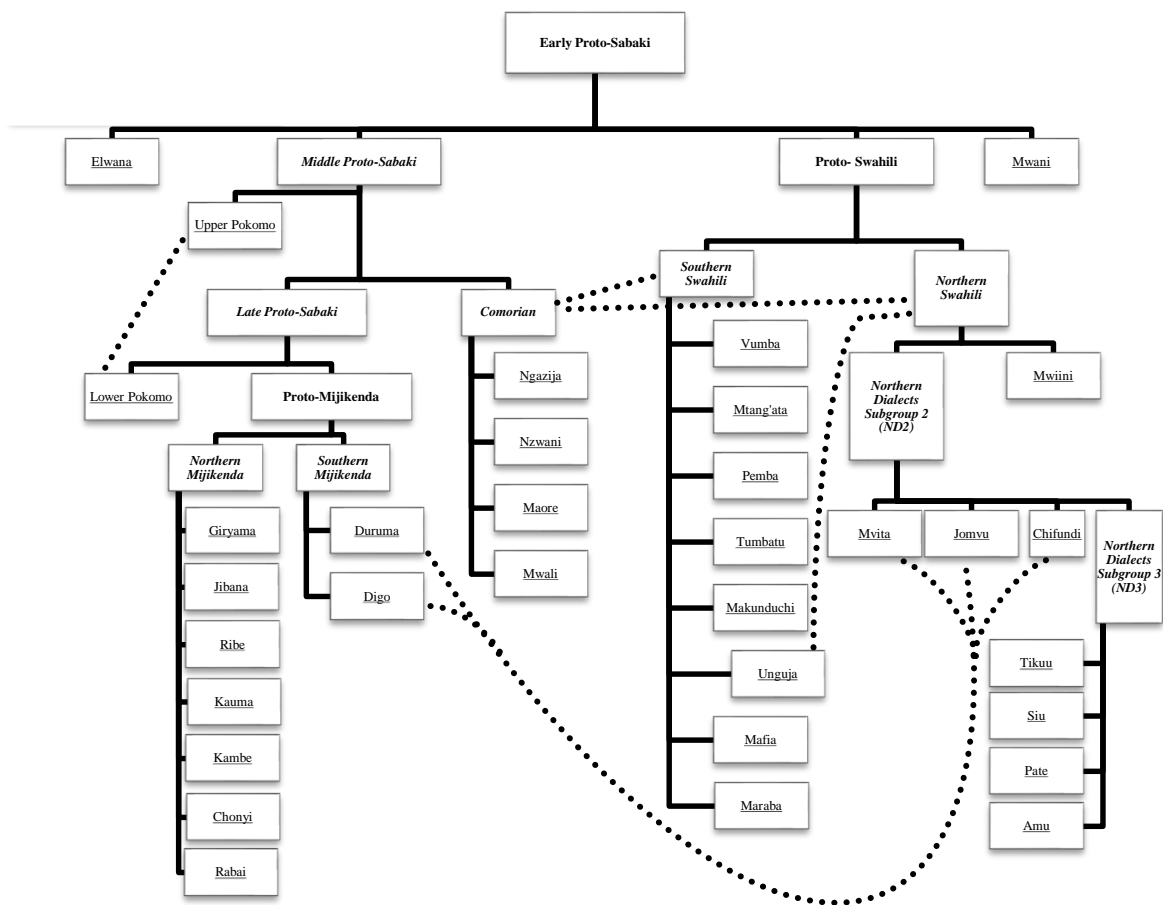




Proto-Northeast Coast Bantu Sound Inventory																			
p		t	c	k			j	g						W					
mp		nt	nc	nk	mb		nd	nj	ng										
[mp <sup>h</sup> ]		[ŋ <sup>th</sup> ]	[ŋc <sup>h</sup> ]	[ŋk <sup>h</sup> ]															
l			m	n	ɲ	(n)						a	e	i	o	u	ɪ	ʊ	
Pre-PSA NEC Dialect Cluster Sound Inventory: Sound Change Rules 1-3																			
p		t	c	k			j	g	<b>f</b>	<b>s</b>	<b>ʃ</b>	<b>v</b>		W	<b>z</b>				
mp		nt	nc	nk	mb		nd	nj	ng	<b>mf</b>	<b>ns</b>		<b>mv</b>						
[mp <sup>h</sup> ]		[ŋ <sup>th</sup> ]	[ŋc <sup>h</sup> ]	[ŋk <sup>h</sup> ]															
l	<b>y</b>		m	n	ɲ	(ŋ)							a	e	i	o	u	ɪ	ʊ
Early Proto-Sabaki Sound Inventory: Sound Change Rules 4-9																			
p		t	<b>tʃ</b>	k			j	<b>g,(ø)</b>	f	s	ʃ	v	<b>v,(ø)</b>	<b>W</b>	z				
mp		nt	nc	nk	mb		nd	nj	ng	mf	ns		mv					nz	
[mp <sup>h</sup> ]		[ŋ <sup>th</sup> ]	[ŋc <sup>h</sup> ]	[ŋk <sup>h</sup> ]															
l	y		m	n	ɲ	(ŋ)							a	e	i	o	u	ɪ	ʊ
Proto-Swahili Sound Inventory: Sound Change Rules 10, 30-31, 40-48																			
p		t	tʃ	k	<b>(b)</b>	<b>(d)</b>	J	g, (ø)	f	s	ʃ	v	<b>v,w</b>		z				
<b>mp</b>		<b>nt</b>	nc	<b>nk</b>	mb	<b>(ndz)</b>	nd	nj	ng	<b>mf</b>	<b>ns</b>		mv					<b>nz</b>	
p <sup>h</sup>		<b>t<sup>h</sup></b>	<b>c<sup>h</sup></b>	<b>k<sup>h</sup></b>															
l	y		m	n	ɲ	(ŋ)							a	e	i	o	u	<b>(ɪ)</b>	<b>ʊ</b>
Northern Swahili Dialects: Sound Change Rules 11, 15, 17, 18, 24, 49-64																			
p	<b>t̥</b>	t	tʃ	k	<b>(b)</b>	<b>(d)</b>	<b>ɟ</b>	J	g, (ø)	f	s	ʃ	v	<b>v,w</b>	z			<b>ʒ</b>	
			<b>nc, nts</b>		mb	<b>ndz</b>	<b>nd</b>	nj	ng				<b>(mv)</b>					nz	
p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>	c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>															
l	y		m	n	ɲ	(ŋ)	<b>nd<sup>r</sup></b>						a	e	i	o	u	<b>ɪ, (ɪ)</b>	
Amu/Mvita Dialect of Swahili: Sound Change Rules 65-70																			
p	<b>t̥</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>tʃ</b>	k	<b>(b)</b>	<b>(d)</b>	<b>(ɟ)</b>		g, (ø)	f	s	ʃ	v	<b>[v],w</b>	z			<b>ʒ</b>	
p <sup>h</sup>	<b>t̥<sup>h</sup></b>	t <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	mb	<b>nd̥</b>		nj	ng				mv					nz	
[mp <sup>h</sup> ]	<b>nt̥</b>	[ŋ <sup>th</sup> ]	<b>nts</b>	(ŋk <sup>h</sup> )						Arabic Loans:	<b>θ</b>	<b>(x)</b>	<b>(y)</b>					<b>(ð)</b>	
l, (r)	<b>(y)</b>	(h)	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	nd <sup>r</sup>						a	e	i	o	u		

### Appendix 3

### Sabaki Language Group



Key:

**Bold:** Proto-Language

***Bold Italic:*** Intermediate Dialect Clusters

Underlined: Modern Dialects

Dotted Line: Extensive Post-PSA Borrowing

## Appendix 4

### Summary of Sabaki Lexico-statistics and Glotto-chronology

Key: **Language Group** (cognition rates [divergence date]; median cognition rate [divergence date])

- Sabaki Bantu Language Group** (54-63 [1-500 CE]; 59 [250 CE])
1. **Elwana (No dialect data)**
  2. **Kiswahili** (62-67 [400 – 700 CE]; 65 [600 CE])
    - 2.1. **Northern Swahili (ND1)** (65-71 [700-900 CE]; 68 [800 CE])
      - 2.1.1. Mwiini
      - 2.1.2. **ND2** (78-80 [1100-1250 CE]; 79 [1200 CE])
        - 2.1.2.1. **ND3** (86-91 [1500 – 1700 CE]; 89 [1650 CE])
          - 2.1.2.1.1. Tikuu
          - 2.1.2.1.2. Siu
          - 2.1.2.1.3. Amu
          - 2.1.2.1.4. Pate
        - 2.1.2.2. Jomvu
        - 2.1.2.3. Mvita
        - 2.1.2.4. Chifundi
    - 2.2. **Southern Swahili** (68-78 [800 – 1100 CE]; 73 [1000 CE])
      - 2.2.1. Vumba
      - 2.2.2. Mtang'ata
      - 2.2.3. Northern Pemba
      - 2.2.4. Southern Pemba
      - 2.2.5. Tumbatu
      - 2.2.6. Makunduchi
      - 2.2.7. Unguja (Standard Kiswahili)
  - 2.3. Mwani
3. **Middle Sabaki Bantu Language Group (SB2)** (57-59 [100-300 CE]; 58 [200 CE])
  - 3.1. **Comoros** (77-84% [1200-1300 CE]; 81% [1250 CE])
    - 3.1.1. Ngazija
    - 3.1.2. Mwali
    - 3.1.3. Nzwani
    - 3.1.4. Maore
  - 3.2. **Late Sabaki Bantu Language Group (SB3)** (57-60 [100-400 CE]; 59 [300 CE])
    - 3.2.1. **Pokomo** (73 [1000 CE]; 73 [1000 CE])
      - 3.2.1.1. Upper Pokomo
      - 3.2.1.2. Lower Pokomo

**3.2.2. Mijikenda** (66-81 [600-1300 CE]; 74 median [1000 CE])

**3.2.2.1. Northern Mijikenda** (77-81 [1100-1300 CE]; 78 median [1200 CE])

- 3.2.2.1.1. Giryama
- 3.2.2.1.2. Jibana (no data)
- 3.2.2.1.3. Ribe(no data)
- 3.2.2.1.4. Kauma(no data)
- 3.2.2.1.5. Kambe(no data)
- 3.2.2.1.6. Chonyi
- 3.2.2.1.7. Rabai
- 3.2.2.1.8. Duruma<sup>1</sup>

**3.2.2.2. Southern Mijikenda**

- 3.2.2.2.1. Digo
- 3.2.2.2.2. Segeju (no data)

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lexicostatistics Duruma groups more naturally with Northern Mijikenda than Digo or Segeju; phonological analysis of shared sound changes however places Duruma and Digo firmly together as Southern Mijikenda dialects.

## Appendix 5

## Bantu Kinship Terms

ENGLISH GLOSS	PROTO-BANTU <sup>1</sup>	PROTO-EAST <sup>2</sup>	PROTO-NORTHEAST COAST	Modern Reflexes <sup>3</sup>
<i>father</i>	*bààbá	> *bààbá	> *baaba	> baba (St. Sw, EI) > aba (MK) > paapa (Daiso)
	*tààtá (my)	> *tààtá (my)		
	*cángó (my)			
	*có (your)	> *có (your)	> *isowe (your)	> soe (LP, Di)
	*cé (his/her)	> *cé (his/her) (alt. *jícíé)	> *ise (his/her)	> ise (his/her) (EI, LP, Di) > mzee (St. Sw.)
<i>mother</i>	*mààmá	> *mààmá	> *mààmá	> mama (St. Sw.)
	*máá (my)	> *máá (my)	> *maa (yo )	> mayo (MK); mayu (Daiso)
	*nyòkò (your)	> *nyòkò (your)	> *nyòkò (your)	> nyoko (UP, Vu), Nyuhò (Ng)
	*ninà (his/her)	> *ninà (his/her)	> *nina	> inya, nina (St. Sw.) > ano- (MK)

<sup>1</sup> Data from Bastin et al., *BLR3*.

<sup>2</sup> Data from Marck and Bostoen, "Proto Oceanic and Proto East Bantu Residence, Descent and Kin Terms." Supplemental data from Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary: Etymologies and Distributions*.

<sup>3</sup> Data from Johann Ludwig Krapf, *A Dictionary of the Suahili Language* (London: Trübner and Co., 1882); Krapf and Rebmann, *A Nika-English Dictionary*; Florence Deed and East African Literature Bureau, *Giryama-English Dictionary*. (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1964); Johnson, *A Standard Swahili English Dictionary*; A. H. J. (Adriaan Hendrik Johan) Prins, *The Swahili-Speaking Peoples of Zanzibar and the East African Coast: Arabs, Shirazi and Swahili*, *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: East Central Africa 12* (London: International African Institute, 1967); Prins, *Coastal Tribes*. Also Tanzania Language Survey by Derek Nurse and the author's field notes.



<i>Grandmother</i>	*kòòkó ~ kàáká “grandparent”			
	*mààmá	*mààmá	*maama	
	See *máá “mother”	*maa-kódó (my) *nyòkò-kódó (your) *ninà-kódó (his/her)	?*ikooko	> koko (Nz, Ma)  bibi ~ nyanya (Sw) hawe ~ wawe (MK) waawa (Daiso)
<i>older sibling</i>	*kòòkó ~ kàáká	?	?*kaka (elder brother)	kaka “brother” (St. Sw., MK)
	*kódó “adult, elder, senior”	*kódó	?*mukula (brother) *kulu	mukulu (Gir.) mkula (Mw.)
<i>younger sibling</i>	NONE	*mununguna		mwanangu “my child” (St. Sw.) mwanangea “orphan” (Daiso)
<i>man’s sister’s child</i>	*jìpóá	*mwìpwa	*mwihwa	mpwa (St. Sw.)
<i>grandchild</i>	jíjòkòdò ( < kód “grow up”)	jíjòkòdò		ahu (Gir.) mjukuu (St. Sw.) mudzukulu (MK) msukuru ~msokoro (Daiso)
<i>husband</i>	*dúmè (<*dúmè “male”)	*dume	*dume	Mume (St. Sw.) mulume (MK) Mrome (Daiso)
<i>wife</i>	*kádí	*káí (alt. *kádí, *ké)	*kazya / *ke	mke (St. Sw.) muche (MK) muka (El)
<i>sibling-in-law</i>	NONE	*dámó	*lamu	Mwamu (St. Sw.) mulamu (MK) mlamu (Daiso)  taata “cross-gender” (Daiso)
<i>cross-cousin</i>	NONE	*bíádá		?vyala (Gir.)
<i>father-in-law</i>	NONE	*cé-bíádá	*muvyazi	
<i>mother-in-law</i>	NONE	*ninà -bíádá	*muvyazi	mucakolu “wife’s mother” (El)
<i>In-law</i>	NONE	*kói (alt. *kó “relative by marriage”)		mokwe mtse ~mutsedza (Rab.)



## Appendix 6

### Glossary

#### Reconstructed Words

- \**bààbá*, father, PB
- \**baba* or *aba*
- \**cé*, his father, CB
- \**cé-bíádá*, father-in-law = father of cross-cousin, PEB
- \**cèd*, sift, CB
- \**céékódó*, his grandfather, PEB
- \**cé-n-kádí*, paternal aunt (lit. my female father), PEB
- \**dongo*, a line, row, PB
- \**éné*, lineage head, PEB
- \**enye*, land-owning lineage, NECB
- \**ganda*, house, PB
- \**ganda*, village quarter, PB
- \**gi*, nucleated villages, PB
- \**ilumbu*, sibling of one's mother, NECB
- \**isemukulu*, grandchild, NECB
- \**jíjòkòdò*, grandchild, PEB
- \**jipúá*, sister's son, PB
- \**ka*, homestead, PEB
- \**kààká*, grandparent, grandfather, grandmother, PB
- \**kààká*, older sibling, PB
- \**-ko-* ~ \**-koo-*, give bridewealth
- \**koi*, relative by marriage, affine, PB
- \**kooko*, grandmother, PEB / SC
- \**-kód-*, to grow up, CB
- \**kódó*, elder sibling, CB
- \**kódó*, great, important, CB

- \**kumu*, big man, PB
- \**liango*, doorway, PEB
- \**longo*, a line, row, PEB
- \**lucelo*, winnowing tray, PSA
- \**lukolo*, marriage alliance, PNEC
- \**luwanda*, clearing [between houses], PSA
- \**máá-dómè*, maternal uncle (lit. male mother), PEB
- \**mààmá*, mother, PB
- \**miji*, villages, PSA
- \**mucele*, grain, PSA
- \**mulyango*, lineage, door, PNEC
- \**mutala*, village quarter, PSA
- \**mwihwa*, sister's son, PEB
- \**nìnà-biádá*, mother-in-law = mother of cross-cousin, PEB
- \*-*nyamal-*, be silent, PNEC
- \**nyumba*, house, NESB
- \**nyumba*, immediate maternal family, house, PNEC
- \**tumbo*, stomach, belly, NESB
- \*-*umb-*, create, PB
- \*-*umb-*, to be pregnant, NESB
- \**Wucelo*, cleared ground for planting grain, PSA
- [i]*gururu*, curdled milk, ND < SC

### Modern Vocabulary

- aba*, father, MK
- abo*, classificatory mother's brother, Pok.
- adhan*, Muslim call to prayer, St. Sw., Ar.
- adzomba*, Swahili people, MK
- ahoho*, children (an age-grade), MK
- akida*, military commander over Hadrami (i.e. Shihiri) troop in 19th c. Mombasa, Ar.

- amari*, commander, St. Sw. < Ar.
- andevo*, slaves, Malagasy
- andriana*, royalty, Malagasy
- baba*, father, St. Sw.
- babulona*, marabou storks, ND < SC
- banda*, shed, outbuilding, St. Sw.
- baraka*, religious power, prestige (Islamic), St. Sw. < Ar.
- bazaara*, people of wife, Proto-Lakes
- beni*, dance association, lit. band, St. Sw.
- bid'a*, unlawful innovation (in regards to Islam), St. Sw., Ar.
- bismillah*, “in the name of Allah”, Ar.
- bodo*, a kind of cereal porridge, ND < SC
- buibui*, black body wrap, St. Sw.
- chama*, association, St. Sw.
- chano*, a large serving tray, used in initiation of elders, MK
- chansa*, cleared area in and around a forest settlement, MK
- chini ya taa yake*, under his light (indicating local political authority), St. Sw.
- chiravo*, oath, Rab.
- damari* ~ *tamari*, bee-stings, ND < SC
- dandari* ~ *dindiri*, antelope, ND < SC
- dansi*, dance, St. Sw.
- dendana*, to ridicule one another, MK
- dewere*, a kind of spinach, ND < SC
- dhow*s, sailboat, St. Sw.
- diriji*, a sword dance, Mv.
- diwan*, hereditary leader, Vum.
- dzina la nyumbani*, lit. name of the house, Gir.
- dzumbe*, chief, SMK
- enye itsi*, *ad hoc* land adjudicating council, Rab.
- enye*, owner, MK4

*fandika*, customs office, St. Sw. < Port. *al-fandaga*

*-fomorera*, to demolish to or for another, MK

*forodha*, customs office, St. Sw < Arabic

*fumboni*, central town square, Com.

*ganda*, clan, Lug.

*gohu*, a title society among the Mijikenda, MK

*gosa*, clan, El.

*gungu*, traditional dance, esp. in Lamu, St. Sw.

*habasi*, a title society among the Mijikenda, MK

*hajawa*, pelicans, ND < SC

*hawe*, grandmother, MK

*heshima*, ceremonial exchange of gifts, lit. respect, St. Sw. < Ar.

*himaya*, foreign protection, guardianship, St. Sw. < Ar.

*hinya*, land owning matrilineage, Com.

*hova*, commoners, Malagasy

*-hwaa*, to marry, take, Pok.

*ijaza*, certificate of learning in Islamic sciences, St. Sw. < Ar.

*-ishima*, to honor, MK

Ithnaashera Taifa, Twelve Tribes, a combination of the Thelatha Taifa and Tissia Taifa of Mombasa in the 20th century

*jemadar*, military commander over Baluchi troops in 19th century Mombasa, Ar.

*jumbe la wakulima*, guardian of the soil, lit. chief of farming, Pat.

*jumbe*, chief, St. Sw.

*kabaka*, hereditary leader of the Buganda polity, Lug.

*kaffir*, unbelievers, St. Sw. < Ar.

Kamba, an ethnic group from central Kenya, also present in eastern Kenya since *ca.* 1800

*kambi* ~ *k'ambi*, elder (an age-grade), MK

*kanga*, women's cloth wrap (many varieties), St. Sw.

*kaniki*, cloth wrap for lower body, MK

*kanzu*, men's ankle-length tunic, St. Sw.

- katika taa yake*, in his light (indicating local political authority), St. Sw.  
*kayamba*, Mijikenda dance, also a tray rattle (musical instrument), MK  
*keti*, clan, Pok.  
*khadi* ~ *qadi*, Islamic judge, St. Sw. < Ar.  
*khatib*, Muslim preacher, St. Sw.  
*kibarua*, temporary labor (usually by the day), St. Sw.  
*kibunzi*, Swahili New Year's Eve, Mv.  
*kidzidzi*, village, MK  
*kiharehare*, honey badgers, ND < SC  
*kijiji*, village, section of rural hamlet, St. Sw.  
*kijoho*, bread made of seven grains for Swahili New Year, MK  
*kikanda*, a tax on slaves, lit. a small plaited mat, St. Sw.  
*kikao*, a rotating feast, in which members take turn hosting one another, Mv.  
*kinyenze*, a title society among the Mijikenda, MK  
*kirao cha fisi*, a trial by ordeal of poison, lit. hyena oath, MK  
*kirao cha kidudu*, a trial by ordeal of poison, lit. insect oath, MK  
*kirao*, oath, St. Sw., MK  
*kirori*, buttermilk, ND < SC  
*kitaata*, patrifilial group, Kikongo  
*kofia*, embroidered hat, skull cap, St. Sw.  
*kombo za nze*, bringing out the child, Rab.  
*kubo*, king, Dig.  
*lala* ~ *yaa*, honeycomb, Late PSA (MK, LP)  
*lalo*, location, MK  
*linyaho* ~ *nwaho*, nipple, Late PSA  
*liwali*, appointed governor, St. Sw. < Omani Arabic  
*madina*, city, specifically the archtypal Arab city of Madina, Ar.  
*malozi*, bride price negotiation, MK  
*mama*, mother, St. Sw.  
*maulidi*, celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birth, lit. birthday, St. Sw. < Ar.

*mayo*, mother, MK

*mbari*, clan, MK, Gik.

*mbingu*, heaven, God, Rab.

*mbiu ya mgambo*, public proclamation horn, St. Sw.

*mfalme*, king, St. Sw.

Midzichenda, see Mijikenda

*miji*, towns

Mijikenda, ethnic group in southeast Kenya hinterland, lit. Nine Towns, St Sw.

*mjomba*, mother's brother, St. Sw.

*mjukuu*, grandchild, St. Sw.

*mkaao*, people sitting together, Am.

*mkuu wa pwani*, grandee of the beach, St. Sw.

*mlango*, door, St. Sw.

*moro*, central (sacred or restricted) clearing, MK < SC

*mriango*, doorway, MK

*mtaa*, village quarter, St. Sw.

*mtepes*, sewn sailboat, St. Sw.

*m̄:zi*, village, hamlet, El.

*mudzukulu*, grandchild, MK

*muko*, son-in-law, Proto-Lakes

*mulungu*, heaven, God, Rab.

*mung'aro*, lit. the shining one, a age-set initiation ritual, MK

*mung'aro*, the shining one (dance), MK

*muongo*, ten-day week, St. Sw.

*mutumia*, elder, MK

*mvyale*, guardian of the soil, native, lit. person who has been born, Ung.

*mwaha*, Digo harvest festival, Di.

*mwaka muvya*, Rabai New Year, Rab.

*mwana ngira*, ambassador, lit. child of the path, MK

*mwana*, queen, St. Sw.

*mwanza m'kulu* “great drum”,  
*mwenyeji*, sons of the soil, town owners, St. Sw.  
*mwihwa*, classificatory sister's son, lit. withered person, Pok.  
*mwinyi mkuu*, guardian of the soil, lit. grand trustee, Tum.  
*mwinyi mui*, town trustee, Am.  
*mwinyi*, title of lineage head, Mv.  
*mwizi*, guardian of the soil, lit. powerful person, Pem.  
*nairuz*, the Persian New Year, St. Sw.  
*nangira*, child of the path, nickname for clan responsible for clearing paths, MK  
*ndola ya kubadili*, exchange marriage, Com.  
*ngoma*, dance, PB  
 Nyamwezi, and ethnic group from the interior of Tanzania  
*nyere*, youth (an age-grade), MK  
*nyika*, "bush country", St. Sw., MK  
*nyumba ya ezi*, house of power, Am.  
*panga*, grove of medicinal trees, MK  
*-pik-*, cook, St. Sw  
*pingo ~ fingo*, a protective charm, PNEC  
*qadi ~ khadi*, Islamic judge, St. Sw. < Ar.  
*-rabiwa*, to be ruled over, lit. to be overlorded, St. Sw.  
*reale*, dollars, coins, St. Sw. < Port.  
*riika*, age-set, Gik.  
*rika*, age-set, MK  
*rika*, generation, St. Sw.  
*sayo ra mudhanga*, dance of clay pot, Gir.  
*sengenya*, Mijikenda dance, lit. to slander, MK  
*serangi*, urban labor boss, St. Sw.  
*shahada*, declaration of Islamic faith, Ar.  
*shaykh*, 1) title of respect, 2) Portuguese political appointee in 16th Malindi, St. Sw.  
*shehe*, shaykh, St. Sw.

- sherif*, descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, St. Sw. < Ar. *shurafa'*
- shokowa*, 1) tribute 2)forced labor, ND
- siwa*, ivory or brass horn (musical instrument), St. Sw.
- Swahili, see *Waswahili*
- taifa*, clan, Mv.
- tamim*, title of Mombasa clan confederation representative, Mv.
- tariqa*, Sufi brotherhood, St. Sw. < Ar. lit. way, path
- Theletha Taifa*, Three Tribes, Mv.
- Tissia Taifa*, Nine Tribes, Mv.
- tsawe*, grandfather, MK
- tumbo*, belly, matrilineage, Mv.
- uchawi*, witchcraft, St. Sw.
- uganga*, proprietary knowledge, PB
- umma*, community of the faithful, Ar.
- 'ushr*, a tax on land, St. Sw. < Omani Ar.
- ustaarabu*, civilization, lit. Arab-ness, St. Sw. < Ar.
- uta*, a dance associated with tree tappers, Am.
- utamaduni*, refinement, cosmopolitanism, urbanity, St. Sw. < Ar.
- utani*, joking, NECB
- utsai*, witchcraft, MK
- uungwana*, civilization, St. Sw.
- vaya*, a title society among the Mijikenda, MK
- vugo* "antelope horn", St. Sw., MK
- waganga*, expert, especially with regard to healing, PB
- wamiji*, townspeople, (also women association leaders), Mv.
- wananchi*, sons of the soil, St. Sw.
- wanyika*, collective name of communities inland from Mombasa, lit. "bush people",  
St. Sw., MK
- wareno*, Portuguese people, St. Sw. < Port. *reino* "kingdom"
- washenzi*, barbarian, St. Sw. < Omani Ar. (zanj?)



Waswahili, an ethnic group along the coast of East Africa, commonly Swahili

*waungwana*, patricians, St. Sw.

*wenyeji*, owners of the land, St. Sw.

*yumbe*, large house, government, Am.

*zakat*, Islamic alms, Ar.

*ziyara*, visit, St. Sw. < Ar.

*-zungulia*, to go around for someone or something, St. Sw.

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