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KINSHIP, CAPITAL, AND THE OCCULT ON THE SOUTH COAST OF KENYA

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“History decays into images, not into stories.”

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*,
(Cambridge, MA: 1999), 476 [N11,4].

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A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In transcribing my own oral materials from Chidigo, I have followed the orthography developed by the Digo Language and Literacy Project, which is similar to the standard Kiswahili orthography.¹ For those unfamiliar with either, note that for both, /ng'/ represents a voiced velar nasal (like the /ng/ in “singer”). In Chidigo, an intervocalic /h/ nasalizes adjacent vowels, and a word-initial /h/ is often effectively dropped in pronunciation, and /m'/ indicates a syllabic or “long” nasal.

Chidigo also contains a number of phonemes not found in Kiswahili. These are rendered as follows:

IPA	Chidigo Orthography	Phoneme
ḡb	gbw	voiced labial-velar implosive
ḱp	kpw	voiceless labial-velar implosive
β	ph	voiced bilabial fricative

When quoting from sources that use alternative orthographies for either Kiswahili or Chidigo, I have always preserved the original. These vary significantly, especially among nineteenth-century missionaries. Where it was important to clarify, I have followed some spellings with a “standard” spelling in square brackets.

¹ See: S. Nicolle, *A Grammar of Digo: A Bantu Language of Kenya and Tanzania* (Dallas: SIL International, 2013) and J. Mwalonya, A. Nicolle, S. Nicolle and J. Zimbu, *Mgombato: Digo-English-Swahili Dictionary* (Nairobi: BTL East Africa, 2004).

A NOTE ON ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Some of the archival sources on which I rely pose certain problems for citation (or at the very least consistency of citational form), for comparison with the citations of older texts, and for future researchers who may be interested in tracking down the source materials for my citations. In some cases these will be inconveniences, in others, serious obstacles. In some cases, for instance, important archives have changed names and locations. The former Rhodes House Library collection at Oxford University is now housed in the Commonwealth and African Manuscripts Collection of the university's Weston Library. The contents of the Fort Jesus Museum Library in Mombasa are now maintained at the Research Institute for Swahili Studies in East Africa (RISSEA) Library.

A more serious obstacle in this regard is the fact that in recent years the Kenya National Archives (KNA) have embarked on a major reorganization of its collection, for instance, so that what was once file number "DC/KWL/3/2" is now "CC1/36/2." When I was using the KNA for research for this dissertation this reorganization had just begun, and seemed to be more complete at the regional Coast Provincial Archives in Mombasa. I have indicated the old file numbers when citing new ones so that they can be compared with the last several decades of citation, but also cite several files according to their old numbers because they have not yet been assigned new ones. The Coast Provincial Archives in Mombasa seem recently to have embarked on an ambitious campaign of acquiring records from various offices within the former Provincial Administration, which has been unevenly but significantly restructured under the new constitution. Unfortunately their acquisitions have, due to staffing issues and budget shortages, run ahead of their capacity to catalogue, organize, and store these materials in a way that makes them accessible to researchers.

At the time that I was using these archives, the collections are dispersed across at least three buildings in different parts of the city with no clear record of which files were stored in which locations. It was unclear whether these files would be maintained in Mombasa, or eventually moved to the National Archives headquarters in Nairobi.

I was able to access the administrative files of two Chiefs' Offices that had not been acquired by the Coast Provincial Archives. These records had not been properly maintained since Chiefs lost their clerks as part of Kenya's Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1990s. In both cases they were disorganized as a result of the respective Chiefs having moved offices recently, and badly deteriorated as a result of the conditions in which they were being stored. My research assistant and I dried out the files, placed them into protective folders, and put onto shelves I had built, but they were otherwise not reorganized. But because the original covers of many of the files were missing, I have had to cite these descriptively. In any case the original file numbers would not have corresponded with whatever new file numbers they would be assigned if they were eventually to be acquired by the National or Provincial Archives. In two cases I have had to anonymize the people and places mentioned in the names of these files, and thus disguise an already difficult-to-find file even further.

This project has also benefitted from the research of a number of scholars who have generously made their own primary research available. The British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) maintains an Oral History Archive containing (among other things) transcripts of interviews conducted on the coast by Suzanne Miers in the 1970s, by Justin Willis in the late 1980s, and by Justin Willis, David Sperling, and George Gona in the 1990s. Each collection has its own preferred citational format, however, which I have indicated in the bibliography. Thomas Spear's interview transcripts for the *Kaya Complex* project are numbered, and the established

format for citing these is as MHT [Mijikenda Historical Tradition] 1, 2, 3, etc., and I have followed this here. Where possible, however, I have also indicated the page number for the more widely available edited transcripts that he generously published in 1981 as *Traditions of Origin and Their Interpretation*. Cynthia Brantley follows the same format as Spear in citing (in her published work) her own oral histories as GHT 1, etc., for Giriama Historical Traditions. But transcripts of her interviews were never published in this format, and it is not the organizational format of the transcripts included among her professional papers deposited in the Special Collections of the University of California, Davis Library. Instead, I have cited her interviews from the UC Davis special collections by their Box and Folder number, and then by the Interview Number within that folder. The numbering system is not consistent across these transcripts, with each of the three sets of interviews numbered in a unique format.

Lydia Wilson Marshall shared with me Fred Morton's research materials (with Morton's permission) from his *Children of Ham* project, which are in her possession. Morton's personal indexing system was idiosyncratic (as are all of ours), and some folders are neither named nor numbered, but contain the same "kind" of data—maps, photographs, archival notes, interview notebooks, etc.—by which I indicate the folder in my citation. And finally, the late Gehan Wijeyewardene's daughter Ingrid has very generously made her father's fieldnotes from his doctoral dissertation research in the late 1950s available to me. These are currently in my possession, and will be deposited in an appropriate archive as soon as possible, but they are currently unindexed and only citable impressionistically.

A NOTE ON CITATION

Throughout the text, I make extensive use of extended “block” quotation of sources of various kinds. I also include a number of historical images—photographs and drawings—with minimal editorial commentary. In a sense, I have moved into the body of the dissertation what might otherwise have been included only in appendices. There are several reasons why I have done this, but it may be well to make clear what are *not* my reasons for doing so, to avoid serious misunderstanding.

It is not out of a naïve historicism that would see the meaning of these texts and images as being in some sense transparent and unproblematic. I mean this in two ways. My use of these texts and images is not motivated by a belief that these qualitatively quite different *kinds* of sources are all historical evidence in the same way—as factual statements of “the way it really was”—irrespective of the specific details of their provenance. But neither is it motivated by the opposite approach, namely the idea that if one could specify the context of a text or image’s production with a sufficiently fine degree of granularity and situate it within a historical continuum of like contexts, that its meaning would, in this way, be made clear. Each position is both true and false (at least potentially in a given instance) if one generalizes what has been described as the “double indexicality” of photography—its “peculiar pointing both outward to the world before the camera and inward to the photographer behind it” (Kelsey and Stimson 2005: xi).

More concretely, the “constellations” to which I am referring emerged for me in large part out of my own encounter with these text. Rather than simply cite them and ask the reader to take my word for it, as is common in academic writing, often justifiably so given the constraints of word limits imposed by journals and presses, I have taken the relatively less constrained

dissertation format as an opportunity to provide the reader with an experience that more closely approximates the author's. The "constellations" to which I will refer are, after all, aesthetic judgements, not empirical facts. These images and text should be understood then not as self-evident statements of fact but as, in a sense, interpretations of each other. "To write history ... means to cite history," according to Benjamin, but "it belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context."¹ The "legibility" of that which the historian "lays before the reader" (Benjamin 1999: 476)—the meanings of the texts—emerges not from the texts themselves but from their recontextualization in relation to one another in a new frame (see also Adorno 1981 [1967]: 239).

¹ W. Benjamin, "Convolute "N": (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress)," in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 476. See also: J. Derrida, *Limited, Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988); and C. Nakassis, "Citation and Citationality," *Signs and Society* 1:1 (2013), 51–77.

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PREFACE: TWO VIGNETTES

Let me begin with two short accounts of cases of witchcraft accusation that took place in rural Kwale County, Kenya, in the mid-to-late 1990s. I include them here to set the tone for the rest of the dissertation, to illustrate the dynamics of what I will call a “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion,” to introduce the key elements of what I will call an “associational nexus of figural motifs,” and to provide two concrete examples of the problematic association of state power and occult power in the region. In both cases the accused witch is a figure in Kenya’s Provincial Administration. In both cases the accusers are people who were invited onto the land on which they were settled by the man whom they would later accuse of being a witch. And in these respects, both cases are shaped by history at two levels.

The first level is the long-term history of patron-client relationships on the coast, at various scales. As the dissertation goes on to show, these include relationships of *enyetsi* and *ajeni* (Chid.), *wenyeji* and *wageni* (Kisw.), “land-holders” and “guests,” at a range of scales. They have also included forms of “pawning” or “mortgaging” people from the hinterland to people at the coast in exchange for loans of food or cash in times of famine or hardship. In such arrangements, children were particularly at risk of becoming the “pawns.” And in post-colonial Kenya they have included relationships between politicians and their constituencies. All three forms of relationship are condensed in the figures of the accusers and accused in these cases. The accused are men who, by virtue of their political office, are in a position to invite “guests” onto the land in their jurisdiction, but—it will retrospectively be understood—at the cost of a child. In other words the specific character of these two cases of witchcraft accusation is shaped by a history of various forms of

dominance and subordination, generosity and obligation, and by an understanding (and perhaps also a cultural memory) of such forms.

The accounts are based on notes taken by clerks at the Chief's moots at which the accusations were made, and my own interviews with the participants some fifteen or more years after the fact.

THE CASE OF NDARO MWAMAKA

On March 30, 1998, a delegation of residents of Nguzoni Adjudication Section came to the office of Chizingo Location Chief Hassani Bora.¹ Led by Nguzoni's Chairman, Selemani Chigumu, they had come to accuse their Vice-Chairman, Ndaró Mwamaka and his wife, of being "*muchawi namba moja*": "Witch Number One."² They had brought with them a letter from Chisimani Sub-Location Assistant Chief Matsaka Mwarufu asking Chief Hassani to intervene: Ndaró "was taken by all villagers to be a wizard" and "there were several cases which confirmed this. ... This is serious because the victims do not want to have Ndaró stay at Nguzoni," and there was the possibility of violence.³ In the interest of maintaining order—the primary task of Chiefs as

¹ Nguzoni Adjudication Section is an area land that had been leased by both the colonial and independent Kenyan states to the Ramisi Sugar Company, but which was settled after the company's bankruptcy by "squatters" from other parts of the country. Because these cases described here involve accusations of witchcraft and physical violence between individuals still living in or near the places in which these crimes are alleged to have occurred, I have changed the names of all of the people and places involved, including in the citations.

² Chief's Office Records, [Chizingo] Location. Administrative File 18, "Pending." 30 March 1998, "A Delegation from Nguzoni lead [*sic*] by the Village Chairman [Selemani Chigumu] against [Ndaró Mwamaka]." 21 March 1998, "Wanakijiji wanodai kuwa [Ndaró] na bibi yake ni muchawi namba moja" ("Villagers who claim that Ndaró and his wife are witch number one"). Translation mine.

³ Chief's Office Records, [Chizingo] Location. Administrative File 18, "Pending." 28 March 1998, Asst. Chief, [Chisimani] Sub-Location, to Chief, [Chizingo] Location, "Ref: [Nguzoni]."

members of the Provincial Administration and representatives of the Office of the President—Chief Hassani ordered Ndaro to leave.

Under the Witchcraft Act (Chapter 67 of the Laws of Kenya), it is an offence “to accuse any person with being a witch or with practicing witchcraft,” *unless* that accusation is made “to a District Commissioner, a police officer, a chief or any other person in authority” (Cap. 67 § 6). Once the accusation is made to a “person in authority,” that person is placed in a difficult position, and is potentially also punishable under the terms of the Act if they do nothing: “Any chief who directly or indirectly permits, promotes, encourages or facilitates the practice of witchcraft or the doing of any act contrary to the provisions of this Act ... shall be guilty of an offence” (Cap. 67 § 8). Thus, when the Assistant Chief referred in his letter to the Nguzoni’s residents as “victims” and stated that he had “found ... roomers [*sic*] which came to me concerning the village [to be] true,” he constrained (in terms of the laws supposed to be governing the case) the decision of his superior. Ultimately, however, it was the threat of popular violence that decided the outcome: The Provincial Administration, recognizing its inability to protect one of its own officials—Vice-Chairman Ndaro—from being killed by the other residents of Nguzoni, ordered him to move away.⁴ Ndaro was obliged to sell the two plots of land to which he held legal title to a wealthy acquaintance from Mombasa, and moved to an informal settlement near the road.

⁴ The Witchcraft Act grants District Commissioners the power to order a person suspected of practicing witchcraft “to reside elsewhere” (Cap. 67 § 9(1)), but it is unclear whether Ndaro’s case ever made it to the DC. Ndaro claims that after the meeting with Chief Hassani he went with his own delegation of “elders” to the District Officer (essentially the Deputy District Commissioner) to request that the matter be resolved with an oath, but that the DO regarded oathing itself as witchcraft, and denied the request. If any records of this higher-level meeting exist, they will remain sealed in the Provincial Archives in Mombasa until 2028. The records of this case that do exist are kept in the Chief’s Office of Chizingo Location, and were only available to me because the government no longer collects or maintains the records of its Chiefs. In the mid-1990s, as part of the government downsizing of Kenya’s Structural Adjustment Program, Chiefs lost their clerks,

Ndaro had arrived in Nguzoni (on the coast) from Tsangala (in the hinterland) in 1972. Ndaro and Selemani were appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman, respectively, in 1992, but their positions were soon switched by higher-ranking officials in the Provincial Administration. According to Ndaro's son Mwamadi, this was at the instigation of Selemani, on the pretext that an *mjeni* (a stranger or guest) should not be in a higher position than a local.⁵ Ndaro and Mwamadi claimed that the real issue was disagreement between Selemani and Ndaro, on the one hand, over who had the authority to "show" land to settlers, how much of a fee to charge them, and how to divide the fee between themselves and their superiors Administration. All of the accusers, including Selemani, had been "shown" their plots in Nguzoni by Ndaro, beginning in the late 1980s. At the same time, Ndaro and Selemani were rivals over some of the women who ended up among Ndaro's accusers.

Ndaro stood accused of being a *Mwanga*—a practitioner of *Uwanga*, a form of witchcraft associated with nocturnal activity and supernatural assault—and of having used witchcraft to kill seven residents of Nguzoni between 1995 and 1998. His accusers claimed to have seen him on several occasions at night with either a stalk of sugar cane or a stick wrapped in strips of colored cloth either sweeping the ground with it, or pointing it in the cardinal directions, or at individuals and their houses.⁶ A death or misfortune would follow. Selemani Chigumu claimed that he and Joseph Omondi (a Luo) had caught Ndaro out one night with just such a device, wearing only a

who had been responsible for maintaining an archive of their office's activity from the colonial period onward. The gradual obliteration of the documentary record of over 60 years of local government (as they rot in closets of Chief's Offices across the country) is thus another unfortunate knock-on effect of Kenya's neoliberal experiment.

⁵ Ndaro had been living in Nguzoni longer than Selemani (and, he claims, was the one who first welcomed Selemani to Nguzoni,) but was born farther away, and is a Duruma (and thus relatively more foreign according to the ideal ethnic geography of the region). Selemani is a Digo.

⁶ INT. 18; INT. 21; INT. 22.

black waistcloth and squatting and muttering in the four corners of his neighbor's field.⁷ Alice Musyoka (a Kamba) claimed that she and Niḅaru Ngala (a Chonyi) encountered Ndaro on a path at night while carrying Alice's sick child to the clinic. They were traveling at night specifically to avoid Ndaro: They believed that he had poisoned the child, who was coughing up blood and crying that he was being pursued by a serpent no one else could see. An *mganga* (healer/diviner) had told them that, despite their efforts, they would encounter Ndaro on their way to the hospital, but that under no circumstances should they let him set eyes on the child. Ndaro, they were told, would be strangely dressed when they saw him. When they did meet him he was wearing, according to Alice, a black cloth "*kimasai*" ("Maasai-style") and carrying a cassava stalk as a walking stick.⁸

Esther Karanja (a Gikuyu) moved to the predominantly Digo and Muslim area of Nguzoni with her family in 1990, having been "shown" a plot by Ndaro Mwamaka. Years later, a strange dog entered her compound in the evening and bit her son's hand. The dog was rabid, and her child died as a result of the infected bite. After her son's death, Esther claimed, Ndaro had gone around Nguzoni bragging, cryptically, that he had "gotten away with something." He did not attend the child's funeral, but she said that later that night he had walked into Esther's compound from the back, carrying a burning branch to light his way. Without announcing himself to the residents of the compound, Ndaro proceeded with his firebrand up to the child's grave and stood for a moment beside it. He then said something inaudible, and left.⁹ Esther, a relative outsider, claimed not to have known the full significance of the torch and the graveside visit, but stated that in the meeting with Chief Hassani it was the detail of this visit that sealed Ndaro's eviction from Nguzoni.¹⁰

⁷ INT. 15.

⁸ INT. 21.

⁹ INT. 22, INT. 21.

¹⁰ INT. 22.

THE CASE OF CHIPARA MWACHANZE

In April 1996, two years before Ndaro's conviction and expulsion from Nguzoni, a complicated case of witchcraft accusation between settlers of the Bungani Adjudication Section came before Chief Hassani. As with the case of Ndaro, this involved settlers who had been invited to the area by a Village Chairman who later became the target of witchcraft accusations. Unlike the accusations of Uwanga that successfully drove Vice Chairman Ndaro from Nguzoni, however, this case saw Bungani Village Chairman Saidi Chibwengo successfully evade the charges laid against him. Additionally, the specific form of witchcraft Saidi would be charged with was not Uwanga, but Mvua, "Rain," a form associated locally with the Chonyi ethnic group to which both he and his accusers belonged.¹¹

Mvua, like Uwanga, is a collective form of witchcraft, involving a corporate group—the Chama or "Guild."¹² The *Chama cha Mvua*, the Rain Guild, approaches an individual and forces them to join, demanding a child to be offered in sacrifice to a powerful spirit. The spirit will slowly consume the child's blood, resulting in their illness, incapacitation, and eventual death, at which point another victim is needed. In exchange for the victim's blood, members of the Chama gain control of the rain. This power is put to destructive use, however, diverting rain away from their area and causing drought in the acute, intensely hot form that is believed, in South Coast folk hydrology, to be the necessary consequence of the *presence* of rain *elsewhere*. In other words, the

¹¹ Following Shaw's (2002) convention I capitalize Mvua/Rain to refer to the form of witchcraft.

¹² *Chama* can refer to any organized group of people but most commonly to political parties and rotating credit or microfinance groups, both of which are salient associated referents in this case.

flow of the means of securing life is not simply dammed up and accumulated, but is directed out and away to the (potential) benefit of outsiders by members of one's own group.

Chipara Mwachanze was brought before the Chief by his sons, who accused him of being a Rain Witch and of having sacrificed their younger sibling, who had been suffering from a long illness. As is common with witchcraft accusations in the region, Chipara did not deny the charges, but sought to shift the responsibility for the problem at hand onto another witch.¹³ In his testimony before the Chief's moot, Chipara claimed that he had been confronted by two of his neighbors and the Village Chairman on a path while returning home from the evening palm wine tapping:

They said "You have fought with men." We then went to the shrine together with Saidi [the Village Chairman]. This whole time I was like a mute. Saidi said what he had to say, and he told me to speak exactly as he had spoken. When we finished, each one went their own way. At the shrine we offered [*tulimweka*, lit. "we placed him"] my child, who is called Juma Chipara. Since then this child has been sick up until now. I was able to treat him and I then also separated myself from my family for one year. When I returned the child relapsed [*alirudiwa*, lit. "he was returned" (to his illness)], and until then he had not had a problem. I went to the shrine [again] and said my piece [to undo the sacrifice], now it is Saidi's own job to go and do the same as I have done, at which time the child will be healed. But Saidi, when we went [to him], refused and said that he can't go because he is not involved. And I, since the day before yesterday, see these people in my sleep, telling me to leave them their person.¹⁴

¹³ I say "common" based on an analysis of 149 oaths administered by Rumbo Kanyiro of Mitsekani in witchcraft cases of various kinds between 17 December 2013 and 22 March 2015.

¹⁴ "They said *wewe umepambana na waume. Tukaenda mpaka pangani pamoja na [Saidi]. Muda wote huu nilikuwa kama bubu. [Saidi] akazungumza yake, na mimi akaniambia nizungumze kama alivyo sema. Tulipo maliza kila mmoja alikwenda kwake. Pangani tulimweka mtoto wangu aitwae [Juma Chipara]. Baada ya hapo mtoto huyu amekuwa mgonjwa mpaka muda huu. Nimewahi kumuagua na pia nikajitenge na jamii yangu muda wa mwaka mmoja. Nilipo rudi mtoto alirudiwa na kabla ya hayo alikuwa hajambo. Mimi nilikwenda pangani nikasema yangu sasa ni kazi ya [Saidi] nae ende akafanye hivyo hivyo ndipo mtoto aagulike. Lakini [Saidi] tulipo kwenda alikataa na akasema hawezi kwenda sababu hahusiki. Na mimi kutoka juzi watu hawa ninawaona usingizini, wakiniambia nimewaachisha mtu wao."*

Chief's Office Records, Chizingo Location. Administrative File 18, "Pending." 10 April 1996. "Watu waliohudhuria kwenye matatizo wa [*sic*] Bwana [Chipara Mwachanze] na watoto wake kuhusu UCHAWI" ("People who attended at the problems of Mr. Chipara Mwachanze and his children concerning WITCHCRAFT"). Translation mine.

In later testimony he put their first encounter about a year earlier:

I believe that my child Juma's illness comes from Mr. Saidi, Kamanya, and Tsongo, who claimed that they wanted me to join their group of witches, and that it was necessary for me to give up my child Juma in order to be a group member. In 1993, when I was getting a home from Mr. Saidi, I was called by these three gentlemen and they advised me that I should join to become a Rain Witch and they asked me to give up one of my children.¹⁵

By "getting a home from Mr. Saidi," Chipara was referring to the early 1990s phenomenon of low-level officials inviting ethnic and regional others to settle and cultivate land that had been owned or leased from the Government by the now-defunct sugar company. As in the case of Ndaro Mwamaka, these settlers turned on the very individual who had "shown" them the land and allocated it to them, accusing them of witchcraft to expel them from the village. In this case, however, the outcome was different.

To resolve the issue, Saidi, Kamanya, and Chipara had all agreed to swear a "traditional" oath.¹⁶ To help cover the considerable cost of the oath, Chipara's son had gone to sell a large consignment of palm wine, but was hit by a vehicle on the road.¹⁷ When news of the road accident reached home, Chipara was badly beaten by his remaining sons (who suspected him of having caused it), and he was driven from the homestead.¹⁸ Kamanya disappeared shortly thereafter, and Tsongo, the third alleged member of the Rain Guild, soon followed.¹⁹ None have been seen since,

¹⁵ "Ninaamini kwamba ugonjwa wa mtoto wangu [Juma] unatokana na Bw. [Saidi], [Kamanya] na [Chipara] ambao walidai kwamba wanataka mimi ni jiunge na [Juma] chao cha Uchawi na nilazima nimtowe Mtoto wangu [Juma] ili niwe Mwana Chama. Mnamo mwaka wa 1993, nilipokuwa nikipata nyumbani kwa Bw. [Saidi], niliitwa na Mabwana hao watatu na wakanishauri kwamba niujiunge kuwa Mchawi wa Mvua na wakaniuliza kumtowa Mmoja wa Watoto wangu." "Pending." 12 April 1996, "Taz: Malalamiko Dhidi ya:..." ("Ref: Complaints Against: ..."). Translation mine.

¹⁶ Ibid. On "oaths," see Chapter Three.

¹⁷ INT. 24.

¹⁸ INT. 19; INT. 23; INT. 24; INT. 25; INT. 26. His oldest son, however, claims that Chipara simply decided to leave on his own. He remained certain that his father was a Rain Witch (INT. 35).

¹⁹ INT. 26

to the consternation of many.²⁰ Some in Bungani speculated that such was Chairman Saidi's power that he had bewitched his fellow witches in order to avoid taking the oath, which would surely have "caught" him.²¹ But although he avoided the oath and any legal consequences as a result of the case (which, with the sudden disappearance of the plaintiff, was dropped), the guilt of all four men is widely agreed upon. As one of his neighbors put it, "when Saidi dies, there will be no one left to say they were not witches."²²

²⁰ This is because they continue to pose an existential threat, and because defense or retaliation against possible future attacks are made difficult by the lack of certainty as to their whereabouts

²¹ INT. 26

²² INT. 23.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an historical ethnography of ritual and rumor among the Swahili and Mijikenda-speaking peoples of the southern Kenyan coast from the nineteenth century to the present. It offers a critique of recent turns to empiricism in the study of “witchcraft” and related “occult” phenomena, and develops a new approach to the historical and anthropological analysis of the occult (in the etymological sense of things “hidden from view”). Through careful engagement with a wide range of textual, visual, and practical ethnographic and archival materials, it describes and analyzes what I call a South Coast Kenyan “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion”—a repertoire of techniques for reading and interpreting events, actions, and utterances in order to arrive at their primary or “true” significance. At the same time, this dissertation identifies a durable associational nexus of figural motifs that mediate such speculative engagements with “occult” meaning, and highlights the forms that certain key “constellations” of these figural elements have assumed since the late-precolonial period.

In the chapters that follow, I make three interrelated arguments. First, I argue that social life in southern coastal Kenya has long been characterized by the widespread sense that the true thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others are hidden or disguised, and can only be arrived at through the careful interpretation of sign phenomena. This sensibility is expressed idiomatically as being unable to know what another person “has inside them.” As a regional feature of the *longue durée* (Braudel 1958), this “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977) has developed out of (and been nurtured by) historical practices ranging from the quotidian to the extraordinary. Far from imputing a suspicious character to coastal Kenyans as some sort of cultural-psychological trait or peculiarity,

then, in this analysis suspicion is a historical and social category. The repertoire of interpretive dispositions and techniques through which hidden—occult—significance is sought out and engaged is what I refer to as a vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion.

I focus on two key modalities in particular through which “the occult” is often brought to light and interrogated: *ritual* and *rumor*. Because the “truth” of utterances, actions, and events is not thought to be self-evident in South Coast Kenya, it must be arrived at through modes of interpretation which are as much social as they are reflective, introspective, and personal. I analyze ritual and rumor as two such modes of rendering visible or tangible forces that cannot themselves be observed, but whose effects are keenly felt (or whose operation is otherwise sensed). Because of the secretive, proprietary, or exclusionary (and thus also “occult”) nature of the rituals and rumors involved, however, this “sense of things unseen” turns out to be a recursive, self-mediating problem. Meaning and significance are thus not thought to be inherently obscure, but rather actively hidden—literally *made occult*. Efforts to arrive at the truth thus entails speculation about the motivations of those who hide it, *and* those who seek it.

Because it has been hidden rather than openly expressed, moreover, this presumed “truth” readily takes on a sinister quality. Quotidian behavior of the most inoffensive sort—a greeting, a gift, a look—can easily transform, upon interpretation, into its uncanny opposite. The interpretive stance of South Coast suspicion is thus less a cultural or psychological response to “the opacity of other minds” as an ontological problem, than a reflexive, practical “ethics of ambiguity” (De Beauvoir 1976 [1947]) in a context of perceived physical, economic, and “spiritual” insecurity (Ashforth 2005, 2011).¹

¹ For recent Anthropological approaches to “the opacity of other minds,” see: A. Rumsey, “Intersubjectivity, deception, and the ‘opacity of other minds’: Perspectives from Highland New

The second major argument of the dissertation is that South Coast Kenyans' speculative pursuit of the truth—especially in the discursive and practical modalities of ritual and rumor—is mediated by what I call an associational nexus of images or figural motifs. These motifs—which include roads or paths as spaces of danger or threat, unreasonable or extortionate demands of patrons amounting to a betrayal of social norms, the sacrifice (literal or figurative) of children (especially kin) in times of adversity (especially hunger), and the bringing or blocking of rain by those in command of proprietary magical means—combine and recombine in different arrangements which, following Walter Benjamin (1999), I call “constellations.” I elaborate on this concept on an historical constellation below, but for the moment note that in the sense in which I use it, a “constellation” may consist of elements that are not of the same order of phenomena or mode of appearance. That is, while the figural motifs out of which they are assembled remain stable over time (both preserved and transformed, reanimated and reinterpreted by the historical practice of social actors), the forms and media in and through which they appear may be, variously and simultaneously, visual, sonic, discursive, material, virtual, and so forth. They are “multi-modal” in this sense. In certain cases they may also form a kind of core or nucleus around which other ancillary images or motifs—body parts or substances, wild animals, (live) burial, old age—may be arrayed, and through which a range of concerns—avuncular authority and political power, proprietary ritual knowledge and the means of social reproduction, or the value of life and the meaning of relatedness—may be articulated.

Guinea,” *Language and Communication* 33:3 (2013), 326–43; and the contributions of J. Robbins, B. B. Schieffelin, R. Stasch, A. Rumsey, W. Keane, and A. Duranti in a 2008 special issue of *Anthropological Quarterly*.

Third, and finally, the dissertation argues that both this generalized sense of suspicion and the repertoire of images and motifs mediating its practical expression are themselves historical phenomena, in two senses. They are, first, in their various constellations, “documents” of their historical moments, in a relatively straightforward sense. They are evidence of how a broader critical social discourse or “moral imagination” (Beidelman 1986) manifested concretely in relation to historical events or experiences at a given moment in time. But they also emerge out of, and in relation to, a history of other such moments in which that discourse was focused and condensed in-and-through these constellated forms. In these moments, “the relation of the what-has-been to the now” (which Benjamin distinguishes from “the relation of the present to the past”) is crystallized and precipitated in “figural” rather than “temporal” forms, according to Benjamin (1999: 463). This is the second, dialectical sense in which suspicion and its mediating forms are historical: The elements that make up a given constellations emerge out of—and are molded by—a history the experience of which they also helped to shape.

In characterizing the phenomena of ritual and rumor as “constellations” of historical consciousness, the dissertation puts forward a very different theory of history than as the pursuit of a Rankean *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (“how it really was”). It is one that views history not as the linear unfolding of causal chains of events, but as something that can, like a specter, return to haunt the present. In this approach, history—like the occult phenomena I describe—“weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx 1963 [1852]). Thus, while Steven Feierman stresses that “even when forms of discourse are inherited from the past,” people “make an active decision to say that they are meaningful at this moment” (Feierman 1990: 3), this dissertation emphasizes instead those moments in which the past exerts itself on the present independently of the active decision-making or conscious “agency” (in the rationalist, methodological-individualist sense in

which that concept is often used in much African History writing) of historical subjects. I have chosen, in other words, to focus on moments in which certain aspects of the past—sometimes the chronologically quite distant past—seem suddenly to have a new and urgent claim on peoples’ attention, returning unbidden to tell them something they can understand only *now*. The past “flashes up” in such moments of recognition (Benjamin 1968). These moments are dialectically related, I argue, to those aspects of the past that seem to linger, to endure, and to burden the present in spite of efforts to forget them. In Hegelian terms, they are the “scars” of a wounded Spirit that have not yet healed (Hegel 1977 [1807]: 407).

Such dramatic language might be taken to imply that the past to which these elements are linked must have been traumatic or catastrophic. This is often the case but, I argue, not necessarily so. My own understanding of history in these terms has, however, been informed by historical and anthropological studies of processes that were just that: The Holocaust (LaCapra 1994, 1998; Postone 2003 in Postone and Santner 2003), and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Baum 1999, 2010; Austin 2001; Shaw 2002; Apter 2017; Isichei 2002). What these studies have also demonstrated is that the past can be preserved in highly mediated, sublimated, and transvalued forms. It need not appear, in other words, self-consciously “as history,” or even in discursive speech (see also: Palmié 2002). It may appear instead in forms of practice and habits of thought to which it does not, at face value, seem to have any immediately recognizable relationship.²

These approaches have tended to focus on history in one of two analytically distinct forms. On the one hand, they have explored various *non-discursive* (for example, practical and material) forms in which the past is retained in the present. These would include, for example, the forms of

² This fact has important consequences for empiricist and positivist approaches to both “the occult” and history, as I point out below.

ritual practice analyzed by Shaw (2002), and the “shrines of the slave trade” examined by Baum (1999, 2010) and Apter (2017). On the other hand, they have explored various forms of *discursive* claims about the past as such. This would include the oral traditions or cultural memories examined by Austen (2001) and Isichei (2002) in the case of the Atlantic Slave Trade, and the historiographical trends analyzed by Postone (2003) and LaCapra (1994, 1998) in relation to a concept of the *repression* of the traumatic memory of the Holocaust.

The use of the Benjaminian concept of historical constellation allows me to build on these approaches by extending the scope of analysis to include, in addition to ritual and memory, historical claims about the present (rather than the past) in the form of *rumor*. Treating such phenomena as expressions of historical consciousness in this way allows the historian to talk about “durable bundles of meaning and practices” in African contexts without treating “the modern” as something only analytically “conjured” up (Schoenbrun 2006), and to make an argument for extended ethnographic field research without thereby suggesting that “modernity” could only be an exogenous “meta-narrative” blinding the anthropologist to ethnographic realities (Englund and Leach 2000). Let me unpack this claim before moving to an overview of the spatiotemporal focus of the dissertation and the specific content of each of its chapters.

SOCIAL THEORY AND THE OCCULT

In the approach adopted here, the Occult—the “sense of things not seen”—emerges as a perduring problem in coastal Kenyan history, as both the focus of and fuel for a great deal of “vernacular” social theory or, as Jean and John Comaroff have dubbed it, “theory from the south” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). Rather than make claims about a South Coast Kenyan “folk theory” of the Occult (which would emphasize a shared set of beliefs or system of knowledge), the concept of a

“vernacular hermeneutics of suspicion” emphasizes processes of speculation, investigation, and theorization in which South Coast Kenyans are routinely engaged. The term gestures obliquely to Miriam Hansen’s notion of a “vernacular modernism” (Hansen 2009 [1999]; see also Pinney 2003; and Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 9), but more directly to Paul Ricoeur’s gloss of much of Western philosophy and social theory as a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur 1970: 30). I happen to disagree with Ricoeur’s characterization of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as “masters of suspicion” engaged in “a battle against masks” (26). I read them as being fundamentally concerned not with unmasking or revelation but rather *mediation* and *determination*. But I use his phrase explicitly to situate the intellectual and practical pursuits of ordinary South Coast Kenyans in relation to a canonical body of “Western” philosophy and social theory that has also sought out “essences” behind “forms of appearance” (Hegel 1977 [1807], Marx 1977 [1867]) or “drives” behind “symptoms” (Nietzsche 1998 [1886], Freud 1989 [1917]), or that have theorized the fundamental, structuring importance of concealment and secrecy (Durkheim 1995 [1912], Simmel 1906) in social and religious life.

As Hylton White has recently argued in reflecting on Theodor Adorno’s “Theses Against Occultism” (1974 [1951]), our empirical social entanglements “depend in a paradoxical way on what they are not” (H. White 2013a: 145). The “pragmatic realization” of concrete relationships between people and things, in other words, depends upon *abstract* forms of social mediation like value, labor, and time. The social world is not self-identical and transparent, but rather highly mediated by abstract, impersonal forms and forces every bit as “invisible” and difficult to demonstrate (or, indeed, to falsify) in an empirical way as ancestral spirits or “witchcraft.” They are, in a word, “Occult.”

This is not, however, to argue that something called “political economy” is what is “really real,” and that empirical social forms are the mere “superstructural” or epiphenomenal “reflections” of a purported material “base.” It is to argue, as White (and before him, Marx (1977 [1867]), Mauss (1966 [1950]), and countless others—including, of course, much of twentieth-century Social Anthropology) does, that things like work, money, or debt “are social forms as much as economic ones. They are not just forms of wealth, that is, but ways of connecting activities” (H. White 2013a: 141). As Moishe Postone put it in his important re-interpretation of Marx’s social theory:

These categories [value, abstract labor, the commodity, and capital], according to Marx, “express the forms of being (*Daseinsformen*), the determinations of existence (*Existenzbestimmungen*) ... of this specific society.” They are, as it were, categories of a critical ethnography of capitalist society undertaken from within—categories that purportedly express the basic forms of social objectivity and subjectivity that structure the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of life in that society, and are themselves constituted by determinate forms of social practice. (Postone 1993: 18; citing Marx 1973 [1939]: 106)

It is this un-disconfirmable, phenomenologically hidden-from-view quality of “the basic forms of social objectivity and subjectivity” in capitalist society that Jean and John Comaroff foreground in their well-known “Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction” essay. The claim there is not that “the Occult” in the colloquial sense of witchcraft, zombies, and Satanism is an allegorical critique of an empirically real neoliberal condition (Ranger 2007), or an “irrational response to the world by the impotent” (Bastin 2002)—positively or negatively evaluated versions of a “weapons of the weak”-style argument (Scott 1985)—as it has sometimes been misread. Rather, it is that the forces behind the global transformations that may be grasped analytically—and thus abstractly—as “neoliberalism” *are themselves occult*. No amount of empirical observation will allow anyone to see “*the free market*,” for instance. One may readily observe,

however, as Todd Sanders has done, the proliferation of markets, plural, in which “diviners openly traffic their goods,” and then relate this empirical proliferation *analytically* to the liberalization of the Tanzanian national economy and its incorporation into the global market (Sanders 2001). Financial derivatives, to take another example, are themselves only a contractual agreement—a performative ritual *bet*—and thus a form of “banking on words,” as Appadurai (2016) and LiPuma (2016, 2017) have recently argued. Reified language expresses a reified social reality, and this gets to the heart of my disagreement with Ricoeur over the methods of his “masters of suspicion,” and points at the same time to a critique of the recent turn to varieties of empiricism in the study of “the Occult.” Let me address these in turn.

Ricoeur reads Marx (and Nietzsche and Freud) through the lens of a concern with representation and power rather than mediation and determination. This concern has been developed to an especially high degree in certain strains of French social theory with which Ricoeur is in conversation. The intellectual genealogy of this approach—which is more a set of shared presuppositions and formal similarities than a theoretical “tradition” or school of thought—extends back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* (1992 [1755]). It includes, I would argue, Emile Durkheim’s “collective representations” (1995 [1912]), Marcel Mauss’s “*personnage*” (1985 [1938]), Ferdinand de Saussure’s “sign” relationship (2011 [1959]), Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of “structure” (1966 [1962]) and his work on masks (1982 [1975]), much of Michel Foucault’s *oeuvre* from *The Order of Things* (1970 [1966]) to *The History of Sexuality* (1978 [1976]), and most recently Bruno Latour’s “Actor-Network Theory” (2005; see H. White 2013b for a critique of Latour specifically, to which my more general argument here is indebted).

In Ricoeur's reading, which I argue develops out of this very Francophone theoretical orientation, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are "men of suspicion," obsessed with "lying and masks" (1970: 34), "ruses and falsifications of meaning" (17), "guile" and "illusion" (34). Their "single method of demystification" (32) is, according to him, "not an explication of the object, but a tearing off of masks" (30). Ricoeur's proposed "phenomenology of the sacred"—in which the symbolic relation is one of "revelation"—thus depends, for its own clarification, on an ambiguously rhetorical psychologization, verging at times on caricature, of those for whom symbolism is purportedly just a form of "dissimulation" (26). My own reading of these figures differs substantially from Ricoeur's, but I will limit myself here to a brief consideration of Marx's method, which he describes in the *Grundrisse* as "rising from the abstract to the concrete." (Marx 1973 [1939]: 101).

What does this mean? In the first instance, such a method contrasts with the deductive method of "the economists of the seventeenth century," who "always begin with the living whole, with population, nation, state, several states, etc." and "always conclude by discovering through analysis a small number of determinant, abstract, general relations such as division of labour, money, value, etc." (Ibid. 100). Such a deductive movement bears a certain formal resemblance to the "unmasking" that Ricoeur attributes to Marx. But for Marx, there is already a problem with this method:

[T]he population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production ... is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes, in turn, are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter, in turn, presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. ... Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole. (Ibid.)

What seems at first to be the most concrete starting point—“the living whole”—is itself an abstraction if left unspecified, as are the elements of which it is composed (if left unspecified), and so on. “Concrete” and “abstract” are, in Marx’s method, not absolute categories, but relative, dialectical ones (this is clear in the unfolding and development of categories across the first volume of *Capital*, for example). Neither are concrete and abstract identical with, for example, “matter” and “spirit.” It is not a question, for Marx, of “unmasking” the *real* material or economic base of an ideology or supposed “reflex consciousness” (Ricoeur 1970: 33). Such a static “materialist” critique had already been offered by Feuerbach (1989 [1841]), whom Marx famously critiqued in precisely these terms (Marx 1978 [1845]). Instead, Marx illuminated the “self-contradictions” of this “particular form of society” (Marx 1978 [1888]: 144–5) by pursuing the *concretization* of the abstract as a dynamic process: “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many [abstract] determinations, hence unity of the diverse” (Marx 1973 [1939]: 101).

Marx moves in *this* direction, from abstract determinants—the categories, recall, that he refers to as “the forms of being (*Daseinsformen*), the determinants of existence (*Existenzbestimmungen*)” (Postone 1993: 18)—to the level of the “concrete, living whole.” (Marx 1973 [1939]: 101). This is “by no means the process by which the concrete *comes into being*,” he says, but it *is* “the way in which thought *appropriates* the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind” (Ibid., italics added). The “concrete totality” of the world is “in fact a product of thinking and comprehending,” but it is “not in any way a product of the concept which thinks and generates itself outside or above observation and conception” (Ibid.). If Feuerbach had erred by positing the “ideal” as a mere reflection of “material” existence, *this*, by contrast, was the “illusion” into which Hegel had fallen (Ibid.). Marx’s dialectical point here is the *immanence* (not “outside or above”) of concepts to social practice. Concepts like “abstract labor” are abstractions, but they

are “real abstractions” (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 20 and *passim*). As Postone puts it, “the category of abstract labor expresses this *real social process of abstraction*; it is not simply based on a conceptual process of abstraction” (1993: 152. Italics added).

The analytic claim that abstraction could be a “real social process” is, however, not the same thing as saying that “abstract labor” is a “social fact” in the Durkheimian (1982 [1895]) or Maussian (1966 [1950]) sense. This is true of Marx’s other major categories as well, which are neither “collective representations” nor the “crystallizations” of collective consciousness in “institutions” (Durkheim 1982 [1895]: 45) like the potlatch (Mauss 1966 [1950]). They cannot be observed directly like the forms of collective practice from which religion derives its social “objectivity,” according to Durkheim (1995 [1912]: 421). Their *concrete reality* can only be grasped *abstractly*, in thought—a dialectical claim that would appear nonsensical within the empiricist frame of much recent scholarship on “the Occult” in African and its diasporas, and so it is to these approaches that I now turn.

EMPIRICISM AND THE OCCULT

Given the preceding discussion of abstraction and concretion, concepts and categories, and the “forms of being” and “determinants of existence,” perhaps the best point of entry into the recent resurgence of empiricism in Anthropology—and not only in relation to the occult—is the influential theoretical tendency now known as “the Ontological Turn” (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). I want to focus in particular on what I consider to be the unfortunate Neo-Lévy-Bruhlianism of Martin Holbraad’s particular version of this “turn,” exemplified in his treatment of Afro-Cuban *Ifá* divination (2007, 2012). To Lucien Lévy-Bruhl,

most of the [ethnographic] testimony available ... remains unserviceable because the observer, in all good faith and unconsciously, has inserted his own concepts in the primitives' ideas, and mingled his personal beliefs with those he thought he had gathered. Not content with thus attributing to primitives ideas alien to them, he nearly always establishes a connection between them to which their minds are indifferent, and he interprets these ideas by the light of our logic, our theology, and our metaphysics. (1936: 7)

The “primitive,” he says, lacks a “sense of the impossible” (Ibid. 5). For Holbraad, the only “real problem with Lévy-Bruhl’s argument”—which, he says, “amounts to the claim that primitive logic disobeys the law of contradiction”—is “that it is cast in essentially negative terms” (Holbraad 2007: 201). Holbraad speculated that it is perhaps as a result of Lévy-Bruhl’s failure to “elaborate an *alternative* set of axioms that may go beyond merely restating the inadequacy of our own” that, in his view, little seems to have changed within the field of Anthropology in the decades since:

When anthropologists or archaeologists ask themselves ... “Why does/did such-and-such group treat things as people?” ... they are continuing the basic line of thought of the Victorians. Namely, they assume that their own commonsense assumptions, such as the distinction between things and people, have enough purchase on the animist phenomena under study to furnish an account of them—explanations, interpretations, and so on. (Holbraad 2009: 432)

If such “animist phenomena”—which one could argue is itself a “Victorian” category within, say, a taxonomy of civilizational hierarchy—seem to “*contradict* the terms in which Western academic debates are cast,” then “the analytical onus is on us to find alternative concepts that do not” (Ibid. 432–3. Emphasis in original.). Note that the pursuit of an ontology that “disobeys the law of contradiction” is thus driven by a compulsion precisely to obey it—a theoretical desideratum that may not be shared, of course, by those who purportedly inhabit these alternative ontologies.

If Holbraad’s argument thus seems, at times, to be chasing its tail, this is in part because he has pitched it at the level of formal logic—of “axioms”—rather than ethnography (despite his repeated, almost talismanic, invocation of its adjectival form in describing his own work). Take,

for instance, the formulation Holbraad often attributes to his *babalawo* interlocutors, that “powder is power” (2007: 214, 217; 2012: 169; 2017: 221, 222). It is a catchy phrase in English, but there is no evidence in Holbraad’s published writing that anyone other than he ever uttered such a phrase, in English or any other language (such as those spoken by the *babalawos* themselves). At least not that I have been able to find. The purported Ifá “axiom” that “powder is power” is, it turns out, a pure logical abstraction drawn by Holbraad himself, and *not* the ethnographic datum as which it is treated. The ensuing metaphysical ruminations about what would have to be the case for *that* to be the case in its most literal form—and this, apparently, is what it means to take our informants “seriously” (Viveiros de Castro 2011; Holbraad 2007: 209; Holbraad 2012: 16, 50, 210, 249; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: 26, 53, 158, 184–194; Cadena 2011): to take them literally, as if “we” have, in a positivistic sense, poetic, figurative, or tropic language and “they” do not³—is just a thought experiment in logical positivism. And indeed, Holbraad is explicit on this latter point: “on this view, anthropological and archaeological analysis must ultimately take the form of what one might call thought-experimentation. ... This intellectual exercise, we may note, is perhaps more akin to the kinds of thought-experiments in which philosophers typically engage” (2009: 434).

³ Unlike the more well-known Bororo claim to be red *Arara* parrots—“*Die Bororó rümen sich selbst, dass sie rote Araras seien*” (von den Steinen 1894: 352)—or the Nuer assertion that “a twin is not a person (*ran*), he is a bird (*dit*)” (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 129), in this case there is no ethnographic evidence of an informant’s statement—such as “powder is power”—that could be understood literally or in any other way. We have only Holbraad’s abstract postulate. Interestingly, Terence Evens (a student of Max Gluckman’s) has revisited the Nuer “twins are birds” claim (if that is what it is) to make an “ontological” argument that “twins, in a sense that is both deep and substantive, *really are* birds” (Evens 2012: 10. Emphasis added). For a very different re-analysis of both the Bororo and Nuer claims, see T. Turner, “‘We are Parrots,’ ‘Twins are Birds’: Play of Tropes as Operational Structure.” In J. W. Fernandez (ed.), *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 121–158.

Leaving aside the question of what “philosophers” “typically” do (and I am far from convinced that *that* is what Hegel and Nietzsche, for instance, were engaged in), such “thought-experiments” in search of an ontology in which “powder *just is* power” and “things *just are* concepts”—and thus the pursuit of a more adequate conceptual framework within which to represent the empirical “worlds” of others (the way things “just are” for them)—actually leads the anthropologist *away from* the empirical. Rather than try to square the analytic circle he himself has drawn (that “powder is power”), Holbraad might instead have addressed the implications of his own *actual* ethnographic claim that “*babalawos* certainly distinguish between the different senses in which they use the word ‘*aché*’ — *no one is confused about the difference between power and powder*” (Holbraad 2007: 204. Emphasis added.). The fact that initiated *babalawos* prepare *aché* powders and that *aché* powders are used in the consecration of *babalawos* is no more a logical contradiction demanding an alternative ontology than the fact that Catholic Priests prepare the Chrism (holy oil) and that the Chrism is used in the ordination of Catholic Priests. What is at issue is a *ritual process* in a *social context*—something eminently investigable ethnographically—and *not* a closed set of either metaphorical representations (“symbols and meanings”) or abstract logical “axioms” and their purported ontological corollaries.

In order to evaluate Holbraad’s radical claim that, for the *babalawos* (despite their own assertions to the contrary), “powder is power,” one would need to see some of the ethnographic data from which it presumably has been abstracted: How does Ifá ritual “play out” in concrete instances of its performance? What are the ritual presuppositions and entailments for the actual participants in an actual case of divination? Instead, Holbraad presents only “the liturgy of Ifá divination” (2012: 130), a detailed but ideal-typical presentation of normative rules supposed to govern divination, but entirely removed from all social and historical context, and indeed from any

empirical performance of the ritual. If anthropology is now about thought experiments, ethnography seems no longer needed, and the “armchair anthropology” of the late nineteenth century gives way to an “armchair ontology” of the twenty-first.

A different sort of thought experiment informs historian Luise White’s innovative and influential approach to what she calls the “transnational genre” of “vampire stories” that circulated widely throughout East and Central Africa during the colonial period.⁴ These colonial “vampires” are, she argues, an “epistemological category, with which Africans described their world” (White 2000: 50). The stories told about them thus “offer historians a way to see the world the way storytellers did” (Ibid. 5). They are not “constructed on a moment-to-moment basis,” but are instead “drawn from a store of historical allusions ... kept alive and given new and renewed meanings by the gossip and arguments of diverse social groups” (Ibid. 82). The “formulaic elements” of these “vampire stories” repeated over space and time are, in White’s analysis, “terms and images into which local meanings and details are inserted by the tellers” (Ibid. 8).

White’s work makes a compelling argument for the utility of communicative genres like rumor and gossip for writing African history. Rejecting the oral history methods of Jan Vansina on the one hand and a more recent emphasis on personal narratives, experience, and “voice” on the other, *Speaking with Vampires* attempts to sidestep a positivist/constructivist impasse in the field of African history. White’s methodological innovation is to treat these stories as a textual genre, focusing on “the pattern of the tale, not the circumstances of the telling” (Ibid. 6). By treating formulaic elements of *Mumiani* stories not as distortions of or distractions from the truth, but rather as the key ingredients of “a good and thus credible story” (Ibid. 89), White directs our

⁴ White’s work is foundational for my own. I return to many of these issues in Chapter Five.

attention to something like what Nancy Rose Hunt calls “the lexicon of debate” (Hunt 1999: 11). In this approach, fire stations, buckets, overalls, pumps, injections, blood, and bandages become “tools with which to write colonial history” (White 2000: 5). Identifying elements like these that have been “kept alive” and, importantly, transformed by rumor, helps reveal “wider terrains of belief and theory” (Ibid. 85). *Speaking with Vampires* is thus “not simply about rumor and gossip,” but also “about the world rumor and gossip reveals” (Ibid. 5).

It is at times ambiguous, however, to what “world” (or what kind of world) this refers. Is it an alternative ontology? At one level of analysis, White writes that she “takes these stories at face value” (Ibid.). Depending on how one interprets that claim, taking vampire stories “at face value” could seem similar to the “taking seriously” of the Ontologists. White is, however, neither an armchair ontologist straining to imagine a world in which there “just are” vampires, nor a folklorist recording and reporting stories from the field. These stories do not reveal another world, another *ontology*, different from ours; they merely allow us to “see the world” as others did (Ibid. 5). Despite attempting to overcome a conceptual opposition between reality and belief by “tak[ing] these stories at face value,” White ultimately understands herself to be writing “the history of things that never happened” (Ibid. 5, vii). To use these “vampire stories” as evidence in the way that she does, one may treat them “*as if* they were true, or accurate,” as long as one keeps in mind the fact that “the stories are false” (Ibid. 122, 41). Not only that, but “their very falseness is what gives them meaning” (Ibid. 43). In this way, despite her attempt “to dismantle what Ann Stoler has called the ‘hierarchies of credibility’ so intrinsic to writings about colonial societies,” (Ibid. 116), White’s argument ends up re-inscribing the categorical distinctions between reality and belief, fact and value, true and false, that it set out to overcome.

At other times, however, White seems to relativize the question of truth: There are “different kinds of truth,” and the lines between them “are as flexible as any genealogy” (White 2001:287). This is, in White’s account, related to a dialectic of what she calls “social truth” and “historical fact”: “Historical facts emerge from social truths just as social truths develop from readings of historical facts” (Ibid.). Here, White seems to gesture to Marx’s famous claim that “theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses,” (Marx 1978 [1843]: 60) when she states that “hearsay is a fact when people believe it” (White 2001: 287). But there is still a positivist insistence here on a historical reality that *just is*, and a social “truth” that *is just* a “reading” of that reality. An “historical fact” might emerge from a “social truth”—as when “in 1947 rioters at the Mombasa fire station demanded the release of a woman” (Ibid.) because the fire brigade was said to trap and drain the blood of their victims in pits hidden inside the fire station—but only one of these things *really* “happened.” Each is “true” in its own way, but only one is a “fact.”

Adam Ashforth’s “relational realism” (Ashforth 2011, after Tilly 2002) offers another way to (once again) “take seriously” (2011: S134) stories that, in his words, “might seem absurd” (Ibid.). This is done by analyzing “the relations spoken of in such narratives as *relations* and to take seriously the question of the politics of such relations in any particular instance” (Ibid. Emphasis in original). Within this approach, “we can remain agnostic about the existence of particular parties to a relationship”—the analyst may consider one or more parties to be “imaginary”—but “nonetheless treat the relation itself as real” (Ibid. S135). Just as White claims to treat vampire stories as if they were true, Ashforth argues for treating relations with “imaginary” forces as real.

Despite his use of the term “imaginary” to describe these “invisible forces,” and despite the unavoidable use of language imputing mental states and processes to other individuals—for them to be imaginary they must be *imagined* by someone—Ashforth makes a vigorous argument against dealing with religious and occult phenomena in terms of “belief.” People might “*see themselves*” as “living in a world with witches” (Ibid. S140. Emphasis added), they might “*presume*” that “witches will harm [them]” (Ibid. S141. Emphasis added), and they might try to “*make sense of*” the invisible forces “*they see* operating in the world around them” (Ibid. 142. Emphasis added). It is somehow more difficult, however, “to demonstrate whether, and in what ways, a belief is believed even for a single individual, let alone a social collectivity” (Ibid. S138). But why a belief is more difficult to “demonstrate” than a presumption is, to me, unclear. Each would seem to be an abstraction based on an “analysis of the context of life” (Ibid. S140), rather than a claim about *something* that can be said “*to exist* within a person’s mind” (Ibid. S138. Emphasis added) in some empirically demonstrable way.

Ashforth’s ethnographic exhortation to “start by always seeking to specify who says what, to whom, where, when, how, and why” (Ibid. 140) is a methodological point well-taken. But dealing with occult phenomena as involving, in some sense, “beliefs,” is hardly the only way an analysis might get badly away from ethnographic data, as we have seen. Holbraad, for instance, is not the least bit concerned with what Ifá practitioners *believe*. He is concerned with what, in their purported ontology, “just is.” But he is also not the least bit concerned with the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the actual inhabiting of that ontology.

Interestingly, despite their significant differences—Ashforth’s work is, unlike Holbraad’s, grounded in exceptional ethnographic detail (see especially Ashforth 2000 and 2018)—they end up articulating a similar position: There is “a world with witches,” *theirs*, and a world without

witches—ours (or at least his). “Most people, in most places,” Ashforth writes, “seem not to live in ‘reality-based communities,’” referencing the now famous phrase of a former aide to President George W. Bush, and “realists ignore this fact at their peril” (Ashforth 2011: S144). Because such people live “in ways that are premised upon the objectivity”—the existence, the ontological reality—“of these entities and the forces they embody,” the analyst must deal with *that* objective fact, and here Ashforth and Holbraad once again part company. Rather than entertain the possibility that the objective existence of other ontologies means that our own “commonsense assumptions” (Holbraad 2009: 432)—our “presumptions,” in Ashforth’s phrase—may be inadequate to the object of analysis, Ashforth will insist on them in a fundamental way.

The category of “belief,” for example, is held to be inadequate for (among other reasons) its Western Christian genealogy. But it is inadequate for this reason *within the terms of “realist” social science itself*, not necessarily within the terms of those who inhabit “a world with witches” (who are themselves Christians, in Ashforth’s South African example, and have been for some time). But by absolutizing what “is”—what is observable, demonstrable, empirical—Ashforth and Holbraad cannot adequately account for what “is” not—abstract forms like “society” or “history.” In these terms, the fact that “most people throughout what we know of the history of humanity” feel that “their security depends upon agencies and entities that are sometimes described ... as supernatural” is to be explained not in terms of that history—the history of humanity, of society—but rather in biological terms as an evolutionary adaptation (Ashforth 2011: S144–5). White’s work, though historical in scope, only projects this problem back into the past: There are things that did, and did not, happen; there are historical facts and social truths; the latter give us a glimpse into “their” world, the former keep us grounded in “ours.”

Rather than posit, implicitly or explicitly, a distinction between “our” world and “theirs,” this dissertation takes an historical anthropological approach to the co-production of a shared modernity. Modernity, in the sense I use the term, is not “a package of cultural traits,” as Frederick Cooper has glossed it, “Western” or otherwise.⁵ It is defined not by any positive content of its own, but in relation to a concept of “tradition.”⁶ It is a relative concept, not an absolute one. It is characterized not just by a feeling of non-identity of depth and surface, and that deeper structures powerfully shape surface forms of appearance, but by a quasi-nostalgic sense that in the past, people were not plagued by such uncertainty and doubt. It is characterized by a discomfort or unease in society, and the idea that this was not the case once. It is characterized not just by a “crisis of meaning” (Adorno 1997), a dissatisfaction with existing interpretive frameworks, but by a sense that such a condition is qualitatively different from a “traditional” order in which meaning was given. Whether or not this is *true* in some positivist sense is beside the point, unless one proceeds only from an empiricist interest in the “the way it really was.” The question with which I am concerned is whether it *feels* this way or *seems* this way to people, and this is eminently empirically investigable ethnographically.

By 2007, for example, Terence Ranger claimed that an “‘occult economies’ consensus” had emerged in the field of African Studies that was in need of “breaking.”⁷ Ranger called for “disaggregating the African occult” and for greater historicization, echoing Luise White’s call for

⁵ F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, and History* (Berkeley, 2005), 114.

⁶ J. L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2, The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago, 1997), 25.

⁷ T. O. Ranger, “Scotland Yard in the Bush: Medicine Murders, Child Witches and the Construction of the Occult: A Literature Review,” *Africa* 77:2 (2007), 278. Ranger, however, cites only two articles by Jean and John Comaroff and one by Filip De Boeck as examples of the consensus.

“careful chronologies of occult beliefs.”⁸ But as Robert Blunt has recently suggested, the “aggregation” of “the Occult” may not be an analytic error, but in some cases “an ethnographic fact.”⁹ If it is—“if our ethnographic subjects experience and describe the occult as aggregate in nature, and indeed as a key feature of its capacity to breed uncertainty and even terror”—then this raises an important methodological question: “how should this empirical ethnographic fact inform our analytic distinctions?”¹⁰

What Blunt and the Comaroffs are pointing to—an experience of occult phenomena as both proliferating and, in a sense, “functionally equivalent”—is, I argue, related to what Ashforth, from a different perspective, calls “a crisis of interpretive authority.”¹¹ Such a crisis has important resonances, I would like to suggest, with what Robert Pippin has called “the dissatisfactions of European high culture.”¹² Suspicion, melancholy, anxiety and nostalgia, but also creativity, experimentation, and a sense of possibility motivate Madumo and Ngeti’s “quest for therapy” (Janzen 1978) no less than Rousseau’s quest for “the origin of inequality” or Nietzsche’s “nihilism.”¹³ This dissertation, then, is guided by an understanding of “modernity” not, as Englund and Leach would have it, as a “meta-narrative” leading ethnographers astray by “assum[ing] prior

⁸ Ibid., 277–8.

⁹ R. W. Blunt, “Oracles, Trauma, and the Limits of Contextualization: Naming the Witch in Contemporary Kenya,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 43 (2013), 333.

¹⁰ Ibid., 332.

¹¹ A. Ashforth, “AIDS, Religious Enthusiasm, and Spiritual Insecurity in Africa,” *Global Public Health*, 6:S2 (2011), S136.

¹² R. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*. Second Edition. (Oxford, 1999 [1991]).

¹³ See: A. Ashforth, *Madumo: A Man Bewitched* (Chicago, 2000); J. H. Smith and N. Mwadime, *Email from Ngeti: An Ethnography of Sorcery, Redemption, and Friendship in Global Africa* (Berkeley, 2014); J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Indianapolis, 1992 [1755]); F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, 1967 [1901]).

knowledge of the contexts of people’s concerns,” but rather itself an ethnographic fact—if only as a “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977)¹⁴

To return, then, to the two cases of witchcraft accusation described in the Preface, note that a certain cluster of images or motifs—paths as spaces of danger, children as potential sacrifices, the failure of rain and the agricultural livelihood it supports, intergenerational conflict within homesteads and intragenerational conflict between them—form something like an associational nexus through which bodies and landscapes are understood to mediate social life as the objects of transformational operations in ritual. At the same time, I argue, the meanings associated with and through this constellation of images have, while being preserved, been transformed by the accumulation of experience, and are thus themselves historical in nature. As the rest of this dissertation goes on to show, the elements of this associational nexus return and recombine in a variety of historical “constellations” of past and present, shaping perceptions of both “what is” and “what has been.”¹⁵

The following two sections, “The Geographical Setting” and “Historical Overview,” provide a brief sketch of South Coast Kenya’s human geography and political and economic history. These are designed to provide a basic orientation to non-specialists and those unfamiliar with the region and its history. Those already familiar with South Coast may wish to skip ahead to the “Chapter Overview” section, beginning on page 60.

¹⁴ H. Englund and J. Leach, “Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity,” *Current Anthropology* 41:2 (2000), 236. For the origin of the concept of “meta-narrative,” see: J.-F. Lyotard, *Instructions païennes* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

¹⁵ W. Benjamin, “Convolute ‘N’: (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress),” in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 463.

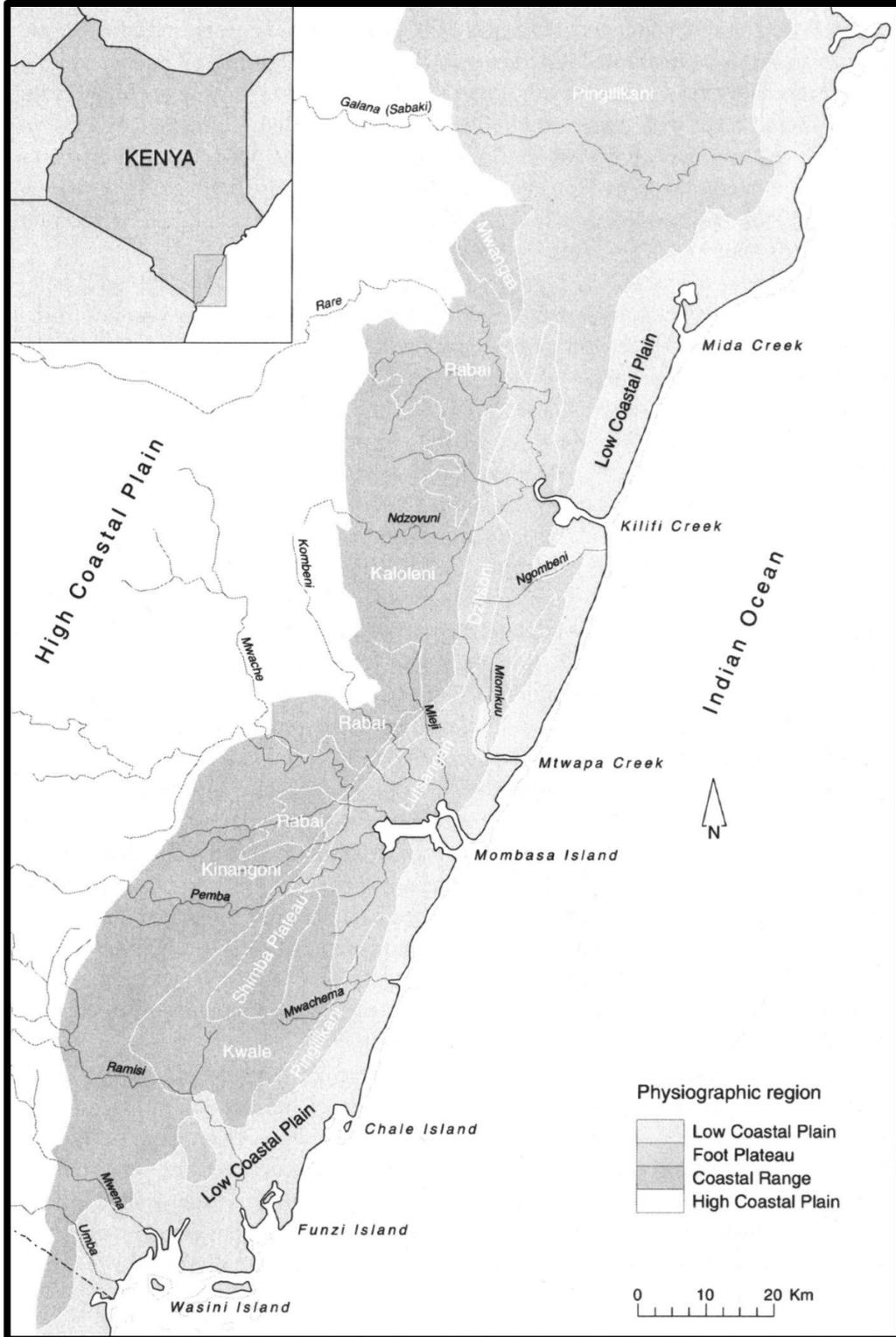
THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

“South Coast Kenya” commonly refers to the stretch of Kenyan coastline between the island of Mombasa in the north and the Tanzanian border in the south. “North Coast” refers to the region between Mombasa and Kenya’s border with Somalia. Note that “North” and “South” are in this case projected not from what is even approximately the geographical midpoint of the Kenyan coastline, but rather from the deictic origo of Mombasa. As Kenya’s second most populous city and East Africa’s most important port, Mombasa is the coast’s political, economic, and cultural center of gravity. I will use “South Coast,” however, to refer to the region between (roughly) Kilifi in the north and Tanga in the south, although the latter is actually across the border in Tanzania, inland through the Coastal Ridge (see Map 0.2). My usage thus overlaps with the regions referred to as the Northern Mrima Coast (“from Pangani northward to the settlements above Mombasa”) and the Nyali Coast (“from the Sabaki River (also known as the Athi and Galana) in the north to the River Uмба in the south”), and includes much of what are now Kwale, Mombasa, and (southern) Kilifi Counties (see Map 0.1).¹⁶

¹⁶ J. Lamphear, “The Kamba and the Northern Mrima Coast,” in R. Gray and D. Birmingham (eds.) *Pre-Colonial African Trade: Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa Before 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 75–101; C. Shipton, R. Helm, N. Bolvin, A. Crowther, P. Austin, and D. Q. Fuller, “Intersections, Networks and the Genesis of Social Complexity on the Nyali Coast of East Africa,” *African Archaeological Review* 30:4 (2013), 427–453.



Map 0.1: Map showing Kenya’s 47 Counties, with Kwale, Mombasa, and Kilifi Counties in bold.



Map 0.2: “Location of Nyali Coast showing main physiographic regions.” From Shipton et al. 2013, 429.

Most of my own ethnographic research (conducted between January 2013 and July 2015) was concentrated in the southern part of Kwale County, an area populated mostly by peoples who identify (and not always exclusively) as Digo, Duruma, Segeju, Shirazi, Kifundi, and Vumba. Of these, only the first two (Digo and Duruma) are recognized as distinct “tribes” among the “43 tribes of Kenya.”¹⁷ They are also, however, “Sub-Tribes” of the “Mijikenda.” “Mijikenda,” as most textual accounts of these peoples point out, means “nine villages” or “nine towns” referring to the nine “peoples” or “sub-tribes” encompassed by the name Mijikenda. The “canonical” nine are the Giriama, Jibana, Kauma, Chonyi, Kambe, Rabai, Ribe, Duruma, and Digo. But as Willis points out, “there still exists some confusion among the Mijikenda themselves as to who the nine tribes are ... and informants today may number the Pokomo and Segeju, sometimes the Taita, sometimes the Kamba, among the Mijikenda.”¹⁸ Some accounts give *Makayachenda* as the “vernacular,” (Spear 1981: 28. See also Brantley 1981: 6, and Allen 1993: 87), but this is a language-ideological adaptation by informants to a “purer,” more “Mijikenda” and less “Swahili” form, emphasizing both the distinctness and antiquity of the identity.¹⁹ “Mijikenda” was in fact derived from *Midzichenda*, which does mean nine towns or settlements in the Mijikenda language. But this name

¹⁷ Until recently, Kenya recognized only 42 tribes as “Kenyan.” In February 2017 the Kenyan Government recognized the descendants of Makonde laborers brought from Tanzania in the 1930s to work on coastal Sisal plantations as Kenyan nationals, declared them to be “the 43rd tribe,” and began issuing them with National Identification cards, for which they had been previously been ineligible as Makonde. See: M. Ndubi, “The Makonde: From Statelessness to Citizenship in Kenya,” 15 Mar. 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/ke/10581-stateless-becoming-kenyan-citizens.html>; and K. Samuel and F. Frederick, “For the Makonde, challenges abound a year after receiving citizenship,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi) 26 Mar. 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Challenges-abound-for-the-Makonde-community/1056-4358542-lqp9qrz/index.html>.

¹⁸ J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32.

¹⁹ “Miji” and “Makaya” being the Kiswahili and “Kimijikenda” words, respectively, for “towns,” “villages,” or “settlements.”

referred not to the nine Mijikenda “subgroups” but rather to nine actual Digo settlements in a single administrative district, whose colonially constituted “council of elders” adopted the terms for themselves in 1924, as Willis points out (1993: 192). It was “not until the 1940s, when a group of workers in Mombasa founded the Mijikenda Union” that the term became “generally used to describe nine of the peoples who had previously been called the Nyika.”²⁰

The Mijikenda Union was founded at a meeting in Rabai in 1945, but despite its stated goal of “uniting our tribes and bringing back the KINSHIP which existed in the time of our forefathers,” this should not necessarily be taken as evidence of widespread pan-“tribal” sentiment.²¹ 1945 also saw the birth of the Young Duruma Association and the Digo Welfare Association.²² Neither is this to say, as Richard Mambo does, that “the Digo Welfare Association and the Young Duruma Association were rather parochial” in comparison with the Mijikenda Union, “since their horizons were limited to the respective sub-ethnic units.”²³ Rather, it is to point out that the significance of the Mijikenda Union emerged only in retrospect, as part of the process by which the Digo and Duruma could come to be considered “sub-ethnic units” in the first place. Up until that point (and informally for a long time thereafter), the peoples who became known collectively as “Mijikenda” were (along with other neighboring peoples who are not counted as Mijikenda) referred to by urban Arabs and Swahilis, as well as by British and German missionaries, colonial administrators,

²⁰ Willis, *Mombasa*, 192. The Digo District Annual Report for 1945 describes these young men as living in Nairobi, not Mombasa. Kenya National Archives (KNA), Nairobi, Kenya, CC1/3/26 “Digo District Annual Report,” 1945.

²¹ KNA OP/1/1331, Said Suleiman, care of William Paul, Mombasa to Provincial Commissioner Coast, 5 Nov. 1944, cited in J. Willis and G. Gona, “Tradition, Tribe, and State in Kenya: The Mijikenda Union, 1945–1980,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55:2 (2013), 452n21. Capitalization in original.

²² KNA CC1/3/26, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1945.

²³ R. Mambo, “Nascent Political Activities among the Mijikenda of Kenya’s Coast during the Colonial Era,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 16 (1987), 107.

historians, and anthropologists, as the “Wanyika”—“the bush people”—as opposed to the “Waswahili”—“the coast people.”²⁴

Claiming as they did a common origin with the other “Nyika Tribes” in Singwaya (see Chapter Two), the Digo were almost always counted among the “Wanyika” by early European missionaries, colonial administrators, and anthropologists. But this overlooked the fact a number of other tribes (including the Segeju, Pokomo, and “Galla”) that were *not* considered “Wanyika” also claimed (and were claimed in several “Wanyika” oral histories to have) origins in Singwaya. Moreover, the Digo have at times (notably, before the rise of late-colonial and post-independence ethnic politics in Kenya) represented themselves (and been represented by other Mijikenda-speaking groups) as a distinct people. One early colonial administrator describes the Digo as “despising” the “Wanyika.”²⁵ By contrast, the Duruma were said (by some) to have origins (at least partly) in Mozambique, but their status as being descended from Portuguese “labourers” was denied by the Duruma themselves, and they were unambiguously “classed as Wanyika”:

As regards the Duruma: I had been authoritatively informed by the late Sheikh Mbaruk bin Rashid, of Gazi who died in exile in German East Africa [see Chapter Four], that the Duruma were originally of Makua extraction; brought up from the Zambesi river, by the Portuguese, to work as labourers for them in Mombasa. The reason was that the natives were in a state of hostility against them, and would not do a hand’s turn of work for the masters of the country. This had happened, Sheik Mbaruk informed me, early in the

²⁴ The “Nyika” is the arid region that lies between much of the coast and the more fertile, temperate “upcountry” region. “Wanyika” means “bush people” (the Class 2 noun prefix [wa-] indicating animate third-person plural) and is considered insulting for obvious reasons. Throughout this dissertation, I use it only when quoting others. There was, however, an attempt to “reclaim” the term by a number of popular East African bands in the 1970s and 1980s, like Les Wanyika, Orchestra Simba Wanyika, and Super Wanyika Stars, whose members were drawn from several ethnic groups formerly classed as “Wanyika.” Following Bresnahan (2018), I will refer to these populations as “Mijikenda-speaking” or “Mijikenda-speakers” when discussing the period before the Mijikenda ethnonym came into common usage.

²⁵ Fred Morton Papers, Coast A 104A-249A, A. C. Hollis, “The Nyika,” n.d. [ca. 1910], Rabai Sub-District Political Record Book.

sixteenth century; shortly before the Mazurui had first landed in Mombasa. Wa-Duruma may, now of course, be classed as Wanyika.²⁶

The anthropologist Luther Gerlach, who conducted ethnographic research in Kwale District between October 1958 and May 1960, describes the geography of Digo and Duruma residence at that time in the following terms:

Broadly speaking, the Digo live along the Kenya and Tanganyika coast in a belt of relatively well-watered land, varying in width from about 10 to 25 miles, and extending south from Mombasa in the Kenya Protectorate to Tanga in Tanganyika. The majority of the Duruma live directly west of this Digo strip in the more arid hinterland, which merges on its western flank with uninhabited, often waterless, bush country.²⁷

Gerlach goes on to describe intermarriage between the two groups, “mostly with Digo taking Duruma wives,” and points out that “a number of people classed both by themselves and by government as Duruma and living in Duruma country are the descendants of Digo,” and that likewise “some Digo apparently have their origins in the Duruma tribe.”²⁸

I return to the question of the flexibility or relativity of ethnic or “tribal” boundaries in passing throughout much of the rest of this dissertation. There is by now a large literature on the colonial “invention of ethnicity,” and a large literature critiquing that literature.²⁹ I would only

²⁶ KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book, K. Macdougall, “Notes on the History of the Wanyika,” 31 Mar. 1914, Malindi. The tradition of Duruma origins among escaped slaves of the Portuguese dates to at least the mid-nineteenth century. See: C. Guillain, *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale, Deuxième partie, Tome deuxième* (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1856), 241. See also: H. B. Johnstone, “Notes on the Customs of the Tribes Occupying Mombasa Sub-District, British East Africa,” *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 32 (1902), 263; and J. B. Griffiths, “Glimpses of a Nyika Tribe (Duruma),” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 65 (1935), 267.

²⁷ L. P. Gerlach, “The Social Organisation of the Digo of Kenya” (unpublished PhD diss., University of London, 1960), 6–7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹ For starters, see: B. Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800–1950* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989); J. L. Comaroff, “Of Totemism and Ethnicity,” in J. L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds.) *Ethnography and the Historical*

point out here that the incorporative processes through which this flexibility or porousness of ethnic distinctions was actually effected were rarely smooth, and often violent. In the East African case, pawning, kidnapping, and enslavement of kin to settle debts or in times of famine, were not uncommon in the nineteenth century. This condition had been aggravated, if not precipitated, by the incorporation of the region into the growing global capitalist economy, a process whose beginnings preceded the proliferation of colonial-era tribal and ethno-racial typologies by almost a century. This is, finally, not to say that colonial-era “invention of ethnicity” has not had disastrous consequences, or that there were no such stable or coherent group identities before it occurred.

The Segeju (to return to the list of groups with which I began) were typically not counted among the “Wanyika,” at least by colonial administrators, although there was some disagreement on this score as well. Not least among the conceptual problems they posed was that unlike the “Wanyika,” the Segeju were Muslim and seemed to have been for some time. They were coastal

Imagination (Boulder: Westview, 1992 [1987]), 49–67; J. Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones: Racial Thought and Violence in Colonial Zanzibar* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 318–41; J. Lonsdale, “The Moral Economy of Mau Mau,” in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds.) *Unhappy Valley, Book 2: Violence and Ethnicity* (London: James Currey, 1992), 265–504; A. Mafeje, “The Ideology of Tribalism,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9:2 (1971), 253–61; M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996) G. Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [1990]); J. D. Y. Peel, “The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis,” in E. Tonkin, M. McDonald and M. Chapman (eds.), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 198–215; T. O. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); A. W. Southall, “The Illusion of Tribe,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5:1/2 (1970), 28–50; T. T. Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44:1 (2003), 3–27; L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989); J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); M. C. Young, “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Class in Africa: A Retrospective,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 103 (1986), 421–95.

town dwellers, living in coral-walled settlements between Tanga and Vanga (roughly), but were neither Arab nor “Swahili.” Indeed, far from claiming origins in Persia or the Arab world (as was—and is—common among urban coastal peoples along the Swahili coast), the Segeju figure in their own traditions of origin as war-like pastoralist pagans from the north (see Chapter One), in stark contrast to their early twentieth-century existence.³⁰

Kenneth Macdougall, former Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) District Superintendent and British East Africa Protectorate Sub-Commissioner, then Chairman of the Coast [Land Title] Arbitration Board, considered that the Segeju were “of the Nyika extraction”³¹ By contrast, Assistant District Commissioner (ADC) Arthur M. Champion (writing the same year) argued that “the origin of the Wa Segeju seems apart,” but that “they have merged long ago into the Wa-Nyika.”³² This was a nice point: informants claimed that the Segeju had been co-residents

³⁰ On the Segeju and the question of their origins and relation to the Mijikenda and other coastal peoples in Kenya and Tanzania, see: Commonwealth and African Archives [former Rhodes House Library] (CAA), Weston Library, University of Oxford, UK, MSS.Afr.s.1272a, A. C. Hollis, “The Wasegeju,” (typescript, 1899); KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5 Political Record Book, C. B. Thompson, “Notes on the WaSegeju of Vanga District,” 2 Jun. 1918; KNA DC/1/3/5 Political Record Book, [H. B. Sharpe?], “How the Wasegeju received their name as told to me by an Msegeju Elder,” [1925?]; E. C. Baker, “Notes on the History of the Wasegeju,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 27 (1949), 16–41; J. M. Gray, “Portuguese Records Relating to the Wasegeju,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 29 (1950), 85–97; Institute of Current World Affairs (ICWA) records, 1914–2018, Columbia University Libraries Rare Book & Manuscript Collections, MS#1528 Series II: ICWA Newsletters, 1926–2011, Box 15, R. F. Gray, “Segeju Tribe: I People of the North Tanganyika Coast,” 6 Jun. 1956, Arusha; H. A. Fosbrooke, “The Masai Walls of Moa: Walled Towns of the Segeju,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 54 (1960), 30–38; J. de V. Allen, “Segeju Traditions,” in *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture & The Shungwaya Phenomenon* (London: James Currey, 1993), 99–113; M. 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*, eds. R. Gearhart and L. Giles (London: Africa World Press, 2014), 25–51.

³¹ KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. I [and CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. III], K. Macdougall, “Notes on the History of the Wanyika,” 31 Mar. 1914, Malindi.

³² KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. I [and CB1/1/3], ADC A. M. Champion, “History of the Wa-Giriama,” 23 Jan. 1914, Rabai.

with their own ancestors in Singwaya—the point of origin claimed by Mijikenda in the twentieth century (see Chapter Two)—but they are always referred to as a separate people (sometimes called the Wakilio).³³ Compiling these accounts for the Kilifi District Political Record book in 1951, June Knowles—the wife of Malindi District Officer (DO) O. S. Knowles—despaired of ever arriving at the truth of the matter given the administration’s limited resources: “If only we could get a philologist but I suppose all that we shall get is a miserable anthropologist. It is pathetic that no organisation is willing to invest inscholarship [*sic*].”³⁴

“Shirazi,” “Kifundi,” and “Vumba,” finally, refer to small populations of Muslim Kiswahili dialect speakers living on the islands and inlets of the South Coast—most notably on the islands of Funzi and Wasini and in the coastal towns of Shirazi, Bodo, Aleni and Vanga (see Map 0.3).³⁵

³³ T. A. Dickson, “Notes on the Wasegeju,” *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* 11 (1917), 167–8; KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5, C. B. Thompson, “Notes on the WaSegeju of Vanga District,” 2 Jun. 1918; KNA DC/1/3/5, [H. B. Sharpe?], “How the Wasegeju received their name as told to me by an Msegeju Elder,” [1925?]; KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. I, ADC L. A. Weaving, “Brief Notes on the Origin and Movements of the Wakambe,” 20 Mar. 1926, Kaya Kambe; KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. I, ADC L. A. Weaving, “Brief Notes on the Origin and Movements of the Wachonyi & Wajibana,” 25 Mar. 1926, Jibana; KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. I, ADC L. A. Weaving, “Brief Notes on the Origin and Movements of the Waribe and Wakauma,” 5 Apr. 1926, Kauma.

³⁴ KNA CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book Vol. III, E. J. F. Knowles, “Observations on the History of the Wanyika,” 1951.

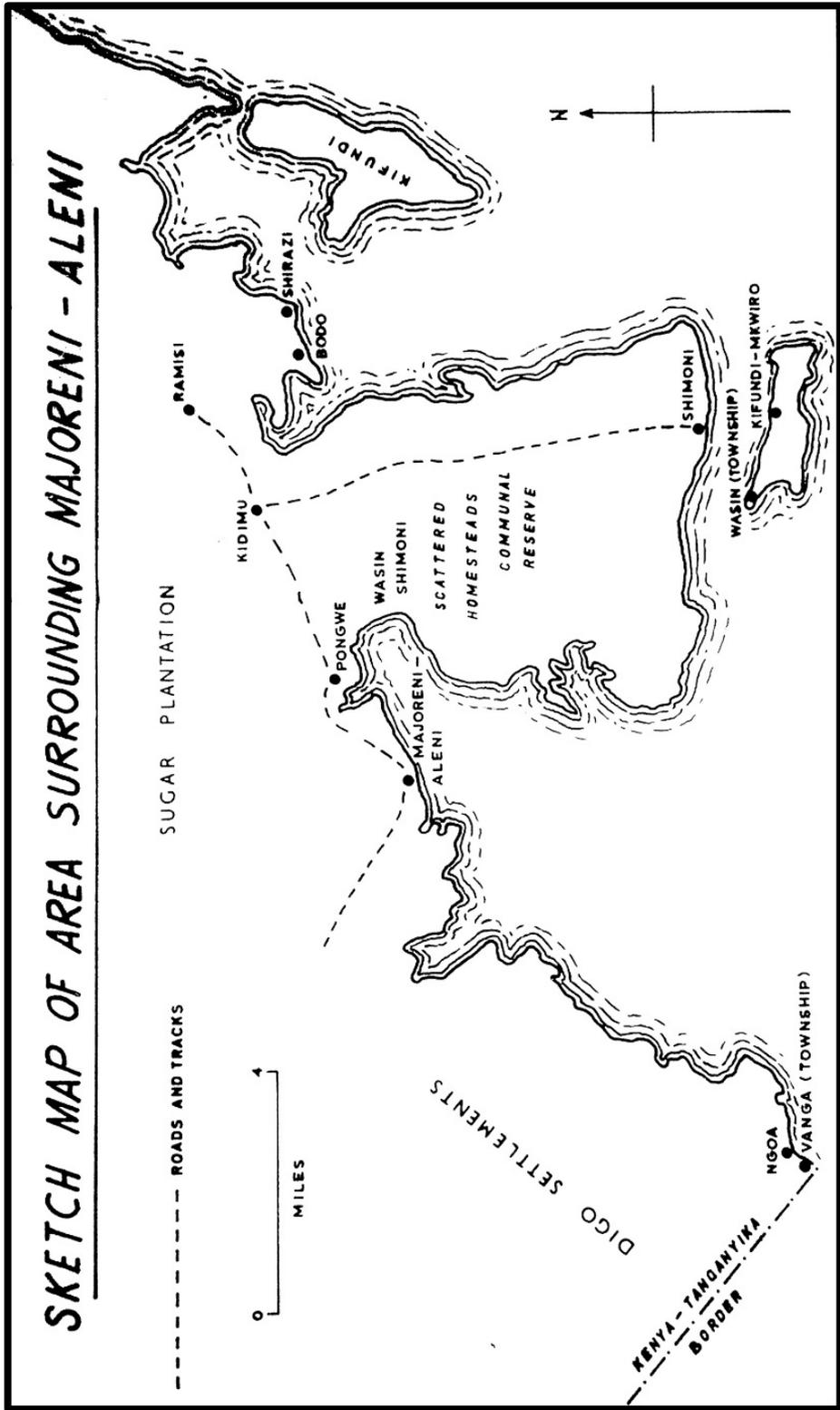
³⁵ On the “Kifundi/Kishirazi” and “Kivumba” Kiswahili dialects, see: H. E. Lambert, *Ki-Vumba: A Dialect of the Southern Kenya Coast* (Kampala: East African Swahili Committee, 1957) and H. E. Lambert, *Chi-Chifundi: A Dialect of the Southern Kenya Coast* (Kampala: East African Swahili Committee, 1958). On the “Shirazi” identity, which is encountered at points along much of the East African coast, see: A. C. Hollis, “Notes on the History of Vumba, East Africa,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900), 275–97; A. E. Robinson, “The Shirazi Colonization of East Africa: Vumba,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 7 (1939), 92–112; E. C. Baker, “Notes on the Shirazi of East Africa,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 11 (1941), 1–10; H. N. Chittick, “The ‘Shirazi’ Colonization of East Africa,” *The Journal of African History* 6:3 (1965), 275–294; R. L. Pouwels, “Oral Historiography and the Shirazi of the East African Coast,” *History in Africa* 11 (1984), 237–267; T. T. Spear, “The Shirazi in Swahili Traditions, Culture, and History,” *History in Africa* 11 (1984), 291–305; On the cultural continuities and contrasts between these “rural-dwelling Swahili-speakers” and more urban

Depending on the resolution of the annual censuses undertaken by DCs, these groups appeared either separately, or in some combination, or all together as “Coast Tribes.” These populations claim patrilineal Arab and Persian descent (and in the case of some Vumba, status as “Sharifs”), but were denied “Non-Native Status” by the colonial administration, which would have come with certain legal benefits, including a lower rate of taxation and the waiving of the communal labor requirements under the Native Authorities Act (Wijeyewardene 1958, 4).³⁶ These claims to Non-Native Status were “strongly opposed by the Protectorate [of Kenya]’s Arab administrators” (Ibid., 5).³⁷ The “tribal” diversity of the region, combined with complex patterns of settlement, land ownership, and usufruct rights led the administration to create a “Communal Reserve” on the Shimoni Peninsula, the only such non-“Tribal Reserve” in the Kenya Colony and Protectorate (Map 0.3).

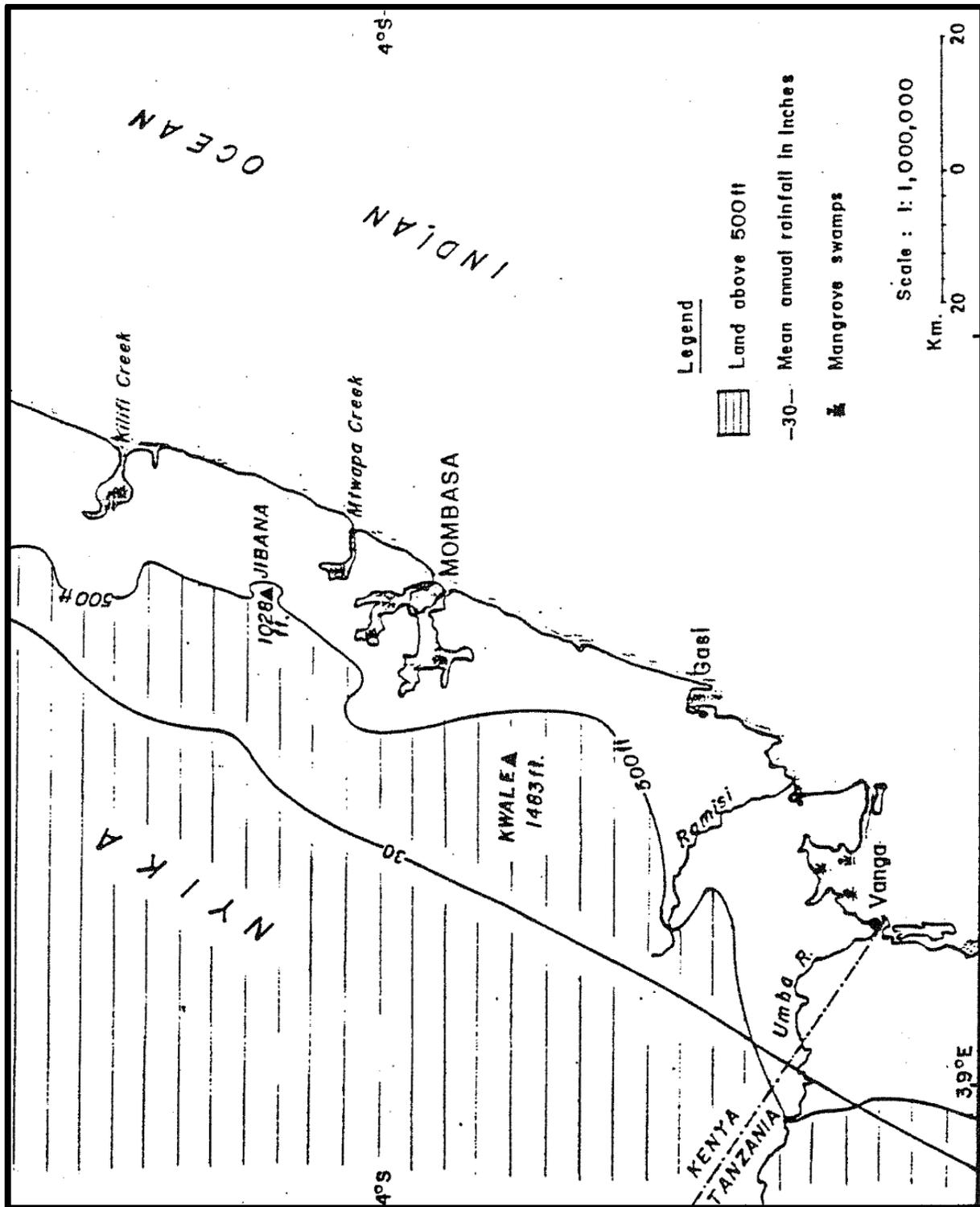
Swahili “townsmen,” see J. de V. Allen, “Town and Country in Swahili Culture,” in *Symposium Leo Frobenius: Perspectives des études africaines* (Pullach: Verlag Dokumentation, 1974), 298–316.

³⁶ See also: A. I. Salim, “‘Native or Non-Native?’ The Problem of Identity and the Social Stratification of the Arab-Swahili of Kenya,” in B. A. Ogot (ed.) *Hadith 6: History and Social Change in East Africa* (Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1976), 65–85.

³⁷ “As part of the Protectorate of Kenya, [the coastal strip stretching roughly from round the Kenya-Tanganyika border up to the township of Msambweni, about 25 miles south of Mombasa, and including the whole of the Shimoni peninsula and the inhabited islands of Funzi, Wasin, and Kirui] is administered by the District Commissioner, Kwale (Digo District) through two Arab officials, the Liwali of Gazi and the Mudir of Vanga. The Mudir has under him [in 1958] four chiefs, at Vanga, Pong’we, Lungalunga and Kikoneni. Each chief is assisted by a headman, except the chief of Pong’we, who has two. ... The chiefs are appointed by Government, are salaried and non-hereditary posts—the same applies to the headmen. In effect all these appointments are made by the District Commissioner on the sole recommendation of the Mudir.” G. E. T. Wijeyewardene, “A Preliminary Report on Tribal Differentiation and Social Groupings on the Southern Kenya Coast,” East African Institute of Social Research Conference, Makerere College, Kampala, June 1958.



Map 0.3: "Sketch Map of Area Surrounding Majoreni—Aleni," from Wijeyewardene 1961, Appendix.



Map 0.5: Detail, "Map 2: The Southern Kenya Coast (showing topography)" (Spurling 1988, 13)

Ideal-typically, the Shirazi, Kifundi, and Vumba peoples, as *watu wa pwani* (“people of the coast/shore”), are closely associated with fishing, both in the open ocean and in tidal creeks and mangrove swamps. The Digo and Segeju are thought of as primarily agriculturalists, growing maize, rice, cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, lentils, and pumpkins, cultivating groves of coconut, cashew, mango, and orange trees, and keeping chickens and occasionally goats or sheep. The Duruma, finally, who live primarily in the more arid and elevated “hinterland” (see Maps. 0.4 and 0.5), are imagined as more sparsely settled sedentary cattle-keeping pastoralists, the least Islamic and most “traditional” of the region’s “tribes.” Notice, then, that within this schema (which is as much a local ideology as it is a rough-and-ready analytic abstraction to help orient the reader), as one moves from east to west one moves from wet to dry, low to high, urban to rural, and Islam to “traditional religion,” through a range of climactic zones each lending itself to an iconic livelihood (fishing-agriculture-pastoralism) that also maps approximately onto an ethnic identity.

From east to west one also moves (albeit less neatly) from patrilineal to matrilineal descent. The Shirazi, Kifundi, Vumba and Segeju practice a form of patrilineal descent (and inheritance) characterized by a high rate of endogamy, with preferential cross-cousin and patrilateral (but not matrilateral) parallel cousin marriage. The Digo (like the more well-known Yao) are matrilineal but also Muslim (and have been for over a century, during which time they are consistently described as being “in transition” from matriliney to patriliney) and thus possess a range of cultural, religious, and legal resources and principles for the negotiation of descent and inheritance.³⁸

³⁸ See: KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, [C. C. F. Dundas?], “Digo Customs,” 1916; C. W. Hobley (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), “Digo Internal Organization,” 28 February 1916; G. H. Osborne (District Commissioner, Vanga), to C. W. Hobley, 9 March 1916; G. H. Osborne to C. W. Hobley, 19 November 1917; H. L. Mood, “Inheritance,” n.d.; G. B. Thompson (Acting District Commissioner, Vanga), [correction to G. H. Osborne’s “The Wadigo of Vanga District”], 1918; H. E. Lambert (Assistant District Commissioner, Digo), “Note on the ‘Mjomba rule’,” 30 May

Duruma kinship, finally, is described as a “double unilineal descent” system “with a matrilineal emphasis,” although it too is often described as “in transition” to a more patrilineal form.³⁹

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Let me now begin to complicate this rather simplistic, atemporal thumbnail sketch of the region by introducing a more explicitly historical narrative. This will be precisely the sort of linear history that the rest of the dissertation will spend critiquing and complexifying. It is intended, like the preceding section, only to help orient readers who are not already familiar with this region and its past, and with the substantial body of literature on the subject that already exists.

As Richard Helm points out, recent archaeological work “has demonstrated that the coast and the immediate hinterland of Kenya were characterised by a continuous and evolving cultural sequence of iron working and farming societies spanning the early first to late second millennium

1924; KNA PC/COAST/1/13/72 H. B Sharpe, “Note on the Tiwi Inheritance Case, Midzi Chenda Cases 14/24 & 26/24, Estate of Pojo, Deceased,” 30 May 1924; KNA CP.572 KEN, W. S. Marchant, “Matrilineal Inheritance,” n.d.; O. F. Watkins, “Note to the District Commissioner,” 7 August 1928; O. F. Watkins (Provincial Commissioner, Coast) to D. L. Baines (Provincial Commissioner, Tanga, Tanganyika), 21 August 1928; D. L. Baines to O. F. Watkins, 5 September 1928; “Record of a meeting held at Tanga on December 8–9th 1928, between officers of Kenya and Tanganyika Governments”; H. R. Montgomery (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), “Digo Inheritance,” 13 March 1930; “Digo Inheritance,” 18 March 1930; Ll. A. Field Jones (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), “Matrilineal Inheritance,” 13 February 1933; C. T. Davenport, “Re. Matrilineal and Patrilineal Inheritance,” 14 February, 1933; G. R. B. Brown (District Commissioner, Kwale), “Extract from Digo District annual report for 1938. Anthropological.”

³⁹ J. L. Bergman, “A Willingness to Remember: The Persistence of Duruma Culture and Collective Memory” (unpublished PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997), 14, 20. See also: KNA CC/13/36, Provincial African Courts Officer (PACO), “Duruma Inheritance,” 4 Apr. 1961; ADC Kwale, “Resolution No. 5/61,” 18 May 1961; PACO to DC Kwale, “Duruma Inheritance,” 5 Jun. 1961; KNA CC/1/46 DC Digo District, “Duruma Law of Inheritance,” 1949.

AD.”⁴⁰ There is, he stresses, “clear evidence for continuity and expansion of occupation, illustrating that these changes formed an unbroken sequence of long-term and interconnected settlement development ... concentrated in the moist, fertile forest margins of the eastern coastal uplands.”⁴¹ By the seventh to eight centuries AD, these populations (which Shipton et al. 2013 characterize as “Bantu”) began to expand eastward toward the coastal lowlands (see Map 0.6, “phase 2”).⁴² This is also the period to which the earliest “Swahili” settlements are dated (Horton 1996; Nurse and Spear 1985).

Early archaeological research in the region focused on the monumental architecture of “stone towns,” “pillar tombs,” and mosques of sites dating from roughly the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries AD, and more or less viewed these as Arab or Persian settlements that had developed out of maritime trade relations dating back to the first century AD.⁴³ From this point of view, “‘Colonial and comfortable’ would be a reasonable description of life in the coastal cities of Kenya up to the end of the 16th century,” as James Kirkman put it in 1966.⁴⁴ A conceptual distinction was maintained between the Arab- and Persian-descended inhabitants of these walled, coral rag-built, Indian Ocean-oriented coastal towns and the “Bantu” residents of wattle and daub

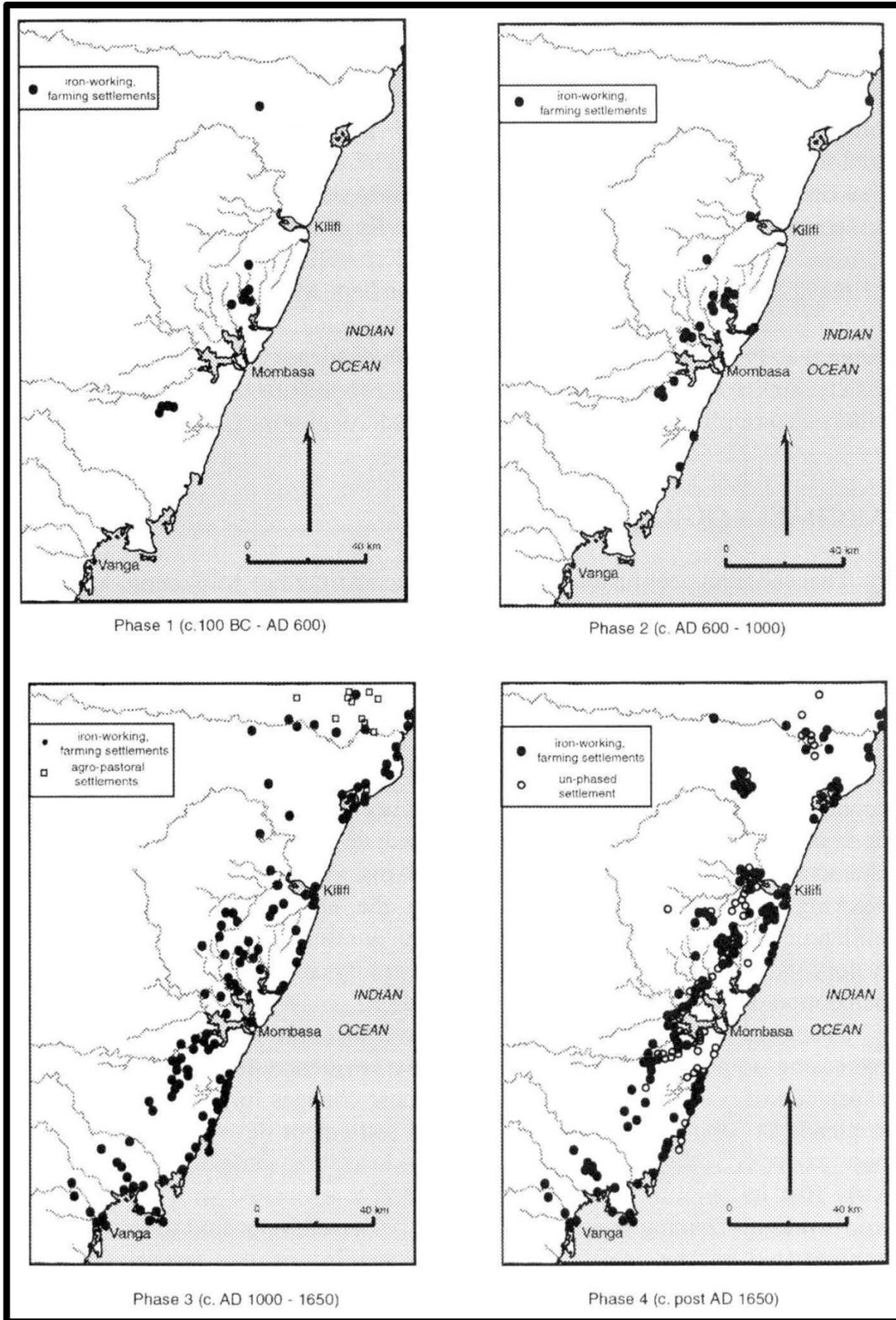
⁴⁰ R. Helm, “Re-Evaluating Traditional Histories on the Coast of Kenya: An Archaeological Perspective,” in A. M. Reid and P. J. Lane (eds.) *African Historical Archaeologies* (New York: Plenum, 2004), 71.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 75; Shipton, C. et al., “Intersections, Networks and the Genesis of Social Complexity on the Nyali Coast of East Africa,” *African Archaeological Review* 30:4 (2013), 447.

⁴³ See: H. N. Chittick, “Kilwa and the Arab Settlement of the East African Coast,” *Journal of African History* 4:2 (1963), 179–90; H. N. Chittick, “The ‘Shirazi’ Colonization of East Africa,” *Journal of African History* 6:3 (1965), 275–294; J. S. Kirkman, *The Arab City of Gedi: Excavations at the Great Mosque, Architecture and Finds* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); J. S. Kirkman, “Kinuni: An Arab Manor on the Coast of Kenya,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3/4 (1957), 145–50; J. S. Kirkman, *Men and Monuments of the East African Coast* (London: Lutterworth, 1964)

⁴⁴ J. S. Kirkman, “The Kenya Littoral,” *Current Anthropology* 7:3 (1966), 347–348.



Map 0.6: “Phased distribution map of known archaeological sites” (Helm 2004, 74).

or thatch structures in less densely populated “villages” in the hinterland. And as Justin Willis points out, “books on the history of East Africa have tended to treat the coast and the interior in separate chapters, and those chapters discussing the coast deal with coastal towns, and overseas trade, not with the ‘half savage’ (as two historians have put it) inhabitants of the narrow strip of populated hinterland that lies immediately behind the towns.”⁴⁵

Such a view of East African history has long-since been discredited and for the most part abandoned, but as Jeffrey Fleisher points out, “because Swahili towns have been understood largely through their external relations, such that trade and mercantilism have come to define urban function,” the “local social relations that were crucial to the development and maintenance of Swahili towns” have largely been ignored or “overshadowed.”⁴⁶ Fleisher has proposed a more “compositional” understanding of these towns’ development, involving “populations shifting from the countryside to found a new center,” echoing Mark Horton’s (1996) archaeological studies of Shanga, which suggest “a more inclusive process of town formation, based on the drawing together of diverse populations, rather than the walling off of towns from surrounding areas.”⁴⁷ Helm, however, has shown that “settlement changes were not restricted to simplistic intensification and expansion, but were also marked by fluctuations in the sizes of the settlement.”⁴⁸ The key point (moving right along) is that this was a dynamic process, that “the country and the city” (Williams 1973) developed in relation to one another, and that the stark division between the two was less an

⁴⁵ Willis, *Mombasa*, 25.

⁴⁶ J. Fleisher, “Swahili Synoecism: Rural Settlements and Town Formation on the Central East African Coast, A.D. 750–1500,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* 35:3 (2010), 266.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 280, 278.

⁴⁸ Helm, “Re-Evaluating,” 75.

empirical reality than a folk model or ideology mediating the constant flow of people, objects, and ideas between them.

Vasco da Gama's arrival in Mombasa and Malindi in April 1498—in the middle of the “‘golden age’ of coastal history” from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century (Pouwels 1987: 24)—marks the beginning of what Justus Strandes called, in 1899, “the Portuguese period in East Africa” (1961 [1899]).⁴⁹ Portuguese involvement in the western Indian Ocean—which included the occupation or destruction of “the most crucial commercial centers of the entire Indian Ocean, including Sofala, Kilwa, Mombasa, Brava, Shihir, Muscat, Ormuz, and Goa”—severely disrupted the political economy of the entire region, “over which the Portuguese notably failed to establish control.”⁵⁰ Under the Yarubi Imamate (with British backing), the Omanis successfully drove the Portuguese first from Muscat in 1650 and, in 1698, from Fort Jesus in Mombasa, where the Imam settled a Mazrui governor and his kinsmen in the mid-1730s.⁵¹ The Yarubi were overthrown by the Busaidi in the 1740s, but the Mazrui in East Africa refused to recognize their sovereignty, and so for almost a century operated as independent sovereigns of much of the Kenyan coast.⁵² In 1837, however, Sayyid Said, the Busaidi Sultan of Oman, successfully captured Fort Jesus and the Mazrui leadership, and moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar shortly thereafter.

In late December 1843, the Christian missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf arrived in Takaungu, a Mazrui-controlled town north of Mombasa, where he was “told for the first time of

⁴⁹ See: E. G. Ravenstein (ed. and trans.), *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499* (London: Hakluyt, 1898).

⁵⁰ R. L. Pouwels, “Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean to 1800: Reviewing Relations in Historical Perspective,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35:2/3 (2002), 399.

⁵¹ R. L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 98; F. J. Berg, “The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500–1900,” *Journal of African History* 9:1 (1968), 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 98–9.

the heathen Wanika, of whom I saw there several, belonging to the tribe Kauma, and heard with great interest that they were accessible to strangers, were agriculturalists and traders, and that a stranger might travel among them without any special danger, provided he were furnished with a guide and companion from the Suahilis of the coast.”⁵³ Krapf describes the relationship between the island of Mombasa (where he arrived in January 1844) and the peoples of the hinterland in the following terms:

The people of Mombaz trade with the Wanika and Wakamba of the surrounding country, and sometimes their caravans go even as far as the mountain-land of Jagga, bringing thence chiefly ivory and slaves. The Wanika tribes are nominally dependent upon Mombaz, and are governed by four Suahili sheikhs who live in Mombaz; but the connection between the town and these tribes is extremely loose and undefined; rendered more so, indeed, by the barbarous conduct of the people of Mombaz toward these heathen tribes, especially in times of famine, when they purchase the children of the Wanika, or make off with them as slaves in return for provisions furnished to the parents.⁵⁴

Over the next several decades, Krapf and others (Johannes Rebmann, John James Erhardt, Charles New, Thomas Wakefield, William Ernest Taylor, John B. Griffiths) would establish a number of mission stations along the coast, most notably at Rabai, one of an unknown number of large, fortified settlements on the ridges and hills of the coastal hinterland, called *kayas*.

⁵³ J. L. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors During and Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa, together with Journeys to Jagga, Usambara, Ukambani, Shoa, Abessinia, and Khartoum; and a Coasting Voyage from Mombaz to Cape Delgado* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 95–6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

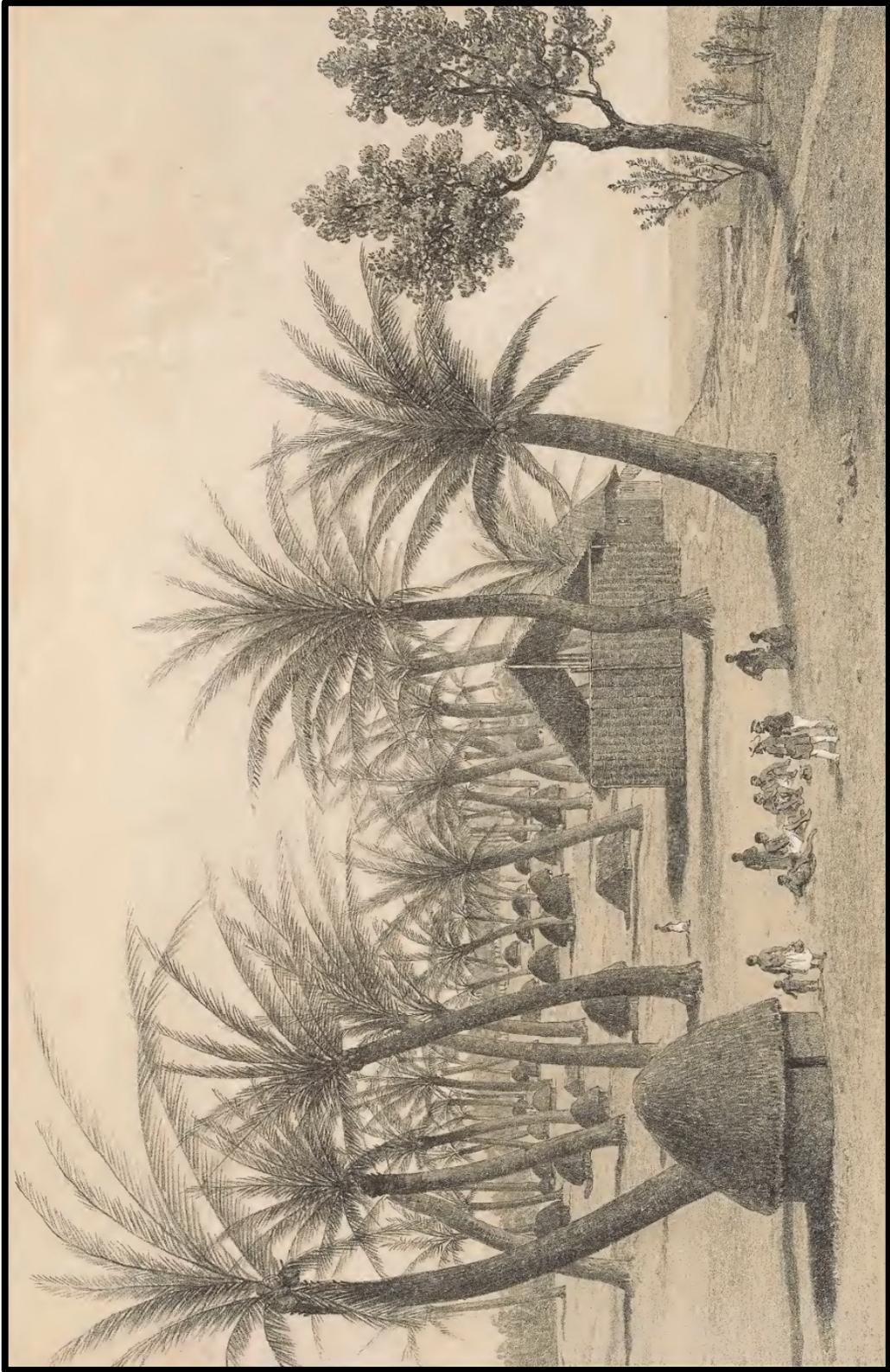


Image 0.1: “Vue du village de Rabaye,” (Guillain 1856b, Plate 48).

In Mijikenda origin stories collected in the twentieth century (discussed in detail in Chapter One), there were six “original” and three secondary *kayas*, making up the “nine towns” of the “miji kenda.”⁵⁵ According to Thomas Spear’s classic account, “these individual settlements defined the individual peoples, for, whether they were separate peoples or not prior to settlement, *kaya* residence came to be a critical element of self-identification.”⁵⁶ Spear acknowledges that “during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries some subsidiary *kayas* were built, especially in Digo,” but as Willis and others has subsequently shown, “there are in fact considerably more than the nine *kayas* of oral tradition” (see Map 0.7) and “some *kayas* were being created in the late nineteenth century, when this institution is widely assumed to have been in terminal decline.”⁵⁷ And although Henry Mutoro claims that “the *kaya* is unique to the Mijikenda people, and as such remains a symbol of their identity,” a comparison of *kaya* layouts (see Appendix) with those of neighboring “non-Mijikenda” peoples shows that this is not the case.⁵⁸ Similar spatial forms are attested in “Swahili” archaeological sites (Horton 1996:84), the Segeju settlement at Pongwe (Owen 1833 v.2: 141) the “Arab stronghold” of Mwele (see Chapter Four; elsewhere Mwele is described as a “Duruma village,” *nota bene*), the Ngulu (Last 1882: 150–1, Beidelman 1967: 61) and Zaramo, Kwere, Zigula, Kaguru, Sagara, and Vidundu of northeast Tanzania (Beidelman 1967: 17, 23, 27, 38, 51, 54, 67–8; Beidelman 1993: 53), as well as Waata hunter-gatherers.⁵⁹

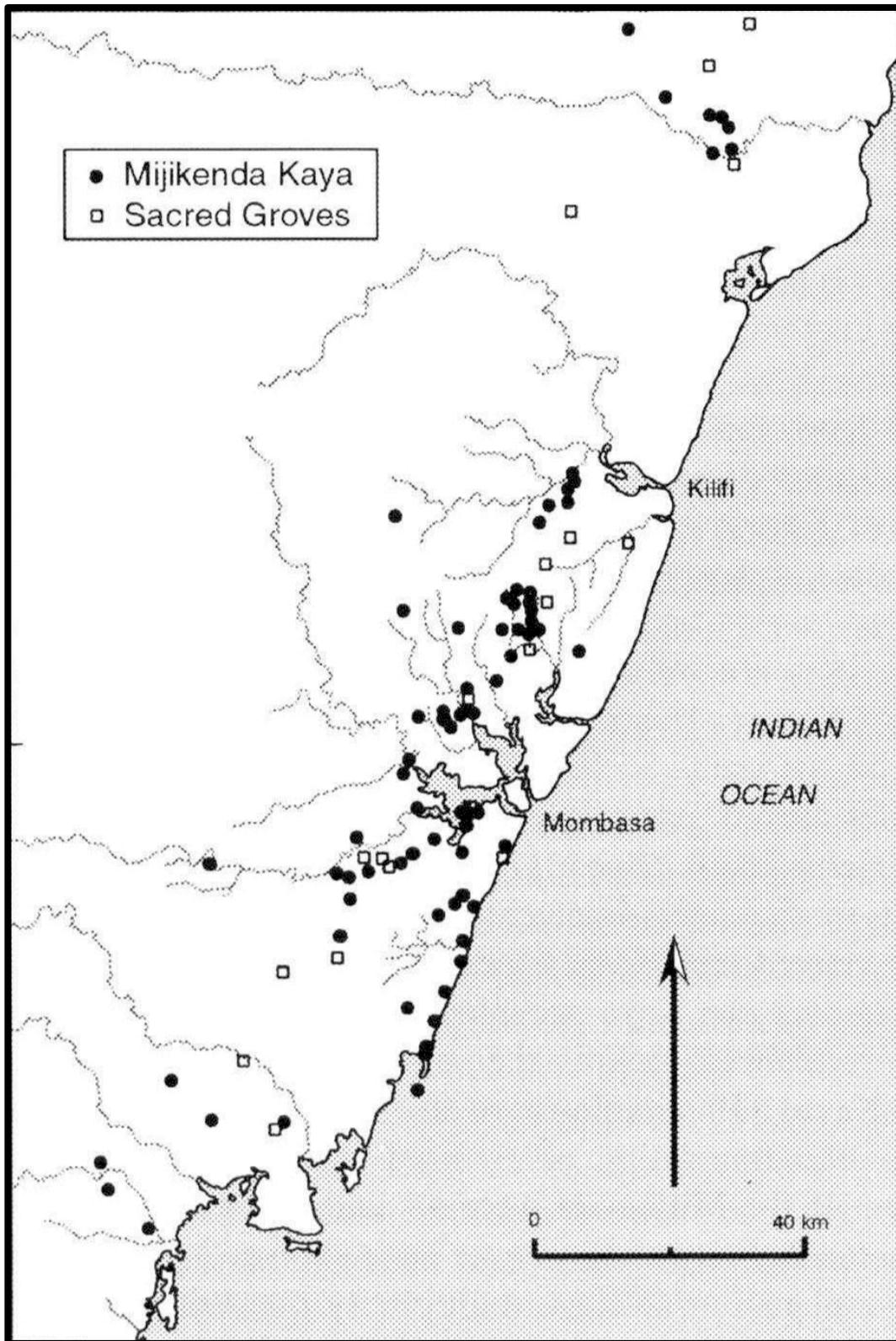
⁵⁵ T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), 46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ J. Willis, “The Northern Kayas of the Mijikenda: A Gazetteer and Historical Reassessment,” *Azania* 31 (1996), 76.

⁵⁸ H. W. Mutoro, “The Mijikenda *Kaya* as a Sacred Site.” In D. L. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves, and A. Schanche (eds.) *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places* (London: Routledge, 1994),

⁵⁹ Kenya National Archives (KNA), Nairobi, Kenya. DC/KWL/1/5/1, H. B. Sharpe, “The Warungula Elephant Hunters of the Coast Hinterland,” n.d. [ca. 1924].



Map 0.7: "Mijikenda Kayas and Sacred Groves," (Helm 2004, 72).

Nor is the presence of a *finigo*—“a complete pottery vessel filled with medicines and magic charms to protect the *kaya* and its occupants from evil spirits and enemies”—unique to the *kayas*, even within Mijikenda society, historically or in the present.⁶⁰ Both barter market (*chete*) and cash sale market (*soko*) clearings in Kwale County have *finigo* charms buried on their premises to protect those transacting business from violence, misunderstandings, and witchcraft that might otherwise easily develop there, and to ensure the general prosperity of the market.⁶¹ Gerlach, for instance, records an oral history from the late 1950s of the founding of the Lunga lunga *chete* barter market in which “the founders of the market engaged in a secret ritual to consecrate a shrine or *finigo*. A good market *finigo* ... gives the market ‘strength’ and assures its success.”⁶² This was confirmed by market histories I collected in 2015, which also revealed that at the establishment of new weekly markets, specialists continue to be engaged by the market’s founders to create protective *finigos* that must be tended with occasional offerings of food and incense.⁶³

At the same time, *finigo* (or objects of the same description—clay vessels containing protective medicine buried in the ground—but called other names) continue to be produced and buried in the ground in individual homesteads, both within larger “village” settlements and in more isolated settings. I participated in the ritual creation and burial of such an object in 2014, when the home in which I was living felt itself to be under siege by neighboring witches. “*Kaya*” is often

⁶⁰ Mutoro, “The Mijikenda Kaya,” 134. Mutoro also calls the *finigo* a “ritual symbol,” but it is unclear what this means, especially when the *kaya* it “defines” by its presence is also a “symbol” of Mijikenda “identity.” Ibid.

⁶¹ On the distinction between *chete* and *soko*, see the unpublished research report prepared by Luther Gerlach for the Provincial Administration as a condition of his research clearance, “Trade and Markets in Digo District, Kenya.” KNA CC/25/13 Trade and Markets—Digo District, Kenya, June 1960.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ INT 42a, INT 54b, INT 56b, INT 58. See also: INT 41c, INT 48b, INT 54a, INT 55b,

used, like its Kiswahili equivalent “*mji*,” to refer to settlements at a range of scale from “city” to “homestead,” even if the latter should include only one or two houses. And as Willis points out, “the evidence for the multiplicity of *kayas*, and for conflicts over them, and for residence without them, spans a hundred and fifty years.”⁶⁴

In 1992, Martin Walsh called for researchers to “start talking about a developmental cycle of *kayas*,” suggesting that a “a process of fission (and periodic fusion)” — what Fleisher calls “synoecism” in the “Swahili” case — may have been a Mijikenda norm.⁶⁵ Incorporating this more recent oral historical and archaeological evidence, Willis has proposed a new interpretation of the place of the *kayas* in Mijikenda history:

Additional *kayas* were not simply replacements, or subordinate; they could represent a challenge to the old men who controlled the existing *kaya*, from others who resented the exactions of these men [see Chapters Three and Four] or who felt that they had failed to guarantee “social health”—the well-being of the community. Moreover, the *kayas* were not uniform or unchanging; rather the very forms which they took represented an unceasing struggle for control of ritual resources, amongst old men, and between old men and young men, and between men and women. Old men sought always to control the *kaya*, and to bring new forms of power within the purview of the *kaya*; while other old men, and sometimes younger men, established new *kayas*, or pursued alternative paths to social health.⁶⁶

As I go on to show, this kind of inter- and intra-generational conflict among South Coast kin over the control of women, other men, and their children, their place of residence, their labor, and the appropriate form of compensation for it, are key to understanding the political economy, temporality, and changing meanings of occult ritual and rumor in southern coastal Kenya in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Meillassoux 1972, 1981 [1975]).

⁶⁴ Willis, “The Northern Kayas,” 96.

⁶⁵ M. Walsh, “Mijikenda Origins: A Review of the Evidence,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992), 10.

⁶⁶ Willis, “The Northern Kayas,” 97.

Before leaving the nineteenth century, it is important to note that over the course of that century, a series of treaties between the Sultan of Zanzibar and Great Britain slowly restricted the scope of the East African slave trade, and as a result, the nature of East African slavery as well. These included the “Moresby Treaty” of 1822 (which banned the export of slaves to Christian nations which, because it was a colonial possession of England, included India), the “Hamerton Treaty” of 1845/7 (which banned the export of slaves out of the Sultan’s East African dominion), the Treaty of 1873 (which banned the maritime shipment of slaves), and the Treaty of 1876 (which banned the overland trade in slaves within the Sultan’s dominions).⁶⁷ These had the combined effect of transforming the regional slave economy “from one that was based primarily on the export of slaves to one based predominantly on production by slave labour within East Africa of commodities for export,” and (especially after the 1876 treaty) of dramatically increasing the number of slaves available for purchase at the coast (Willis and Miers 1997: 487).⁶⁸ And as Willis and Miers have persuasively argued, “the increased availability of bought slaves in the latter part of the nineteenth century enabled ‘new men’”—ambitious accumulators of wealth and status whose rise to prominence in this period is in part a result of this increased availability—“to reduce the autonomy of all their dependants—whether they were bought slaves, or were acquired in other ways,” further complicating the inter- and intra-generational structural conflicts outlined above.⁶⁹ It is in this context, I would argue, that one should understand the widespread conversion of young men among the southern matrilineal Mijikenda—the Digo especially—to Islam, beginning in the

⁶⁷ See Cooper (1977: 270) for a list of these and other anti-slave trade measures between 1822 and 1890.

⁶⁸ A. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Athens, OH, 1987), 35.

⁶⁹ J. Willis and S. Miers, “Becoming a Child of the House: Incorporation, Authority and Resistance in Giryama Society,” *Journal of African History* 38:3 (1997), 479–495.

late nineteenth century: “Islam marked not only their attachment to a new patron, but their freedom from the demands of the elders, from a gerontocracy which drew its strength from non-Islamic ritual and belief.”⁷⁰

In 1887, the British East Africa Association (BEAA) arranged a fifty-year lease of all of the Sultan of Zanzibar’s mainland possessions between the towns of Vanga (in the south) and Kipini (in the north). The Association’s representatives quickly obtained from various “Chiefs” of the coastal and hinterland “tribes” marks on a form letter indicating that had each “placed himself, country, and peoples under the protection of the British East African Association.”⁷¹ The following year the BEAA was incorporated by royal charter as the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). As “free people who have made treaties with and placed themselves under the jurisdiction of this Company,” none could legally “be held as a slave,” as seemed to be happening in early 1890, when it was reported that “the Wanika and Giriama tribes are now making war upon each other and selling their captives into slavery.”⁷² This did not apply, the Administration was quick to point out, to “the ordinary domestic slaves who are heretofore recognized to be the property of their masters according to old custom and the law of the Sultan of Zanzibar. With such slaves the Company has no intention to interfere; they will be dealt with according to the Sherials

⁷⁰ Willis, *Mombasa*, 73. These tensions persisted well into the colonial period. See KNA CC1/3/10 Digo District Annual Report, 1924: “At the beginning of the year there was also some light Mahomedan versus pagan feeling amongst the natives of the Littoral. The old men taking up the pagan and the young men the Mahomedan cudgels. It has now settled down and I think was really the natural expression of dissatisfaction of youth against, to them, the irksome control of age.”

⁷¹ School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library Archives, University of London, PP.MS.1 Mackinnon Papers IBEA Co., Box 78 Volume 1, 87–127 and Volume 2, 89–95.

⁷² PP.MS.1 Mackinnon Papers IBEA Co., Box 78 Volume 2, George S. Mackenzie, “Slavery—Proclamation,” 423 [ident. “Copy of Proclamation regarding Slavery of Friendly Tribes, issued by the Administrator, Mombasa, 1st May, 1890,” 437–8].

[sic].”⁷³ The question of what was “old custom” and what was Sharia, and to whom they could each be applied, became more acute when the IBEAC’s lease of the Sultan’s mainland territories was taken over by the British Crown in 1895, becoming the British East Africa Protectorate.

Under the terms of the lease agreement with the Sultan, Islamic law was to be applied to his now British Protected Subjects. The Protectorate established a series of administrative districts, the non-Muslim inhabitants of which were subject to what would come to be called “Native Law and Custom,” the content of which had to be determined and codified for each “tribe.” The large-scale conversion of the Digo to Islam in the late nineteenth century posed a dilemma that plagued the administration for decades: Were Muslim Digo to be governed according to Native Law and Custom or according to Sharia Law?⁷⁴ This question posed itself most frequently in the Kenyan courts in inheritance disputes, but it bore more pressingly (and with more dramatic long-term consequences) on the question of who could hold title to land.⁷⁵ Islamic law recognized individual

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, the efforts of Mombasa District Commissioner (DC) Charles Dundas to elicit the opinions of the Digo Councils of Elders as to whether they wished to be subject to Native Law and Custom (in which case they would be the ones hearing the cases and collecting the fees) or according to Islamic law (in which case they would not, but rather be subject to the rulings of a Kadhi from the coast). Unsurprisingly, they all asked to “abide by our tribal custom.” KNA PC/COAST/1/13/72 C. C. F. Dundas to PC Coast, 1 Jul. 1915; PC Coast to Chief Native Secretary; Chief Justice High Court Mombasa to Chief Secretary Nairobi 25 Mar. 1916; Attorney General to Chief Secretary, “Re. Mohamedan Law at the Coast,” 14 Mar. 1916; C. C. F. Dundas to C. W. Hobley, 15 Apr. 1916, New Moschi; and KNA CO1/19/19 [formerly DC/MSA/3/4], C. Dundas and the Elders of Cheteni, Mtongwe, Matuga, Likoni, Pungu, Tiwi, Magogoni, Waa, Ngombeni, Kwale, and Vuga, 19 June 1915 to 29 June 1915.

⁷⁵ KNA PC/COAST/1/13/72 C. C. F. Dundas to PC Coast, 1 Jul. 1915; PC/COAST/2//11/36, Acting Chief Native Commissioner S. H. la Fontaine to all PCs and DCs, “Native Land Tenure,” 1 Nov. 1938; “Native Land Tenure Questionnaire,” DC Digo District to PC Coast, “Native Land Tenure,” 22 Nov. 1938; H. S. Potter for Chief Secretary, Secretariat Circular to PCs, “Native Land Tenure,” 11 Nov. 1938; Senior District Commissioner H. E. Lambert and District Officer P. Wyn Harris, “Policy in Regard to Land Tenure in the Native Lands of Kenya, 19 Mar. 1945; KNA CC/1/46 DC Digo District J. A. H. Wolff to PC Coast, “Native Law of Inheritance,.” 12 Dec. 1948; Native Court Officer (NCO) for Attorney General (AG) D. O’Hagar, “Native Law of Inheritance,”

freehold title, but Native Law and Custom, as established by the Protectorate, did not. Official inquiries seemed to reveal that for the non-Muslim peoples of the hinterland, the land “belonged to God,” and was only held in trust for the people by groups of elders who could allocate portions of it for the use of individuals and their families. And as Alfred Claud Hollis (former IBEAC agent, now Protectorate Administrative Officer) put it in a 1909 memo, “I do not think that the right of natives to sell land would hold good in a Court of Law as this is not the custom of the tribe, and the custom of the tribe can hardly be changed by a change of religion.”⁷⁶ The concern, in other words, was that individuals who had come into possession and use of land by virtue of their membership in matrilineal descent groups—according to “Native Law and Custom”—would, after conversion (disingenuously or instrumentally, it is often implied), attempt either to alienate this land or to pass it on to their sons under Islamic Law, depriving the matrilineal group (to which it would otherwise have reverted) of the land it had allocated to one of its members.

A series of laws—the Land Regulations of 1897, Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902, the Land Titles Ordinance of 1908—established, first, that the Crown had “original title” to land, and

22 Dec. 1948; DC Digo District J. A. H. Wolff to PC Coast, “Native Inheritance and Wills,” 23 Dec. 1949; Member for Health and Local Government M. N. Evans to PC Coast, “Native Inheritance and Wills,” 26 April 1950; DC Kwale P. M. Hughes to G. Roberts, *East African Standard*, 7 May 1951; KNA CC1/3/13 “Digo District Annual Report,” 1927; KNA CC1/3/14, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1928.; KNA PC/COAST/2/12/22, “Civil Case No. 12 of 1936 In the Kathi’s Court at Mombasa,” 26 Sep. 1936; “Judgment in Appeal Case No. 9 of 1937,” 18 Aug. 1937; DC Digo District to Registrar, Supreme Court, Mombasa,” *Selemani b/- Mtenda v. Ali Zuzu b/- Mwaruwa*,” 3 Jan. 1938; PC Coast to R. M. Doshi, Advocate, Mombasa, “Ali Maruwa Ref. Your Letter Dated 23/3/38,” 29 Mar. 1938; “Appeal No. 11/36 Original Case No. 87/36 Midzichenda,” 25 Sep. 1936; “Re:- Native Tribunal Court Case No. 87/1936 of Kwale,” 31 Oct. 1936; KNA CA/9/65, Mbaruk, Liwali Mombasa to PC Coast, 29 May 1937; DC Digo to PC Coast, “Midzichenda Ngambi:- Case no. 50 of 1937,” 2 Jun. 1937; Mbaruk, Liwali Mombasa to PC Coast, 7 Jun 1937.

⁷⁶ KNA PC/COAST/1/11/22, A. C. Hollis, Memorandum, 4 Mar. 1909, cited in H. bin A. Hamid, “Colonial Land Law and Muslim Societies in Coastal Kenya, 1895–1930s,” *Jurnal Usuluddin* 19 (2004), 163.

second, that uncultivated or (apparently) unoccupied land was “waste,” by virtue of which it reverted to the Crown. The 1908 ordinance also allowed the issuing of freehold titles to individuals who could demonstrate proof of ownership, to which end a Land Arbitration Board was established in 1910.⁷⁷ The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1915, finally, redefined “Crown Land” to include all land not privately owned, including land occupied by Africans under Native Law and Custom. Portions of this newly expanded Crown Land were then “reserved” for Africans—establishing the system of “Tribal Reserves”—making those living outside them into squatters on Crown or “Alienated”[-to-settlers-or-corporations] land.

Beginning in the 1920s a number of large settler “estates”—most notably East African Estates Limited, the Ramisi Sugar Estates and Gasi Sisal Plantations south of Mombasa, and the Vipingo and Kilifi Sisal Estates north of Mombasa—were established on leases of Crown Land surrounding the Nyika Reserves and Wassin Communal Reserve. Finding it difficult to entice local populations to work for wages on the estates, they primarily employed contract labor “imported” from Western Kenya.⁷⁸ Over the next several decades the administration tinkered relentlessly with the boundaries of the Tribal Reserves (which later became “Native Land Units”), arranging a series of land swaps between the Reserves and the various Estates and the creation of various “Settlement Schemes” on Crown Land.⁷⁹ During this period a series of Arbitration Boards, Advisory

⁷⁷ *Colonial Reports—Annual. No. 705. East Africa Protectorate. Report for 1910–11* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1912), 55.

⁷⁸ The ratio of “imported” to local labor fluctuated, but see, for example: KNA CA/6/1 Digo District Ramisi Sugar Estate Ltd. Labour, 1928–1954.

⁷⁹ BNA CO 533/701, “Digo Native Reserve,” 1927; CO 533/411/9, “Native Lands Trust Ordinance. Grant of leases for periods of 33 years and over. Ramisi Sugar Estate,” 1931–2; MR 1/1841, “Plan of Mwachi Forest Exchange” 1934; CO 533/476/15, “Land Commission Report Claims of Duruma to Mwachi Valley,” 1937; CO 533/488/6, Land Commission Report Claims of Duruma to Mwachi Valley,” 1937–8; CO 533/498/13, “Land Grants—Messrs. Kenya Sugar, Ltd.,”

Committees, Settlement Boards, and Land Titles Committees were periodically established and abandoned without ever satisfactorily addressing the growing number of unadjudicated land claims that had been lodged with them. By 1956, these were estimated to number 5,000.⁸⁰

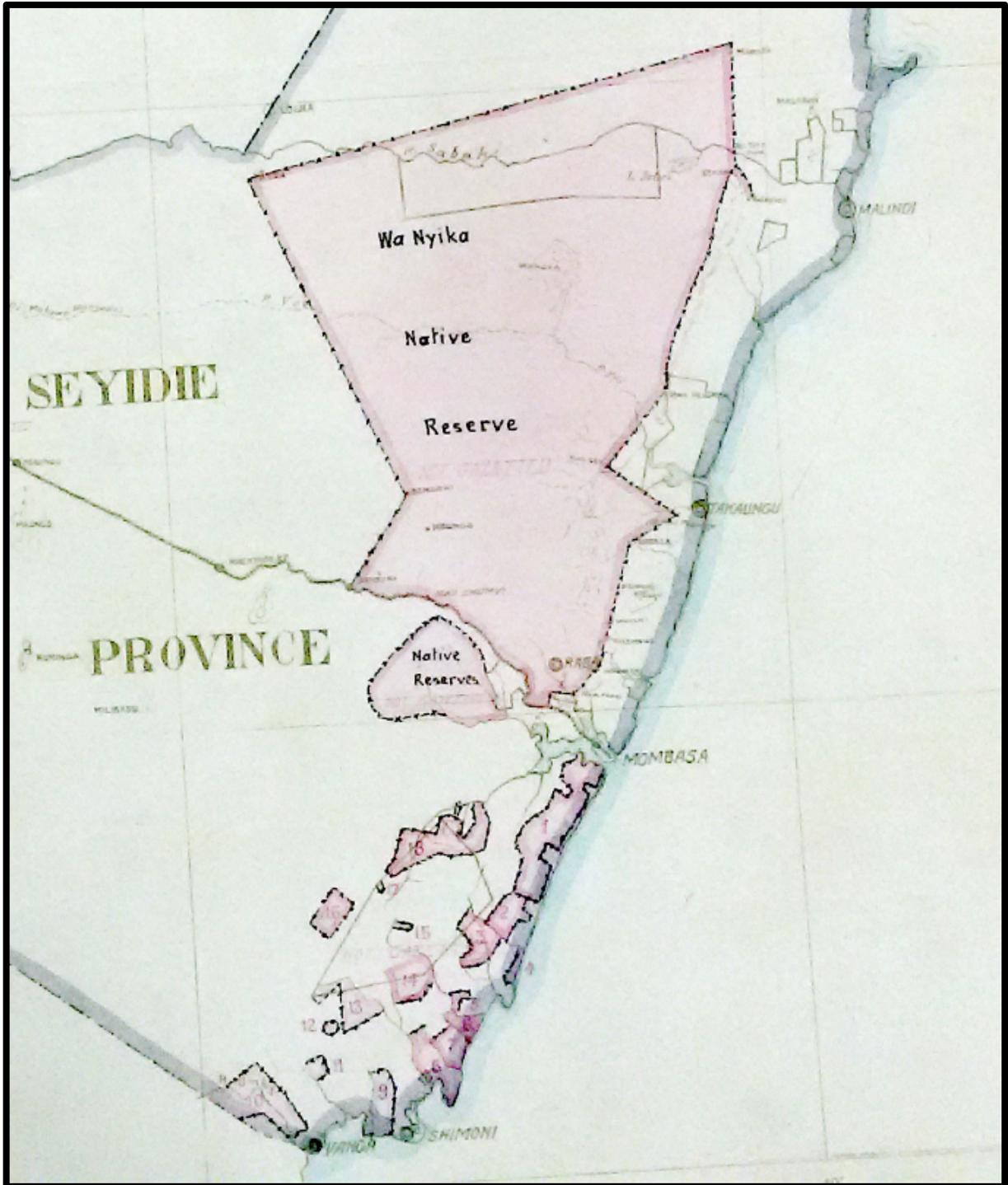
Although the system of Reserves was abolished at independence in 1963, laws relating to public land remained, as Kathleen Krauss points out, “virtually unchanged in the post-colonial constitution. While the wording shifted from ‘Crown’ to ‘President’ and ‘Crown Land’ to ‘Government Land,’ the enduring effect was a property rights system that vested the President with full powers to lease and grant land.”⁸¹ In 1968 under a new national land policy, the Kenyan government began anew the project of demarcation and registration of land claims (Gray 1972). In 1988, the Ramisi Sugar Company (now Madhivani Sugar Company) went into receivership, and the land it had leased from first the Crown reverted to the Kenyan Government. The still-unfinished process of land adjudication took on a new urgency as village headmen, eager to increase their influence and acting under the authority of President Daniel arap Moi’s “populist pronouncements” (which, as Kanyinga points out, were often interpreted by Government Officials as “directives) began inviting large numbers of new settlers onto what had until then been sugar company land.⁸²

1938; KNA CA/10/49, notes attached to Acting Commissioner for Local Government, Lands, and Settlement to Provincial Commissioner (PC) Coast, 1 July 1941;

⁸⁰ H. bin A. Hamid, “From Bad to Worse: The Implementation of the Land Titles Ordinance in Kenya, 1908–1960s,” *Proceedings of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific 2003 Conference*,” 37.

⁸¹ K. Krauss, “Claiming Land: Institutions, Narratives, and Political Violence in Kenya” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015), 50.

⁸² K. Kanyinga, *Re-Distribution from Above: The Politics of Land Rights and Squatting in Coastal Kenya* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000), 51.



Map 0.8 (left): Detail from “Map of East Africa Protectorate Showing Native Reserves & Closed Districts” showing (in pink) the early fragmented character of South Coast Native Reserves. British National Archives (BNA), Kew, England, MR 1/748/2, “Map of East Africa Protectorate,” 1910.



Map 0.9 (right): Detail from “Colony and Protectorate of Kenya” map showing (in yellow) the North and South Nyika Native Reserves and Digo Native Land Unit, April 1929. BNA CO 533/411/8 “Native Lands Trust Ordinance—Demarcation of Native Reserves.” Areas not highlighted are Crown and Alienated Land.

Many of these new settlers were Giriama, Chonyi, and Kamba from the north, but much of the land was already settled or claimed by Digo and Duruma squatters, who had hoped that the land adjudication process would give them legal title. A large number of these Digo and Duruma settlers had been squatting on undeveloped Company land for decades, which ought to have given them title by adverse possession. What ended up happening, however, was that (among other forms of deception and corruption), large parcels of land were awarded to “ghost” persons who then “sold” the land to an upcountry speculator the same day the title deed was issued, whereupon title became almost impossible to challenge in the courts.

Headmen, Chiefs, Members of Parliament, and unelected members of the Provincial Administration (itself a conservative relic of the Colonial period), as well as prominent local businesspeople, were widely suspected of collusion in this process, alerting upcountry *matajiri* (“wealthy people”) to the availability of land at the coast, for a fee. Many of those locals who were issued certificates of land registration following the relatively public process of land adjudication, but who had not gone through the additional expensive and time-consuming process of using that certificate to obtain an actual title deed later found out, one way or another, that their acreage had been whittled away by the wealthier owners of neighboring plots who had expanded their own boundaries during the much less public process of obtaining a title deed. In this way, one of the key signs of the state—and the entire process through which one was meant, after decades of promises, at last to obtain it—is revealed to be an “evil simulation,” to use Robert Blunt’s (2004: 295) phrase; a corrupt perversion of both an imagined past moral order in which elders managed clan land equitably, and a promised future order in which individual title to land could be used as security for loans that could be used as capital for agricultural improvements or business ventures.



Image 0.2: Photograph shared with the author during an interview of the subject standing in the ruins of his house. This, he stated, had been destroyed by the Provincial Administration and KISCOL to evict him from the land on which he and his family were “squatting.” At the time of the interview the case had been taken to court and an injunction to halt the evictions had been issued.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Part One, “Myth and Ritual,” begins in Chapter One, “History and Human Sacrifice in Mijikenda Myth and Ritual,” with a detailed examination of the history of a ritual of male initiation called *mung’aro*, “[the] shining.” I analyze a range of texts as “prefiguration” (early accounts of ritual killing and emasculation from Chinese and Portuguese sources), “testimony” (nineteenth-century accounts of Protestant missionaries and, in one case, of a convert who claimed to have had participated in *mung’aro* before his conversion), “memory” (early twentieth-century colonial ethnographic texts) “myth” (the appearance of *mung’aro* in Singwaya origin stories in the late twentieth century) and “trace” (the noticeable absence in the early twenty-first of *mung’aro* both from Mijikenda origin stories and from the collective memory of Kaya elders) of an image of ritual killing. I chart the historical movement in and out of descriptions of *mung’aro* of certain details, like the collection of genital trophies from the victims of initiatory killings, and point out certain other persistent features of these descriptions. I suggest that these are the elements of what I have called an associational nexus of images having to do with the danger of movement, the connection of rain and power, and intergenerational conflict. By way of conclusion I consider the submerged theme of slavery in these accounts, suggesting that together with the Oral Traditions to be examined in Chapter Two, these texts also encode an argument about patronage and betrayal.

Chapter Two, “Singwaya Narratives and Mijikenda Traditions of Origin,” undertakes a historiographical review of the literature on Mijikenda “origins.” From an early concern with trying to identify the site actual site of an actual “homeland”—the historical reality of which was uncritically accepted by early historians and archaeologists of the East African coast—I move to a debate in the second half of the twentieth century among historians, linguists, archaeologists, and anthropologists about the epistemological status of Singwaya, about the study of oral traditions as

either (or both) “history” and “myth,” and about the use of other kinds of evidence in reconstructing the past. Departing from approaches that would interpret these narratives in such terms, I turn to the collection of “Mijikenda Historical Traditions” collected by Thomas Spear in 1971 to highlight, at one level, the internal diversity, rather than consistency, of these narratives, and the patterned distribution of certain narrative elements among Mijikenda sub-groups. Pointing ahead, I argue that despite the heterogeneity of these narratives with respect to the cause of the exodus from Singwaya, an underlying unity is suggested by situating them in relation to the narratives examined in Chapter One, which cite an initiation ritual as the cause of the migration.

Part Two, “Political Institutions and the Occult Ground of Authority,” analyzes the historical development of what I call a “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion” by rooting in the political and economic transformation of coastal Kenyan society over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chapter Three, “Elders, Power, and Secrecy in South Coast Political Imagination,” begins with a discussion of the 1997 “Kaya Bombo Clashes,” in which pseudo-traditional militias of young Digo men who had been trained and ritually “oathed” by old Digo men, attacked “upcountry” Kenyans to destabilize and depopulate potential opposition strongholds in the run-up to a multi-party election. In particular, I highlight both the ways in which the events of 1997 resonate with earlier accounts of the *mung’aro* ritual, and the local concern after the fact that the elders who had presided over the “oathing” rituals were “fake.” Stepping back, the chapter then explores the nineteenth-century “age-grade” system that the *mung’aro* ritual was understood to mediate. In particular, I focus on the early attempts of missionaries to identify the bases of elder power, on the one hand (which they tended to regard as fear, maintained through secret ritual), and on the other to translate South Coast forms of political and social organization into their own terms (as “republicanism,” “freemasonry,” etc.).

The dictionaries and journalistic accounts that these missionaries produced would become the basis of the early colonial attempts to identify and consolidate “native” institutions through which to administer indirect rule. I take up an analysis of these efforts in Chapter Four “Ritual, Administration, and Ambivalence in the Twentieth Century.” The chapter begins with the distinction drawn between “Arab Chiefs”—the semi-autonomous Mazrui leaders of Takaungu and Gasi hostile to the Arab Governors appointed by the Busaidi Sultan of Zanzibar—and “Native Chiefs,” or their apparent absence among the Mijikenda, with the exception of a powerful Digo leader called Kubo. Under the early administration of the British East Africa Protectorate, Kubo—the hereditary name of this leader—becomes an hereditary office—the “Kuboship.” The death of Kubo during the First World War precipitated a flurry of ethnographic and historical research on the “office” by local administrators, but efforts to identify and appoint a successor were quickly abandoned, and the name (as well as the command of the rain magic that legitimated the holder of the name) were dropped in favor of the more secular office of “Chief.” I argue, however, that the colonial administration was plagued for decades by the sense that it lacked a specifically *ritual* legitimacy in the eyes of the African population, and so sought to sponsor initiation rituals that would lend authenticity to the newly created Local Native Councils and Local Native Tribunals. These efforts were always framed as a “revival” or “renewal” of the Ngambi (or Kambi), which the colonial administration understood to have been *the* form of political organization and social control in the nineteenth century, weakening only under the influence of Islamic conversion of younger generations.

Chapter Four concludes, finally, with a brief consideration of how the colonial-era conceptual divisions—native/non-native, pagan/Mohamedan, African/Arab—shaped the ethno-religious politics of decolonization in Kenya and the consolidation of new arrangements of

patronage and clientage in the post-independence period. Pointing ahead to the following chapter and to the beginning of Chapter Three, I argue that over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mijikenda political cosmology was effectively turned “inside-out” as “new men” began looking outward to the credit and commodities of the Indian Ocean (and later, to national politicians) as ways of building up their own power and influence locally. Extraversion became an increasingly important path to wealth, power, and influence outside the Kaya system of esoteric knowledge, “age-grades,” and “secret societies” of elders. At the same time, the sense or suspicion by the political class of patrons that they lacked a certain authenticity or ritual legitimacy would lead them to engage Kaya Elders to hold rituals initiating or blessing them. This, in turn, created a sense that contemporary elders were “fake,” compromised by money and influence from outside, and that their esoteric knowledge and secret ritual techniques were “no longer” the real source of power, but that they had been in the past—a condition Janet McIntosh (citing Michael Hertzfeld) calls “structural nostalgia.”⁸³

Part Three, finally, “Bodies, Rumor, and History,” analyzes two moments in which the concerns of a “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion” are focused and articulated into moral panics about gangs of blood stealers (in the first moment) and organ thieves (in the second) called *Mumiani*. Chapter Five, “Rumor and History: *Mumiani* in the Twentieth Century,” begins by tracing the shifts in the term *Mumiani*’s referents over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries throughout the western Indian Ocean world. The chapter then turns to a scare about *Mumiani* that coincided with both a drought and a colonial labor conscription scheme at the end of the Second

⁸³ J. McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds’: Commodified Expertise and Politicized Authenticity among Mijikenda,” *Africa* 79:1 (2009), 35. See also: M. Hertzfeld, ‘Pride and Perjury: Time and the Oath in the Mountain Villages of Crete’, *Man* 25:2 (1990), 305-22.

World War. I argue that Mumiani fears condense a history of concerns about pawning relationships contracted with coastal patrons in times of famine, and that the manner in which the conscription campaign was executed effectively posed this moment to the local population as just such an arrangement: Men were obliged to pawn their sons or sisters' sons to a new patron—the colonial state—in exchange for food in the form of “Famine Relief” rations. I demonstrate that the link between Mumiani and such arrangements is not merely my own analytical claim, but is also part of the local theory of why *Mumiani* emerge when and where they do: They were thought to work for powerful coastal patrons, or the colonial state, and to prey on populations strained by the economic, ecological, physiological, and moral strains of famine.

Chapter Six, “*Mumiani* since 1945: Politics by Night,” examines a panic about Mumiani that occurred over seventy years after the 1945 panic, during my fieldwork in 2013. Driven from the market in blood by consumer fears of HIV/AIDS, Mumiani now harvest the eyes, tongue, and genitalia of their victims, now at the behest of Kenyan politicians. I argue that the timing of this Mumiani panic was conditioned by the re-running of a local parliamentary election, a teacher's strike, and—as in 1945—the failure of the rains. Also contributing to the scare was an event that took place at the Port of Mombasa involving the apparent revelation of “occult paraphernalia” imported by an unnamed but “very famous” politician. I explore the uptake of this incident in local rumor which, I argue, was also communicated indirectly and non-verbally through the defacement of images of faces by the scratching out of their eyes. I suggest that this episode can be interpreted on the one hand as a new constellation of the images and motifs identified in Part One, and on the other as a collective exercise in the “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion” whose development is described in Part Two.

PART ONE:
MYTH AND RITUAL

CHAPTER ONE:

HISTORY AND HUMAN SACRIFICE IN MIJIKENDA MYTH AND RITUAL

1.1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the history and meta-history of a “constellation” of images and motifs through a detailed examination of the life (and afterlife) of a coastal Kenyan initiation ritual called “*Mung’aro*” (“[The] Shining”). The constellation emerges, in this case, when one examines claims about the nature and significance of a specific ritual practice as they change over a roughly five hundred-year period. It is an analytic claim developed out of an archive of ethnographic and historical materials, but it is not itself an historical or ethnographic datum. I divide the history of this ritual constellation into five moments in which *mung’aro* will be examined respectively as prefiguration, testimony, memory, myth, and trace. This division maps onto a rough temporal periodization that also generally parses source materials by type, but this is not the principle guiding the division. It is not a chronology of transformation so much as it is a sequence of variations in the form that this constellation has assumed as elements come into view or are obscured, fade away or return.

Section 1.2 describes the “prefigurative” moment, drawing together early traveler accounts of the East African coast that purport to document the practice of post-mortem emasculation of victims of ritual killings as a necessary step to marriageable male adulthood among various peoples living in the Northeast African coastal hinterland, referred to as “Galla” and “Mosseguejoes.” These texts include an twelfth or thirteenth century Chinese encyclopedia and two sixteenth

century accounts by Portuguese missionaries. Although the Portuguese texts were composed by individuals who had themselves traveled to the regions they are describing, with respect to ritual killing and the collection of genital trophies from its victims the ethnographic details they report have all been related to them by Arab and Swahili intermediaries and do not purport to be first-hand accounts. These early texts, finally, do not describe the practice of collecting genital trophies as part of a ritual called “*mung’aro*”—they neither name nor specify the ritual process of which it was supposed to have been a part. They thus prefigure twentieth century understandings of the *mung’aro* ritual only retrospectively, once this detail is incorporated into local understandings of what the ritual had been. They are part of the pre-history of *mung’aro* in this specific sense. I am not claiming the empirical evolution of a ritual called *mung’aro* out of an unnamed sixteenth (or eleventh) century practice on the one hand, or that a familiarity with these early texts on the part of colonial administrators and missionaries distorted their understanding of what was being described accurately to them by informants.

The second moment, “Testimony,” which is the focus of Section 1.3, corresponds to the second half of the nineteenth century. There is thus a documentary gap between the Portuguese sources and these early English and German ones that spans some 250 to 300 years. Sources from this period include missionary and traveler accounts that purport to describe *mung’aro* as a contemporary practice among the “Wanyika” (now referred to as the “Mijikenda”) peoples of the coastal hinterland. These are primarily accounts by Church Missionary Society missionaries living and working in the area around Mombasa. Although they do not include the collection of genital trophies as an element of the ritual, *mung’aro* is understood in this moment to involve the killing of a stranger or slave, which was a detail of the early-modern accounts of ritual emasculation discussed in Section 1.2.

The third moment, “Memory,” is discussed in Section 1.4. It includes early twentieth century accounts by colonial administrators and a missionary who worked closely with them. But these accounts are based on descriptions from anonymous Mijikenda informants who may or may not have themselves participated in the performance of a *mung’aro* ritual in the nineteenth century. In fact the only firsthand account by a onetime participant—CMS catechist George David—was written on the occasion of his refusal to participate in what would be the last documented performance of the ritual in 1879, and is discussed in the preceding section. These are, then, more likely evidence for a kind of “social memory” of *mung’aro*. But like “the evidence of experience” (Scott 1991; see also: Mann 2015), the evidence of memory—whether individual or social—is hardly unproblematic. As Jean and John Comaroff point out, “memory—despite the tendency to treat it as a direct, unmediated mode of knowing—is always a contextually shaped representation, always implicated in the play of signs and power that underpins conventionalized efforts to produce value” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 136). These descriptions of *mung’aro* were collected as part of a colonial administrative effort to identify “local” political systems (which to the amateur ethnographers of the administration meant political systems apparently free of Arab and Swahili—in other words, Islamic—influence) through which these populations might “indirectly” be ruled. *Mung’aro* thus appears in this moment as a recently abandoned historical practice that had been integral to the precolonial authority structures that had already been transformed (and were well on their way to being replaced) by the early colonial encounter. Such an understanding corresponds to the Colonial State’s displaced anxiety, analyzed in Chapter Four, that its “Native Authorities” lacked ritual legitimacy in the eyes of those they were supposed to administer. It is also this moment that sees the incorporation of the idea of collecting genital

trophies from the slain into local understandings of the ritual killing which *mung'aro* had, in the nineteenth century, already been understood to include.

The fourth moment, “Myth,” considers the incorporation of the *mung'aro* ritual into origin stories collected by local intellectuals, foreign anthropologists, and historians working in the mid-to late-twentieth century. These include the important corpus of oral traditions collected and generously published by Thomas Spear as part of his foundational attempt to recover the distant precolonial past of the Mijikenda peoples. They also include the “Giriama Historical Traditions” that Cynthia Brantley collected (with the assistance of Wilson Gona Nguma and Victor Kazungu Gona) during her fieldwork at the same time as Spear’s oral history project (in 1971), as well as interviews by Suzanne Miers and Gona Kazungu between 1972 and 1974. In these accounts, the killing and mutilation of a “Galla” by “the Mijikenda” in the course of a *mung'aro* results in a war that eventually drives the Mijikenda from their “homeland” in the Northeast. But the section begins with two earlier versions of Mijikenda origins that posit a different relationship between *mung'aro* and Singwaya origins. The first is a Digo origin story collected by Hugh Martin Thackeray Kayamba, a mission-educated Sambia, from a group of Digo “elders” in northeastern Tanzania in the first decades of the twentieth century. In Kayamba’s account, *mung'aro* was the ritual that re-founded Digo political order after their expulsion from Singwaya, rather than the act that precipitated their exodus. The second account is that of the anthropologist Luther P. Gerlach, who conducted fieldwork in southern coastal Kenya in the late 1950s. Like Spear, Brantley, and Miers, Gerlach sees *mung'aro* as a ritual that *was* performed in Singwaya. Unlike their sources, however, there is no indication that it is cited as the cause of the originary migration. Like Kayamba, Gerlach sees *mung'aro* as a political ritual, but also as having mediated a kinship structure that faded along

with it, and whose former existence is detectable now only in kinship terminology and joking relations.

The fifth moment, “Trace,” explores the contemporary significance of “Mung’aro” among “Kaya Elders” in coastal Kenya at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Drawing on a set of interviews conducted between 1992 and 1996 by a team of researchers from the University of Nairobi and the British Institute in Eastern Africa, as well as my own oral history data collected between 2013 to 2017, I document the apparent disappearance of Mung’aro from the Singwaya Origin Story—after its mid-twentieth century incorporation, discussed in the previous section—and *mung’aro*’s transformation in local understanding from a dangerous ritual of elder initiation to a celebratory form competitive dance. Its disappearance from these origin stories, however, does not mean that it has disappeared from Mijikenda society. As I argue in Chapter Six, the associational nexus of images and figural motifs out of which the *mung’aro* constellation was assembled continue to mediate contemporary Mijikenda political life in the form of rumors about *Mumiani* organ thieves working for elected officials. But there is a great deal of empirical material that must be adduced before this claim can be made plausible. Let me begin by turning now to the origins of this associational nexus in the Medieval and Early Modern “World System” (Abu-Lughod 1993) of the Indian Ocean world.

1.2: PREFIGURATION: THE WORLD-HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF AN EAST AFRICAN IMAGE

The earliest reference of which I am aware to the practice of ritual post-mortem emasculation among unspecified East African peoples is in the *Shih-lin Kuang-chi*, a late twelfth or early thirteenth century encyclopedia compiled by Ch’en Yüan-ching:

When a marriage is to be arranged the bride's family announces the agreement by cutting off the tail of a cow in calf as [a gesture of] good faith. The period of the betrothal starts from the day when the tail is cut, and the marriage can be consummated only after the cow has calved. The groom's family must respond to the cutting of the cow's tail as a pledge of the date [of betrothal] by bringing a severed "human tail" to the house of the bride. The "human tail" which serves as a betrothal gift is the male organ. When it arrives the bride's family, rejoicing, welcomes it with music and parades through the streets for seven days, after which the groom enters the bride's house, is married to her and they become one family. Each marriage [consequently] deprives a man of his life. Such is the custom of mutual rivalry among families wishing to display the fortitude and courage of their sons-in-law, without which no girl's family would ever consent to her marriage.¹

It is certainly possible to dismiss such accounts as "fifth-hand sailor" [sic] yarns," as Justin Willis describes them, but only if one is interested in whether such sources are "true" or "false" in a restricted empiricist sense.² Willis may be correct that such accounts as this "probably tell us more about Chinese images of the other than about African society," but the question I am concerned with here is not whether these early texts (and nineteenth century descriptions of *mung'aro*, for that matter) are factually accurate historical accounts of actual practices, considered from a putatively "objective" standpoint. Rather, I am concerned with the durability and distribution of a bundle or constellation of images and motifs, how that constellation came into being, and how it subsequently faded from view—or assumed a new form. What is important in citing this early Chinese text is the simple fact that by the thirteenth century at the latest, *accounts* of the ritualized collection of genital trophies on the East African coast were circulating *throughout* the Indian Ocean world. This was part of a contemporary "Idea of Africa" (Mudimbe 1994), and it is one which—as this chapter, together with Chapter Six, will go on to show—has been a remarkably

¹ P. Wheatley, "Analecta Sino-Africana Recensa," in *East Africa and the Orient: Cultural Syntheses in Pre-Colonial Times*, H. N. Chittick and R. I. Rotberg eds. (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1975), 97.

² J. Willis, "Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon by James de Vere Allen (Review)," *African Affairs* 93:370 (1994), 148.

durable feature (whatever its epistemological status) of how Northeast Africa and the East African coastal hinterland have been imagined and understood.

Although the peoples supposed to have engaged in the collection of “human tails” for marriage are unnamed in the *Shih-lin Kuang-chi*, this detail of post-mortem mutilation reappears in three sixteenth century Portuguese accounts. In these texts the identity of the peoples said to practice the ritual killing and emasculation of their enemies is specified as “Moceguejos” (or “Mosseguejos”) and the “Galla.” Scholars have tended to identify the former with the present-day Segeju people inhabiting northeastern Tanzanian and southeastern Kenyan coast, and the latter with the Oromo-speaking peoples of Northeastern Kenya and Ethiopia (for whom “Galla” is a derogatory term).

Like the *Shih-lin Kuang-chi*, these texts present themselves to the reader as descriptions of contemporary practices along the East African coast. Unlike Yüan-ching’s encyclopedia, however, these Portuguese texts were composed by individuals who had themselves actually travelled to East Africa. This is not to say that these are “eye-witness accounts,” much less “ethnographic” ones, or that such accounts would be better or preferable. For a different historical project, they might be, and they would certainly be inherently interesting. But at issue at this early point is not the empirical existence of a practice, but the existence of a discourse about practice.

The first of these three texts was written by Joao Bermudez in his “Short account of the embassy which the patriarch Dom Joao Bermudez brought from the Emperor of Ethiopia.”³

³ J. Bermudez, “A short account of the embassy which the patriarch D. Joao Bermudez brought from the Emperor of Ethiopia, vulgarly called Preste John, to the most Christian and zealous-in-the-faith-of-Christ King of Portugal,” in *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia*, R. S. Whiteway trans. and ed. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1902 [1565]), 124–257. A partial translation of Bermudez’s “account” was first made available in English in 1625. See S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or, Purchas His Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and*

Bermudez claimed to have been confirmed the Patriarch of Abyssinia by Pope Paul III, although the Vatican apparently has no record of his appointment. The “short account” purports to describe the events of his residence in Northeast Africa between 1541 and 1556, during which time Bermudez claims to have been present for a series of wars among Christians and Muslims, “Kings” and “Queens,” “Moors,” “Turks,” and “Abyssinians.” Published in 1565, his account is the earliest of which I am aware to identify the collection of genital trophies (first described in Yüan-ching’s encyclopedia) as a cultural feature of a specific people, referred to in his text as the Galla:

These Gallas lived in the country near Magadoxo [=Mogadishu]; they are a fierce and cruel people, who make war on their neighbours, and on all, only to destroy and depopulate their countries. In the places they conquer they slay all the men, cut off the privy parts of the boys, kill the old women, and keep the young for their own use and service.⁴

Although the association of ritual killing and emasculation with Oromo-speaking peoples continues up to the present in East Africa, Portuguese accounts roughly contemporaneous with Bermudez’s (although slightly later) describe the practice among a differently named population much farther south, in what is now Kenya. Importantly, the resonances in the descriptions of these populations across these texts are not limited the detail of ritual emasculation, but include pastoralism as a mode of livelihood, diet, bodily adornment, and an antagonistic relationship to the Muslim population of the coast itself.

Take for instance the account of Francis Monclaro, a Jesuit priest who “accompanied a Portuguese punitive expedition from Mozambique to Pate [near the Kenya–Somalia border]” in 1571. Describing the “Moorish city” of Malindi (in what is now mid-coast Kenya), Monclaro notes that:

Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others, Volume Seven (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905 [1625]), 310–378.

⁴ Bermudez, “A short account,” 228–9.

These Moors [Malindi's "Swahili" residents] have as neighbours in the interior a race of Cafres different from all the others of the coast. They are called Moceguejos, and the name alone declares their barbarity. They have neither holy days, cultivated lands, nor houses; they live in the fields or woods, and cover their heads with stinking clay, the smell being caused by its being mixed with different oils, and to them it is very delicious. They have large numbers of cattle, and subsist upon their blood and milk mixed together, which they eat raw, and they have no other ordinary food, according to report; they bleed the oxen on alternate days. They are very warlike, *and it is said that their habit in warfare is to cut off foreskins and swallow them, afterwards casting them up out of their mouths when they appear before the king, that he may make them knights.* Their dress consists of the skin of animals, and they have many other very barbarous customs. The Moors here are much molested by these Cafres, and to prevent them from spoiling their crops and making war on them, they buy them off with cloth and other things, but their usual dress is made of skins, as I have said.⁵

The historian John Milner Gray omits the sentence detailing the ingestion and regurgitation of foreskins when he quotes the same passage in an article in the 1950 *Tanganyika Notes and Records*.⁶ It seems possible that this struck Gray as a fabulation, and that he omitted it as a

⁵ F. Monclaro, "*Relação da Viagem ã Fizerão os Pes da Companhia de Jesus com Franco Barreto na Conquista de Monomotapa no anno de 1569/Account of the Journey made by Fathers of the Company of Jesus with Francisco Barreto in the Conquest of Monomotapa in the year 1569,*" in G. M. Theall, ed., *Records of South-Eastern Africa Collected in Various Libraries and Archive Departments in Europe, Volume Three* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1899), 167, 214. English translation quoted in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 141. Italics added. This passage is also quoted in J. M. Gray, "Portuguese Records Relating to the Wasegeju," *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 29 (1950), 86, with the exception of the italicized section. The original reads:

Os Mouros daqui confinaõ pella terra dentro cõ huã manra de Cafres estranha dos outros de toda a costa, a que chamaõ Moceguejos ã o mesmo nome declara sua barbaria. Estes naõ tem festas terras nem casas. Viuem nos campos e matos, trazem a cabeça chea de barro muy fedorento pellas misturas ã tem de diuersos oleos, e a elles he muy cheiroso. Tem mto gado, e do Leite e sangue delle misturado se mantem e comem cru, sem outra manra de comer ordinaria segundo dizem; sangraõ os bois cada dia alternados. Saõ muy guerreiros e segundo dizem usaõ nas brigas cortar os prepucios e engulillos, e despois quando aparecem diante do Rey tornaõ nos a lançar pella boca pra ã ashi o Rey os arme Cavalleyros. Seus uestidos saõ de pelles de animaes, e tem outros costumes muy barbaros. Saõ os Mouros dalli muy infestados destes Cafres, e por lhe naõ danarem as sementeiras e fazerem guerra resgataõ sua uexação com roupas e outras cousas ã lhe daõ, mas o sou uestido geral saõ pelles como disse.

⁶ Gray, "Portuguese Records," 86.

distraction from the more factual data of Monclaro's reporting in which he was primarily interested. But as fantastic as the details of the storage, transportation, and presentation of enemy foreskins may be, they indicate the persistence or re-emergence of the idea of the collection of genital trophies from the bodies of defeated enemies as a requisite for initiation from a lower to a higher social status.

The image reappears in a second, much longer, Portuguese account from the 1609 *Aethiopia Oriental* by Joao dos Santos, a Dominican Friar who had visited the Malindi coast about three decades after Father Monclaro:

On the mainland along the coast of Melinde [=Malindi] there lives a nation tribe of Cafres, called Mosseguejoes, who are very barbarous and very powerful and who have been there some few years. At their beginning they were by origin cattle herds which task and calling all their descendants have followed ever since, and they have some very big herds of bullocks and cows. Their principal source of sustenance is the milk of these cows and they likewise drink their blood, but, as though they were living upon their own blood, they do not become exceedingly fat. Out of this blood they make a porridge mixed with milk and the fresh dung of these cows, all of which is mixed together, and heated in a fire, and they then drink it so that they may become strong and robust.

Males who have reached the age of seven or eight years are compelled to carry a clay head covering which is fastened by the hair and the skin of the head, covering in the same manner as people do with a hat or helmet. It is very smooth on top. The Cafre wears this headdress, which weights five or six pounds, both when he sleeps and when he walks about, as if it were a burden of no weight. *He cannot remove the clay from his headdress, until he has joined the company of old men, or has entered into the council, or he has killed a man in war or a just quarrel.* Hence it follows that all the youths pretend to wage war so that they may show themselves to be Warriors and men of rank, and able to kill an enemy in those fights. *In order to make known that he is a slayer, he is compelled, after the quarrel is finished, to take to his headman some prominent mark of the man whom he has killed. When he produces this mark, he is held to be a warrior and a brave man in war, and for this reason is much honoured and held in high esteem.* Hence it follows that the Captain gives arms to the warrior and removes the clay from the headdress, and thenceforward they enjoy all the privileges of a warrior.

The principal reason why these barbarians do this is so that they may be feared by their enemies; when they see with what delight they enter upon war, resolved to take away their lives, by reason of the honour which will come to them. For this reason they are so ambitious that they will even fight with and kill each other in pursuit of this object.

The chief of the island of Macoloem told me that during the battle of Quilife [=Kilifi, between Malindi and Mombasa to the South] (with which we shall deal later) he

saw two Mosseguejos struggling with a Moor, who fell down, though not very badly wounded, and there followed a quarrel between them as to who was the first to wound him; whilst the Moor, who was still alive, defended himself against them as best he could: and finally one of the Mosseguejos forcibly seized his rival and turned to quarrel with him, in which act more of his companions joined. When this was finished, he went in front of his headman and showed him the mark of the man who had died in war, and for this he was armed as a warrior along with many others who had done the same thing in battle.

So barbarous are these Mosseguejos that *they preserve these signs of their valour so as to display on their feast days, lifting them up so that all may know of his valour and heroism and hold him in estimation for the same*. And they allow their wives the same kind of brutality at any feast or dance so that they may be held and deemed to be the wives of brave and honourable men. One could mention many other kinds of brutality of this nation of Cafres both in this respect or in their customs and the abuses which they conceal, as they are very dishonest and unworthy of credit.⁷

⁷ Gray, "Portuguese Records," 86–8. Italics added. The original (J. dos Santos, *Ethiopia Oriental* (Lisboa: Commercio de Portugal, 1891 [1609]), 432–4) reads:

Pela terra dentro, que corre ao longo da costa de Melinde, habita uma nação de cafres, chamados mosseguejos, muito barbarous e mui exforçados, os quaes ha muito poucos annos que começaram; cujo principio e origem foi de pastores de vaccas, no qual officio e trato vivem inda hoje todos estes seus descentes, e assim tem grandissimas creações de bois e de vaccas. O seu principal mantimento e leite das mesmas vaccas, as quaes tambem sangram muitas vezes, assim por lhe não abafem e morerem de gordas, como para se sustentarem do proprio sangue. Do qual fazem uma potagem misturada com leite, e bosta fresca das mesmas vaccas, e tudo isto junto, e quente ao fogo, o bebem, dizendo que os faz robustos e fortes.

Os machos de idade de sete ou oito annos para cima são obrigados a trazer a cabeça coberta de barro pegado nos cabellos e no couro da cabeça, de tal modo que lhe fica como outro casco ou capacete, mui bornido por cima e quando se greta o barro, tornam-lhe a dar com outro molle por cima, e a concertal-o de novo com muito primor, estimando muito sua perfeição. E ha cafre, que traz n'este capacete de barro cinco ou seis arrateis de pezo, e com elle dormem, e andam, como se não trouxeram nada. Este barro não podem tirar da cabeça, nem fallar em ajuntamento de homens velhos, nem entrar em conselho, ate que não matem algum homem em guerra ou briga justa. Pela qual razão todos os mancebos pretendem que haja guerras para n'ellas se mostrarem e fazerem cavalleiros e nobres, matando algum inimigo n'ellas. E para se saber que o mataram, são obrigados depois da briga acabada, levar diante do seu capitão um signal evidente do homem que mataram; e os que levam, mais signaes d'estes, são tidos por môres cavalleiros e exforçados na guerra, e por isso mais honrads e estimados. Pela qual razão logo o capitão os arma cavalleiros, tirando-lhes o barro da cabeça, e d'ali por diante ficam gozando dos privilegios dos outros cavalleiros.

A principal causa porque estes barbaros fazem isto, é por serem temidos de seus inimigos, vendo com quanto gosto entram na guerra, apostados a lhe tirar a vida, pela honra que d'isso lhe resulta, da qual sãp tão ambiciosos, que pelem uns com os outros,

Although not included in Gray's article on "Portuguese Sources Relating to the Wasegeju," a typescript draft of his translation of *Aethiopia Oriental* in the "African Papers of John Gray" collection at Cambridge University Library, dos Santos's text continues as follows:

The Abyssinians and some of the Moors who are their neighbours and the Galla people of Ethiopia all practice the same customs. This is mentioned by the patriarch Dom John Bermudez in the book which he wrote about Prester John and it is the custom of some tribes in Ethiopia. It is also to be found in the Sacred Scripture in the First Book of Kings, where it is related that Saul told David that he would give him his daughter Michal in marriage, if he should produce the foreskins of the Philistines who he had killed in war and that these numbered some two hundred. This Saul did (as Nicholas de Lyra has explained) because it was by this sign that he could see that they were Philistines and not Hebrews, who were circumcised, nad [sic] also because this would increase the hatred which the Philistines bore towards David and make them procure his death. As David's son Solomon and the Queen of Sheba came and ruled in Ethiopia (as I have already said), it is very probable that they introduced this custom and that it thus came to be practiced in Ethiopia.⁸

em porfia de quem ha-de chegar primeiro ao inimigo que cae ferido para este effeito, não dando lugar para que outrem lhe tire esta honra.

O senhor da ilha de Macoloê me contou, que achando-se elle na guerra de Quilife (de que abaixo tratarei) vira estar dois mosseguejos pegados em um mouro, que cahira no chão mal ferido, em grande porfia sobre qual d'elles o cortaria primeiro; e por outra parte o mouro, que estava inda vivo, defendendo-se d'elles o melhor que podia. E finalmente um dos mosseguejos que mais força teve levou o que pretendia, e depois d'isso tornou a briga, em que andavam os mais companheiros; a qual acabada, se foi diante do seu capitço, e lhe mostrou o signal que levava de ter morto homem na guerra, e foi armado. cavalleiro por isso, com outros muitos, que fizeram o mesmo na mesma guerra.

Tão barbaros são estes mosseguejos, que guardam estes signaes de sua valentia, para depois se honrarem com elles nos dias de suas festas, em que se querem mostrar, levando-os comsigo, para que todos conheçam por elles sua valentia e cavallaria, e sejam estimados por isso. A mesma brutalidade mermittem a suas mulhere quando se hão de achar em algumas festas ou bailes; para lá serem estimadas, e conhecidas por mulheres de momens honrados e exfoçados. Outras muitas brutalidades poéra contar d'esta nação de cafres, assim n'esta materia como em outros costumes, e abusos que calo, por serem mui deshonestos e incrediveis.

⁸ Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge (RCS) RCMS 126/9/6 J. dos Santos, "Aethiopia Oriental" (with an appendix containing extracts from D. de Couto, "Da Asia"), 1964. The original (J. dos Santos, *Ethiopia Oriental*, 434–5) reads:

Os abexins e alguns mouros seus visinhos, e os gallas gentios d'esta Ethiopia, todos tem este mesmo costume dos mosseguejos, como refere o patriarcha D. João Bermudez, no livro que fez do Preste João. De modo, que d'este costume usam algumas nações d'esta Ethiopia. Outra cousa quasi como esta se acha na sagrada Escripura, no primeiro livro dos Reis, onde se contra que Saul pediu a David por lhe dar sua filha Michol em

Dos Santos makes a slight error in the scriptural reference: 1 Kings does relate the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, but the reference to Saul and David is from 1 Samuel 18:

²⁵ And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

²⁶ And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired.

²⁷ Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.⁹

Although dos Santos's proto-diffusionist theory of the Hebrew origins of East African military culture seems improbable to say the least, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the collection of genital trophies in battle as requisites for marriage is clearly not an East African peculiarity (despite its being adduced by Montclaro and dos Santos as evidence of their "barbarous customs"). It seems more likely that in attempting to render intelligible what was being told to him by others (the details of his account are all "according to report" from unspecified sources) Father Montclaro, was assimilating these "reports" to a passage from the Bible with which he—as a Jesuit Priest—was no doubt familiar. Thus, the then-current image of East Africans harvesting genital trophies from their enemies as proof of their capacity for lethal violence and suitability for marriage becomes one of the "Moceguejos" presenting the foreskins of their enemies to their "King."

casamento, lhe trouxesse cem prepucios de phylistheneus, qu matasse na guerra; e elle lhe trouxe duzentos. O que Saul fez (como diz Nicolau de Lyra explicando este logar) assim porque por este signal se conhecesse serem philistheus os que David matara na guerra, e não hebreus, que eram circumcidados; como tambem por acrescentar o odio dos philistheus contra David, e elles lhe procurassem a morte, por quanto os circumcidava; cousa que elles grandemente abominavam. E como depois o filho Salomão a da rainha Sabbá veiu reinar n'esta Ethiopia (como já disse) cousa provavel é, que traria de lá este costume, e o mandaria usar n'esta Ethiopia.

⁹ 1 Sam. 18:25–7.

An early seventeenth century account by Jerónimo Lobo, another Portuguese Jesuit, describing his travels in 1620s, compounds the sense hinted at above of confusion about the identity of the peoples being described. At one point, Lobo describes the “Galla” of Abyssinia as “the same people who inhabited Melinda”—Malindi—in the hinterland of which Montclaro and dos Santos place the “Mosseguejos” some forty to fifty years earlier.¹⁰ This is how Lobo describes the “Galla” of Abyssinia: “They neither sow their lands, nor improve them by any kind of culture; but, living upon milk and flesh, encamp, like the Arabs, without any settled habitation. They practice no rites of worship.” Recall that Monclaro’s “Moceguejos” similarly have “neither holy days, cultivated lands, nor houses; they live in the fields or woods,” and possess “large numbers of cattle, and subsist upon their blood and milk mixed together, which they eat raw.”¹¹ The similarities between their descriptions are sufficiently pronounced to raise the question of whether Lobo was familiar with Monclaro’s earlier text and either intentionally or unintentionally borrowed from it without citation or attribution. Alternatively, the similarities raise the possibility—not mutually exclusive with the first—that the people referred to as “Galla” and “Mosseguejos” are much more closely related culturally than has generally been assumed.

“Galla,” at least, is a term used by others to refer to the Oromo-speaking peoples of what are now Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, and is considered derogatory by Oromo peoples themselves. In local understanding, its etymology is from the (Cushitic) Somali root “*gal*” (pl.

¹⁰ J. Lobo, “A Voyage to Abyssinia,” in S. Johnson (trans. and ed.) *The Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume 15, A Voyage to Abyssinia by Father Jeronimo Lobo, a Portuguese Missionary, containing the History, Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical, of that Remote and Unfrequented Country, Continued down to the beginning of the Eighteenth Century; with Fifteen Dissertations on various Subjects, relating to the Antiquities, Government, Religion, Manners, and Natural History of Abyssinia by M. le Grand*, (London: Elliot and Kay, 1789 [1735]), 32.

¹¹ Gray, “Portuguese records,” 86.

“galo”), meaning “pagan, infidel, or non-Muslim in general” (although Herbert Lewis seems to dispute this, the implication being that this is perhaps a “folk etymology” based on the felicitous phonetic similarity of two negatively associated—but otherwise unrelated—terms).¹² “Mosseguejoes,” by contrast, would seem to be a term derived from a Bantu language, taking the Class 1 (singular, animate) “M(u)-” prefix, rendered plural with a terminal “-s,” following Portuguese (and English, etc.) grammar. The possibility of cultural continuity (or at least influence) of the Oromo on the people now known as the Wasegeju—and subsequently, of the cultural influence of the Wasegeju on the Mijikenda of the southern Kenyan coastal hinterland—has recently been raised by Martin Walsh, and it is a possibility to which I return later in this chapter.¹³ In any case, killings and the collection of genital trophies in the context of initiation rituals within age-grade systems is much more widely distributed than simply among Cushitic-speaking peoples in the region, as Günther Schlee and others have shown.¹⁴

In “A Dissertation on the Eastern Side of Africa, from Melinda [=Malindi, mid-coast Kenya] to the Strait of Babelmandel [=Bab-el-Mandeb, between Yemen and Djibouti],” originally published in 1728, Joachim Le Grand offers another description (ostensibly based on Lobo’s writings) of the “coast of Melinda,” which according to him “begins at the Cape del Gado”—Cabo

¹² H. S. Lewis, “The Origin of the Galla and Somali,” *Journal of African History* 7:1 (1966), 37.

¹³ M. 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*, eds. R. Gearhart and L. Giles (London: Africa World Press, 2014), 25–51.

¹⁴ See: G. Schlee, *How Enemies are Made: Towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts* (New York: Berghan Books, 2008), 66–72.

Delgado, in present-day Mozambique, near its border with Tanzania—”and runs upwards towards the Cape of Guardafui”—at the tip of the “Horn of Africa” in Somalia.¹⁵

Father Jerome Lobo tells us, that after he left Pate [an island near the present-day Kenya-Somalia border], he travelled along the coast, part by sea and part by land, and hath given an account of what he observed; but as he followed the course of the shore, without daring to go far from the sea-side, he could not tell us any thing of those nations which inhabit the country a little higher.¹⁶

Here his account deviates from the material provided by Lobo to provide an account of peoples of the coastal hinterland. He does not cite a source and could easily be mistaken for attributing to Lobo the ethnographic details he includes. But his source is immediately recognizable as the passage from dos Santos quoted above:

The most considerable of these [peoples] are the Mossegueios, who are not much less rude and uncivilized for being allies of the Portuguese. The young people among them have a custom sufficiently barbarous and uncommon. At the age of seven or eight years, they fix upon their heads a lump of clay in form of a cap; and as the clay dries, and they grow bigger, more is added, till at last this kind of cap weighs eight or ten pounds: this they are not suffered to be without night or day; neither are they admitted to any consultation till they have slain an enemy in battle, and brought his head to their commander.

These Mossegueios were formerly vassals and peasants who revolted from their lords. They live chiefly on the milk of cows. The people having defeated and killed a king of Mombazo [=Mombasa], made his kingdom tributary to the king of Melinda.¹⁷

¹⁵ [J.] Le Grand, “A dissertation on the eastern side of Africa, from Melinda to the strait of Babelmandel,” in S. Johnson (trans. and ed.) *The Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume Fifteen* (London: Elliot and Kay, 1789 [1728]), 221.

¹⁶ Ibid. 222. The original reads: “*Le Pere Jérôme Lobo dit qu’il partit de Paté, & alla le long de la côte, en partie par terre, en partie par mer. Il parle des païs qu’il a vûs; mais comme il suivoit la mer sans oser s’en éloigner, il n’a pû rien dire de plusieurs peuples qui sont un peu plus avant dans les terres.*” J. Le Grand, *Voyage Historique d’Abissinie, du R. P. Jerome Lobo, de la Compagnie de Jesus, traduit du Portugais, continué & augmenté de plusieurs Dissertations, Lettres & Memoires.* (Amsterdam, 1728), 282.

¹⁷ J. Le Grand, “A Dissertation,” 222–3. The original (J. Le Grand, *Voyage Historique*, 282) reads: “*Les plus considérable sont les Mossegueios qui, pour avoir été amis & alliez des Portugais, n’en sont ni moins sauvages, ni moins barbares. Les jeunes gens parmi ces Mossegueios ont une coûtume assez singuliere & bizarre. Dès l’âge de sept à huit ans on leur applatit sur la tête un morceau de terre en forme de calotte; à mesure qu’elle se seche & qu’ils croissent on met d’autre terre sur celle-là, & enfin cette espace de bonnet pese quelquesois huit ou dix livres. Ils ne peuvent le quitter ni nuit ni jour, ni obtenir aucune charge, ni*

In the second paragraph, Le Grand is referring to the sack of Mombasa by the Mosseguejos in 1592, after the “king” of Mombasa declared war on the “king” of Malindi, to whom the Mosseguejos and the Portuguese were both allied at that time. The details of these events are also recorded by dos Santos. But Le Grand has added the detail of the continual addition to the clay cap, substituted the head of a slain enemy for his genitals as the trophy which permits them to remove the cap, and added the historical claim about their former position as “vassals and peasants who revolted from their lords.” Note the latter detail, as it will return in certain variants of the Singwaya origin stories recorded by Spear in the early 1970s, examined in Chapter Two.

The point here is simply to show that by the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in Europe there was already an international discourse about what has since come to be known as the “killer complex,” “killer system,” or “killing cult” in Southern Ethiopia, Northern Kenya, and (South-)Eastern Somalia.¹⁸ The image of the barbaric, castrating “Galla” and their neighbors circulated through the translation, repetition, and elaboration of earlier texts, with no identifiable *origo*. This free use of these earlier accounts was a feature of later accounts by those who had themselves traveled to and lived in the regions, as well as of texts by those who had not. Lobo’s “Voyage to Abyssinia,” for instance, seems clearly to have drawn upon Monclaro’s earlier

entrer dans aucun conseil, qu'ils n'aient tué un homme dans un bataille, & qu'ils n'aient apporté sa tête à celui qui les commande.

Ces Mossegueios étoient autressois des bergers qui se sont révoltez contre leurs maîtres; ils ont encore aujourd'hui beaucoup de vaches & ne vivent que du lait & du sang de ces vaches, qu'ils saignent souvent de peur que la graisse ne les tuë. Ces peuples plus aguerris que les autres ont défait & tué un Roi de Mombaça & Soumis son Royaume au Roi de Melinde.

Compare this passage to the second paragraph of the lengthy passage by dos Santos, quoted above.

¹⁸ Schlee, *How Enemies are Made*, 68–70; Ulrich Braukämper, *A History of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012 [1980]), 22–3.

depiction of the “Mosseguejos” in composing his own description of the Galla. Similarly, Le Grand—Lobo’s initial translator and publisher—drew on both Lobo and dos Santos’s accounts, with uneven citation. Lobo’s text was apparently never published in Portuguese—the manuscript “is said to be in the Monastery of St. Roque at Lisbon and to be still unprinted”—and was first published in Paris and Amsterdam in 1728 in a French translation by Le Grand.¹⁹ Samuel Johnson, in turn, translated Le Grand’s translation of Lobo together with Le Grande’s own “Fifteen Dissertations” into English, publishing them 1735.²⁰

The image of Northeast Africans as barbaric killers and collectors of anatomic trophies was thus part of the early modern development of an “idea of Africa” (Mudimbe 1994) that would influence subsequent encounters between East African peoples and various European explorers, missionaries, traders, and colonizers. It was also an image that was current among the Arab and “Moorish”—Swahili—populations of the Western Indian Ocean, from whose reports it made its way into the “accounts” of early Portuguese missionaries and travelers. This population is also the most likely source of the information—described by Willis as “fifth-hand sailor’ [*sic*] yarns”—recorded in Yüan-ching’s late twelfth or early thirteenth-century Chinese encyclopedia (with which these Portuguese were not likely to be familiar). It was, finally, an image whose repetition in this chain of texts also tended to include an addition of some new detail—like the foreskins of Monclaro’s account, or the heads-as-trophies described by Le Grand—in ways that make it

¹⁹ W. P. Courtney, *A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1915), 3.

²⁰ See: S. Johnson. *The Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume Fifteen, A Voyage to Abyssinia by Father Jeronimo Lobo, a Portuguese Missionary, containing the History, Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical, of that Remote and Unfrequented Country, Continued down to the beginning of the Eighteenth Century; with Fifteen Dissertations on various Subjects, relating to the Antiquities, Government, Religion, Manners, and Natural History of Abyssinia by M. le Grand*, trans. and ed. Samuel Johnson. (London: Elliot and Kay, [1735] 1789).

difficult to know what may have been the result of the author's own imagination, what may have resulted from translation and transcription of earlier texts, and what may be the reporting of historical transformations in Indian Ocean imaginaries of the ritual practices and social organization of the peoples of the interior.

In the following section I develop a sense of how an initiation ritual that came to be known as "*mung'aro*" was described in the second half of the nineteenth century. In these accounts, the ritual is always described independently from the origin stories in which it will later be embedded (and subsequently disembedded). The accounts that follow are from missionaries and travelers on the Kenyan coast before the imposition of formal colonial rule in 1895, and thus also before the eventual abandonment of the practice around the turn of the century. Importantly, then, unlike the accounts of the early modern period, discussed above (which are all "according to report") and those collected in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries discussed below (which are based on recollections and oral traditions), these nineteenth-century accounts purport to be descriptions of *mung'aro* as an ongoing, contemporary ritual practice embedded in extant political systems based on first-hand experiences.

1.3: TESTIMONY: THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY MISSIONARY ACCOUNTS

In the early nineteenth century, sources continue to report a significant "Galla" presence along the Kenyan coast in much the same terms as the seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources. In November of 1823 at Lamu (an island off the Kenyan coast, near the border with Somalia), for example, Lieutenant Thomas Boteler notes that

the Gallah, by which name the natives of the interior are known ... are considered as a most ferocious and cruel race, insomuch that the Arabs, whose humility and mildness of disposition generally obtain for them the good-will of the natives, dare not venture among

them, but confine themselves entirely to the sea-coast. The Gallah have no houses but wander in the woods in the wildest state. Professed enemies to every nation and tribe around them, they hunt and are hunted, committing indiscriminate slaughter on unresisting multitudes one day, and becoming the victims of the like treatment from a superior force of their enemies the next. Like their brother savages of America, they consider a relic from the body of a slain foe the most honourable and appropriate badge of their military prowess. When at their feasts, the most successful among their warriors is rendered conspicuous by the number of these dried and shriveled relics dangling from his arms, and the scalps of hairy breasts and bearded chins covering those parts of his own person. ... [C]onsequently the commerce between them and the Arabs is carried on entirely in the towns of the latter. These they will sometimes venture to harass, but seldom with a less force than two thousand men, armed with bows, arrows, and assagays.²¹

Later that month, Boteler describes “the territories of the ancient city of Melinda [Malindi, south of Lamu]” as being “at present wholly occupied by the Gallah, who are much dreaded by the Arabs in their coast navigation.”²² That same year, Captain William Fitzwilliam Owen (Lieutenant Boteler’s Commanding Officer) attributed what he perceived to be the decline of coastal cities like Malindi, Kilifi, and Mombasa to a combination of Arab piracy, Portuguese corruption, and Galla predations, “whose desolating fury has swept off every town situated on the mainland, from Juba to Mombas.”²³

Twenty years later, in 1843, Sayyid bin Sultan al-Said—the Omani Sultan of Zanzibar—sent a military expedition to Pate Island, near Lamu, to subdue Fumo Bakari and Bwana Mataka,

²¹ T. Boteler, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery to Africa and Arabia, performed in His Majesty’s Ships Leven and Barracouta, from 1821 to 1826, under the command of Capt. F. W. [sic] Owen, R. N., Volume One* (London: Richard Bentley, 1835), 387–8. See also the extracts of Boteler’s journal published two years earlier in W. F. W. Owen, *Narrative of Voyages to explore the shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar; performed in H. M. ships Leven and Barracouta, Volume One* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 236, which has “leniency of character” in place of “mildness of disposition,” specifies the “state” in which the “Galla” “wander the woods” as one “of barbarism,” adds “frequently” to their “committing of indiscriminate slaughter,” describes the genital trophy as a “distinguishing emblem” rather than an “appropriate badge,” and has the scalps and beards covering “all parts of his body” rather than “those parts of his own person.”

²² Boteler, *Narrative*, 399–401. See also Owen, *Narrative*, 242, which describes Malindi as an ancient “kingdom,” rather than a “city.”

²³ Owen, *Narrative*, 218–9.

who had declared themselves rulers of the independent states of Pate and Siyu, respectively.²⁴ According to the Pate Chronicle, “Sa’id bin Sultan summoned Amir Hamad bin Hamad ‘l Busaid, surnamed es-Samar, and he attacked Pate and Siu, but was unable to take them and made peace.”²⁵ Sir Richard Burton’s description of the events of the assault—the sources for which are unclear—is predictably more graphic, and includes only the first reference to the collection of genital trophies by peoples other than the Oromo [“Galla”] and the “Mosseguejos:”

The Wágunya, or as some write the word Bajúni, warriors, described to be a fierce race of savages, descended from the Wasawahili, the Somal, and the Arab colonists, charged in firm line, brandishing spear-heads like those of the Wamasai, a cubit long, and shouting as they waved their standards, wooden hoops hung round with the dried and stuffed spoils of men.²⁶

A footnote elaborates: “The trophies are drawn out with a lanyard, and cut off when the patient is still alive—after death they are not so much valued; finally they are dried so as to resemble isinglass.”²⁷ This is only the second reference to a people other than the “Galla” collecting (and displaying) genital trophies from their victims. Recall that the other group was the “Mosseguejos,” whom scholars have tended to identify with the Segeju peoples of Northeast Tanzania and Southeast Kenya. Intriguingly, a comparison of moiety and clan names (see Table 1.1, below) suggests a significant historical connection (hinted at above) between the antecedents of the present-day Segeju and Bajun peoples. This is a possibility that has been explored by others in the context of broader arguments (reviewed in Chapter One) about the claims of the Mijikenda and

²⁴ Pate and Siyu were polities on the island of Pate near the present-day Kenya-Somalia border.

²⁵ “Sa’id bin Sultan kamuita ‘l Amir Hamad bin Hamad ‘l Busaid ‘l maîqab es-Samar, kapija Pate na Siu asieweze akafanya Amani.” A. Werner, “A Swahili History of Pate (Continued),” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 14:55 (1915), 294–5.

²⁶ Sir R. F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast, Volume One*, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 299. Cited (incorrectly) in J. de V. Allen, *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon* (London: James Currey, 1993), 109n32.

²⁷ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 299n1.

Segeju peoples to have northern origins (in a place called Singwaya, believed to be located in the vicinity of the present-day Bajun).²⁸ At this point, I am simply pointing to a historically durable and geographically widespread “image” of a practice which cuts across ethnic boundaries, without attempting to derive from it a linear or genealogical link between historical populations.

In the same year as Seyyid Said’s failed assault on Pate (1843), the Church Missionary Society missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf reports seeing “some Gallas” at Takaungu (near Kilifi, between Malindi and Mombasa), “between whom and the people of the place there is friendly intercourse, as they come at certain periods into the neighborhood to sell ivory, cattle, &c.”²⁹ In apparent contradiction with these statements, Krapf goes on to claim that “in cruelty and inhumanity those of the south exceed the northern, murdering every stranger whom they meet by the way, a characteristic which their wandering life contributes to strengthen.”³⁰ As with the “reports” cited in Section 2.2, the basis of the claim is unspecified, although it seems to be something he was told by the patrician Swahili and Arab residents of Takaungu with whom he was in close contact. His descriptions of the relationships between the “Galla” and the “Mohammedans” of Takaungu that he actually observed present a very different picture, however.

²⁸ Walsh, “Segeju Complex”; D. Nurse, “Segeju and Daisu: A Case Study of Evidence from Oral Tradition and Comparative Linguistics,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982) 175–208; D. Nurse, “Shungwaya and the Bantu of Somalia: Some Linguistic Evidence,” in H. M. Adam and C. L. Gesheker (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Somali Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 54–61; D. Nurse, “The Swahili Dialects of Somalia and the Northern Kenya Coast,” in M.-F. Rombi (ed) *Etudes sur le Bantu oriental: Comores Tanzanie, Somalie et Kenya* (Paris: Société d’études linguistiques et anthropologiques de France, 1982), 73–146; Allen, *Swahili Origins*, 108–11.

²⁹ J. L. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors During and Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa, together with Journeys to Jagga, Usambara, Ukambani, Shoa, Abessinia, and Khartoum; and a Coasting Voyage from Mombaz to Cape Delgado* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 95–6.

Segeju ^a	Bajun ^b	Bajun ^c	Bajun ^d
[Kilio (people)]	Mnakilio	Kilio	
Ameshire	Amishiri	Amishiri	
Avutila	Avatila	Avutila	
Rasmali	Rasmale	Rasmili	
	Mfirado	Firado	Ferado
	Vakava	Yava?	
Daile	Vadaile	Gare?	Kudai?
Mwiwa			
Hartikawa	Hartikawa		
			Abugado/Abimali
Omwe	Muomwe	Omwe	Womwe
	Mchithindani		
Tawayu		Kiwayu?	Tawayu
Chandaha	Mchandaa	[Chandaa (place)]	Chandaa
Simambaye	[Simambaye	Simambaye	Simambaye
Kiunga			[Kiunga (place)]
Mwani			
Upembo			
Kismayu	Mchisimayu		Kisimayiu
Thinkindine	[Kisingitini	[Kidhingichini	
	Mvadhi Pingoni	Pingoni	Ndipingoni
[Kinangumbi]	Vangumi		
	Vakayama	Koyama	
	Vagede		
	Vyangove		
			Chokavi
			Kachwa
			Nòfali/Nùfal
			Shiradhi/Sheradhi
		Vumwe	Vumbu?
		Taka	
		Shungwaya	Shungwaya
		Umbuyi	

^a Commonwealth and African Archives [former Rhodes House Library] (CAA), Weston Library, University of Oxford, UK, MSS.Afr.s.1272a, A. C. Hollis, "The Wasegeju," (typescript, 1899).

^b Research Institute of Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa Library [former Fort Jesus Museum Library] (RISSEA), Mombasa, Kenya. A. S. Nabahany, "History of the Swahili Bajuni," (n.d.).

^c D. Nurse, "Bajun Historical Linguistics," *Kenya Past and Present* 12 (1980), 39.

^d V. I. Grottanelli, *Pescatori dell'Oceano Indiano* (Rome: Cremonese, 1955), 202–3.

Table 1.1: Comparative table of Segeju and Bajun clan names.

In his journal, Krapf notes that the nearest “Galla village”—rather less nomadic, it would seem, than his published account of their “wandering life” would indicate—is only “distant 12–15 miles from Takongo,” and

the Gallas come constantly to Takongo [=Takaungu], but the inhabitants of the latter place do not go to them, but have an agent who transacts the business between the Gallas and Takongo. This agent is a Galla himself who turned Mohammedan. This man became much attached to me. ... He promised to assist me if I wished to visit the Galla country.”³¹

At the time, Krapf still hoped to missionize “the Gallas” (“As the Romanist missionary said ‘Give us China, and Asia is ours;’ so may we say, ‘Give us the Galla, and Central Africa is ours’”):³²

The Gallas occupy all the land between the Jub [the Juba River] in the north and the river Sabakee [=Sabaki, or the Tana River] in the South near Malind [Malindi], as far inland as to Shoa [=Shewa], Caffa [=Keffa], and Inarea [=Ennarya], and perhaps still beyond. It is unquestionably one of the greatest nations of Africa.³³

But it was at Takaungu that Krapf “was *told* for the first time of the heathen Wanika” among whom he, together with Johannes Rebmann, would establish a mission station two years later.³⁴ It would be among the “Wanika”—the peoples now referred to as Mijikenda, more or less—that Krapf would first encounter the ritual complex known as “*Mung’aro*”—but not before being told about it by another set of Arab-Swahili intermediaries.

³¹ Church Missionary Society Archives, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (CMS), CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal December 28 1843,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 225.

³² Krapf, *Travels*, 22.

³³ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal December 29 1843,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 226. This passage was also published in the January 1845 issue of the *Church Missionary Record*. See J. L. Krapf, “Takaungo—Remarks on the Gallas,” *Church Missionary Record* 16:1 (1845), 10. Interestingly, although it does not appear in publication, Krapf’s diary records that the “Gallas” living near Takaungu “believe that they originate from the Boran [Borana] Gallas, in whose country their ancestor is reported to have lived.”

³⁴ Krapf, *Travels*, 96. Italics added. Like the term “Galla,” “Wanika” seems to have referred—for Krapf, at least—to a “nation” of distinct “tribes”: “From Takaungu to the islands of Wassin and Tanga [in what is now northeast Tanzania] extend the Wanika, who may number from 50,000 to 60,000 and are divided into twelve tribes.” Ibid. 97.

On March 15, 1844 in Mombasa, Krapf met with both the Kathi of Mombasa and Rashid bin Salim, who had been “the chief of Mombasa” under the short-lived British Protectorate of 1822. “At this opportunity,” he writes, “I heard some account of the customs of the Wonica pagans.”³⁵ Thus the first “account” of *mung’aro* of the nineteenth century takes the same form as those of previous centuries: that of information related to Europeans by Swahili or Muslim intermediaries who do not themselves engage in the practice. This is what Krapf records in his journal entry for the day:

In the present month is the Wangnaro [*Mung’aro*] of the Wonicas [=Wanyika], i.e. the time when the young people assume the mastery of the aged ones. They whiten their faces with lime in order to make a more ghost-like appearance. If any spectator should laugh at this comic parade, they would beat, strip & send him off empty-handed. Therefore the Sooahlees [=Swahilis] do not like to travel amongst them at the time when their annual pranks take place.³⁶

Krapf was afraid that “publishing of my observations made down the coast” might provide valuable intelligence to Catholic missionaries, “Roman Jesuits being everywhere in the ambush.”³⁷ As a result, this passage was not published until February 1845.³⁸ By that time, however, new information had led Krapf to revise his understanding of the content and significance of the ritual. It was—he had since been told (although it is unclear by whom)—more sinister than he had at first been given to understand. This is how Krapf’s edited journal entry for 30 January 1845 appeared when it was published in the January 1846 issue of the *Church Missionary Record*:

The Wonicas ... at certain months of the year celebrate their Wagnaro, when young people are permitted to govern public affairs. I have formerly described this practice; but I did not know, at that time, that the Wagnaro, or festival of the children, cannot terminate unless

³⁵ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal March 15, 1844,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 259.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/C A5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf to the Lay Secretary,” Zanzibar, 31 January 1844, Mission Book 1844–1846, 209.

³⁸ J. L. Krapf, “Voyage along the Coast to Mombas,” *Church Missionary Record* 16:2 (1845), 40.

they have slain somebody in the fields, or bought, by common contributions, a slave, whom they may kill. When this has been done, the festivity terminates with eating and drinking, and with the washing of their bodies, which they cover with mud during the Wagnaro, in order that they may remain unknown when they slay any body on the road. How happy are out Christian children at home, who are encouraged to raise contributions for putting down the works of Satan and darkness; while the parents and relations of African children encourage their benighted offspring to contribute to the committing of murder and other cruelties ... The Wagnaro, however, is not exercised in full force at every village, nor is the month of its celebration the same at every place. A traveler [*sic*] is therefore advised to ask after the time of the Wagnaro of a village, as he might risk his life, if alone on the road during its observance. The Wadigo, or Wonicas in the South, appear to be especially attached to this cruel practice, which seems to be a kind of propitiation, or sacrifice, offered to the evil spirits.³⁹

A few important additions to his earlier description have been made. First, it is no longer understood to be an annual event held every March: “The month of its celebration” is variable by region, and travelers are “advised to ask after the time of the Wagnaro of a village.” Second, there is regional variation in the intensity or enthusiasm with which the public ritual is performed, with the Wadigo south of Mombasa “especially attached to this cruel practice.” Finally, what had previously been understood to be a simple assault on the person of a “spectator” who might happen to “laugh at this comic parade” of masked revelers is now understood to be the killing of a stranger or slave, without which the ritual cannot be completed. This last detail would prove important a few weeks later when Krapf received a different kind of information about *mung’aro*: a spontaneous warning to avoid the location of a current performance, rather than a general description of the ritual in response to an elicitation.

³⁹ J. L. Krapf, “Account of the Wakamba Tribe—Visit to an Elder of Rabbay, a Wonica Village, and various Information respecting the Wonicas,” *Church Missionary Record* 17:1 (1846), 5–6. Where the published text states that the slave “*may* be killed,” Krapf’s original journal entry has “*will* be killed.” CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal January 30, 1845,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 590–591. Italics added. This passage also appeared in slightly modified form in the April 1846 issue of the *Church Missionary Gleaner*, another CMS publication. See J. L. Krapf, “Account of the Wonicas of Eastern Africa, and of the Wagnaro, an Absurd and Atrocious Custom among them,” *Church Missionary Gleaner* 6:4 (1846), 42–3.

On 17 March 1845, Krapf, was evangelizing in the settlements around Likoni, on the mainland south of Mombasa:

I found a great part of the population singing and dancing around a Muhamedan, who was beating a drum. As soon as they saw me they were all silent at once, and, young and old ones listened to the address which I gave them in Suahelee. But after some while they went away one by one, only a few men and women remaining. It may be, that they either did not sufficiently understand the Suahelee, or that I did not express myself in well chosen figures, which alone can attract the attention of a Wanika, and in fact, of every uncultivated person.⁴⁰

When his “discourse on the great love of God toward us sinners” failed to achieve the desired effect, Krapf decided to move along to the next settlement.⁴¹

I asked the Sheikh, to provide me with a few men, showing me the way to the scattered hamlets. He complied with my request, but charged me, not to go to Bumbo and its vicinity, as the Wagnaro (a cruel custom described by me in my last journal of my excursion to Keriamia) had just commenced, and it were not advisable that I should stroll about the plantations in that quarter. I therefore avoided going in that direction. I saw at the hamlet and among the assembly which I had addressed, a few men and women, who were come from Bumbo and who had bedaubed their faces with mud, to give themselves the appearance of evil spirits. Besides they make their faces unknowable, in order that they cannot be discerned, when they slay a lonely traveler in the fields or forest.⁴²

⁴⁰ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal March 17, 1845,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 548. See also: J. L. Krapf, “Tours to various Hamlets and Villages, and General Information respecting the Country and Inhabitants,” *Church Missionary Record* 17:2 (1846), 36.

⁴¹ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, “Reverend Doctor Krapf’s Journal March 17, 1845,” Mission Book 1844–1846, 548.

⁴² Ibid. 548–9. These events would also later be recounted in Krapf’s *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors* (1860: 120–121), in slightly different terms:

I asked the chief of the place to show me the way to the scattered villages. He was quite ready to do so, but warned me not to visit the village Yumbo, because the Wanika were celebrating their Ugnaro [=Mung’aro] there. This is a horrible sport, practiced from time to time by the young people when they have reached a certain age. They smear the body, especially the face, with white and gray earth, so that they cannot be recognized, being also almost in a complete state of nudity; upon which they remain in the woods until they have killed a man, after which they wash themselves and return home, where they then feast and carouse to their hearts’ content. It is therefore not advisable to journey at such times through these places, as solitary travelers [*sic*], especially slaves, are their favorite prey. A wise government in Mombaz would long ago have suspended this abomination.

Krapf encounters *Mung'aro* in this moment as a phenomenon currently underway nearby, rather than as an assertion by town dwellers about what rural mainland residents “do.” He finds himself on its periphery, and reports no new information about the ritual process itself, except that it had “just commenced.” Although he does not observe the ritual process itself, he sees signs of others’ participation—the individuals among the crowd at his failed sermon “who were come from Bumbo and who had bedaubed their faces with mud ... in order that they cannot be discerned when they slay a lonely traveler in the fields or forest.”⁴³ In contrast to later accounts of *mung'aro* in which it is described as a ritual of male initiation into elderhood, in this account Krapf indicates that both men and women were decorated with “mud” from the ritual, although he does not take the opportunity to inquire about its significance, or any other details about the ritual, from the participants.

In 1846 Krapf, together with Johannes Rebmann (a fellow CMS missionary), established a mission station at Rabai Mpya (“New Rabai”) on the mainland northwest of Mombasa. Rebmann later shared his ethnological notes on the peoples of the area with the explorer Sir Richard F. Burton, who makes the following brief mention of *mung'aro*, apparently based on Rebmann’s material:

A characteristic of Wanyika customs is the division of both sexes into distinct bodies, with initiatory rites resembling masonic degrees. ... The Wanyika split into the Nyere, or young; the Khambi, or middle-aged; and the Mfaya, or old. Each degree has its different initiation and ceremonies, with an “elaborate system of social and legal observances,” the junior always buying promotion from the senior. Once about every twenty years comes the great festival “Unyaro,” [= *mung'aro*] at which the middle-aged degree is conferred. This (1857) is Unyaro-year; but the Wamasai hindered the rite. Candidates retire to the woods for a fortnight, and clay themselves for the first half with white, and during the second with red

⁴³ Ibid.

earth; a slave is sacrificed, and the slaughter is accompanied by sundry mysteries, of which my informants could learn nothing.⁴⁴

Burton's account is the earliest specification of the periodization of *mung'aro*. While Krapf initially describes "Wagnaro" as being practiced annually in March, later amending this to "from time to time," Burton describes the ritual as taking place "once about every twenty years." More substantially, he frames the ritual not as a "festival of children" but an initiation into a gendered, gerontocratic hierarchy with "sundry mysteries" resembling "masonic degrees." He repeats Krapf's earlier claims about the "mud" (now "clay") body decoration, elaborating this detail to include the bifurcation of the ritual process into an initial white period and a terminal red one. Burton omits the claims about the ritual killing of a stranger, reducing it to the "sacrifice"—a specific form of ritual killing—of a slave.

In no account of *mung'aro* from this period do we have anything like a "native" exegesis of the local meaning of the ritual process (like those of Victor Turner's teacher, Muchona the Hornet), so its "sundry mysteries" remain, to an unfortunate extent, mysterious.⁴⁵ Subsequent generations of missionaries did, however, gain greater access to the ritual space, and were able to provide more detailed descriptions. In 1863, for example, Charles New arrived in Mombasa to support Thomas Wakefield in the expansion of CMS operations along the East African coast. Wakefield had, together with Krapf (who, by the time of New's arrival, had returned to Europe), completed construction of a new mission station in Ribe (not to be confused with the Rabai station mentioned above). Although the year is not given, New describes in detail a brief encounter with

⁴⁴ Sir R. F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast, Volume Two*, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 89–91.

⁴⁵ V. W. Turner, "Muchona the Hornet, Interpreter of Religion," in: *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 131–150.

a ritual in Ribe. Although he does not give its name, it bears some resemblance to the second- and third-hand descriptions of *mung'aro* recorded by Krapf and Burton. New presents it as a ritual initiating an individual into the *kambi*, the “governing body,” rather than a of an entire cohort into an age-grade or generation-set (as in the Krapf and Burton’s descriptions from twenty years earlier):

When visiting on one occasion the Kaya of Ribe, one of these ceremonies was proceeding, and I was admitted behind the scenes. Taken to the candidate for admission into the order, I found him behind a screen of platted palm-leaves, stretched at full length upon the ground. He lay stone still, as if dead. Over his head had been spread a covering of soft mud, an inch thick, looking like a close-fitting cap, and he was lying in the manner I have described till the mud should be baked and hardened in the sun. But this was only the foundation of further ornamentation. By the man’s side I observed a basket of red clay and a quantity of grey wool, which had been shorn from some one’s head. These materials, I was told, would be mixed together into a stiff mortar, and then spread over the man’s entire head and face. Horns were to be mounted over each eye, one upon the middle of the forehead, and two others at the back of the head. The ears were to be filled and the nostrils plugged with clay. The mouth was to be stretched to the utmost with a skewer, extending from corner to corner. His neck was to be adorned with beads, iron-chain, etc., and his limbs with bands of skin, etc. Everything was to be done to make him as hideous in appearance as possible.

When this “get up” is complete, the man is turned into the woods, and is allowed to do as he pleases. He prowls around like a demon, making frightful noises, and is the terror of the country. Dr. Krapf says that he is expected to kill some one [*sic*] before the ceremony is over, and this, I have no doubt, was the case in former times, but I believe it is not so now.

The chief part of the ceremony is the putting on of the “luho” or “uvo.” This is a ring of horn or rhinoceros hide, and is the badge of the order. It is placed on the arm just above the elbow, and the ceremony is not complete till this ornament has been put in its place. ... Then the ceremony is concluded. It sometimes lasts for many days, during which time those who are concerned in it run the wildest riot, and day and night continue their disgusting orgies. It is a dark picture, but here the curtain shall fall.⁴⁶

New describes the initiate as wearing “a covering of soft mud, an inch thick, looking like a close-fitting cap,” an image which resonates with both earlier nineteenth-century descriptions of

⁴⁶ C. New, *Life, Wanderings and Labours in Eastern Africa, with an Account of the First Successful Ascent of the Equatorial Snow Mountain, Kilima Njaro, and Remarks upon East African Slavery* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1873), 108–110.

mung'aro participants, and with the Portuguese descriptions of the clay headdresses of Mosseguejo youth which, recall, could only be removed after a man had slain an enemy in battle and collected a genital trophy from the corpse. New also mentions Krapf's claim that a *mung'aro* initiate is "expected to kill someone before the ceremony is over," but "believe[s] it is not so now." He does not specify the basis either of this belief, or his certainty that such killing "was the case in former times."

The most detailed nineteenth century account of the ritual is also, as far as I am aware, the only account provided by a person who claimed to have actually participated in the ritual, as an initiate. Rabai elder Abe Mjeni Mwasunga's description of *mung'aro* was recorded in 1879 by George David, a CMS catechist at Rabai Mpya. David was himself a former slave of East African origin who been "recaptured" and liberated by the British Navy and then taken to the CMS Industrial Mission in Nasik, near Bombay, where he converted to Christianity.⁴⁷ He was sent to Kenya in 1864, serving at the Rabai mission station under Rebmann.⁴⁸ Mwasunga claimed to have once participated in a *mung'aro*—as an initiate. Mwasunga had refused to participate, however, when the ritual was performed (as it had been in Krapf's accounts) in March 1879, when he was asked to serve as one of the initiators.

⁴⁷ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O6, George David, letter, 29 November 1876.

⁴⁸ Ibid. On the population of "Bombay Africans" around Rabai and Mombasa connected with the CMS Missions there, see T. J. Herlehy and R. F. Morton, "A Coastal Ex-Slave Community in the Regional and Colonial Economy of Kenya: The WaMisheni of Rabai, 1880–1963," in S. Miers and R. Roberts (eds.) *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 254–81; A. J. Temu, "The Role of the Bombay Africans (Liberated Africans) on the Mombasa Coast, 1874–1901," in B. A. Ogot (ed.) *Hadith 3* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1971), 53–81; and R. F. Morton, "The Freed Slaves of Frere Town," in *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873–1907* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 52–76.

After having quarreled with his younger brother over a debt (for which his coconut palms were awarded as an indemnity by a court of elders) and having been driven from his home as a result of his refusal to accept the court's decision, Mwasunga settled at Rabai and was baptized in 1878. But, "being one of the number among those who were showed the Wanyika Customs of special office by their grandfathers, the rest having all died excepting he and another who understands to do the things," Mwasunga suddenly found himself in demand at home:⁴⁹

the whole tribe of people wanted him back again, promising him a protection from his own brother, and also the palm trees to be given back to him if he should yield to their request. And when that took place, he came to let me [George David] know, and to get some advice as I was his old friend. While he was with me, I asked him the reason of his being so much wanted by the people, he said to me "Ugnaro" [=Mung'aro] and so I asked him the object of Ugnaro, he related to me as in the enclosed paper. This Custom of Ugnaro as it ends by taking a man's life of a different tribe, it was thought better that he should not go to show them. And so on the early part of the last month the Ugnaro begun [*sic*], and up to this day is not over because they have not killed a man yet.⁵⁰

This was probably the last time *mung'aro* was performed—there is no evidence of any later performance. Instead of officiating at the ritual, Abe Mwasunga the convert offered George David the following description from memory:

On the day on which the Ugnaro begins, the elders orders their young men to spend the night dancing; and in the morning they are ordered to strip themselves, of all their ornaments of beauty which they wear excepting the piece of cloth round their loins. And as soon as they finish striping [*sic*] themselves of the ornaments, both they and the elders go out on the open field, away from their Kayas (Forts) to fetch clay for their bodies. And as soon as they come within the reach of a certain place where they generally take their clay for smearing their bodies, they are made to stand. Then 16 particular elders, go first to their sacred place to remove the charms. ... The place at which they take the Clay is held as sacred among them, and it is supposed not to be known by the other tribes of people owing to their charms being much superior than those of the other tribes. ... After hiding their clay on the banks of the river, they then go up to their Kayas about 7 p.m. with great noise of singing the songs of Ugnaro. And as soon as they reach the Kayas, they must need go round the Kaya singing all along, after which they go to sleep at the certain place fenced round with branches of trees for that purpose. And early in the morning about a cock crow

⁴⁹ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O6, George David to J. A. Lamb, 24 April 1879.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

they go round again singing the same songs. And as soon as they finish going round they hasten to their jungle to hide themselves. They continue doing so morning & evening every day till seven days. And during the time they are doing this loathsome business no man or a woman is allowed to see them excepting the elders only. When the seven days are over they are then allowed to return to their homes, but they are not to wash off the clay from their body till they murder a man, i.e. a stranger or slave seen passing alone any where [*sic*] on their Country. For cause, during the Ugnaro, no one passes their Country for fear lest they should be made a Sacrifice. After this they are then allowed to enter the office of Kambi, i.e. of snake medicine, and the private Council in the forest called “Mvaya”⁵¹

In Mwasunga’s testimony we see the familiar divestment of clothing and donning of clay disguises, the seclusion in the *kaya*, the abduction and ritual killing along the path, and the initiation into a new status linked to ritual and political power (referred to variously in this account as “*Kambi*,” “snake medicine,” and “*Mvaya*”). What is new here is mention of “charms” kept in the *kaya* that must be removed from hidden storage for the ritual, and that have some association with the sacrality of the clay with which initiates adorn their bodies. The source of the clay must also be kept secret. In this account, the differentiating function of the ritual—“separating the men from the boys” (White 1990)—is not limited to the killing of a “stranger.” The secrecy of the ritual media themselves demarcate “insiders” and “outsiders,” and this is related to their “power” (although the exact nature of the “charms” and their “power” is left unspecified).

Two years before recording Mwasunga’s account of *mung’aro*, David had transmitted a “Nyika” migration story to J. A. Lamb, the head missionary at the CMS station in Freretown, near Mombasa. It cites the familiar claim of the alleged Oromo practice of ritual killing for genital trophies as cause of “Nyika” migration from the northern coastal region. Importantly, as with the accounts cited in Section 1.2, it is a description neither of Mijikenda practice, nor of the *mung’aro* ritual. In fact, in no nineteenth-century account (of which I am aware) is the collection of genital

⁵¹ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O6, George David, “Ugnaro,” 24 April 1879.

trophies described as an element of the *mung'aro* ritual, or an aspect of “Nyika” cultural practice in any form (and given the lurid quality of New’s account, for instance, it would be hard to chalk this up to a presumed squeamishness on the part of missionaries, much less a figure like Richard Burton). I adduce this account here because, as I show in Section 1.4, by the early twentieth century—by which time *mung'aro* was no longer being performed—it had *become* part of the Mijikenda understanding of their own ritual history. The ritual practice that had been a marker of Oromo alterity became part of the synthetic image of Mijikenda self-understanding. And as I show in Section 1.5 (in which I revisit some of the Singwaya narratives collected in the early 1970s by Thomas Spear and Cynthia Brantley), the roles of perpetrator and victim in George David’s 1877 tradition will be reversed:

The history of Jilori [=Jilore, inland from Malindi, on the Sabaki River] as George David gives it is that it was originally Wanika territory—that the Gallas once had a law that no man should have a wife until he had killed a man, or at least produced his privy parts, and for this barbarous purpose they used to catch the Wanika which caused them to leave that part of the country, whereupon it was resorted to by runaway slaves who put themselves under Galla protection and render tribute in return; and now that the Gallas fear a white man is coming they are beginning to sell the slaves.⁵²

This 1877 reference is not the only nineteenth century account of killing an outsider for the purpose of removing their genitals (recall Boteler and Owen’s accounts from 1823 of the “Galla” in the Malindi–Lamu hinterland). Nor is George David’s the only account in which this practice is explicitly related to the capture, purchase, or sale of slaves. But unlike those other accounts,

⁵² CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O17, J. A. Lamb to The Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, 19 May 1877. Compare the Singwaya narratives of “Mwenyi Msa Mwangombe. Segeju of Jimbo. Int. 1, 17 August 1972” in William McKay, “A Precolonial History of the Southern Kenya Coast,” PhD dissertation, Boston University (Boston, 1975), 276–277, and those of Joseph Denge (5 March 1971), Bukardi Ndzovu (15 March 1971), Kilian Ngala (15 March 1971), and Pembe wa Bembere (11 May 1977) in T. T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin: The Mijikenda of Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1982), 31, 34, 41, 46, 53.

interestingly, what David is describing is itself a tradition of origins and migration, rather than a description of contemporary practice.

It is unclear how far in the past David understands this migration to have taken place, or how long ago it was that Oromo “had” this “law.” But almost a quarter of a century earlier, in 1853, J. L. Krapf published an account of the very practice David describes:

Throughout the Galla Nation the abominable custom prevails to emasculate a prisoner in war either when he is alive or slain in the battle. The trophy is after cleaning stuffed with grass and suspended in the door of the cottage. When about to marry a woman the lover shows his trophy to her in sign of his bravery. Without this exhibition a Galla cannot get a wife. He is consequently compelled to go to war or waylay innocent travellers [*sic*] of other nations, until he gets his requisite for the marriage contract. But as he cannot always quickly succeed he has found out the horrid expedient of buying a slave from the coast, in order to cut his privacy and carry it to his bride. I have some years ago seen myself some slaves brought from Mombas to the Galla market at Mberria, who were sold for this wicked purpose to the Galla who sell their ivory to Mombasa partly on this count alone.⁵³

Krapf presents it as an ongoing practice among the “the Galla Nation,” and claimed to be an eyewitness to at least one dimension of the practice’s broader social context. In Krapf’s text, as in David’s, the practice is linked to the East African slave trade, although in different terms. Rather than abducting escaped former slaves to sell them back into slavery at the coast, according to Krapf these Oromo were buying slaves at the coast in order to kill them for body parts. But what is important for my argument is not the specific nature of the relationship between slavery, death, and organ theft, but rather the simple fact that they are understood to be related in some way. The conceptual and historical link between these institutions and practices, I argue, are important elements of the associational nexus of images that mediate southern coastal Kenyan society from the nineteenth century to the present.

⁵³ J. L. Krapf, *Memoir on the East African Slave Trade* (Wien: AfroPub, [2002] 1853), 72–73.

Before proceeding to twentieth-century accounts of *mung'aro* as memory, it may be useful to draw out of the passages quoted above some of the images and motifs that belong to this associational nexus or shifting constellation of images. The first is the killing of a stranger or slave, especially one abducted from a path. Importantly, the abduction of an individual in *mung'aro* has strong resonances with—and may perhaps be seen as a ritualized version of—the kidnapping and slave raiding that were increasingly commonplace features of the later nineteenth century in coastal Kenya. The fact that a slave may be the one abducted in during the ritual only adds to the density of associations between these two elements.

The second image or motif is the elaborate decoration of the ritual participants with mud, disguising them by transforming them into monsters, accentuating their own alterity or that of their victim, depending on one's perspective. The ritual initiates are intimates—kin, neighbors, etc.—rendered strange and unknowable. There is a way of reading this feature of the ritual as the materialization and performance of the widespread sensibility on the coast that, as it is put idiomatically, “you can't know what someone has inside them.” Because the thoughts and intentions of others are opaque and only revealed by degrees in social semiosis, those closest to someone—kin, neighbors, etc.—potentially pose the greatest threat. The ritual disguises donned by initiates at the moment of their greatest threat to the surrounding community can thus be seen as concretizing the hidden interiority and external façade that is locally understood to be features of social personhood in the everyday. And, as with the raid-like ritualized killing attributed to the Oromo, the “mud” or “clay” facilitates (by association) the incorporation of certain details of alleged nineteenth-century Oromo practices (like the collection of genital trophies) into twentieth-century understandings of Mijikenda practices in ways that will become clear in Section 1.4.

The third motif is the seclusion in the *kaya* ritual enclosure before and after the killing of a stranger by the masked initiates. And finally, the ritual transition between social statuses, conferring new power or authority on initiates. The significance of these features will become clearest in the discussion of “Elders” in Chapter Three, but to give an initial determination of their significance from these early sources, nineteenth-century Mijikenda and Oromo populations were each stratified by a different system of age- and generation-sets, with members of the senior male generation set (called *kambi* in Northern dialects and *ngambi* in Southern dialects) assuming juridico-political authority over the junior generation (the *nyere*) and society at large. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century Mijikenda societies were cross-cut as well by both male and female “secret societies” or ritual guilds, membership in which was “purchased” through the payment of hefty initiation fees, thus linking hierarchies of age, authority, and esoteric knowledge to a hierarchy of wealth. One can synthesize these four images or motifs into a preliminary constellation, before tracing its twentieth-century transformations: The killing of a stranger along a path is associated with the renewal and transfer of political power that is anchored to specific points in the landscape.

1.4—MEMORY: *MUNG’ARO* IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the end of the nineteenth century, *Mung’aro* had fallen out of practice.⁵⁴ The last documented performance was in 1879—the *mung’aro* in which Abe Mjeni Mwasunga declined to participate, supplying George David with an account of the ritual process instead. Accounts from the early

⁵⁴ The sociological and political transformations of which this abandonment was a part are outlined below, but discussed fully in Part Two of this dissertation. At this point I am merely charting the shifting forms of *mung’aro*’s constellated images and figural motifs.

twentieth century thus take—with one exception—the form of memories of a lapsed ritual practice.⁵⁵ Early colonial administrators collected these accounts in an effort to identify native institutions separate and distinct from what they saw as “alien” forms of Arab and Swahili domination.⁵⁶ In the early twentieth century, the ethnographers of the colonial administration believed they had identified a system of age-grades and ritual authority as being the kind of local political formation amenable to indirect rule.

These institutions, however, seemed to be dissolving before their eyes, despite their efforts to shore up the authority of the “elders” in office.⁵⁷ Elders at the highest levels of the age-grade system, now supported by the colonial state, actively put off the initiation of their successors, holding on to power for as long as possible. This was a possibility inherent in the precolonial system as well, but the material backing of the colonial administration made elders less vulnerable to pressure from their juniors for initiation. Willis, for instance, points to the example of Mwaiona

⁵⁵ The one reference from this period that is not a memory, but purports to be an account of a contemporary practice refers not to the *mung'aro* ritual among Mijikenda peoples, however, but to a practice among their neighbors the “Wariangula,” Oromo-speaking hunter-gatherers of the coast hinterland: “When a human being is killed the private part is dried on the little finger of the slayer and worn as a ring.” Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services (KNA), Nairobi, Kenya. DC/KWL/1/5/1, Acting District Commissioner H. B. Sharpe, “Notes on the Wariangula,” n.d. [circa 1924].

⁵⁶ J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 133.

⁵⁷ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122, Acting District Commissioner (Shimoni) to Acting Provincial Commissioner, 3 October 1907; Assistant District Commissioner (Rabai) to Acting Provincial Commissioner, 5 October 1907; KNA PC/COAST/1/11/144, J. M. Pearson, Assistant District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, “No. 242/1/6,” 28 July 1913; C. W. Hobley, Provincial Commissioner to Assistant District Commissioner, 8 August 1913; KNA, PC/COAST/1/12/98, Assistant District Commissioner, “Memorandum on the Subject of Land Tenure and Customs of the Wadigo,” 28 February 1913. KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, C. C. F. Dundas, “Digo Customs, 1916; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, 19 November 1917; G. B. Thompson, “Information obtained from Mzee Ngoma wa Mwazuno,” n.d.; “Memorandum: Waduruma in Vanga District;” “Headmen and their Councils of Elders,” n.d.; H. L. Mood, “Political Record Book: Notes on the Wa-Duruma, Kayas, Kambis, Customs, &c.,” n.d.

wa Munga (see Image 4.9, below), who “persuaded the PC [Provincial Commissioner] to accept him as ‘paramount head’ of the Duruma” by “claiming that he alone could conduct initiations to produce a new set of elders. He then delayed the initiations indefinitely, and used his position to accumulate wealth.”⁵⁸ As these old men began to die, and as a series of droughts, local rebellions, and the disruptions of the First World War interfered with the ritual transfer of generational authority, the esoteric knowledge these senior age grades claimed to possess was lost and the political structures of which it was a key part began to unravel. By the 1920s the search for viable traditional authorities was abandoned and replaced by a system of government-appointed Local Native Councils and Local Native Tribunals, and the ritual capacities of elder males were effectively uncoupled from the political institutions of indirect rule, despite persistent attempts by the administration to re-unite them (see Chapter Four).⁵⁹

As part of the descriptions of elder councils, age-grades, and secret societies collected in search of viable native political structures, administrators also obtained descriptions of the initiation rituals regulating advancement within, or admittance to, the councils. These included descriptions of *mung'aro*. The first twentieth-century account, collected around 1914 (but not published until 1967), is that of Arthur M. Champion, then the Assistant District Commissioner of Kilifi District. Champion oversaw the Administration’s effort (with which he personally disagreed) to push young Giriama men from an expanding sphere of agricultural production into the coastal labor market, first through the imposition of tax (which the Giriama were able to meet

⁵⁸ Willis, *Mombasa*, 133 n. 71. The generalized problem of office-holders delaying the performance of initiations is the focus of Chapter Four, below.

⁵⁹ Willis, *Mombasa*, 133.

through the sale of agricultural surpluses), and later directly through the offices of government Headmen and officially recognized “elders.”⁶⁰

But, as Willis points out, “in a situation in which the age-grade initiations on which power was claimed to have rested had not taken place for some time, the category of ‘elder’ had become a blurred one; a blurring that was worsened by the introduction of government-appointed headmen, and later chiefs.”⁶¹ Government recognition of the authority of certain elders to the exclusion of others exacerbated intra-generational competition among household heads for power over one another, and inter-generational conflict over enforceable rights to the labor of junior men. And despite the material backing of the colonial state, Champion believed that in order to function, the system needed a ritual backing as well:

With regard to the details of initiation it is difficult to obtain reliable information, as in the first place the last ceremony took place over forty years ago; the old men’s memories are somewhat impaired whilst the young men find it difficult to describe what they have never seen. Both however seem to think that the “old days” are over and that when the time comes for the ceremony to be again performed great modifications will be necessary owing to the altered condition and expansion of the tribe.

I have been given the following brief account of what took place in the *kaya* on the occasion of the initiation of *Kambi Kavuta* [circa 1870].

The whole male population from above about 13 years of age who did not belong to the *Kambi Makwavi* [the generation set preceding *Kambi Kavuta*] arrayed themselves in the *kaya*. Each of the clans provided two bulls and six poles (*mahalu*) of fowls (sixty fowls to the pole). Nothing was said about beer, but I cannot believe that it was omitted from the feast. The *nyeri*, their bodies smeared in red mud and castor oil (*mbono*) and wearing a garment known as *marinda wa makindu* (a kilt made of leaves), were grouped into *marika* and each *rika* was given its name. The feasting continued for some days in the *kaya* and then the young men went forth into the bush, still in the same guise, and so they had to remain till a foreigner could be found and killed. They then scraped off the mud and oil and threw their kilts on to the body of the dead man. The seven senior *marika* then went back to the *morho* [elders’ meeting house] and receiving the coloured cloth (the symbol of

⁶⁰ C. Brantley, *The Giriama and Colonial Resistance in Kenya, 1800–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 76–83.

⁶¹ Willis, *Mombasa*, 92.

the *kambi*), took their place under the great trees; all night long they sat there being taught the mysteries and shown the wisdom of the elders whom they were to supersede.⁶²

In contrast to the nudity or near-nudity of initiates in nineteenth century accounts, Champion describes *mung'aro* as involving a kind of ritual cross-dressing. Champion translates “*marinda*” as “kilts,” perhaps because in this context they are being worn by men, but “*marinda*” are women’s pleated skirts. This opens up an interesting mimetic dimension of the ritual.

These ritual costumes are, in this case, not ordinary women’s *marinda* (which are made of cloth), but rather disposable replicas made from the leaves of the *mkindu* palm. They are imitations of distinctively young, female attire, and are removed and disposed of at the culmination of the ritual that transforms the initiates into old men. The skirts are removed (along with the clay disguise) and placed on the body of the victim whose death effects that transformation and confirms their status as men who have killed. The initiates’ new status as powerful senior men figurates not only their prior existence as having weak, junior, perhaps female qualities in some way, but perhaps also (in the piling up of these garments on his body) the nature of “outsiders” like the ritual victim, relative to their own status as well. Note the resonances here with the testimony of Chipara in the second vignette of the Preface, who is discursively framed as weak and female in comparison to the band of rain-witch “men” he encounters on a path.

Champion’s description of the ritual also includes the first mention of payment for its performance since Burton’s characterization of the junior *nyere* cohort “buying promotion” from the senior *kambi* cohort. This complicates later descriptions of *mung'aro* as quasi-automatic and regularly periodized age-grade ritual, but also resonates with the mentioning in those same

⁶² A. M. Champion, *The AGiriyama of Kenya* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1967), 16–17.

accounts bridewealth and blood-debt payments.⁶³ Each “clan” is required, in Champion’s description, to contribute two bulls and *three hundred and sixty chickens* for the initiation of its men.⁶⁴ This seems implausible. If one takes the claim literally (and not as hyperbole intended to convey to Champion the importance and demanding nature of the ritual, as I believe it to be), a single performance would have necessitated the transfer of 9,360 chickens to a small group of men (the Giriama at the time are described as having 26 clans).⁶⁵ The payment of steep ritual fees does, however, become a central feature in early twentieth century administrative understandings of Mijikenda “elders’ councils,” even as it calls into question age as the basis of the hierarchy. Champion’s account thus gives us a picture of a system in which age may simply be the idiom through which personal wealth (one’s capacity to pay substantial fees in livestock, palm wine, cloth, and cash) stratifies political and ritual power.

In 1917 two colonial officers recorded similar (though less detailed) accounts of *mung’aro* from representatives of the Digo and Duruma peoples, in what was then Vanga District.⁶⁶ G. B. Thompson, the District Commissioner, collected the following account from Mzee Ngoma wa Mwanzano, a Digo “elder,” and Kamtore, his interpreter:

Candidates spent a period of seven days at their respective kayas, during which time much feasting took place. They then stripped, plastered themselves with mud and put on “*Urinda*” (women’s kilt) of *mkindu* [wild date palm] leaves, bells made of borassus palm nuts (ngorokoro) and a string of “*mfwichi*” nuts on a thin piece of hide, which was tied around the waist. The candidates then proceeded to “*Ngara*,” the steps of some dance being performed (according to the interpreter Kamtore this ceremony is common to the

⁶³ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 90.

⁶⁴ Champion, *AGiryama*, 16–17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 10.

⁶⁶ The administrative area in question was called Vanga District until 1924, when, with some boundary modification, it became Digo District. The name changed again in 1948 to Kwale District, acknowledging the ethnic diversity of its population and the relocation of its capital to the town of Kwale. In 2013, under the new constitution, it became (with further boundary modification) Kwale County, where I conducted fieldwork from 2013 to 2015.

Waduruma, Wachonyi, Wakauma and Wagiriama). The payment of this initiation is said to have been 2 or three bullocks.⁶⁷

In Thompson's account, the ritual is reduced to a "dance." Singing and structured, ritualized movement around the space of the *kaya* appeared in earlier accounts, but in this and some later versions, *mung'aro* is described simply as a dance that inaugurated a new generation set. The skirts and clay disguises are mentioned (with the addition of other forms of bodily adornment), as is the payment of an initiation fee, but the sacrificial victim is notably absent here.

In the same year, Assistant District Commissioner H. L. Mood collected a similar account of the ritual as it was once supposed to have been performed (despite his use, unlike Thompson, of the unmarked "ethnographic" present tense) by the neighboring Duruma. Mood's version does include a ritual killing:

Eligible members go to their Kayas, where they remain for a period of seven days. They strip off all their clothes, and plaster their heads with mud (*Kinarra*). After a further period of seven days they leave the Kaya wearing the *Merinda*, and go into the bush. The *Merinda* must not be taken off until a human blood sacrifice has been [*sic*] taken place. It is alleged that a python may be substituted for the human victim. The ceremony of "Kunarra" is also performed on sons of Chiefs, members of the Kambi, and for this purpose, persons who have already been through the ceremony visit the former in their villages.⁶⁸

The syntactically ambiguous assertion that the ritual "is also performed on sons of Chiefs, members of the Kambi" complicates the understanding of *mung'aro* as a purely age-grade or generation-set initiation, and in some ways bears a closer resemblance to New's early description of the lone initiate. It is unclear whether the "Chiefs" in Mood's account refers government-appointed Chiefs (who were a relatively recent addition to the South Coast political landscape), to

⁶⁷ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, G. B. Thompson, "Information Obtained from Mzee Ngoma wa Mwanzano," 19 November 1917.

⁶⁸ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, H. L. Mood, "Notes on the Wa-Duruma, Kayas, Kambis, Customs &c.," 1917.

regionally important “big men” within a field of dispersed and relatively autonomous homestead settlements, or to the heads of individual settlements or settlement clusters. But note that in Mood’s account *mung’aro* is available as an individualized ritual less of elderhood than of a generalized increase in status, power, or leadership, and one that could be performed “in their villages” rather than in the *kaya*. It does not produce a cohort, but shores up power along some lines of descent—those wealthy enough to muster the fees to have male representatives initiated—and not others.

Crucially (if Mood understood and accurately reported what he was told), the patrilineal logic of descent in these Chiefly lines is at variance from the more generally matrilineal Duruma system. This was a noted (and much debated in the colonial administrative correspondence) feature of the lineages of certain local big men, including a particularly powerful figure of centralized authority among the Digo (who, like the Duruma, are matrilineal), called “*Kubo*.”⁶⁹ Such apparent inversion was predicated on the skillful manipulation by these elites of a “kinship idiom of slavery.”⁷⁰ Through the purchase of “slave wives” with no local kin of their own, wealthy men with no “wife-givers” in alliance ensured that their sons (having no “mother’s brothers” from

⁶⁹ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, “Digo Internal Organization,” 28 February 1916; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, 9 March 1916; Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, 15 March 1916; KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17, Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, 26 October 1917; Acting District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, 16 November 1917; Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, “The Digo Kubo,” 15 December 1917; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner, “Ref. your No. 1.237 of 15/12/17,” 28 December 1917; KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5, G. H. Osborne, “The Wadigo of Vanga District,” n.d.; KNA DC/KWL/1/3/4, Native Affairs Department, “Circular No. 46 of 29/10/25. Census—Sec. 4,” 29 October 1925.

⁷⁰ Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, “African ‘Slavery’ as an Institution of Marginality,” in: Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 3–81.

whom to inherit) inherited from their father to the exclusion of *his* sisters' sons.⁷¹

The last early twentieth century account of *mung'aro* as lapsed historical practice (performance of which was still within living memory) is drawn not from a colonial administrator but a missionary who had lived for three decades with the Duruma. In a posthumously published article, the Methodist missionary J. B. Griffiths disputes—in the course of a lengthy and detailed description of the Duruma version of *mung'aro*—the idea (included in Mood's 1917 account) that a wild animal might be substituted for a human victim. Because the account was published posthumously, and given the long period of time Griffiths spent accumulating ethnographic data on the Duruma, it is difficult to date his account more precisely within the 1900–1935 period in which he was active. It is entirely possible, for instance, that Mood's 1917 account was based on information from Griffiths (with whom administrators were in close contact), not Duruma interlocutors. Griffiths lived for decades in the predominantly Duruma area of Mazeras, west of Mombasa and, apparently, had been “initiated” as a Duruma “elder” (although it is unclear what “elder” means here, and what “initiation” looked like. It seems unlikely that Griffiths's initiation included the ritual killing and dismemberment of another person). And despite his use—like Mood—of the unmarked present tense to deny the claim of the Duruma themselves “that they have now substituted a python or a leopard for a human being,” there is no evidence that a *mung'aro* of any configuration was performed in the twentieth century:

The *nyere* [junior age grade] divested themselves of their clothes, and went to the initiation pit, where they had their bodies washed with a mixture of clay and water, and had their heads covered with a thick cap of clay. Then they went to the initiation ground.

⁷¹ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, G. B. Thompson, [untitled correction to G. H. Osborne's “The Wadigo of Vanga District”], 1918; KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5, Assistant District Commissioner, “Note on the ‘Mjomba rule’,” 30 May 1924; W. S. Marchant, “Notes on Duruma and Digo customs with particular reference to Marriage, Divorce & Inheritance,” n.d.; “The Duruma Mode of Inheritance,” n.d.

That and the following nights ... for a week, from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m., they moved forward and backward from one end of the ground to the other, stamping and singing initiation songs in a cloud of dust. ... When a man fell either by accident or through exhaustion, he was trampled to death and buried on the spot.

The first day of the second week, they washed off the clay and donned the initiation dress. One part of the dress consisted of armlets, a loin cover and leggings, all made of the fronds of the *Mkindu* palm; the other part, of a belt of *Flui* seeds, a mask and a club.

When every man had had a charm tied around his left arm, they formed themselves into parties and went in quest of the initiation victim, who had to be a man of an enemy tribe, and whose right hand and sexual organs they had to take to the elders. They will tell one that they have now substituted a python or a leopard for a human being; it is untrue: they are too much afraid of the shades of their forefathers to make a change. While they roamed over their own country and over the countries of friendly tribes, singing and dancing and begging, their object was to watch the main paths which led to an enemy country. They could not return before they had succeeded in their quest. When a party secured a victim, the other parties were made aware of the fact by a tightening grip of the charm on their arms.

When the parties returned, they put on the colored dress of elders, and were admitted to the rank of elders on the following day.⁷²

Griffiths's account includes many familiar images—mud, song and dance, palm leaf skirts, killing, paths, charms—but introduces a number of variations. The first is the grueling nature of the dance: “When a man fell either by accident or through exhaustion, he was trampled to death and buried on the spot.” This is the first such mention of the death of *initiates* in the course of the ritual—trampled underfoot and buried inside the *kaya*. “The initiation dress,” in this account, includes a mask, a club, and a “charm” tied around the left arm of each participant. The charm magically tightens on the wearer's arm when a member of the cohort has killed “a man of an enemy tribe,” whose mutilation now includes the removal of their right hand in addition to their genitals. These “relics” are turned into either a *chirumbi*—a “War Charm” placed at the gate to a fortified *kaya* settlement—or kept in the elders' “house of secrets” at the center of the *kaya*.⁷³ In Griffith's

⁷² J. B. Griffiths, “Glimpses of a Nyika Tribe (Waduruma)” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 65 (1935), 293–294.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 295, 292.

description, then, the ritual does not only effect a transition between social statuses, but renews and revitalizes the hidden ritual objects that anchor elder male authority at the center of the *kaya* enclosures from which their authority radiates. The ritual incorporation of an outsider's reproductive organs and right hand into the very center of in-group authority by those who will wield that authority in-and-by that ritual incorporation is, in this formulation, essential to the ongoing well-being and safety of the community at large.

Griffith's account is of a ritual that had not only not been performed in over fifty years. It is also a characterization of the place of that ritual in mediating a political system and social organization that had been dramatically transformed during that period as well. As the image of *mung'aro* continued to morph over the twentieth century, however, the aspect highlighted in Griffith's account of the sacrificial revitalization of elder-controlled "charms" took on new significance. Re-contextualized in Mijikenda traditions of origin, the charms were became pots of protective medicine brought from the Mijikenda homeland of Singwaya. The Mijikenda exodus from Singwaya itself was accounted for by the reaction of neighboring peoples to the violence of *mung'aro*. To renew the protective magic brought with them from a homeland from which they were driven by violence, they must repeat (in this interpretation) the ritual that resulted in their expulsion from home. It is to this "mythic" moment of the *mung'aro* constellation—its incorporation into twentieth-century Mijikenda traditions of origin—that I now turn.

1.5—MUNG'ARO IN MYTH

In this section I examine three different ways in which the image of *mung'aro* has been incorporated into Mijikenda origin stories over the twentieth century. Significantly, *mung'aro* does not feature in Mijikenda traditions of origin (in Singwaya or elsewhere) until the twentieth century,

at which point (as we have seen) it had fallen out of practice.⁷⁴ The Singwaya narrative is, as I argue in Chapter Two, a development of the twentieth century, despite which it remains an important archive of pre-twentieth century Mijikenda social life precisely because of the ways it incorporates elements like *mung'aro* into the narrative structure. In this section the focus will be on the image of *mung'aro* in this new configuration; the following chapter will situate the *mung'aro*-variants of the Singwaya narrative in relation to older versions that characterize the originary violence of the myth in different terms.

I begin with the account of Hugh Martin Thackeray Kayamba, a Tanganyikan teacher and colonial civil servant whose account of the Digo past puts *mung'aro* at the foundation of political order *after* the flight from Singwaya. I then address the anthropologist Luther Gerlach's theory of *mung'aro* and the origins Digo social structure based on his fieldwork in Southern coastal Kenya in the late 1950s. Briefly, Gerlach holds that a deteriorating moiety system had previously been regulated by the performance of *mung'aro* in the past, and is retrospectively rationalized in the present by the myth of Singwaya origins. Finally, I turn to the oral traditions collected by Thomas Spear, Cynthia Brantley, and Suzanne Miers in the 1970s. In many of these oral traditions—but certainly not all, as seen in Chapter Two—*mung'aro* is cited as the cause of the war with Oromo neighbors that led to the expulsion of the Mijikenda from Singwaya. Note that the earliest versions of the Singwaya traditions make no reference to *mung'aro* at all, and either leave the cause of the war with the Oromo unspecified, or attribute it to a dispute between men over sexual access to women.

⁷⁴ I examine the full range of available Mijikenda origin stories from the nineteenth century to the present in Chapter Two.

The earliest mention of *mung'aro* in a Singwaya origin story (and not, like the accounts collected in Section 1.4, as a description of a contemporary or only recently abandoned practice) is a text from northern Tanganyika written by H. M. T. Kayamba. Completed in the 1920s but not published until 1947, the text is compiled from the statements of sixteen Digo elders living in Tanga on the Tanganyikan coast.⁷⁵ Kayamba's "Notes on the Wadigo" circulated among colonial administrators in manuscript form as early as 1928 as part of an investigation into Digo matrilineal descent and inheritance, thought to be partly responsible for their relative "backwardness," and into the outcomes of German and English colonial policy toward matrilineality in Tanganyika and Kenya respectively, during the pre-war period.

Kayamba relates that "some ten generations ago there was a tribe called the Wambokomu which inhabited the country known as Chungwaya [=Singwaya], north of Lamu."⁷⁶ After siding

⁷⁵ H. M. T. Kayamba, "Notes on the Wadigo," *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 23 (1947), 80–96. KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5, H. M. T. Kayamba, "Notes on the Wadigo compiled by Martin Hugh Kayamba, a native of Tanganyika Territory," 1928. On the administration's preoccupation with matrilineal descent, see: KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199, [C. C. F. Dundas?], "Digo Customs," 1916; C. W. Hobley (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), "Digo Internal Organization," 28 February 1916; G. H. Osborne (District Commissioner, Vanga), to C. W. Hobley, 9 March 1916; G. H. Osborne to C. W. Hobley, 19 November 1917; H. L. Mood, "Inheritance," n.d.; G. B. Thompson (Acting District Commissioner, Vanga), [correction to G. H. Osborne's "The Wadigo of Vanga District"], 1918; H. E. Lambert (Assistant District Commissioner, Digo), "Note on the 'Mjomba rule'," 30 May 1924; KNA CP.572 KEN, W. S. Marchant, "Matrilineal Inheritance," n.d.; O. F. Watkins, "Note to the District Commissioner," 7 August 1928; O. F. Watkins (Provincial Commissioner, Coast) to D. L. Baines (Provincial Commissioner, Tanga, Tanganyika), 21 August 1928; D. L. Baines to O. F. Watkins, 5 September 1928; "Record of a meeting held at Tanga on December 8–9th 1928, between officers of Kenya and Tanganyika Governments"; H. R. Montgomery (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), "Digo Inheritance," 13 March 1930; "Digo Inheritance," 18 March 1930; L. A. Field Jones (Provincial Commissioner, Coast), "Matrilineal Inheritance," 13 February 1933; C. T. Davenport, "Re. Matrilineal and Patrilineal Inheritance," 14 February, 1933; G. R. B. Brown (District Commissioner, Kwale), "Extract from Digo District annual report for 1938. Anthropological."

⁷⁶ Cognate with "Pokomo," an ethnic group now living in the Tana River Delta region of northern mid-coast Kenya. Kayamba, "Notes on the Wadigo," 80.

with the “Wasegeju” in a war (the cause of which is unspecified) between the Segeju and the “Wagalla,” the Wambokomu migrate south, fragmenting along the way into five of the nine canonical Mijikenda groups: Giriama, Chonyi, Ribe, Duruma, and Digo. In Kayamba’s account, then, *mung’aro* is not cited as the cause of the war that led to migration. Nor is any claim made that the ritual was performed in “Chungwaya” at all. Instead, *mung’aro* is presented as the act that re-founds political order in the wake of the exodus, after settling on the Kenyan coast:

The Wadigo had no chief at the time. Each elder of a family ruled over his own. There was no special authority to decide Digo tribal affairs. The result was that the poor people were oppressed unmercifully. It is said that if a weak man broke a chair of a strong man by accident he was sold in compensation for the breakage of the chair. Chaos and oppression were the order of the day. The more powerful a family, the more tyrannical were its members and there was no tribal authority to which the aggrieved could appeal for redress.

After a time the Wadigo decided to establish tribal authorities. It was therefore agreed amongst themselves to hold a grand tribal meeting called *Mngaro* at a certain pond near Shimoni. The people crowded into the pond displacing the water by their numbers. Many were trampled underfoot in the process. This function went on for about three months until the pond was quite dry. No person was allowed to leave the lake and go home.

When the lake was dry, they smeared themselves with mud and returned to their villages. Each person was taken in turn to his house and his wife asked to identify him. If she did she paid a goat as a fee for identification. These words were used to the wife, *Chikumbu kumbuchila mulumeo* i.e. If you can remember, identify your husband. When all Wangaro had been identified by their wives, they returned to their houses. Then each village selected three persons to fill up three grades of a council which was assembled after the *Mngaro*.

1. *Mwerya*
2. *Mugwa*
3. *Mdowe*

These three chiefs of each village periodically sat together at the council and judged the Wadigo with the assistance of the village elders.

In addition to this open council the *Mwerya*, *Mugwa*, and *Mdowe* established a secret council to which the village elders were not admitted. The village elders in due course became curious about these secret meetings of the three dignitaries but could only obtain the information that it was *Ngambi* and could not be revealed to persons who were not members.

Eventually certain elders applied to be admitted into the *Ngambi* and were charged entrance fees, etc., to become members. This was the beginning of the *Ngambi* council.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” 80–81.

Kayamba then enumerates the range of substantial fees payable for initiation through a series of ranks within the *ngambi*, which seem—in this account—only to regulate access to palm wine at meetings of the *ngambi* council.⁷⁸

In Kayamba's incorporation of *mung'aro* into the Digo origin story, we see the same trampling underfoot of participants as in Griffiths's ostensibly ethnographic account of the neighboring Duruma peoples. But while in Griffiths's account there is a movement of people *from* the body of water where the mud or clay is obtained *to* the dry clearing where the "dance" is held, for Kayamba the dance itself transforms the landscape from a lake into the dry land from which the mud for their ritual disguises is taken. Interestingly, it is the wives—absent from the ritual itself—who pay for the initiation of their husbands, but not until they can correctly identify them. The law-founding ritual is not complete until all the surviving husbands have been "remembered" by their wives and normal domestic arrangements are resumed. Only then are the "grades" of a "governing council" filled with representatives from each "village."

The triarchic quasi-chiefship described by Kayamba is not attested anywhere else in the ethnographic or historical literature on any of the Mijikenda people. But it is from these three ranks, in Kayamba's account, that the membership of a secret society is drawn: the mysterious *ngambi*. In Kayamba's text, the governing council of elders—*ngambi*—begins as a secret society that slowly transforms into a political institution through the initiation of new members on the basis of their ability to pay "entrance fees." This secret society was made up of elders who had participated in "a grand tribal meeting called *Mngaro* at a certain pond near Shimoni" and who had subsequently been "selected" by their villages "to fill up three grades of a council."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid. 81–2.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 81.

Kayamba's version of the Digo *ngambi*, then, like the Giriama *kambi* described by Brantley, Champion, Spear, and others (see Chapter Three), consists of three "grades" of members, but the similarities end there.⁸⁰ There is no mention of a grouping together of junior grades equivalent to the *nyere* of other Mijikenda peoples, and two of the three "grades" named by Kayamba (*Mwerya* and *Mugwa*) appear in a later anthropological account as referring to a fundamentally different kind of social group—different both from Kayamba's own description of them and from all other descriptions of Mijikenda age-grade systems.

In Luther Gerlach's 1960 dissertation, "The Social Organisation of the Digo of Kenya," *Mweria* and *Mugwa* are names of two (out of four) "exogamous [matrilineal] sections," the others being *Mwana Mweria* and *Mwana Mugwa* ("*mwana*" meaning "child [of]").⁸¹ In his reconstruction of the system which, at the time of his fieldwork was no longer observed, *Mweria* marries classificatory cross-cousins *Mugwa*, and their children would be either *Mwana Mweria* or *Mwana Mugwa*, tracing descent matrilineally. *Mwana Mweria* marry *their* classificatory cross-cousins *Mwana Mugwa*, *their* children being either *Mweria* or *Mugwa* according to matrilineal descent. Special social functions were assigned to these groups, according to Gerlach's informants, with *Mweria* and *Mwana Mweria* responsible for leadership in war and organization of agricultural production, and *Mugwa* and *Mwana Mugwa* responsible for mortuary rites.⁸²

⁸⁰ These three eldest Kambi grades, however, have entirely different names among the Giriama (and other northern Mijikenda peoples). Instead of *Mwerya*, *Mugwa*, and *Mdowe*, the Giriama and others have *Vula Mbere* ("The Rain Ahead"), *Vula Kahi* ("The Middle Rain"), and *Vula Nyuma* ("The Rain Behind"). See: Champion, *AGiryama*; Spear, *Kaya Complex*; and C. Brantley, "Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama," *Africa* 48-3 (1978), 248–264.

⁸¹ L. P. Gerlach, "The Social Organization of the Digo of Kenya," PhD dissertation, University of London (London, 1960), 243.

⁸² *Ibid.* 244.

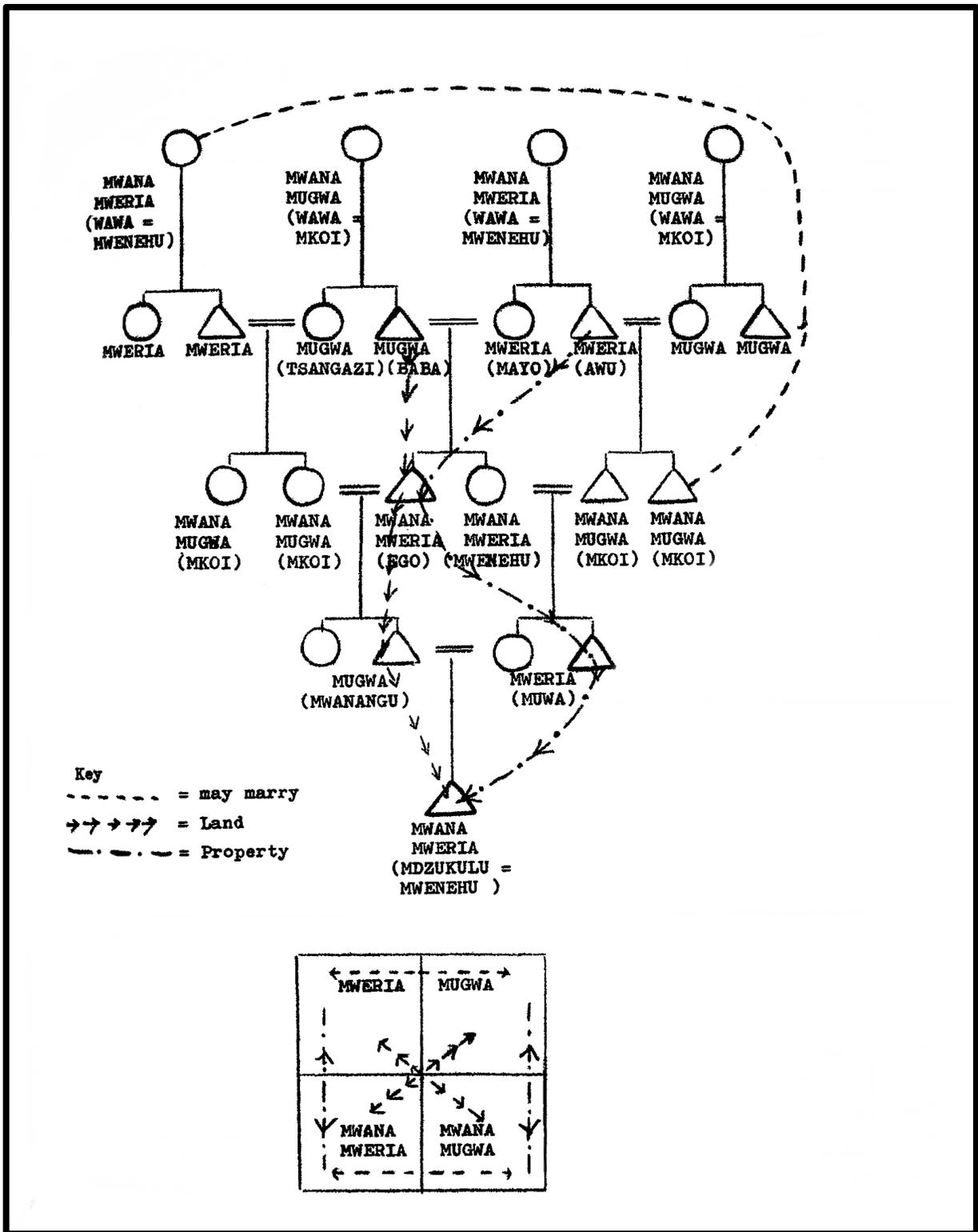


Diagram 1.1: Luther P. Gerlach's diagrammatic representation of the lapsed *Mweria-Mugwa* system. From Gerlach, "Social Organization," 245.

In Gerlach's description, then, pre-colonial Digo society was divided into two moieties in which genealogical—not chronological—generation was marked in a two-part alternating arrangement regulating exogamy and, in a more limited way, social function. The only other mention of these names, however, is in material provided by one each of Spear and Suzanne Miers's later informants—each of whom contradicts Gerlach's version, and each other's. What these two accounts share, however, is an understanding of these named groups as *rikas* or “age-grades,” rather than a moiety system of kinship and descent, and that *mung'aro* was what initiated individuals into these groups. Juma Zani, for instance, told Spear in a 1971 interview that

For *mung'aro* they used to come here to this tree. ... It is very old. They came here for their discussions about the festivals. After the meeting here they went to Vevesi where they smeared themselves with mud and danced *mung'aro*. There were the following age sets: *mwerya*, *mugwa*, *mwanamwerya*, and *mwanamugwa*. The cycle went like this: the first generation was the *mugwa*, second *mwerya*, the third *mwanamugwa*, and the fourth *mwanamwerya*.⁸³

Rather than a moiety system, Spear's informant (over a decade after Gerlach's own fieldwork) understands these four groups to be sequential age sets that make up the *ngambi*.

By contrast, Suzanne Miers records the following in a 1974 interview with Said Mwangumbo:

EK [=Ezekiel Kazungu, Miers's interpreter]: How were people initiated?

SM [=Said Mwangumbo, the interviewee]: If a boy wanted to be initiated he paid the Ngambi a goat and some wine and then he went to the *Kaya* to dance *Mng'aro* and became a Ngambi too.

EK: When the Wagiriama initiated their children there was some sort of order to be followed. Did the Wadigo initiate their children according to some definite order?

SM: First the children were initiated into *Mwerya* and *Mwanamwerya* then into *Mugwa* and *Mwanamugwa*. When someone was going to be initiated for instance into *Mwerya* he usually went with a friend or a cousin or even his brother who had already been initiated

⁸³ MHT 74, in Mijikenda Historical Traditions (MHT), Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University Bloomington Library, US. Thomas T. Spear, "Mijikenda Historical Traditions," 1978. Published in edited form as T. T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and their Interpretation: The Mijikenda of Kenya* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981).

into *Mwanmwerya*. This was very necessary because he was expected to surmount very difficult obstacles and so his friend or whoever he would have gone with would console him in case he was afraid.

EK: Were *Mwerya Mwanamwerya* etc. societies or *Rika*?

SM: People who danced the *Mng'aro* at the same time, were of the same rika. Or people who went to the Kaya at the same time, to be circumcised, were also of the same rika and it happened that if big boys went to the Kaya to be circumcised with the young boys were also considered to be of the same rika.

EK: At what age were people initiated into *Mwerya*?

SM: It depended on how rich the father of the person who wished to be initiated was. Some people even wished their children to dance *Mng'aro* so that they could become Ngambi but since they [had] no goat or a cow or wine to give to the elders they could not dance. Besides people who went to the *Mng'aro* had to [be] somehow grown up and reasonable to understand the rituals. When they went to dance *Mung'aro* they could never be seen by other people, also when people came from *Mung'aro* other people were not allowed to see them and if someone was caught looking at them he was fined either a goat or two.⁸⁴

Mwagumbo's account initially seems closer to Gerlach's reconstruction, grouping *Mwerya* and *Mwanamwerya* together on the one hand, and *Mugwa* and *Mwanamugwa* together on the other. There is some ambiguity in his statement that "children were initiated into *Mwerya* and *Mwanamwerya* then into *Mugwa* and *Mwanamugwa*," since it is unclear whether this is meant to show a serial structure (i.e., first *Mwerya*, then *Mwanamwerya*, then *Mugwa*, etc.) or not (i.e. people are initiated into *Mwerya* and *Mwanamwerya* at the same time, then at the next *Mung'aro*, participants enter *Mugwa* or *Mwanamugwa*). In either case, it is different from Spear's interlocutor Juma Zani's understanding of the progression through generation sets as *Mugwa*, *Mwerya*, *Mwanamugwa*, *Mwanamwerya*. But Brantley's record of Mwagumbo's account also contradicts Gerlach's model, in that an initiate into *Mwerya* (in his example) would go with "a friend or a cousin or even a brother" in *Mwanamwerya*. In the kinship system outlined by Gerlach, above (and explored in detail in throughout his dissertation), *Mwanamwerya* would belong to an alternate

⁸⁴ Miers Interviews, Oral History Archive, British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA), Nairobi, Kenya. Said Mwagumbo, 14 November 1974, Diani, Kenya.

generation, and thus not be considered a cousin (*mkpoi* or *mkoi*) or a brother (*kaka*) but rather (within the Digo classificatory kinship terminology) a *muwa* or “sister’s son” (see Diagram 1.1). Moreover, cousins and brothers belong to different moieties in Gerlach’s model: one’s brother (even one’s classificatory brother, like one’s father’s brother’s daughter, who is not considered a “cousin”) would belong to the same moiety as Ego (*Mwerya/Mwanamwerya*, in this example), but one’s cousins (that is, one’s *cross*-cousins) would belong to the other (in this case *Mugwa/Mwanamugwa*).

By the time I began conducting preliminary research in Kwale District in 2010, Digo informants did not recognize *mweria*, *mwanamwerya*, *mugwa*, and *mwanamugwa* as “Chidigo words” at all—even obsolete ones—much less as kinship categories. During an interview with two Kaya Kwale elders in 2017, however, one man did offer *Mwanamwerya* and *Mwanamugwa* as having been ranks or offices (*vyeo*, sg. *cheo*) within the *Ngambi*, in response to a question about status within the *Ngambi* council, without my having raised the terms.⁸⁵ But in this case they were understood not as generation-sets or as part of a moiety system—as Gerlach understood them—but as sequential positions in a hierarchy of ranks, in a council drawn *from* a generation-set. In this respect it would seem to be in closer accord with Juma Zani’s conceptualization of the Digo *ngambi*, although it lacks the *Mwerya* and *Mugwa* correlates.⁸⁶

Gerlach’s vision of the pre-colonial Digo past is largely an ideal reconstruction from mid-twentieth century patterns of respect and joking relationships, marriage rules, and generational equivalence. But it is also derived from oral traditions collected during his 1958–1959 fieldwork. These versions, like Kayamba’s, relate the birth of the social and political order as part of a

⁸⁵ Int. 64.

⁸⁶ MHT 74. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 159.

narrative of origins, but with two key differences. The first is that in Gerlach's account the system is the result of events that took place *in* Singwaya, rather than after the southward migration. The second is that the foundation of this order is unrelated to the performance of *mung'aro*, which serves, or served, only to perpetuate the system and not to establish it:

The first two Digo were a man named Chirau and his sister Ngumba, both of whom lived in the place north of the Galana River which the Digo call Shungwaya, and claim to be their original homeland.⁸⁷ ... Chirau's wife bore him sons and daughters, each of whom he named *Mweria*. Ngumba bore sons and daughters, each of whom she named *Mugwa*. ... *Mweria* males married only *Mugwa* females, and *Mugwa* males married only *Mweria* females. ... In the days of the system of *Mweria* and *Mugwa*, there was, ideally at least, no conflict between patrilineal tenure of land and matrilineal descent and inheritance. This is because both property and inheritance returned to the originating group in the second descending generation. ... The Digo claim that at one time they did not make war among themselves, and the only units of society were the units of *Mweria—Mugwa* and *Mwana Mweria—Mwana Mugwa*. They say that only after they came to Kenya and settled in their present habitat did they develop lineages and lineage groups, which then warred against each other.⁸⁸

Whereas for Kayamba *mung'aro* was a ritual innovation to found a just political order out of chaos, in Gerlach's account *mung'aro*, like the Digo generation-set system itself, is understood to have been a survival from an earlier, idealized past that has only recently deteriorated in the face of increasing social division:

The system of *Mweria—Mugwa* continued to function in many important ways in spite of this development [of lineages and lineage groups]. This system formed the basis for an age-grade, or rather a generation set system. For example, a generation of *Mweria* and *Mugwa* existed as elders. Below them, a generation of *Mwana Mweria* and *Mwana Mugwa* were the young and middle-aged men of warrior class, and below this generation was a new generation of *Mweria* and *Mugwa* children growing up, preparing to be initiated and enter the warrior status.

Every 13 to 15 years, the men of the elder and warrior generation would hold a *mng'aro* or initiation for the whole "child" generation. If the warrior generation, that is,

⁸⁷ "Kirao and Ngumba" are cited in many of Spear's Singwaya traditions as waypoints or sites of secondary dispersal during the migration, and in a number of nineteenth century traditions of origin as the original home—not Singwaya—of the "Wanyika." As far as I am aware Gerlach's is the only version in which these two are personified as ancestors.

⁸⁸ Gerlach, "Social Organization," 243–7.

the generation which had last experienced the *mng'aro*, consisted of *Mweria* and *Mugwa*, then all *Mwana Mweria* and *Mwana Mugwa* who had never been initiated went to the *mng'aro*. If the warrior generation consisted of *Mwana Mweria* and *Mwana Mugwa*, then all non initiated *Mweria* and *Mugwa* went to the *mng'aro*.⁸⁹

Mung'aro emerges here not as the founding moment of political order in Digo society after their flight from Singwaya, but as a regularly repeated ritual of initiation regulating the relationship between generations *and* between men and women of the same generation.⁹⁰ Interestingly, his periodization of the ritual (as taking place every thirteen to fifteen years) is closer to the periodization we see in nineteenth century accounts (recall Burton's "once about every twenty years") than the later reconstructions of Spear (fifty-two years), Brantley ("a minimum of thirty-nine years"), and Champion (forty-five years).⁹¹

Gerlach's version is also unique among the *mung'aro* traditions in that it is explicitly characterized as a ritual for the initiation "of both sexes, just entering the first years of puberty".⁹²

Each *mng'aro* lasted for weeks and involved the circumcision of both males and females, and extensive dancing in the thick mud *chilindini* during which weaklings often collapsed and were trodden underfoot, to die. Furthermore, males being initiated had to take to the warpath and kill either dangerous wild animals or humans of other tribes, or both.⁹³

The claim that men and women were initiated together in a single ritual is contradicted by an undated, but much earlier, account by C. C. F. Dundas, a colonial administrator in the region. In a report on Duruma political structure and ritual, Dundas writes:

One of the ceremonies at elections held by the Wa-Duruma is called "Kunarra." This consists in the men leaving the Kayas, where the ceremonies commence, wearing the Marinda, and going into the bush for a period of 7 days. Here they plaster their heads with

⁸⁹ Ibid. 247–8.

⁹⁰ Gerlach, "Social Organization," 243–253.

⁹¹ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 90; T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1977), 59; Brantley, "Gerontocratic Government," 254; Champion, *AGiryama*, 16.

⁹² Gerlach, "Social Organization," 248.

⁹³ Gerlach, "Social Organization," 249.

mud. It would, moreover, be unlawful for any woman of the tribe to come near them during this period, the penalty for such an offence being death.⁹⁴

This does not mean, of course, that male and female initiations could not have been held simultaneously and separately; only that *mung'aro*—"kunarra"—was a male "ceremony," according to Dundas's informant.

Finally, in their discussions of *mung'aro* Gerlach's informants seem to have had a sense that, beyond the lethal danger to weaker participants and solitary outsiders, the ritual posed a more general threat to the very population whose youths were being initiated:

Mng'aro was a time of stress and strain for all Digo, not only the initiates. For one thing, ... *mung'aro* brought danger to the land. It is said that when the male initiates became drunk with the excitement and power of the *mng'aro* and took to the warpath to prove their mettle, no one, not even a Digo of their own or other areas was safe.⁹⁵

Although written within the structural functionalist paradigm of mid-twentieth century British Social Anthropology, we get a clear sense in this passage of ritual *excess*. *Mung'aro* appears here as an event that unleashes a force threatening to undermine the very institutions it is meant to reproduce: Young men, "drunk" with "excitement and power" bring "danger to the land," and "no one, not even a Digo of their own or other areas was safe."⁹⁶ Gerlach's account paradoxically deviates most dramatically from all other reconstructions of Mijikenda social structure while at the same time bringing us back most closely to those early descriptions of Johann Krapf, where "the young people assume the mastery of the aged ones" and may "slay anybody on the road."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ KNA DC/MSA/8/2, C. C. F. Dundas, "Mvula Nyuma," n.d. "Kunarra" [= *kung'ara*], "to shine," is the verb from which the nominal form, *mung'aro*, is derived. Dundas is describing the Duruma practice, but of the other Mijikenda peoples the Duruma are the most similar culturally, linguistically, and geographically to the Digo.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 252.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Krapf, "Account of the Wonicas," 42–43.

The most dramatic shift in the relationship between the Singwaya traditions of origin and the *mung'aro* ritual, however, is in the oral narratives collected by Thomas Spear and Cynthia Brantley in 1970–1. In these versions of the Singwaya story, *mung'aro* has been fully incorporated into the myth itself as the cause of the war that results in the original migration from Singwaya: As part of an initiation ritual regulating the intergenerational transfer of political authority, the Mijikenda kill a member of the neighboring Oromo. The victim of this ritual killing is described (by the senior men who were Spear's sources) as a “boy,” a young Oromo man, betrayed by his Mijikenda friends. His body is buried in secret at the center of a cattle enclosure, where his bones are eventually discovered by his relatives (sometimes through the betrayal of a Mijikenda woman who reveals the truth to them). The Mijikenda refuse to pay *kore* (“blood-debt”)—in other words they refuse to compensate the Oromo with a “payment” of Mijikenda children—resulting in a war, which the Mijikenda lose. They are pursued down the Kenyan coast, and eventually settle in the fortified *kayas* along the coastal ridge.

By the time *mung'aro* was incorporated into the Singwaya narratives as the cause of the war with the Oromo (which again seems *only* to have occurred by the early 1970s), the significance of the ritual was thus open to a wide range of interpretations. Among those explanations and definitions of *mung'aro* offered by Spear's informants, are the following:

- to bring rain in times of drought⁹⁸
- to “differentiate between *kambi* and *nyere*”⁹⁹
- to “cut a rika ... during the *vuri* [short rains]”¹⁰⁰
- “a dance which was performed during mourning ceremonies or when people were going to fight”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ MHT 4. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 46.

⁹⁹ MHT 23. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ MHT 29. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 59.

¹⁰¹ MHT 65. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 88.

- a circumcision ritual¹⁰²
- a dance performed near a large pond during the execution of “wrong-doers condemned to death by the *kaya* elders”¹⁰³
- to “select leaders”¹⁰⁴
- to “cleanse the sick”¹⁰⁵

Despite the inconsistency of these narratives—in their descriptions of the ritual process and their representations of its significance, purpose, or function—Spear ventures the claim that “the initiation ceremony of the age-sets, *mung’aro*, was a detailed reenactment of the migration from Singwaya.”¹⁰⁶ He undertakes no analysis of the ritual along these lines, however, so this interesting claim unfortunately remains merely an assertion.

Looking closely at these historical traditions collected by Spear and Brantley, it is difficult to see any textual evidence to support Spear’s claim that *mung’aro* was “a detailed reenactment of the migration from Singwaya.”¹⁰⁷ This is true both at the level of content (it is difficult to sustain the claim, for instance, that the order in which named groups are said to have held their respective *mung’aro* rituals encodes the order in which they left Singwaya, especially when the accounts of who left in which order conflict with one another) and of logic: It is difficult to see how the *mung’aro* performed in Singwaya could be the reenactment of a migration that had not yet occurred, and of which its performance—a performance, not necessarily the only one that took place in Singwaya—was the cause (according to Spear’s own sources) not the result. An alternative, quasi-psychoanalytic interpretation might be that the periodic repetition of *mung’aro*

¹⁰² MHT 38. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 117.

¹⁰³ MHT 67. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 142.

¹⁰⁴ MHT 71. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 150.

¹⁰⁵ MHT 74. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 157.

¹⁰⁶ Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 44.

¹⁰⁷ Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 44.

can be understood as the ritual repetition of a supposed “primal crime” recounted in the origin story (see, for example, Freud and Reik 1957). But whatever its speculative virtues, such an interpretation would only be a tempting optical illusion made possible by the incorporation of the ritual into the Mijikenda origin story over seventy years *after* the consolidation of the Singwaya narrative at the turn of the century.

Whether or not one finds the claim convincing, Spear is articulating a version of an older structural-functionalist theory of myth as a “charter” for ritual (see: Malinowski 1948 [1926]). But as Walsh points out, the appearance of *mung’aro* in the Singwaya narratives “does not seem to be the kind of myth that sanctions ritual action, given that the consequences of the *mung’aro* in the story are negative for the Mijikenda, and do not obviously explain or justify key features of the ritual.”¹⁰⁸ And given that accounts of *mung’aro* predate the earliest references to Mijikenda origins in Singwaya by fifty years (and that accounts of the same constellation of images and motifs predate them by three hundred years, or seven hundred years, depending on what one makes of the Portuguese and Chinese sources), one could just as easily make the counter-claim: That in this case what we have is a nineteenth-century ritual charter for a twentieth-century myth.

Alternatively, one could claim that the constellation of images condensed in *mung’aro*—has a much deeper history among coastal peoples than the Singwaya narrative—is in some way more compelling to Spear’s informants than the myth of Singwaya origins on its own, and was perhaps unconsciously incorporated into it for that very reason (as part of an unconscious effort to shore up a widely shared but historically shallow and perhaps for that reason less than culturally satisfying origin story). One could suggest, referring back to the origin story recorded by George

¹⁰⁸ M. Walsh, “Mung’aro, the Shining,” *Kenya Past & Present* 40 (2013), 10.

David in 1877 (Section 1.3, above), that neither the narrative nor the figural forms of the constellation is “strong enough”—is culturally compelling enough—to exist independently of the other, and that each requires the other for mnemonic support.

But with regard to the question of the relationship of *mung'aro* to Mijikenda origin stories, recall that in David's 1877 non-Singwaya origin story, the killing of an outsider and the removal of his genitals is described as a necessary step in the transition between social statuses, and is given as the cause of a migration, but the direction of violence is different: The Oromo are the perpetrators and the Mijikenda the victims. In the Singwaya narratives collected in the 1970s, by contrast, the point of Mijikenda origin is transposed (from Mwangea to Singwaya) and the direction of the violence between Oromo and Mijikenda is reversed. But the constellation of figural motifs that anchor the myth is the same. Between the 1870s and the 1970s, in other words, the geographical point of Mijikenda origin is displaced and the roles of ritual killer and victim are reversed, but the bundle of images—seizure along a path, killing and dismemberment, transition between social statuses, elder power—remains unchanged, propping up the story. Such reconfigurations, reversals, displacements, and transpositions are facilitated by the imagistic and associational qualities of the ideas condensed in accounts of *mung'aro* as ritual, memory, and myth. And as will be seen in Chapters Five and Six, this bundle of images mediates rumors in the present that otherwise have no clear connection to *mung'aro*, which has, in any case, largely disappeared from the collective memory of the Mijikenda peoples in the present.

1.6—TRACE

Between 1992 and 1996, a team of researchers from the University of Nairobi and the British Institute in Eastern Africa led by Justin Willis, George Gona, and David Sperling collected over

one hundred oral histories from residents of what is now Kilifi County. Unlike the “Traditions of Origin” Spear collected twenty-five years before, most of the interviews focus on the histories of individuals, families, and clans, as well as historical figures like Ngonyo wa Mwavuo, the most famous of the “New Men” to rise to prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ Many, however, turn eventually to questions of ritual history and whether the interviewee, their father, and their grandfather had been initiated into the *Kambi* or any of the various “Secret Societies” related to the *Kayas*.

There were considerable differences among interviewees in their conceptualization of the sequence in which initiation *ngomas* (in this context, “rituals,” though often translated as “dances”) were to be performed (I have focused in this chapter only on *mung’aro*, which is one in a sequence of male initiation rituals [see below and especially Chapter Three]), and what kind of group one became a member of by virtue of having undergone each ritual (see Table 1.3, below). The “function” of *mung’aro*—what these interviewees understood the ritual to *do*—and the details of the ritual process itself were for the most part left unspecified. Two respondents stated that *Mung’aro* was performed to “cut” (*kukata*) a *rika* (another stated in more general terms that it created groups of men and gave them names).¹¹⁰ Two mentioned wearing *marinda* skirts made from palm fronds as part *Mung’aro*, one of whom also mentioned the wearing of powdery white disguises of ash, dust, or maize flour, reminiscent of earlier accounts of white clay disguises.¹¹¹ Another stated that the *mung’aro* “song” was sung naked, but that when singing, participants

¹⁰⁹ Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” 489–91. See also Chapter Three, below.

¹¹⁰ Int Kil 5b, Kilifi Interviews, Oral History Archive, BIEA, Nairobi, Kenya; Int Kil 15b. Another individual asserted that this was the purpose of an initiatory *ngoma* called *Kirao*, and made no mention of *mung’aro* at all. Int Kil 99a; Int Kil 10d.

¹¹¹ Int Kil 5b; Int Kil 38b.

coated themselves with mud (“*wakiimba nyimbo yao wanajipakia tope kisha tena wanaimba tupu tupu*”).¹¹² But most of the men and women interviewed simply identified as a song (occasionally specifying that it was “a song of the old men” (*nyimbo ya wazee*)), or stated that they did not know *mung’aro*, but had only heard of it.¹¹³ There was also disagreement about whether *mung’aro* was performed in the *Kaya* ritual centers or in individual homesteads, and about whether it was an *ngoma* exclusively for men or for men and their wives.¹¹⁴

Two men described *Mung’aro* as involving the killing of a “Galla,” one in the context of a Singwaya narrative, the other as a possible—though not necessary—element of *mung’aro* in general.¹¹⁵ In the first case, as in the examples from Spear and Brantley, the victim was an Oromo youth sent by his father (this time to ask for tobacco from his Giriama friend in Singwaya):¹¹⁶

If they do their songs, a person of another tribe cannot pass there, not a one. If he is even seen he is just killed and to cast off their pollution. And they are filthy songs. Just at the start a Giriama, the child was visible, he came, when he was on the path he was seen by those having that song, they beat him with clubs, they killed him, they took that filth of theirs and they buried him. The Galla waited. His child did not come. The sun set, the sun rose, he did not come. That was when he entered the side of Mkunumbi to ask, “have you seen my child?” Those Swahilis said, we cannot walk when the Giriamas start that song of theirs. Because it is dangerous. Go look there where they spend their time in their song. There you will see they have cast off their filth, maybe by chance you will be able to see your child right there. The Galla came, even when he arrived there that filth of theirs had been covered in salt. When he [?], he saw his child full of holes. Because it had happened the day before yesterday, the Galla returned. When he returned the Galla went to [?] to his fellow Gallas.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Int. Kil 26b.

¹¹³ Int Kil 26b; Int Kil 34b; Int Kil 38b; Int Kil 39a; Int Kil 40a; Int Kil 46a; Int Kil 47a; Int Kil 49a; Int Kil 51a; Int Kil 53a; Int Kil 56a.

¹¹⁴ Int Kil 49a; Int Kil 51a; Int Kil 54a; Int Kil 34b; Int Kil 46a.

¹¹⁵ Int Kil 38a; Int Kil 15b.

¹¹⁶ MHT 13; MHT 29; MHT 33; MHT 58; MHT 16; MHT 20; MHT 21; MHT 27; MHT 8; MHT 10; MHT 12; MHT 64; CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 25, “Oral Interviews,” Interview 128; CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 25, “Oral Interviews,” Interview 131, 16 June 1971; CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 28, “GHT 1-55,” Interview XXIX, 23 December 1970.

¹¹⁷ Int Kil 38a. Translation mine. The original transcript reads:

INTERVIEW	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
Kil 15b	Sayo	Kirao	Mung'aro
Kil 34b	Kirao	Mung'aro	Sayo
Kil 39a	Mung'aro	Sayo	Kirao
Kil 41a	Mung'aro	Kirao	Sayo
Kil 50a	Kirao	Mung'aro	
Kil 54a	Kirao	Sayo	Mung'aro
Kil 64a	Kirao	Sayo	
Kil 99a	Kirao	Sayo	
Kil 101a	Sayo	Kirao	

Table 1.3: Order of initiation *ngomas* according to interviews conducted by the joint British Institute in Eastern Africa/University of Nairobi Kilifi District research project between 31 July 1992 (Kil 15b) and 23 September 1995 (Kil 101a).

In the second case, there is still a connection between Mung'aro, Singwaya, and the Oromo, but it is looser and more associational. Killing an Oromo is something Mung'aro initiates *should* do if they happen to encounter one, in this version. And although this is described as a normative feature of the ritual in general, discussion of this aspect of *Mung'aro* leads the interviewee to the subject of Singwaya:

Ikiwa wafanya nyimbo zao, hakupiti mtu wa kabila, hata mmoja, hata akionekana huuawa tu na kuangusha yale matakataka yao. Na ni nyimbo chafu sana [sic]. Mwanzo tu mgiryama, ndyo akaonekana yule mtoto, akaja, alioofuwa [sic] njiani akaonekana na wale ambao ni wenye nyimbo ile wakampiga marungu, wakamuwa, wakachukua ule uchafu wao wakamwekea. Mgala akangoja, mtoto wake hakujaa [sic], kuchwa, kucha, hakuja. Ndiyo akaingia upande wa Mkunumbi kuuliza, umemwona mwangau [sic]? Wale Waswahili wakasema, sis [sic] hatuwezi kutembea Wagiriama wakiwa waanza nyimbo yao hiyo. Kwa sababu ni hatari. Neenda kaangalie hapo waliposhidikiza [sic] katik [sic] nyimbo yao. Hapo utaona uchafu wao ushaondoa, pengine kwa bahati lutaweza [sic] kumwona mtoto wako hapo hapo. Mgala yukaja, hata alipoofika [sic] hapo ule uchafu wao ul9owekwa [sic] chumvi. Alipohuua, akamwona mtoto wake atoboka. Kwa sababu imetokea juzi, ndiyo Mggala [sic] akarudi. Aliporudi Mgala akaenda piga ??? kwa Mggala [sic] wenziwe.

SS: We have to hunt an animal. We have to hunt an animal like a lion, an elephant; that is something we must not miss when we are doing that [i.e *mung'aro*]. Back then, the animal could only be beaten with clubs. Even if it was a lion, it is beaten with clubs until it is killed. Once it's killed, then we create bed of leafy branches on which to place the body [*"tanzu"* (*sanzu* in southern Chidigo dialects) is a bed of leaves on which an animal is placed when being butchered so that when the hunters are finished, the leaves may be destroyed leaving no blood or other sign that an animal was killed there]. There that lion will be buried, and they will make a bed of leaves.... So that is our example. That's *mng'aro*.

J: Hm.

SS: A baboon too, if it was killed then people would put down branches [to make a *tanzu*]. If they put down branches, then they are done [literally, "there are no words again."]

J: Hm.

SS: And we saw the Galla out in the open too. Well, the Galla harassed us. There at Singwaya, if you saw a Galla, I mean a Galla was seeing a Giriama as his enemy and a Giriama seeing a Galla as his enemy. Now we at that time hunting, if we see a Galla we kill him.

J: Hm.

SS: And if he is killed, that one, there are things that are taken and brought to be placed at the Kaya. Now that *mng'aro* has finished. And just like that he's buried. We and the Galla we did not get along [literally, "hear each other"] at all. Did you hear that history?

J: Hm.

SS: Did you hear it, truly?

J: Hm.

SS: Ah. And another person who was our war enemy was the Maasai. These Muis [=“enemies”]. They were coming to steal from us here in our land. Those ones too if we saw each other it was war.

J: Hm.

SS: But those ones we did not do them like that. I mean those ones, they came from Singwaya.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Int Kil 15b. Translation mine. The original transcript reads:

SS: *Lazima tuwinde, nyama. Tuwinde nyama kama simba, ndovu, ndio kitu sisi tusikose. Tukifanya hivyo, na wakati huo alikuwa yule nyama hupigwa magongo tu. Hata akiwa simba, anapigwa na magongo mpaka awawe. Akishawawa basi watu hubwaga maphungo. Pale yule simba atazikwa, na watabwaga tanzu.... Basi ile ndiyo mfano wetu sisi. Ndio mng'aro huo.*

J: Hm.

SS: *... Nyani pia alikuwa akiuawa yule basi watu hubwaga viphungo. Kisha bwaga kiphungo basi hakuna maneno tena.*

J: Hm.

SS: *Na tulikuwa tukiona Mgala waziwazi kabisa. Maadhali Mgala alitutesa. Kule Singwaya, ulikuwa ukiona Mgala, maana Mgala alikuwa akiona Mgiriama ni adui wake na Mgiriama akimwona Mgala ni adui yake. Sasa sisi muda huo tukiwinda, tukimwona Mgala twamuua.*

By the mid-1990s, then, the image of *mung'aro* still involved the possible substitution of animals for humans in sacrifice, which first appeared in the description of H. L Mood in 1917 (see Section 1.4, above). But the connection between the Oromo, Singwaya, and *mung'aro* is not as tight as it was in the 1970s. Talking about historical performances of *mung'aro* leads the speaker to talk about the killing of an Oromo, which leads to him mentioning a common origin in Singwaya as the reason for *not* killing Maasai in the same ritual way. But the killing of an Oromo in Singwaya is not cited as the cause of their exodus.

The associations to the *mung'aro* constellation seem to have undergone a further proliferation in the interval between the “Kilifi interviews” of the 1990s and my own oral-historical research between 2013 and 2017. During a series of interviews with *Kaya* elders throughout Kwale and Kilifi Counties, for instance, *mung'aro* was described as:

- a dance performed in the elders’ meeting house in the Kaya had collapsed and needed to be repaired.¹¹⁹
- a dance performed when a new structure is built, or to celebrate a large and successful hunt, or for a wedding.¹²⁰
- a song played when elders return from successful prayers for rain, striking two sticks together.¹²¹

J: Hm.

SS: *Na akiuawa yule, kuna vitu huchukuliwa vikaenda ekwa kaya. Sasa mng'aro huo umekwisha. Na vile vile humzika. Sis na Mgala tulikuwa hatusikizani kabisa. Ulisikia zamani hizo?*

J: Hm.

SS: *Ulisikia kweli?*

J: Hm.

SS *Ah. Na mtu mwingine tulikuwa ni mvita wetu ni Mmasai. Hawa wa kina Mui. Walikuwa wakija kutunyang'anya huku kwetu. Wale pia walikuwa tukionana nao ni vita.*

J: Hm.

SS: *Lakini wale hatukuwafanya hivyo. Maana wale wao walitoka Singwaya.*

¹¹⁹ Int. 56c.

¹²⁰ Int. 59.

¹²¹ Int. 60.

- a broad category comprising a range of competitive or celebratory dances.¹²²
- a song played to assemble people for a communal sacrificial offering or prayer.¹²³
- a celebratory dance performed by women wearing special shining clothes (*nguo za kung'ara*) at harvests or weddings.¹²⁴
- possibly a form of *uganga* (“traditional medicine” or esoteric knowledge and power).¹²⁵
- songs sung by women when the *nyere* were going to or coming from the forest for circumcision.¹²⁶
- a song or dance involving the *mwanza* friction drum, during which children were chased away and houses shut.¹²⁷
- a collective hunt for predators (like lions or leopards) performed by members of the *nyere* as part of their initiation into the *kambi*, from which they must return with evidence of having killed (like teeth or skins).¹²⁸

It bears mentioning that the same individual who (in two contexts, first in an individual interview, in then in a group interview with other members of the Kaya Kauma council of elders, respectively) identified *mung'aro* as a phase of elder initiation involving a hunt for dangerous wild animal trophies *and* as a song or dance performed by women during the departure and return of initiates, produced a copy of Spear's *The Kaya Complex* during our first meeting. At our second meeting, a junior member of the Kaya Kauma council took careful notes throughout a group interview that lasted several hours. He has also worked closely for years with researchers from international and Kenyan universities, as well as the National Museums of Kenya, and was involved in the inscription of several Kayas as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2008, and of the “Traditions and Practices associated with the Kayas in the sacred forests of the Mijikenda” in the 2009 UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.¹²⁹

¹²² Int. 61.

¹²³ Int. 62; Int. 64.

¹²⁴ Int. 63; Int. 64; Int. 65.

¹²⁵ Int. 64.

¹²⁶ Int. 70.

¹²⁷ Int. 71.

¹²⁸ Int. 63.

¹²⁹ UNESCO World Heritage Committee, *Decisions Adopted at the 32nd Session of the World Heritage Committee (Quebec City, 2008)* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2009), 190–

This is only the most obvious example of the kind of process David Henige would call “feedback” in the “oral traditions” of Mijikenda ritual.¹³⁰ Henige characterizes “feedback” as a “problem” that “occurs in oral traditions when extraneous material, usually from printed sources, is incorporated into the tradition.”¹³¹ But this would only be considered a “problem” in the first place if one accepts a number of dubious assumptions about the nature of historical sources: that there is a clear distinction between “literate” and “oral” societies, that “non-traditional written evidence” (non-traditional *because* written?) is distinct from and “extraneous” to the evidence contained in oral traditions, that there are analytically discrete “societies” each with its own “tradition” in the singular, and that the *transformation* of an historical understanding is a “distortion” resulting from the “contamination” or “adulteration” of an original “pristine” tradition.¹³² But as I show in Chapter Two in a discussion of the historiographical dispute among

92 (available online at <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2008/whc08-32com-24reve.pdf>); UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, “Item 14 of the Provisional Agenda,” *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Fourth Session, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates* (Paris: UNESCO, 2009), 11–12 (available online at <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-09-4.COM-CONF.209-14+Corr.-EN.pdf>). This was also the same individual, mentioned in Chapter One, who (citing Thomas Spear’s historical linguistics evidence in *The Kaya Complex*) gave “Congo” as the origin point of “the Mijikenda” as Bantu speakers in response to my elicitation of Mijikenda origins as he understood them.

¹³⁰ D. P. Henige, “The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands,” *Journal of African History* 14:2 (1973), 223–35.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 223.

¹³² *Ibid.* 224, 234, 224, 223. For a recent anthropological critique of these and other assumptions about the “orality” of such “traditions,” see C. Severi, *The Chimera Principle: An Anthropology of Memory and Imagination*, trans. J. Lloyd (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015 [2007]). At times Henige seems to contradict the basic conceits of his own argument, such as when he states in the second paragraph that “feedback has affected oral materials throughout historical time and space” (223), or when he acknowledges the “the promptitude with which previous accounts were abandoned in colonial times in favour of new and ‘better’ ones suggests that such accounts were likewise regarded as adaptable or dispensable in earlier times as well” (235). This latter insight is dismissed, however, as “not really germane to this analysis” (235). But if this is true, then what is the significance of the fact that new material from *written* sources have inflected the account? Written sources are also subject to reinterpretation, revision, redaction, or destruction, so what is

Fred Morton, Thomas Spear, and H. Neville Chittick over the place of the *Kitab al-Zanuj*—a nineteenth-century Arabic-language chronicle—in *local* historiography that is, in the historical self-understanding of the Mijikenda and Swahili peoples), the relationship between “oral traditions of origin” and written historical chronicles is by no means straightforward on the East African coast.

1.7: CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced several historical shifts in the representation of a Mijikenda ritual of male initiation called *mung'aro*. Following Walter Benjamin, I have referred to the “dialectical image” of *mung'aro* as a “constellation” whose shifting form emerges when one charts the five-hundred-year history of its recurring salience to a series of historical presents. The constellation is, in this case, an analytic abstraction, as are the “moments” into which I have divided its history. Each moment describes a period in which the associational nexus of images and figural motifs—ritual killing, danger along paths, sacrifice, political transition—crystallize for a time into a relatively stable form. They are “moments” in an ongoing historical flux and modes of historical intelligibility (as prefiguration, testimony, memory, etc.). Without attempting to account analytically for these shifts in the form of the constellation, this initial chapter has sought only to describe in sufficient detail the stratigraphy (to mix metaphors) of its historical transformations. These will be related analytically to other salient aspects of coastal Kenyan history in the chapters to follow. I begin this analysis in Chapter Two by exploring the historical development of the

specifically “oral” about Henige’s basic historiographical conclusion, that “oral traditional materials be recognized as having their own internal dynamics, and that their *development* be studied diachronically. Before the history *in* the oral traditions can be properly understood, the history *of* these traditions must be essayed” (235)?

“Singwaya Narrative” of Mijikenda origins and the role that the *mung’aro* constellation played in the stabilization of this narrative in the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE “SINGWAYA NARRATIVE” AND MIJIKENDA TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN

“The key to the genesis of the Swahili settlements, and to many events in the Swahili world over the next six or seven centuries, lies in an understanding of Shungwaya.”¹

2.1: INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One, I demonstrated both the durability and transformations of what, following Benjamin, I referred to as the “constellation” of figural motifs that have made up the historical understandings of the *mung’aro* ritual of male initiation from the nineteenth century to the present. I further showed that the existence of this constellation of images predates the ritual known by this name by several centuries, as a set of practices and dangers associated with Oromo-speaking pastoralist “strangers;” associations that persisted as historical knowledge alongside *mung’aro* as a contemporary form of ritual practice until at least the late 1870s. I argued that whether organized under the sign of “*mung’aro*” or the “Galla,” this constellation can be discerned in various ways in the earliest recorded origin stories of the peoples who would become known as the Mijikenda.

Having established the constellation, I turn now in this chapter to the Mijikenda traditions of origin themselves, focusing in particular on the consolidation in the twentieth century of a narrative of origins in a place called “Singwaya.” This chapter begins in Section 2.2 with a

¹ J. de V. Allen, *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon*. (London: James Currey, 1993), 38.

historiographical review of the literature on Singwaya, which Justin Willis has aptly called one of the great “chimeras” of African History.² At the center of this discussion will be the historian Thomas T. Spear’s foundational work on precolonial Mijikenda history. Although I am critical of this work, my critique develops out of respect for his scholarly achievement, which remain fundamental to any understanding of coastal Kenyan history.

The second part of the chapter, Section 2.3, will focus on the large corpus of interview transcripts that Spear has generously made available to other researchers. These “Mijikenda Historical Texts” (MHT), which Spear collected in the early 1970s, and to which I have already made reference in Chapter One, are the basis of his argument about a coherent “Singwaya narrative.” I will quote from these at length below, but my goal in this section is different from Spear’s. I am not trying to write *the* precolonial history of *the* Mijikenda. Rather, I am interested in how the narrative or idea of Singwaya has served as a rich source of material for many coastal peoples’ self-understanding over time. I am interested in the question of *how* these narratives are useful, beyond the positivist question of their possible utility as either empirical “history” or symbolic “myth”? I argue that there is way they can be used to write a dialectical historical anthropology of the Kenyan coast without forcing these narratives into either epistemological frame, and that this may be done by analyzing the role of the *mung’aro* constellation in these narratives of origin.

As in the previous chapter, then, I will focus on a bundle of images or motifs, in this case those surrounding the moment of Mijikenda expulsion from Singwaya. These images and motifs, as “durable bundles of meaning and practice,” may be understood in the various forms of their

² J. Willis, “Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon by James de Vere Allen (Review),” *African Affairs* 93:370 (1994), 147–9.

interrelatedness, as what Benjamin called “dialectical images” or “constellations.”³ What is durable about them is less their specific configuration in a given moment (the form of which, as I showed in Chapter One, may shift while retaining a consistency of content), than the recursive, nature of their association in a variety of configuration; their persistence and the persistence of their shifting association, in other words. I argue that both this durable quality and the ease with which they have lent themselves to mythologization is partly the result of their associational, imagistic quality. Images, as Lisa Stevenson has recently and evocatively put it, “drag the world along with them,” making it “difficult to translate them into the singular and incontestable facts that social sciences seem to demand.”⁴ By taking images (in an expansive sense) as “precipitates of experience” (citing Benjamin) and as “a language that expresses without formulating” (citing Foucault citing Freud), Stevenson suggests that images “point to the way the everyday is best communicated not through the piling up of examples, but through the condensation of experience in an image that cannot be approached as a fact to be tested.”⁵

2.2: SINGWAYA HISTORIOGRAPHY

All present-day Mijikenda peoples of the Kenyan coast share traditions of origin in and migration from a place in the north called Singwaya. As an initial determination, the more-or-less “orthodox” version of the Singwaya tradition can be expressed as follows: The peoples who would become

³ D. L. Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” *American Historical Review* 111:5 (2006), 1438; W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. R. Tiedman, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 463.

⁴ L. Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 11.

⁵ *Ibid.* 11, 12, 14.

known in the 1940s as “the Mijikenda” formerly lived in a polity known as Singwaya somewhere in what is now northeastern Kenya or southern Somalia. A war with their Oromo-speaking neighbors (referred to in the literature as “Galla,” although this term is considered derogatory by Oromo-speakers themselves) drove them south along the Kenyan coast. These displaced populations eventually settled along the ridges and hilltops of the coastal hinterland in fortified clearings called *kayas*. These peoples continued to inhabit the *kayas* until the mid-nineteenth century, at which point they began to disperse, settling in smaller residential units in the plains between the hinterland ridge and the Indian Ocean. As they established these new village settlements, the “original” *kayas* slowly morphed from fortified villages into “sacred forests” or ritual centers.

Although it is also spelled “Shungwaya,” “Shingwaya,” “Shangaya,” (and other variants) in the historical traditions of various coastal Kenyan peoples (including the Bajun, Swahili, Pokomo, Taita, and Segeju), I will use Thomas Spear’s spelling—Singwaya—unless quoting from a speaker or text that uses an alternate pronunciation or spelling. It is consistently spelled “Shungwaya” in the early secondary literature, with multiple variants occurring in the primary sources as missionaries, colonial administrators, and anthropologists (from English, French, German, and Italian linguistic backgrounds) recorded origin stories and transcribed Arabic manuscripts up and down the East African coast. Spear introduced “Singwaya” as the “local” (in this case, “Mijikenda”) pronunciation, which then became solidified through a series of his publications in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ At the southern end of the Kenyan coast where I conducted

⁶ See: T. T. Spear, “Traditional Myths and Historian’s [*sic*] Myths: Variations on the Singwaya Theme of Mijikenda Origins.” *History in Africa* 1 (1974), 67–84; T. T. Spear, “Traditional Myths and Linguistic Analysis: Singwaya Revisited.” *History in Africa* 4 (1977), 229–246; T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900*. (Nairobi:

most of my research, the local pronunciation would be spelled (in the Chidigo orthography recently developed by the Bible Translation and Literacy Society) “Singbwaya,” with [gbw] representing a voiced bilabial implosive. This is significant for contemporary folk etymologies of “Singbwaya” among South Coast Kenyans, and its changing place in their stories of origin (see Section 2.3 below), but Spear’s spelling has become the standard.

Most of the early secondary literature on Singwaya and the Singwaya narrative focused in positivist terms on the historicity, location, and character of Singwaya as an actual place somewhere on the North-East African coast. For Vinigi L. Grottanelli, it was “a lost African metropolis,” which he claimed to have located in the ruins near “Bur Kavo” (Buur Gaabo, formerly Port Durnford, in the Jubaland region of Southern Somalia).⁷ Grotanelli’s (purported) City of Shungwaya “must have flourished between the tenth and the fifteenth century A.D.” and “commanded a hinterland stretching from southern Somalia to the Tana river [in what is now Kenya] and beyond ... inhabited by a number of inter-related agricultural Bantu tribes who in some form acknowledged the suzerainty of the Arabo-Persian minority living along the coast.”⁸ A. H. J. Prins was also willing to assert, based on seventeenth-century Dutch and English maps, that “*we know* that Shungwaya has been a historical town,” and that “its ruins are still to be found near the present Port Dunford Bay in the south of Somalia,” and suggests a remarkably precise date for its destruction: 1687.⁹ Like Grottanelli, Prins held that “the ‘Kings’ of Shungwaya ... held

Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978); T. T. Spear, *Kenya’s Past: An Introduction to Historical Method in Africa* (London: Longman, 1981); T. T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and their Interpretation: The Mijikenda of Kenya*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981).

⁷ V. L. Grottanelli, “A Lost African Metropolis.” In Lukas Johannes (ed.) *Afrikanistische Studien*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1955).

⁸ *Ibid.* 241.

⁹ A. H. J. Prins, “The Shungwaya Problem: Traditional History and Cultural Likeness in Bantu North-East Africa.” *Anthropos* 67 (1972), 10. Italics added. See also: A. H. J. Prins, “Shungwaya,

sway over the surrounding country, once probably more densely populated, now virtually semi-desert land.”¹⁰

The most extreme version of this understanding of the North-East African past was articulated by James de Vere Allen in a series of articles and the posthumously published *Swahili Origins: Swahili Culture and the Shungwaya Phenomenon*. There, Allen lays out in full his grand vision of a “Great Shungwaya” (on the model of Great Zimbabwe), a massive “state” that had emerged on the mainland near the Lamu Archipelago near Kenya’s border with Somalia by the end of the ninth century AD. Dominated by a quasi-aristocratic class of Cushitic-speaking pastoralist patrons, it incorporated too iron-working Bantu-speaking agriculturalists and “Khoisan”-speaking hunter-gatherer populations as clients, initially through their incorporation into “*diye* [“blood-money”]-paying units.”¹¹ Out of this *ur*-polity—which had “disappeared” by 1500—and its “successor states” developed all of modern Swahili culture.¹²

Though Allen had played a key role in shifting scholarly understandings of coast settlement away from earlier Orientalist fixations on isolated and purely maritime Arab and Persian outposts toward a more integrated sense of the “African-ness” of Swahili language and culture, his final vision of Great Shungwaya is idiosyncratic and untenable. It was also anachronistic: By the 1970s, scholarly efforts to pinpoint the location of an historical Shungwaya city-state had generally given way to historiographical disputes about the utility of Shungwaya *narratives* for the study of the

die Urheimat der Nordost-Bantu: Eine stammesgeschichtliche Untersuchung.” *Anthropos* 50 (1955), 273–281.

¹⁰ A. H. J. Prins, “The Shungwaya Problem,” 11.

¹¹ Allen, *Swahili Origins*, 135–148, and 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 148–63, 213–39.

distant East African past. At the center of these debates were two historians (Thomas Spear and Fred Morton), an archaeologist (Neville Chittick), and a linguist (Thomas Hinnebusch).

In 1972, Morton published “The Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins: A Problem of Late Nineteenth-Century Kenya Coastal History,” the first major scholarly work to call seriously into question the veracity of (by then widely accepted) Mijikenda claims to origin in Singwaya. Morton begins with a tautology:

Because Shungwaya has always been regarded as an authentic part of Miji Kenda traditions instead of the appended myth which it is, students of the Kenya coast have passed by one of the more intriguing questions arising from the late-nineteenth-century history of the area: why was the Shungwaya myth put into circulation?¹³

By treating Shungwaya origins as late addition to Mijikenda traditions of origin, Morton is able to ask why it became part of those traditions when it did. Morton’s argument proceeds in two phases: First, a review of the documentary record from the nineteenth century (and earlier) to show that, although traditions of origin were recorded for various “Nyika” peoples during this period, none of them mention Shungwaya. Shungwaya only appears in the origin stories of the “non-Nyika” Segeju and Kilindini people. It is not until the early twentieth century that Shungwaya origins appear in “Nyika” traditions.

Morton is careful to avoid claiming that these nineteenth century traditions are more accurate or “truer” picture of the Mijikenda past. He does so, however, by deploying a Malinowskian understanding of the “function” of myth—an understanding shared with other contemporary historians, as I show below—to be a social “charter” for the present:

To investigate the pre-Shungwaya sources for another Miji Kenda homeland, however, is not to achieve certain success. For one thing, in taking in the Shungwaya myth, Miji Kenda

¹³ R. F. Morton, “The Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins: A Problem of Late Nineteenth-Century Kenya Coastal History.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5:3 (1972), 397.

traditions of origin have exhibited a capacity to absorb spurious elements. For another, there are reasons to suspect that it is one of the functions of these traditions to do so. It is my impression, based on my own field research and that of others, that with the possible exception of the Digo, the Miji Kenda have retained predominantly those traditions which refer to their origins and immigration into present settlement areas. ... Because their traditions reflect an overriding concern for the presettlement period, it seems apparent that the Miji Kenda view their origins as very much related to the present. This leads directly to the question of what changes in Miji Kenda societies occurred to permit the appending of the Shungwaya element to their traditions.¹⁴

This is the second phase of Morton's argument: relating the appearance of the Shungwaya in Mijikenda origin stories (on the one hand) and the roughly contemporaneous appearance of an Arabic language chronicle—*Kitab al Zanuj*—that mentions the “Wanyika” peoples as originating in Shungwaya (on the other) to the ambiguous legal status of certain forms of slavery and bondage among the British-protected subjects of the Kenyan coast in the late nineteenth century.

Under the administration of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC), “Shari’a was the basis for decisions which affected Muslims; this was also true with respect to the status of slaves not affected by slave proclamations,” which, in 1889 and 1890, “gave freedom to children born after 1890 and prohibited the purchase of domestic slaves respectively,” and “prohibited all forms of slavery among the non-Muslim Miji Kenda.”¹⁵ These proclamations were intended to disrupt, among other things, a long-standing regional strategy for dealing with famine in the hinterland: the “pawning” of relatives (or of oneself) to coastal patrons in exchange for food or refuge. But as Morton points out, “Miji Kenda” continued to sell themselves and their children into servitude at the coast during the famines of 1892 and 1898:

When Giriama began to sell their children under stress of famine [in 1898], protectorate officials moved quickly to prosecute offenders They were frustrated, however, by Giriama

¹⁴ Ibid. 403–4. See: B. Malinowski, “Myth in Primitive Psychology,” in Robert Redfield (ed.) *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays by Bronislaw Malinowski* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948 [1926]), 72–124.

¹⁵ Ibid. 411–12.

claims that the parents were not selling their children, but rather betrothing them at an early age in accord with ancient custom. ... The protectorate courts could not convict because in [Commissioner Arthur] Hardinge's words, "it cannot be proved that any departure from the usual tribal marriage customs has taken place." ... In August, the acting district officer of Malindi reported cases in which creditors claimed the traditional right to demand from an otherwise insolvent creditor a daughter in compensation who became a slave. ... As in the case of child betrothal, custom supported these practices in court, and new laws were required to eliminate them.¹⁶

It was in this context of active debate about the pasts and futures of slavery and bondage on the coast that the *Kitab al Zanuj* seems to have been compiled out of earlier historical chronicles. If one could demonstrate that a practice was of sufficient antiquity to be considered "Native Law and Custom," it could be protected by law under the system of Native Courts established by the East Africa Order in Council of 1897—subject to the "repugnancy clause."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid. 412–13.

¹⁷ The East Africa Order in Council of 1897 established two categories of native courts along ethnic lines. The first category was presided over by an European officer and included the High Court, the chief native court, provincial courts, district courts and assistant collectors' courts. The other was presided over by a native authority that included *Walis*' courts (Arab governors' courts), Court of Local Chiefs (African local courts), and Mussulman religious courts (kadhi courts). Native courts were bound to follow the Indian civil procedure code and the Indian penal and criminal procedure codes. In dealing with Muslims in the protectorate, courts were to be guided in civil and criminal cases by the general principles of Islamic law. See: A. Hashim, "Coping with Conflicts: Colonial Policy towards Muslim Personal Law in Kenya and Post-Colonial Court Practice" in S. Jeppie, E. Moosa, and R. Roberts (eds.) *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 225–6.

"Mussulman Ecclesiastical Courts," also called Cadi [=Kadhi] courts, were granted jurisdiction over "all matters effecting [sic?] the personal status of Mohammedans (such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance)." Quoted in Ibid. 226. The Order in Council 1897 also created new administrative posts for Arab local governors, the *Liwalis* and *Mudirs*, who were granted magisterial powers under the supervision of the District Commissioner. Although *Liwali* and *Mudir* courts were administrative offices with civil and criminal jurisdiction, they were also conferred concurrent jurisdiction with kadhi courts in Muslim personal law. Ibid. See also: H. Mwakimako, "The Historical Development of Muslim Courts: The Kadhi, Mudir, and Liwali Courts and the Civil Procedure Code and Criminal Procedure Ordinance, c. 1963." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5:2 (2011), 329–343.

The Native Courts Regulations of the Order in Council also "empowered the British Commissioner, with the consent of the Secretary of State, to make rules and orders for

Although it only came to the attention of Europeans as the *Kitab al Zanuj* in the mid-1920s as a manuscript in the libraries of the kadhis of Mogadishu and Kismayu, its historical account bears a strong resemblance to “certain scripts by one Fazil bin Omar Alburi, compiled presumably from native traditions and embellished very likely from his own imagination” that came to the attention of the then-Acting District Commissioner of Malindi, J. A. G. Elliot, around 1916-1917.¹⁸ In Elliot’s understanding, the text is not a faithful copy of an older, “authentic” historical document, but rather an original compilation that was probably “embellished” by bin Omari. He goes on to suggest to his readers that although “some of his statements are corroborated from trustworthy source lends a colouring of truth to the rest ... it is as well to accept what he says with considerable caution.”¹⁹

Although Elliot describes him only in racial terms as “An Arab living in Malindi district; said to have Pokomo blood,” Fathili bin Omari Al-Ba’urii had been, in 1898, the District Officer’s clerk in Malindi, and later served as Mudir of Arabuko location and Liwali of Mambui in Kilifi District, retiring in 1914.²⁰ It is largely on the basis of his close involvement with the British administration that Morton suggests Fathili bin Omari, together with Said bin Hemed, the *Liwali* of Malindi, “may have conspired to delude the British regarding Giriama customs, with Fathili bin Omari doctoring an Arabic manuscript to prove the case, and Said bin Hemed producing it in

administration of native courts, including alterations in any native law or custom” and granted British judicial and administrative officers “general supervision over all inferior native courts within the protectorate, including the kathi courts.” Hashim, “Coping with Conflicts,” 226.

¹⁸ J. A. G. Elliot, “A Visit to the Bajun Islands Part I (continued)” *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 25:98 (1926c), 150; R. F. Morton, “New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10:4 (1977), 638.

¹⁹ Elliot, “A Visit ... Part I (continued),” 150.

²⁰ Ibid. footnote 2; Arthur M. Champion, Assistant District Commissioner, “History of the Wa Giriama,” 23 January 1914, 1 footnote 1; Morton, “The Shungwaya Myth,” 415–16.

court.”²¹ Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence to support that speculation, as Morton’s critics were quick to point out.²²

But there is more to Morton’s argument than his speculations about elite Arabs in the colonial judicial and administrative systems forging documents and misleading European officials in court in self-interested bids to preserve precolonial forms of slavery and servitude. Although his argument has been dismissively characterized as claiming simply that “the Shungwaya story of Mijikenda origins is a late nineteenth century fiction, the result of a conspiracy designed to deceive us all,” Morton is ultimately trying to pose and answer a much more sophisticated question.²³ Once one calls into question the historical authenticity of the only purportedly nineteenth-century source which claims Shungwaya origins for the eventual Mijikenda peoples, the question becomes: Why such an origin story emerged when it did, and how did it gained such wide acceptance so quickly? Whether or not he is successful on *that* score is a separate issue from the plausibility of his speculations about the historical individuals who may or may not have played a role in rendering such a history plausible to a new colonial administration and what their motivations might have been.

Morton speculates that, in addition to emphasizing the historical interconnectedness of coastal and hinterland peoples through ties of trade, labor, and kinship (especially through the processes of pawnship, child betrothal, and debt bondage that he highlights) which were in the process of being disentangled and re-categorized by a new colonial judicial and administrative

²¹ Morton, “The Shungwaya Myth,” 416.

²² H. N. Chittick, “The Book of Zenj and the Miji Kenda.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 9:1 (1976), 68–73.

²³ M. Walsh, “Mijikenda Origins: A Review of the Evidence.” *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992), 1–18.

apparatus, the rapid adoption of the Shungwaya origin story may have been facilitated by a number of other factors. He cites the coalitions of Muslim and non-Muslim populations that came into being during the Mazrui rebellions of the mid-1890s (see Chapter Four), “the Islamization of the peoples of the coastal hinterland” taking place “up and down the coast around the turn of the century,” and later, “the growing inclination in the 1940s on the part of the nine groups known collectively to outsiders as “WaNyika” to think of themselves as Miji Kenda.”²⁴ Indicating an approach to the study of coastal Kenyan history that would later be taken up by Justin Willis (see below), Morton argued that the question of “why the nine Miji Kenda groups, who not long ago had different ancestral homes, should today claim common origin seems to be a problem which primarily concerns the relationship of traditional history to the progress of Miji Kenda ethnicity in the twentieth century.”²⁵

Thomas Spear responded to Morton’s thesis by characterizing it as “a historians’ myth, which this time does not naively accept evidence, but just as naively destroys it.”²⁶ Rather than dismiss claims of Singwaya origins as “a superimposition on the earlier traditions” that make no mention of it, Spear argued that the historian’s task “is to try to sift the historical wheat from the mythical chaff in order to recover as much valid historical evidence as possible from origin myths.”²⁷ Spear concedes that “Morton is correct in stating that no mention of Singwaya origins for the Mijikenda, Taita, or Pokomo exists in collections assembled before 1897,” but argues that such negative evidence is not sufficient grounds for dismissing later traditions that do.²⁸

²⁴ Morton, “The Shungwaya Myth,” 419–22.

²⁵ Ibid. 421–22.

²⁶ Spear, “Traditional Myths,” 68.

²⁷ Ibid. 68, 67.

²⁸ Ibid. 68.

The nineteenth century collections are also “a small and biased body of evidence,” according to Spear: “None of those made in the latter half of the nineteenth century could be considered to be a serious or comprehensive collection of Mijikenda traditions. Few of these early observers evinced a strong interest in history, and their informants were invariably unreliable.”²⁹ But on this score, in mounting a defense of the utility of oral history (or “traditional myths”) for writing empirical history, Spear makes a number of untenable positivist assumptions about the nature of historical evidence and sources. Sources are “unreliable” (or not “serious”) if they were collected by someone who does not evince sufficient “interest” in “history” (however one chooses to evaluate the former and define the latter).³⁰ A tradition is “biased” if it was not collected from a member of the group to which it pertains (the status of these “groups” themselves through time is also left unquestioned).³¹ Further error is introduced into these nineteenth-century origin stories, according to Spear, by the apparent failure of their collectors to glean the historical traditions from “elders,” who “could be expected to know Mijikenda history.” In this understanding, only (presumably male) “elders” know and are willing faithfully to transmit the *real* history of their own group to outsiders (but only professionally trained and sufficiently “interested” ones!).

By contrast, the early twentieth century traditions collected by Alfred Claud Hollis, Alice Werner, and Arthur M. Champion—which *do* include Singwaya origins—are “careful studies . . . based on interviews with the elders” and, in the case of Werner, made by “a respected professional ethnographer.”³² Rather than apply his historical method of interpretation to the “incomplete and

²⁹ Ibid. 75.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

unsatisfactory early European collections of traditions,” which do not mention Singwaya, Spear restricts his analysis to the narratives that he collected in 1971, which do.³³

Spear sets out to analyze these traditions on two levels. At the first level, he—like Morton, despite their differences—adopts the Structural Functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski, according to which the *function* of myth is to serve as a “charter” for social organization, institutions, or practices.³⁴ Thus, for Spear,

the Singwaya tradition is a cultural charter which acts to legitimate the major features of Mijikenda life. It represents symbolically the most important normative values of their society. . . . Oral traditions must be vital living documents. They are remembered and retold, not out of idle historical interest, but because of their vital importance as symbols or charters that *express and legitimate present reality*. In its role as a charter a tradition is linked in a reciprocal and dialectical relationship with the institution that it serves, maintaining the integrity of that institution, but at the same time *liable to be changed as the institution itself changes*.³⁵

But if one accepts that this is the social “function” of myth, the relationship between myth and institutions starts to look less “reciprocal and dialectical”—at least in the case of the Singwaya narrative—than Spear has suggested.

The Singwaya tradition is a major ideological statement defining the main Mijikenda institutions . . . And since the *kayas*, age-sets, and clans *are no longer important functioning institutions* in Mijikenda life, the tradition is of inestimable value in *reconstructing these institutions* for the period prior to *their disintegration in the late nineteenth century*.³⁶

Far from “expressing and legitimating present reality” and “changing as the institution itself changes,” the widespread and robust Singwaya traditions have somehow survived the institutions they are supposed to have “served” by a century, and can now be used to “reconstruct” them. Spear

³³ Ibid. 76. Spear generously published a selection of his oral history fieldwork interviews in translation in *Traditions of Origin*.

³⁴ Malinowski, “Myth in Primitive Psychology,” 72–124.

³⁵ Spear, “Traditional Myths,” 69. Italics added.

³⁶ Ibid. Italics added.

has already conceded that there is no evidence for Singwaya traditions among the Mijikenda from the nineteenth century, when these institutions (like kayas and age-sets) *were* part of the “present reality,” but nevertheless assumes that they must *have been* present because he assumes that the function of myth is to “serve” contemporary institutions.

Aware, perhaps, that this line of argument is beginning to look less like “dialectics” and more like “question-begging,” Spear attempts to resolve the contradiction by separating out the “narrative core” of the Singwaya tradition from its “charter” function: “Whereas charters functionally relate to culture and change with it, the narrative is irrelevant to that culture and hence an unconscious element in the overall tradition, unlikely to be changed to reflect institutional changes.”³⁷ But this only introduces further confusion. Using the infelicitous metaphor of “whole cloth,” Spear suggests that “if we can isolate or extract the cultural weft, we are left with the historical warp.”³⁸ What Spear is describing, however, are not two different dimensions of an integral whole, or even the “form” and “content” of the Singwaya tradition, but rather the tradition itself, on the one hand, and its assumed social *function* on the other.

It is unclear what Spear means by the tradition’s “narrative core” and how it might be distinct from its function as a social “charter,” but a generous reading might be that the claim of having “come from Singwaya” is not *in itself* the charter for kayas and age-sets. Rather, it is the fact of a tradition that accounts for the founding of kayas and the existence of age-sets that is important. In this way, Singwaya origins (as opposed to claims of origin somewhere else) are an historical truth that has been preserved in the traditions precisely because it is not *essentially* linked to the institutions. It has survived as an “unconscious” element in the traditions precisely because

³⁷ Ibid. 70.

³⁸ Ibid. 69.

of its lack of an integral link with changing institutions. If one grants Spear's assumptions, this could also explain the survival of the institutions the myth once served *in the myth itself*—and only in the myth. No longer a meaningful part of Mijikenda life except in the realm of ideas, they persist as an element in their traditions of origin precisely because of their relative irrelevance.

Although I am deeply sympathetic to the idea that “history” is preserved and transmitted largely, perhaps even primarily, in an “unconscious” way—indeed, this is a basic argument of this dissertation—Spear's functionalist attempt to separate the “cultural weft” from the “historical warp” actually prevents an adequate theorization of how this might occur. It leads him, instead, into further contradiction. Thus Spear is able to claim, in successive sentences, that both “the vestigial survival of the Singwaya tradition itself for nearly a century after the decline of the institutions it once served” and “the main recent deterioration of the tradition itself” has been “through neglect because it is no longer relevant.”³⁹ But it also raises the question of how one might adjudicate—without having pre-judged the issue of origins—which elements of the tradition are “historical,” having been unconsciously transmitted by the tradition, and which are contemporary “cultural” insertions or adaptations.

For Spear, this can be done not by treating the Singwaya narratives as texts and looking for internal evidence, but by looking for corroborating evidence in the documentary, linguistic, archaeological, and ethnographic record. Before turning to his fullest consideration of these lines of evidence in *The Kaya Complex* (see below), it is worth taking into consideration two early critiques of both Morton and Spear, by H. Neville Chittick and Thomas J. Hinnebusch, respectively.

³⁹ Ibid. 78 n. 18.

Chittick, an archaeologist most well-known for his work on Kilwa in Tanzania (Chittick 1963, 1966, 1974), but also as a “shrewd judge of coastal documents” for his work on the Pate Chronicle (Chittick 1969), responded to Morton’s claims by arguing, first, that based on the formal structure of the *Kitab al-Zanuj*, the details relating to the “Kashur” people are “closely integrated” with the rest of the text, and that “other factors indicate that the traditions relating to the Kashur are of early date rather than spurious recent insertions.”⁴⁰ These amount to: 1) the non-necessity of certain details for the legal argument Morton alleges, 2) the unlikelihood of using “an obscure and unsatisfactorily-explained name” like *Kashur* if the argument was about the Mijikenda, 3) the fact that the Pokomo call the Giriama *Koshuru* indicates this is not a recent fabrication, and 4) that some Somali people call some hunter-gatherer peoples “Ribi,” which sounds like “Ribe,” one of the Mijikenda peoples.⁴¹ None of these “factors” is exactly compelling, nor are they for that matter internally coherent (point three goes some way to answering point two, for instance).

Second, Chittick argues that Morton’s claim that there are no nineteenth-century sources that claim Shungwaya origins for the “Nyika”/Mijikenda peoples, but rather claim it for the Swahili, is not quite accurate. He dismisses the claim for the Swahili as “hardly convincing in view of the fact that the Galla appear to have arrived in the region concerned [=Shungwaya] in the sixteenth century, and Swahili-speaking peoples apparently had been on the coast long before that.”⁴² This is true, but does not explain *why* it was a compelling origin story to these Swahili-speaking peoples in the nineteenth century. Guillain, he points out, in the mid-nineteenth century described the Segeju as having come from Shungwaya, but their status with regard to the

⁴⁰ R. F. Morton, “Response to H. Neville Chittick,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 12:4 (1979), 674; Chittick, “Book of Zenj,” 70.

⁴¹ Chittick, “Book of Zenj,” 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*

“Wanyika” and Mijikenda was always up for debate. Most damningly, however, is that in “The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa,” Sir Richard Burton “refers to Shungwaya as an area near the Ozi River, and in another place states that the Nyika originally came from an area near the Ozi River.”⁴³ This brings the number of nineteenth-century textual sources that may possibly be read as indicating contemporary claims Shungwaya origins among the “Wanyika” to two.

In 1977, Morton restated his position that the passages in the *Kitab al Zanj* dealing with the *Kasur* peoples were “deliberate falsifications.”⁴⁴ He did, however, drop the suggestion of “conspiracy” to argue that,

rather than a pastiche of old legends, lost chronicles, and myths, the *Kitab al-Zanj* was part of a new [sic] historiographical trend developing on the coast at the turn of the century. The *Kitab al-Zanj* would appear to be, in fact, evidence of the Arabicization of Swahili culture in the post-Portuguese period that, at the turn of the century, intensified along the Kenya coast.⁴⁵

The production of the *Kitab al Zanj* was thus, in this modified understanding, part of a broader shift among Swahili, from claiming “Shirazi” to “Arab” origins through the well-attested process of manipulating genealogies and historical chronicles.

At the same time, further research in the Church Missionary Society Archives had revealed a number of nineteenth-century claims of Mijikenda origin in places *other than* Singwaya. Morton compiles seventeen of these nineteenth-century accounts into the chart reproduced in Table 2.1.

As Morton points out,

Shungwaya appears in not one of the seventeen separate traditions of origin collected prior to 1900. These traditions were recorded in scattered localities, from seven subgroups, by eleven individuals, and over a period of fifty years. The plenitude of traditions and the

⁴³ Ibid. See: R. F. Burton, “The Lake Region of Central Equatorial Africa,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 29 (1859), 51, 310.

⁴⁴ R. F. Morton, “New Evidence Regarding the Shungwaya Myth of Miji Kenda Origins,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10:4 (1977), 628.

⁴⁵ Morton, “New Evidence,” 639–40.

varied circumstances in which they were collected renders implausible the notion that until the twentieth century Shungwaya's connection with the Miji Kenda went somehow unmentioned.⁴⁶

This is especially so, he argues, when one considers that “in contrast to their Miji Kenda informants, ... five of the nineteenth century recorders ... were acquainted with Shungwaya” from their collection of origin stories among non-Mijikenda peoples.⁴⁷

Notice in Table 2.1 that from the 1840s to 1900, twenty or so sources report origins other than Singwaya for the Mijikenda peoples, and no known sources from this period *do* report Singwaya as their place of origin, according to Morton. During the colonial period, however, “Shungwaya” becomes the point of origin in almost every account. By the time Spear began collecting his traditions of origin in the early postcolonial period, Singwaya is acknowledged as a place the Mijikenda peoples *have* lived, and in many cases still as the point of origin, but a number of these traditions report more distant origins:

[Mwinga wa Gunga, Giriama, 5 March 1971]

We came from Misri (Egypt). At Misri we came from two people, Mbodze and Matsezi. Originally we came from Nuhu [Noah]. Nuhu's grandson is the one who gave birth to Mbodze and Matsezi. Mbodze was a man and Matsezi a woman. They gave birth to nine children.⁴⁸

[Ronald Mwavita, Jibana, 23 March 1971]

As far as I know the origins of the Mijikenda are Singwaya. In addition, most of the people of Kenya originated there. But before that time, all the people of the world came from Babel. It was God's wish that the people should disperse from Babel and populate the world.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 630.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 633.

⁴⁸ MHT 2. See also: Cynthia Brantley Papers (CBP), University of California Davis Library Special Collections, Collection D-514, Box 16, Folder 28, “GHT 1-55,” Interview V (Shadrack Kambi), 15 Dec. 1970

⁴⁹ MHT 8.

<i>Sub-group/Group</i>	<i>Tradition</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Informant</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Recorded by</i>
CHONYI	—	—	—	—	—
DIGO	(1)	Kirao (west or northwest of Malindi), Angomba (northwest of Teita)	?	1846	Guillain ^a
DURUMA	(2)	Makua slaves	Duruma	1900	Johnstone ^b
	(3)	Makua slaves	?	1840s	Krapf ^c
	(4)	Makua slaves	?	1846	Guillain ^d
GIRIAMA	(5)	Mt. Mangea	Giriama	1865	Wakefield ^e
	(6)	Mt. Mangea	Swahili	1847	Krapf ^f
	(7)	Mt. Mangea	Giriama	1887	Taylor ^g
	(8)	Mt. Mangea	?	1860s	New ^h
JIBANA	—	—	—	—	—
KAMBE	(5)	Mt. Mangea	Giriama	1865	Wakefield ^e
	(9)	Teita Hills	Kambe	1900	Johnstone ^b
KAUMA	(5)	Mt. Mangea	Giriama	1865	Wakefield ^e
	(10)	Teita Hills	Kauma	1900	Peel ^j
RABAI	(11)	Kilimanjaro	Rabai/Swahili	1847	Krapf ^k
	(12)	Kilimanjaro	Rabai	1848	Rebmann ^m
	(8)	Kilimanjaro	?	1860s	New ^h
RIBE	(8)	Mt. Mangea	Ribe	1860s	New ^h
	(5)	Mt. Mangea	Giriama	1865	Wakefield ^e
MIJI KENDA	(13)	North-northwest of Malindi	?	1850s	Rebmann ⁿ
(WA-NYIKA)	(1)	Angomba/Kirao	?	1846	Guillain ^a
	(14)	Pokomoni	Pokomo	1845	Krapf ^o
	(15)	Ozi	Swahili	1857	Burton ^p
	(16)	"Interior"	?	1878	Jones ^r
	(17)	Jilore Area	?	1872	Wakefield ^e

Notes:

a. C. Guillain, 1856, *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, III (Paris), 240, 243-245.

b. H. B. Johnstone, 1902, "Notes on the Customs of the Tribes Occupying Mombasa Sub-District, British East Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 32: 263.

c. J. L. Krapf to A. Hamerton, 21 Jan. 1850, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1882, 4: 747-753; J. L. Krapf, 1964, *A Dictionary of the Swahili Language*, 2nd ed. (Ridgewood, NJ), under *Durumana* and *Mnika*.

d. C. Guillain, 1856, *Documents sur l'histoire, la géographie et le commerce de l'Afrique Orientale*, III (Paris), 241.

e. T. Wakefield, *Footprints in Eastern Africa: or, Notes of a Visit to the Southern Gallas* (London, 1866), 11. Or, as reproduced in E. S. Wakefield, *Thomas Wakefield: Missionary and Geographical Pioneer in East Equatorial Africa* (London, 1904), 60.

f. J. L. Krapf, "Journal," 1 Oct. 1847, CMS, CA5/016; Krapf, *Vocabulary of Six East African Languages* (Tübingen, 1850), viii.

g. W. E. Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (London): vi, W. E. Taylor, "Diary of Itineration in Giryama, October 8 to November 9, 1887," CMS, G3A5/05 (1888), 24 November and 1 December, *Church Missionary Gleaner* (1898) 25: 4-5.

h. C. New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours in Eastern Africa* (London, 1873), 93.

j. *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, New Series (1901) 26: 31.

k. see f above and Krapf, "Journal," 1 Nov. 1848, CMS, CA5/016.

m. J. Rebmann, "Journal," Mar/Apr. 1848, CMS, CA5/M2,218.

n. Rebmann's tradition was recorded in R. F. Burton, *Zanzibar: City, Island and Coast*, II (London, 1872), 80.

o. J. Krapf, "Journal of Journey to Takaungu," 23 June to 4 July 1845, CMS, CA5/M1, 651-652. p. R. F. Burton, "The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, XXIX (1859), 310.

r. W. H. Jones, "A Journey to Duruma," 7-14 August 1878, CMS, CA5/014.

s. G. David and I. Nyondo to J. A. Lamb, 22 February, 1877, CMS, CA5/M5, 58-60.

Table 2.1: Comparative table of nineteenth-century claims of origin. Morton 1977: 631–2.

[James Sanga Mwavita, Jibana, 24 March 1971]

A large number of people went to Singwaya from Babel; there were people of all races. Singwaya itself was a very big city.⁵⁰

[Thomas Govi, Chonyi, 17 April 1971]

The Chonyi came from Singwaya. The first human being was Adam; that is why we call ourselves Adamu. Their first home was at Mecca and then they moved to Medina. That is why when the Chonyi are praying to their ancestors sometimes they mention Mecca and Medina. From Medina God dispersed the people to fill the world and the Chonyi left and built their first home, Kaya Laa.⁵¹

[Joseph Sanga, Chonyi, 3 June 1971]

The Chonyi came from Aden and established settlements at Mecca, Medina, Zingaovu, and Singwaya. We were driven out of Singwaya by the Galla. At that time we were not known as the different Mijikenda peoples, but all of us were known as Laa. After we left Singwaya we went to Ulambai and, after staying there for a while, we went on to Mwangea.⁵²

[Ambari wa Lewa, Chonyi, 9 June 1971]

The Chonyi lived first in Mecca. Then they left Mecca, they went to Medina, but the first Chonyi woman had still not yet given birth to any children. When they left Medina they settled in Egypt and it was there that the first children were born. In Egypt they were followers of Jesus Christ and believed in God. When they had children, they went to church to give thanks and to sacrifice to God, but on the way there all but three of the men were killed. These men remarried and formed another Chonyi community. When they left Egypt they divided and each family followed a different route. They settled in different places, the names of which I have forgotten, but at last they came to Singwaya.

[Ezechiel Hanga, Kauma, 5 August 1971]

The Kauma originally came from Mecca. From Mecca they went to Kaya Zikanangwe, Kaya Kau, and Kaya Singwaya. After leaving Singwaya, they settled in Kaya Chidhongo at Kwa Demu, then Kaya Chonyi, Kaya Chizingo, and Kaya Chivara here in Kauma.⁵³

[Chibo wa Mundu, Chonyi, 7 August 1971]

We originally came from Marikano. Then we went to Segeju, Ganzoni, and Singwaya. After Singwaya we went to Mwangea, Katsomeni in Ruruma, Mombasa, Nguluni, Kashau, Mirihini, and finally Chonyi.

⁵⁰ MHT 10.

⁵¹ MHT 21.

⁵² MHT 27.

⁵³ MHT 64.

Shungwaya becomes, in these narratives, a stopping point along a chain of historical settlements, or a point of secondary dispersal after an original exodus from Aden, Mecca, Babel, or Egypt. Spear dismissed these claims as merely “appended” to the Singwaya tradition, singular, by Muslim and Christian converts.⁵⁴ This is, he acknowledges, not dissimilar from Morton’s argument that Singwaya itself was “a superimposition on the earlier traditions,” plural.⁵⁵ Morton’s reasoning is “not unsound,” Spear concedes, but to apply such skepticism to Singwaya (and not simply to Mecca and Babel) “casts doubt on the whole enterprise.”⁵⁶

Morton proposes instead that, having removed Shungwaya from serious consideration as the “origin” of the Mijikenda peoples, “two long-neglected and much more stimulating hypotheses may now receive their due.”⁵⁷ The first recognizes the significance of “Mt. Mangea” in a number of the nineteenth-century traditions in Table 2.1, especially those of the “northern” Mijikenda. The second is separate origins for the Digo, Duruma, and Rabai (which they claim), and that “the uniformity of Miji Kenda subgroups stems in part from the middle of the nineteenth century, when members of these three subgroups ... resettled among the Miji Kenda to their north.”⁵⁸

Hinnebusch, meanwhile, responding primarily to Spear on the grounds of historical linguistics, pointed out that the language classification schema with which Spear had attempted to correlate the data of origin myths, are typological classifications—based on “arbitrarily selected” features like “the presence or absence of tone, noun prefixes, [and] verbal extensions”—not

⁵⁴ Spear, “Traditional Myths,” 68.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Morton, “New Evidence,” 642.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

“genetic” classifications.⁵⁹ They are not, in other words, “the kind of classification[s] from which well-founded inferences about such interrelationships [between the people who speak the languages] can be made.”⁶⁰ Hinnebusch goes on to show, based on a new genetic classification, that the Sabaki languages (which include Mijikenda and Swahili) and Seuta languages—spoken by people in Tanzania who do not share the Singwaya tradition—diverged more recently from each other than from Saghala, speakers of which—the Taita—*do* share the tradition, but which split off “at a time when the Shungwaya languages, as such, were not yet in existence” (see Diagram 2.1).⁶¹

Based on this linguistic data, and “the fact that only two Swahili groups share the myth [of Singwaya origins] with the Pokomo and Mijikenda,” Hinnebusch proposes that “the myth did not appear until sometime after the formation of the Sabaki languages proper and the breakup of proto Pokomo-Mijikenda. The myth thus developed sometime after the Swahili began to move out of contact with the bulk of the Sabaki peoples or at least during their expansion south.”⁶² Given this, the Singwaya tradition “appears to be a statement of a people based on their immediate observations of linguistic and cultural affiliations with their neighbors,” and “the Kilimanjaro-Taita-Pare triangle”—southwest, not northeast of their present location—is speculatively put forward as the “homeland” of the Sabaki language speakers of the Kenya coast and the Seuta language speakers of northeast Tanzania.⁶³

⁵⁹ T. J. Hinnebusch, “The Shungwaya Hypothesis: A Linguistic Reappraisal,” in: J. T. Gallagher (ed.) *East African Culture History* (Syracuse: Program in Eastern African Studies, 1976), 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25–6.

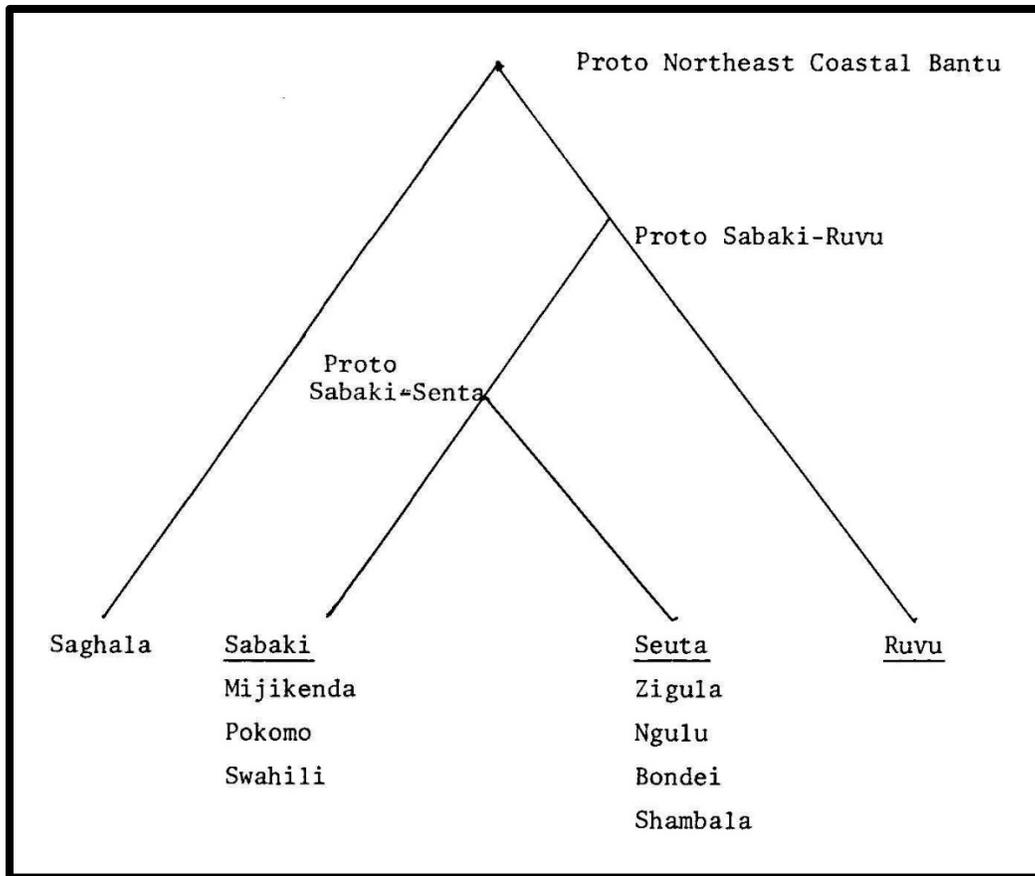


Diagram 2.1: Northeast Coastal Bantu Language Tree Diagram (Hinnebusch 1973: 15)

In subsequent publications, Spear acknowledged the critiques of Morton and Hinnebusch, and has attempted to incorporate these new insights into his interpretation, which, however, remains substantially similar to earlier versions. In the introductory comments accompanying his 1981 publication of his 1971 interview transcripts, Spear summed up his position as follows:

Sabaki speakers, the future Mijikenda, Pokomo, and Swahili, clearly were in Somalia by the 10th century when Swahili began to disperse down the coast. The others remained in Somalia (moving from the area around Mogadishu and Brava to Kirao, Ngumba, and Singwaya) until the mid-16th century, when they were forced to migrate south by the Oromo. Digo, already a distinctive people, migrated directly to the area southwest of Mombasa, while the others moved in stages; the Pokomo settled along the Tana River, the Mijikenda dispersed from Mt. Mwangea into their separate kayas where they were settled by the end of the century, while others possibly moved into the Taita Hills. In the meantime, other groups of people had already settled along the coast, or continued to do so, including Waata hunters, Rabai from Rombo, ex-slaves from Mombasa, Daiso/Segeju from central Kenya, and others. All became a part of evolving coastal culture as they each developed their own distinctive culture. Swahili became defined by their urban living and maritime culture influenced from across the Indian Ocean. Mijikenda became farmers living in large central kayas, while Pokomo adapted to the needs of riverine flood plain agriculture. For all, the Singwaya tradition provides an elegant explanation of their present cultural identities, but to say this is not to say that the tradition is historically false. For there was a real movement of people south amidst a general process of cultural upheaval and reformation. It is this process that the Singwaya tradition distills and conveys to the people who continue to relate it and listen to it today. Ironically, though, most of the cultural institutions to which the tradition refers have not existed since the late 19th century when Mijikenda moved out to live in their farms, abandoning the kayas and ceasing to initiate age-sets. Thus the tradition is itself a relic which speaks not to the transformations caused by colonialism at the turn of the century, as Morton claimed, but to much earlier transformations which first established the Mijikenda, Swahili, and Pokomo as distinctive peoples and cultures in their own right within the overall context of changing coastal cultures. The tradition is thus true, both to coastal cultures as they have existed over the past four hundred years or more and to the main historical processes that their development involved.⁶⁴

Martin Walsh, meanwhile, has offered a painstaking critique each kind of evidence mobilized by Spear (documentary, ethnographic, linguistic, archaeological) and offers an alternative hypothesis of dynamic north-south migrations, fission and fusion, language contact and clientage:

⁶⁴ Spear, *Traditions*, 16–7.

This would see one group of Sabaki speakers, proto-Mijikenda, settling along the southern and central Kenyan coast and its hinterland, while the rest (who were to become Pokomo, Elwana and Swahili/Comorian) pushed further north. As they settled, the proto-Mijikenda interacted with indigenous Southern Cushitic speakers, and gradually assimilated them, in the process adopting some of their productive techniques and social practices (including, possibly, some elements of the “*kaya* complex”). The Southern Cushites who succeeded in retaining a separate identity did so by occupying a restricted productive niche: hunting and gathering. Meanwhile, as the Mijikenda themselves began to diverge (the Digo first), Swahili speakers began to move down the coast, resulting in new cultural (and linguistic) syntheses, particularly where they interacted with the Digo. Later, when the Galla (Orma) [=Oromo] moved south, residential patterns among the northern Mijikenda were disrupted, and they withdrew to a closely linked series of hilltop *kayas* north of Mombasa. During the same period their hunter-gatherer clients switched allegiance to the Galla and adopted their language to become Waata. Gradually, however, normal relations were resumed, the Galla moved back north and the Giriama followed, leaving us with the cultural map as we know it today.⁶⁵

More recently, Justin Willis has reiterated Morton’s claim of lack of evidence for the Singwaya story among nineteenth century Mijikenda.⁶⁶ He also points out that the “consistency” of the Singwaya narratives is “illusory” and “constructed by disregarding the differences in the stories.”⁶⁷ “They are,” he points out, only “consistent in the inclusion of Singwaya, but not in the dating or manner of the migration—nor in the reasons adduced.”⁶⁸ Willis argues instead that the prevalence of the Singwaya tradition among twentieth-century Mijikenda peoples is in part a local theory to explain cultural and linguistic similarities, as well as “ethnic” identities, that actually developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century out of the relationship between these communities and the city of Mombasa.

In this regard, the differences in detail between the various Singwaya traditions are part of an argument about the nature of that relationship: “Through their presentation of details of the

⁶⁵ Walsh, “Mijikenda Origins,” 16–7.

⁶⁶ Willis, *Mombasa*, 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 31

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

tradition, story-tellers seek to establish a hierarchy between Mijikenda groups, to find precedents and claim rights.”⁶⁹ He also points out, following Hinnebusch’s insight into the historical relationship between the Sabaki languages of the Kenyan coast and the Seuta languages of northeastern Tanzania, that “groups speaking ‘Seuta’ languages share some of the cultural features which Spear associates with Singwaya; notably the use of *fingo* charms to protect circular, palisaded settlements and a male initiation ceremony in which initiates are smeared with clay.”⁷⁰

Spear has responded to these critiques (1994, 2000, 2003), but has done so by relying more heavily on historical linguistic data on the one hand (and, significantly, by shifting focus to the Swahili, rather than the Mijikenda), and an increasingly symbolic approach to the origin stories in order to “appreciate the deeper meaning of the [Singwaya] traditions” on the other.⁷¹ There is a stark divide, in other words, between the status of these traditions as *history* and their status as *myth*. Interestingly, despite Spear’s claim that the Singwaya story may be understood as both a narrative of “a real migration through chronological time from a real place” *and* as “a mythical migration through cultural time from a common source,” most of the historiographical back-and-forth about the Mijikenda origin story (as outlined above) has focused on the former dimension and largely ignored its significance as myth.⁷² That is, most of the concern among historians of

⁶⁹ Ibid. 33.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 29–30. Being “smeared with clay” is a reference to the *mung’aro* Mijikenda initiation ritual analyzed in detail in Chapter Two. See (cited in Ibid. 30n33): H. Cory, “The Sambia Initiation Rites for Boys,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 58/59 (1962), 2–7; G. Dale, “An Account of the Principal Customs and Habits of the Natives Inhabiting the Bondei Country, Compiled Mainly for the Use of European Missionaries in the Country,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 25 (1896), 181–239; and O. Baumann, *Usambara und seine Nachbargebiete* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1891). Compare also the spatial settlement patterns of the various “Sabaki” and “Seuta” peoples in the Appendix.

⁷¹ Spear, “Early Swahili History,” 287.

⁷² Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 16.

East Africa has been with the historical validity of these narratives as a literal account of the deep Mijikenda past, and with how well they correlate with historical linguistic, documentary, and archaeological data. This literature has, as Walsh points out, “fallen far short of a comprehensive analysis of the narrative as myth and as a model of and for social action.”⁷³

Without undertaking such a “comprehensive analysis” of these origin stories “as myth” (and thus, by implication, not “as history”) let me turn instead to a number of the actual narratives collected by Spear in 1971. In what follows I focus on the reasons his informants give for the departure of the Mijikenda from Singwaya. This is a relatively restricted scope of inquiry. I will not attempt to reconstruct a chronology of migration by counting age sets or establishing series of waypoints. Neither will I be concerned with deciphering the symbolic significance of different narrative elements or with divining among them a “charter” or “model and for society.” Without treating the narratives as either (or both) “myth” or/and “history,” I first wish to highlight the internal diversity of the Singwaya traditions. Although the corpus of narratives collected by Spear do all cite Singwaya as a point of origin, they differ dramatically in the reasons they give for the Mijikenda migrations from it. These differences, moreover, are patterned: The Digo, at the southern end of the Mijikenda distribution, favor one explanation (the murder of a seductive stranger by jealous men who subsequently refuse to pay compensation to the stranger’s kin, prompting a war), while the Giriama, at the northern end of Mijikenda territory, favor another (an enraged husband murders an aristocratic patron exercising his “traditional” right to initiatory sex with his clients’ new brides). Between these two poles, a range of explanations having to do with illicit or unsanctioned sex or marriage, murder, and retaliatory violence are found. Despite the

⁷³ Walsh, “Mijikenda Origins,” 8.

range of explanations presented here, I argue that they present a cluster of images, forms, and motifs that appear in varying combinations in another set of narratives explored in Chapter Two, the changing significance and recurrent salience of which will be demonstrated throughout the remaining chapters.

2.3: NARRATIVES AND IMAGES OF ORIGINS

Before Spear's collection of "Mijikenda Historical Traditions" (MHT) in the early 1970s, there are almost no recorded *narratives* of origins. Both the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century documentary sources merely indicate the point of origin, and for the most part do not relate any information about why the speaker's ancestor's left that point of origin, or where they went after, what other events occurred during the migration, and so forth. The one notable exception is a Chidigo-language text written sometime after 1939 by Paulo Mwapera (or Mwamriba), a Tanzanian Digo associated with the Bethel Mission. and published in the *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen* by Ernst Dammann in 1944:

There at Singwaya people stayed very many years. What forced them to leave their home? They were forced to leave by war between the Segeju and the Galla. Fighting because of something the Segeju did, killing a Galla boy in the land of Singwaya. This Galla boy was a young man, and very handsome. They killed him out of jealousy. ... Mora or Mwiru was a Galla boy. This Mwiru went to Singwaya looking to marry; because he was a young man. He went to court a Segeju girl, the daughter of Sultan Pununu or Todja. When the Segeju saw him, they caught him, killed him, and buried him in the cattle enclosure. When the Galla looked for [him], they met a Segeju woman in secret. It was this person who told them: "Your child was killed and buried in the middle of the cattle enclosure." The Galla brought a blood-debt case. The Segeju refused and told the Galla, "go look for yourselves!" Then the Galla pretended to be *waganga* to look for something there in the middle of the cattle enclosure. They went where they had been told by the woman. ... The Galla dug up Mwiru's grave, there where he was buried; they saw he had not totally decomposed, they

saw Galla markings. The Galla left there, leaving with great bitterness. It was a great insult; they went home. Back there, the Segeju knew, “we will have war brought to us.”⁷⁴

In this account, the jealous killers of the Oromo youth are the Segeju, not the Digo (or some other Mijikenda people). The Mijikenda only become involved in the conflict once the Oromo attack the multi-ethnic settlement of “Tšungwaya” [=Singwaya]. In a footnote, Dammann speculates that the Oromo boy, “Mora or Mwiru” may have been called “Mora” because it is the Oromo-language word for the cattle enclosure in which he was buried.⁷⁵ As I point out in Chapter Three in a discussion of the ritual lives of Mijikenda elders in the nineteenth century, the name of the secret enclosure in which Kaya elders would meet was called the *moro*, a loan word from the Eastern Cushitic language family to which Oromo belongs. The Oromo word for a cattle enclosure

⁷⁴ E. Dammann, “Zur geschichte der Digo,” *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen* 34 (1944), 53–69. Translation mine. The original text reads:

Hiko Tšungwaya atu asagara miaka mindži muno. kuuka kwao auswani? auswa ni viha vya Asegedzu na Agara. kupigana kwa tšisa tša Asegedzu kumuoraga mwana wa tšigara hikura tsi ya Tšungwaya. hiyuya mwana wa tšigara ni muhana, tsona kara ni mnono muno. amuoraga kwa tšidzitso. ... Mora hidzeni Mwiru kara ni mwana wa tšigara. Hiyu Mwiru wayiha hikura Tšungwaya atširunga urusi; kwani kara ni mvurana. Atšendarusa mwana wa tšisegedzu, mwanangwa wa surutwani Pununu au Todja. Asegedzu yomumaña, atšingwira atšimworaga atšimzika tšaa tša ñombe. Agara yomwenza hiyu Mwiru, aonana na mutu mumwenga wa tšitšetu wa tšisegedzu kwa faraga. Hiyu ndiye mweñe kuambira: “mwana wenu waoragwa atšizikwa kahikahi ya tšaa.” Agara aenda marau. Asegedzu atširema atšiambira Agara: “enzani eñe!” ndiyo Agara vodziya kuenda uganga wa kuenze hiyara kahikahi ya tšaa varayo ñombe. Atšiyorana kwa hikura kuambirwa ni hiyuya mtšetu. ... Agara aitšimba mbira ya Mwiru varatu yozikwa; amwona kadzambwe kuora kabisa, amwona arama za tšigara. Agara youka hiyo, atšiuuka na utsungu mundži. Itšikaratsibero tšibaha; atšiyiha kwao. Hiku ñuma Asegedzu atšimaña kama swiswi hundareherwa kondo.

The non-standard Chidigo orthography is Dammann’s. In a manuscript written sometime in the 1920s but not published until 1947, H. M. T. Kayamba, another mission-educated Tanzanian Digo, also cites a war between the Wasegeju and the “Wagalla” as the cause of an original migration from “Chungwaya,” but does not specify the reasons for the war. See: KNA DC/KWL/1/3/5, H. M. T. Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo compiled by Martin Hugh Kayamba, a native of Tanganyika Territory,” 1928; and H. M. T. Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 23 (1947), 80.

⁷⁵ Dammann, “Zur geschichte der Digo,” 55n2.

becomes the Mijikenda word for an elder male ritual enclosure, and this historical link is captured by the metonymic identification of an Oromo victim with the site of their burial in a narrative that accounts for the historical separation of once much closer peoples in a northern homeland where the Oromo still reside. I return to the issue of northern origins, Oromo-Mijikenda connections, and the possible mediating role of the Segeju peoples below.

Compare Paulo Mwapera's text to the following narratives collected by Spear just over thirty years later in Kenya. Note that the narrators are all Digo, the southernmost of the Mijikenda "sub-groups":

[Juma Bakari, Digo, 16 August 1971]

Originally Galla and Digo children played together. Some Digo girls fell in love with a Galla boy, Mura, and they told their parents about him. The Digo elders arranged to watch this boy and, when they saw how handsome he was, they grew jealous of him. The next time he came to dance in the Digo village he was kidnapped, killed and buried in a cattle kraal. The Galla people missed their son and when they went to the Digo to ask about him the Digo said they didn't know where he was. The Galla asked the Digo three times and each time the Digo gave the same answer. One day the Galla found a woman alone in her home. When she was asked by the Galla where her people were she said they had all gone. The Galla threatened her, but she pleaded with them to spare her and told them what had happened to their son. The Galla then told the Digo that they were going to get a diviner to find their son. The diviner found the boy's bones and that is how the war started. The Digo lost the war and were driven away from Singwaya. On their flight they dispersed and did not know each other anymore.⁷⁶

[Saidi Mwangumbo, Digo, 17 August 1971]

We left [Singwaya] because of a war. We lived there with the Galla. One day a Galla boy, Kalindi, came to find a girl friend. After several days the Digo got angry with him, killed him, and buried him in a cattle kraal. When the boy's father asked the Digo if they knew the whereabouts of his son, they said they didn't know. The Galla looked for his son everywhere. One day when the Digo had gone to their fields and left only one sick old lady behind, the Galla asked her for the news of his son. The woman was alone and frightened so she told him what had happened. The Galla went to the kraal and saw that there was some red earth there. He returned later wearing leg bells and holding a flywhisk, pretending to be an *mganga* looking for the lost boy. His followers sang for him while they moved towards the burial place. He went around several cow sheds and finally dropped the flywhisk where his son had been buried. His followers dug up the place, found the body,

⁷⁶ MHT 71.

and carried it away before the Digo had returned from their fields. Later they came back to the Digo to ask for cattle in compensation, but the Digo refused, saying: "Let come what may, we are ready." Then the war started. The Galla lost the first battle and the boy's father's clan gave up, but his mother's clan revived the war. When the Digo lost all hope of winning, they escaped through a secret passage.⁷⁷

[Juma Zani, Digo, 19 August 1971]

The Digo came from Singwaya. When they were living there they were not known as Digo, but as Mngumba and Mchirao. One a giant came and the people called him Digo, meaning big. The giant could kill goats with his hands, strip them, and eat them raw. One evening the people of Singwaya killed the giant with stones and clubs and buried him in a cattle kraal. They wondered where he had come from, guessing that it had been either Israel or Egypt, but they couldn't find out as he was dead.

After six days a Galla came with a baobab drum. He stopped first at Pokomo where he was greatly applauded by the girls. The Pokomo got angry with him because they thought he would spoil their daughters, so they drove him away. He then fled to Singwaya, arriving there towards sundown when the people were taking their cattle back to their kraals. He joined the herdboys and helped them drive the cattle. One boy befriended him and took him to his home. After the evening meal the Galla boy got out his drum and began drumming. The girls admired him. He lived there for four days and then the people killed him and buried him with the giant.

The boys' [sic] father began looking for his son. At Pokomo he was told that his son had gone to the village of Mngumba and Mchirao. The Pokomo cautioned the Galla that the village was dangerous, that the people of that village were the people of Digo because they had killed a giant. That was how we got our name. When the Galla and his companion got to Singwaya all the people were out hunting. They met a sick old lady who had stayed home and asked her about the boy. She said that the boy had come, but she didn't know which way he had gone. One of the Galla was wearing a *chivele* and the woman said she would tell him about the boy if he gave it to her. He did and she revealed the burial spot. The Galla went to the kraal, turned over the cattle dung with their spears, and saw the fresh red earth. They recovered the grave and told the woman they were going to get their comrades to show them the grave.

After twenty days about two hundred Galla came. The Digo lived in wooden kraals to protect themselves from wild animals and when the Galla came the gate was closed. The Galla asked for twenty cattle as compensation for their son, but the Digo refused and the Galla attacked the kraal. The Galla were armed with spears and the Digo with bows and arrows, but the arrowheads were not poisoned. The Galla began digging away the logs and when they reached the third layer the Digo made a secret passage and escaped at night.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ MHT 72.

⁷⁸ MHT 74.

In these accounts, again, an attractive outsider is killed out of jealousy or anger, but this time by the Digo themselves rather than the Segeju. And while its cause is ambiguous in the first two texts, it is clearly specified in the third: Digo anger is rooted not in jealousy of his fine appearance or drumming, but rather in a fear that the outsider will “spoil their daughters,” a euphemism for either deflowering or impregnating them without also making the appropriate compensatory gifts to initiate further marriage negotiations and exchanges. Senior men (this is explicit in the first text and implied in the third, in the concern of the Pokomo for their daughters, rather than their wives and sisters, etc.) then abduct and kill the young outsider and “bury him in the cattle kraal.” The outsider’s kin come to ask after him, and the Digo deny any knowledge of his whereabouts, before the secret is revealed by an old woman living alone. After a divination or a mimetic performance of a divination, the Oromo discover the body of their kinsman, and demand a blood-debt compensation. The Digo refuse to compensate the Oromo with cattle, and war begins between the two.

There are other similar, but less detailed accounts, with the genders of certain roles reversed, collected from members of other (i.e. non-Digo) Mijikenda groups as well:

[Chimwenga wa Ngoro, Ribe, 26 June 1971]

We stayed with the Galla at Singwaya and they had the duty to sweep for us. One day a Galla came to perform this duty, but a Mijikenda youth caught him sleeping with a Mijikenda woman and killed him. The Galla waited in vain for the return of their son. Finally they became convinced that the Mijikenda were responsible for his loss and they attacked us and drove us from Singwaya.⁷⁹

[Ambari wa Lewa, Chonyi, 9 June 1971]

One day a Chonyi youth slept with a Galla girl and made her pregnant. According to Galla custom the man should have married the girl, but she refused to identify him. The Chonyi knew who he was, however, and persuaded him to invite the girl to his village. There she was killed and buried in the kraal. The Galla searched in vain for their daughter and asked the Chonyi about her, but the Chonyi denied any knowledge of her whereabouts. One time

⁷⁹ MHT 38.

when the Galla came they met a Chonyi woman with a bad sore that had not responded to any treatment. They offered her medicines and these cured her. She was very grateful to the Galla and offered to help them. They asked about their daughter and she revealed what had happened. The Galla dug up the girl's remains and thereafter they killed any Chonyi who wandered outside. When the Chonyi realized what was happening, they fled from Singwaya.⁸⁰

[Chibo wa Mundu, Chonyi, 7 August 1971]

The main reason we left Singwaya was there was a Chonyi woman who married a man from a different people against the will of the Chonyi. When this woman married him a fight broke out between the Chonyi and these people. The Chonyi were defeated and were driven out.⁸¹

[Mwachiti wa Nyawa, Duruma, 12 August 1971]

The Duruma left Singwaya because they were attacked by the Galla. Some Duruma had killed a Galla woman and buried her in the middle of a cattle kraal. When the Galla came to the Mijikenda peoples in search of their daughter, no one told them anything, with the exception of one dumb man who kept pointing at the grave. The Galla dug in the kraal and found the body. Then they attacked the Mijikenda.⁸²

In these texts there is, similarly, a burial in the kraal of the victim of a killing that was the result of unsanctioned sex or a “marriage” between members of the narrator’s own ethnic group and “the Galla” outsiders. In these four texts, however, unlike the Digo texts, there is no possibility of redress through the compensatory payment of *kore* (“blood-wealth”). In these texts, as in all previous accounts, the narrator’s own group are the killers, and “the Galla” are their victims. And in two of these accounts—those of Ambari wa Lewa and Mwachiti wa Nyawa—the secret is revealed, as it was in the first set of texts, by a marginal member of the in-group (a woman with “a bad sore” that would not heal, and a mute man).

Consider now a third set of texts in which jealousy and anger around marriage and sexual access to women are cited as the precipitating cause of the killing that leads to war. In these

⁸⁰ MHT 31.

⁸¹ MHT 65.

⁸² MHT 67.

accounts it is not marriage between groups that is at issue, but rather the “right” of an aristocratic Oromo to engage in sexual intercourse with a new Mijikenda bride before her Mijikenda husband. Note that the narrators of these texts are all Giriama, the northernmost “subgroup” of the Mijikenda peoples, located at the opposite end of their North-South distribution from the Digo, with whose texts we began:

[Joseph Denge, Giriama, 5 March 1971]

During that time there was a custom that when a man married, the wife first had to spend a night with a Galla. Once a young man refused to follow that custom. When he came home he found two spears stuck in the ground near the door of his house (showing that there were two Galla in the house). He had a bow and arrow. He entered the house, shot them, and killed them. This was the cause of the war between the Galla and Giriama.⁸³

[Bukardi Ndzovu, Giriama, 15 March 1971]

Singwaya. Singwaya was a place where the Giriama used to live, but the country belonged to the Galla. When we were there, the Galla treated us as slaves. The word Singwaya comes from *Tsingwa*, meaning “the country of other people.” When we were there we were slaves of the Galla. For instance, if one cultivated maize and harvested it, a Galla would come and eat first. Or, before moving one’s homestead, a Galla had to sleep with his wife.... When a man married, a Galla had to sleep first with his wife. A Galla was just like an *mganga*; people thought of the Galla the way people today think about *waganga*.

One day a man was married and he did not want to allow a Galla to sleep with his wife. When a Galla got into his house with his wife, he killed him. The man’s father blamed his son for the death. He dug a grave where rubbish was being thrown. The Galla was buried there and the grave was covered so that no one would discover it. The father of the Galla, to whom the bridegroom’s father had gone to request the services of his son, was disturbed when his son didn’t return, and he went to the bridegroom’s father to enquire where he was. Then a woman came out from the house and revealed the secret, pointing to the Galla’s grave. The Galla’s father returned home and informed his friends that his son had been killed: “My son has been killed. Find my son for me (asking for revenge or bloodwealth).” That was the cause of the war between the Galla and the Giriama.⁸⁴

[Kilian Ngala, Giriama, 15 March 1971]

The Giriama were the slaves of the Galla. A Galla had better weapons than a Giriama. Whenever a Giriama married, a Galla had to sleep first with his wife. There was one young man who objected to this and he killed the Galla who had come to his wife. This was the cause of the war.⁸⁵

⁸³ MHT 1. Compare this to the narrative Denge relates to Cynthia Brantley, quoted below.

⁸⁴ MHT 3.

⁸⁵ MHT 4.

[Pembe wa Bembere, Giriama, 11 May 1971]

They left because of trouble. At Singwaya, 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. The Galla's father waited for his son for almost a week, but he didn't return. Then one day he saw a Giriama woman who told him that his son had been killed. When the father heard this he went to the rest of the Galla and told them. The Galla attacked the Giriama and drove them from Singwaya.⁸⁶

Cynthia Brantley recorded similar Giriama traditions in the same year as Spear:

BB: You see sometime in the wanderings of the Agiryama they clashed with the Agala. In the distant past if you ever got married to a girl you would not have the deflowering ritual sex with her. That was to be done by the Agala.

Q: Was that the king of the Agala or may any rude fellow who claims such being a bully?

BB: The Mugalla has always been a bully. You see the Mugalla actually used to interfere with the matumis (sex ritual) [parenthetical translation Kazungu's]. On one occasion a person who had two wives killed the Mugalla who had come to sleep with his newly married second wife. That was when they had to leave Singwaya in the Gala country and they came to Jorore [=Jilore].⁸⁷

Brantley also collected an alternate version of the narrative from Joseph Denge, who had been interviewed by Spear three months earlier (see above, MHT 1):

It all originated in Singwaya. Muyeye had two wives called Mbodze and Matseze. In those days when a young man like you [addressing Brantley's research assistant] had got married it was the custom for the Agalla to come and climb the woman before the husband was given a chance to start his honeymoon.

You see the Agalla were in a way like our kings. So one young man after getting married and then taking his grandmothers to see them off he came back to find two spears at the door and he found inside the two men who were climbing his wife and he killed both of them, then he started the trouble. The Agalla made sporadic attacks and they wanted to kill Muyeye.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ MHT 23.

⁸⁷ CBP, Box 16, Folder 27, "Cynthia Brantley," Interview 091 (Hawesidi Kabuche), 13 Sep. 1971. These interviews were conducted in Kigiryama by Brantley's research assistant Victor Gona Kazungu, who also likely translated them into English for the transcripts.

⁸⁸ CBP, Box 16, Folder 25, "Oral Interviews," Interview 130 (Joseph Denge and Samuel Baya Mose), 17 June 1971.

Morton, finally, also seems to have encountered the same Giriama version of the Singwaya narrative during his own research, conducted contemporaneously with Spear and Brantley. In a folder of his papers labeled “Oral History” are the following undated (but ca. early 1970) interview notes:

“Singbaya” North East—near Pokomo. Move caused by: Galla thought them kings over Giriama, & felt obliged to sleep with a Giriama woman before her Giriama husband was allowed the same privilege. Galla was killed in this process, by the new husband. Vondo, the husband, killed the Galla. Father of Galla wanted his son, but as he was dead, war broke out.⁸⁹

Notice the absence, as in Spear and Brantley’s Giriama texts, of any mention in these traditions of a secret burial in the cattle kraal, or of the possibility (present in Spear’s Digo traditions) of a payment of blood-debt cattle that would have prevented the outbreak of war.⁹⁰ In these cases, the conflict is rooted in the quasi-aristocratic status of “a Galla” relative to “a Giriama.” For Bukardi Ndzovu (MHT 3), this is explicitly related to the fact that “the country belonged to the Galla.”⁹¹ He supports this claim with reference to a folk etymology that I also encountered while collecting Singwaya narratives in 2017: “The word Singwaya comes from *Tsingwa*, meaning ‘the country of other people.’”⁹² This also contextualizes Ndzovu’s reference

⁸⁹ Fred Morton Papers, “Oral History” Folder. See also the transcript “The Tape on Paper, Informant: Karezi Mwabaraki,” 13 Mar. 1970, which relates the story in Kigiriama, and an English translation in: Oral History Notes, Book I: Giriama, “Karezi mwa Bakari,” Bamba Location, 2 Mar. 1970.

⁹⁰ In the Brantley tradition cited above, the question of whether or not to pay compensation is raised between the killer and his brother, but they disagreed, occasioning the split between the Giriama and the Ribe. The name “Ribe,” in this tradition, derives from the younger brother’s plea to the elder brother, “murihe ye Mugala” (“pay the Galla”). Ibid.

⁹¹ MHT 3.

⁹² Ibid., Hilary Kalama 4 Aug, 17. “*Tsing[b]wa*” is derived from “[N]Tsi-” (“country,” “land,” etc., cognate with “*nchi*” Kisw.) and *-ng[b]wa*, a third-person possessive suffix that can be used to emphasize (but is not necessary to indicate) possession or ownership, even in the case of lexical forms in which such possession is “inalienable” (Ball 2011) as in Chidigo *ise* (“his/her father,” as

to the right of “a Galla” to eat the “first fruits” of a maize harvest. The Giriama were permitted to live in “the country of other people,” but their Oromo patrons treated them, according to Ndzovu, “as slaves.”⁹³

Despite these differences with the Digo and other Mijikenda texts cited above, the Giriama texts nevertheless similarly point to a violation of established norms regulating the relationships between groups by the narrator’s ancestors. In the Digo case, it was the refusal of the killers to pay *kore*—“blood-wealth”—in the form of cattle. As in E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s description of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940), “tribe” marks the limit—often only retrospectively “discovered” in the wake of failed attempts to resolve the dispute by negotiation and mediation—beyond which mediation does not occur, leading to war. In the Digo texts, their ancestors refused to settle the conflict through negotiation and prestation, and the Oromo respond with war. In the Giriama case, it is the unwillingness of an ancestor to tolerate an intolerable, but established, arrangement between patrons and clients—the terms of which he violates by killing—that leads to a violent response by the more powerful patrons. From a different perspective, however, these versions are not as far removed from one another as they might seem: Both are concerned with male control of the reproductive capacities of women and its consequences within their respective kinship systems.

In the Singwaya narratives of the matrilineal Digo, the anxiety is that a young woman through whom group membership will be transmitted will be seduced by an outsider and carried off without the normative payment of bridewealth. Historically, the Digo were (and to a variable degree still are) ideologically relatively endogamous, preferring marriage among classificatory

distinct from “*baba yakpwe*,” which has the same denotational content), which is often rendered *isengbwa*.

⁹³ MHT 3.

cross-cousins.⁹⁴ This can be seen most clearly, for instance, in the moiety model of sister exchange reconstructed by Gerlach described in Chapter One. Such marriages were (again, ideologically at least) arranged by senior male representatives of matrilineal descent groups as part of the pragmatic management of group boundaries and relationships. Outsiders represent a threat to this arrangement.

At the same time, the myth encodes the seduction of the outside that will become such an important feature of the region's incorporation in the capitalist world in the nineteenth century (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four). Foreigners possess attributes, value, capacities, and abilities that are both threatening and appealing, recognizably appealing yet almost impossible to control. The possibility of domesticating their power through affinal ties is outweighed, in these narratives, by fear of the risk of such exchange arrangements collapsing into purely extractive ones.

The Singwaya narratives of the patrilineal Giriama, by contrast, encodes an anxiety about control of sexual access to women in relation to an explicit hierarchy of wealth and status among ethnic "hosts" and "guests." In these narratives, it is the Mijikenda who are strangers in Oromo lands, and it is this fact that entitles the Oromo overlords to ritually take Giriama wives without paying bridewealth by sleeping with them on their wedding night. This could, perhaps, be understood as another "version" (in Lévi-Strauss's sense) of the same mythic idea (Lévi-Strauss 1963 [1955]), which is that the expulsion of the Mijikenda from Singwaya was precipitated by their failure or refusal to transfer rights in or control over persons to others according to "traditional" norms. But the theme of unfair (asymmetrical, without reciprocity) sexual access to

⁹⁴ With their widespread conversion to Islam beginning in the late nineteenth century, patrilineal parallel cousin marriage has become a preferential form of endogamous marriage as well, while matrilineal parallel cousins remain unmarriageable "siblings."

women is also repeated in discussions of a centralized political authority—*Kubo*—among the nineteenth-century Digo (see Chapter Four).

Kubo is said to have had the “right” (or simply the power) to take and marry anyone’s daughter within his domain without paying bridewealth. It is perhaps significant that the *mbari* (“clan”) within which the *Kubo* title was (patrilineally, in apparent contrast to the matrilineal descent characteristic of the rest of Digo society) inherited was *Achinangala*—“The Gallas,” the Oromo. But I argue that the ritual taking of wives without bridewealth has to do, in the case of these Giriama narratives, with the regional slave economy of the nineteenth century.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the exportation of slaves from the East African coast was slowly restricted by a series British treaties. Limitations on the export of slaves meant that the number of slaves available for purchase locally increased as the price fell.⁹⁵ Slaves wives could be purchased more cheaply than the cost of free wives’ bridewealth, and without the support of her kin (higher-status “wife-givers” in relation to the “wife-taking” group), the residence and labor of the woman and her children were easier for these nineteenth-century “new men” to control (Willis and Miers 1997). Women incorporated into a homestead in childhood could later be married by heads of homesteads or “given” to kinsmen without payment of bridewealth was well. By ritually taking their wives without compensatory payment in these versions of the narrative, the Oromo figure their Giriama guests as slaves in this way, a fact made explicit in Bukardi Nzovu’s account (MHT 3).

At the same time, the identification of the cause of the Mijikenda exodus as having been a despised marriage ritual performed by their Oromo neighbors has important resonances with the

⁹⁵ J. Willis and S. Miers, “Becoming a Child of the House: Incorporation, Authority and Resistance in Giriama Society” *Journal of African History* 38:3 (1997), 488.

1877 story reported by George David (see Chapter One) in which the ritual, recall, involved the castration of a Mijikenda victim. Setting aside the shift of *origo* (from the mid-coast hinterland around Jilore to the more northern Singwaya), these accounts (and others) echo the migration story of George David from 1877, in which the Mijikenda are the victims of Oromo predations.⁹⁶ In nineteenth-century versions of the myth, the ritual killing and emasculation of a victim advances an Oromo warrior to marriageable rank. But David's account includes an additional reference to slavery: After the "Wanika" fled "Galla" persecution, escaped slaves from the coast took their place. These escaped slaves successfully domesticated "Galla" violence with unspecified payments of "tribute"—precisely what the Mijikenda *failed to do* in Spear's Singwaya narratives.⁹⁷ David, however, suggests that even this arrangement was, by the late nineteenth century, in the process of breaking down: The "Galla," aware of the social and economic consequences of growing British presence in the region, had begun to betray the escapees, kidnapping and selling back into slavery those who had sought refuge in their patronage.⁹⁸

Taking the question of the relationship of these narratives to slavery as a thematic hinge, we can turn now to the place of *mung'aro* in the Singwaya story. Recall from the discussion in Chapter One that all nineteenth century accounts of the *mung'aro* ritual mention slavery with reference to the ritual victim. At the time that these accounts were being collected, slave raiding in the coastal hinterland was on the rise, and the paths connecting fortified settled areas became increasingly threatening spaces of potential abduction and enslavement. A slave is either at risk of being captured and killed in the course of *mung'aro* (reminiscent of regional narratives of

⁹⁶ See footnote 58, above.

⁹⁷ CMS CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O17, J. A. Lamb to The Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, 19 May 1877.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

enslavement by abduction from the paths connecting fortified settlements) or is said to be purchased for the purpose of being “sacrificed” in the ritual.⁹⁹ In the early twentieth century sources, by contrast, the ritual victim is not a slave, but “a foreigner” or “a man of an enemy tribe.”¹⁰⁰

Of these twentieth-century sources, only Kayamba’s makes reference to slavery, but not in reference to *mung’aro* (his account of which includes no mention of a ritual victim at all). Rather, slavery was a condition into which one risked being sold by “a strong man” as punishment for even minor transgressions during the “chaos and oppression” of the *pre-mung’aro period* (which Kayamba’s informants illustrated with the example of enslavement as punishment for accidentally breaking a chair).¹⁰¹ In this account, *mung’aro* is not a ritual during which slaves are at risk of being killed, but is instead the ritual by which the arbitrary rule of “strong men” and “powerful families” over “poor people” is replaced by a new, just hierarchy of age and rank in a legitimate governing council.¹⁰² Like the Giriama narratives above, Kayamba’s early twentieth-century Digo narrative centers on the insufferability of radical inequalities of wealth and power. Unlike the expansive northern Giriama, however, who locate this power differential between themselves and a neighboring group, the Kayamba’s narrative of the endogamous southern Digo understands the inequality to be internal to pre-*mung’aro* Digo society.

⁹⁹ Krapf, *Travels*, 121; CMS CMS/B/OMS/CA5/O6, George David, “Ugnaro,” 24 April 1879; Krapf, “Account of the Wonicas,” 43; Krapf, *Memoir*, 73; Burton, *Zanzibar*, 89–91.

¹⁰⁰ Champion, *AGiryama*, 17; Griffiths, “Glimpses of a Nyika Tribe,” 293.

¹⁰¹ Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” 80.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*



Image 2.1: National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Archives, Joy Adamson Photographic Collection, “Duruma Mask Pair, Kinango, 1952.” According to the commentary on a painting based on this photograph in J. Adamson, *The Peoples of Kenya* (London, 1967), 312-13:

One of the men was disguised as a woman. He wore feminine ornaments such as ankle bells, a string of beads around the loins, a woman’s basket and a mask on which the soft, round features of a woman were carved. Thus disguised, he hoped to be mistaken for a woman, and thereby find it easier to catch one. His partner was out to deceive men. He wore a mask carved in a square, strong shape to which a false beard was attached to stress his masculine nature. To trick his victims, he carried powder in a gourd, which was supposed to make him invisible, and was fortified with charms to protect himself against sorcery and snakebites.

Both men are wearing *marinda* skirts of *mkindu* palm, as do *mung’aro* initiates according to Champion, Thompson, Mood, and Griffiths (see Chapter One).

2.4: MUNG'ARO AND THE QUESTION OF NORTHERN ORIGINS

There is considerable variation across Spear and Brantley's oral traditions as to the ultimate cause of migration from Singwaya, as we have already seen. Besides war, Spear's informants also cite a vague dislike of the place, "unfriendliness" of neighbors, sibling rivalry, and famine as possible causes.¹⁰³ Of the twenty-eight traditions collected by Spear that do give an explicit reason for the departure from Singwaya, however, eleven cite *mung'aro* as the cause (see below).¹⁰⁴ And to reiterate, it is not until Spear and Brantley's collection of these traditions that *mung'aro* is mentioned in Mijikenda traditions of origin in this way at all. I quote Spear's *mung'aro* traditions of Singwaya origins *in extenso* below to give a sense of both the continuity and variability across these accounts, and to give the reader a fuller picture of the state of local knowledge of *mung'aro* roughly one hundred years after it had fallen out of practice:

[Johnstone Muramba, Giriama, 29 March 1971]

The Giriama used to perform a dance known as *mung'aro* and when it was performed a person of a different tribe had to be killed. One time they killed both the sons of Maro [the leader of the Oromo]. Maro waited for his sons to return but they never did. After waiting for three days, Maro sent his men to the village of the Giriama. He knew the Giriama had danced *mung'aro* and that his children had gone there. He wondered why his children had not returned since *mung'aro* had taken place. When his men went to the Giriama village, they carried spears. On the way they met some Giriama women and they threatened to kill the women if they didn't tell what had happened to Maro's sons. The women were afraid and revealed that the two sons of Maro had been eaten by *vondo*. *Vondo* is another name for the land; the two sons of Maro had been eaten by the land. The men replied that if the land could eat people it would eat many more, and they returned to tell Maro what they

¹⁰³ MHT 45, MHT 66, MHT 43, MHT 63, MHT 44. Spear, Traditions of Origin, 101, 137, 129, 118, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Given that *mung'aro* was a ritual of male initiation, and that the killing practice among the Oromo (discussed in Section 2.1 and 2.2) was initiation into marriageable adulthood, it is worth noting that almost as many of these traditions (see MHT 1, MHT 3, MHT 4, MHT 23, MHT 31, MHT 38, MHT 65, MHT 67, MHT 71, MHT 72, MHT 74) cite conflict between men of different ranks and anachronistic "tribal" identities over their relative control of sexual access to women as the cause of the killing. See Chapter One.

had learned. Maro, his wife, and his men then began the war with the Giriama. The Galla smeared their faces with ash to threaten the Giriama and went to fight them.¹⁰⁵

[Kathungi Ndenge, Giriama, 7 June 1971]

The Giriama were driven from Singwaya by the Galla because of *mung'aro*. This was a dance which was performed to cut a *rika* and people danced it while naked. Before they could dance *mung'aro* and cut a *rika*, however, a person had to be killed. One time the Giriama killed a Galla and, when the Galla heard of this, they attacked the Giriama at night when they were all asleep. The Giriama could not defend themselves because the Galla did not fight in open battle and so they left Singwaya.¹⁰⁶

[Mitsanze Mwamure, Giriama, 14 June 1971]

It was the Giriama custom that whenever they danced *mung'aro* they had to kill a person. During one *mung'aro* at Singwaya, they killed a Galla youth. When the Galla were told about this, they became very angry and started killing the Giriama at night using their long spears to stab them while they slept.¹⁰⁷

[Toya wa Kiti, Giriama, 20 July 1971]

The Giriama lived with the Galla at Singwaya. During one *mung'aro*, when they had to kill a man, the Giriama killed a Galla. When the Galla discovered this they started to kill any Giriama they came across. The Giriama had no choice but to flee.¹⁰⁸

[Chimbugwa wa Kadosho, Chonyi, 7 April 1971]

First there was the war with the Galla caused by *mung'aro*. Before the Chonyi performed *mung'aro*, they had to kill a person. They continued this custom until other people discovered it. A Galla whose son was lost went looking for him at the home of the Mijikenda. They told him that they had seen his son off in the early morning, but a woman later told the Galla that his son had been killed and buried in a cattle kraal. During the night he went to the kraal and saw the freshly dug grave. He returned to the Mijikenda and again demanded his son, but they again denied knowing anything about him, so the Galla took them to the grave in the kraal. But then he left them without causing any more trouble. Six years later, the Mijikenda killed another Galla boy and buried him like the earlier one. They were again betrayed by the same woman, but this time the Galla armed themselves with spears and shields and attacked the Mijikenda. The Galla lost the war and in revenge they took to waylaying the Mijikenda along the paths to their shambas [plantations].¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ MHT 13. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 47–48. Recall that in Morton's interview notes, cited in Chapter One (footnote 89), "Vondo" is the name of the jealous husband who kills the "Galla." See: Fred Morton Papers, "Oral History" Folder. Recall also that in the account of Paul Mwapera, "Mora" is the name of the "Galla" killed and buried in the cattle enclosure, whereas here, a variant ("Maro") is the name of his father. See above, Section 2.3.

¹⁰⁶ MHT 29. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 59.

¹⁰⁷ MHT 33. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ MHT 58. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 65.

¹⁰⁹ MHT 16. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 70–71.

[John Mwanda & Anonymous, Chonyi, 16 April 1971]

The Chonyi left Singwaya because one Chonyi killed a Galla boy. This boy was killed so the Chonyi could use some of his parts to celebrate *mung'aro*. The Galla were informed about their son's death by a Chonyi woman who was a Galla's lover. The Galla then went to war against the Chonyi. The war went on for a long time and in the end the Chonyi were forced to flee from Singwaya.¹¹⁰

[Thomas Govi, Chonyi, 17 April 1971]

One day two Galla boys went to visit a Chonyi who was their father's friend and they were killed for a Chonyi ceremony, *mung'aro*. Before dancing *mung'aro* the Chonyi had to kill a person from another tribe and cut off his arm and genital organs to be used in purification. After killing the person and cutting off what they wanted, they would beat their drums, shave their heads smooth, and then put on the *luvoo* (ivory armlet). Before *mung'aro*, they had kept their hair long. When they put on the *luvoo*, they became *kambi*. ... It was after the Chonyi had won their decorations that the two Galla boys, Badula and Maria, came to visit their father's Chonyi friend. As part of the ceremony they were killed and their arms and genitals were cut off and they were buried in a cattle kraal. Then the people danced *mung'aro*, put on the *luvoo*, and became *kambi*. The Galla looked in vain for their sons. Later, they met a woman by chance outside the *kaya*. The Galla seized her and refused to release her until she told them about their sons. The woman told them to dig in the kraal and they would find the bodies of the two. This is what started the war with the Galla.¹¹¹

[Joseph Sanga, Chonyi, 3 June 1971]

The men were circumcised after two uncircumcised men had gone to a far country and killed a person who was not a Chonyi. To prove they killed a man, they brought back his male organs, a hand, and sometimes even the head. Then these two people and all those behind them would be made *kambi*. ... On the same day all the initiates had to shave their heads. ... The original name for the Mijikenda was Laa. The reason the Galla drove the Laa out of Singwaya was the cutting of a *rika*. As I have also told you, to cut a *rika* two people had to go out and kill a person before the *rika* could be circumcised and made *kambi*. At first the Galla were friendly with the Laa and they visited each other. One day when a *rika* was about to be cut a Galla boy came to visit a Laa friend of his father's. Instead of going to a far country for their sacrifice, the Laa seized this easy prey and killed him. The Galla waited in vain for the return of their son until they discovered the Laa had killed him. Then they attacked the Laa at night and drove them from Singwaya.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ MHT 20. This account was not subsequently published in *Traditions of Origin*. Unlike the other texts which were elicited by Spear, it is "a translation of a manuscript kindly lent me [Spear] by John Mwanda. It was recorded by him from an unnamed Chonyi, his elder."

¹¹¹ MHT 21. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 71–2.

¹¹² MHT 27. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 78.

[Ronald Mwavita, Jibana, 23 March 1971]

The Mijikenda had a custom called *mung'aro*. *Mung'aro* was magic and children were not allowed to watch when the old men performed it. At the end of the ceremony they sacrificed a man of a different tribe, cut off his arm and genital organs, and took them to their ceremonial hut where they used the arm to beat a drum. There is such a hut in the *kaya*, called *Nyumba ya tutu*, and in it they keep their *viraongo* (medicines). One time they sacrificed a Galla boy, took his arm and genital organs, and buried him in a cattle kraal, marking the spot with a stick. But the boy had had a Mijikenda friend and the boy's father, when he missed his son, went to the home of this friend. The Mijikenda elders had instructed everyone to be quiet about the affair, so that when the Galla came he was told that his son had not come to the village for two days. The boy also could not find him. The Galla looked for his son elsewhere, but could not find him. He suspected that his son had been killed by the Mijikenda. He knew about *mung'aro*, that it ended in the sacrifice of a man of a different tribe and that the end of the ceremony had coincided with the boy's loss. To confirm his suspicions, he arranged the marriage of a Galla girl to a Mijikenda boy. The Mijikenda did not suspect the Galla trick and they were married. After some time the woman asked her husband about the death of the boy and he told her about the sacrifice. ... After she found this out, she went for a visit to her family and told them of the sacrifice. After they had heard, the Galla men kept quiet for a week so that the woman would not be suspected and then they went to the Mijikenda and again asked about the boy. The Mijikenda again denied any knowledge of what had happened to the boy. The Galla then offered the coincidence of *mung'aro* with the boy's loss as proof of his murder, but the Mijikenda still denied the fault, saying that they sacrificed another. The Galla went home and returned in a week to ask again about the boy. This time they asked the Mijikenda to accompany them to the burial spot and had the Mijikenda remove the burial marker and dig. The Mijikenda, pretending not to know anything, dug up the body. When the Galla asked about the bones, the Mijikenda said they belonged to a diseased cow which they had buried because it was inedible. The Galla were sure they were the boy's bones and demanded compensation, but the Mijikenda still denied their guilt. The Galla returned home planning revenge. When the Mijikenda went to their banana shambas to collect the bananas, the Galla hid among the trees and speared them. ... That was the beginning of the Galla wars.¹¹³

[James Sanga Mwavita, Jibana, 24 March 1971]

Singwaya itself was a very big city. There the Mijikenda started the custom of *mung'aro*. They used to *ng'ara* when they were marking the beginning of a *rika*. At the end of *mung'aro* they had to kill a man from a different tribe. One time they killed a Galla and cut off the parts they wanted. They buried the boy in a cattle kraal and marked the spot with a stick. The Galla looked everywhere for his son and even enquired about his son's death among the Mijikenda who had performed *mung'aro*. To find out the truth about their son's death the Galla married one of their girls to a Mijikenda. After some time she was told the truth by her husband and she took this information back to her own people. The

¹¹³ MHT 8. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 91–2.

Galla came to the kraal, dug up the place marked, and produced the bones. That is what started the war of the Galla against the Mijikenda.¹¹⁴

[Michael Chirongo, Jibana, 23 March 1971]

In the olden days Singwaya was the home of all people. ... The Galla were especially friendly with the Mijikenda. At one time there was a Mijikenda boy and a Galla boy who were friends. The time came for the Mijikenda to celebrate *mulimo*.¹¹⁵ During *mulimo* they had to beat a special drum with a dried human hand and they also had to have human genital organs. When the Galla boy came to visit his friend, the Mijikenda instructed the boy to take his friend for a walk. The Mijikenda boy did not know their plan and he took his friend for a walk at the appointed time. The Galla was seized by the Mijikenda elders and killed. They cut off the parts they wanted and buried his body in a cattle kraal so that the dung would cover the turned soil. The Galla's father went to his son's friend and asked about his son. The Mijikenda told him that they had not seen him for two days. He returned home, but his son was still nowhere to be found. In the end he nearly gave up hope, but one woman revealed the secret and took the Galla father secretly to his son's grave. This discovery triggered off the war between the Galla and the Mijikenda.¹¹⁶

[Ezechiel Hanga, Kauma, 5 August 1971]

We left Singwaya because the Galla were after us. We had one ceremony which required the killing of a stranger and removal of his male organs. While performing this at Singwaya we killed a Galla. When the Galla found out about this, they attacked us and drove us away.¹¹⁷

Cynthia Brantley, who was conducting ethnographic fieldwork in coastal Kenya at the same time Spear was collecting these oral histories, recorded a number of similar accounts citing *mung'aro* as the root cause of the Oromo wars that drove the Mijikenda from Singwaya:

[Mwangoto wa Kalama, Giriyama, 16 June 1971]

Q: People say that we all came from the same navel and they talk about Singwaya and such places. What were you told about that?

¹¹⁴ MHT 10. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 96.

¹¹⁵ The appearance of the word "*mulimo*" here in place of some variant of "*mung'aro*" is suggestive. "*Mulimo*" is the name of a protective charm said to have been brought from Singwaya and reburied at the center of their new settlements in the kayas, as what are called "*fingos*." Its appearance here in a discussion of the ritual that is the cause of exodus from Singwaya is suggestive, given the association between *mung'aro* and the production of defensive power objects like the *chirumbi* "war charms" mentioned by Griffiths, or the ritual deployment of "charms" as described by Mwasunga to George David in 1879.

¹¹⁶ MHT 12. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 98.

¹¹⁷ MHT 64. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 124.

A: Our home was Singwaya and it had seven mivirya (gates). The names of Muchonyi and Mugiryama etc. were sorted out when people arrived here but originally we were all called Akashoro. Then there happened to be very great friends. Then the two children of one friend were sent by their father to pay a visit to his friend and they arrived when the Akashoro were about to start their Mung'aro. And it was essential at the mung'aro to get a human sacrifice. When they murder the victim they cut out the ndude (genitals). The children were a boy and a girl. These were the children who were strangled and their genitals were removed. Then they were buried in a cattle enclosure. When they were doing so there was a certain old woman who was suffering and could not join the carnival. She watched everything from her hut. The children were Agalla. So when their father had waited for some time for their return he decided to come for them. When he arrived his friend told him that they had left for home some two days before and he was surprised at the news that the Mugalla had brought. So the two friends began searching for the children. They asked the people they met. The children were called Badula and Meria. They could not find them. So they went to a diviner and the diviner told them to go and find out from the kaya of the Akashoro. When the sick old woman saw the two anxious men she called them and told them to go and dig out the bodies of the murdered children at the cow shed. The woman was a Mkashoro. So when they had found the bodies the Agalla became enemies of the Akashoro and they went home and started kupiga pembe [to blow horns, signaling war]. ...

Q: Why was it necessary to get a non-Mkashoro in order to do the maadha [rites] of their mung'aro?

A: It is simply to trim the rika.

Q: But why the sacrifice?

A: That was the crowning part of the maadha of the rika trimming. ...

Q: After they had killed the people what use would they make of the things they would cut off from the strangled bodies?

A: They would use them in their dances. Their kung'ara is part and parcel of dancing with those things. They brandished them. (it sounds like the cult of the phallus) [This remarkable parenthetical insertion seems to have been made by Brantley's interpreter and research assistant, Victor Gona Kazungu, who also prepared the interview transcripts]. When they were dancing all children would have to be kept away from the horrible spectacle.¹¹⁸

[Samuel Jefwa Gumbe, Giryama, 16 June 1971]

A: ... (He recounts the version of the story of Singwaya which tells about the murder of the Mugalla youth and concurs with Mwangoto's explanation) [V. G. Kazungu]. When they were dancing their dance of Kung'ara and they had to get a non-Singwayan whom they would murder and then they would use the blood to kukokotera their pengu [charms or amulets] and then they would take the pengu to the kaya. And when they return to the kaya they say they have dropped their mikomba [see below].

¹¹⁸ Cynthia Brantley Papers (CBP), University of California Davis Library, US. Collection D-514, Box 16, Folder 25, "Oral Interviews," Interview 128. Compare this account to that of Thomas Govi, above, who also names the ritual victims as Badula and Maria, but identifies them as both being male, rather than "a boy and a girl."

Q: What sort of pengu was this?

A: I don't know its name but I think it had to do with the warrior group of the nyere.

Q: And what are mikomba?

A: Mikomba seems to be the idea of discarding the costume used during the carnival. It is used during almost every function. ... They were ordinary things you buy in shops and then beat up into kilts. ... So when they were fully dressed they were then in their full mikomba. And in the case of the story of Singwaya it was when they were ready to go out of the kaya that they caught the stranger and murdered him. The stranger was a mugalla youth coming from the fields with his cattle in the evening. That was the ritual of their pengu. Then they dropped the mikomba and the ceremony and the carnival was over. So the Mugalla came to look for his son. So the whole trouble of the Galla wars which was to make them traditional enemies started.¹¹⁹

[Luganje wa Masha, Giryama, 23 December 1970]

The Giryama came from Singwaya. That's where the fighting between the Giryama and the Galla took place. Their cattle which they used to raise together fought. A Giryama cow fought with a Mgalla's cow. The first was killed by the latter. The Mgiryama said to the Galla to kill his cow so that when you are eating meat I also eat meat. The Mgalla agreed and killed his cow and both of them ate meat. Again the cows fought, and the Mgalla's was killed by the Mgiryama's this time. And when the Mgiryama was told to kill his, the Mgiryama said no, I am not going to kill my cow. And that is how the fighting started. The Mgalla reminded the Mgiryama that he killed his cow when it had killed the Mgiryama's but the Mgiryama will not do the same. So he is in the wrong. And the Mgalla said to the herdboys, if you see the Mgiryama's cow, kill it, so that we also eat meat. And the herdboys tried, but they were defeated by the other herdboys. And that is how the Galla became annoyed. ... And a Galla youth came to Mwangea to greet a friend of his father's. And when he reached the Giryamas they were having a *Mng'aro*. And they were just about to Kubwaga mikomba and then they would go to the kaya and buy vitambi. And then they would be kuhaswa (blessed, initiated) made kambi. And the youth arrived just at the time that the Giryamas needed a foreigner (to be killed as part of the dance). And they strangled him and took him under a baobab tree and that is where they dropped the Mikomba. And they went to the kaya and bought kitambi [colored cloth worn around the waist as insignia of office] and were made kambi.

And the youth's father wondered why he didn't return. He came to Giryamas and was told that his son had returned to Galla country a long time back. But the Mgalla was not only was [sic] a friend of the man his son had come to greet, but also of the woman. When the man had left the house, the Galla called the woman and asked her what happened to my son? The woman told him to go under the baobab tree and look carefully under it. You'll see your son, but don't say anything about it. The Mgalla used to spend the night in the Kigijo (just a roofed structure) He waited until everybody was asleep, he went out to the baobab tree and uncovered carefully and saw his son. And he returned to the home and slept until morning. And when it was daylight, the Mgalla said I am going home, but there is no home here (Meaning I am going to destroy the home). He told the woman that she

¹¹⁹ CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 25, "Oral Interviews," Interview 131, 16 June 1971.

should run away after a certain number of days (her whole family). We are coming into this place and we are going to kill the whole lot of you. And he went away. And in Mwangea, they stayed until the days she had been told were approaching. And she said let us go away from here. The koma have told me that there is a war coming to this place. She insisted. All of us are going to be killed if we do not go away. They went away. And that is how they dispersed.¹²⁰

Brantley also records one tradition of origin that includes a ritual killing as part of an initiation into elderhood as the cause of the war with the Oromo, but with the ethnicities of killer and victim reversed. Recall that until the twentieth century, the Oromo (“Galla” in the texts) were the only people in the region to whom the practice was attributed, with the exceptions of the “Mosseguejoes” and the Bajun (with whom the people now known as the Wasegeju were understood—as of 1899—to share the majority of their clan identities). In this way, this account both repeats the nineteenth-century attribution of the practice to the Oromo, and cites the practice (as did George David’s 1877 account) as a feature of the “Galla” predations that were the root cause of Mijikenda migration southward:

[Masha Murumwengu, Giryama, 30 August 1971]

Q: According to you it means that the kondo [“war”] of the Mugiryama and the Mugalla had the Mugalla at the aggressive end?

A: Certainly and that is supported by the fact that the Mugalla does not wear his ring until he has murdered a person. Would you be the victim of that wretched custom?

Q: Of course not.

A: Well in Ugalla the ring is not to be worn just like that anyhow and by any fellow. It has to be worn by a ritual murderer. The Mugalla has to murder a stranger to get the elders; okay that he is now of age (mulume) [“*mulume*” means “man”]. The war was started by the Agalla.

Q: Why don’t you give me the whole story?

A: When the Mugiryama realized that his mudamu (clansman) [“*mudamu*” indicates someone of the same “blood” (*damu*), not necessarily a “clansman”] had been killed in Singwaya then he began to fight back. You see in Singwaya the Mugiryama and kindred tribes like the Ambokomu and the Agalla were neighbours in the same way as the Agiryama and the Arahai are geographical neighbours today, You see the Mumbokomu

¹²⁰ CBP, D–514, Box 16, Folder 28, “GHT 1–55,” Interview XXIX, 23 December 1970.

and others were merely clusters within the same homogeneous community and the stranger was the Mugalla. Remember that the story of the ring is my own conjecture.¹²¹

The “ring” to which Murumwengu refers is the *arbora* ivory armlet worn by some Oromo-speaking peoples indicating that its wearer has killed an enemy and collected a genital trophy (see Image 2.2).¹²² But note that in the narrative of Thomas Govi, above, part of the ritual process in *mung'aro* is the putting on of “*luvoo*” ivory armlets, only after “killing the person and cutting off what they wanted.”¹²³ Martin Walsh has suggested that “*arbora*,” the name of the Oromo armlet indicative of having killed and acquired a genital trophy, may be cognate with “*luvoo*,” the name of the Mijikenda insignia of elderhood (initiation into the *ngambi*) after having completed *mung'aro* (which in twentieth-century memory and mythologization is now understood to have involved not only the killing of a stranger, but the collection of a genital trophy from his corpse).¹²⁴ This seems plausible, but there are two other terms that seem like likely candidates.

The first is “*luuba*,” the name of Boran generation-sets that overlay the complicated *gaada* age- set system.¹²⁵ The second is “*Abora*,” which is attested in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature as the name of a rank within the *ngambi* or *kambi* of ruling elders. The root, “-*bora*” means “better/best” or “superior” in the Mijikenda languages, and in this case takes the third-person plural (“-*a*”) noun class marker. As the words for a rank or status within a ritually mediated age-grade hierarchy and the emblem indicating that status were absorbed from Oromo into Mijikenda languages and transformed in the process, the referents were effectively swapped.

¹²¹ CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 27, "Cynthia Brantley," Interview 061, 30 August 1971.

¹²² P. T. W. Baxter, "Boran Age-Sets and Warfare," *Senri Ethnological Studies* 3 (1979), 82–3.

¹²³ MHT 21. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 72.

¹²⁴ Walsh, “Segeju Complex?,” 42.

¹²⁵ On the *gaada* system, see: P. T. W. Baxter and U. Almagor (eds.), *Age, Generation, and Time: Some Features of East Africa Age Organizations* (London: C. Hurst, 1978).

This is not surprising in a context in which the emblem is often used in speech to refer to the rank or status in a metonymic way.¹²⁶ It could also, in the case of *arbora/Abora* perhaps, have been facilitated by a phenomenon described by Nietzsche (who, as is well known, was originally trained as a philologist): “When we hear another language we try involuntarily to form the sounds we hear into words that sound more familiar and more like home to us: thus the German, for example, transformed *arcubalista*, when he heard that, into *Armbrust*.”¹²⁷ Thus “*Arbora*”—the ivory armlet—became “[*A*]bora,” the “betters” or “superiors” who were entitled to wear it. For example, according to Ambari wa Lewa (one of Spear’s informants),

- A. ... *Mung’aro* is danced before a *rika* dons the *voov* [=luvoo]. They go to the dam and cover themselves with mud and then dance *mung’aro* as they approach the *vaka*, or *bora*, in the *kaya*.
 Q: And who are the *bora* [=Abora]?
 A. Those who already have the *voov*.¹²⁸

Similarly, for Ezechiel Hanga, “when a *kambi* wore a *luvoo* he was known as *bora*. ... After donning the *luvoo*, one became *bora*.”¹²⁹

	Oromo	Mijikenda
Status	<i>Luuba</i>	<i>Abora</i>
Emblem	<i>Arbora</i>	<i>Luvoo</i>

Table 2.2: Inversion of Status and Emblem loanwords from Oromo (Lowland Eastern Cushitic) to Mijikenda (Northeast Coastal Bantu) languages.

¹²⁶ See for example Spear’s interview with Toya wa Kiti (MHT 58), in which Kiti refers to the precolonial elders as “*luvoo* members,” and with Kilian Ngala (MHT 4): “When someone wearing the *luvoo* died, another *luvoo* would come and bury him.”

¹²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in W. Kaufmann (trans. and ed.) *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1967 [1886]), 295.

¹²⁸ MHT 31. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 83.

¹²⁹ MHT 64. Spear, *Traditions of Origin*, 127.

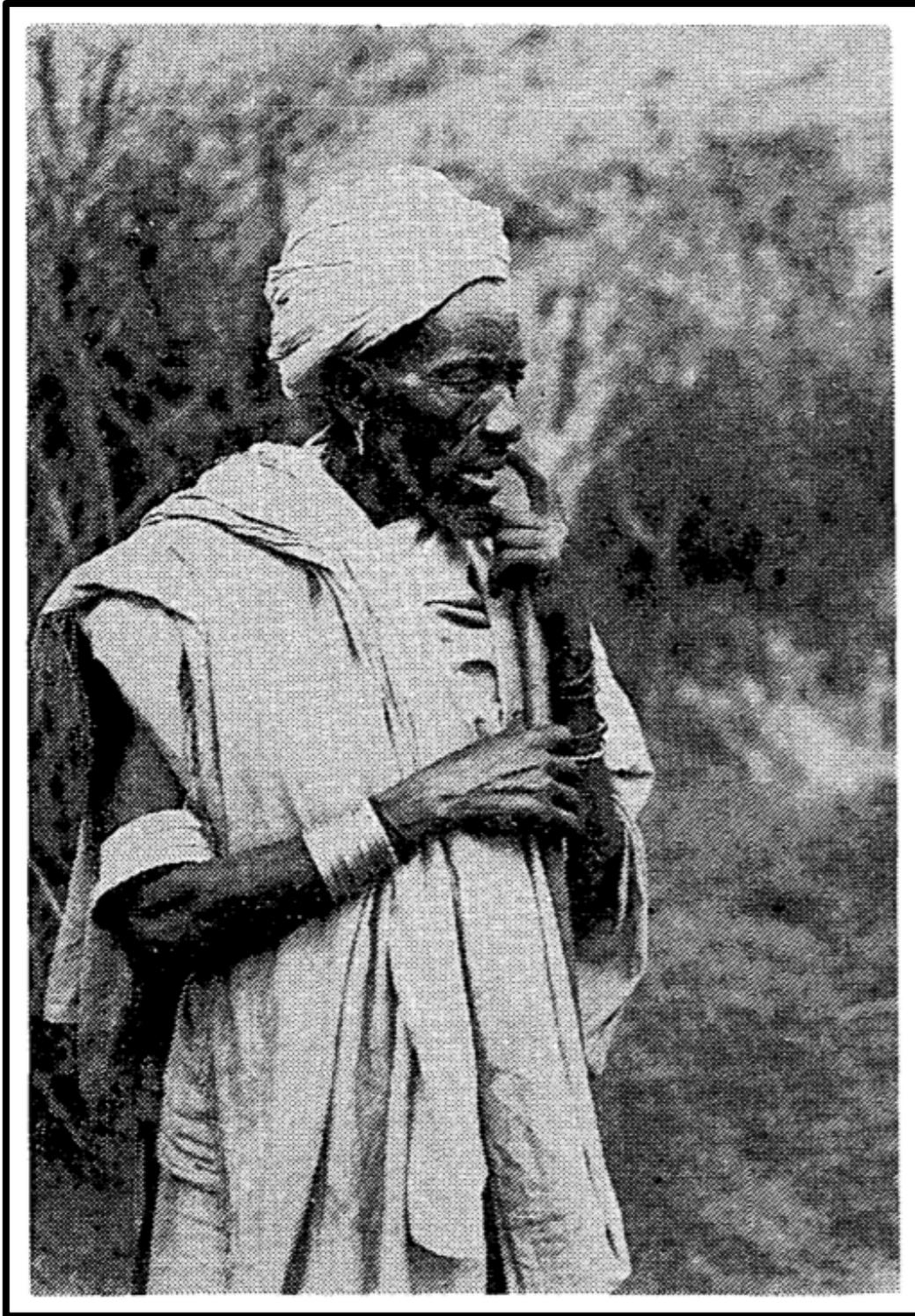


Image 2.2: “[Boran] Elder with [three] *arbora* ivory armlets [worn at the right elbow] which indicate that he had acquired a trophy.” From P. T. W. Baxter, “Boran Age-Sets and Warfare,” *Senri Ethnological Studies* 3 (1979), 83.

There is some evidence, moreover, that the name of the emblem—the ivory armband, *arbora*—could also be used to refer to genital trophy it indexed. In a manuscript summarizing recent research among the Cushitic-speaking Aweer (or Boni) “hunter-gatherers” of the Lamu hinterland (at the northern end of the Kenyan coast), reference is made to practice similar to that attributed to the Bajun by Burton (see above, footnote 222): “Long ago, too, if they killed a person man-to-man, as a sign to show in the village they would cut his (harbole), that is, testicles, and fasten them to their spear.”¹³⁰ “*Harbole*,” used here to refer to the genital trophy a Boni hunter would collect from a foe (in this case “*makende*,” “testicles”), is cognate with the Oromo “*Arbora*.”

None of this is to say that the oral traditions of Spear, Brantley, and Miers are consistent on the question of which ritual entitles initiates to wear the *luvoo*, or of which rank or status—and what kind of rank or status—the *luvoo* indicates. For John Mwanda (MHT 20), Thomas Govi (MHT 21), Joseph Sanga (MHT 27), Ambari wa Lewa (MHT 31), and Chibo wa Mundu (MHT 65), *mung’aro* initiation entitles one to wear the *luvoo*, though Govi (a Chonyi) claimed that the Giriama would allow people to wear the *luvoo* after having performed only the preparatory *kirao* ritual, and not *mung’aro* itself. For Ezechiel Hanga (MHT 64) and Ambari wa Lewa (MHT 31), the *luvoo* was a sign of *Bora* status, but Chibo wa Mundu (MHT 65) claims that it was a sign of membership in the *vaya* secret society or ritual guild. I describe the broad range of attested Mijikenda age-grades, generation-sets and “secret societies” in Chapter Three. At this point it is enough to note the lack of consensus about the significance of the insignia.

¹³⁰ “Kwa hapo kale pia walikua wakiuwa mwanadamu mwanamume kwa mtu alama ya kuonesha kijijini humkata (harbole) yaani makende akatundika katika kuki.” Translation mine. Research Institute of Swahili Studies in Eastern Africa (RISSEA) Archives [former Fort Jesus Museum Library], Professor Ahmed Sheikh Nabahany Collection, “Taarifa ya Ukweli wa Mambo (Data) Juu ya Awer (Boni),” 12 Feb 2006–6 Mar. 2006.

This latter claim is explicitly contradicted, however, by Chimwenga wa Ndoro (MHT 38) for whom *luvoo* was not a sign of *vaya* society membership, but rather of belonging to the *kambi* generation set—an understanding shared by Ronald Mwavita (MHT 8), John Mwanda (MHT 20), and Thomas Govi (21). Finally, Befukwe wa Kagumba (MHT 43), Nzaka wa Kunya (MHT 44), and Mbitsi wa Musuku and Chai wa Kamuenzi (MHT 63) specify (as does Ronald Mwavita, in fact) that it is members of the *Gohu* society made up of the wealthiest members of the *kambi* who have purchased the ritual right to wear the *luvoo*. Four of Brantley’s informants—Kuronga Gona and Kadu wa Baya on the one hand and Mwavuo wa Menza and James Ponda on the other—concur that *luvoo* is the proprietary emblem of the *Gohu* society.¹³¹

Four years after the Brantley interview, Mwavuo wa Menza would repeat this assertion about *luvoo* and *Gohu* in an interview with Suzanne Miers.¹³² Mwavuo wa Menza was also interviewed by Spear one month before Brantley, but did not mention the *luvoo*. Instead, in the context of a Singwaya narrative, he describes an Oromo ornament and its ritual complement in terms that clearly resonate with descriptions of the Mijikenda *luvoo* and *mung’aro*:

The Giriama were driven from Singwaya by the Somali and the Galla. At first the Giriama had been friendly with the Galla, but when the Galla put on the *lukoso* they had to kill someone. The *lukoso* was an ivory arm band and had to contain a small piece of penis inside. Thus the Galla often killed Giriama ... and the Giriama were forced to flee from Singwaya.¹³³

There is thus significant disagreement across the historical traditions collected by Spear, Brantley, and Miers over the precise rank or status that the *luvoo* indicated and into which

¹³¹ CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 27, “Cynthia Brantley,” Interview 041, 16 August 1971; CBP, D-514, Box 16, Folder 28, “Oral Interviews,” Interview IX, 16 December 1970.

¹³² Miers Interviews, BIEA. Mwavuo wa Menza II, 8 November 1974, Marafa, Kenya.

¹³³ MHT 47.

mung'aro (or perhaps some other ritual) placed initiates.¹³⁴ But this ambiguity about the status into which one is placed by *mung'aro* only emerges when the interviewer is eliciting descriptions of the ritual as a historical practice. When an informant inserts *mung'aro* into the Singwaya narrative of origins without prompting, there is a reduction in detail and greater consistency across accounts. In other words, the ambiguity emerges in elicited descriptions of how the ritual functioned in the recent historical past, rather than in spontaneously offered descriptions of its consequences in the deep mythic past. In these traditions of origin, what is at issue is not the historian's interest in the social "function" of the ritual or the specific details of the ritual process, but rather showing how its violence led to the Mijikenda expulsion from Singwaya.

2.6: CONCLUSION

This chapter began by tracing the course of the historiographical debates among key anthropologists, historians, linguists, and archaeologists about what one such figure calls "the Shungwaya phenomenon."¹³⁵ Without attempting either to prove or disprove what another of these scholars calls "the Shungwaya hypothesis," the chapter critically engaged each of these major arguments, highlighting a number of problems of sources, methods, and theory. The chapter then analyzed a number of the actual Singwaya *narratives* collected by Spear (and others) in the early 1970s, demonstrating that there is significant internal variation among the "traditions," and that these variations are spatially patterned—a fact that seems so far to have gone unnoticed. Finally, I argued (gesturing back to Chapter One) that despite this variability, a core cluster of images or

¹³⁴ There is also disagreement among sources about the material from which the object was made. Buffalo horn, rhinoceros horn, and elephant ivory are all attested. Despite this Spear is willing to gloss *luvoo* as "A buffalo horn armband worn to denote *vaya* status."¹³⁴

¹³⁵ Allen, *Swahili Origins*.

motifs recur in traditions that give otherwise radically different reasons for the Mijikenda exodus. I argue that this associational nexus and the various constellation-forms into which it periodically crystallized offer an approach to traditions of origins like these without treading to read them in positivistic terms as either factual “history” or symbolic “myth” on the one hand, and without reducing them in theory to mere fodder for the manipulations and instrumental logic of shrewdly maximizing middle figures on the other.

To conclude Part One of the dissertation, let me highlight in summary form the elements that make up what I have called the constellation of images and figural motifs through which coastal Kenyans have, in their engagements with others, made and remade their world from the nineteenth century to the present. They include, first, a *ritually mediated* relationship of *power* and *authority* between *elder* and *junior* men. Second, the *capture*, *killing*, and *dismemberment* of *strangers* along *paths*. Finally, a *betrayal* that is *hidden* and *buried*, followed by a *refusal* or *obstruction* of normative modes of *compensation* or *reciprocity*. And while it is clear that these individual elements take on their full meaning only in the context of the narratives in which they occur, they also have an almost modular quality to them, or a kind of durability independent of whatever symbolic significance they might be ascribed in context. There is something compelling and durable about these images, and the way they “go together” over and over again in various ways. In Part Two, I show how this associational nexus mediates contests over political and economic extraversion over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

PART TWO:

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE OCCULT GROUND OF AUTHORITY

CHAPTER THREE:

ELDERS, POWER, AND SECRECY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Fisi ra kaya?

[“The hyena of home?”]

Tarikurya rikakumara

[“It eats you, but it does not finish you.”]

3.1: INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND VIOLENCE

This chapter’s epigraph is an unusual example of a Chidigo *fumbo* (a “riddle” or “enigma”).¹ It is unusual in a number of ways. In the first place, it inverts usual form of such “enigmas.” Rather than beginning with a descriptive phrase or predicate posed as a question—the correct response to which is to name the thing so described—here the order is reversed. The answer is posed as the question. It is thus not a riddle, exactly: The first pair-part contains no real clues to the second. The qualities predicable of an imaginary domesticated hyena are endless. Not-eating-you-to-the-point-of-finishing-you is only one such possibility. It would be almost impossible to guess the correct response without having been taught it. It was for this reason participants in the 1997 “Kaya Bombo clashes” (see below) chose the enigma, in this inverted form, as a shibboleth with which to identify *ajeni* (“strangers” or “guests”). Its relative obscurity and semantic opacity would suss

¹ On the *fumbo* form among Mijikenda and Swahili speakers on the Kenyan coast, see: A. C. Hollis and A. Werner, “Nyika Enigmas,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 16:62 (1917): 135–42; J. L. Kallen and C. M. Eastman, “‘I Went to Mombasa, There I Met an Old Woman...’: Structure and Meaning in Swahili Riddles,” *Journal of American Folklore* 92:366 (1979): 418–44; and H. E. Lambert, “Some Riddles from the Southern Kenya Coast,” *Swahili: Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 33 (1962): 14–18. See also the “Giryama Riddles” Appendix in W. E. Taylor’s *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1891), 138–40.

out those who might otherwise have been able to pass as locals by virtue of having learned to speak Chidigo after long residence at the coast, for example, but without having mastered its more esoteric “inner” or “deep” (*ya ndani*) forms and uses. Once singled out as “strangers” or “guests,” these individuals could be attacked and killed and their property stolen or destroyed.² Between 150 and 200 people were killed during this period of insurgent violence and state counter-violence, and around 100,000 people displaced.³

Briefly, these “Kaya Bombo clashes” (often referred to by a kind of shorthand as “Kaya Bombo”) were a series of violent episodes on the southern Kenyan coast that occurred around the 1997 general election. During this period, politicians loyal to the ruling Kenya Africa National Union (KANU) organized (or funded the organization of) groups of young Digo men into militias, which were referred to in pseudo-traditional terms as “kaya raiders.” The “clashes” were part of a broader KANU strategy of strategic depopulation or violent intimidation of ethnic voting blocs in districts where it thought the opposition party might pose a threat. The Kaya Bombo raiders targeted “upcountry” Kenyans living and working in the region who were suspected, because of

² As one Digo man (who had not participated in the violence) put it succinctly, “*Uchifeli hapo... mchenjere tayari*” (“if you fail there... [there’s a] handle-less *panga* ready”). The speaker made a chopping motion at an imaginary third person with the edge of his right hand to illustrate what he meant. His use of the word “*mchenjere*” instead of “*panga*” elicited laughter from others in the group. “*Mchenjere*” is a *panga* (a machete-like field knife) from which the original wood which formed the handle on either side of the metal plate has fallen off through heavy use. The fact that Chidigo has a word for a broken-but-still-in-use *panga*, that the speaker knew this “deep” Chidigo word and that he was suggesting that this was the kind of weapon most widely available to the Digo participants in the Kaya Bombo violence points to the region’s history of impoverishment and marginalization and the modest resources available to those who would seek to transform that situation through political violence, while simultaneously establishing the speaker’s own ethno-linguistic credentials and, by implication, his political sympathies. Informal group conversation, Kanana Junction, 6 April 2015.

³ Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), *Killing the Vote: State Sponsored Violence and Flawed Elections in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1998), 56.

their ethnic identities, of being loyal to the opposition political parties that had only recently been re-introduced into Kenyan political life. But the strategy also successfully tapped into widespread resentment of the perceived exploitation of the coastal region and its inhabitants by a government in Nairobi to which many feel no meaningful connection, on the one hand, and by migrant populations of traders, civil servants, and skilled laborers on the other.⁴

The violence itself began with a raid on a police station in Likoni, on the mainland south of Mombasa, in which six police officers were killed and the station's guns and ammunition stolen. But "Kaya Bombo" is the name of the kaya—the nineteenth century settlements-turned-"sacred forests" that have become the focus of cultural revitalization and ecological preservation efforts in the present (described in Chapter One)—in which the "raiders" had been trained, "oathed," and treated with protective medicines. Historically, "oathing" had been the prerogative of Mijikenda elders in the nineteenth century, and one of the key ritual technologies through which their authority was maintained. Diane Ciekawy has argued, however, that the "elder" who led the Kaya Bombo oathing—one Swalehe bin Halfan—and the oaths themselves were "fake."⁵ Further, she points out that media coverage of the events surrounding "Kaya Bombo" relied on a narrative framing that she terms "the revelation of demonic tradition."⁶ For Ciekawy, the violence was

⁴ Ibid.; KHRC, *Kayas of Deprivation, Kayas of Blood* (Nairobi, 1997); KHRC, *Kayas Revisited: A Post-Election Balance Sheet* (Nairobi 1998); *Report of the Judicial Commission Appointed to Inquire into Tribal Clashes in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1999); Human Rights Watch, *Playing with Fire* (New York, 2002).

⁵ D. M. Ciekawy, "Fake Kaya Elders and Fake Oaths: Reflections on the Immorality of Invented Tradition in the 1997 Crisis in Coastal Kenya," in V. Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *Recontextualizing Self and Other Issues in Africa* (Athens, OH, 2014), 213; and 287–307.

⁶ D. M. Ciekawy, "Demonic Tradition: Representations of Oathing in Newspaper Coverage of the 1997 Crisis in Coastal Kenya," in K. Njogu and J. Middleton (eds.), *Media and Identity in Postcolonial Africa* (London, 2009), 298.

orchestrated using *simulacra* of local forms, linking it to stereotypes of the Mijikenda as “backward” and superstitious.

Kaya elders whom Ciekawy interviewed in neighboring Kilifi District denied that Swalehe bin Halfan had any legitimacy as a “kaya elder,” and asserted that “there was no evidence that Halfan knew about *kaya* medicines or had any skills taught by *kaya* elders.”⁷ Whether Halfan and his rituals were “fake” is a different kind of question, however. For despite this characterization, Ciekawy’s own research reveals that “the focus of *kaya* elders’ critiques were not about the fake-ness of the oath itself, or whether or not it used medicines that originated in *kaya* institutions.”⁸ Rather, what disturbed her interlocutors was that Halfan had “staged oathing rituals at the behest of politicians who paid him,” and in so doing had “misled those who trusted him”—junior men with no knowledge of *kaya* ritual who held an idealized vision of those who did.⁹ For her interlocutors, what was at issue was the nature of Halfan’s relation to powerful outsiders, his private profits, and his willingness to abuse the aura of authenticity surrounding *kaya* esoterica to mislead the region’s young men.

Several aspects of the Kaya Bombo clashes resonate with the themes or motifs of the *mung’aro* ritual analyzed in Chapter One. Kaya Bombo was an episode in which outsiders—*ajeni*, “strangers” or “guests”—were in danger of being killed by groups of armed men in search of victims. It was a ritual moment presided over by elders during a moment of possible political transition—the 1997 Kenyan general election. The ritual activities centered in the *Kayas*, which by this point had become regional centers of ritual activity. And although the ritual processes were

⁷ Ciekawy, “Fake Kaya Elders,” 227.

⁸ *Ibid.* 230.

⁹ *Ibid.* 230, 227.

described as “oaths”—which, by that historical moment, were the ritual form most closely associated with the “traditional” power of “Kaya elders”—rather than initiation into *Kaya* elderhood, the oathing rituals were presided over by elders who had themselves been initiated (or were believed at the time to have been initiated) into hierarchical societies of esoteric knowledge based in the *Kayas*.

What I am pointing to, then, is the possibility of something like a cultural grammar of violence, power, and authority in coastal Kenya whose specific forms of expression change historically in relation to transformations in socio-historical context. Alternatively, using a metaphor drawn from psychoanalysis rather than linguistics, one could interpret Kaya Bombo (and the forms of rumor analyzed in Chapters Five and Six) as a kind of “return of the repressed”—the eruption (after a period of dormancy) of an older form into a new context in which it appears (because of the intervening history) transformed, uncontrolled, and pathological.¹⁰ One of the main

¹⁰ As far as I am aware, Freud’s earliest use of the phrase “return of the repressed” was in S. Freud, “Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence,” in J. Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893–1899): Early Psychoanalytic Writings* (London: Hogarth Press, 1962, [1894]), 45–61; but see also: S. Freud, “Repression,” in J. Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953 [1915]), 141–58; and S. Freud, “The Uncanny,” in J. Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955, [1919]), 217–56. I want to emphasize that, like the idea of a “cultural grammar,” the idea of a socio-cultural “return of the repressed” is being used here in a metaphorical or analogic, rather than analytic, sense. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to elaborate a social-psychological theory according to which such a claim could be made in rigorous analytic terms, I do not think it is impossible, and others have made substantial theoretical contributions in this direction. See, for example: F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C. L. Markmann (London: Pluto Press 1986 [1952]); E. Fromm, “The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology: Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism,” in A. Arato, and E. Gebhardt (eds) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1990 [1932]), 477–96; M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cummings (New York: Continuum, 1989 [1944]); D. LaCapra, “History and Psychoanalysis,”

tasks of this chapter and in Chapter Four, then, will be to lay out the historical transformations to the social, political, and economic institutions, arrangements, and sensibilities in which this constellation of images and motifs is expressed, repressed, preserved, and re-molded between the nineteenth century and the present. At the same time these two chapters argue that as these institutional social forms were transformed, re-purposed, suppressed, or propped up through a long regional history of extraversion, they became something like templates for the elaboration of local ideas about possible forms of witchcraft and other occult activity on the one hand, and the ritual forms through which they might be addressed on the other.

This chapter will focus on the histories of age grades, generation sets, and ritual guilds of the nineteenth-century Kenya coast. Following from this, Chapter Four examines the Chiefs, Headmen, Local Native Councils, Local Native Tribunals of the twentieth-century colonial administration and postcolonial Provincial Administration, and the relationship between re-constituted “Kaya Elders” and elected politicians in the early twenty-first. The rest of this chapter will serve, in a sense, as the background to the “enigma” with which it began: The hyena of home eats you but does not finish you off. It was, I argue, not solely for its semantic opacity to outsiders that the Kaya Bombo “raiders” selected the inverted *fisi ra kaya* ‘enigma’ as their shibboleth. The expression itself captures part of the political sensibility of “Kaya Bombo,” and of contemporary coastal Kenyan separatist movements more generally.¹¹ *Local* politicians, according to this

Critical Inquiry 13:2 (1987), 222–51; H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966 [1955]); and M. Postone. “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century,” in M. Postone and E. Santner (eds.) *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 81–114.

¹¹ J. Prestholdt, “Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony, and Decolonization on the Kenyan Coast.” *Journal of African History* 55:2 (2014), 249–270; J. Willis and G. Gona, “Pwani C Kenya?: Memory, Documents, and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya,” *African Affairs*

political sensibility, may be corrupt—they may mislead the people and use their positions of power to their own economic advantage at the expense of their constituency—but they will not “eat” their own people until there is nothing left. There will be a remainder, something for the people themselves, who will not be “finished.” An *mjeni*, by contrast, a “stranger” or “guest” with no local attachments (especially those of kinship) or responsibilities (especially those of kinship), could easily plunder the region and its people without reservation, draining value without concern for the future. In this sense the *fisi ra kaya* ‘enigma’ bears a family resemblance to familiar English-language expressions like, “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” But at issue here is less a problem of relative uncertainty and containment of risk than feelings of deep ambivalence with which South Coast residents regard the figures—local politicians and administrators in particular—who mediate between them and external sources of power and value. This chapter excavates part of the history of that ambivalence, and traces the afterlives of specific political figures and institutions in the wake of their historical decline and obsolescence.

Chapter One analyzed the history of a nineteenth-century ritual of initiation called “*Mung’aro*”—“[The] Shining”—that mediated moments of transition within coastal systems of age grades and generation sets. There, I was only able to describe in brief outline the complexity of the precolonial gerontocratic order. In what follows, I explore the political systems of the precolonial period, including gerontocratic hierarchies, “secret societies” or ritual guilds, and chiefship. In the following chapter, I show how and in what ways these institutions were, or were not, transformed and incorporated into the colonial state in the early twentieth century, and how

112:446 (2012), 48–71; J. Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:4 (2008), 531–561; “Changing Political Faces on Kenya’s Coast, 1992–2007.” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2:2 (2008), 242–253.

the colonial state was haunted by the suspicion that the new political forms that emerged—like Local Native Councils and Local Native Tribunals—lacked the *ritually backed* legitimacy and authority necessary to maintain order and administration.

3.2: GERONTOCRACY, SECRECY, AND POWER IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH COAST

A key aspect of social organization in the Coastal Kenyan hinterland from the late seventeenth to early twentieth century was the hierarchical stratification of the male population into age-based groups called *rikas*.¹² This stratification mediated competition between senior male heads of lineage-based settlements for control over the residence and labor of women and men from other kin-groups.¹³ Competition became increasingly acute over the nineteenth century, as regional trade and agriculture intensified and the population expanded both demographically and geographically. But as I noted in Chapter Two in the discussion of historians' attempts to date a putative Mijikenda migration from Singwaya, much of the literature on these precolonial "age-sets" is inconsistent, if not contradictory. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the earlier nineteenth-century sources were generally less interested in the social, legal, and political organization of the peoples they describe than they were in their physical appearance, characterological dispositions, and religious sensibilities. The missionary authors of these texts were more interested in conversion than governance. In the later nineteenth century, as

¹² C. Brantley, "Gerontocratic Government: Age-Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama." *Africa* 48:3 (1978), 248–64. As mentioned in Chapter One, Spear argues that the *rika* system can be used to date a sixteenth-century Mijikenda migration from Singwaya. See: T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples to 1900* (Nairobi: Africa Literature Bureau, 1978). More recent scholarship has put this claim into serious doubt. See M. Walsh, "Mijikenda Origins: A Review of the Evidence." *Transafrican Journal of History* 21 (1992), 1–18; and J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³ Willis, *Mombasa*, 40–2.

European economic and political interests in the region, a more detailed understanding of the forms of power and value that shaped their opportunities there was needed. Second, early twentieth-century colonial are generally recorded through the lens of British social anthropology's emergent structural-functionalist paradigm at the same moment that local forms were being transformed and re-purposed for use in colonial administration. The effect is both the projection of a reified model of society from which, because of its idealized, abstraction character, present forms of social organization could only be seen as deviations or degenerations. Although this sense of decline characterized some of the nineteenth-century sources as well (especially regarding coastal Muslims), it was at this moment that social transformation became an acute problem for the colonial administrative imagination. This precipitated a series of failed efforts (described in Chapter Four) to shore up new forms of state-backed authority with old ritual forms. Third and finally, later twentieth-century historians and anthropologists have tended to depend upon structural-functionalist models of "clans," "age-sets," and "secret societies" even when they rely for documentary evidence on nineteenth-century sources. That is, these earlier sources are often read through the lens of early twentieth-century British social anthropological models in search of a method by which to reconstruct more distant Mijikenda pasts.

Johann Ludwig Krapf makes frequent reference to encounters with the "chiefs" of various *kaya* and non-*kaya* settlements during his travels, and occasionally to meeting groups of such men in council. There is no clear sense of what Krapf understands "chief" to mean, however. In certain cases it seems to be closer to what Willis calls "homestead heads" than to a higher-order office or rank.¹⁴ In others, it refers to groups of such men, who are locally pre-eminent in an unspecified

¹⁴ Willis, *Mombasa*, 40–1 and *passim*.

way.¹⁵ It is unclear whether he understands a settlement to have one or many such “chiefs,” as in the case of “the village Rabbai Ku [=Rabai Kuu], Great Rabbai, or Old Rabbai,” which Krapf visited on 19 August 1844.¹⁶ On that occasion, after being escorted through the three gates of the *kaya* (“which with its wretched cone-shaped huts lies quite in the wood”), Krapf “saw only two men, who beat upon great drums in honor of the visit” and, finding “the chief” absent, “returned to the house of Abdalla-Ben-Pisila, who gave me shelter for the night, the chief sending a message that he would visit me early in the morning.”¹⁷ But Krapf goes on to mention that his guide and host, Abdalla-Ben-Pisila, had “received from the *chiefs* of Old Rabbai a piece of ground by the creek, where he had settled down to traffic with both [Wanika and Wakamba].”¹⁸ Rabai Kuu thus seems to have a chief, but also chiefs, plural, responsible for the allocation of land in their territory.

Or take for example the arrival of Krapf and Johannes Rebmann at “Rabbai Mpia” [=Rabai Mpya] (“New Rabai”) one year later, on 25 August 1845, to establish a mission station. There, Krapf collapses in exhaustion “on a cow-hide in the house of *the* chief Jindoa,” sleeping for several hours before “the *chiefs* then came in a body to greet us, and to fix the day for the commencement of the building.”¹⁹ Krapf’s account resembles later descriptions of “councils of elders” (including their authority to allocate land to newcomers, as in both Rabai Mpya and Rabai Kuu), but in

¹⁵ As in the case of Krapf’s description of “the village of Ribe,” at whose “outermost gate” Krapf and Sheikh Ibrahim of Makarunge, were compelled “to await the chiefs and their retinue” on 3 September 1844. Krapf, *Travels*, 112. Later that day, however, Krapf encounters “the chief of Kambe and his people,” without any sense of there being a council of such “chiefs” in Kambe. Ibid. 113.

¹⁶ Ibid. 111.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 116. Italics added.

¹⁹ Ibid. 127. Italics added.

Krapf's account these men are "chiefs" without reference to any gerontocratic hierarchy. The basis of their power is left unspecified.

The earliest account of a power hierarchy resembling later descriptions of precolonial "gerontocratic government" among the Mijikenda-speaking peoples is that of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Lambert Playfair from 1864. At the time, Playfair was the English Consul and Political Agent in Zanzibar. In a report read to the Bombay Geographical Society on his "Visit to the Wanika Country in the vicinity of Mombassa, and the Progress made by the Christian Missionaries at that place," Playfair states the following (based on information provided to him by Rebmann):

The males are divided into three orders:—

1st.—*M'fia*, or elders.

2nd.—*Kambi*, or intermediate order; and

3rd.—*N'airi*, or youth.

Admission is obtained into the superior grades by constant payments or offerings of palm-wine and the performance of certain ceremonies.

Those appointed for the admission of youth into the superior order *Kambi* only occur about once in a generation, namely when all the previously appointed *Kambi* have been absorbed into the rank of elder; thus, one frequently observes middle-aged men classed as youth.

On a fixed day the youth are all assembled in a certain place, whence the clay with which the bodies are to be smeared is to be taken, a fire is lighted, and a sacrifice offered. At a given signal the youth rush to the fire and extinguish it with their naked feet, and each seizes a lump of clay. All this time they are beaten by the men of the *Kambi* or 2nd order with the palms of their hands. They then cover their bodies with clay, and in this state, entirely divested of clothing, they are required to pass eight days in the forest. They then apply a second coating of clay, taken from any place they please, and pass another week in the same manner as the first. During all this time decency is laid aside and the utmost license prevails. At the close of the second week they return to their homes and resume their usual avocations; but they still continue the application of clay till the order is given for the concluding and most horrible part of the ceremony.

This consists in some one of the candidates killing a man; he must not belong to their tribe, but must be a person of some consideration in another one; the murder of a poor slave will by no means be accepted. The particulars are kept a profound secret; the novices

simply inform the elders that the victim has been slain, whereupon the former wash their bodies shave their heads, and the ceremony of initiation is completed.²⁰

Although unnamed, this ritual is recognizable as the *Mung'aro* ritual described in Chapter One. In the earliest account of something like an age-grade system, then, *Mung'aro* is described as the ritual separating a junior category, *N'airi* [=Nyere], from a senior category, *Kambi*. Playfair's text continues:

Promotion from the second to the highest order is performed gradually as the aspirants are able to pay the prescribed offering. These consist of an unlimited quantity of palm-wine given to the elders during a series of years, and finally two goats, thirty measures of rice, and twenty-four fowls. While these are being presented, the *muanza* or sacred horn, at other times carefully concealed in the forest, is played in such a manner as to make the sound emitted resemble the word *m-bo-see* [=mbuzi] (a goat). The rice is then put into three large pots kept for the express purpose, and to each pot eight fowls are added. This mess, with the goats, is eaten by the elders.

The *Kambi* or middle order is divided into four classes; the first consists of the eight eldest men, who are called "people of the hair," and have the privilege of selecting the prime pieces when an animal is killed. The second and third sections also consist of eight men each, next in age, while the fourth includes all the remainder.

On the day fixed for the initiation of the *Kambi* into the rank of elders, they assemble in the village, while the elders meet in one of their sacred places, disposed in two ranks so as to form a street. Each man is armed with a switch, and the candidates are brought two at a time and made to pass along the street, and receive a cut with the cane from each elder as they pass him. The sacred horn is then exhibited, and this terminates the ceremony, which is repeated from time to time till the whole of the *Kambi* have become elders.

The whole power lies in the hand of the elders, and though each tribe of the Wanika has an hereditary chief, his authority is merely nominal.²¹

Richard Burton published a description of a "Wanyika" age grade hierarchy eight years after Playfair's, also based on information from Rebmann. Despite the common source of their information, there are differences between the two accounts that point to the difficulty of accepting

²⁰ R. L. Playfair, "Visit to the Wanika Country in the vicinity of Mombassa, and the Progress made by the Christian Missionaries at that Place," *Transactions of the Bombay Geographical Society* 17 1863/4: 274–5.

²¹ Ibid. 275–6.

texts of this sort as empirically accurate descriptions of Mijikenda social organization and ritual practice, and thus also of using them to try to date transformations to those presumed forms:

The Wanyika split into the Nyere, or young; the Khambi, or middle-aged; and the Mfaya, or old. Each degree has its different initiation and ceremonies, with an ‘elaborate system of social and legal observances,’ the junior order always buying promotion from the senior. Once about every twenty years comes the great festival ‘Unyaro,’ at which the middle-aged degree is conferred.²² ... When all the Khambi have been raised to the highest rank, the Mfaya, these, formerly the elders, return, socially, to a second childhood; they are once more Nyere, or (old) boys, and there is no future promotion for them.²³

For both Playfair and Burton, the male population of the coast hinterland is divided into three statuses: *N’airi/Nyere*, the “youth” or “young,” *Kambi/Khambi*, the “intermediate” or “middle-aged” (which Playfair further differentiates into three superior ranks of eight members each, followed by a fourth rank of the remaining members of *Kambi* status) and *M’fia/Mfaya*, the “elders.” Playfair and Burton describe a similar ritual (but with different details) effecting the transition from “young” to “middle-aged” status, which Burton calls “Unyaro,” the *Mung’aro* ritual analyzed in Chapter Two.²⁴ Both also describe the progression through the statuses as being “purchased,” in some sense, from the existing occupants of the next highest status by payments of “prescribed offerings.” But while in Playfair’s understanding the progression through the statuses has an ascending, linear trajectory, Burton describes the system as quasi-cyclical: The *Mfaya*, after being replaced by incoming members from the *Khambi* status, retire to a “second childhood,” returning to *Nyere* status.

²² At this point Burton inserts a description of the “Unyaro” [= *Mung’aro*], already quoted in Chapter Two, involving the application of clay disguises and the “sacrifice” of a slave.

²³ Sir R. F. Burton *Zanzibar: City, Island, and Coast, Volume Two*, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 90–1.

²⁴ Among these differences, recall from Chapter Two, is that while for Burton “a slave is sacrificed” in the course of the ritual, for Playfair the ritual victim “must be a person of some consideration in another one; the murder of a poor slave will by no means be accepted.” Ibid. 91; Playfair, “Visit,” 275.

Charles New's account of "government among the Wanika" is both the most detailed nineteenth-century account of precolonial political authority in the coast hinterland (in terms of the actual operation of power, rather than providing an ideal-typical model of ranks and statuses), as well as perhaps the earliest attempt to assimilate local political forms to more familiar European ones. And unlike earlier (and later) descriptions that present the gerontocratic order as rigid, static, and "customary," New understands "Wanika" political society to be predicated on the principles of freedom, independence, and deliberation—although these are not necessarily virtues in his eyes:

Government among the Wanika is an exceedingly loose and an almost powerless institution. It is founded upon the principle of "State Independency," each tribe attending to its own affairs. There is no general government, nor any bond of union among them whatever. This state of things has no doubt led to their spoliation and present broken-down condition. Their want of union has invited attack. Had they been an united people, they might have bidden defiance to all comers; but, disjointed as they have been, they have become an easy prey to their foes.²⁵

New struggles to define hinterland political forms in terms he believes his readers will understand:

It is not an easy matter to define what their government *really is*. It is a strange mixture of Monarchy, Constitutionalism, and Republicanism. Each tribe has its "Shaha" (chief), its "Mvaya" (House of Lords), and its "Kambi" (House of Commons), the rest of the people being "niere" (young men), women, and children. . . . The chieftainship is hereditary, but it is confined to the male line; and when all the male members of one family have perished, it then passes over to that of the next brother. The Shaha has no power to act apart from the "Mvaya" and "Kambi." His privileges and emoluments are almost nil, the honour of his position being his chief reward. But if he be a man of energy and spirit, he may make something of his office; he may also exert a great influence; indeed, do almost as he pleases. It is so in some cases, but in others the Shaha is the poorest, weakest, and most uninfluential man of the tribe. Unless he can do something for himself, the people will do nothing for him; they say it is the duty of the Shaha to help them. If he, therefore, be a man of substance, and can dispense his benefits among his people, he can work everything to his will, and his power is almost absolute. He, of course, shares the black-mail, visitors' presents, fines, and whatever other means come to the exchequer, but this does not amount to much.²⁶

²⁵ C. New, *Life, Wanderings and Labours in Eastern Africa, with an Account of the First Successful Ascent of the Equatorial Snow Mountain, Kilima Njaro, and Remarks upon East African Slavery* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1873), 106–7.

²⁶ New, *Life*, 107–8.

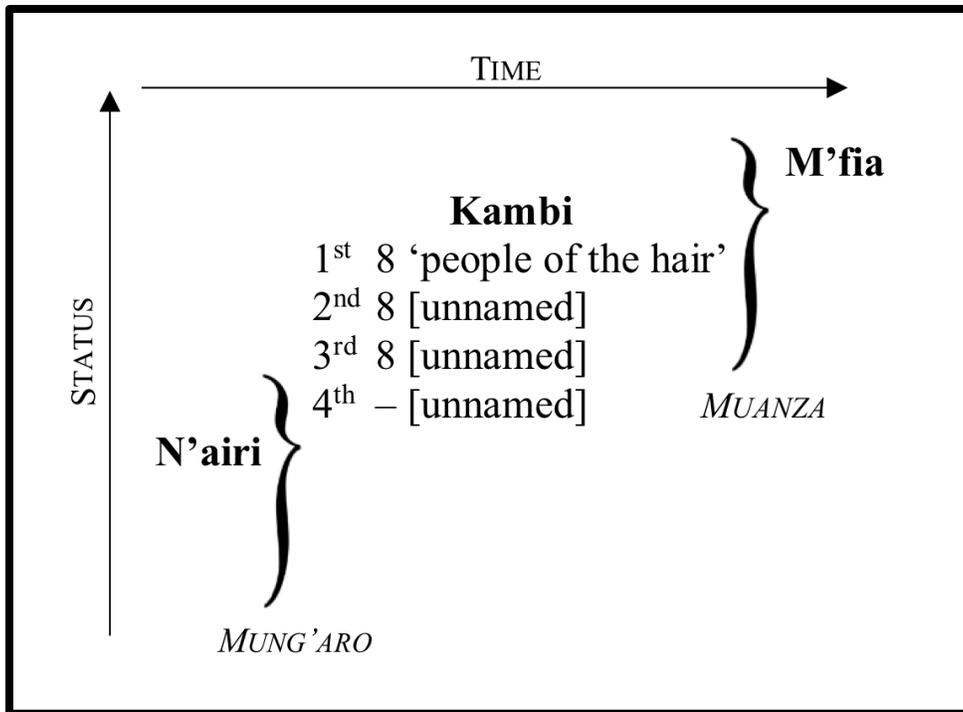


Diagram 3.1: Wanika "Grades" and "Orders" in Playfair's 1864 rendering of Rebmann's account.

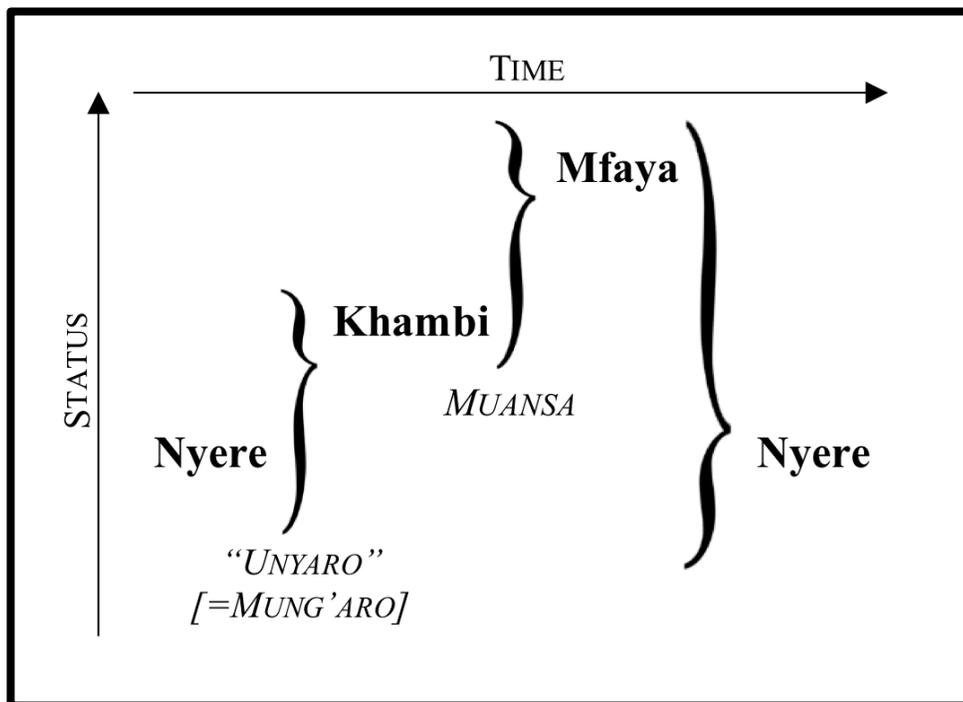


Diagram 3.2: Wanika "Degrees" and "Ranks" in Burton's 1872 rendering of Rebmann's account.

The “chieftainship,” according to New, is a position of “honour” with no attendant powers unless the officeholder “be a man of energy and spirit” or “substance,” in which case he may have “great influence.”²⁷ If he is able to “dispense his benefits among his people ... his power is almost absolute,” otherwise he is often “the poorest, weakest, and most uninfluential man of the tribe.”²⁸ The position is “hereditary,” and “confined to the male line.”²⁹ He “shares the black-mail, visitors’ presents, fines, and whatever other means come to the exchequer,” but “has no power to act apart from the ‘Mvaya’ and ‘Kambi.’”³⁰

The Mvaya has been called the “House of Lords” because it is constituted of the oldest men of the tribe, and is looked upon as a kind of “upper house” between the Kambi and the Shaha. They are the immediate counsellors of the chief, but have no power to act in any matter, except in conformity with the wishes of the Kambi.

The Kambi is really the governing body. It is composed of all adults who pay the costs of initiation. The ceremonies associated with induction into the order are in keeping with the barbarity of the people. The candidate, by the fees he pays, provides ample means for several days of feasting, rioting, and drunkenness. The demands made upon him are in proportion to his means, and whatever they may be they are sure to be pressed to the utmost. He is, as a rule, thoroughly fleeced, and so is made to pay “very dear for his whistle.”³¹

The *Mvaya*, as in earlier sources, is “constituted of the oldest men of the tribe,” but New also describes them here as “the immediate counsellors of the chief.”³² Contradicting the account of Playfair (for whom, recall, “the whole power lies in the hand of the elders”), New’s *Mvaya* elders “have no power to act in any matter, except in conformity with the wishes of the Kambi,” which is “really the governing body.”³³

²⁷ Ibid. 107.

²⁸ Ibid. 107–8.

²⁹ Ibid. 107.

³⁰ Ibid. 108, 107.

³¹ Ibid. 108.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.; Playfair, “Visit,” 276.

“Every adult [man],” New claims, “expects to become a member of the Kambi.”³⁴ Nevertheless, he points out, it is composed only of those men “who pay the costs of initiation.”³⁵ In this understanding, then, the Kambi is not a quasi-automatic and collective “age-grade,” but rather a social status for which age is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Because the fees for initiation are assessed in proportion to the individual initiate’s means, “there are not many who do not attain to the honour:”

Thus it becomes a parliament composed of almost the entire people [*sic*], which has but little to do but to govern itself. Its chief occupation is that of feasting. It consumes all fines, black-mail, and other “ada” (dues), which often coming in the shape of cattle, etc., the order has been termed a “society of beef-eaters,” and it is this privilege which makes the order so popular.³⁶

New closes his characterization of “Wanika” political life by gesturing—negatively—to the ideals of the French Revolution: “Every man does what is right in his own eyes; liberty, fraternity, and equality being the order of the day.”³⁷ This comparison to the revolutionary order that replaced an aristocratic one is especially surprising in the wake of New’s characterization of “Wanika” law as customary and conservative:

The laws of the country are those of “ada” (custom). The question with the Wanika is not “what is right?” but “what is the custom?” and before this they bow with the utmost servility. Thus the government is severely conservative. Reform they abominate; improvement upon the old state of things is not allowed. The son must not aspire to anything better than his father has had before him. If a man dares to improve the style of his hut, to make a larger doorway than is customary; if he should wear a finer or different style of dress to that of his fellows, he is instantly fined.³⁸

³⁴ New, *Life*, 110.

³⁵ Ibid. 108. As in the accounts of Playfair and Burton, above, the ritual of initiation from *Niere* to *Kambi* is recognizable as *Mung’aro*. Recall New’s description of his encounter with an initiate being prepared for the ritual in *Kaya Rabe* cited in Chapter Two. Ibid. 108–10.

³⁶ Ibid. 110. It is unclear by whom it “has been termed a ‘society of beef-eaters,’” but in any case it could hardly be said to be “a parliament composed of almost the entire people” when women were by definition excluded from membership or participation in its functions.

³⁷ Ibid. 114.

³⁸ Ibid. 110.

The “liberty, fraternity, and equality” of New’s moment (1863–72) are, in his understanding, the result of the decline and decadence of “Wanika” political and legal institutions. For reasons that are left unspecified, “the government of the Wanika is not now what it must have been in earlier times. Everything in connection with them is falling into decadence. They are going down. The “Shaha,” the “Mvaya,” and the “Kambi” are becoming more and more effete.”³⁹ It is not entirely clear what this means empirically, but New clearly interprets his moment as one of transition—“decadence”—from a prior order in which chiefs and elders were powerful and respected (but again, it is unclear what the evaluative criteria are) to one in which they are “more and more effete.”⁴⁰

Before turning to the last available nineteenth-century source on precolonial political organization in the coastal hinterland—one which marks a significant shift in the understanding not only of the specific organization of power in a specifically age-based hierarchy, but of the relation between that hierarchy and esoteric ritual knowledge—I would like to note two further aspects of New’s account. These are, first, the trying of “cases” by the Kambi and its methods of ritual verification and punishment, and second, the ritual paraphernalia of “the government of the Wanika.” As we will see in subsequent materials, European understanding of the place of these legal and ritual mechanisms and artefacts would change in important ways as the coast became a British Protectorate at the turn of the century, with consequences for both the socio-political life and historiography of the colonial and postcolonial Mijikenda peoples

³⁹ Ibid. 113.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

“The penal code,” according to New, “is based upon the requirements of the Kambi”.⁴¹

As has been pointed out, it is the privilege of that body to be fed and feasted. Most crimes and misdemeanours therefore are punished by fine. For debt, theft, assault, adultery, etc., the offenders are mulcted in their flocks and herds, the fines, of course, being devoured by the Kambi. An incorrigible thief is sometimes sold out of the country, and a man’s children may be seized and enslaved for debt. There are two crimes which are visited with capital punishment—murder, and an improper use of Uganga (sorcery). A Mganga, for instance, is supposed to have the control of the elements in his hands. Therefore should the country suffer from drought, the probability is that the Mganga will be suspected of maliciously preventing the rain; and as this is held to be a crime equal to murder, the man will be punished accordingly. Sometimes, however, expulsion from the country, or the sale of the individual into slavery, is substituted for capital punishment. Trial takes place before the Kambi, its members being both judge and jury.⁴²

Note that “fines” are the primary form of punishment not only for deviations (in New’s understanding) from “custom” (in mode of dress, or domestic architectures, above), but for other “crimes and misdemeanours” as well.⁴³ Such crimes include not only thefts, assaults, and adultery, but also failure to repay a debt. Those found guilty by the Kambi are “mulcted in their flocks and herds,” and the fines are, according to New, consumed directly by the Kambi rather than transferred to the complainant in compensation.⁴⁴ The exceptions are theft and debt, in which case the offender or their children may be “seized,” “enslaved,” and “sold out of the country.”⁴⁵

Aside from murder, the only other crime punishable by death is “an improper use of Uganga,” which New translates as “sorcery,” but which refers to more general supernatural powers or abilities and in most contexts lacks the negative valence of the English term “sorcery.”⁴⁶ In

⁴¹ Ibid. 110.

⁴² Ibid. 110–11.

⁴³ Ibid. 111.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also: R. F. Morton, “Small Change: Children in the Nineteenth-Century East African Slave Trade,” in G. Campbell, S. Miers, and J. C. Miller, eds., *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Athens, OH, 2009), 55–70.

⁴⁶ New, *Life*, 111.

therapeutic contexts *Uganga* is typically translated as “healing” or “traditional medicine,” and, although it may be abused, is often counterposed to “*Utsai*” (Kimijikenda) or “*Uchawi*” (Kiswahili), often translated into English as “Witchcraft.”⁴⁷ When *Uganga* is misused (that is, used for harm or attack instead of healing or protection) it remains *Uganga*, but would tend to be characterized as an instance of *Utsai* by Mijikenda-speaking peoples.

Crucially, some *Aganga* (pl., *Mgbwanga* sg.) are said (New does not say by whom) to have “control of the elements,” especially rain, so that should the region suffer drought, “the probability is” that one or more *aganga* will be suspected of having held back or diverted the rain, and this is, New says, a capital offence.⁴⁸ But although there is in his description no institutional form associated with these *aganga* and their capacity to affect the rain, subsequent accounts identify the practice (or at least the potential) with certain “secret societies” of elders associated with the *kayas*. I address these ideas below in detail, and wish to highlight the conceptual association of powerful older men and rain here, to be borne in mind as the chapter proceeds. This link will also prove important to the interpretation of rumors about *Mumiani* “vampires” in Chapters Five and Six.

New continues with an account of the Mijikenda legal process:

The accuser and accused meet face to face, and witnesses on both sides are patiently heard. The case is well sifted, and is discussed *pro* and *con* by the judges, with a good deal of acuteness and ability, and it must be admitted, not unseldom with much fairness; though no doubt personal relationships, friendships, and bribes will now and then interfere with the administration of even-handed justice.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See, for example, D. M. Ciekawy, “*Utsai* as Ethical Discourse: A Critique of Power from Mijikenda in Coastal Kenya,” in D. M. Ciekawy and G. C. Bond (eds.), *Witchcraft Dialogues: Anthropological and Philosophical Exchanges* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), 158–89, especially 164–7.

⁴⁸ New, *Life*, 111.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The hearing of cases is deliberate, skillful, and “not unseldom” fair, in New’s estimation. In “doubtful and mysterious cases,” however, “trial by ordeal is resorted to.”⁵⁰

This is called by the Wasuahili “Kiapo,” and by the Wanika “Kiraho.” It is administered in different ways. The following may be mentioned. First, the “Kiraho cha Tsoka” (the ordeal of the axe). This consists of applying a red-hot axe four times to the palm of the hand of the suspected person. Secondly, the “Kiraho cha Sumba” (the ordeal of the needle). In this case a red-hot needle is put through the lips of the individual. Thirdly, the “Kiraho cha Chungu cha Gnanu” (the ordeal of the kettle of copper). A copper vessel containing a stone is put upon the fire, and both are heated to the highest pitch; and the trial here consists in taking the stone from the kettle by the hand. Fourthly, the “Kiraho cha Kikahi” (the ordeal of the piece of bread), the accused man being compelled to eat a piece of poisoned bread. In each case, if he take no harm, he is deemed innocent; but if the fire burn him, or the needle draw blood, or the poisoned bread do him any injury, he is pronounced to be guilty, and punishment is proceeded with.⁵¹

In later primary and secondary sources (see below), these techniques *viraho* (*chirapho*, sg.) in Mijikenda called and *viapo* (*kiapo*, sg.) in Swahili—have tended to be translated as “oaths.” But New translates them—more accurately, perhaps, in a legal context in which they operate as rituals of verification—as “trials by ordeal.” They also share critical features with the institutions Evans-Pritchard glosses as “oracles” (Evans-Pritchard 1937). These ritual forms will, as “oathing,” become central to both Mijikenda and European understandings of the *kaya*-based “power” of elders. Before turning to later accounts of Mijikenda-speaking coastal hinterland society—in which ritual power (especially “oathing”) is held to be the preserve of a range of “secret societies” distinct from, but overlapping with, a specifically age-based “gerontocratic” hierarchy—the following section explores the importance of ritual secrecy around the “paraphernalia” of the Kambi in nineteenth-century accounts in which the categorical distinction between age grades and secret societies had not yet been made.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. 111–12.

3.3: VISUAL SECRECY AND SONIC PUBLICITY

In New's account, ritual technologies associated with the operation of elder power also anchor that power to the space of the *kaya*. But in these description their exact relation to what are described as political and legal forms is unclear (or at least untheorized). Although the objects and their ritual manipulation are described in significant detail, the authors of these texts seem to understand the "function" of these objects and their modes of ritual deployment to be to contribute to a more general sense of awe or fear in which elders are held, rather than be understood to play a specific role in governance or jurisprudence. In this way, these early missionary sources develop an understanding of these ritual spaces, objects, and processes as forming something like the mystical basis or ground of elder power. The key dimensions of this grounding are, in these accounts, visual secrecy on the one hand (the literal occulting of the material bases of power by hiding them from general view), and, on the other hand, a kind of sonic projection that makes present through other sensory modalities the invisible (because occult) sources of power. Here is New's account, for example, of the secret ritual spaces and objects "associated" with the forms of government he encountered in the 1860s:

Associated with the government of the Wanika are the "Moro" and the "Muanza." The former is a hut built in the Kaya, which is looked upon with great awe by the people. *None but the initiated are allowed to enter it.* In it are kept the insignia of office, wonderful relics of former days, trophies of victories won in the past, magic horns, drums, and other instruments; and above all, the Muanza itself.⁵²

The Moro and the Muanza are "associated," in an unspecified way, with "the government of the Wanika."⁵³ The Moro is a structure built inside the *kaya* from which "the people" are barred

⁵² Ibid. 112.

⁵³ Ibid.

entry and which, for that reason, “is looked upon with great awe” by them.⁵⁴ Recall from the discussion of the development of the details of the Singwaya origin story and the details of the *Mung’aro* ritual in Chapter One, as well as the discussion in Chapter Two of the purported northern origin of the Mijikenda and the possible role of the Segeju in introducing a range of Eastern Cushitic loan words into the Mijikenda lexicon, that “*Moro*” is cognate with an early Somali term for cattle enclosure:

Mijikenda as a whole has loan sets from ... some eastern Cushitic sources. Although these are few, there is a question about how they have got into Mijikenda. So, for example, *moro* “assembly of elders, meeting place,” a central part of traditional Mijikenda culture, [is] otherwise found only in Pokomo and Mwiini (as a loan), Aweera, Dahalo, and deriving from an early Somali form referring to “cattle fold” (so “cattle fold” to “enclosed space in a village” to “meeting place”).⁵⁵

Martin Walsh has offered a plausible explanation for how such Eastern Cushitic loanwords may have entered the Mijikenda lexicon via the mediation of the Segeju peoples.⁵⁶ The argument is made largely through the use of lexical evidence, but Walsh also makes reference to a range of material and ritual forms that the Mijikenda share—and seem to have borrowed from—the Central Kenya Bantu-speaking ancestors of the contemporary Segeju and Daiso peoples, including the *mung’aro* ritual, the *luvoo* ivory armlet, as well as the spatial layout of the precolonial *kaya* settlements.⁵⁷

As he points out, “the direction of influence appears to have been largely one-way, from the Segeju-Daiso to the Mijikenda; and the Daiso language today shows little sign of being

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Nurse and T. J. Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki: A Linguistic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 333.

⁵⁶ M. Walsh, “The Segeju Complex? Linguistic Evidence for the Precolonial Making of the Mijikenda,” in R. Gearhart and L. Giles (eds.) *Contesting Identities: The Mijikenda and Their Neighbors in Kenyan Coastal Society* (London: Africa World Press, 2013), 25–51.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 40–41.

influenced in the past by Mijikenda.”⁵⁸ The greater number of Cushitic loans in Central Kenya Bantu than in Mijikenda languages would also seem to indicate longer-term, or more intense, contact between Cushitic and Central Kenya Bantu speakers than between Cushitic and Mijikenda speakers.⁵⁹ It also raises the possibility of Cushitic cultural and lexical material—like the *luvo* armlet and *arbora/Abora* status—having been incorporated into Mijikenda languages by means of more prolonged or intense historical contact, in turn, with those Central Kenya Bantu speakers—the Segeju and Daiso—who had borrowed it from Cushitic speakers, rather than by means of direct historical contact between Mijikenda speakers and Cushitic-speaking peoples (like Oromo—“Galla”—and Somali). What the *mung’aro* ritual—and its incorporation into Mijikenda traditions of origin in Singwaya—may encode, then, is a symbolic equivalence between cattle enclosure and elder enclosure that also represents a historical-linguistic or etymological connection.

Recall that in the origin stories that involved the killing of an Oromo (“Galla”) outsider—whether in the course of a *mung’aro*, or by an enraged husband, or by the jealous men of a Mijikenda settlement—the body of the stranger was then taken to the center of the cattle enclosure and buried there—hidden. Recall also that when the collection of genital and other anatomical “trophies” (in addition to the “ritual killing” of a stranger or slave) becomes part of the local understanding of the *mung’aro* ritual process (and which was itself a practice for which the Cushitic-speaking “Galla” had long been known, as was shown at some length in Chapter Two), these body parts were brought back to the ritual enclosure at the center of the *kaya*. In the performance of *mung’aro*, then, the “primal crime” of killing is repeated in a ritual space-time that

⁵⁸ Ibid. 45.

⁵⁹ D. Nurse, “Segeju and Daisū: A Case Study of Evidence from Oral Tradition and Comparative Linguistics,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982), 191–2.

figurates the center of the *kaya* settlement as the center of the mythic Singwaya cattle enclosure, in which are kept hidden the material traces of the act that authorizes the rule of the new initiates. In *mung'aro* the Mijikenda *moro*, the enclosed elder male meeting place, becomes the (Eastern Cushitic) *mooro*, the cattle enclosure in which were buried the remains of a mythic betrayal that brought to an end a period of prolonged, amicable interaction between the ancestors of contemporary Bantu and Cushitic speaking peoples.

The exact uses to which the anatomical trophies collected during *mung'aro* were put there is never spelled out (secrecy, again, was important to how they were socially consequential or efficacious), but the sense one arrives at from early twentieth-century sources is that they were understood to have been incorporated into or used ritually to revitalize the hidden charms or power objects kept in the *moro* enclosure within the larger *kaya* enclosure. These hidden—occult—objects, “wonderful relics of former days, trophies of victories won in the past,” were the material origo from which elder power radiated.⁶⁰ These included the *mulimo*, a protective medicine said to have been brought from Singwaya.⁶¹ The ritual repetition of the “primal crime” of *mung'aro* at the point of Mijikenda origin thus renewed or revitalized certain materials believed to be from that point of origin as a means of renewing elder power anchored to a new origo in the *moro* at the heart of the *kaya*.

New does not specify whether members of the Kambi, or only the Mvaya, were allowed to enter the Moro. But it contained, according to him, all of the “insignia of office” which include (he was apparently told, but perhaps also imagines) “magic horns, drums, and other instruments.”⁶²

⁶⁰ New, *Life* 112.

⁶¹ MHT 8, MHT 10

⁶² New, *Life*, 112.

Chief among these, in New's account, is an unusual kind of friction drum, called the "*Muanza*."

Here is New's description of the *muanza* and its operation:

The latter is a kind of drum about six feet long. A portion of the trunk of a tree about this length is hollowed out to within an inch of one end. Over the open end is stretched the skin of a goat or a sheep, through the centre of which a thong is passed, being kept in place by a knot on the inner side. The instrument is rudely carved and painted. The natives operate upon it by taking a wisp of cocoa-nut fibre in each hand, seizing the thong, pulling at it hand over hand, and allowing it to slip by rapid jerks through their grasp. The vibrations thus produced create some of the most hideous sounds imaginable. Sometimes they resemble the rumbling of distant thunder, now the roaring of a lion, and now what may be imagined of the moaning of some demon in agony. For the purpose of producing the greater effect the operation is often performed by night. When all nature has fallen into the profoundest silence, and dense darkness covers all, the horrible bellowings of this drum, rolling through the forests, up the valleys, echoing and re-echoing among the hills, accompanied by the howls and shrieks of a drunken crowd of savages, become really terrifying, reminding one of Dante's "Inferno," and creating sensations such as you might suppose yourself to be the subject of in that dismal abode. Such is the superstitious terror with which the Wanika regard the *Muanza*, that they believe it to be certain death for anyone but the initiated to look upon it; even an accidental sight of it is considered to be fatal. Whenever the instrument is brought from its secrecy by day the Wanika rush into their huts, close the doorways, and bury their faces in their hands, lest they should catch sight of the dreaded monster.⁶³

The *mwanza* is kept in "secrecy," hidden in the *moro*, where only the initiated men may see it.

Though hidden from view, occulted, its presence is made known to the broader public by its "horrible bellowings."⁶⁴

The "*muanza*," recall, was described by Playfair as a "sacred horn" kept "carefully concealed in the forest."⁶⁵ Playfair's "visit" to the region was brief, and there is no evidence to suggest that he either saw (or heard) a *mwanza* being played. It is unclear on what basis he declares it to be a "horn," but one possibility is that, as Consul and Political Agent for England in Zanzibar, Playfair would have been familiar with Swahili ritual instruments called *siwa* and *mbiu*. These

⁶³ Ibid. 112–13. Italics added.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Playfair, "Visit," 275.

large side-blown trumpets of brass, ivory, or wood are mentioned among the “regalia” and “paraphernalia” of the leaders of cities on the East African coast from (early fourteenth century) Mogadishu in the North to Sofala, Mozambique in the South, and their use in fifteenth-century Malindi is attested by the unknown chronicler of Vasco da Gama’s outrageous exploits there (see Image 3.1 and Image 3.2, below).⁶⁶

But although these instruments were the proprietary ritual objects of Swahili ruling houses and entrusted to the care of a warden or keeper, they were not governed by the same taboos on being seen in public as the *mwanza*. Indeed, display of the often ornately carved ivory tusks seems to have been an important dimension of their deployment as status markers on occasions of public ritual, such as the installation of a new *Diwan* or leader, during the feasts that followed circumcision or wedding rituals, at funerals following the “deaths of important personages,” and (one source adds) during “religious services for rain, victory in warfare, &c.”⁶⁷ And although *siwa*

⁶⁶ C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (eds.), *Voyages d’Ibn Batouta, Tome Second* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1854), 187–8 [A partial English translation of Defrémery and Sanguinetti’s French translation, with the relevant passage, appears as: “A Visit to Zeil, Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Kilwa Kisiwani in 1331,” in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville (ed.) *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 30. The relevant passage does not appear in H. A. R. Gibb’s 1929 “translation and selection” from the original Arabic. See: H. A. R. Gibb (trans. and ed.) *Ibn Battûta: Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325–1354* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1929), 111–12.]; B. M. Fagan and J. Kirkman, “An Ivory Trumpet from Sofala, Mozambique,” *Ethnomusicology*, 11:3 (1967), 368–74; E. G. Ravenstein (trans. and ed.) *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499* (London: Hakluyt, 1898), 42–3. See also: R. L. Pouwells, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 27–8.

⁶⁷ What the residual “&c.” could include is left entirely to the reader’s imagination. See: T. Ainsworth Dickson, “The Regalia of the Wa-Vumba” *Man* 21 (1921), 33. Although Ainsworth Dickson was a colonial administrator in the region, his account in “Regalia” is based almost entirely on Alfred Claud Hollis’s earlier “Notes on the History of Vumba, East Africa,” as has been most of the subsequent literature on that part of the southern Kenya coast (as Stephanie Wynne-Jones, points out). See: A. C. Hollis, “Notes on the History of Vumba, East Africa” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900), 280; Fagan and

were important among the “regalia” of office of certain coastal elites (along with chairs, umbrellas, and a special set of drums), they seem to have been regarded with none of the religious horror that nineteenth-century missionary believed that they had detected in the attitudes of hinterland residents towards the *mwanza*.

Burton, in any case, describes the *mwanza* in terms similar to New: as a large drum. For both Playfair and Burton, it is deployed during the ritual initiation of male candidates from the *Kambi* (the second or “middle-aged” status) to the “*Mfaya*” (the third or “elder” status) within the gerontocratic order mapped out for them by Rebmann. For Playfair, the “exhibition” of the “sacred horn” to initiates “terminates the ceremony” that makes *Kambi* members into “elders.”⁶⁸ And for Burton (as for New), restricted access to the “religious utensils” (New’s “insignia of office”) of the various “orders” is essential to their nature and operation in “*Wanika*” society:

After the clay-coatings and the bloody sacrifice [of the *mung'aro* ritual], the chief distinctions of the orders are their religious utensils. For instance the *Muansa* (plural *Miansa*) drum, a goat-skin stretched upon a hollowed tree-trunk, six feet long, whose booming, drawn-out sounds, heard at night amongst the wild forested hills, resembled the most melancholy moaning, is peculiar to the third degree or elders of both sexes. It is brought during the dark hours to the *Kaya*, and the junior orders may not look upon it.⁶⁹

The nocturnal sonic presencing of elder male ritual activity was a persistent feature of Missionary and explorer accounts of the coast hinterland during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Kirkman, “An Ivory Trumpet,” 372; William F. McKay, “A Precolonial History of the Southern Kenya Coast” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1975), 70–74; KNA RW 967.6204 POU, “Copies of Interviews carried out in Kenya, 1974–1975, Mombasa and Lamu by Rondall [sic] L. Pouwels, Ph. D.,” Interview with Bibi Zena and Hababu Aisha Nasir, 8 April 1975, Lamu, Interview with [illegible], April 15 1975, Lamu, Interview with [illegible] Jahadhmy, 11 May 1975, Lamu, Interview with Salim bin Heri and Amina bint Salim Heri, 17 May 1975, Lamu; Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*, 27–8, 60n.9, 60n.10. See also: S. Wynne-Jones, “Remembering and Reworking the Swahili Diwanate: The Role of Objects and Places at Vumba Kuu,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43:3 (2010), 407–27.

⁶⁸ Playfair, “Visit,” 276.

⁶⁹ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 91.

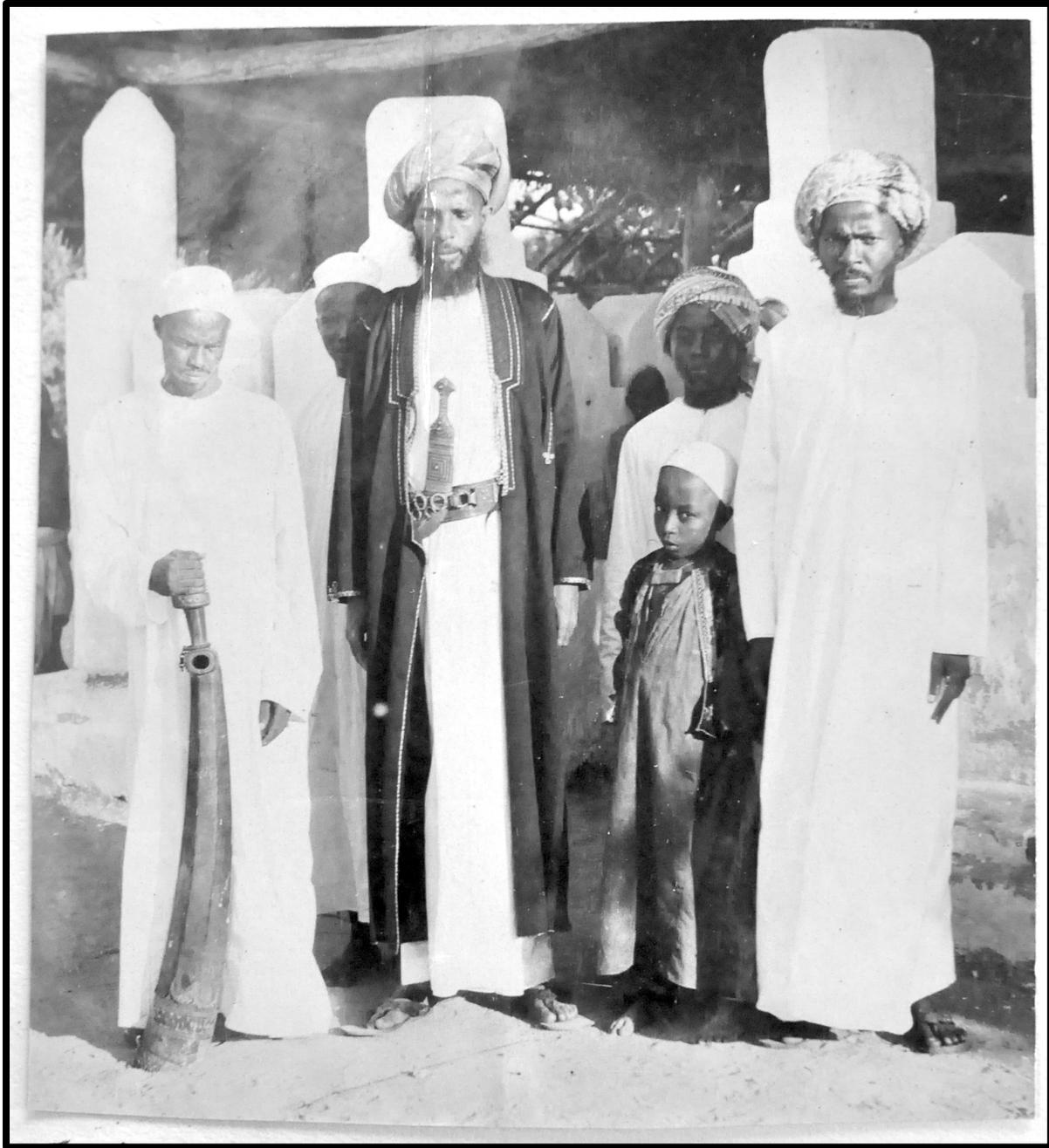


Image 3.1: “The Mudir of Vanga, Abubakari bin Ali (centre), with the Kadi of Vanga (right), and the ivory horn of the Divans of Vumba Kuu with its keeper.” Commonwealth and Africa Manuscripts Collection, Weston Library, Oxford University: MSS.Brit.EMP.s.294, “Alfred Claud Hollis Autobiography.” No date.



Image 3.2: “A Siwa Blower — From a photograph by John Kirk.” From Ravenstein, *A Journal*, 43. No date or location are given, but either Lamu or Zanzibar seem most likely. John Kirk was British Vice-Consul of Zanzibar from 1866 (just after Robert Playfair’s tenure) to 1873, and Consul General of Zanzibar until retirement in 1887.

On 2 February 1847, for example, the missionary Krapf recorded in his diary that:

To-day the chief and some other Wanika advised us to close the doors of our house, as the Muansa was to roar. I reproved them for their superstition, and their deceit in leading the people to believe that the Muansa is a wild beast making a noise in the wood, whereas it is in reality nothing but the stem of a tree hollowed out, which is made to give forth a frightful sound by rubbing.⁷⁰

For Krapf, the apparent popular fear of the *mwanza* is the result of an intentional deception by clever elders who “compel obedience by superstition and sensual practices.”⁷¹ When an informant responding to Krapf’s questions about the nature of the *mwanza* states “that he could not say; for no one not an elder was allowed to see the instrument,” Krapf seems to take this as a factual declaration of ignorance, rather than as his interlocutor simply recognizing and respecting the boundaries of proprietary knowledge.⁷²

At other times, however, “fear” of the *mwanza* seems to be the consequence not of a mistaken belief that elders were cavorting in the forest with a “dreaded monster,” but of the (to the missionaries’ minds) no less “superstitious” threat of sterility, blindness, or death if the uninitiated were to set eyes on it.⁷³ Less “deceitfully,” however, elders regularly assessed substantial fines from women and uninitiated men who failed to prostrate themselves or hide indoors on those occasions when the elders took the *mwanza* from its hiding place in the Kaya and paraded the object through a settlement.⁷⁴ “Even the Mohamedans shut their doors” when the *mwanza* passed

⁷⁰ J. L. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors during an Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa* (London: Ticknor & Fields, 1860), 133–4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 138.

⁷² *Ibid.* 134.

⁷³ New, *Life*, 113; Krapf, *Travels*, 134–5; J. L. Krapf, *A Dictionary of the Suahili Language*. London: Trübner & Company, 1882), 261.

⁷⁴ Krapf, *Travels*, 135.

their homes, Krapf actually re-opened his door after the elders had shut it for him).⁷⁵ Krapf responded with a lengthy harangue, urging them to burn the *mwanza* and send him their children for instruction. The elders replied, according to Krapf, “You are a true magician,” which he (in all seriousness, it seems) understood to mean “We cannot resist your eloquence,” but which could probably have been better translated as something like, “You truly are a witch.”⁷⁶

The most interesting and detailed description of a *mwanza* is that of Arthur M. Champion, Assistant District Commissioner of Giriama District at the time of “The Giriama Rising” of 1914:

For the sum of –/25 I was allowed to see a *mwanza* or friction drum. It was kept in a small hut built in the usual Giriama style in the middle of the village of Nduria wa Gunga. All children and those who had not seen the drum were driven off. After the preparation of some medicine two men went into the hut with an *nzeli* of water and sounded it. They then brought it out, one man having previously covered his head and face with a cloth. The drum which consists of a hollow cylinder of wood about 5 to 6 feet long was placed on two bits of wood. One end was covered with a pig skin, still retaining the hair. In the centre of this circle a hole was pierced in the pigskin and a piece of *milala* (platted palm leaves) cord inserted about 2 feet in length. Attached to the other end of this cord is a smooth stick about two feet long and about ½ inch in diameter. The operator first wetted his hands and some coconut fibre. He then seized the stick with wet coconut fibre between his hands and pulled on the stick with both hands so that the stick slid through. This produced a noise from the drum like the deep growling of a lion. There was nothing whatever inside the cylinder. I was allowed to operate the drum myself; it requires a certain knack to get the best sounds out of it. I can quite believe that the noise travels a long way. The vibration is considerable and if the drum is laid on the ground it is highly probably that its warning can be heard some miles.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid. 138. Note, again, Krapf’s mention of “chiefs” of an area, without reference to the basis of their authority, either in gerentocracy or as homestead heads.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Champion, *The Agiryama*, 44.



Image 3.3 (left) and **Image 3.4 (right)**: *Mwanza* drums in the collections of The Pitt Rivers Museum [1908, 34, 32], Oxford University (left), and The British Museum [Af 1908, 0723, 94], London (right). Sir Alfred Claud Hollis, then Secretary for Native Affairs, gave the drums to the museums in 1908. The exact date, source, and conditions under which Hollis obtained the drums are unknown. I would like to thank Jeremy Coote of the Pitt Rivers Museum for allowing me to examine the *Mwanza* in the museum's collection on short notice.

Champion adds that “The work of construction is very rough and not ornamented. It does not appear to be very greatly prized or much care devoted to it.”⁷⁸ This, despite the fact that the drum was kept in a special structure for its storage at the center of a settlement, tended only by ritual specialists (“two medicine men”), one of whom has “covered his head and face with a cloth,” that all those not authorized to see the drum were “driven off,” and that he was charged a fee to be initiated into its use.⁷⁹ His assertion that it “does not appear to be greatly prized or much care devoted to it” seems to be based entirely on the fact that “the work of construction is very rough and not ornamented,” and perhaps that it is kept in “a small hut” rather than a grander structure.⁸⁰ But this ignores the fact that the broader social significance of the *mwanza* were its sonic, rather than visual, qualities. Its ritual use stipulates, in fact, that it *not be seen*, but rather *heard* “for some miles.”⁸¹ It is not the awe inspired by the exquisite appearance of the object itself which is important, but rather the ritual stipulation that those who have not paid for the knowledge of its appearance may not see it in public, which sends people running for cover. In this sense, the *mwanza* is proprietary knowledge. The question is not whether the uninitiated really believe that it is a monster, but that they have not paid for the right to have that knowledge recognized publicly.

But note that the particular *mwanza* that Champion was allowed to see—but only after paying the initiation fee—is kept at the center not of a fortified kaya of ritual importance and purported antiquity, but of “the village of Nduria wa Gunga.” According to his brother, Mwinga wa Gunga, Nduria had been made *Mzee wa Serikali*, “Government Elder,” by then-District

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Commissioner G. H. L. Murray (“Bw. Mare”).⁸² By the early twentieth century, then, what had been described in the nineteenth century as a key item in the “regalia” of the Kaya elders, kept hidden at the center of these important forested sites, seem to have proliferated, or are at the very least being reproduced and maintained in new locations by men with a claim to local authority not rooted in the system of Kaya elderhood, but in something else. It would thus seem to support Willis and Miers’ claim about the increasing localization of power in the late nineteenth century during the Giryama expansion to the North and West, and the creation of new or modified political bodies and authorizing rituals as settlements became increasingly dispersed and distant from both the Kayas and the Elders who wielded power from them.

On the other hand, Alice Werner, describes five *mwanza* friction drums kept in Kaya Rabai, near Krapf and Rebmann’s original mission station at Rabai Mpya.⁸³ These she describes as stored “in a little spirit-hut,” the largest *mwanza* being about four feet in length, and stored on a platform up off the ground.⁸⁴ Werner reports hearing these drums “sounded twice at night during the month of February. At Kisulutini, about two miles away, it sounds more like the buzzing of an enormous beetle than anything else.”⁸⁵ She believed that their playing was associated with “certain dances” performed before the March rains, but about which she “could get no very precise information.”⁸⁶ In addition to such a “festival” (if indeed there was one), Werner suggests that “the old men sound the *mwanza* when they wish to promulgate a new law, or when some serious offence has been committed—rather, perhaps, when they are dissatisfied with the state of morality in general and

⁸² MHT 23.

⁸³ A. Werner, “The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 45 (1915), 344.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Recall Krapf’s early insistence that *mung’aro* was held in March.

feel the necessity of inspiring awe in the younger generation.”⁸⁷ If true, the proliferation of *mianza* (pl.) in certain Kaya ritual centers and their deployment by “the old men” to “promulgate a new law” and “inspire awe” may indicate an ongoing attempt by these Kaya Elders to shore up what they viewed as their declining power in the face of increasingly independent dispersed homesteads and the new administrative apparatus of the colonial administration.⁸⁸

3.4: “AGE-GRADES” AND “SECRET SOCIETIES”

Stepping back slightly into the late nineteenth century, I want to pinpoint the moment in which outside understandings of Mijikenda social organization underwent a transformation that would be critical to subsequent historical reconstructions of precolonial Mijikenda society. This shift involved, first, the introduction into the literature of a system of named male age-grades and generation-sets called *marika* (*rika*, sing.) on the one hand, and a distinct, but partially overlapping, number of “secret societies” on the other. Previously, as I have shown above, male politico-ritual organization was understood to be structured by the comparatively undifferentiated grouping of the male population into the *nyere*, *kambi* (or *ngambi*), and *vaya* “orders” or “ranks,” based on a rough division by approximate age (as “youth,” “middle-age,” and “elder”). But in the nineteenth-century the missionary W. E. Taylor’s published his *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections*, the source that would prove to be the most influential for subsequent understandings of “gerontocratic

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For a careful analysis of the problem of proliferation of ritual objects connected to an idealized vision of “elder authority” elsewhere in Kenya, see R. Blunt, “Kenyatta’s Lament: Oaths and the Transformation of Ritual Ideologies in Colonial Kenya,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3:3 (2013), 167–93; and R. Blunt, *Of Money and Elders: Ritual, Sovereignty, and the Sacred in Kenya* (forthcoming).

government” in precolonial Mijikenda society.⁸⁹ Taylor’s *Vocabulary* contained two key entries in this regard: “Circumcision-cycles” and “Freemasonry.”

Circumcision-cycles, *marika*. These play a very important part in the Giriama commonwealth. Every child born before a certain time has to be brought to one common place, where the ceremony is gone through. All the children of one cycle receive a common name and are bound by a common tie. They grow up free of the same private clubs, and from their number are chosen the three Enye-ts’i, when the time comes for promotion. The cycles always bear the following names (which are taken by their respective members), and succeed one another in the following order:—

- (1) *Wula-mbere*, “First-rains.”
- (2) *Wula-kahi*, “Middle-rains.”
- (3) *Wula-nyuma*, “Latter-rains.”
- (4) *T’ungudza*, “Tomatoes.”
- (5) *P’uku*, “Large wild rats.”
- (6) *Nguluwe*, “Pigs.”
- (7) *Vitambi*, now meaning “Coloured cloths.”
- (8) *Vitsoka*, “Hatchets.”
- (9) *Abi-Kizi*, “Kizi’s Father.”
- (10) *Atsai*, “Wizards.”
- (11) *Mafira*, “Puff-adders.”
- (12) *Mitseka*, “Mats.”
- (13) *Nyoga*, “Feathers.”⁹⁰

Although Taylor states that these “circumcision-cycles” play “a very important part in the Giriama commonwealth,” and although earlier sources do mention circumcision among the “Wanyika,” there is no mention in those earlier sources of *marika* organized in this formal way, or of circumcision being important in the political life of the coastal hinterland peoples in any way. Rather, the emphasis in terms of political institutions is on the *Kambi* and *Vaya*.

Krapf’s Swahili dictionary defines “*marika*” simply as “those who are of the same age,” and makes no mention of named age-groups in this way.⁹¹ These is, however, evidence that the

⁸⁹ W. E. Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1891).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 25.

⁹¹ Krapf, *Dictionary*, 203.

term “rika” was used in both this general sense of people who are the same age and in connection with circumcision rites, as those who had undergone initiation together. Krapf and Rebmann’s *Nika-English Dictionary* of 1887 gives the following entry for “Rika:”

Rika, *n.* (ra, pl. Ma-). *See* Sagala [“to sit, to stay”]. (K.) Peer, equal, fellow. Gnania na gnania ni mutu na rikare; or Gnania na gnania ni marika. Mutu hiyu ni rika rangu. Mimi na hiyu hu rika menga, huagnara vamanga. Hia ni rika menga, hebu luembe lumenga. Atu hia ni marika, ela hiyu ndiye ayeona dzua na mbere. Ni Kironda cha rika, kakivola, mutu ni ku fua nache.

[**Rika**, *n.* (ra, pl. Ma-). *See* Sagala. (K.) Peer, equal, fellow. Someone and someone are a person and their peer; or Someone and someone are peers. This person is my peer. This one and I are one age-grade, we underwent *mung’aro* together. They are one age, or one razor. These people are peers, but this one saw the sun first. It is a wound of initiation, if it does not heal, a person dies from it.]⁹²

Clearly, then, while Taylor’s description resembles no earlier account in its formal properties, it does resonate in other important ways with those accounts. Note the mention of the *mung’aro* ritual (discussed in Chapter One), in the verbal form (*huagnara vamanga*, “we gnara-ed together”), as being what marked a rika. But note also the reference to circumcision (people being “of one razor,” and there being *Kironda cha rika*, a “rika wound” which, if it does not heal (literally “cool”) may prove fatal). Finally, note the suggestion of a hierarchy by birth order within each otherwise egalitarian rank (“These people are peers, but this one saw the sun first”).

The system Taylor describes is thus too well-formed and detailed to have been an invention either of the elders with whom he was in conversation or of Taylor himself, but also cannot

⁹² J. Krapf and J. Rebmann, in T. H. Sparshott (ed.) *A Nika-English Dictionary*, (London: Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1887), 331. The “(K.)” preceding indicates that the information is from “Krapf, and indicates that in Rebmann’s opinion further examination is necessary” (vii). The entry for “Sagala” to which the entry for “Rika” directs us contains the following poignant indication of the importance of age-mates in nineteenth century Mijikenda society: “*Mutu hiye yadzisagala sana (= yudzikala sana, kana rikare kahiri; marikage gadzisira, yusere iye).*” [“This person stays very much alone (= they sit alone very much, they have no age-mates anymore; their peers are finished, they remain.” Translations mine.

plausibly be taken to mark so dramatic and rapid an empirical transformation of Mijikenda social organization. As a description of statuses that are the result of past ritual activity, it projects backwards in time to well before the moment it was recorded.⁹³ Even if it were not an entirely accurate description in an empiricist sense, it is thus evidence that the social organization of the northern Mijikenda at least was more complex than earlier European residents had been aware (which is not in itself entirely surprising). In general, however, it is difficult to say how much the differences between sources during this period are the results of regional variations, historical transformation, or the variable quality of research and description.

Before moving to the second key term from Taylor's *Vocabulary*, it is worth highlighting two features of his description of these "circumcision cycles." First, Taylor notes that "all the children of one cycle receive a common name and are bound by a common tie," but also mentions "promotion." It is unclear whether this means promotion "up" the ranks (from "(13) Nyoga" to "(12) Mitseka," for example), or whether members of one "cycle" retain their common name for the duration of its existence. Taylor notes that three "Enye-ts'i" are chosen from each "cycle" at promotion. "Enye-ts'i" is one of his glosses for "(Great) Chief" elsewhere in the *Vocabulary*, but it literally means "Those having [the] land" (*enye*, "having" or "possessing," *ts'i*, "land" or "country").⁹⁴ In contemporary Chidigo, it refers to the hereditary "owners" of a territory, the clan historically associated with the land by (claimed) first settlement. In this understanding, quite different from that described by Taylor, all members of a given clan are *enyetsi* of the territory

⁹³ In other words if there are members of each of these sequentially produced ranks present at the moment Taylor was writing, they must have been initiated into those statuses at some point in the past by an institutional ritual that had endured in one form or another for the last thirteen ritual "generations" at the very least.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 24.

associated with that clan.⁹⁵ Taylor will have occasion to return to the category of “*Enye-ts’i*” in his entry for “Freemasonry,” addressed below, but his remarks there are not entirely clarificatory, either.

Second, in Taylor’s account, the names of these groups are fixed. There are always thirteen groups in the larger, unnamed set—it is ambiguous whether this larger set comprising the named groups is the “circumcision cycle,” or whether each named group is a “cycle.” He seems at times to be indicating each, and this would actually be in keeping with local usage of the term *rika*, which refers (in later understandings, anyway) to both the named age sets into which people were initiated, and a larger generational cohort made up of these chronologically ranked age sets. In any case, Taylor is clear that these thirteen groups always have the same names as those he lists, and always succeed one another in the same order. This will prove important for later attempts at historical reconstruction based largely on Taylor’s description.

As significant for the shift in understanding of Mijikenda political organization in Taylor’s *Vocabulary* as the specification of a gerontocratic hierarchy of “circumcision-cycles,” is the separation of this gerontocratic order from a system of secret societies that Taylor describes, tellingly, in the entry for “Freemasonry.” The lengthy description of these societies is detailed, but formal and decontextualized. Certain categories, objects, and rituals mentioned by Taylor in this regard will by now be familiar. Others, like *nyere*, are conspicuous by their absence. But both the

⁹⁵ Recall from Chapter Two the significance of being and not being “*Enyetsi*” in contemporary articulations of the Singwaya origin story in which Singwaya is no longer the point of origin, but rather a waypoint, or “a mere small station,” (Park 2012) on the way from elsewhere. “Singwaya,” in these versions, has been re-analyzed as “Tsingbwa-ya,” “[The] Country of,” the implication being that it was “the country of” some other people, and the Mijikenda were simply guests there. It was not their homeland, which is now often claimed (especially by the Muslim Digo) to have been Mecca.

nature of these statuses and the conceptualization of their interrelatedness are dramatically different from those of Krapf, New, Playfair, and Burton. What follows below is the full entry, divided up into shorter sections for commentary and analysis:

Freemasonry. The system of initiation which constitutes the Giriyama state is called K'ambi, after its most numerous division. The preliminaries to the *Habasi*:—

(1) *Uhoho*, Infancy. The *muho*, child, is not yet sufficiently grown, or cannot yet afford the fees, to become a candidate. From the latter cause there are many grown up “infants” in Giriyama.

(2) *Umondo*, the Candidature. Negotiations have been entered into by the child's father for his initiation into the first grade, the *Habasi*.

(3) *Ubor*, the having been declared free of the—

FIRST DEGREE, *Habasi*, follows in due course, and the youth takes his place among the *Ahoho a Habasi-ni*, Children in the *Habasi*. He is now allowed to have his share in the division of the fees paid by the *Umondo* in their candidature, which consist of flesh, beer, etc. He and his companions are called *Nyere*, and are still under the care of their hierophant, the *Muhagizi*, who completes this stage of his teaching by putting them through a course of medicine, teaching them simples and spells (but *not* charms or fetishes, *p'engu*) in the woods, where he takes them and shows them every medicinal herb. While engaged in this study, the initiated receive the name of *Ahoho a Mihaso-ni*, Children in the Simples.⁹⁶

“K'ambi” is, in this understanding, both the name of “the system of initiation which constitutes the Giriyama state” and, we will see below, a phase or status within that system. “*Habasi*,” the first time this term appears in the literature, is the name of the “first degree” in a two-degree system of proprietary ritual knowledge. During this phase, in which the initiates, “called *Nyere*” are instructed in “simples and spells”—herbal medicines and incantations—but not in the creation of “charms or fetishes.” Taylor continues:

The preliminaries to the full status of the *K'ambi*. There are four ceremonies of initiation to be passed before an *M'giriyama* can enjoy his full status as a citizen; each is named after its ceremonial dance.

(1) *Gawe*, the Distribution or Partition—that is, into those who may and those who may not wear the full-sized loin-cloth. The mysteries last six ritual “days” of twelve hours each, which are practically three ordinary days. (The Giriyama daytime is divided into ten *mirongo*, or decades, which are, however, only imaginary divisions. The hierophant of the *Gawe* is called *M'kuzi*, as if to say, the Initiator of the Greater Mysteries (see *Fisi* below);

⁹⁶ Taylor, *Giriyama Vocabulary*, 43–4. Emphasis in the original.

and the mysteries themselves are called Mwandza M’kulu, the Greater Mystic Drum. The candidates, Ku-tsindza rigo, “flay the Great Skin” (?), i.e. they are shown the Mwandza by the Initiator. This drum, with its strange roaring bellow, is used to excite the superstitions of the common people.

(2) *Sayo ra K’oma*, the Clapping of the Shades (the ancestral ghosts), is a dance which lasts only one day (of twelve hours?). The hierophant is called simply Mwenye Sayo, the Clapping Man. There seem to be no special names for these officers in the succeeding steps.

(3) *M’ng’aro*, Shining, is the same in the duration of its ceremonies as the Gawe. It receives its name from the fact that the candidates are entirely smeared with clay, which gives them a weird appearance.

(4) *Kirao* lasts for the same period as the Gawe and M’ng’aro. In this dance the bodies of the initiated are reeking with oil. They vie with one another in the amount of their fees, and the one who surpasses his companions is entrusted with the keeping of the ritual drum peculiar to this class—a long bamboo closed at the end with a tight skin, and beaten rhythmically with a pounding motion upon the ground. This drum they call their *musichana*, or “young woman.”⁹⁷

This is by far the most complex—if, however, not the most detailed—account of the transition between Nyere and Kambi status. Recall from the accounts of Krapf and New (and the extensive discussion of Mung’aro in Chapter 2) that until this point it is only the third ritual in Taylor’s sequence, “M’ng’aro,” which is described as effecting the initiation into the Kambi. The first, “Gawe,”—“the Distribution or Partition” (from *kugawa*, to divide or separate)—involves exposure to the “Mwandza Mkulu,” the *Mwanza* drum described in Section 3.2.1. The initiator is called “M’kuzi,” which Taylor glosses as “Initiator of the Greater Mysteries,” but which Krapf and Rebmann’s *Nika-English Dictionary* defines (in Chidigo, however, not Kigiryama) “*mukusi*” as “Mwegnie lumfo [= *luvoo*, the ivory armllet described earlier], one who has received the lumfo.”⁹⁸

Taylor states that the showing of the *mwanza* to the Nyere initiates is called “Ku-tsindza rigo,” which he translates as “flay the great skin,” but marks his own uncertainty about this translation with a question mark in parentheses. The primary meaning of “*kutsindza*” is “to

⁹⁷ Ibid. 44.

⁹⁸ Krapf and Rebmann, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 282.

slaughter (as with an animal),” which is how Taylor himself glosses it, along with “cut,” “flay,” “skin,” and “slit.” The meaning of “rigo,” however, is unclear. It appears nowhere else in Taylor’s *Vocabulary*, nor does it appear in any other dictionary. Two possibilities suggest themselves. The first is that “rigo” is a typographical error for “ringo,” which Taylor took to mean “Great Skin.”⁹⁹ The other possibility is that Taylor heard “rigo” for *rika*, which would be an unusual slip-up from so careful a linguist. But “*kutsindza rika*,” to cut a *rika*, is the idiomatic expression for the purpose attributed to this series of rituals in later oral histories. That is, cutting (or in Cynthia Brantley’s preferred translation, “trimming”) a *rika*—in this case the generation-set comprising the several shorter age-sets listed above—meant initiating the members of that *rika* as a cohort into Kambi status. All those born subsequently would be initiated into *marika* age-sets within a new Nyere generation set until it came time to initiate that Nyere *rika* into the Kambi. This would also accord well with the name of this stage of the ritual process, *Gawe*, the division or separation, in Taylor’s words, of “those who may and those who may not wear the full-sized loin cloth,” the *kitambi* insignia of Kambi status.

The second phase of the initiation, *Sayo ra K’oma*, Taylor translates as “the Clapping of the Shades,” but this seems questionable. “*Sayo*” appears to have no direct translation.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere in the *Vocabulary*, we find “Clapping-dance, *sayo* (clapping the thighs with the hands [?]).”¹⁰¹ The bracketed question mark is, again, Taylor’s. “*Koma*,” however, are venerated ancestral spirits, to whom small offerings of palm wine are occasionally made.

⁹⁹ From *kingo*, a hide or skin, but taking a *ri-* augmentative prefix. Taylor offers “ku-tsindza k’ingo” as the Kigiryama gloss for “(to) Skin” elsewhere in the *Vocabulary*. Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 92.

¹⁰⁰ “To clap” is “*kupiga makofi*,” literally to hit palms, and there is no verb “*kusaya*” from which the nominal form “*sayo*” might be derived.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 25.

Krapf and Rebmann's dictionary does contain an entry for "sayo" which, despite its brevity—"Sayo, *n.* (m). *See* Mbala; Moro; Ingirira. Ku piga sayo ra boso."—points us toward a more nuanced understanding of this phase of initiation than Taylor's.¹⁰² First, note that they give "kupiga sayo ra boso" as the gloss, rather than "sayo ra koma." In his journal entry for 18 February 1849, Krapf records that "to-day the Wanika celebrated their Boso festival, or the festival of the young people, who come to the Kaya to dance, shout, eat, and carouse. This time, however, not many children came."¹⁰³ Recall that "festival of children" is how Krapf described the "Wagnaro" [=Mung'aro] in his journal of 30 January 1845.¹⁰⁴ Krapf and Rebmann's dictionary, however, defines "boso" as follows: "*Boso ni gnire-ku dzanga uchi ku va Kambi. Hivo mbere machira ga ndzala. Wali wa Kisiwani yuere akilafia boso, aka-a-va Anika*" ("Boso is the Nyere [young men] collecting palm wine to give to the Kambi. Previously in times of famine [literally, "hunger" (*ndzala*)]. The Ruler of the Island [=Mombasa] would offer *boso*, and give [it] to the Wanika").¹⁰⁵

Boso, in this understanding, refers in the first instance to a combined contribution by the Nyere to the Kambi as part of the "fees" paid by the young men for their initiation. "Sayo ra Boso" would thus be the Sayo ritual of making the gift payment of palm wine to the elders to begin the initiation. There is also, however, a syntactically ambiguous reference to past periods of hunger, and to gifts to the Mijikenda peoples from the "Ruler of the Island [of Mombasa]." This gift is also referred to as *boso*, apparently. Assistance in the form of food loans in exchange for pawned kin will be essential to the understanding of a 1945 *Mumiani* "bloodsucker" panic, analyzed in the

¹⁰² Krapf and Rebmann, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 340.

¹⁰³ Krapf, *Travels*, 166.

¹⁰⁴ CMS, CMS/B/OMS/CA5/M1, "Reverend Doctor Krapf's Journal January 30, 1845," Mission Book 1844–1846, 590–591.

¹⁰⁵ Krapf and Rebmann, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 17. Translation mine.

following chapter. For the time being, however, simply note the association of such (or similar) payments in times of famine with a phase of initiation from youth to adulthood.

Finally, Krapf and Rebmann's entry for "*Sayo*" points to an important gendered dimension of the ritual, and may help to clear up some of the confusion that emerged in the previous chapter around the participation of women in the transition of Nyere men into the Kambi. "*Mbala*," to which the reader of the dictionary is referred by the "*Sayo*" entry is described as a female antelope, and "*kulungu*" a male antelope.¹⁰⁶ I note this because the entry for "*Mbala*" also includes the only known record from this period of the (reported) words of the song sung during *Sayo*:

*"Kulungu wadamfua ni mbala,
be nawe wadamfua ni muche"* "Eland was carried off by Bushbuck,
as you, you are carried off by a woman"¹⁰⁷

The significance of the tropic figuration of the initiates as being like the male Eland taken away by the female Bushbuck becomes clearer when we note that under "*Moro*" (*Moro*, recall from the discussion in Section 3.2.1, above, is the ritual enclosure at the center of the Kaya, and the preserve of the highest-ranking elders), Krapf and Rebmann claim that "*Ka-va-fiogua ni ache; ela dziku ya sayo ndo ache na ahoho afikavo moroni. Dziku hio ndo arivo na ruhusa ya kuingira moroni*" ("It is not trod upon by women; but on the day of *sayo* is when women and children arrive inside the *moro*. On that day they have permission to enter inside the *moro*").¹⁰⁸ Finally, "*Ingirira*," ("to intervene/interfere" or "to follow into"), the last of the referrals from the "*Sayo*" entry contains

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 245. *Mbala* and *Kulungu* are different species of spiral-horned antelope (Bushbuck and Eland, respectively), but the entry clarifies: "*Ka va na kulungu muche wala kavana mbala mulume*" ("There is no female Eland, neither is there a male Bushbuck"). Translation mine.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 259. Translation mine.

the following example: “*Atu akifuina sayo moroni, basi hara ache akaingirira alumeao*” (“When people are dancing *sayo* in the *moro*, then those women follow their men in”).¹⁰⁹

Not only, then, is this (apparently) the only male initiation ritual that involved the participation of women and children, it was the only occasion of any sort on which women and children enter the *moro* enclosure without their husband or father incurring a fine of “a goat with two horns.”¹¹⁰ And although Krapf and Rebmann’s (presumably male) informants describe the situation during the performance of *sayo* as one of “permission” (*ruhusa*), it seems less that women are “permitted” so much as they are required for its successful execution: To bring this phase of the initiation to a close, the female “Bushbucks” must “carry away, as plunder or booty” the male “Elands.”¹¹¹ Note the resonances here with H. M. T. Kayamba’s version of the Digo origin story presented in Chapter One in which, at the conclusion of the law-founding *mung’aro*, the men, disguised with clay, were brought back to the settlements to be identified by their wives, accompanied by the payment of a goat.¹¹²

Taylor’s third phase, “*M’ng’aro*,” was treated at length in the previous chapter. Here I only note that he, too, repeats a version of the disguise motif, stating that the ritual takes its name, “Shining,” from “the fact that the candidates are entirely smeared with clay, which gives them a weird appearance.”¹¹³ This seems slightly incongruous, however, given the dull or matte appearance such clay disguises would soon take on, especially in comparison to the appearance of initiates in his description of the fourth and final phase of the ritual transition, *Kirao*. “In this

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 132. Translation mine.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 259. Translation mine.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 33.

¹¹² Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” 81.

¹¹³ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44.

dance,” Taylor writes, “the bodies of the initiated are reeking with oil.”¹¹⁴ The oil, in this case, is castor oil, *mafuha ga mbono*, which he notes elsewhere, “is used as a cosmetic.”¹¹⁵ The initiates “vie with each other in the amount of their fees” in a competitive display of wealth, “and the one who surpasses his companions is entrusted with the keeping of the ritual drum peculiar to this class.”¹¹⁶

This drum, referred to as *musichana* (“girl” or “young woman”) is attested nowhere else in the nineteenth century literature, but is described as “a long bamboo closed at one end with a tight skin, and beaten rhythmically with a pounding motion upon the ground.”¹¹⁷ This is conceivably a mimetic performance of pounding grain with a mortar and pestle, a prototypically female activity, but it is difficult to say given the level of detail in this description. Such ritualized mimetic inversion is not uncommon during the liminal phases of such *rites de passage* (Van Gennep 1961 [1909], Turner 1969), and would not be out of place in a ritual sequence which, as seen in the previous chapter, involved the creation, wearing, and then disposal of replicas of women’s clothing as part of the process of ritually turning boys into men.

At the conclusion of the *Gawe—Sayo ra K’oma—M’ng’aro—Kirao* ritual sequence,

The man has now become free of the—

SECOND DEGREE, the K’ambi. He may assume the luwoo, or armlet denoting status, at the Nyambura dance, and sit in the M’oro, or Parliament, where at first he is usually content to listen to his elders, and learn the tricks of rhetoric.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 108. See also: Krapf, *Travels*, 146; New, *Life*, 126–7.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44. See also the entries for “Armlet” (on page 8) and “Festival” (page 40).

This is the first specification of the name of the ritual—“Nyambura”—in which members of the Kambi are invested with a *luvoo* ivory armlet. Elsewhere in the *Vocabulary*, under “Feast,” Taylor describes “*nyambura*” as “solemn,” but also notes, somewhat confusingly, that “the word may be used of any large entertainment,” with no further elaboration in terms of a description of the ritual itself.¹¹⁹

Krapf and Rebmann’s dictionary entry for “Niambura” directs the reader to “Chumba,” the primary meaning of which is, according to them, “an enclosure; a small space enclosed; a small room ... the particularized and diminutive form of Niumba [=“Nyumba”], a kind of house.”¹²⁰ But they go on to specify a second usage:

Chumba cha Govu, The temporary enclosure of the *Góvu* company, made of sticks and palm leaves, without any roof. Men and women have each a separate one, in which, during the festival called *Niambura*, they are for a certain time entirely excluded from all intercourse with others. *Mutu akithura, ndo vahendwavo chumba cha alume, na cha ache; kuani-akisagala niumbani, andaguirua ni vidio* [When a person advances, there is made a men’s enclosure and a women’s enclosure; for if they stay at home they will be seized by *vidio* (=vito)].¹²¹

Before turning to the question of what “the *Góvu* company” might be, it is worth noting first that although “*Niambura*” [=*Nyambura*] is, here, the name of a “festival,” the verb for the action that this festival achieves is *ku-thura*:

(1) to receive the crowning honours on being promoted from a *mumondo* to a *govu*. The individual concerned wears a crown made of clay, but highly decorated, and, as the completion of the honours bestowed on him, receives on his right arm the *lumfo*, which he wears ever afterwards. See *Niambura*. *Ku thura ni ku bumua lumfo. Ka dza thura iye, yuchari mumondo* [To advance is to have a *luvoo* put on. He has not advanced, that one, he is still a *mumondo*]. ...

(2) Fig., to be at an end. Only used of war. This application of the word refers to the circumstance that, after the *Ku thura*, a man ceases to make contributions to the *govu*.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 40.

¹²⁰ Krapf and Rebmann, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 30.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* Italics added.

¹²² *Ibid.* 360. Italics added.

The “crown made of clay, but highly decorated” immediately recalls earlier descriptions of *mung’aro* and the elaborate clay disguises or headdresses it was supposed to have involved. A later account, drawing on interviews with Kaya elders in the mid-1980s, would state that, rather than clay, “on their heads the men wore conical or cylindrical crowns made from [a paste of] millet flour. Sometimes the crowns were smeared with red ochre over which were painted black and white patterns. Palm leaves were notched to resemble feathers and were stuck in the crowns.”¹²³ This is a remarkably accurate description of the conical structures on the heads of a number of Kaya elders in a series of portraits from the early 1950s by the white settler, conservationist, and painter Joy Adamson, the negatives of which are in the archival collection of the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi (see Figures 3.5, 3.6, and 3.8). There is, unfortunately, no accompanying text or information about the circumstances under which the highly posed photographs were taken apart from the popularized and embellished yarns and folksy reminiscences of her later coffee table book, *The Peoples of Kenya*.

That *ku-thura* can also, according to Krapf and Rebmann, “figuratively” mean to end a war highlights both the antagonistic relationship of juniors to elders within the gerontocratic hierarchy, in which elders at higher ranks are reported as demanding exorbitant “fees” from their juniors in the form of meat, grain, and palm wine, before those juniors may themselves become *mudzovi*, “drinkers.”¹²⁴ The *amondo* (plural of *mumondo*), are the “herd-boys” (*arisa*, literally, “feeders”) of the *Govu*, according to Krapf and Rebmann’s informants, and “sit neither on chair nor woven

¹²³ E. Orchardson-Mazrui, “Expressing Power and Status through Aesthetics in Mijikenda Society,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 11:1 (1998), 91.

¹²⁴ Krapf and Rebmann, *Nika-English Dictionary*, 269.

mat; they sit on the ground, in the dirt itself.”¹²⁵ But it also points to the conceptual counterpart to the advancement or promotion in its primary meaning: the termination or completion of the prior state—and, in the phrase provided by their informants, the need for a ritual moment to achieve both termination and transition: “*Viha vidzithura, kakuna utu kaviri, atu adzeria dzoga*” (“When a war ends [*thura*], there is no problem anymore, people make blood-brotherhood [literally, “eat scars”]).”¹²⁶ In this regard it is interesting to note that *Nyambura*—the name of the ritual of promotion to “the Góvu company and investiture with a *luvoo*, recall—is also the name both of mortuary ritual among the Pokomo (who neighbor the Giriama to the North) at which a friction drum that resembles the *Mwanza* is played, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, marriage among the Mijikenda peoples before the Arabic-derived “*harusi*” replaced it.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ibid. 286. “*Kasagala kihini wala lukasani; yusagaldzi, mudzangani wegnie.*” Translation mine.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Translation mine, but see also Parkin, *Sacred Void*, 180; and T. J. Herlehy, “An Economic History of the Kenya Coast: The Mijikenda Coconut Palm Economy, ca. 1800–1980,” (unpublished PhD thesis, Boston University, 1985), 143.

¹²⁷ C. Denhardt and G. Denhardt, “Bemerkungen zur Originalkarte des unteren Tana-Gebietes,” *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1884), 149–51; W. von St. Paul-Hilaire, “Ueber die Rechtsgewohnheiten der im Bezirk Tanga ansässigen Farbigen,” in F. von Danckelman (ed.), *Mitteilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten, Achter Band* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1895), 200–204; A. Werner, “A Pokomo Funeral,” *Man* 13 (1913), 66–8; A. H. J. Prins, *The Coastal Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu (Pokomo, Nyika, Teita)* (London: International African Institute, 1952), 68–9; H. M. T. Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” 86.



Image 3.5: Portrait of an unnamed Kaya Chonyi elder with conical “crown” (of either clay or millet flour paste) and notched palm fronds, shoulder cloth, medicine bag, staff, and stool of rank. Joy Adamson Photograph Collection, National Museums of Kenya Archive (NMKA), Nairobi, Kenya. “High Priest of the Kaya Chonyi, I, 1952”



Image 3.6: Portrait of Chonyi elder Mwyembora, wearing a conical “crown” of either clay or millet flour paste and notched palm fronds, with staff, shoulder cloth, and bag of medicines marking his status. Joy Adamson Photograph Collection, NMKA. “High Priest of the Kaya Chonyi, II, 1952.”

Second, related to these two alternate meanings of the term “*nyambura*,” note that *vitio*—which is said to afflict those who remain at home during *nyambura*—also refers to the afflictions that result from the violation of either post-mortuary taboos or the taboos governing the proximity and of individuals within a homestead (including, but not limited to, the incest taboo) and their spatially appropriate actions (who may enter whose house, for example).¹²⁸ These afflictions include, according to Parkin, “vomiting, diarrhoea, the inability to produce children or to give birth successfully, and by eventual death if untreated. It spreads to people living within the same homestead or close neighbourhood, mainly but not exclusively among agnates, and threatens to annihilate a line of descent.”¹²⁹ Reading back into the passage from Krapf and Rebmann, then, one can see that on the occasion of an individual’s investiture with a *luvoo* and induction into “the Góvu company,” a ritual condition of, as it were, heightened security is generated against the possibility of violating taboos normally operative within the homestead or kin group, but which have been momentarily generalized and extended to the broader community. During *nyambura* there is a male ritual enclosure and a female ritual enclosure, and those who remain hidden in the domestic spheres of their respective homes, beyond the compass of public ritual, will be “seized by *vitio*.” *Nyambura* would thus seem to be the name of the ritual of induction into “the Góvu company,” but also to a class of rituals that mediate the passage of individuals from one social status to another (living/dead, unmarried/married, *mumondo/govu*), during performances of which risk of transgression resulting in *vitio* is heightened.

¹²⁸ D. Parkin, *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual among the Giriama of Kenya*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 137–8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Finally, it is interesting to note that early ethnographers and missionaries of the Kikuyu peoples of Central Kenya—including Hobley (1910), Routledge and Routledge (1910), Cagnolo (1933), Kenyatta (1964 [1938]), Leakey (1977 [1938]), and Benson (1964)—report a cognate ritual, *Ma(a)mbura* with a similarly broad definition. For the early colonial administrator C. W. Hobley, *Mambura* is a “feast” or “festival” which “precedes circumcision” of both men and women, who are either “smeared with red or grey paint, and in some cases were picked out with star-like patterns,” or “smeared with red ochre and oil” (see Image 3.7).¹³⁰ For amateur ethnographers William and Katherine Routledge, it is the “dancing prior to initiation” in which “a boy should be painted in a particular manner ... in which it will never found to be wanting, that is, the ornamentation of the limbs and abdomen with an indentated pattern in a white pigment,” and “his head is shaved, with the exception of one tuft on the centre of the crown, and painted like the body.”¹³¹ The Catholic missionary C. Cagnolo, by contrast, records a rather different understanding of *mambura*, namely the ceremonial performance of sexual intercourse on one of three ritual occasions, each of which marks the conclusion of a phase of the larger ritual process in which they are embedded: at the end of a “second-birth” ritual, a circumcision ritual, and a marriage.¹³²

¹³⁰ C. W. Hobley, “British East Africa: Kikuyu Customs and Beliefs: Thahu and its Connection with Circumcision Rites,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 40 (1910), 442.

¹³¹ W. S. Routledge and K. Routledge. *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa, being some account of the method of life and mode of thought found existent amongst a nation on its first contact with European civilization* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), 156.

¹³² C. Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu, their Customs, Traditions, and Folklore* (Nyeri: Mission Printing School, 1933), 84, 91, 113; quoted in B. Bernardi, “Old Kikuyu Religion Igongona and Mambura: Sacrifice and Sex Re-reading Kenyatta’s Ethnography,” *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* 48:2 (1993), 178.

In a text largely written by 1938 but published only posthumously in 1977, L. S. B. Leakey describes “*mũũmbũro*” simply as a dance performed by initiation candidates before their heads were shaved their “neck and chest anointed with red ochre mixed with castor oil.”¹³³ The ritual intercourse between the elder hosting the initiation at his homestead and his wife in the presence of both male and female initiates who “all had to pretend to go to sleep and be absolutely silent,” is referred to euphemistically as a “sacrifice” (*igogona*) that was “of vital importance to the welfare of all the ‘children’ (i.e. the initiates) of the *mũrithia* [initiation host] and his wife.”¹³⁴ Interestingly, Jomo Kenyatta, London School of Economics-trained Anthropologist and future first President of independent Kenya, “*igogona* (sing.) [‘sacrifice’] is the only Gikuyu word which can possibly be translated as religion although *mambura* (lit. the sacred) is practically synonym with it.”¹³⁵ Finally, T. G. Benson’s dictionary entry from the mid-1960s for *Maambura* contains the following:

1. Ceremonial accompanying certain “rites of passage”; sacred rituals (including coition between the father and the mother of the homestead concerned) connected with the normal events of family life, birth, second birth, puberty, initiation, circumcision, marriage, performed under the direction of senior elders or old women...
2. (N.K.)[=“New Kikuyu”] Dance of young men and women, boys and girls, on the day before circumcision...
3. Menstrual period (during which none of the above rites could be performed); *ona* —, menstruate.”¹³⁶

It would therefore seem that the “*nyambura*” of the Mijikenda peoples and the “*mambura*” of the Kikuyu peoples are not only lexical cognates, but practical and conceptual cognates as well.

¹³³ L. S. B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903, Volume II* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 612.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 629.

¹³⁵ Kenyatta, J. *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (New York: Vintage, 1965 [1938]), 233; quoted in Bernardi, “Old Kikuyu Religion,” 174.

¹³⁶ T. G. Benson, *Kikuyu-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 9, quoted in Bernardi, “Old Kikuyu Religion,” 177.

What I mean is this: While earlier historical efforts either to demonstrate a northern origin for the Mijikenda peoples or the historical relatedness of the Mijikenda peoples and Central Kenya Bantu speakers have relied on historical linguistic evidence (recall the discussion of Spear and others in Chapter Two), what I am highlighting here is something more like a ritual or conceptual archive. Or, if one prefers, something like David Schoenbrun’s “durable bundles of meaning and practice.”¹³⁷ If we suspend for a moment the question of geographical origins and linear historical connections, we may note that for both the precolonial Mijikenda and the (at the latest) early colonial Kikuyu, ritual sexual intercourse, male and female initiation, wedding rituals (including the consummation of a new marriage), “feasts” and “festivals,” red ochre and white clay, castor oil, dance, visual secrecy, and a potentially polluting sacrality all seem to “go together” in much the same way. They “go together,” moreover, in a way that does not seem to depend for its unity on the stability of the relationship between sign and referent, linguistic form and semantic content. Missionaries (especially those involved in the “reduction” of local languages to writing and codification in dictionaries like those I have been examining in this chapter), colonial administrators, and early ethnographers were often, in different ways and to varying degrees, involved in projects guided by an Enlightenment linguistic ideology of denotation, reference, and functional equivalence: *this-word-“means”-that-thing*.¹³⁸ Hence the maddening proliferation of

¹³⁷ D. L. Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” *American Historical Review* 111:5 (2006), 1438.

¹³⁸ On “linguistic ideologies,” see M. Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in P. R. Clyne, W. F. Hanks, and C. L. Hofbauer (eds.) *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1979), 193–247; A. Rumsey, “Word, Meaning, and Linguistic Ideology,” *American Anthropologist* 92:2 (1990), 346–61; and the essays collected in B. Schieffelin, K. Woolard, and P. Kroskrity (eds.) *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

contradictory laundry-lists of terms denoting statuses, ranks, rituals, grades, orders, degrees, and titles in the historical record. But as I hope has been clear so far, the point in reviewing these so exhaustively has not been to try to identify which term “really” referred to which status or *rite de passage* where and when—Habasi? Góvu? Mung’aro? Kirao?—but rather to highlight the consistency in the form of materials, practices, and more general abiding concerns that they index.

The consistency of these forms—if not the consistency of the form of their ritual assemblage—across Central Kenyan Kikuyu and Coastal Mijikenda societies, moreover, is also highly suggestive, if also relatively unexplored (especially when compared with the historical linguistic data) *ritual* evidence of a historical connection between the language and culture of the two peoples—if not of the people themselves, in a genetic or genealogical sense—like that posited (in various ways) by the scholars whose work was addressed in Chapter Two. It is thus also consistent with the entirely plausible hypothesis proposed by Walsh (2014), which sees the Segeju/Dhaiso peoples as the “culture-bearers,” as it were, of this “durable bundle of meaning and practice” from the Upper Tana River to the southern Kenya coast. To be clear, I am not arguing that the Kikuyu *mambura* and Mijikenda *nyambura* were the “same” ritual, or that the red and white decorations of initiates at a *mambura* (pictured in Image 3.7) “mean” the same thing—have the same ritual significance—as the red and white decorations of the Kaya Kambe elder posed in the regalia of *nyambura* in Image 3.8. I *am* arguing that it is not random or coincidental, however. Meaning is contextual and resides in use. But ritual, material, and lexical forms may be more “durable” than the stability of their “meaning” across contexts and over time.



Image 3.7: “[Kikuyu] Warriors at the [*Mambura*] Feast, Showing Ornamentation,” from Hobley 1910, Plate XXX. Compare the red and white spotted decorations to those of the unnamed Kaya Kambe elder pictured in Image 3.8.



Image 3.8: Portrait of unnamed Kaya Kambe elder wearing mask of thorns, conical “crown” of clay or millet flour paste, red ochre and white clay body paint, wrist charms, and shoulder cloth of office, with forked staff. Joy Adamson Photographic Collection, NMKA. “Kaya Kambe High Priest, 1952.”

Let me now turn to the final paragraphs of Taylor's entry for "Freemasonry." Because he makes no mention of the "Govu company" raised by Krapf and Rebmann in their discussion of the *Niambura* ritual, I would like simply to flag it here as something that will become important to later understandings of Mijikenda—and especially Giriama—"secret societies" in the twentieth century. For the moment I want to stay with Taylor, and will return to address "*Govu*" or "*Gohu*" in the context of early twentieth-century anthropological and colonial administrative texts in Chapter Four.

Having completed the *Gawe—Sayo ra K'oma—M'ng'aro—Kirao* ritual sequence, and possibly also the *Nyambura* "dance," and thus as a man of K'ambi rank or status, a man's "ambition," Taylor writes,

is to become a member of the Azhere, Elders. These are—

(1) *Waya*, or Circle of the Elders. These may deliberate on smaller judicial questions in their own district (lalo), but are really nothing more than a convivial club. They are privileged during their sittings with inviolability of person, and then may confiscate any goat, fowl, or ox that comes in their way, or any beer or food of any description, if so minded. They carry such articles off to their bandari—the *Waya* clubhouse of their district. They even confine persons who intrude upon them until the offenders can ransom themselves; and no one who is introduced to them is allowed to salute them, nor do they salute one another in the ordinary manner. In the woods their drunken howlings often make night and day hideous, and altogether the people are becoming tired of them, as they daily grow less useful to the state.

(2) The *Fisi*, "Hyena"—the Inner Circle of all, and very select. The chief of the Azhere a *Fisi-ni*, is the M'kuzi (see under *Gawe*, above). The members of the Hyena inspire great terror, as they are the depositories of the most potent spells and oracles.

The Enye-ts'i, Possessors of the Land, are the three elders that govern Giriama and judge the land. They are chosen in rotation from the last two classes, according to their succession in circumcision. These retain power during the interval between one circumcision and another. They can convene the M'oro, or general assembly of the K'ambi.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44–5.

“*Waya*,” “*Fisi*,” and “*Enye-ts’i*.” Let me open these terms up in reverse order, beginning with “*Enye-ts’i*,” the “Possessors of the Land.” Recall from the discussion of the “circumcision cycle” and *marika* “age-sets” above that Taylor glosses “*enye-ts’i*” as “Great Chief,” and claims that three are chosen from each “circumcision cycle.”¹⁴⁰ Based on the structure of this entry, they do not seem to have been members of the *Waya* or *Fisi*. Rather, they are chosen from “the last two classes” (presumably what he had earlier referred to as “degrees”), namely *Habasi* and *Kambi*.

This is the first clear indication that, for Taylor, the system of “circumcision cycles” is related in a formalized, structural way to the system of initiation into esoteric knowledge he calls “freemasonry.” It is unclear how the three individual *enye-t’si* are “chosen,” although the resonance with Kayamba’s later (ca. 1920s) description of a tripartite chiefship established among the precolonial Digo of northeast Tanganyika after the mythic first *Mung’aro* is perhaps significant.¹⁴¹ For Kayamba, recall, there was a territorial aspect to this form of chiefship as well (in that “each village” had three), although he did not refer to them explicitly as “*enyetsi*.” Taylor describes the *enye-ts’i* as “retain[ing] power during the interval between one circumcision and another,” but it is unclear what this power consists of, apart from the ability to “convene the M’oro, or general assembly of the K’ambi.”¹⁴² Kayamba’s three chiefs “periodically sat together at the council and judged the Wadigo with the assistance of the village elders,” but Taylor does not explain what “power” the *enye-ts’i* held or exercised.

This contrasts dramatically with the *Fisi*, the “Inner Circle of all,” the “chief” of whom was the *M’kuzi*, the initiator responsible for overseeing the initiation of *Habasi* (or *Nyere*) into *Kambi*.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 24, 25. But interestingly, his primary glosses for “Chief” are “*mutumia*” and “*muzhere*,” both of which are better translated simply as “old man” or “elder.”

¹⁴¹ Kayamba, “Notes on the Wadigo,” 81. See Chapter Two.

¹⁴² Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 45.

Although the *Fisi* elders “inspire great terror,” according to Taylor, “as they are the repositories of the most potent spells and oracles,” he does not elaborate on this important claim.¹⁴³ Here Krapf and Rebmann’s dictionary once again sheds some light, pointing in a direction that can only fully be addressed in the following chapter: “Oathing.” “*Fisi*,” as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, means “Hyena.” But it can also refer to what was understood in the twentieth century as a particularly deadly form of what is typically, but misleadingly, translated into English as “oath.” These terms (*kiravo* [= *chirapho*] in Mijikenda, *kiapo* in Swahili) refer to a range of ritual objects and procedures used to detect guilty or lying parties in disputes where other evidence is either unavailable or unconvincing. As ritually produced objects they may be either displayed or hidden on one’s property either as a deterrent to thieves and witches, or to afflict such trespassers with illness or death that publicly identifies them as a trespasser.

Note that the “*Kiravo cha fisi*” appears in Krapf and Rebmann’s entry for “*Fisi*” between its primary meaning, “the hyena,” and a Mijikenda proverb: “*Fisi rikiria mukongo, nawe muzima sindika niumba to*” (“If a hyena is eating a sick person and you are healthy, just shut your home”). The dictionary lists a number of *viravo* (pl.): “*Kiravo cha kidudu*” (“Oath of the small insect”), “*Kiravo cha ndogoe*” (“Oath of the shellfish”), “*Kiravo cha bahasi*” (“Oath of the *bahasi* [= *habasi*?]”), “*Kiravo cha msengeneko*,” “*Kiravo cha muansa wa ache*” (“Oath of the women’s *mwanza*”), “*Kiravo cha safura*,” and finally “*Kiravo cha fisi*,” (“Oath of the Hyena”).¹⁴⁴ Of the *Kiravo cha Fisi*, Krapf and Rebmann say the following: “The *kiravo* of the hyena was so called because the 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

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 157, 178, 290.

Musafuma [*sic*, =*Musafura*, *safura*].”¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, given the fear that, the *fisi* oath was said (in the twentieth-century sources) to have inspired, Krapf and Rebmann claim that by the late nineteenth century it was no longer believed to be effective and had been “superseded” by a new form. Elsewhere, they note that the *kiravo cha fisi* had itself superseded the older *kiravo cha kidudu*. While Krapf and Rebmann present a range of contemporary oaths (with little sense of a hierarchy of prestige, danger, etc.), we do get a sense (uncommon in individual early documentary sources but perceptible in their differences when taken as a set) of ritual innovation, attributed to changes in the perceived efficacy of existing forms.

With the “*Waya*, or Circle of Elders,” Taylor’s description of Mijikenda “Freemasonry,” returns us to the “*M’fia*” of Playfair, the “*Mfaya*” of Burton, and the “*Mvaya*” of New. For Playfair, recall, “the whole power lies in the hand of the elders” who make up the *M’fia*.¹⁴⁶ Burton has little to say about the “*Mfaya*” except that it is the third and “highest” rank, with exclusive right to operate the *Mwanza* friction drum.¹⁴⁷ For New, however, the *Mvaya* was analogous to a “House of Lords” in the “strange mixture of Monarchy, Constitutionalism, and Republicanism” that he claimed characterized the system of government of the Mijikenda-speaking hinterland peoples (which he also found to be “not an easy matter to define.”¹⁴⁸ For Taylor, by contrast, although these elders “may deliberate on smaller judicial questions in their own district (lalo),” they are “really nothing more than a convivial club.”¹⁴⁹ In his own translation of local practice to English legal concepts, the *Mvaya* are “privileged during their sittings with inviolability of person,” under

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 178.

¹⁴⁶ Playfair, “Visit to the Wanika Country,” 276.

¹⁴⁷ Burton, *Zanzibar*, 90–1.

¹⁴⁸ New, *Life*, 107.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44–5.

penalty of confiscation of livestock, food, or drink, or of detention of violators pending their ability to pay a ransom (likely in the form, again, of livestock, food, or palm wine).¹⁵⁰

Taylor also mentions the “drunken howlings” of these elders in “the woods,” which “often make night and day hideous.”¹⁵¹ This was a consistent aesthetic and moral evaluation of elder male ritual practice by missionaries during the nineteenth century. Such figures regarded the influence of these old men—maintained, according to Krapf, “by superstition and sensual practices,” recall—as one of the most significant obstacles to widespread conversion. But the passage from Taylor includes an additional characterization of popular attitudes toward the *Vaya* that is worth noting, and which perhaps suggests changing attitudes toward these elder councils corresponding to a more general social transformation, described below, that was already well underway: “Altogether,” he writes, “the people are becoming tired of them, as they daily grow less useful to the state.”¹⁵²

3.3—CAPITALIZATION, SEGMENTATION, AND COLONIZATION

Having described nineteenth-century cultural practices and their variants in historiographical terms, I turn now to the political and economic context in which these practices (and their transformation) was situated. In the second half of the nineteenth century the Mijikenda-speaking peoples of the coastal hinterland (and especially the Giriama with whom Taylor was most familiar) underwent a dramatic process of geographical dispersion, demographic expansion, and tighter incorporation into increasingly capitalized regional and global markets.¹⁵³ As the century wore on,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 45.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” *passim*; Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 81–105.

new sources of political and economic power began to displace and transform older ones anchored to the gerontocratic and lineal control of the protective objects and substances at the heart of the Kayas. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, “access to credit and foreign markets became a key mechanism by which particularly shrewd and well-placed men acquired the wealth to attract large followings of clients and firearms to protect and empower them.”¹⁵⁴ At the same time, an expanding market for grain, palm wine, and caravan commodities and the development of plantation agriculture meant that senior male control of the labor of junior kin took on new significance. Established practices like the pawning of junior kin to Swahili and Arab Mombasans for food in times of drought increasingly took the form of something more like enslavement.¹⁵⁵ Slave raiding in the coastal hinterland was on the rise during this period as well, and the paths connecting settled areas became increasingly threatening spaces of potential abduction and enslavement.¹⁵⁶

What I am describing is the rise of *extraversion*—a looking outward for new, more powerful entities with which to cultivate asymmetrical relationships as a way of bolstering power locally—as a viable political and economic strategy in a system already structured by relations of patronage and dependency.¹⁵⁷ Within that system, struggles for opportunity and control over production had formerly been organized around a tension between the ritual objects and proprietary knowledge that anchored power locally under the control of established senior men

¹⁵⁴ J. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (London: James Currey, 1995), 47.

¹⁵⁵ Spear, *The Kaya Complex*, 100; J. L. Krapf, *Memoir on the East African Slave Trade* (Wien: Afro-Pub, 2002 [1853]).

¹⁵⁶ Willis, *Mombasa*, 74.

¹⁵⁷ J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009 [1989]).

and the fission of these units into smaller homesteads under the leadership of ambitious men. What is described in older histories of the Mijikenda as a fundamental transformation from a longstanding, centralized “*kaya* complex” (Spear 1978) to a more dispersed pattern of residence and social organization may be understood, in these terms, as the increasing tendency to realize one of a number of possibilities within the political grammar of coastal hinterland society. In this respect it is not unlike Tswana society as described by John Comaroff (1980, 1982) and Jean Comaroff (1985).

As Justin Willis (1996, 2009), Richard Helm (2004) and David Bresnahan (2018) have shown, settlement patterns and ritual landscapes of the hinterland were far more complicated than previously appreciated. But with the increased capitalization of East African trade, junior men (and women) increasingly began to look outward, rather than inward, developing a detailed understanding of the hierarchy of intermediary social types that stood between them and distant founts of wealth and power. In his discussion of “the spreading perception [in the Coastal hinterland] that the control of imported commodities was linked to power,” Glassman summarizes the emerging optics of power along the Mriima coast nicely:

The hands that spread the influence of the market were not invisible; East Africans saw plainly who benefitted from the control of commerce. Trading chiefs dominated the countryside in part because of their ties to the Shirazi merchants and Arab state elites who dominated the port towns, and behind the new Omani regime of the coast stood Indian financiers and European consuls.¹⁵⁸

This nineteenth century shift is thus not a fundamental transformation of the basic form of patron-client relations that structured social life on the coast, but rather a general tendency to reorient outward to new, more powerful patrons in a global capitalist order. It was, as Willis points out,

¹⁵⁸ Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 53.

“not the steady breakdown of an established order”—characterized, as I have said, by the immanent tendencies toward centralization and dispersion—“but the continuation of a dispute over what that order should be.”¹⁵⁹

The corollary of this shift of orientation and the rise of extraversion as a key strategy of the “new men” (Packard 1981) of the coastal hinterland was the progressive segmentation and localization of society.¹⁶⁰ These “new men” developed “new ritual forms which emphasized their autonomy and their own authority,” including the creation of new *fingos* to protect new settlements.¹⁶¹ But while the *Kaya fingos* were believed to contain powerful magic substances that had been brought from the quasi-mythical Mijikenda homeland of Singwaya, these new *fingos* are remembered in the present as having involved the live burial of the homestead founder’s sister’s son, or the burial of a pot containing the body parts of the sacrificial victim.¹⁶² The sacrifice of a matrilineal heir created a charm that would, as long as it continued to be propitiated with sacrifices and gifts of palm wine and cloth, protect the land now associated with that matrilineal descent group by virtue of the original sacrifice against outsiders and ensure its ongoing fertility.

As the regional organization of power was slowly turned inside-out, reorienting to streams of commodities and cash flowing in from the Indian Ocean, the ambivalence that characterized attitudes toward those who had formerly secured the means of social reproduction deepened. The *Kambi* and *Vaya* elders continued to serve as ritual and juridical specialists responsible for the ritual delivery of the rain, the timing of the agricultural cycle (including planting and harvests),

¹⁵⁹ Willis, *Mombasa*, 46.

¹⁶⁰ Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 112–22.

¹⁶¹ J. Willis and S. Miers, “Becoming a Child of the House: Incorporation, Authority and Resistance in Giryama Society,” *Journal of African History* 38:3 (1997), 479–95.

¹⁶² INT 3b; INT 41b; INT 42c; INT 54a, b; INT 56b,

and the arbitration of disputes. But as the Mijikenda expanded into new agricultural lands, resentment of centralized control over the timing of planting and harvesting grew, and the “new men” increasingly came to see Kambi and Vaya fees for hearings and “fines” for ritual violations as unnecessary brakes on their own accumulation.¹⁶³ As “local councils of homestead heads usurped the prerogatives of *kaya* elders in the dispensation of justice,” the “ritual power of the *kaya* diminished, and the authority of those elders who controlled the *kaya* declined.”¹⁶⁴

3.4: CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a brief discussion of the Kaya Bombo violence of 1997, highlighting both the importance of local imaginaries of *kaya* forests as sites of ritual importance and the expertise of *kaya* elders in contemporary Mijikenda society. At the same time, the Kaya Bombo episode shows how these attitudes are haunted by the suspicion that *kaya* ritual and *kaya* elders might be “fakes,” and that their fakeness has to do with their association with their possible corruption by money and instrumentalization by politicians. The point of entry into this discussion was the Chidigo shibboleth used during the violence to identify “outsiders”—*Fisi ra kaya? Tarikurya rikakumara*—which also neatly expressed both the ideology of the movement itself (the insatiable hunger of strangers and the need to expel them) and its bleak correlate: That locals will also “eat” you.

From there the chapter turns to the nineteenth-century missionary accounts and dictionaries from which twentieth-century understandings of precolonial Mijikenda political history were derived. The analysis of these texts involved highlighting, again, the differences in their respective

¹⁶³ Ibid. 488.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

descriptions of the specific nature, names, and arrangements of institutions, ranks, rituals, and objects, while at the same time extracting from them a shared set of concerns and orientations that we may interpret as a cultural grammar of politics, power, and violence. The point has not been to claim that, given the inconsistent and contradictory nature of the available sources, the Mijikenda past is unknowable. Rather, it has been to highlight the difficulty of such an endeavor, and to point to a number of problems with simplified models of that past that claim a coherence and systematicity of institutional forms of authority that may not have existed. Neither is it to argue, however, that there was no order at all. Despite the complexity of and difficulties that I have emphasized, I have, at the same time, highlighted the durability and consistency of certain cultural elements.

The chapter concluded, finally, with a descriptive account of the political and economic transformations of the late nineteenth century. I argued that what has been interpreted as the decline of a pre-existing stable gerontocratic order is better understood as an historical tendency toward the increasing realization of one immanent possibility—segmentation, dispersal, extraversion—within a dynamic structural logic. A more dramatic transformation would come, however, at the turn of the century. This moment, with which I begin Chapter Four, was characterized by widespread social, political, and ecological disruptions that included a rebellion by Mbaruk bin Rashid el-Mazrui against the British-Zanzibari alliance in 1895-6, a series of famines (in 1884-5, 1894-6, 1898-1900, 1907-8, 1916-8), rinderpest and trypanosomiasis epizootics, and massive population relocations during World War I (when much of what is now southern Kenya was occupied by German military forces).¹⁶⁵ It was in the wake of this prolonged period of volatility

¹⁶⁵ J. L. Giblin, *Famine, Authority, and the Impact of Foreign Capital in Handeni District, Tanzania, 1840–1940*. Ph. D. diss., University of Wisconsin Madison, 1987.

and chaos that the local councils established in the second half of the nineteenth century would be replaced with a colonial administrative system of “Local Native Councils,” “Local Native Tribunals,” Chiefs, and Headmen. These offices were held by men who had convinced the colonial administration of their legitimacy in “traditional” terms, but who derived whatever power they now wielded from precisely the relationship they had cultivated with their new foreign patrons (in the guise of District Commissioners and District Officers). As the interface between populations newly localized in “Tribal Reserves” and a new foreign patron that demanded its due, village headmen and elders were responsible for both the annual collection of tax and conscription of labor for communal work projects.¹⁶⁶ The rise of extraversion—the shoring up of local power by access to “foreign” sources of wealth and military capability—made it increasingly difficult to discern the *fisi ra kaya* from those whose hunger could not be satisfied.

¹⁶⁶ M. Gluckman, J. C. Mitchell, and J. A. Barnes, “The Village Headman in British Central Africa,” *Africa* 19:2 (1949), 89–106.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RITUAL, ADMINISTRATION, AND AMBIVALENCE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

4.1: INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three, I began with a brief discussion of the Kaya Bombo violence around the 1997 election, and widespread suspicion about both the intentions and capabilities of “outsiders,” on the one hand, and the authenticity and legitimacy of the “Kaya Elder” who had ritually “oathed” the young men who became known as “kaya raiders.” The shibboleth of these armed groups during the violence—*fisi ra kaya/tarikurya rikakumara* (“the hyena of home/it eats you but does not finish you”)—expresses both this fear of “outsiders” (who *do* finish you), but also a kind of resignation about those from “home” (who, although they do not finish you, nevertheless *do* eat). It does so poetically by troping on an older political entity, the *Fisi* elders at the highest level of the gerontocratic order in the nineteenth century with which Chapter Three concluded. The ritual activity of these *Fisi*—who “inspire great terror,” recall, as “the depositories of the most potent spells and oracles,” according to Taylor—was centered in the *Moro* enclosures at the very heart of the *Kaya* settlements.¹ It was these *Fisi ra Kaya*, “Hyenas of the *Kaya*,” who were troped upon in Kaya Bombo’s implicit commentary on late-twentieth century politicians.

Chapter Three reviewed the available nineteenth century documentary accounts of contemporary social organizational forms among the peoples of the coastal hinterland. Rather than try to identify or classify *the* form of government that *the* precolonial Mijikenda had, Chapter

¹ W. E. Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1891), 45.

Three teased out from these sources, first, a broad pattern of concerns or general principles of social organization, like the stratification of male and female populations into a hierarchical arrangement structured by age, generation, wealth, proprietary knowledge, and secrecy. Second, it highlighted the ritual forms that mediated transition from one rank, status, or identity to another within this general schema. Instead of generating a description of a precolonial institutional order from which colonial political forms would be understood as a deviation or degeneration, I chose instead to give a sense of both the variability of local practices over space and time, and the durability of set of general concerns, sensibilities, or “structures of feeling” (Williams 1977) that guided their ongoing transformation. In this sense, the colonial-era changes that are my focus here should be understood not as the demise of a stable political order, but rather as a new phase in efforts to identify such an order, but with different goals.

As I indicated at the end of Chapter Three, the second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by both the demographic and geographic expansion of the people who would become known in the twentieth century as the Mijikenda, as well as by the aggravation of intergenerational tensions between young and old men. On the one hand, access to credit, cash, and commodities flowing in from the Indian Ocean re-oriented young men’s aspirations for wealth, power, and respect away from the gerontocratic hierarchy of the Kaya elders and the ritual techniques and technologies kept hidden by them. On the other hand, the increasing availability of new agricultural land (as the threat of Oromo and Maasai predations gradually receded north and west) and increasingly cheap slave labor for purchase at the coast (as a series of English-Zanzibari treaties restricted the exportation of slaves elsewhere) meant that young men could more easily strike out on their own as “new men” (Packard 1981), develop new ritual and political forms, and seek wealth, power, respectability, and authority outside the framework of the Kayas and the

gerontocratic hierarchy of earlier generations (Willis and Miers 1997). In other words, the sense that power increasingly came from *elsewhere*, rather than radiating outward from the sociological and geographical “Innermost Circles” of coastal hinterland societies, combined with the new availability of land and labor to pose the question of elder male authority in new ways. Under such conditions, what really was the basis of gerontocratic authority? What grounded the claims of old men to the livestock, labor, agricultural surplus, palm wine, and wages of their “dependents? What could justify their power?

In what follows, I argue that the new colonial administration not only inherited this political and economic situation, but these more philosophical problems as well. As I show, the administration’s efforts to identify, codify, rationalize, and support a system of “Native Authorities” was haunted by a sense that these figures lacked legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects. Specifically, the administration believed that their Chiefs, headmen, Local Native Councils, and Local Native Tribunals lacked *ritual* authority. Combined with an “antiquarian historical sense” and quasi-museological attitude toward “culture,” the administration was frequently at pains to oblige senior men to pass on their esoteric knowledge and status to their juniors in public, state-sponsored ritual.² At the same time, however, the fact that the power that backed these newly-minted “Kaya Elders” was clearly felt to be no longer rooted in whatever it had been in the past led to a growing sense that even those contemporary elders authorized by ritual were—somehow—fake, illegitimate, or counterfeit.

² On the “antiquarian historical sense” (as opposed to “monumental” and “critical”), see F. Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss. (Indianapolis, IN, Hackett Publishing, 1980 [1874]).

4.2: INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PROTECTORATE ADMINISTRATION

In 1895 the Imperial British East Africa Company's lease of, and administrative responsibility for, the ten-mile-wide so-called "coastal strip" of land that made up the Kenyan coast, were taken over by the British Government as the East Africa Protectorate. This made residents of the coastal strip British-protected subjects of the Sultan of Zanzibar, who retained nominal ownership of the ten-mile strip, and (after 1920, when the name was changed) made Kenya the only British possession that was both "Colony and Protectorate." This posed a number of practical political and legal problems to be worked out, and the administration quickly sought to establish a detailed understanding not only of local institutions and offices, but a sense of the personalities and capabilities of the figures who occupied them and a more general sense of the demography.

One of the earliest text artifacts of this "will to knowledge" (Foucault 1978 [1976]) was Sir Arthur Henry Hardinge's 1897 report on the *Condition and Progress of the East Africa Protectorate from its Establishment to the 20th July, 1897*.³ Although clearly drawing on earlier, but uncited, missionary accounts, Hardinge also had some first-hand knowledge of the region, which he describes in familiar terms:

The institutions of all the Wanyika (inhabitants of the Nyika or intermediate zone between the coast and the highland of the interior) are very similar, though each of the *eight or nine* Bantu races known collectively under that name, viz., the Wadigo, Wasegua, Waduruma, Warabai, Waribe, Wachogni, Wagibana, Wagiriama, and Wakauma, has certain distinctive peculiarities in its government and social customs. In each we find *a loose Republican organization*, based partly on tribal sub-divisions and partly on *a kind of freemasonry*, known as the "Kambi," which involves *several degrees*, each attended by its special *ceremony of initiation*, and admission to which is obtained by payments to the *Elders or "Wazee," who constitute the ruling class, and are the depositaries of the tribal mysteries and traditions.*

The "Wakambi," or members of the Kambi, wear a fuller-sized loin cloth than the "Nyere," or youths not admitted to full civil rights, who constitute the fighting force of the

³ A. Hardinge, *Condition and Progress of the East Africa Protectorate from its Establishment to the 20th July, 1897* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1897).

tribe, and are distinguished by a wooden bracelet called the "luwu," which is worn on the left arm.

They meet to decide any matters of public importance in the "Moro," an open space round the "Rungu" or sacred hut, in which is kept the "Mwanza," a kind of drum, producing hideous and unearthly sounds and regarded with superstitious reverence by the people, and especially by the women and youths, who hide when its noise is heard.

There is a Moro, Rungu, and Mwanza in each "lalo" or collection of villages, but for certain purposes the whole Wakambi are convoked at the "Kaya" or capital of the entire tribe. This takes place, for example, when once in every forty or fifty years the whole of the Kambi is reconstituted, the places of the Wazee who retire from the general Assembly being filled by a corresponding number of Nyere.

On these occasions the Nyere go for seven days to hunt in the bush, and bring back, as evidence of their bravery, wild animals, such as lions or elephants, killed by their spears. Up to a recent period the killing of a man (the first stranger met with in the woods), was, especially among the Wadigo a test of valour qualifying for the Kambi.

Within the Kambi, whose numbers vary from 200 or 300 in Duruma to 5,000 in Giriama, is a smaller circle of Elders known as the "Mvaya" or "Waya," whose members meet chiefly for feasting, or for presiding over funeral ceremonies, at which it is their privilege to get drunk on "tembo."

Admission to this order is by the co-optation of its members; the payment varies in different parts of the Nyika; among the Wadigo it is, I believe, 70 dollars or an equivalent in cloth or cattle, in Giriama a single bullock.

Higher still than the members of the Mvaya are the "Fisi," or Hyaenas, so called from the power vested in them of administering to suspected criminals the oath by this sacred animal, which, from the circumstance that in old days, before the practice of burial became prevalent, their deceased ancestors were devoured by hyaenas, is revered by all the Wanyika as a sort of living mausoleum, so to speak, of their race.

It is held that a false oath by the Hyaena will cause the death of the perjurer, a superstition which the "Fisi" keep up by secretly causing the assassination, by poison or strangulation, of any person whom they believe to have sworn falsely and then ascribing it to supernatural vengeance.

The numbers of the Fisi vary in different tribes; in Duruma I have been led to believe that they are practically identical with the "Ngambi," the local equivalent of the "Mvaya" of the Wadigo and Wagiriama, and that the highest depositaries of the tribal mysteries are the "Bahasi" or Wizards, of whom there are said to be about 100.

In Giriama the Fisi are, I understand, a very small and exclusive body consisting of the six senior Elders of the six clans, and of a few other old men of great authority,

One of the functions of the Fisi and Bahasi is to protect fields from thieves by consecrating them to the Hyaena, which is done by placing certain fetish marks on trees or on the ground near the boundaries, it being believed that the removal of any produce (except by the owner) from fields so dedicated will entail the death or sickness of the person removing it.

At the head of the organization stand the Chiefs of clans, who, in Duruma and among the Wadigo, are hereditary. In Giriama, however, under the name of "Enyetsi" or "Enyenti" (Lords of the Soil), they rule by their seniority in a cycle of tribal rotation, a

vacancy in their number being filled by the senior Elder of the clan next in rank to the one to which the deceased "Lord of the Soil" belonged.

There are three chief "Enyenti" (the senior Elders of all the six clans are, strictly speaking (at present), entitled to the appellation), viz., Kombo, Mwazize, and Mbaruku, who are regarded as the three supreme Magistrates of Giriama, and alone have the right to convoke by the blowing of a sacred horn the general assemblies of the Kambi.

The authority of the Chiefs and that of the Elders throughout the Nyika over the Nyere is, however, not as great as might be supposed; some years ago, for example, during the great drought the young men in Giriama rose against the Wazee, cruelly tortured them to make them produce rain by medicine and magical incantations, and when they failed made them pay heavy fines in goats and cattle.

All crime among the Wanyika is atoned for by fines, but in some cases a murderer who is unable to pay is outlawed, and may lawfully be killed by the relatives of the deceased. In others he must "pay ten of his children or relatives" for "a life" taken by him; that is to say, he must hand them over to the tribe or clan of his victim *with which they become absolutely incorporated*, the boys cultivating for it and serving in the ranks of its "Nyere," and the girls working for its members as though they belonged to it by birth, the idea here apparently being a compensation to the tribe collectively, in the shape of an addition to its force for the loss of one of its members. ...

As the Nyika is almost everywhere beyond the Zanzibar boundary, and as even where it is not the Mahommedan Law does not recognize the right of any one but a Moslem or a "Kitabi" (believer in the Old Testament or Gospel) to hold slaves, *the slavery existing among these tribes is not acknowledged as legal by our authorities.* ...

Each of the Wanyika tribes is represented at Mombasa by *an Arab or Swahili Agent*, who acts as an intermediary between the tribe and the Government.

The offices of most of these Agents, though formerly conferred upon them by the Sultans of Zanzibar, and *now confirmed by ourselves*, are hereditary; thus the ancestors of Hamis-bin-Said of Malindi, who represents Giriama, have been Agents for the Wagiriama from the days of the Portuguese. *The Agents receive a small allowance from the Public Treasury* in return for which they are supposed to summon the Elders of the tribe represented by them whenever wanted, or to communicate to it the orders of Government, and they are naturally, within the territory of the tribe itself, *the recipients of much honour, and doubtless of many perquisites in the form of presents of cattle, goats, and other local produce.*⁴

The Digo, he claims, "have no central Government or any single Ruler accepted by the whole tribe; but one or two Chiefs, the most important of whom, Kubo of Kikoreni [*sic*] ... claim a wide, and in point of fact do actually exercise, a certain authority beyond the limits of their

⁴ Ibid. 10–12. Italics added.

own villages.”⁵ Kikoneni (not “Kikoreni”) is “a day’s journey inland from Wasein,” which was at that time “the political head-quarters for the district” (see Map 4.1 and Map 4.2).⁶ I will return to the figure of Kubo below, but note that in the Shimba Hills to the north, Hardinge claims that the population is “divided into the two Wadigo tribes of the Washimba and Walongo, each of which is again sub-divided into three sub-tribes or ‘milango’ [‘doors’],” and is also “ruled by an hereditary chief.”⁷

The Duruma are also “divided into three tribes, known respectively as Duruma Kuu, Chokara [=Tswakara], and Chiogni [=Chonyi],” which are “united merely by the federal bond of the Kambi or general Assembly of the Elders of all three tribes, who meet alternately at the three ‘Kayas’ or capitals” where the “federal bond” is “strengthened by the possession of common mysteries and ceremonies.”⁸ Each of these three divisions has a “supreme chiefship,” which is “roughly speaking, hereditary; occasional deviations from the direct line being made in favour of a more suitable kinsman than the heir-at-law, but by a curious custom that of Chiogni has from time immemorial been divided, like the regal power at Sparta, between two rulers invested with equal powers.”⁹ But,

the most important place within the nominal limits of Duruma ... is Ganjoni, better known as Mazera’s, from its Chief, Mazera, who became a convert of the Methodist missionaries, and is now a catechist in their mission, as well as village headman. It contains an increasing population of 500 souls, two Indian shops, and a church, and its position as the first station on the railway line will probably contribute still further to develop it. The rest of Duruma is on the whole a poor country.”¹⁰

⁵ Ibid. 4.

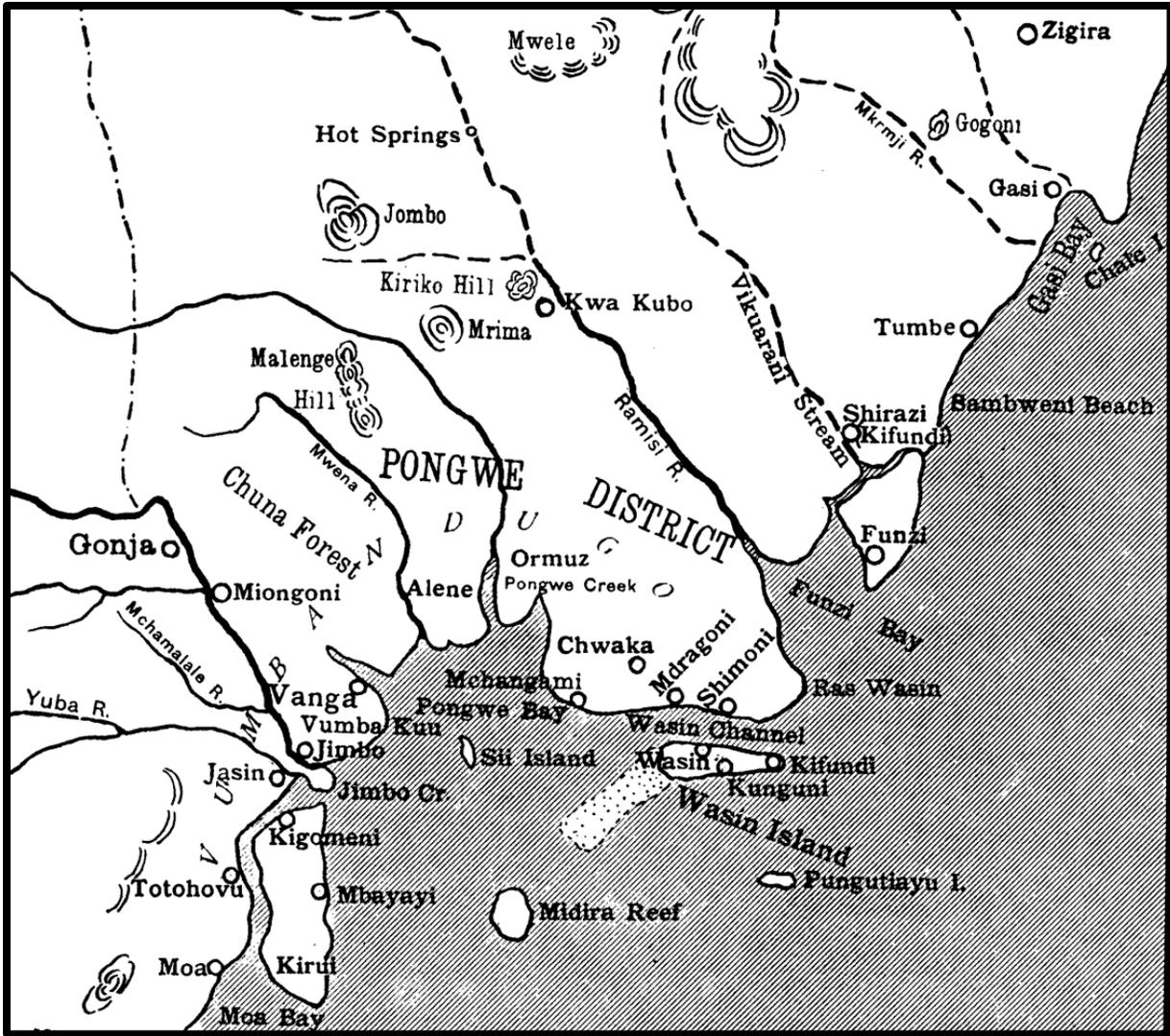
⁶ Ibid. 5.

⁷ Ibid. 6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.



Map 4.2: Detail of a map from Hollis 1900, showing the Shimoni Peninsula with Wasini Island to the south and Pongwe District to the north. Note the position of the settlement called “Kwa Kubo” (“Kubo’s”) and compare this to “Mwadunda” in Map 4.1, and of “Kikoneni” in Map 4.3.



Map 4.3: Detail of an annotated map printed by the War Office in 1914. UKNA WO 32/8514, “Map of East Africa Protectorate & Country between Vanga and Gasi.” Note the position of Kikoneni (just right of center), and the absence of any mention of “Kubo” in connection with it.

“Mazera’s” quickly became “Mazeras,” with the English possessive form incorporated into the place name itself. But it is interesting to note that it once appeared, as did “Kubo’s” in Hobley’s 1895 map (Map 4.1, above), to follow the local convention of referring to (if not naming, in a baptismal sense) settlements by their founder or “owner” or *mwenyetsi* (see the discussion of “enyetsi” in Chapter Three), simply grammaticalizing it differently. In this case it was Thomas Mazera, a United Methodist Free Church (UMFC) minister who rebuilt the Duruma mission station in 1885, after it had been destroyed by “the coast people” a few years earlier during a rebellion of the Mazrui and their allies against the Busaidi Sultanate of Zanzibar.¹¹ This act would, perhaps, have made Mazera the *mwenyetsi* of the location indeed which, although originally founded by John Mgomba (another Duruma catechist) and called “Mawsonville, after the then treasurer,” had been unoccupied since its destruction.¹²

Hardinge describes Mazera as both the “Chief” and the “village headman” in the same sentence, perhaps indicating a conceptual distinction, if not also a practical administrative one, between the authority one might hold over a people, on the one hand, and that held over a territory or a place on the other. In any case, it is unclear from Hardinge’s report whether Mazera was the “Chief” or “village headman” before or after becoming a Methodist Mission convert and catechist. But it would seem that Ganjoni/Mazera’s prosperity relative to the rest of “Duruma country” at that time, as well as the relative strength of its “Chief,” “headman,” and namesake, had to do precisely with the connections Mazera had managed to establish and maintain with outside forces: the United Methodist Mission, Indian merchants, the Imperial British East Africa Company, and

¹¹ E. S. Wakefield, *Thomas Wakefield: Missionary and Geographical Pioneer in East Equatorial Africa* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1904), 198.

¹² *Ibid.*

now the British Government (with its railway connecting “Mazeras Station” to both the interior and the port of Mombasa). This is precisely the phenomenon of “extraversion” (Bayart 2009 [1989]) to which I gestured at the end of Chapter Three. Namely, it is a situation in which individuals or groups shore up power locally through their ability to cultivate connections to more powerful outside entities, rather than primarily through their access to a fount of power that was hidden at the “Innermost Circle” of society, say, or from a historical association with the land itself.

A similar situation seems to have obtained in the hills and ridges west of Mombasa, “occupied by small independent Wanyika tribes, the Wa Rabai, Wa Ribe, and Wa Chogni, and Wa Jibana, the two last of whom,” according to Hardinge, “may, for practical purposes, be regarded as united,” but all of which “resemble one another in language, manners, and institutions.”¹³ Rabai—the site of Krapf and Rebmann’s original mission station, recall—featured “fifteen Indian traders, all living on Mission ground and paying a ground-rent of 3 rupees a-month for each shop.”¹⁴ And although “the local administration is in the hands of a body of native Elders *who are subject to the Mombasa district officials*,” Hardinge claimed that “in practice the English clergyman in charge of the Mission is the real local authority, and the Rev. A. G. Smith, who for the last year or more has filled the office, has been voluntarily doing to a great extent there the work of an assistant district officer and Magistrate, and has, in that capacity, rendered very useful service to the Government.”¹⁵

¹³ Hardinge, *Condition and Progress*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Italics added.

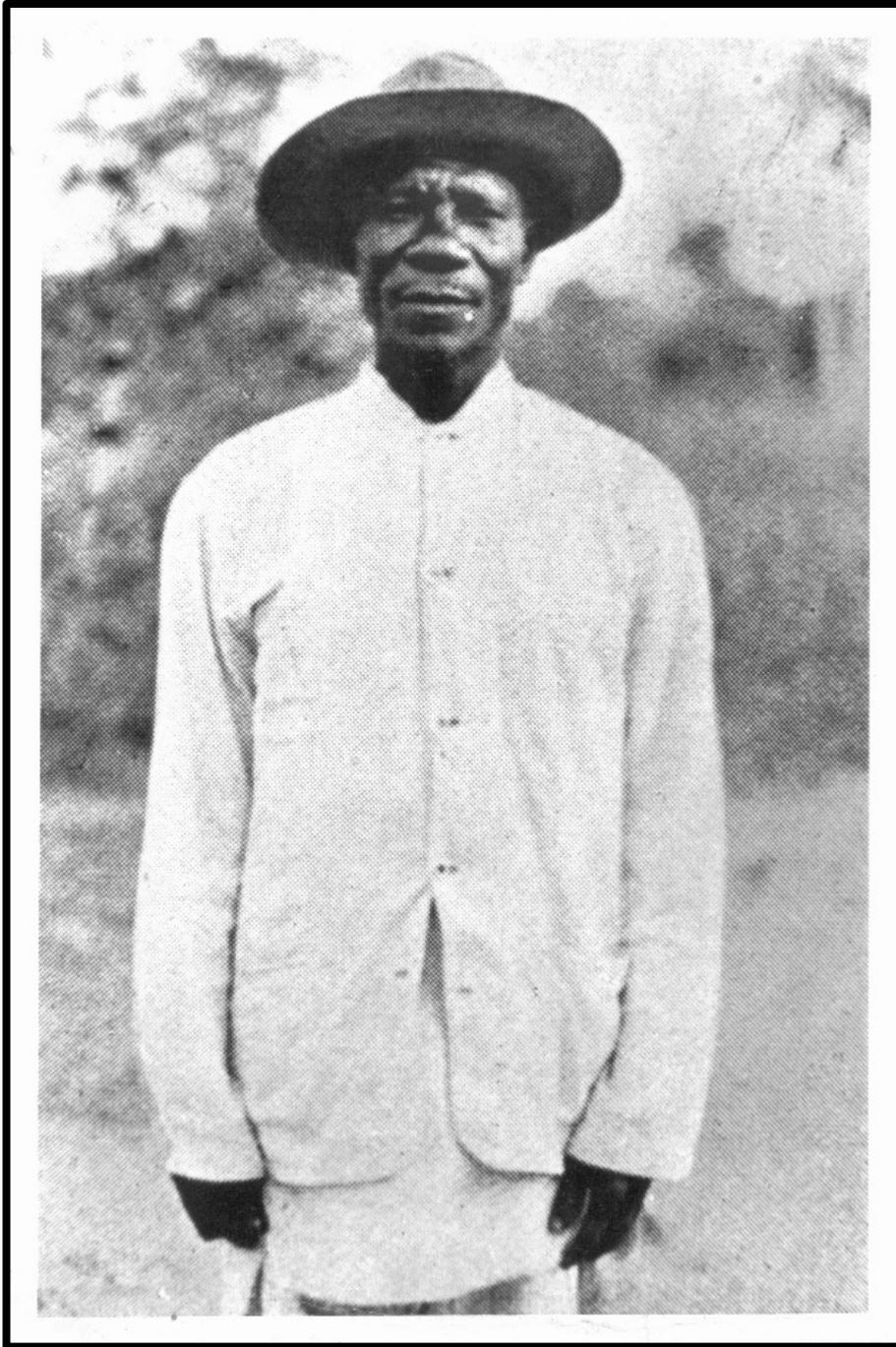


Image 4.1: Undated portrait of Thomas Mazera. Fred Morton Papers, Loose Photographs.

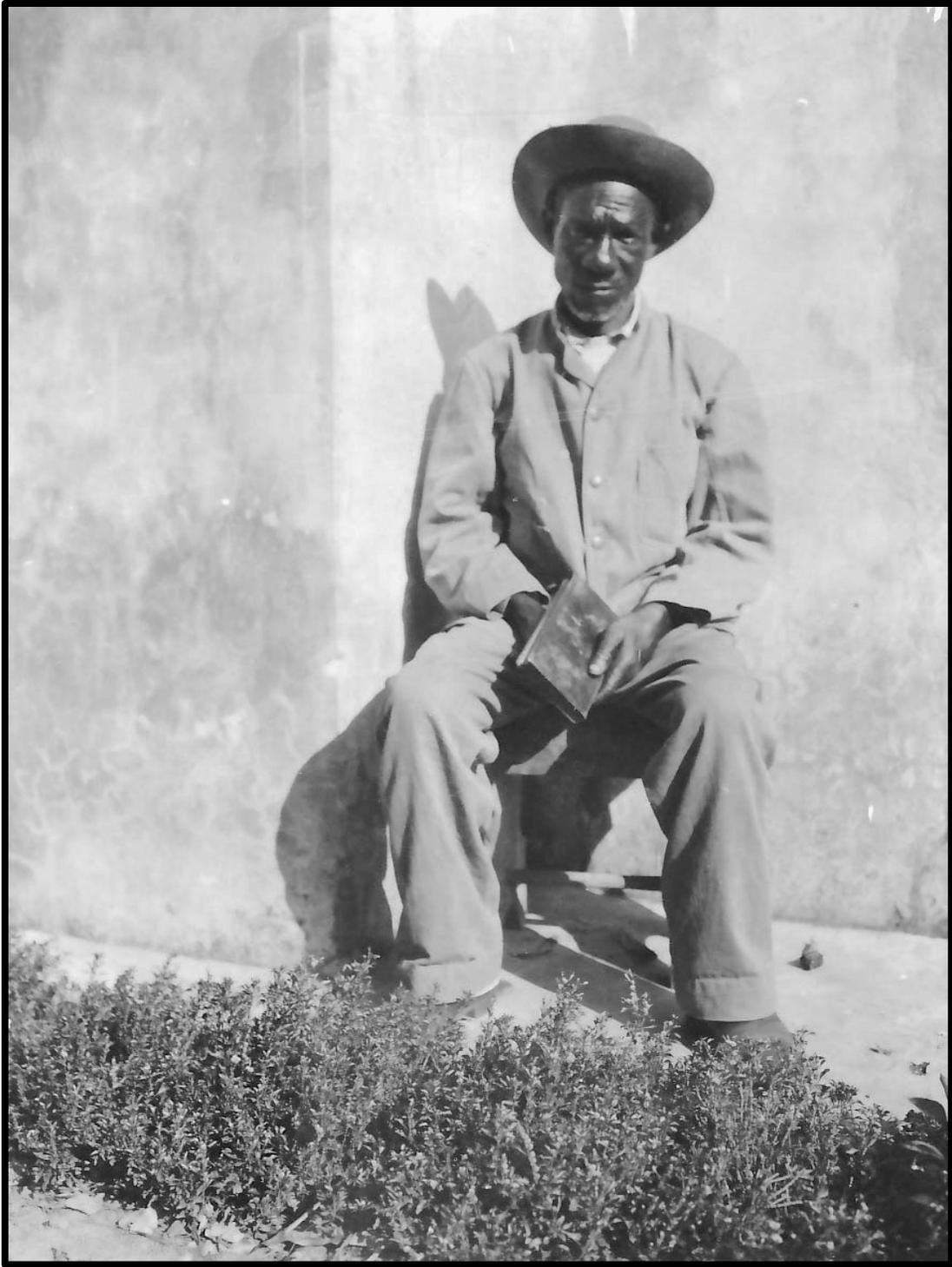


Image 4.2: “Rev. Mazera of the United Methodist Mission after whom Mazeras Station was named, 1898.” National Museums of Kenya Archives (NMKA), Alfred Claud Hollis Photographic Collection F.

In legal matters “in the region beyond the Mahommedan pale,” the new administration under the East Africa Order in Council, 1897, recognized

the jurisdiction over their own people of certain specified tribal Chiefs, over whose procedure and punishments the European administrative officers are directed to exercise a reasonable supervision, not unduly interfering with them, unless they should be essentially inhuman or unjust, as for instance where convictions are obtained by witchcraft or torture, or entail barbarous penalties such as mutilation, cruel corporal punishments, or the enslavement of a condemned person or his relations.¹⁶

A tripartite legal system was proposed, in which

the native Courts held by English officers should be guided by the general principles of the Indian Civil and Criminal Procedure Codes, but that within the Mahommedan coast region and in dealing with Mahommedans they should have regard to the general principles of the law of Islam, and throughout the Protectorate to any native laws or customs not opposed to general morality or humanity, and that the purely native Courts, *i.e.*, those held by native Magistrates, should be guided by the native laws or customs existing within the respective jurisdictions, subject always to the qualification above mentioned, and to such enactments or modification of existing laws or customs as may at any future time be introduced by, under or in virtue of Her Majesty’s authority.¹⁷

All this left a great deal to be worked out in practice, and all of which was, at the time, still “pending the sanction of this scheme by Her Majesty’s Government.”¹⁸ Of concern was the specification of the “specified tribal Chiefs” and “native Magistrates” over whom “European administrative officers” were to “exercise a reasonable supervision,” the codification of the “native laws or customs existing within the respective jurisdictions,” and indeed the identification and demarcation of those jurisdictions.¹⁹

In the early years of the Protectorate, this task (among numerous other duties) was left up to the “men on the spot,” the Administration’s Provincial and District Commissioners (Grigg

¹⁶ Ibid. 36.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

1927). The Village Headmen Ordinance 1902, for instance, had established that Provincial Commissioners and their subordinates “*may* appoint any native or natives to be the official headman or headmen ... of any village or group of villages and to make the headman of any village subordinate to the headman of any other village.”²⁰ The Commissioners “*may* require any headman to keep order in any area adjacent to his village or villages and to keep any public roads in any such area in good condition and repair.”²¹ But it was left to the Commissioner’s discretion whether and how to compensate these figures for their work: “The Commissioner *may* provide for the remuneration of any headman by a rate to be levied upon the inhabitants of the headman’s village or villages *in such manner as the Commissioner may approve.*”²² But ten years after Hardinge’s report, very little of this seems to have been formalized.

In late 1907, the Acting Senior Commissioner and the Secretary for Native Affairs tried to work out, in consultation with District Commissioners throughout the Protectorate, whether, how much, and from what source of revenue the Administration should pay Chiefs and Headmen, and what the responsibilities of these figures should be. In response to a request for reports on the districts, Acting District Commissioner for Vanga District Charles Wise wrote that although he could “see no objection to the appointment of Native Headmen who shall be responsible for order being kept in their villages, and the clearing of the roads in his part of the District,” as well as being responsible for the paying of Hut Tax,

I should certainly object to his being given power to try cases of any kind, for the following reasons: 1st that none of the natives in the District live more than 30 miles from a court. 2nd that the Chiefs one and all are far too ignorant, they can neither read nor write and therefore

²⁰ “The Village Headmen Ordinance 1902,” in *East Africa Protectorate Ordinances and Regulations, Volume IV, January 1st to December 31st 1902* (Mombasa, Government Printer, 1903), 58. Italics added.

²¹ Ibid. Italics added.

²² Ibid. Italics added

would be unable to keep a record of the cases. 3rd that their judgment would be liable to lies. 4th that they would abuse the powers given to them. ... Native Courts in these parts are not to be trusted with powers to try cases even in the smallest scale. ... Instead of relegating these to native Chiefs I would suggest that the District Commissioner be given powers to try such cases and keep a separate record of same, or Liwalis and Mudirs might be given the power to try such cases by the Sharia. I am more in favour of the latter course, the natives have great faith in the Liwalis and show them every respect. Headmen should be compelled to produce persons who are wanted by the court, instead of hiding them and helping them to escape justice. In cases of this kind the Chief at fault should be fined and for a second offence lose his appointment.²³

Despite his language, however, it is clear that it was less a question of “giving” chiefs the “power to try cases” than of recognizing and gazettement their existing authority to do so. Cases had long been, and continued to be, heard, mediated, adjudicated, resolved, and their decisions enforced, by a range of formal and informal institutions from kin groups to Arab officials of the Sultanate (Liwalis, Mudirs, and Kathis), to the District Commissioners, according to a range of legal principles, from “native law and custom” to Islamic law to the Indian Penal Code. And as I show below, the legal foundations of the judicial apparatus on the East Africa Protectorate were unclear, or nonexistent, for much of its history. Both the administration and the local population simply acted “as if” the institutions they had more or less inherited from the Imperial British East Africa Company’s operation had a clear legal basis.²⁴

But despite his lack of faith in the abilities of Chiefs and Headmen to try cases, DC Wise felt that with regard to the transportation infrastructure in their jurisdiction,

²³ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122 Village Headmen, Ag. DC Vanga District, Shimoni, to Ag. PC Mombasa, 3 October 1907.

²⁴ To this day, Kenyan Chiefs have no legal right to hear and adjudicate “cases” within their jurisdiction, but this is precisely how most village-level disputes are resolved, rather than through the courts. The primary concern of the Provincial Administration (of which the Chiefs are the lowest level) has been, since the colonial era, the maintenance of “order” above all. On Kenya’s longstanding “Ideology of Order,” see: E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, “Democracy and the Ideology of Order in Kenya,” in M. G. Schatzberg (ed.) *The Political Economy of Kenya* (New York, Praeger, 1987), 177–201.

[e]very Chief or Village Headman should be made responsible for the cleaning of the public roads and keeping them in order. I have no doubt that they would do this if they were paid a monthly sum or wages. The present system of issuing posho to the natives for cleaning the roads is not altogether satisfactory and is a continual cause for trouble.

If these were Chiefs or Headmen recognised and paid a small sum monthly by the Government the people would be more ready to do the work and it would become a much easier matter of getting porters and labour, which at present is very scarce and difficult to obtain in this District, Vanga being the only place from which I can obtain reliable men.²⁵

In Vanga District (the southernmost administrative district in Seyidie Province (itself the southernmost province on the Kenyan coastline), then, it would seem that chiefs were not formally paid, and that communal labor on the district's roads was compensated only with "posho" or meal flour. It is not clear why Wise thought that if chiefs and headmen were made into salaried government employees "the people would be more ready to do the work" and why "it would become a much easier matter of getting porters and labour."²⁶ Wise did not, in any case, "think it advisable that any Chief or Headman in this District should be paid or subsidized until the natives have been placed in reserves," but the reasons for this, too, are left unspecified.²⁷

Questions of pay for chiefs and their ability to command labor on District roads were also closely tied to the question of how to collect taxes from the District's African population. In 1901 the Hut Tax Regulations left it "in [the Commissioner's] discretion" to "impose a tax on all Makuti huts or other huts used as dwellings and built of mud or wattle and daub or other such materials as natives are in the habit of employing for the purpose of constructing huts or dwelling places."²⁸ The commissioner was also at liberty to "make such arrangements for the collection of hut tax

²⁵ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122 Village Headmen, Ag. DC Vanga District, Shimoni, to Ag. PC Mombasa, 3 October 1907.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. Capitalization in original.

²⁸ "Hut Tax Regulations," *East Africa Protectorate Ordinances and Regulations, Volume III, January 1st to December 31st 1901* (Mombasa, Government Printer, 1901), 26.

when imposed as he may think fit, and in particular may take payment in kind or in labour in lieu of money,” and also free to “make such arrangements ... for the payment of collectors, whether by salary or commission, as shall appear to him to be necessary or expedient.”²⁹ Six years on, however, all of this seems to have remained unsettled in the East Africa Protectorate. Hence the inquiries by the Seyidie Provincial Commissioner in Mombasa, to which DC Wise and his counterpart in Rabai, Assistant DC G. H. Osborne, were responding in 1907.

Much of this seems to have proceeded by trial and error. DC Wise recounts the following story in support of his total opposition to having chiefs collect the Hut Tax from their jurisdictions:

The Principal Chief collected hut tax at his village and the immediate neighbourhood, as I was informed that was the custom. At the end of the year I found that the Chief was Rs.114/- short. I visited the District and found that scarce any of the people had received their receipts. I asked the Chief why this was, he said they had not paid. On referring to the hut tax book I found that every one whom he said had not paid had really paid and the Chief had his receipt in his charge. The Chief then admitted that all had paid but he had not given in their names as he had spent the money. This Chief, as I later found out, could neither read nor write.³⁰

Although DC Osborne contrasts sharply with DC Wise in terms of their respective attitudes toward both the Chiefs and the local population as a whole (Wise writing, “I do not consider the native Chiefs here as a whole as a class that could be trusted to collect the money. ... [T]hey are not sufficiently advanced in civilization to be entrusted to collect the hut tax”), they were fundamentally in agreement about how chiefs should be employed in the collection of tax.³¹ Although “not sufficiently advanced in civilization” to collect the money themselves, according to Wise, “as they know all the people in their neighbourhood we might expect of them the duty to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122 Village Headmen, Ag. DC Vanga District, Shimoni, to Ag. PC Mombasa, 3 October 1907.

³¹ Ibid.

see that each person paid his tax, and to that extent only should be made responsible.”³² Osborne, for his part, was less dismissive of the abilities of the chiefs and headmen, and seems in general to have been the more thoughtful of the two.³³ Nevertheless, he too concluded that

the Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs are to be responsible for the payment of the hut tax by their people by collecting their people and bringing them into the Station or the hut tax station to pay and receive individually his chit. I should strongly deprecate any system of a Chief and Sub-Chiefs collecting the money ... bringing it to the station and receiving a number of corresponding tickets for subsequent distribution among the people.³⁴

This was in part because, in contrast to Wise (who, recall, was more than willing to operate through the Mudirs and Liwalis, perhaps reflecting a bias of his being stationed on the coast at Vanga, rather than inland at Rabai like Osborne), Osborne held that “there are absolutely no Chiefs” among the “ten separate tribes included under the title of Wanyka [*sic*].”³⁵ In terms of pay, “when Chiefs have been created by Government (I have remarked that as yet they do not exist) I consider 5% of the hut tax for Chiefs and 2 ½% for Sub-Chiefs sufficient.”³⁶ The “Head Chief in each district” should be “paid directly by Government and I should suggest that the sub-chiefs should also be paid by the Government but *though* [*sic*] their Head Chief, the Government Officer supervising the payment only. ... My point is that if Government avoided paying the Sub-Chief directly but paid through the Chief, the Sub-Chief would recognize the situation and not attempt

³² Ibid.

³³ I will have occasion to return to Osborne’s more ethnographic and historical reporting below.

³⁴ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122 Village Headmen, ADC Rabai to Ag. PC Mombasa and Ag. DC Mombasa, 4 October 1907. This seemed to be motivated more by the sheer number of tickets involved (10,400 by Osborne’s calculations) than by any spurious judgment of the relative civilizational level of the Chiefs.

³⁵ Ibid. Note that for Osborne the “Wanyka [*sic*]” are made up of ten “Tribes,” not “eight or nine Bantu races” as Hardinge had it. The ten tribes, according to Osborne, are (in decreasing order of population) the Duruma, Rabai, Chonyi, Giriyama, Kamba, Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Langulu, and Teita.

³⁶ Ibid.

to compete with his superior.”³⁷ In the meantime, “all internal administration” was “managed or discussed by the Council of Wazee [“Old Men”] who in some cases have a kind of President,” but who with the exception of court assessors, “receive no remuneration except a small present.”³⁸ In a follow-up communication, Osborne elaborates on the local political system as it operated at that time, naming prominent members of the “Council of Wazee” among each of the “tribes,” recommends certain individuals for appointment as chiefs, makes policy recommendations, and speculates about the future ability of the new chiefs to supply labor when needed. I quote him here at length:

The Internal Administration of the majority of the tribe is in the hands of an oligarchical Council of Wazee or Elders who meet for assembly in the Kaya or ancient stronghold of the tribe. Subjects for discussion are introduced and the general Council decides the issue. The Wagiryama have one Mzee Pembe Mirimbe who lives in the Kaya and cannot leave it. When a shawri [*sic*] is necessary he assembles the wazee at the Kaya and the case is settled in Council, he acting as President and holding a casting vote. I believe he has considerable influence among the people though exercised hitherto for internal matters only. He is assisted by Kizele who is able to leave the Kaya. The WaRabai have five principal wazee three of who are my Court Assessors. Any of the five can summon the Wazee to Council, but only the wazee in Council can ratify a measure. Wachonyi have an Mzee Cherevu at the Kaya to whom the Council assembles, and there are two assistant Wazee Rangoma and Gulani. Wajibana, WaKambe and WaRibe have Councils but no preeminent mzee. The Waduruma have three Kayas but none are inhabited and so far I have been able to find out no preeminent mzee, though Bemeomu wa Meomu and Maiona have helped me considerably when required. WaKamba alone seem to have no council of wazee. There are two wazee to whom shauris are taken independently and one other mzee is a Court Assessor. Every Mkamba mzee however appears to think he is a law unto himself so that the two principal ones do not always effect a settlement of a point. They are the nearest approach to Chiefs in this district, but they have little power outside their immediate villages.

As regards the attitude of the people to their wazee it may be described as one of loyalty and obedience so far as the latter does not interfere with the individual [*sic*] private wishes. An individual may obey an order of the wazee in Council, but he certainly does not appear to feel bound to obey an individual mzee. Chiefs would therefore have to be created practically by Government for this district: Where there is an mzee of any recognized standing in a tribe I should recommend his selection; when there is no one so

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

recognized I should suggest the Council electing one themselves. In both cases the confirmation of such appointment should be made by Government in presence of the assembled Councils.

I should like to suggest the following names in the tribes where prominent Wazee appear to be recognized.

Wagiryama, Chief Pembe Mrimi, Sub-Chiefs Kizele and Toya;

WaRabai, Chief Benyai, Sub-Chiefs Bendara and Kavuu;

WaChonyi, Chief Cherevu, Sub-Chiefs Rangoma and Guleni;

WaKamba, Chief Mwambua, Sub-Chiefs Kalonchi and Khinyiuko;

Waduruma, WaKambe, WaJibana, WaRibe, WaLangulu and WaTeita to elect them in Council;

Jomvu Chief Mzee Hamisi bin Haji already holding certificate.

When once these Chiefs have been appointed, Government could support their authority; but I would venture to suggest in the new Headmen Ordinance that a clause be inserted giving the District Commissioner the right to punish by fine or imprisonment any sub-chief reported by his Head Chief for insubordination. In this district I do not think they would be called on to exercise any judicial authority except in the matter of Marriage Dowry disputes which form the majority of the Civil suits in my Court at present.

As regards the supply of labor I doubt if Chiefs here would be able to influence the people in that direction for some considerable time; the reason being that the natives of this district are generally prosperous and very independent in character.³⁹

Subsequent Handing Over Reports—brief reports prepared by an outgoing commissioner to orient and incoming commissioner to the District in question—would seem to bear out Osborne’s predictions about the relative weakness of Government-created chiefs over the “prosperous and very independent” population of Vanga District. Outgoing DC C. W. Haywood writing two years later (in 1909), claimed that “there are not Chiefs either, the population of Wanyika being very scattered, and consisting of isolated villages containing three or four Huts, over which there is an Mzee or Elder,” but “these men possess little or no influence over their fellows” (for which reason he considered them “not worth mentioning”).⁴⁰ Like DC Wise,

³⁹ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/122 Village Headmen, ADC Rabai to Ag. PC Mombasa, 5 October 1907.

⁴⁰ KNA PC/COAST/1/12/97, “Handing Over Report,” District Commissioner to Acting District Commissioner, Vanga, 12 June 1909. Haywood also considered that “the natives of this District being principally released or escaped slaves, possess no customs worth mentioning and certainly none that might affect the Administration of the District. Unless a marked disability to tell the truth, under any and every circumstance, may be called a custom.”

Haywood felt that “the place of Chiefs is really taken by the Liwali and Mudirs who settle all questions regarding customs, etc.,” and that “the greater part of Hut Tax collecting is done by the Liwali and Mudirs.”⁴¹ Two years after Haywood (in 1911), outgoing Acting DC Walter Mayes wrote that “there are no Chiefs or Elders who in my opinion are capable of dealing in an intelligent manner with their people. The only one of my [*sic*] standing is Kubo, a Digo Chief, this man is I consider not altogether responsible.”⁴² Two years after Mayes, finally, in 1913, DC E. V. Hemmant reported that “with the exception of the Kubo there are no headmen who pretend to exercise [control?] over more than [*sic*] about 150 people.”⁴³

Sixteen years after Hardinge described Kubo as the most important of the few Digo Chiefs able to exercise any authority “beyond the limits of their own villages,” Kubo remained “the only one of [any] standing” in the eyes of the colonial administration.⁴⁴ The apparent singularity of “Kubo” is remarkable. How, among a “generally prosperous and very independent” people living in “scattered” in “isolated villages” recognizing no other greater authority than their councils of resident elders, did a figure like Kubo—who appears to predate both the IBEAC and colonial administrations—come to power? And what was to be his fate in the new colonial order of Chiefs and Village Headmen?

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² KNA PC/COAST/1/12/97, “Handing Over Report,” Acting District Commissioner to District Commissioner, Vanga, May 1911.

⁴³ KNA KWL/1/3/4 Political Record Book, E.V. Hemmant, “Native Administration,” n.d. [ca. 1913].

⁴⁴ Hardinge, *Condition and Progress*, 4.

4.3: “NATIVE” AND “ARAB” CHIEFS: REBELLION, PRESTIGE, AUTHORITY

The earliest mention of Kubo of which I am aware is that of Alexandre Le Roy, of the *Congrégation du Saint-Esprit et du Saint-Coeur de Marie* Catholic mission in Zanzibar. It appears in the accounts of his travels in East Africa between 1881 and 1892 (at which point he was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Gabon), published in serial form in *Les Missions Catholiques* and then collected and republished in 1893 as *Au Kilima-ndjaro (Afrique Orientale)*. In the August 1892 edition of *Les Missions Catholiques*, Le Roy’s text—“*Au pays Digo*,” (“In Digo Country”)—contains the only description—albeit a brief and superficial one—of an actual encounter with the man himself, as well as the only visual representation of him, in the form of an engraving based on a drawing by Le Roy (see Image 4.3, below):

The Digo country is divided into a large number of small townships, each with its own particular chief. However, all these leaders admit to having at least one honorary president in the person of Kubo who lives in the south in *Kikoné*, and whom we desired to visit....

This elder, when we arrived at his house, was not there. Nevertheless, we settled in the square outside the village, around a tamarind tree whose benevolent head usually shades the idleness of the place. A long hour passes: finally, accompanied by a numerous cortege and preceded by an artist who plays the trumpet, there appears a large body, old and thin, wearing a slightly worn red coat, and topped with a head mercilessly ravaged by smallpox. This is the body and head of Kubo. His conversation is quite intelligent, his reception courteous, his dispositions benevolent. He willingly shares his sympathies and hatreds: the former for the Arab governor of Vanga, the latter for the Swahili chief Mbaruku, of Gasi, who killed his uncle and his three brothers, who ravaged the entire Digo country, and against whom he has a just and terrible rancor.

But immediately we notice that the population is no longer the same as above. The faces are less simple, the bodies more clad and the methods less honest; there is here a leaven of Islam.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ A. Le Roy, “*Au Kilima-Ndjaro (Afrique orientale)*, Première partie, De Zanzibar au Kilima-Njaro, IV.—*Au pays Digo*,” *Les Missions Catholiques* 1210 (Aug. 1892), 409. Reprinted in A. Le Roy, *Au Kilima-Ndjaro (Afrique Orientale)* (Paris, L. de Soy et Fils, 1893), 47. Translation mine. The original reads:

Le pays digo est divisé en un grand nombre de petits cantons qui ont chacun leur chef particulier. Cependant tous ces chefs reconnaissent avoir au moins un président d’honneur dans la personne de Koubo qui demeure au sud à Kikoné, et que nous avons voulu visiter....

Brief and superficial though it is, Le Roy's description nevertheless yields up a number of important details, in different ways. Brushing Le Roy's discursive account and visual representations against the grain, one sees once again a misrecognition by Europeans of the local semiotics of power and prestige. There is, in general, a focus on Kubo's "slightly worn red coat," his smallpox-ravaged face, his old, thin body, and the "leaven of Islam" corrupting him and his subjects. In his drawing (Image 4.3), Kubo appears barefoot with a plain robe and turban, and a walking stick, before a background of wild grassy undergrowth, *mirara* palms, and a dead tree.

As in Champion's disappointed description of the "rough" and unornamented design of the *Mwanza* drum (which, solely because of its appearance and in spite of the obvious care with which it was maintained and handled, did not seem to him "to be very greatly prized or much care devoted to it"), Le Roy is underwhelmed by the frail, elderly Kubo in his worn-out garment, and seems irritated by the noisy procession that accompanies his arrival.⁴⁶ But as with the *Mwanza*, the sign of Kubo's power is not the opulence and robustness of his physical appearance, but in what does *not* appear. His presence is announced by a trumpet blast, so that he is heard before he is seen. And

Cet ancien, quand nous sommes arrivés chez lui, n'était point là. Nous nous sommes quand même installés sur la place qui est en dehors du village, autour d'un tamarinier dont la tête bienveillante ombrage d'ordinaire les désœuvrés de l'endroit. Une longue heure se passe: finalement, accompagné d'un nombreux cortège et précédé d'un artiste qui joue de la trompette, apparaît un grand corps, vieux et maigre, vêtu d'une houppelande rouge un peu usée et surmonté d'une tête ravagée sans pitié par la variole. C'est le corps et la tête de Koubo. Sa conversation est d'ailleurs assez intelligente, son accueil courtois, ses dispositions bienveillantes. Volontiers il nous fait part de ses sympathies et de ses haines: les premières sont pour le gouverneur arabe de Vanga, les autres pour le chef swahili Mbaroukou, de Gassi, qui lui a tué son oncle et ses trois frères, qui ravagé tout le pays digo, et contre lequel il a de justes et terribles rancunes.

Mais nous remarquons tout de suite que la population n'est plus la même que plus haut. Les figures sont moins simples, les corps plus vêtus et les procédés moins honnêtes, c'est qu'il ici un levain d'Islam.

⁴⁶ Champion, *The Agiryama*, 44.

the true source of his power lies not in his external physiognomy or in the garments that clothe him, but rather—as becomes clear in oral histories of his office—in the powerful objects that he wears around his neck. One can see the charms and the fact that he wears them, but not the powerful substances and Koranic inscriptions that they conceal. He also wears a key beside these charms around his neck, indicating both a connection to the outside sources of this manufactured object, the lock it opens, and the container in which further valuable or powerful objects (like cash, rain magic, or clothing) or text-objects (like holy books, receipts, or treaties) are concealed.

In the most straightforward way, however, Le Roy's account records Kubo's residence as being located in "*Kikoné*," with the locative suffix "-ni"—which was included in Hardinge's account as "Kikoneni" (as it is generally referred to locally)—dropped. Le Roy also records Kubo's "sympathies" as being with the "Arab Governor of Vanga," and his "hatred" for "the Swahili chief Mbaruku of Gasi."⁴⁷ These political tensions and alignments would come to a head in 1895 when the transition between Company rule and Crown rule coincided with a succession dispute among local leaders, resulting in a "rebellion" against both the British-backed Sultan of Zanzibar and the administration of new Protectorate (which included "the Arab Governor of Vanga," with whom Kubo was allied). Under these circumstances, Kubo sided with the British Protectorate and the Sultan of Zanzibar in putting down the "rebellion" by Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Khamis al-Mazrui of Takaungu and his more powerful uncle, also named Mbaruk bin Rashid, the "Swahili Chief of Gasi."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

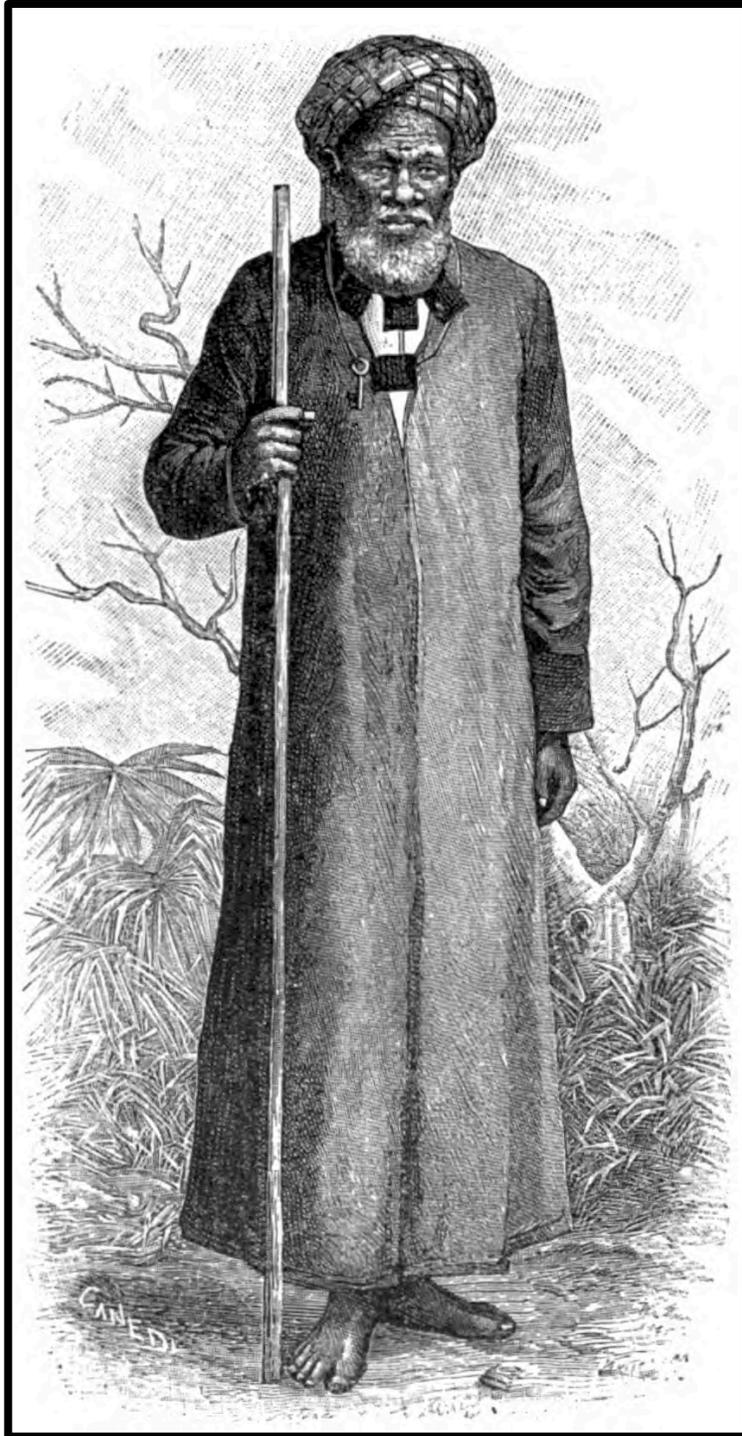


Image 4.3: “*Koubo, Chef honoraire du peuple Digo.*” Although these go unremarked in the text (Le Roy focusing instead on Kubo’s well-worn garment, smallpox scars, and the “leaven of Islam” in his domain), note the charms worn around his neck, alongside a key, as well as the staff. Kubo’s staff (in some accounts a spear) and his powerful magic appear frequently in oral histories as the most salient features of his local memory. (Le Roy 1892, 406; Le Roy 1893, 48).

Briefly, the background to the events of 1895 is this:⁴⁸ When Oman expelled the Portuguese from East Africa in the seventeenth century, the ruling Yorubi dynasty settled members of the Mazrui clan on the coast of what is now Kenya as local governors. In the mid-eighteenth century, war in Oman (and between Oman and Persia) saw the end of the Yorubi dynasty and its replacement by the Busaidi. The Mazrui refused to recognize the Busaidi sovereignty, and it was not until 1837 that Busaidi Sultan (formerly of Muscat, now of Zanzibar) Sayyid Said managed to capture Mombasa from the Mazrui and imprison Rashid bin Salim, the last Mazrui Sultan.

Having relocated their capital from Muscat to Zanzibar, the Busaidis claimed sovereignty over the entire coastal strip and used this new position to negotiate both commercial and political treaties with increasingly interested European powers. During this time, however, Mbaruk bin Rashid of Gasi, son of Rashid bin Salim (see above) and enemy of Kubo, staged a series of uprisings against what he perceived to be the interference in local affairs by the Busaidi sultanate. These uprisings earned him—and then lost him—a “subsidy, which he affected among his own people to treat as tribute, of 1,000 rupees a month.”⁴⁹ The payment was restored to him in 1888 by the Busaidi Sultan Seyyid Khalifa, just before the newly-incorporated IBEAC assumed

⁴⁸ For more detailed accounts of this complicated history, see: F. J. Berg, “The Swahili Community of Mombasa, 1500–1900,” *The Journal of African History* 9:1 (1968), 35–56; F. J. Berg, “Mombasa under the Busaidi Sultanate: The City and its Hinterlands in the Nineteenth Century” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1971); T. H. R. Cashmore, “Sheikh Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim el Mazrui,” in N. R. Bennett (ed.) *Leadership in Eastern Africa: Six Political Biographies* (Brookline, MA: Boston University Press, 1968), 109–37; S. Chiraghdin, “Maisha ya Sheikh Mbaruk bin Rashid al-Mazrui,” *Swahili: The Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 1:31 (1960), 150–79; J. Gray, *The British in Mombasa, 1824–1826* (London: Macmillan, 1957); R. L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and A. A. Pearson, “History of the Origin of the War,” in *Correspondence Respecting the Recent Rebellion in British East Africa* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1896), 100–102.

⁴⁹ “No. 72. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Zanzibar, 12 Apr. 1896, in *Correspondence*, 86.

administrative control over the Sultan's "territories and dependencies from Wanga to Kipini inclusive [that is, from the border with what was then German East Africa in the South to the Tana River in the north], and also the islands embraced in such territory," under the terms of which treaty "his Highness the Sultan shall not be liable for any expenses connected with the same."⁵⁰ In return for continuing his "subsidy," Mbaruk supplied the company "with mercenaries from the ranks of his fighting slaves," although "their relations with him were never entirely satisfactory" and he "he allowed [the IBEAC's] Resident at Wanga ... no real power."⁵¹

In February 1895, the senior male representative of a rival branch of the Mazrui clan and "Chief of Takaungu," Salim bin Hamis, died. The IBEAC seized the opportunity to replace "a semi-independent petty Prince" who had, in defiance of both Sultanate and Company rule, imposed taxes on "British Indian traders residing there," with a more pliant local proxy. The company thus created the office of *Wali* of Takaungu within its administrative apparatus, and Kenneth MacDougall (then-District Officer, Malindi) appointed the late Salim bin Hamis's son, Rashid bin Salim to it.⁵² This, despite the fact that "according to strict hereditary law the best claimant was Mubarak-bin-Rashid [-bin-Hamis, not Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim of Gasi], the late Chief's nephew, as the eldest male of the family" (see Diagram 4.1).⁵³ Mbaruk appeared at first to accept the decision, but then left Takaungu to assume command of its arsenal, situated in the hinterland

⁵⁰ "Appendix No. 1, Concession of the 9th October 1888," in 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), 269.

⁵¹ "Inclosure 1 in No. 26. Memorandum by Mr. A. Hardinge respecting the Mazrui Chiefs, their History, &c. up to the recent Disturbances at Takaungu," in *Correspondence*, 31.

⁵² "No. 1. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Earl of Kimberley," Zanzibar, 13 Feb. 1895, in *Correspondence*, 1. Salim bin Hamis had always rejected the title of *Wali* and the stipend that accompanied it, considering that it would have indicated an acknowledgement of his subservience.

⁵³ Pearson, "History," 102.

at a place called Gonjoro. Fearing that Mbaruk was preparing to attack Takaungu and overthrow his cousin Rashid, and skeptical of his reasons to avoid meeting Hardinge and Sir Lloyd Matthews (First Minister/*Wazir* to the Zanzibari Sultanate), Hardinge and Matthews declared Mbaruk “a rebel against the authority of His Highness the Seyyid, and an outlaw” on 15 June 1895.⁵⁴

On the 16 June Hardinge and a military force of “50 marines and 310 blue-jackets, 54 Nubians, and 100 Zanzibari regulars” arrived at Gonjoro, finding it unfortified and largely abandoned, and encountering no resistance from Mbaruk’s “armed followers” who “covered” the riverbanks as they approached the settlement.⁵⁵ A messenger from Mbaruk arrived “to assure [Hardinge] of his master’s peaceful intentions,” but later, when “one or two of his armed retainers” were moving through the settlement, “an attempt was made to stop them” and,

in the struggle, a gun accidentally went off. This was interpreted as a signal for hostilities by some of his irregulars who were posted on the hillside near our camp, and they at once began firing at us. The sailors and marines replied, and in a short time an exchange of shots, more noisy than destructive, had put to an end all prospects of peaceful settlement. The 17th was spent in burning the outlying hamlets and cutting Mubarak’s crops.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ “Inclosure 2 in No. 13. Proclamation.” in *Correspondence*, 9.

⁵⁵ “No. 13. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Earl of Kimberley,” Zanzibar, 25 June 1895, in *Correspondence*, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 7–8.

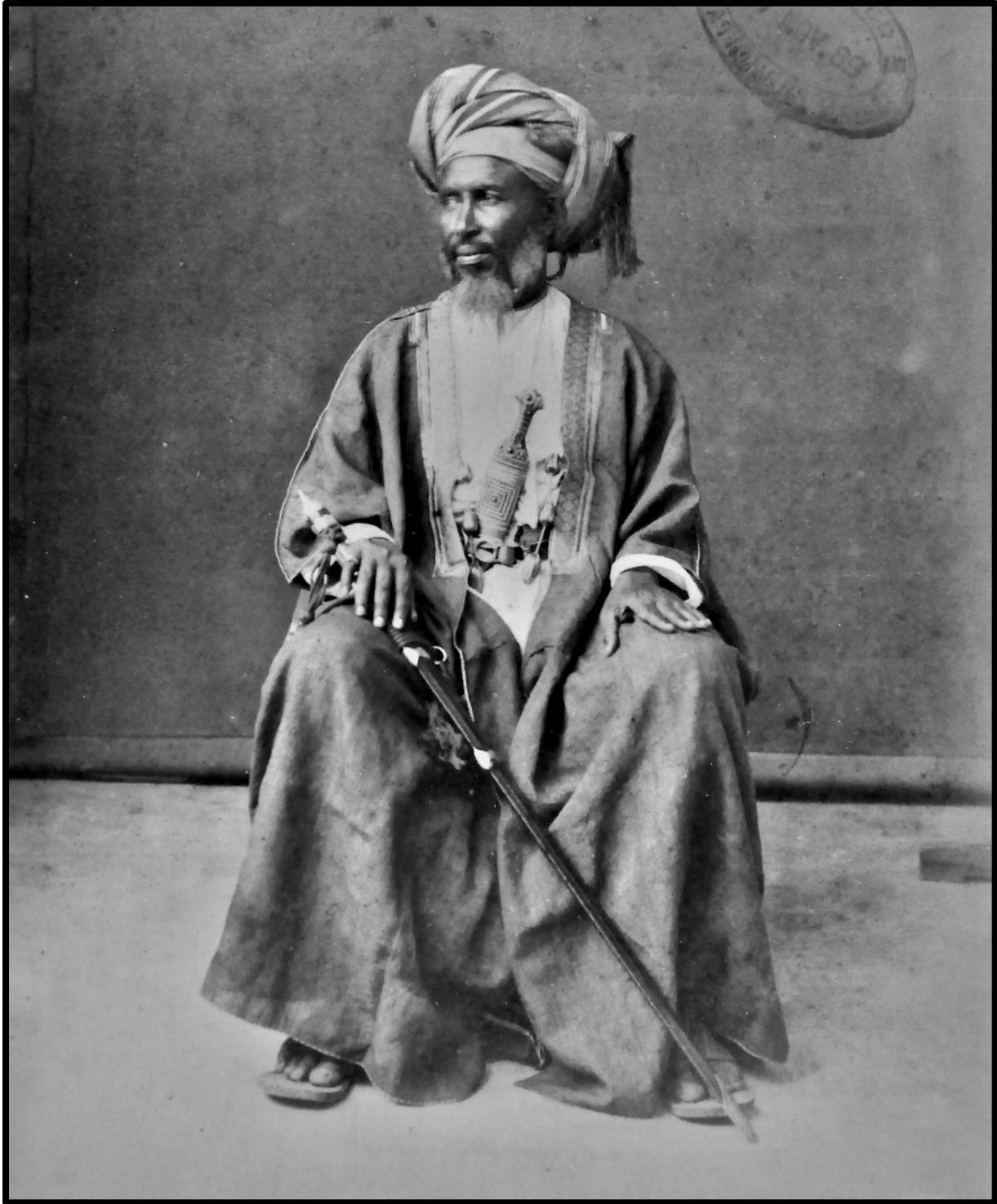


Image 4.4: Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim el-Mazrui, “Swahili Chief of Gasi.” BNA COPY 1/398/410, Box 3, “Photograph of Sheik M’Barak Bin Raschid Mazrooel [*sic*], Gazi near Wanga,” 1889.

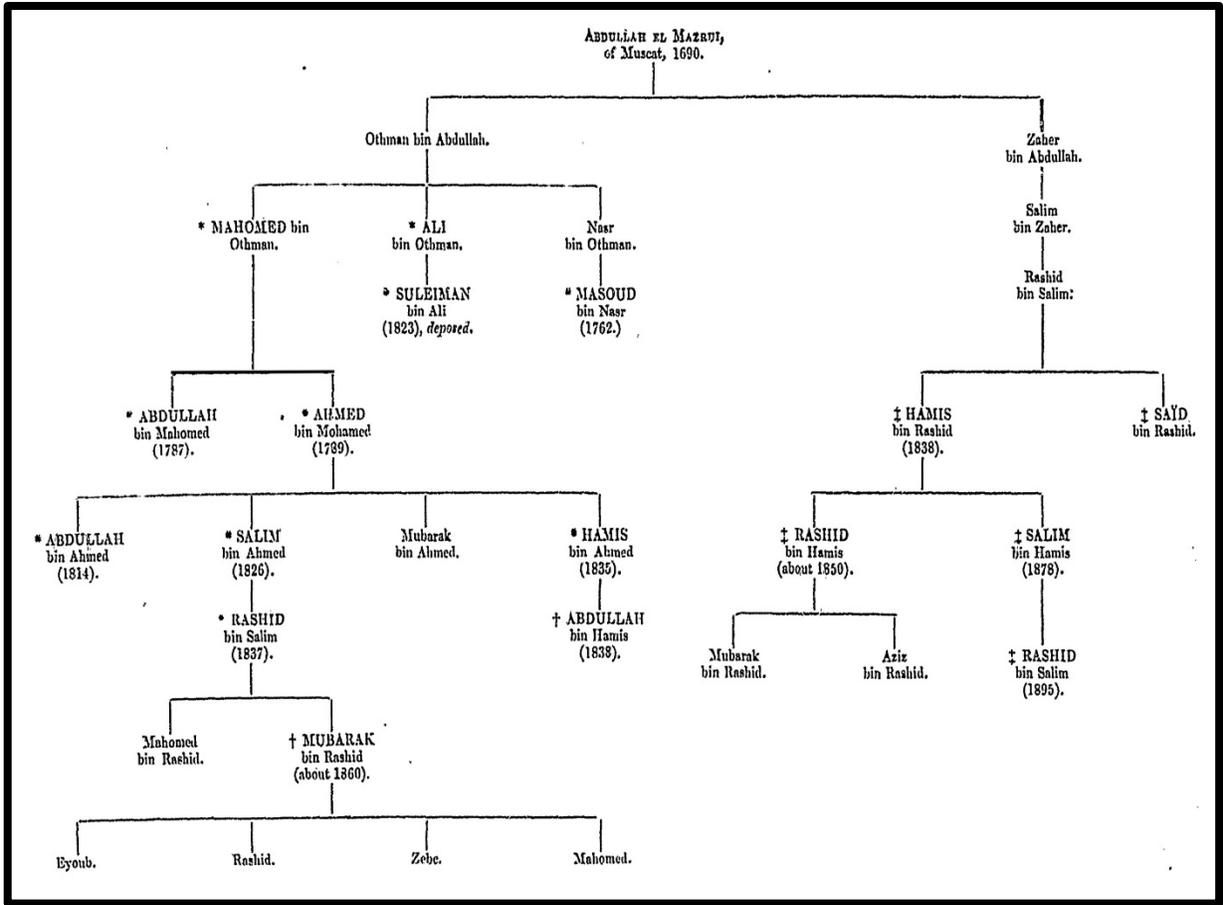


Diagram 4.1: Genealogical table of the Mazrui “Chiefs” of Gasi (left) and Takaungu (right). “Inclosure No. 2 in No. 26, Genealogical Tree and List of Chiefs,” in *Correspondence*, 34.

Mbaruk bin Rashid of Takaungu, together with his younger brother Aziz, sought refuge with Mbaruk bin Rashid of Gasi (see Image 4.4), their much more powerful classificatory uncle, whose offers to mediate a settlement were rejected by the new Administration (which suspected “that he had encouraged Mubarak of Takaungu in his contumacious attitude, in the hope of producing disturbances, and of being invited to quell them on his own terms, which would probably have included the recovery for himself of the hereditary Chieftainship of Takaungu”).⁵⁷ Sir Lloyd Matthews had been inclined “in the interests of peace and of the revival of trade in the districts affected” to accept Mbaruk of Gazi’s overtures, but Hardinge considered that “for the new Imperial Administration not to insist on the surrender of a rebel, and to allow an Arab Chief to put down for it a disturbance in its own territory, would be a confession of feebleness which would fatally damage our prestige, and that the restoration of peace and order a few weeks sooner would be too dearly purchased at such a price.”⁵⁸

In the upshot, Mbaruk of Gazi (whose father, recall, had been convinced to surrender to a Zanzibari-British alliance with promises of peace and protection before being deported and imprisoned for life in one of the Sultan’s prisons) refused to surrender either himself or his nephews to Hardinge, and fled Gasi with them and their followers to a fortified hilltop settlement

⁵⁷ “No. 14. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Mombasa, 6 July 1895, in *Correspondence*, 10.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Clearly, the “suspicion” which I have argued characterized South Coast sociality is not a purely local peculiarity of “culture and personality,” but rather a shared attitude among locals and outsiders that developed in part out of a history of political and economic transformations involving a range of governmental and private agencies from England, Oman, and East Africa. Clearly, too, the attribution of an almost childish obsession with “prestige” and appearances to local “Arab” rulers (Mbaruk “*affect[ing]* among his own people to *treat as* tribute” what was *actually*, in Hardinge’s eyes, a “subsidy,” for example) was as much a projection and disavowal by the new Protectorate’s administration of anxieties about the foundations of their own authority moving forward.

in the hinterland called Mwele (see Map A.9 in Appendix). Although referred to in this period as his “stronghold,” it was earlier described as a “Duruma village.” Mbaruk’s mother was said to be Duruma. Mwele fell to British forces in August after a brief battle (see Image 4.5 and Image 4.5), but Mubarak bin Rashid and his sons and nephews escaped. The next several months were spent followings rumors of their comings and goings up and down the coast, and reports of their attacks on caravans into the interior and settlements in the hinterland (including Mazeras, which was destroyed on 2 November 1895, and Rabai, Krapf’s old mission station, then under the supervision of the Reverend William Jones, which was attacked the same night as Mazeras).

In the north, the Mazrui rebels sought alliance with and support from Giriama leaders with whom they had long-term commercial relationships, trading in grain, ivory, and slaves. The most prominent of these was Ngonyo wa Mwavuo, the son of a wealthy Giriama farmer and one of his wives, who had been purchased as a slave. Ngonyo himself grew wealthy through trading for ivory from the interior, and then ivory for slaves at the coast, especially at Takaungu.⁵⁹ Ngonyo seems at first to have denied Mbaruk refuge when he was chased from Gonjoro, but then to have sheltered the larger forces of his uncle, and even rumored to have “made blood-brotherhood with him.”⁶⁰ Ngonyo would eventually turn himself in to the Administration, giving Hardinge “the fullest information as to the doings of the rebels, as well as provisions and guides.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ MHT 47.

⁶⁰ “No. 43. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Zanzibar, 18 Dec. 1895, in *Correspondence*, 52; and W. H. Jones to J. R. W. Pigott, 13 Aug. 1895; A. G. Smith to J. R. W. Pigott, 25 Aug. 1895; W. H. Jones to J. R. W. Pigott, 25 Aug. 1895; W. H. Jones to J. R. W. Pigott, n.d., W. H. Jones to J. R. W. Pigott, 28 Aug. 1895; and W. H. Jones to J. R. W. Pigott, 9 Sep. 1895, in “The Mbaruk Rebellion, as reported from Rabai, Jomvu, Mbungu, Freretown.” Fred Morton Papers, Folder “Coast A 250A–422A.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; No. 59. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Mombasa, 17 Feb. 1896, in *Correspondence*, 62. See also A. G. Smith to J. R. W. Pigott, 1 Dec. 1895 in “The Mbaruk Rebellion.” Fred Morton Papers, Folder “Coast A 250A–422A.”

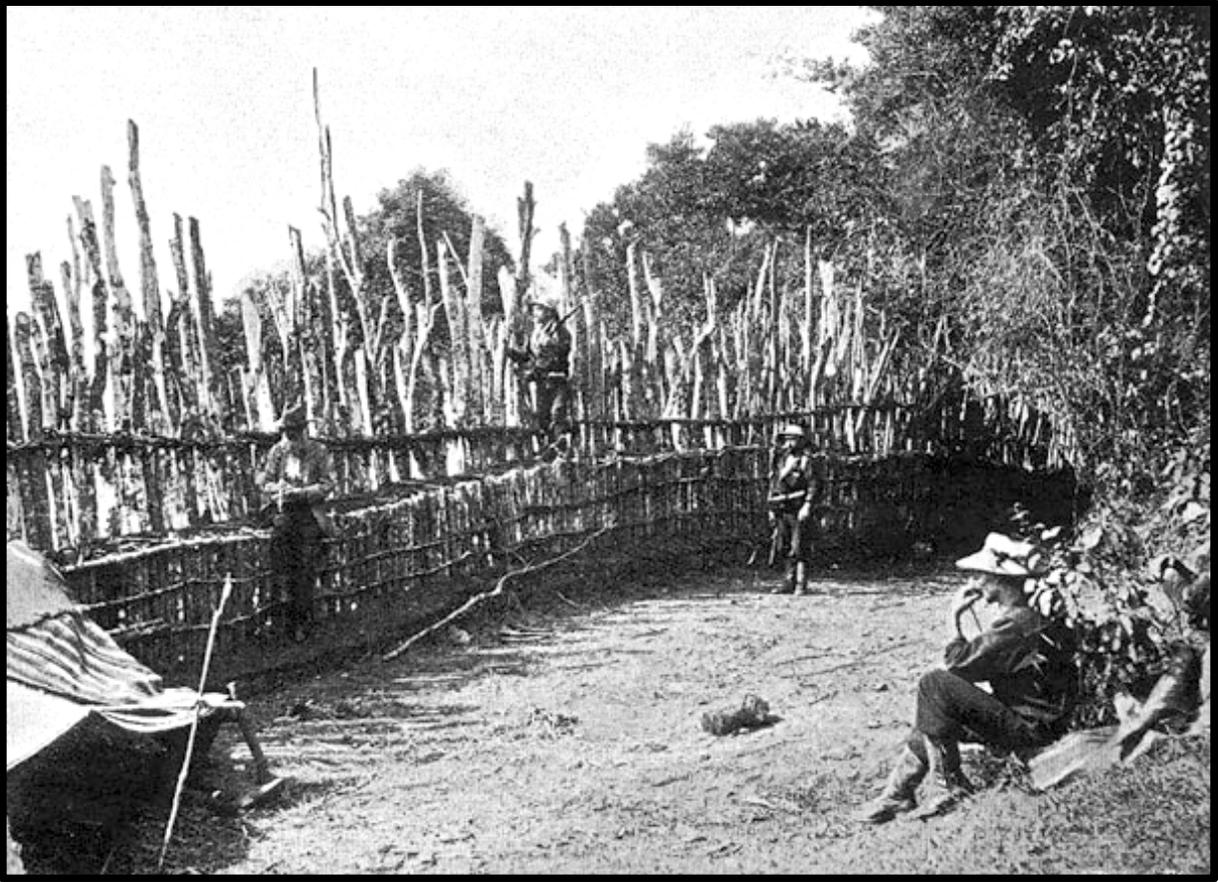


Image 4.5: Photograph taken inside the Mwele fortifications after its capture by British and Zanzibari forces in 1895. I thank Mr. Kevin Patience for sharing with me his copy of the image, the original of which is in the Zanzibar National Archives.



Image 4.6: Photograph taken inside Mwele showing the destruction of its building after its capture. Again, my thanks to Mr. Patience for providing me with copies of these images from the Zanzibar National Archives.



Image 4.7: Left to right, seated: Mbaruk bin Rashid of Takaungu (captioned as “Baraka Sultan of Tackavangu”), Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim el Mazrui of Gasi (“Mabaracku Sultan of Kawcabani” [=Gasi]), and Aziz bin Rashid (“Haziz”). Oxford University (OXF), Weston Library Commonwealth and Africa Manuscripts Collection, MSS.Afr.s.1494, “Photographs of British East Africa belonging to Arthur W. Read,” [n.d.]; and Fred Morton Papers, loose photographs. It is unclear when and where this photograph was made, likely German East Africa post-“rebellion.”

Ngonyo was the most well-known of the “new men” described at the end of Chapter Three—those who had come to prominence in the second half of the nineteenth century through their political and especially economic connections to outside forces.⁶² For this reason, as well as for his lineage’s purported origins among the Digo peoples to the South, Ngonyo was (according to Hardinge) “looked upon with a good deal of jealousy by the other Giriama magnates, and himself assumes a somewhat independent attitude towards the ‘Enyetsi’ and Elders at the Kaya.”⁶³ Nevertheless, he was apparently instrumental in convincing an assembly of “forty Elders ... representing in all about fourteen districts” to “abandon their system of benevolent neutrality towards the rebels.”⁶⁴ Mbaruk’s forces were driven back south, at which point the new Administration enlisted the services of Kubo, “the Chief of the Wadigo,” who, recall, had an existing enmity toward “Mbaruk, the Swahili Chief of Gasi.”⁶⁵

Kubo’s role, however, seems to have been limited to the provision of porters and guides, none of whom were up to the standards of Major G. P. Hatch, then leading the military operation against Mbaruk. Hatch complained that Kubo had “not the slightest control” over the porters, whom he describes as frequently “deserting” in search of palm-wine in the surrounding area.⁶⁶ Although according to Hatch only “about one-third” of Kubo’s porters “put in an appearance” each morning, this is out of a total number of around 220. As will be seen in what follows, provision of

⁶² On Ngonyo wa Mwavuo, see: MHT 1, MHT 4, MHT 14, MHT 47, MHT 48; Miers Interviews. BIEA, Box File 1, Kiponda Mwavuo, 4 Aug. 1973; Box File 3, Mwavuo wa Menza, 19 June 1973, Kiponda wa Mwavuo 2 Nov. 1974, and Mwavuo wa Menza 8 Nov. 1974; Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” *passim*.

⁶³ “No. 61. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Mombasa, 19 Feb. 1896, in *Correspondence*, 69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 70.

⁶⁵ “Inclosure 1 in No. 63. Major Hatch to Mr. A. Hardinge,” Mombasa, 28 February 1896, in *Correspondence*, 74; Le Roy, “Au Kilima-ndjaro,” 409.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 74–5.

laborers for the new Administration would be one of the primary services Chiefs and Village Headmen were expected to provide to the new Protectorate.

Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Hamis (of Takaungu), Mbaruk bin Rashid bin Salim (of Gasi), and Aziz bin Rashid bin Hamis, eluded British and Zanzibari forces for several more weeks before crossing the border into German East Africa in mid-April 1896. After first offering to combine forces with the Germans to invade British East Africa, Mbaruk (of Gasi) surrendered at Moa to Major Hermann von Wissman, then Governor of German East Africa.⁶⁷ At the time of their surrender and disarmament, the Mazrui “rebels” had “a following of 3,000 persons, 1,500 of whom were armed with guns.”⁶⁸ Mbaruk and his kin were exiled to Dar es Salaam.

After the Mazrui Rebellion, Kubo the person disappears from the Administrative archive (except, as indicated above, in occasional administrative reports as “the only [Chief] of standing” among the Digo peoples), until the reorganization of Vanga District’s Locations and Sub-Locations (and their accompanying administrative positions) in April 1913.⁶⁹ Until that point, the district had been “divided into three sub-districts under the Liwali of Vanga, the Kathi of Wassein, and the Mudir of Gazi, respectively,” Arab administrators formally appointed by the Sultan of Zanzibar subject to approval by the Protectorate.⁷⁰ Under the terms of the new division, Vanga District was split into eighteen locations, two of which—Vanga and Gazi—as predominantly “Arab” Townships, continued to be administered by the Liwali and Mudir. The remaining sixteen locations were to be:

⁶⁷ “No. 73. Mr. A. Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury,” Mombasa, 17 Apr. 1896, in *Correspondence*, 95.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 94.

⁶⁹ Hardinge, *Condition*, 4; KNA KWL/1/3/4 Political Record Book, E. V. Hemmant, “Native Administration,” n.d.

⁷⁰ KNA KWL/1/3/4 Political Record Book, E.V. Hemmant, “Native Administration,” n.d.



Image 4.8: “Photograph of a meeting convened in Mombasa” [1907]. From left to right, standing: A. C. Hollis, Captain E. Hayes-Sadler, the Liwali of Malindi, the Liwali of Vanga, the Kadhi of Mombasa, the Liwali of Faza, the Liwali of Siu, and Acting PC T. T. Gilkison. From left to right, sitting: Seif bin Salim (Liwali of Mambui), Ali bin Salim (Assistant Liwali of Mombasa), Sheikh-ul-Islam, Governor Sir J. Hayes-Sadler, Salim bin Khalfan (Liwali of Mombasa), the Liwali of Takaungu, and the Liwali of Lamu. OXF Mss.Brit.Emp.s.295, “Alfred Claud Hollis Autobiography.”

administered by the local elders who are responsible for the peace and good conduct of their people, have to assist in the collection of taxes and supply of labour and try cases according to native law. Each council of elders has its president and deputy president who perform the functions and exercise the powers given to headmen under the Enforcement of Authority Ordinance.⁷¹

In the eight “purely Wadigo locations” membership in the council of elders was “restricted to members of the ‘Ngambi’,” formalizing the grafting of the Provincial Administration onto an existing gerontocratic order.⁷² Under this new schema, finally, Kikoneni Location, Kubo’s home, was “divided into four sub-locations Kikonene [*sic*], Mrima, Mwanyamala and Kigandini each sublocations [*sic*] having its own Council of Elders and the last three having their own sub-headmen under the Kubo”—the definite article seeming to indicate that “Kubo” was now understood to be the name of a rank or office, rather than a personal name.⁷³

In January of 1916, as part of a broader effort to “get the various sections to agree on a uniform practice” through the codification of “Native Law and Custom,” the Commissioner of the amalgamated Coast Province, C. W. Hobley, wrote to DC Osborne to inquire about “the Kubo.” His concern was that “there is no mention of the Kubo in Mr. Dundas’ [*sic*] notes and the inference is that the N[orthern] Digo do not acknowledge him but this may not be correct. There is no Kubo in Giriama as far as I know, but someone told me that there was formerly one in Duruma. One wonders therefore whether it is a Nyika institution or brought in from outside and if so from where?”⁷⁴ In response, Osborne generated a remarkable report, “Notes on the Wadigo of Vanga

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. I return to the complications resulting from this below.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 C. W. Hobley to DC Gazi, G. H. Osborne, 14 January 1916. Hobley was a keen reader of J. G. Frazer (who would supply the Introduction to Hobley’s 1922 *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*), and in fact distributed Frazer’s ethnographic questionnaire among his District Officers. In much of the quasi-ethnographic discourse among colonial administrators during this

District”—remarkable not only for its detail and conceptual neologisms (like “Kuboship”), but for its formal qualities as well. The section on political leadership clearly resembles the “chronicle” form of historical knowledge in which its contents were likely related to Osborne by knowledgeable elders, and from which Osborne has uneasily abstracted in places to generalize statements about “the accepted theory of Kubo succession” and its difference from “the recognized Digo theory of succession” (for example):

The first record of any individual leadership dates back probably to about 150-200 years ago when a Mdigo by name Mwamdia Ngoma, born at Shimba, seems to have assumed the leadership of the Tribe and installed himself at a hill called Jombe [*sic*, =Dzombo].

It was however probably in the time of Mwamakati Muzungu who succeeded the 4th Kubo or leader and was almost at once deposed because he was supposed to have stopped the rains and caused a famine, that the Wadigo migration from Shimba began in earnest to the Lowlands.

The Chieftainship “Kubo”

Since Mwamdia Ngoma there has been a recognized succession of Chiefs or “Kubos” (see Appendix 1) down to the Kubo Shehe Mwachalozi who died Feb. 20. 1916 the 12th Kubo to hold office.

Selection for the Kubo Chieftainship was originally limited to the KinaNgalla clan.

The first 5 Kubos are said to have belonged to this clan. The 6th Kubo Mwakikonga, who was the first to assume the title of “Kubo” was the founder of the Mwenjano family of the KinaNgalla Clan, and from his time the choice of the KinaNgalla Clan for the selection of a Kubo has been limited to the Mwenjano Family to which all the succeeding Kubos are said to have belonged.

This is the accepted theory of Kubo succession among the Wadigo.

The consequence is that the KinaNgalla clan have now assumed some of the prerogatives of Royalty. The most interesting feature of this clan is that its members do not follow the recognized Digo law of Succession through the female line but inherit direct from father to son.

Theoretically where the son of the deceased is a minor the deceased’s eldest brother acted as guardian till the son was of age. Practically the uncle continued in possession till his death when the real heir might succeed.

In the case of the succession to the Kuboship as may be seen from Appendix 1, whilst nominally the son was supposed to succeed, in practice generally on the death of the Kubo the most powerful or influential member of the Mwenjano family succeeded and property seems to have followed the same fate, the son of the deceased eventually perhaps succeeding to the Kuboship and a portion of the property.

period, one sees the influence of an older Victorian anthropology much more interested in historical questions in the guise of the “diffusion” of culture.

e.g. Mwakikonga had amassed during his reign considerable wealth, but on his death his various children seized what each could retain and successive Kubos are said not to have been preeminently wealthy. Shehe the late Kubo had practically no property.

Mwakikonga, the first leader to assume the title of Kubo was a remarkable man of great ability who converted the leadership into a veritable autocracy and not only earned the implicit obedience of his own people but the recognition and respect of the Diwans of Umba [*sic*, =Vumba] Kuu and the other heads of neighboring settlements and tribes.

During this period the Digo country was divided into 3 areas:—

1. That around Jombo was under the direct administration of Mwakikonga himself.
2. The Trans-Mkurumuji area (i.e. Matofia, Muhaka, Ukunda, Diani) he placed under the guardianship of Mbeha [*marginal note by DC C. B. Thomson: Mbega*]
3. It was in the 3rd and 4th areas i.e. those of the Digo settlements on the banks of the Umba River and in German East Africa that he failed to consolidate his rule.

The Umba Valley WaDigo chose a chief of their own to whom they also gave the title “Kubo,” and maintained a constant warfare with Mwakikonga.

Their “Kubo” who belonged to the Kina Nyiro section of the Waeombo [=Wayombo] Clan gave himself the significant name of “Mtondomera” which means that part of a sweet potato which contains the eye upon which the new plant sprouts thereby implying that however often he was defeated by Mwakikonga he recovered and thrived.

Mtondomera outlived Mwakikonga and the Umba Valley Wadigo became a separate body.

The struggle was apparently brought to a conclusion by Mtondomera marrying the daughter of Mwiri, nephew of Mwakikonga who succeeded Mwakikonga forcibly to the exclusion of the own son of Mwakikonga also called Mwiri. Later on Gita the 9th Kubo married the daughter of Mtondomera.

The Kina Nyiro section of the Waeombo Clan on the institution of Mtondomera of which he was a member broke away from the rest of the clan and adopted the patrilineal instead of the matrilineal system of inheritance, leaving the other section of the Waeombo the Kina Nguli family to follow the regular ki-Digo system of inheritance.

The genealogical table of the Umba Valley Chieftainship is shown in Appendix 3, Gunda the present Chief of the Umba Valley Wadigo being the 5th to hold the office, the 3 sons of Mtondomera having each held it in turn.

4. German East Africa Wadigo

These Wadigo appear to have been a fourth section of the tribe owing partial allegiance at one time to Mwakikonga through his headman Mwana Moki Mwabubu who is spoken of by Hollis in his History of the WaVumba as an “underling of Mwakikonga.”

Mwana Moki belonged to the Kombo family of the Dziribe clan and obtaining a certain amount of influence among the Wadigo built himself a house on the top of Kilulu where he and his 5 brothers are buried.

He is said to have been killed by the Masai in one of their raids and all connection between the Kubo of British East and German East Africa appears to have ceased.

In modern times according to Mzee Mwachalozi a refugee headman from G.E.A. [German East Africa] all authority among G.E.A. Wadigo is vested in the Ngambi Councils who select a Headman or Jumbe who is presented to the Government for their approval.

They do not send representatives to the Kubo of Vanga District or consult him in any way.

Selection of the Kubo

The KinaNgalla clan assemble and select a candidate from the Wa-Indzano family. They then send a deputation accompanied by presents to a Medicine man of importance to consult him on the suitability of their candidate for the office. If their selected candidate is not approved they return and choose another, till their selection is approved.

This visit or visits to the Medicine Man are secret and the personality of the Medicine [Man?] is unknown to the candidate or the general public. The KinaNgalla, their selection having been duly approved, send word to the neighboring WaDigo, WaSegeju, and Coast tribes that they have chosen a Kubo.

He was taken to the Diwan to whom he swore allegiance on behalf of his people who called together the Wasegeju and the Coast Sheikhs and shewed him to them. The Uмба Valley and G.E.A. WaDigo were not specially summoned to this meeting.

The new Kubo was given by the Diwan a Turban and cloth and a number of Coast Elders were told off to accompany him to Kikoneni where he made a feast for his escort before their return.

Kubo Mangaru was sent by the Diwan to Zanzibar where he was given by the Sultan a sword, Kilemba [“Turban”] and cloth. The Uмба Valley WaDigo also apparently swore allegiance to the Diwan, because when the present Liwali was made prisoner by Mbaruk and was being sent to Mwele the Uмба Valley Kubo collected his fighting men at Miongoni and rescued the Liwali by force of arms.

Appendix 1: Succession of Kubos

Kubo	1 st	Mwamchia Ngoma
	2 nd	Movera Chalafu (1)
	3 rd	Chalafu
	4 th	Mongonzi
	5 th	Mwamakati Mzungu (2)
	6 th	Mwakikonga (3)
	7 th	Mwiri Momosi (4)
	8 th	Njali Mwamyendesesi (5)
	9 th	Gita Mwiri (6)
	10 th	Chane (7)
	11 th	Mangaru (8)
	12 th	Shehe Chalezi (9)

(1) Moveru Chalafu, nephew of Mwamchia

(2) Mwamakati, brother of Mwongonzi, was deposed shortly after accession because of a drought occurring.

(3) Mwakikonga, son of Mwamakati, reigned about 1820, vide Hollis “History of the WaVumba”

(4) Son of Mwakikonga’s sister, Mwakikonga’s own son Mwiri being passed over.

(5) Njali, cousin to Mwiri Momosi

(6) Gita married the daughter of Mtondomera.

(7) Chano was killed by Mbaruk about 1880

- (8) Mangaru taken by the Diwan to be introduced to the Sultan of Zanzibar, was continually at war with Mbaruk and died about 1890 without issue.
- (9) Shehe bin Chalozzi the first Mohammedan Kubo died 20/2/16
 Kubos 1-5 belonged to the KinaNgalla Clan
 Kubos 6-12 were members of the WaIndzano family of the KinaNgalla Clan.⁷⁵

Before Osborne could finish the report, however, Kubo Shehe Mwachalozi died (on 20 February, 1916), posing the problem of succession to an office newly beholden to British Administration that had spawned the Mazrui rebellion twenty years earlier. Hopley's questions for Osborne became more practical ("I should be glad if you would go into the questions of his functions and utility with the elders") and less ethnological [Osborne's replies in italics]:

- a) Do the elders desire to elect a successor or is the succession automatic
(a) The accession appears to be automatic in so far as it is confined to the Mwenjano family of the Kinangalla clan. Theoretically it falls on the eldest son but if he is not of age a brother or nephew of the deceased Kubo can and has been frequently selected. In the present case there are at least 3 possible candidates for selection.
- b) The late Kubo did not as far as I know exercise great influence on the tribe and if he ought to have played a leading part in their deliberations and failed to do so, I would suggest that the successor only be recognized by government if he takes up his proper duties and carries them out.
(b) There is no question that the Wadigo intend to select a Kubo when he will be presented to the Government as their selection. As in the case in other parts of the protectorate I presume that the selected candidate will be accepted on probation for 1 year by Government.
- c) Has the Kubo theoretically any influence with the Digo over the border in German East Africa? This is an important point these days and Mwacholozi will be available to enlighten you. Or have they a separate Kubo in each area?
(c) The Kubo according to Mwacholozi exerts no influence even theoretically over the German East [Africa] Wadigo. They do not even send representatives to greet the new Kubo on accession. There has only been one akubo in German East [Africa] Mwaca Mochi who established himself at Kilulu [and] is buried there—On his death the power reverted to the Ngambis of Wazee. At the present day the elders select their head man (Jumbe) and present him to Government for acceptance.

⁷⁵ KNA KWL/1/3/5 G. H. Osborne, "Notes on the Wadigo of Vanga District," n.d. [1916]

d) It may be that the Kubo was an appointed representative of some tribe to whom in former days the Digo were subject and which has now disappeared as a political factor like the Diwans of Vanga.

*(d) The Kubo is an original product of the Digo tribe probably selected like the Mkamba Muthiani for a special purpose which should have ceased on the completion of the object in view (in this case probably a migration), but which the personality of the holder enabled him to consolidate into a lasting autocracy e.g. Mwanchia Mgoma 1st Kubo and Mwachikonga 5th Kubo.*⁷⁶

Matters were further complicated by the fact that, according to both Osborne's own information and a "memo" by A. C. Hollis, "the selected candidate for Kubo had to go to the Diwani at Vumba Kuu [near Vanga] to be invested with the royal cap, turban, Joho, and other clothes."⁷⁷ Part of the problem in selecting and installing a new Kubo was that the Diwanate at Vumba Kuu no longer existed. The last Diwan, "Marithia" (Seyyid Ahmed bin Sultan Twahiri el-Jadid), died in 1897.⁷⁸ The closest analogue, in Osborne's opinion, was the Liwali of Vanga, but he also considered that either "the DC or better still the PC should make the investiture if possible unless the claims of Zanzibar come in any way."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199 Political Record Book, PC Coast to DC Gazi, "Digo Internal Organization," 28 February 1916; KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199 Political Record Book, DC Gazi to PC Coast, 9 March 1916.

⁷⁷ KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Kubo in Vanga District, DC Vanga to PC Coast, n.d. [1916].

⁷⁸ A. C. Hollis, "Notes on the History of Vumba, East Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900), 294, 296.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

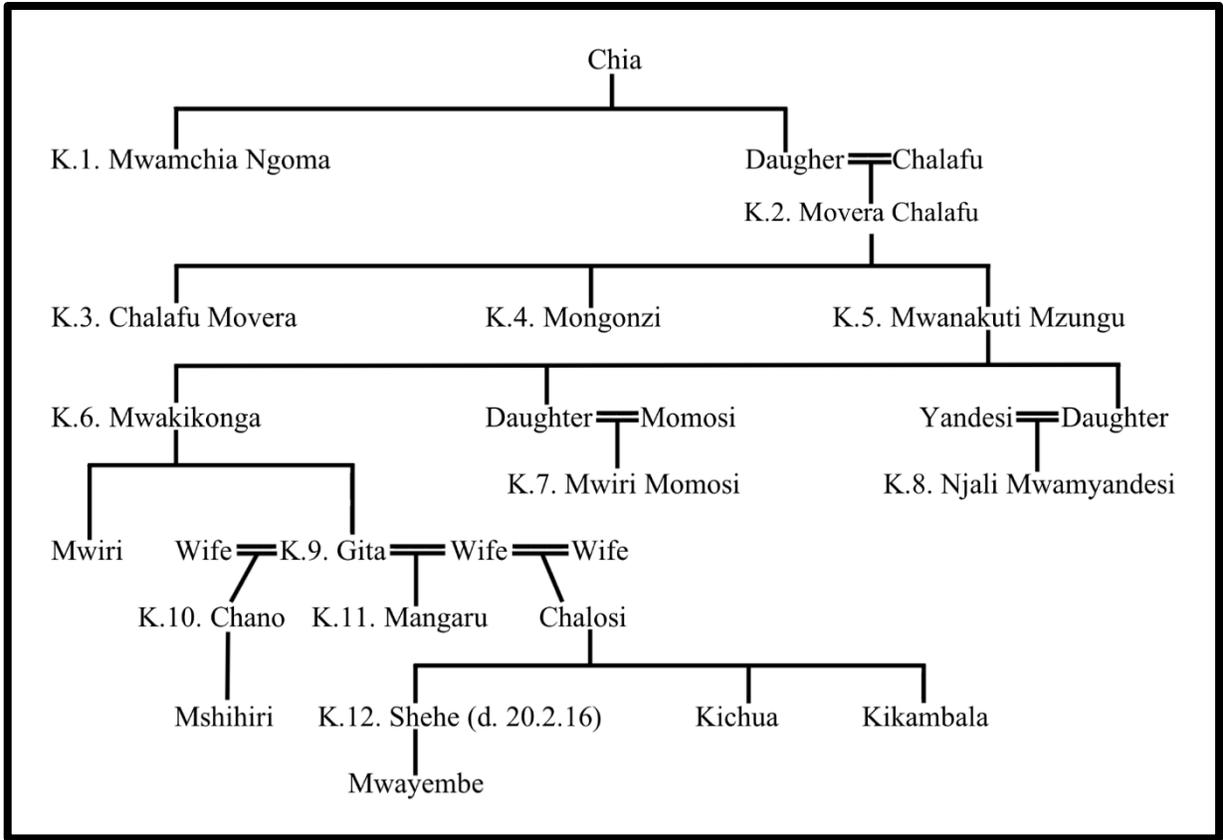


Diagram 4.2: “Appendix 2: Genealogy of the Kubos.” Genealogical chart of the “Kubos” of the Kikoneni/Mrima/Dzombo region, as drafted by DC Osborne in his “Notes.” KNA KWL/1/3/5 Political Record Book, G. H. Osborne, “Notes on the Wadigo of Vanga District,” n.d. [1916]

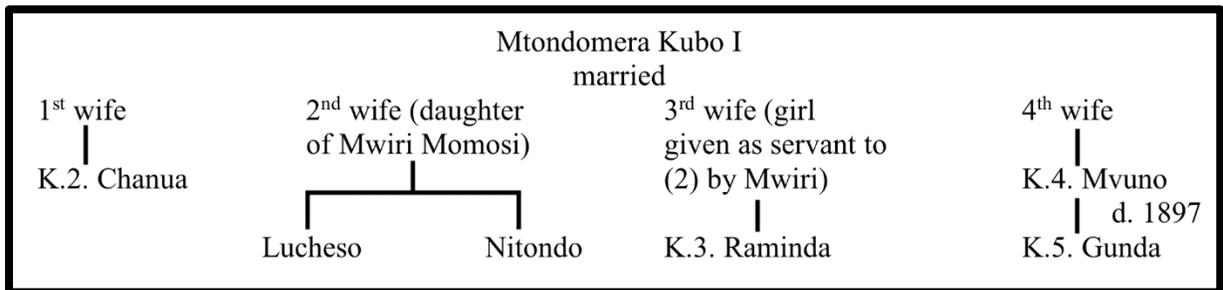


Diagram 4.3: “Appendix 3: Genealogy of Kubos (Umba Valley).” Genealogical chart of the Umba River Valley “Kubos” as drafted by DC Osborne in “Notes,” beneath with he includes the following: “Lucheso quarreled with Chanua and returned with his sister to his own people. He was killed by Mbaruk at the same time as the latter killed Kubo Chano. Mvuno was living at Miongoni when Mbaruk rebelled against the British. He assembled his fighting men and rescued the present Liwali from the escort who was taking him as a prisoner to Mbaruk’s stronghold at Mwele. Gunda the present Kubo is blind.” KNA KWL/1/3/5 Political Record Book, G. H. Osborne, “Notes on the Wadigo of Vanga District,” n.d. [1916]

In the upshot the question of succession was put off until after the dislocation, scarcity, and insecurity in the region as a result of the First World War (and the German army's invasion of southern Kenya) had subsided.⁸⁰ But in the interval, new claimants to the "Kuboship" had emerged. In October of 1917, PC Hobley requested information on each of the six claimants "from the point of view of 1) Ancestry, 2) Local position, Wealth and standing, 3) Character, and 4) Approximate age and grade in ngambi if any."⁸¹ C. B. Thompson, who had taken over as Acting DC of Vanga District, compiled a synoptic table comparing the six aspirants according to Hobley's criteria (see Table 4.1, below), but noted that "with regard to the characters of 3, 4, 5, and 6 beyond their desire to Kubo, I know nothing about them," except that "there have been no complaints of any kind against them either by headmen or others."⁸² Hobley, however, considered that "none of the men appear to be suitable."⁸³ While maintaining that "the point of view Government should adopt is that the nomination of a person for the post of Kubo is one for the WaDigo themselves to settle," the Administration had certain expectations:

The desire should be expressed by a large majority of the elders from the various parts of the district. The candidate should I consider be a member of the Ngambi though not necessarily of the highest grade for we do not desire a Kubo who is of advanced age.

The candidate should be a person of some position and wealth and respected by the tribe, not an ambitious nobody who would be likely to use the position to amass wealth.

If the people can unite sufficiently to nominate a suitable man the matter will be considered by Government, but before he is invested Government approval must be obtained.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Kubo in Vanga District, PC Coast to DC Vanga, 15 Mar. 1916.

⁸¹ KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Kubo in Vanga District, PC Coast to DC Vanga, 26 Oct. 1917.

⁸² KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Kubo in Vanga District, Ag. DC Vanga to PC Coast, 16 Nov. 1917.

⁸³ KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Kubo in Vanga District, PC Coast to DC Vanga, "The Digo Kubo," 15 Dec. 1917

⁸⁴ Ibid.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Ancestry</u>	<u>Local Position</u>	<u>Character</u>	<u>Approx. Age & Grade</u>
1) Fundi Mwakimatu	Kigandini	Kina Ngalla on mother's side	Formerly akida of Kubo Mwachalozi. Not wealthy.	A fitina maker of the worst type. Impudent and troublesome	About 50 Grade Mkono.
2) Mwachagaga Kiruku wa Gagaga		Muhindzano on father's side	Formerly akida of Kubo Mwachalozi. Not wealthy.	A fitina maker of the worst type. Impudent and troublesome	About 35 Grade Mkono
3) Mwanjerewa Majoreni wa Jerewa		Muhindzano on father's side	No official position. No wealth or standing	?	About 35 Grade Mkono
4) Mwachagaga Kiruku wa Jeruko (Msambwemi)		Muhindzano on father's side	No official position but father akida of Kubo Mwanjaro. Poor.	?	About 35 No grade
5) Mwachagaga Kiruku wa Mwachagaga		Muhindzano on mother's side	Formerly akida of Kubo Mwachalozi. Poor.	?	About 65 or 70 Grade Mkono
6) Mwachagaga Kiruku wa Mwachagaga		Muhindzano on father's side	No official position. Father killed by Sheikh Mbaruk because of his pretension to the office of Kubo. Poor.	?	About 35 years No grade.

Table 4.1: Synoptic table of claimants to the office of Kubo, as compiled by DC Thompson in response to a request for information by PC Hobley. KNA PC/COAST/1/22/17 Ag. DC Vanga to PC Coast, 16 Nov. 1917.

Additionally, “the functions of the Kubo should be carefully defined after consultation with the elders and approval of the proposed functions by Government obtained before appointment,” and inquiry was required into what “emoluments” the Kubo “was entitled to receive from his people in former times.”⁸⁵

Although there is no mention in any earlier source of Kubo’s membership in the Ngambi council—indeed, all earlier sources describe the key criterion of accession to be membership in a lineage-based group rather than an age-grade hierarchy—Hobley feels strongly that the next Kubo *should* be a member. This was likely for three related reasons. First, Kubo’s relationship to the Diwans of Vumba—a dynastic repository of powerful magic that partially underwrote his own authority—had been severed by the disappearance of that title and its displacement by Sultanate-nominated and Protectorate-approved *Liwalis*. An important ritual element of the “Kuboship”—the investiture of a candidate with the regalia of his new position by the Diwan—was thus no longer possible without significant modification.

Second, as the Ngambi had, since 1913, been absorbed into the new administrative structure of locational “councils of elders” and made responsible to newly created Headmen and Sub-Headmen (see above), Hobley may have sought both to re-found “the Kuboship” on a connection to the Provincial Administration, and by restricting candidates to the Ngambi to limit possible future Kubos to a pool of men who would already be known to the Administration, on the one hand, and have experience governing, on the other. Third, and finally, if the Kubo were also a member of the Ngambi, his authority by virtue of his connection to a hierarchy of outside power—the Administration—would be supplemented by a different ritual basis—the proprietary rituals of

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the Ngambi—and the weight of “tradition” that Hobley and others believed followed from this. This moment, in other words, between the Mazrui Rebellion of 1895–6 and the end of the First World War, was one in which a variety of economic, political, and juridical offices, institutions, and relationships were rapidly and significantly transformed. Others, like the semi-independent polities of Takaungu Mazrui or the Diwans of Vumba, or, as it would turn out, “the Kuboship,” lapsed entirely. Cynthia Gillette reports that “according to Kikoneni elders” interviewed during her fieldwork in 1975, “*Kubo* Chorozi [=Mwachalozi], who ruled during World War I and led the Wadigo in fighting that took place at Gazi, was the last man to be addressed as *Kubo*. Those who followed Chorozi were known merely as “chief” and were recognized as being part of the British colonial administration.”⁸⁶ None of the subsequent appointees to the chiefship were claimants to the “Kuboship,” and the kinship-based transmission of the leadership position was abandoned.⁸⁷

The rapid transformations occasioned first by the capitalization of the East African economy, then by the formalization of regional concessionary arrangements between the Imperial British East Africa Company and the Zanzibari Sultanate, and finally the transfer of administrative responsibilities along the coastal strip from Company to Crown (and their subsequent reorganization) made administrators like Hobley uneasy. If Hardinge (who later joined the British Fascist party) had sought to found the legitimacy of the British East Africa Protectorate on a healthy respect for its capacity for violence (which capacity the Company, he felt, had lacked), Hobley sought to clothe what he acknowledged to be radically altered institutions in a veneer of “tradition” wherever possible. This would entail anthropological investigation on the part of DCs

⁸⁶ C. Gillette, “A Test of the Concept of Backwardness: A Case Study of Digo Society in Kenya” (unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1978), 70.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

and District Officers (DOs) as part of their administrative duties in order to ascertain, record, and then standardize and codify “Native Law and Custom.” But it was also part of what, in the following section, I argue was a growing sense on the part of administrators that the new institutions lacked a specifically *ritual* legitimacy in the eyes of the African population. Put briefly, administrators believed that those holding office within the Provincial Administration would lack legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies, and thus lack efficacy in implementing government policy, if they were not *also* subjected to “traditional” rituals of initiation into analogous precolonial positions, and thereby made privy to the esoteric knowledge the fear of which administrators believed had grounded precolonial authority.⁸⁸ Awareness, however, that the state rather than ritual now backed authority meant that state-sponsored rituals intended to lend authenticity to administrative office achieved the opposite effect, and were themselves perceived to be fraudulent imitations of true Mijikenda ritual.

In what follows, I trace how this sense developed in the early twentieth century with respect to the colonial Ngambi councils of elders and explore its consequences for postcolonial South Coast society. I argue that the administration that was haunted by this sense of its own illegitimacy, and that this drove it continually to attempt to re-ground itself in “traditional” ritual. Among the Mijikenda peoples of the South Coast, however, political sensibilities had already undergone a dramatic shift away from the secret ritual and ritual media of elders, recognizing that local political power was now increasingly available by virtue of connections to more powerful outsiders (see Chapter Three). This was a political logic already present in South Coast society, not an outside

⁸⁸ In an article published after this chapter was written, the historian David Bresnahan independently arrives at the same conclusion. See D. Bresnahan, “Forest Imageries and Political Practice in Colonial Coastal Kenya,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12:4 (2018), 655–73.

innovation, insofar as social relations had long been characterized by patronage and clientelism. What was new was the scale on which it became generalized during the early colonial period. And, as I indicated earlier, when the ritual basis of elder power was replaced by connection to the state and recognition of this new basis undermined the perceived authenticity of State-sponsored ritual, the secret ritual knowledge of elders *not* in power became suspicious. No longer a “necessary evil,” it became simply evil, and the “durable bundle of meanings and practices” surrounding the operation of the precolonial gerontocratic order became an imagistic or associational, if not conceptual, template for the elaboration of twentieth-century ideas about forms of suspected witchcraft practice like those described in the Preface.

4.4: ELDERS, COUNCILS, AND RITUAL LEGITIMACY

Concern with the ritual authenticity of the Elders populating the Protectorate’s newly incorporated elders’ councils dates from before the disruption of the first world war. J. M. Pearson, the Assistant DC of Vanga District, reported to PC Hobley in 1913 that

[The Duruma Council’s] members number approximately thirty, of whom ten only (one rika) have been initiated into the mysteries and wisdom of the Kambi. I am informed that it was intended to admit the second rika to the mysteries these rains, for they had paid their fee since a very long time and the members of the first rika are getting very old. But the severity of the weather made a meeting in the open grove impossible, so it has been postponed for another year. Thus we are faced with the undisputed fact that a population of nearly fifteen thousand possess no tribal authority except ten tottering old men and their twenty half-fledged colleagues. Young men defy the council; old men die without a chance of becoming elders. ... The Council of Elders is a cypher.⁸⁹

As Pearson’s note indicates, administrative concern about the initiatory status of Elders was less about the transmission of what it considered to be the accumulated knowledge of governance from

⁸⁹ KNA PC/COAST/1/11/144 Duruma Tribe, Asst. DC Rabai J. M. Pearson to PC Mombasa, “No. 242/1/6,” 28 July 1913.

one cohort to the next than about the recognition (by both the African public and the European administration) of individuals “initiated into the mysteries and wisdom of the Kambi.”⁹⁰

Nor was the concern with the specific content of the “mysteries,” “virtues,” and “wisdom” of the Kambi which, despite their obvious importance to the administration, were almost always rhetorically used in an ironic sense. DC H. H. Trafford (who had only two months in Vanga District at the time of his reporting for the year 1922), for example, wrote that “administration is hampered by a pack of drunken useless old men representing the wisdom—judicial, moral, and social, of the tribe; in the majority of cases the elected Government headman is as bad as any of his subordinates.”⁹¹ G. H. Osborn, however, and other DCs with experience in the District, took a more positive view of the Elders themselves and the actual functioning of the Councils:

Since the return of people to their homes [after their displacement by German forces during World War I], the Native Councils have resumed their judicial functions, and trials by native tribunal are regularly held. Each Council has been given a book in which to record the results of their enquiries, the book being forwarded to Government Headquarters each month for the recording of the decisions in the Office file. Such findings as have come before the Acting District Commissioner for review have generally been noticeable for good sense and impartiality....[The Digo] are in particular amenable to discipline, and with a few exceptions such as are found in the best ordered community, recognise their elders, who in turn have a very fair idea of responsibility.⁹²

Charles Dundas, DC for Mombasa District, considered that “excepting where we have destroyed it, their councils are constituted on the original mould which is also the best I have met with in any of the tribes I have had to deal with.”⁹³ His recommendation to the Provincial Commissioner

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ KNA CC1/3/8, H. H. Trafford, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1922.

⁹² KNA CC/1/3/2, G. H. Osborn, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1916.

⁹³ KNA CO1/19/19 [formerly DC/MSA/3/4], DC Mombasa to PC Coast, Mombasa, 1 July 1915.

(Hobley) was “recognising and supporting” these “original” councils, as “nothing can be gained by the disposal of authorities whose position rests on the whole tribal organisation.”⁹⁴

During the interwar period, efforts to oblige surviving elders of the precolonial Ngambi/Kambi councils in Vanga District to initiate the other members of the council consistently failed. No initiations (now “elections”) were held in Vanga District (which became Digo District in 1923) between 1914 and 1934. There is no indication that successful initiations into the Ngambi of members of what were then Local Native Councils with elected three-year terms, occurred after this point either. The issue simply disappeared from the administrative record.

What follows are extracts Vanga/Digo District Annual Reports between 1917 and 1934 on the situation with respect to the Duruma Council that Pearson, recall, called a mere “cypher” in 1913. No such initiation had occurred, apparently, since around the time of the Mwakisenge Famine of 1884 (an informant claimed in 1921), and the last recorded performance of the Mung’aro ritual in the region, recall from Chapter One, was in 1879.⁹⁵ Compare the urgency with which the Administration felt the need to initiate a new Ngambi cohort after 35–40 years with the *rika* chronologies used by Spear (see Chapter One) and others to date the purported migration from Singwaya. As was likely the case in the past, too, the twentieth century government-sponsored initiations were stalled at least in part by environmental conditions: partial failure of both rains in 1917, Spanish influenza in 1918, smallpox in 1919 and 1920, resulting in failed harvests despite adequate rain in 1920, rat infestations destroying 1921 harvests, followed by the failure of the short rains, resulting in serious food shortages in Duruma for the first half on 1922, followed by flooding, widespread food shortages in 1925, 1926, and 1927, failure of the long rains in 1928, swarms of

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ KNA CC1/3/7, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1921.

locusts in 1929 leading to food shortages necessitating Famine Relief rations, the lowest rainfall on record in 1933, followed by locusts, smallpox, and famine 1934.⁹⁶ At the same time, note the reluctance on the part of those Elders who *had* been initiated to initiate a new cohort of Ngambi/Kambi elders with whom they would, theoretically at least, been in competition:

1917: Investigations ... revealed the fact that very few real “Kambi” elders existed throughout the tribe, no elections having taken place for many years. Enquiries made amongst the Waduruma of Vanga district confirmed this fact, and it was found that only 3 of the original Kambi elders were still alive in the district.⁹⁷

The initial ceremonies have been postponed owing to various causes. The last of these being the death of Muhenda Cazi, the head of the Kaya Bomu, or Duruma. This man was recognised throughout the tribe as their chief, and he had undertaken to initiate the present generation by directing the ceremonies at the Kaya. Fortunately he is said to have passed on the particular “virtues” to Elders of his Generation.⁹⁸

1918: It was unfortunate that the difficult conditions which prevailed during the year prevented the holding of the election for the Duruma Kambi. ... At the present time barely half a dozen original Kambi elders exist in the two districts, and unless the elections are held soon the surviving members of the old Kambi will die, and no one will be left to instruct those who are anxious to be enrolled as new members. *It is probable that only by reconstituting the old Kambi can a satisfactory administration of the Waduruma can be attained.*⁹⁹

1919: Efforts were made to revive the Duruma Kambi but proved abortive. Practically all parts experienced a poor mwaka season [the “long rains” in the spring], and the crops obtained from the vuli rains [“short rains” in the fall] were, if anything, worse.

⁹⁶ KNA CC1/3/3, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1917; CC1/3/4, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1918; CC1/3/5, W. S. Marchant, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1919; CC1/3/6, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1920; CC1/3/7, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1921; CC1/3/8, H.H. Trafford, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1922; CC1/3/11, Major Brook, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1925; CC1/3/12, W. S. Marchant, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1926; CC1/3/13, C. B. Thompson, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1927; CC1/3/14, W. S. Marchant, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1928; CC1/3/15, W. S. Marchant, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1929; CC1/3/19, V. M. McKeag, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1933; CC1/3/20, V. M. McKeag, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1934.

⁹⁷ KNA CC1/3/3, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1917.

⁹⁸ KNA PC/COAST/1/1/199 Political Record Book, “Headmen and their Council of Elders,” 1917.

⁹⁹ KNA CC1/3/4, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1918. Italics added.

A shortage of this description tends to scatter the people and makes combined efforts, at ordinary times difficult, almost impossible. The reconstruction of the Kambi has consequently once more had to be shelved.¹⁰⁰

1920: Since the beginning of this year Mr. Brailsford has been able to tour the Duruma country, and to interview the elder members of the community with a view to re-establishing the original Kambi. ... The matter is one of urgency. A bare half dozen elders of the original Duruma Kambi remain. These are naturally old men, and if efforts are not made soon to re-establish the council, there will be no elders left to initiate intending candidates. The writer has always held the view that a successful administration of the Waduruma can only be achieved by the re-construction of the Kambi. This is now all the more important than formerly, and rendered them still more inaccessible to an officer on tour.¹⁰¹

1921: [T]he absence of any elections to the old Duruma Kambi since the days of the Mwakisenge famine has left the tribe with a mere handful of duly constituted Elders and these are naturally very old men. ... The result is that the administration of the locations is left in the hands of men with no qualifications for the posts they occupy, other than glib tongues and sufficient personality to bring them to the notice of Government. ... *The first step to ameliorate conditions is undoubtedly the reconstitution of the old Kambi, whereby properly constituted Elders would form the Councils.*¹⁰²

1923: The Duruma councils had got to such a condition and were so distasteful to the natives that steps had to be taken in this matter, a general baraza [“meeting”] was called at Mariakani on November 16th by the Senior Commissioner Coast and there the Government Headmen resigned and the paramount headmen took their places, much to the general satisfaction of the tribe. *These men are old but they can initiate younger men into the Kambi customs so that a more popular native legislation can be established.* Beneficial results are noticeable from this action in the short space of a month.¹⁰³

1924: [September:] Mwayaona senior Headman of Duruma [see Image 4.9, below] has been told to commence these initiations he is not too anxious to do this as he is one man alone now and after the initiations there will be many elders.

[October:] A meeting was held of the Elders on 5/10/24 to arrange the commencing date and commenced the initial proceedings 5 days later. They will need “Gingering up” the whole time and it will be January at the earliest before the whole things is completed.

¹⁰⁰ KNA CC1/3/5, W. S. Marchant, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1919.

¹⁰¹ KNA CC1/3/6, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1920.

¹⁰² KNA CC1/3/7, C. B. Thompson, “Vanga District Annual Report,” 1921. Italics added.

¹⁰³ KNA CC1/3/9, H. B. Sharpe, “Vanga District Annual Report, 1923. Italics added.

[December:] Mwayaona wa Munga of Duruma was prosecuted and pleaded “guilty” to extortion and fines and if it were not that the Government needs to squeeze out of him the Duruma Initiations before his already lengthy life terminates it might have been better to remove him.¹⁰⁴

The initiations are not yet completed though preparations still continue. The Elders keep procrastinating continually but they should be completed early in 1925.¹⁰⁵

1925: The initiations have lapsed, I fear. I once thought they were essential for the good rule of the tribe but I have changed my mind and come to the conclusion that the modern young Mduruma is much too up to date to want to bind himself to be ruled by reactionary and in many cases very drunken initiated elderly elders. I fear the elders have lost their ancient authority and rule by the young and vigorous is the alternative.¹⁰⁶

1926: The question of Initiations is still in abeyance.¹⁰⁷

Five years later, in 1931, the “question” of Duruma Kambi initiations remained “in abeyance,” with fewer “properly constituted elders” available to oversee them. Kidanga wa Mwarua seems, at this point, to be the sole remaining member of the precolonial Duruma Kambi. He was, according to DC C. T. Davenport, “the recognized head [an ambiguous term] of the Waduruma at Kiliboli,” and although (due to his advanced age) it had “been arranged for Charles Mwakipuli,” a Christian, “to take on some of the duties of the headman,” as “head of the Kaya it is difficult to replace Kidanga though the Kaya system has almost entirely dropped out amongst the Waduruma.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ KNA CQ1/19/21 [formerly DC/MSA/6/1], H. B. Sharpe, “Station Diary Digo District,” 1924.

¹⁰⁵ KNA CC1/3/10, H. B. Sharpe, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1924.

¹⁰⁶ KNA CC1/3/11, Major Brook, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1925.

¹⁰⁷ KNA CC1/3/12, W. S. Marchant, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1926.

¹⁰⁸ KNA CC1/3/17, C. T. Davenport, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1931.



Image 4.9: “Maiona wa Munga, 1st Duruma Headman.” KNA CQ1/19/21 [formerly DC/MSA/6/1], “Station Diary Digo District,” May 1924. Photograph by Acting Digo District Commissioner Harry Barron Sharpe.



Image 4.10: “Kidanga wa Mwarua.” KNA CQ1/19/21 [formerly DC/MSA/6/1], Station Diary Digo District, “Station Diary Digo District for the Month of May, 1924.” Photograph by Acting District Commissioner Harry Barron Sharpe. Note Kidanga’s *luvoo* ivory armband, discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Davenport's immediate predecessor, W. S. Marchant, "feared that the Tribal system of control by 'Wangambi' is against the development of real Chieftainship, the headman being little more than the spokesman of the Wangambi and the locational representative of Government."¹⁰⁹ The Ngambi Council and its members—"the Wangambi"—were thus "Ngambi" in name only. Or rather, the name referred only to a generalized "council of elders," none of whom, save Kidanga wa Mwarua, had been initiated to the rank to which it formerly referred.

Although the impending obsolescence of the precolonial Ngambi seemed increasingly to have been accepted by administrators as an unavoidable fact, the desire to "reconstitute" the Duruma Ngambi remained a key administrative focus as of 1934, when Kidanga was still alive:

So far as is known there is only one living person who has ever been initiated into the practices and mysteries connected with the tribal Kayas. This is *Headman Kidanga*, a very old man indeed who, it is understood *was gazetted Government Headman in December, 1923* at the same time as Mayona and Lukuni, two other initiates now dead, *with a view to their initiating the rising generation of elders which they had hitherto refused to do on the grounds that Government had removed their prerogative by appointing non-initiates as Headmen over them.* However, even after this reproach was removed, on one pretext or another they continued to avoid proceeding with the initiations. I am inclined to think that we shall never know the true history of this extraordinary state of affairs.¹¹⁰

McKeag considered that, given the breakdown of the Kaya institutions on the one hand, and the "resistance" of the Duruma peoples "not only to economic development but to the teachings of missionaries—both Christian and Moslem" on the other, they found themselves with "no proper center for their religious beliefs of instincts and they are very unhappy about it."¹¹¹ He was tentative, however, on the question of whether the Administration should intervene ("one hesitates

¹⁰⁹ KNA CC1/3/15, W. S. Marchant, "Digo District Annual Report," 1929.

¹¹⁰ KNA CP.572 KEN, Captain V. M. McKeag, "Extract from Annual Report for Digo District 1934." Italics added.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

to step in where angels fear to tread,” he writes).¹¹² To McKeag, the Duruma were suspended between a traditional past of which they know little and modern political, economic, and religious systems that seemed pale in comparison with “the tenets of their forefathers which, as they know little about them, they probably invest with all the power and virtue in the world.”¹¹³ “If that should be the case,” he mused, “is it not possible that the lifting of the veil of mystery might lead to a breaking down of this resistance?”¹¹⁴

In this understanding, performance of a ritual over-invested with significance by those who have not experienced it would effectively disenchant it and the institutions with which it is connected, either facilitating their abandonment or allowing the Duruma to incorporate them into “modern” life as a kind of civil religion. McKeag thus makes a number of the same naïve assumptions about the place of elder male ritual in Mijikenda public life that many of the nineteenth-century missionaries did: That the uninitiated have, in effect, been bamboozled by the initiated; that they have no sense of what the initiated do in private; that their professed ignorance is a fact and not the pragmatic acknowledgement of the boundaries of proprietary knowledge and “public secrets” (Taussig 1999). He also seems to assume that there is something *different* about the present generation of Duruma men, such that they would be appropriately disenchanting by exposure to Kaya ritual, whereas earlier generations remained under its spell.

McKeag assumes the priority of an assumed cognitive effect of exposure to a secret over the sociological effect that such exposure ritually entails: membership in an exclusive group. Such

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

separation, Georg Simmel writes, “has the force of an expression of value.”¹¹⁵ The secrecy that effects such distinction may, moreover, have cognitive effects that are precisely the opposite of those McKeag assumes: Tanya Luhmann, for instance, has argued that “the secrecy of magical knowledge reinforces magicians’ belief by exploiting secrecy’s respect-inspiring, awe-endowing properties.”¹¹⁶ The performance of a Kaya initiation thus may well “lift the veil of mystery” to a new generation of Duruma men, but to welcome them in, not merely reveal to them “the man behind the curtain.” As it happens, however, this is the last mention of any administrative concern with the “reconstitution” of the precolonial Duruma Ngambi, the ritual knowledge of which seems to have been lost with the eventual death of Kidanga wa Mwarua.

Efforts to reconstitute or revitalize the Kambi met with more success in Kilifi District, to the north of Digo District. As in Digo District, by the mid-1920s, the administration was concerned that “the initiation ceremonies are over due,” and that “the people have lost all interest in them.”¹¹⁷ Mzee [“old man”] Wanje [see Image 4.11, center], who at the time was “the head of the Kaya and the head of the [Giriama] tribe,” was not “recognized” as such by the administration because of the part he was alleged to have played in the “Giriama Rising” of 1915.¹¹⁸

Briefly, the “Giriama Rising” is the name given to a violent conflict between the Giriama peoples and the administration of the British East Africa Protectorate during the First World War. After the Mazrui Rebellion of 1895–6, the Protectorate had invited Ngonyo wa Mwavuo (wealthy

¹¹⁵ G. Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,” trans. A. W. Small, *The American Journal of Sociology* 11:4 (1906), 486.

¹¹⁶ T. M. Luhmann, “The Magic of Secrecy,” *Ethos* 17:2 (1989), 139.

¹¹⁷ KNA CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book, “Kilifi Annual Report (Takaungu Political Record Book), 1924”

¹¹⁸ KNA CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book, “Takaungu Political Record Book, Kilifi Sub-District Annual Report for 1925.”

Giriama “new man,” recall) to settle the lands north of the Sabaki River as a reward for his loyalty and assistance in putting down the “Arab Revolt.” Twenty years later, however, when the Protectorate was busy establishing Tribal Reserves from which the surrounding East Africa Estates Ltd. and agricultural concerns on “Alienated Crown Land” could secure a workforce, the relative wealth of the Giriama as farmers meant that they were able to meet the hut taxes meant to drive them into wage labor by the sale of their agricultural surplus. The land onto which those living north of the Sabaki had been invited by the new Protectorate was, for that reason, not their “traditional” lands—now Native Reserve—making them squatters on valuable Crown Land. The subsequent removal of the Giriama from north of the Sabaki to the Nyika Reserve was violent, and met with violence, including the dynamiting of a Giriama Kaya.

Ten years after the “Rising” was violently put down and Giriama elders forced to swear a modified *fisi* oath of loyalty to the Government, the Kilifi District Commissioner felt that the administration’s punitive exclusion of Wanje from any government position and non-recognition of his status outside it was “in some measure responsible for the present lack of tribal cohesion.”¹¹⁹ Wanje was thus brought back into the administrative fold in the capacity of initiator of a new Giriama Kambi, beginning in 1925. After interviews with Wanje and “the elders of various locations and sub-tribes,” the C. B. Thompson, then Acting DC for Kilifi District, drafted a memo on Kaya Initiation Ceremonies that highlights both the hierarchy established by a series of initiations within what were now considered “sub-tribes,” but also a stipulated priority of performance among the various sub-tribes (but without specifying whether this indicated a hierarchy of status, or recorded local historical knowledge, or something else):

¹¹⁹ Ibid. “Tribal cohesion” would remain a concern of Kilifi District administrators—and initiation of elders its suggested remedy—through the end of World War Two at least. See below.

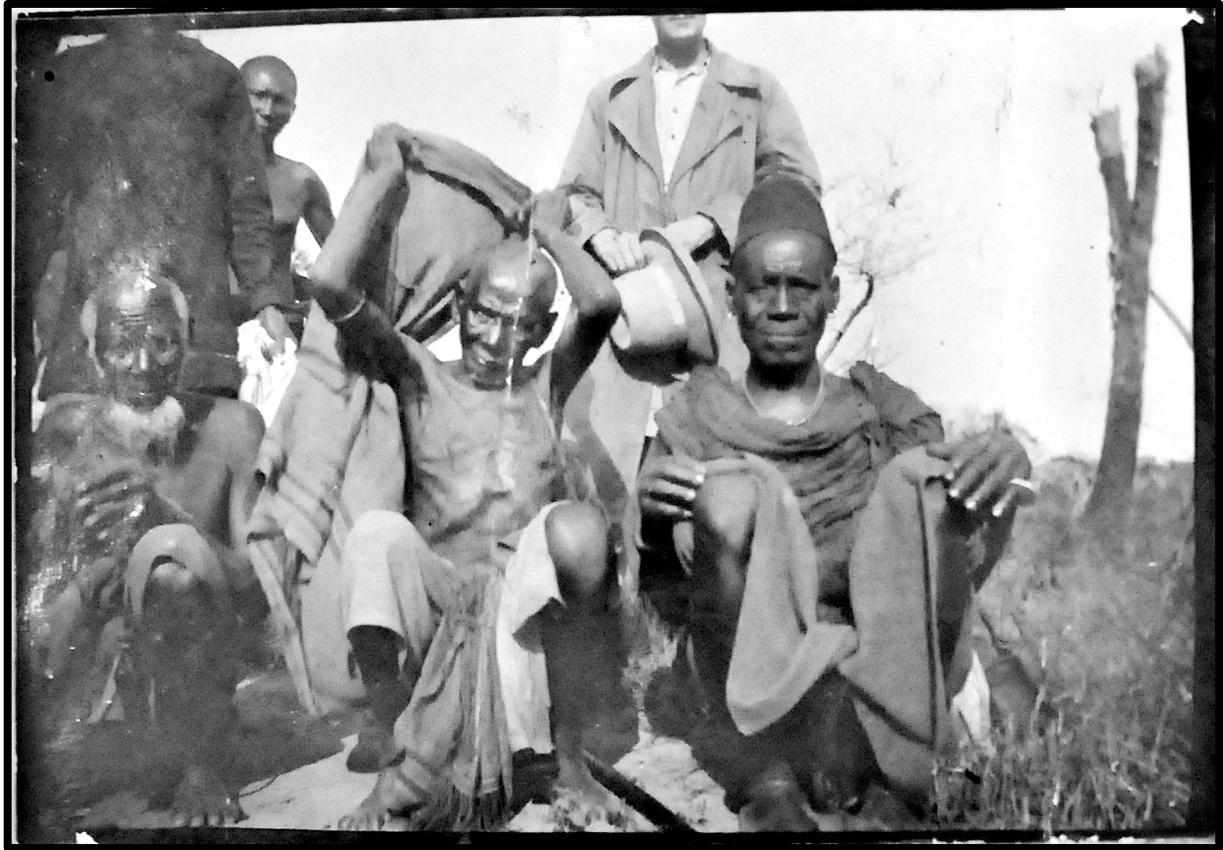


Image 4.11: “June 1923 at Kafulani Camp [Kilifi District].” Giriama Elders and Headmen, from left to right: Toya wa Karimbuko (“Chief Wanje’s deputy”), Mzee Wanje of Kaya Fungo (“the head of the Kaya and the head of the tribe”), and Gunga wa Baya, headman of Kibwabwani. The European figure standing behind the Elders is likely either W. S. Marchant, who took numerous photographs during his tenure as DC Digo District (including the portraits of Mwaiona wa Munga and Kidanga wa Mwarua, Image 4.9 and Image 4.10 above), or E. G. Tisdall. Both men served as Acting District Commissioner for Kilifi District in 1923. KNA CB1/1/1, “Kilifi District Political Record Book 1926–1938.”

It is customary for first the Kauma then the Chonyi and other sub-tribes to perform their Kaya initiations before the Giriama. But the Chonyi point that the two junior rikas of the old Kambi (namely the Nyoka and Kitsoka) have still to make their final visit to Kaya Giriama before the younger generation can commence at Kauma and Chonyi. Mzee Wanje and his elders however state that the iniations [sic] of the elder and younger generations are independent of each other, and Wanje has already instructed his son Nyela ... the head of the Nyeri, to call the Nyeri immediately to pay their initiation dues at Kaya Giriama. Such payment, he states, may take place at Kaya Giriama before the initiations at Kaya Kauma etc., but not payment for the subsequent ceremonies. ...

The Kambi mainly with an eye to the initiation fees (one bullock and five pots of tembo the first visit, a voluntary gift of two goats value or there about the second visit and no payment for the third visit) are desirous for the ceremony to start. The elder Nyeri appear willing but their attitude as a whole remains to be proved.¹²⁰

Thompson's memo also included the planned schedule of the three-part initiations:

Mlele. The Vulamberi and Vula Kahi i.e. the two older Rikas of the Young men will celebrate the Mlele at Kaya Giriama on April 16th. This consists of a ceremonial clapping dance and anointment of the head with earth and of the whole body with oil. It will last a week.

Mungero. These Rikas will celebrate the Mungaro in the Mvule rains at the end of the year.
Kirau. The Nyoga and Kitsoka Rikas of the present Kambi will complete the Kirau ceremony in September.¹²¹

The “*Mlele*” sounds, in this description, like the ritual phase referred to in Taylor’s *Giryama Vocabulary and Collections* as “*Sayo ra Koma*” (in its use of clapping), but also to Taylor’s descriptions of *Mung’aro* (in the “anointment of the head with earth”) and *Kirao* (in its use of oil). “*Mungero [sic]*” appears here, however, as a distinct phase of the Kambi initiations performed only by the members of the two most senior *rikas* of the *nyere* (“Vulamberi” and “Vula Kahi”), and not the *nyere* as a whole.¹²² “*Kirau [=Kirao]*,” finally, was to be performed not by the “Vulamberi” and “Vula Kahi,” having recently completed *mung’aro*, but rather by the juniormost *rikas* of the existing Kambi, “in September.” Note that *Kirao*, which would complete the existing

¹²⁰ CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book, “Kaya Initiation Ceremonies,” Jan. 1925.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Kambi by fully initiating, as it were, its own junior rikas, was to be performed just before *Mung'aro*, which would retire the Kambi and inaugurate the two senior rikas of the *nyere* as Kambi. The idea thus seems to have been the “revitalization” of the Kambi by the replacement of its personnel. But before that could happen, the existing Kambi had to be finalized by the performance of *Kirao*.

The 1925 *Kirao* took place in late November (not September, as planned), and DC W. S. Marchant was permitted to attend. His account of the ritual is as interesting for the new features it records as for the details that correlate with elements that had been unique to Taylor's second-hand account from 1891:

Visited Kaya Fungo, where Kerao [*sic*] ceremonies were in process. The ceremony is a stage in the somewhat length[y] process of handing over the reins of Government to the members of the new Kambi to be initiated next year. It appears that certain Marika of the present Kambi went through the ceremony two years ago and the remaining Marika are doing it now; it seems that there are certain mysteries to which the Kambi elders have to be initiated before they can retire from the Kambi, also of course there are payments of tembo [palm wine] and goats to be made to the fathers by their sons who are members of the Marika of the incoming Kambi, these payments are for the purchase of “inchi [*sic*]” [“the land”] so that the new Kambi may be “enye nchi” [=enyetsi (Chidigo), “holders of the land”]. The Kaya presented a very animated scene with groups of elders sitting round in circles, each group with its women-folk doing the cooking just in the rear. Everything seemed to be extremely well organized which was rather surprising. Each group of elders had Senior Elder attached to it (one who had been through the ceremony before) and it is his duty to initiate his pupils in the various rites and ceremonies. No one of the uninitiated is allowed to leave the Kaya for whatever purpose (be it even to relieve nature) without the “instructor,” he goes out first and comes back last. Tembo is also drunk first by the instructor and then ladled out by him to his “pupils.”

The elders being initiated had all their heads decorated with small pieces [*sic*] of white wood sharpened at one end, the other end “frayed” out to resemble a flower. The result was in the distance rather like a curly wig. Great importance is attached to these pieces of stick and not one must leave the Kaya before the ceremony is completed when they are all collected and thrown away in a particular place. I was informed by Mzee Toya (Chief Wanje's deputy) that I could not possibly have one of these pieces of stick as bad luck would be brought on whoever parted with it, but that he would get another for me on some future occasion.

Coloured loin cloths are not allowed to be worn by any who have not been fully initiated, all elders being initiated wore an iron ring round their necks, flattened on the

inside like a curved blade; this is only worn at “kirao” ceremonies, I could not find out what particular significance is attached to this iron ring.

Also those being initiated carried staves to which were tied short pieces of stick, they are not allowed to move about without these staves; one purpose to which they are put is tapping the small stick against the staff while singing—the effect is rather like heavy rain drops in trees. They also initiate [sic] thunder by stamping their heels on the ground quickly and moving slightly backwards.

Another dance is with “njuga” (bells) fixed to their right ankles and goats beards tied above the elbow, they sing and rattle the bells and wave their goat bearded elbows in perfect rhythm [sic], a feature of this dance is two [sic] large hollow bamboo poles which are stamped on the ground, end on and make a noise like a drum. It is interesting that no “ngoma” drums are used during the ceremony.

The impression given was that everything was extremely well organized, the dances were orderly [sic] and decorous, and strict discipline was maintained over those being initiated and the young men who visited as on-lookers. Women appear to take no part in the ceremony beyond joining in the choruses as it were.

Women have their own Kaya ceremonies which take place after mungaro which is the final stage of the “initiation” of the new Kambi elders. The ceremony lasts three days and three nights.¹²³

Setting aside the DC’s “surprise” that a public ritual was “extremely well organized,” note first the mention of the two large bamboo drums “stamped on the ground, end on,” and recall Taylor’s description of *Kirao* as involving “a long bamboo closed at the end with a tight skin, and beaten rhythmically with a pounding motion upon the ground.”¹²⁴ Note also the mimetic production of rain sounds by the tapping of sticks and the stomping of heels by those being initiated into the body held responsible for the provision of the rain on which the region’s inhabitants depend.

Lastly, note the frayed white pieces of wood tucked into the initiates’ hair. Marchant compares the effect to a “curly wig,” perhaps continuing the longstanding comparison of the Kambi to more familiar British legal ritual. He does not enquire after the significance of the wooden wig, but given the ritual’s purpose of initiating men into “full” elderhood, one possible

¹²³ KNA CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book, “Kaya Initiation Ceremonies 21st Nov. 1925.”

¹²⁴ Ibid; Taylor, *Giryama Vocabulary*, 44.

interpretation is that element of this ritual transformation is the mimicking of old age through the production (and subsequent destruction) of one of the most salient external signs: white hair (which is also lexically marked as a distinct “kind” of hair in Mijikenda languages). The removal and secret disposal of the symbolic white hair also mimics local practices of hair disposal designed to prevent its use by witches to target the individual from who it was separated. In this regard, it is interesting that Marchant, who expresses a wish to obtain some of the ritual hair, is denied by Toya wa Karimbuko, one of the initiators, who offers instead to provide him with a replica at a later date. The shaving of hair is, finally, a common feature of Mijikenda rituals of transition including *Mung’aro* (see Chapter One), the ritual separation of individuals from their kin groups when being “paid” out as *kore* (“blood-debt” compensation) or as slaves to settle some other debt, and as part of the process of “de-witching” suspected witches during public witchfinding rituals.

The *Mung’aro* intended for the rainy season did not take place as planned that year. Nor did it take place the following year. Twelve years later, in 1937, E. R. Davies, the District Officer for Malindi Sub-District wrote to Kilifi DC E. G. Tisdall about preparations to hold a *Mung’aro*:

From what Wanje tells me—and it has been in the air for about ten months or so far as I know—the idea is to hand the country over to a new age grade. There are very few of the present Kambi left and the “Mungara” dance is to turn these out of office and hand over to the new lot—these would consist of all now living, males and females, except those who are already initiated and are to be “debunked” [*sic?*]. ...

The six mbaris (clans each containing a number of sub-clans) will provide six men each chosen by the retiring Kambi who will then be shown the secrets of the tribe including the rain making business. ... Of old, all thirty six would receive the rain-making dope and would bury this in their own localities (kuzika chomba) [*sic*, “*kuzika chombo*,” (“to bury a pot”)] so that all the country was covered. The thirty six were called “alombi a vula” [“those who pray for rain”]. ...

I consider (1) that the Mungara dance should be held and a new rika installed. It is 35 or more years since this was done. (2) The rain-making performance should be allowed if the 36 accept the position.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ KNA CB1/1/3 Kilifi District Political Record Book, “Letter from E. R. ST [*sic*] Davies to Tisdall, from Malindi, dated 21-8-37.”

DO Davies was concerned, however, that the cohort of 36 *alombi a vula* “be made the leading rain priests of their localities”—“rain priest” not being a recognized position in Mijikenda society, however—and should “receive instruction in rain-making and the secrets thereof, but would not be allowed to bury rain charms.”¹²⁶ This was so that if the rains failed, “these men would be the natural leaders of the ceremonies but would not be held responsible for the drought.”¹²⁷

Suspicion of having blocked the rain was, from the nineteenth century (and probably earlier) to the early twentieth century, associated with the public ritual installation of proprietary rain magic (so, public ritual in the sense of, “on behalf of and acknowledged by the public,” rather than “in the public eye”) to “cover the land” (Feierman 1990, esp. 69–93). If the rains failed, the suspicion focused on the elders who had buried the clay pots of rain magic, who were believed to have buried rain-*blocking* (or diverting) charms instead. One could not know, because the charms were the proprietary magic of the elders. But during droughts, young men would occasionally seize old men suspected of having caused the rain to fail, and then compel them to exhume and destroy the pot responsible for the failure.¹²⁸ DO Davies thus thought that by forbidding the elders to bury the pots believed to bring the rain, the elders could not be held responsible for its failure, but would instead only be asked to perform some other “rain-making performance” by a hopeful populace.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ See, for example, CMS CA5/O16/172: Johann Ludwig Krapf, Journal, 27 December 1848; KNA PC/COAST/1/1/138 Outward Departmental, Murray, “Native Laws and Customs of the Takaungu Subdistrict,” 1898; and KNA PC/COAST/1/10/53 Collective Punishment Ordinance Cases & Deportation of Mzee Golijo of Takaungu, 1913.

It is unclear whether “the rain making performance” was held and the 36 “leading rain priests” established as Davies had envisioned, although it seems highly unlikely, dependent as this would have been on the successful execution of a *Mung’aro*, which seems never to have taken place (see below). In any case Davies’s basic premise was flawed: Forbidding the elders to plant rain charms would have amounted to forbidding them to secure the rains, not insulate them from suspicion of having done so. Davies assumed that the Mijikenda shared his concept of a natural world whose rhythms unfolded in a normative, more-or-less predictable way irrespective of human action (the long rains *should* fall in April and May, the short rains *should* fall in September or October). While not accepting that rain-making rituals were actually effective, it nevertheless intuitively made sense to him that if empirical events should deviate from the normative order (if the rains “fail,” as it is always said), people might seek some sort of ritual intervention (a “rain making performance”).

The Mijikenda, by contrast, seem to have understood the normative unfolding of the rhythms of the world as a condition that must be ritually produced and maintained, rather than a pre-existing, purely objective “natural” order. As Monica Udvardy writes of the Giriama, “their preoccupation is not so much with the *proliferation* of life, as implied in the concept of fertility, as it is with the *prevention* of barrenness, sterility, and ill-health which might impede a continuity of life through generations both living and deceased, and through the repeated passing of the seasons.”¹²⁹ But even if this were not the case, and Davies shared the Mijikenda philosophy of nature, the subsequent history of the Mijikenda Kayas and the Elders associated with them casts

¹²⁹ M. Udvardy, “*Kifudu*: A Female Fertility Cult among the Giriama,” in A. Jacobson-Widding and W. van Beek (eds.) *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 137.

serious doubt on the efficacy of banning their public ritual. The “privatization” of public ritual, or the banning of certain practices, merely occults them—hides them from view—or at least generates the *suspicion* that they are still ongoing, but in secret. The transformation of Elder ritual, including its disappearance from public life and the separation of the esoteric knowledge of Elders from the institutions of formal governance, I argue—the privatization and occulting of ritual power—made elder councils both a kind of generative template for ideas about witchcraft in the twentieth century, and generated a condition Janet McIntosh (citing Michael Hertzfeld) calls “structural nostalgia” for a romanticized vision of the nineteenth-century Kambi.¹³⁰

The “Mungara [=Mung’aro] dance” for which Davies advocated, in any case, did not take place. At a sitting of the Kilifi District Local Native Council (LNC),

The President [the Kilifi DC] said he had heard a lot of talk about reviving the Kambi and that various people had approached Mr. Osborne about it. The same thing had happened in Mr. Carver’[s] time [1938–9] and in Mr. Tisdall’[s] time [1936–8] and despite the encouragement of those officers, nothing had come of it. He wished members to express their views on the matter. Chief Shadrack Harrison said that the matter had been discussed more than once previously and nothing had come of it. Certain practices connected with the change of “Kambi” were considered undesirable, such as the practice of dancing naked and in particular the killing of a stranger. In other respects the survival and revival of Kambi was much to be desired, for were the institution to pass away with the few old men who now represent it, the tribe would be losing their history. ...

The President stated first that the Kambi could only be revived by the people and then only if the great majority of the people wanted it. Government could not revive the Kambi for them. Secondly that an attempt to revive the Kambi merely for the sake of finding out what it used to do would be futile. Thirdly that an attempt to revive the Kambi and maintain it purely in its old form, with all its old powers and outlook, was also futile and doomed to failure. ... The Kambi could not exist without exercising certain functions of government. If the Kambi could be revived and in some way merged into the existing scheme of administration, then it would live and make a great contribution towards the development of the tribe, but it could not live by itself outside the existing scheme of Government. If the Kambi modified its ancient customs, functions and organisation and

¹³⁰ J. McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds’: Commodified Expertise and Politicized Authenticity among Mijikenda,” *Africa* 79:1 (2009), 35

included within its progressive elements and so formed a link between past and present, then indeed the Giriama would progress.¹³¹

Confident of the effect the DC's exhortations would have on the members of the LNC, the DO for Malindi Sub-District considered it "probable" that following the administration's "recent encouragement there will be a determined effort to initiate the new Kambi as soon as possible."¹³²

The following year, however, it seemed that "there appears to be no intention on natives [sic] part to resurrect the Kambi system."¹³³

The last attempt to "revive" the Kambi took place in the years between the end of World War Two and the beginning of Mau Mau, when the colonial administration quickly lost its sympathy for African "secret societies" and their rituals of initiation. This phase of attempts are marked by a much looser sense of the organizational structure into which men would be initiated, as well as a much less elaborate taxonomy of Mijikenda ritual. Where twenty years before administrators had talked of *mlele*, *suara*, *mungara*, and *kirau*, by 1946 they were concerned only with the "resuscitation" of "certain Wanyika customs" and the "revival" of "the less obnoxious initiation ceremonies."¹³⁴ The Giriama were, according to the 1946 Annual Report for Kilifi District, "completely lacking in tribal ceremonies with the result that there is no tribal cohesion."¹³⁵ DC E. A. Sweatman wrote that "early in the year it was decided"—by whom is unspecified—"that an attempt should be made to resuscitate certain Wanyika customs including the appointment of

¹³¹ KNA CB1/1/1 Kilifi District Political Record Book, "Minute No. 20/40. Revival of Native Institutions—'Kambi'."

¹³² KNA CB1/22/9 Kilifi District Handing Over Reports, DO P.S. Osborne to DO S.R. Harrison-Lowder, "Handing Over Report Malindi Sub-District," 1940.

¹³³ KNA CB1/22/4 Annual Reports Kilifi District, 1938–1946, W. A. Perreau, "Kilifi District (Including Malindi) Annual Report," 1941.

¹³⁴ KNA CB1/22/4 Annual Reports Kilifi District, 1938–1946, E. A. Sweatman, "Kilifi District Annual Report," 1946.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Kambe elders and the restoration of the Kayas,” and that this decision met with “a favourable response and at the time of writing”—early 1947—“most of the Kayas have been restored and the Kambe elders elected.”¹³⁶

Although DC Sweatman wrote “Kambe”—the name of one of the canonical nine Mijikenda peoples—he evidently meant “*Kambi*,” the council, as the “revival” efforts he described all seem to have taken place at Kaya Fungo, the primary Kaya of the Giriama. The error is repeated in the caption of a photograph—one in an uncredited series—in the Kilifi District Political Record Book, showing “The Head of Surviving Kambe [*sic*] Elders in 1948” (see Image 4.15).¹³⁷ Although the portrait of the unnamed Kambi elder is dated 1948, the photographs in this series depict a Government-sponsored ritual at Kaya Fungo, including goats for sacrifice (Image 4.12), the entrance of junior male administration employees into the Kaya (Image 4.13), and the existence of “traditional” grass-thatched huts inside the Kaya, constructed to house initiates and elders during the extended initiation process (Image 4.14). There is no record of such an initiation in 1948, but Sweatman’s successor, J. D. Stringer, recorded the following details of an inspection he made in February 1947 of the preparations underway in Kaya Fungo for the planned “Kambi Ceremonies.” They are notable for their explicit inclusion not only of Islamic elements, but the involvement of Arab craftsmen and officiants as well:

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District.

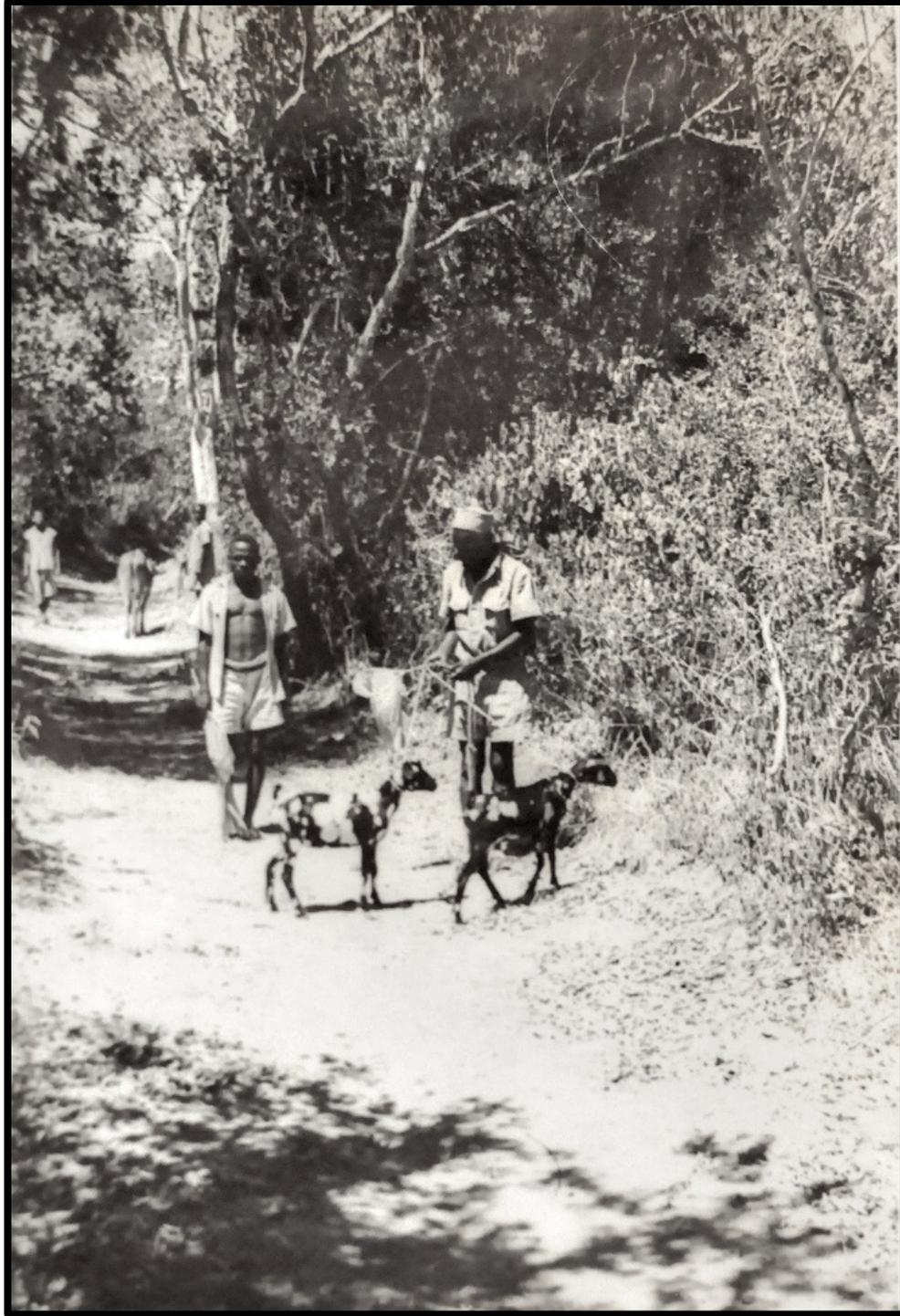


Image 4.12: “Entrance to Kayafungo,” KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District.



Image 4.13: “Main Entrance to Kaya,” KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District.



Image 4.14: “Within the Kaya,” KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District.



Image 4.15: “The Head of Surviving Kambe [*sic*, =Kambi] Elders in 1948,” KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District.

There were three gates at the very entrance to the Kaya—these have fallen down but two will be repaired for the present Ceremony by an Arab fundi [“craftsman”].

I found about 20 huts fully built and others partly thatched. Approximately: 20 of the last “Kambi” were there most of them were very old indeed. ...

I was introduced to an Arab “Sharif” who was living in the Kaya. Apparently from the beginning—before the start of all Kambi Ceremonies an Arab “Sharif” must be present and read the Sheria. He is also responsible for the construction of the entrance doors. They do not use Giriama Fundis for this work. I was unable to find out just how Islam entered into these Ceremonies originally.

Apparently there is no objection to Europeans, male and female, inspecting the Kaya, though they must not enter the “Moro.”¹³⁸

Although this is the first mention of an “Arab ‘Sharif’” living inside the Kaya and “reading the Sheria” to begin an initiation there, it seems unlikely that this is was an innovation unique to this moment. Nor could it easily be chalked up to increased conversion of the Giriama to Islam in the interval between Taylor’s time and Stringer’s—which did not in fact take place (as it did in the south among the Digo peoples).¹³⁹ Indeed, the association of Swahili and Arab Muslims with the Kayas—in particular, their association with the gates to the Kayas—goes back to the 1880s at the latest. A chronicle of “the founding of Rabai,” written in Arabic script 1882 by Midani bin Mwidadi in the Jomvu dialect of Kiswahili, describes the purchase from the Jomvu of the hills on which the Rabai peoples settled, upon which the Jomvu showed them “the water that is in the well

¹³⁸ KNA CB1/1/1 Political Record Book, Kilifi District. J.D. Stringer, “Notes on a visit to Kayafungo which was made approximately two months before the Ceremony for the institution of a new grade of ‘Kambi’ elders. 5/2/47.”

¹³⁹ On the history of Mijikenda conversion to Islam, see: D. Sperling, “The Growth of Islam among the Mijikenda of the Kenya Coast, 1826–1930,” (unpublished PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1988); and D. Sperling, “Islamization in the Coastal Region of Kenya to the End of the Nineteenth Century,” in B. A. Ogot (ed.) *Kenya in the Nineteenth Century* (Nairobi: Bookwise, 1985), 33–82. On the contemporary significance of Islam in Giriama ritual, see: J. McIntosh, “Reluctant Muslims: Embodied Hegemony and Moral Resistance in a Giriama Spirit Possession Complex,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 10:1 (2004), 91–112.

and the water that is in the rivers,” and “made for them the doors of their village.”¹⁴⁰ And as Willis points out, a Duruma tradition records the exchange of children to the Coast for the gates of their Kaya, and “other parts of the ritual regalia of the elders were also said to come from Mombasa.”¹⁴¹

An 1887 sketch by W. E. Taylor depicts a Giriama “wizard” in Islamic dress engaged in an *ngoma ya pepho* [“spirit therapy,” roughly] in his homestead.¹⁴² The patient is one of his wives (“by inheritance,” he speculates, given her advanced age), the rest of the family play drums in a group behind her.¹⁴³ Similarly, recall that in the incident in which Krapf is warned not to travel to Bumbo because of the *Mung’aro* currently underway there (see Chapter Two), Krapf had just arrived in hamlet in which “a great part of the population [was] singing and dancing around a Muhammedan, who was beating a drum.”¹⁴⁴ Krapf had just come from another hamlet in which he found “a great number of Wanika women engaged in buying cows [*sic*] meat, which a Muhamedan had slaughtered.”¹⁴⁵ The significance of the “Muhamedan” butcher and why the presence of one would have caused such “a great bustle” is not made clear to him until three years later, when Krapf records the following in his diary:

¹⁴⁰ M. bin Mwidadi, “The Founding Rabai: A Swahili Chronicle by Midani bin Mwidad,” Lyndon Harries (trans. and ed.), *Swahili: The Journal of the East African Swahili Committee* 31 (1960), 145. Translation amended.

¹⁴¹ J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 61. See: KNA PC/COAST/1/11/218, ADC Rabai to Land Officer, 28 Mar. 1914, cited in Willis, *Mombasa*, 61n75.

¹⁴² CMS/Z/13/3 Rev. W. E. Taylor Field Notebook 1886–1887.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ CMS/B/OMS/C A5/M2 Mission Book 1846–1856, “Dr. Krapf’s Journal from 13th to the 27th March 1845—Excursions to Dshombo, Dshogni, Rabbay-Empia and the Vicinity of the latter place,” 17 Mar. 1845.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

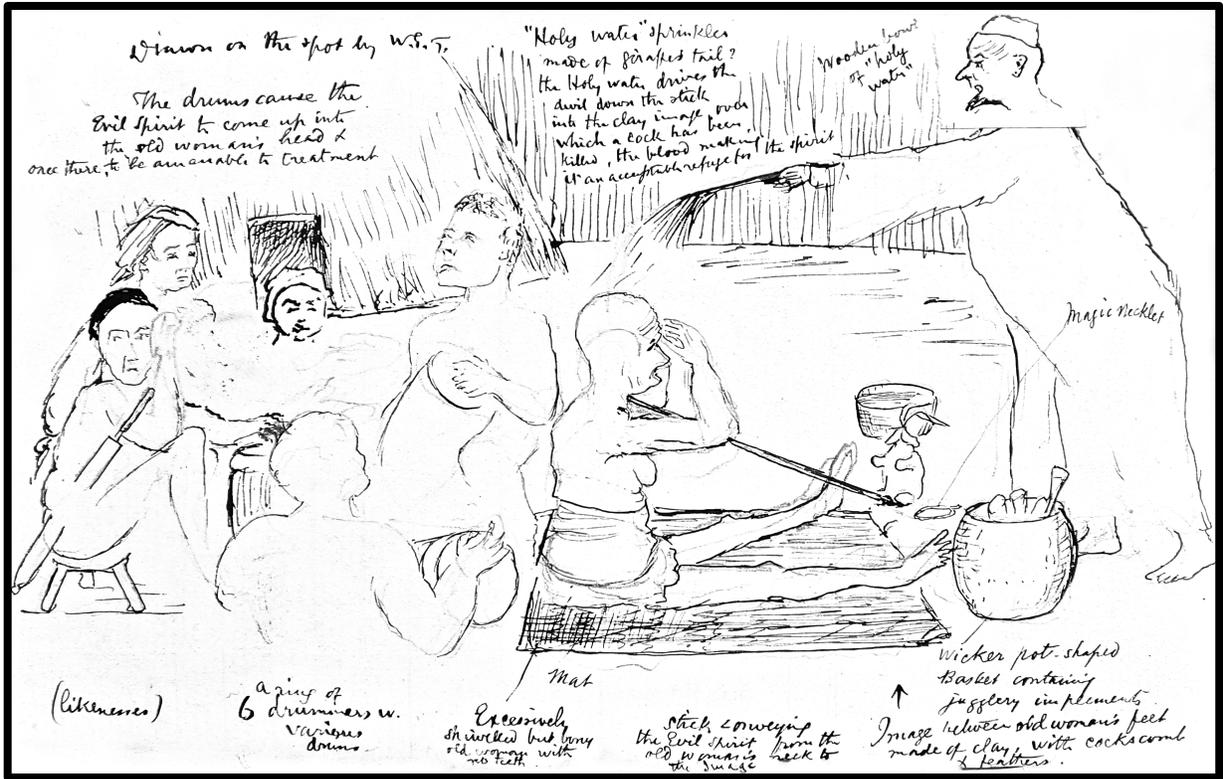


Image 4.16: “Drawn on the spot by W. E. T.” Mjema wa Mwanganga, “a great wizard,” draws an afflicting *pepho* spirit from an “excessively shriveled but bony old woman with no teeth.” Note Mwanganga’s Islamic *kofia* cap and *kanzu* robe. CMS/7/13/3 Rev. W. E. Taylor Field Notebook 1886–1887.

This morning came an Mnika requesting our Muhamedan servant to slaughter a goat intended for a sadaka [“offering”]—the Wanika living under the impression that the meat of an animal slaughtered by the Muhamedans is more congenial to a sick person, than otherwise. I strictly refused our servant to comply with this superstitious request and learned on this occasion, that Amri our former servant was constantly engaged in this slaughtering business with the Wanika, without our being aware of it.¹⁴⁶

The apparent simultaneous intimacy and alterity of Islam for the peoples of the coast hinterland posed a number of conceptual problems not only for Christian missionaries, but later for the political and legal structures of the coast protectorate, predicated as they were upon the ethnoreligious distinction between the “Mohammedan Waswahili” and the “Pagan Wanyika.”

Islamic law recognized individual title to land, “Native Law and Custom” did not. As a result, Muslim Swahili and Arabs who could demonstrate ownership of land according to religious law were granted freehold title by the Protectorate, while the Mijikenda peoples—whose “Native Law and Custom” recognized only communal ownership of land—were relocated to Native Reserves. The remaining territory became Crown Land, alienable to Europeans, Arabs, and Indians to be “developed” into large-scale agricultural operations.

Further, Muslims had recourse to Islamic “Kadhi Courts” in matters of Personal Status and Family Law, while the Mijikenda Peoples could seek informal mediation by elders or chiefs locally, or bring cases to Local Native Tribunals that met infrequently and often at a distance from the litigants’ homes. These decisions could be appealed to the District Magistrate’s Court. Conversion to Islam by the southern Mijikenda, especially the Digo, posed a number of problems for this arrangement. In 1915, Charles Dundas, the Mombasa District Commissioner, circulated through the district enquiring among the councils of elders whether they wished to be governed by

¹⁴⁶ Ibid; CMS/B/OMS/C A5/O16 166–173, J. L. Krapf Letters and Diary, 13 Mar. 1848.

Islamic law or by “custom.”¹⁴⁷ The councils expressed a desire to be governed by custom—which meant, in effect, that they wished to govern, since they were the authorities empowered by the administration to rule on matters of “Native Law and Custom.”¹⁴⁸ Predictably, not all Digo (and Duruma) shared this point of view, as the recurrence of court cases challenging the exclusive authority of LNTs to decide matters according to Native Law and Custom clearly shows.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ KNA PC/COAST/1/13/72 C. C. F. Dundas to PC Coast, 1 Jul. 1915; KNA CO1/19/19 [formerly DC/MSA/3/4], C. Dundas and the Elders of Cheteni, Mtongwe, Matuga, Likoni, Pungu, Tiwi, Magogoni, Waa, Ngombeni, Kwale, and Vuga, 19 June 1915 to 29 June 1915.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ See: KNA PC/COAST/2/12/22 “Civil Case No. 12 of 1936 In the Kathi’s Court at Mombasa,” 26 Sep. 1936; “Judgment in Appeal Case No. 9 of 1937,” 18 Aug. 1937; DC Digo District to Registrar, Supreme Court, Mombasa, “Selemani b/- Mtenda v. Ali Zuzu b/- Mwaruwa,” 3 Jan. 1938; “Appeal No. 11/36 Original Case No. 87/36 Midzichenda,” 25 Sep. 1936; “Re:- Native Tribunal Court Case No. 87/1936 of Kwale,” 31 Oct. 1936; PC/COAST/1/11/312 Memorandum for PC, n.d. [1913?]; ADC O. F. Watkins, “Memorandum on Coast Land Difficulties,” 11 Oct. 1913; Recorder of Titles A. J. MacLean, “Minute on Recommendations prepared by Mr. O. F. Watkins in his Memorandum on Coast Land Difficulties,” 25 Oct. 1913; PC/COAST/1/11/204 ADC Rabai A. M. Champion, “Report on Sale of Land etc. in Neighbourhood of Tunza,” 24 Jan. 1914; Duruma Headman Mutzau wa Jira, Affidavit, 23 Feb. 1914; Duruma Elders, Affidavit, 28 Feb. 1914; Midani wa Shomari, Affidavit, 1 Mar. 1914; AP1/895 DC Kitui to Registrar of High Court, Mombasa, 17 Feb. 1914; Secretary for Native Affairs A. C. Hollis, “Memorandum;” PC/COAST/1/11/339 Ag. DC C. B. Thompson to Administrator General, Mombasa, “Re. Juma bin Kunyapa,” 3 May 1918; Ag. DC C. B. Thompson to PC Coast, 3 May 1918; CA/11/7 A. de V. Wade, “Inheritance of Estates of Converts to Islam,” 25 Oct. 1927; PC Coast O. F. Watkins to CNC, Nairobi, “Estate Administration—African Natives—Mohammedans,” 3 Mar. 1928; DC Mombasa W. S. Marchant to PC Coast, “Native Inheritance Mohammedans and Pagans,” 4 May 1931; CNC to PC Coast, “Native Inheritance,” 13 Jan. 1932; Chief Kadhi to PC Coast, “Re. The person becoming mohammedan during his death-sickness and the manner of inheritance,” 24 Mar. 1939; “Minute 24/39. Law of Inheritance in re. Mohamedan Husband with Pagan Wife and Children;” PC Coast to AG, “Native Law and Custom versus Mohammedan Law with reference to Inheritance,” 11 Apr. 1940; DC Mombasa to PC Coast, “Law of Inheritance,” 13 Apr. 1940; CA/9/65 Mbaruk, Liwali Mombasa to PC Coast, 29 May 1937; DC Digo to PC Coast, “Midzichenda Ngambi:- Case no. 50 of 1937,” 2 Jun. 1937; Mbaruk, Liwali Mombasa to PC Coast, 7 Jun 1937; CA/11/9 Methodist Missionary Society, Mazaras to PC Coast, “The Inheritance of Land (Shamba),” 9 Aug. 1954; Mwalimu Saidi bin Mganga to DC Kilifi, “Re. Estates of Ali bin Mganga Deceased, Administration Case No. 52 of 1954,” 1 Apr. 1957; Jabu Chanzerato to Public Trustee, Mombasa, “Re. Estate of Mwajuma Binti Ali of Changamwe, Mombasa—Deceased,” 11 Apr. 1957.



Image 4.17: “Ngati Kituto, Mkamba, Headman Kinango and Ngui wa Thitu, Headman of Kirazini. Photograph by H. B. Sharpe. KNA CC1/36/2 [formerly DC/KWL/3/2] Chiefs and Headmen—Miscellaneous Papers, “Some Official Headmen of Digo District, December 1924.”



Image 4.18: “Some Official Headmen of Digo District. December 1924.” Standing, from left: Selemani Dzilali of Waa, Abdulla Ali of Pungu, Mbwana Mwachangoma of Shimba, and Kizibe of Trans-Shimba. Seated, from left: Nasoro Munagwaja of Muhaka, Mohamed Mwasemo of Gwirani, Mohammed Nzai of Pongwe, and Shehe bin Fumo of Wasini. Photograph by H. B. Sharpe. KNA CC1/36/2. [formerly DC/KWL/3/2] Chiefs and Headmen—Miscellaneous Papers, “Some Official Headmen of Digo District, December 1924.”

This conceptual distinction carried over into the administration's regimes of visual representation as well. With the exception of a few photographs of all the members of the district's LNCs assembled together—in which case such co-presence was unavoidable (but its impact reduced by the distance from the subject required to include the entire assembly within the frame)—Muslim and “Pagan” chiefs and headmen almost never appear together in the photographs of district administrators (see Image 4.17 and Image 4.18). In these photographs, the distinction between “Mohammedan” and “Pagan” trumps both location and “tribe,” achieving in the realm of visual aesthetics a neat division belied by the efforts of decades of colonial-era litigation, legislation, and administrative re-organization.

4.5: EXTRAVERSION, AUTHENTICITY, AND EPISTEMIC ANXIETY

Recent scholarship on Kenya's decolonization has emphasized both the shifting criteria of belonging through which claims to coastal sovereignty were made, and the historical processes through which various forms of “nativist territoriality” became plausible bases of political claims-making.¹⁵⁰ The identities through which the struggles were fought were not givens, but emerged out of a complex history of differential taxation of colonially-defined “native” and “non-native” statuses, “communal” and individual title to land, ossification of “tribal” and administrative boundaries, the banning of African political parties in 1953, the restriction of those parties to District—and thus roughly “tribal”—levels between 1955 and 1960, and the weakening of African political organizations through the “extension downward of the system of appointed chiefs,” all of which laid the groundwork for Kenya's postcolonial political culture of ethnic alliances and

¹⁵⁰ Prestholdt, “Politics of the Soil,” 250; Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan's Flag,” 852, 859–60; Willis and Gona, “*Pwani C Kenya?*,” 49–51.

personal patronage.¹⁵¹ The same is true of the entities in relation to which these groups sought affiliation or autonomy. As Justin Willis and George Gona point out regarding the Zanzibari Sultanate:

Oman's ruling family became both beneficiary and victim of British patronage. British protection allowed one branch of the family, in Zanzibar, to split away from Oman ... in 1856; and British capital, as well as diplomatic and military support, allowed the newly styled sultans of Zanzibar to maintain and extend their influence along the East African coast. The treaties turned this uncertain authority into an internationally recognized sovereignty, but also limited it to a strip ten miles wide.¹⁵²

What Willis and Gona are describing is, in Bayart's terms, a history of extraversion. An important element of the delimitation of the political units on the basis of which (and in relation to which) claims of *mwambao* and *majimbo* were articulated was the creation and configuration of an interface with outside entities. This simultaneously connecting and differentiating interface becomes a key instrument through which individuals and organizations consolidate power internally. Frederick Cooper has made a similar argument about the "gatekeeping" function of postcolonial African states more generally as bodies that manage "the interface between a territory and the rest of the world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself."¹⁵³ Extraversion is thus not a simple "looking outward." It is at the same time a struggle over the nature and internal organization of the political units involved in such relationships, and the identities of those who manage them. It is also, as the history of struggles over elder authority, Sultanate sovereignty, and regional autonomy make clear, a dialectical, recursive process across

¹⁵¹ A. I. Salim, "Native or Non-Native? The Problem of Identity and the Social Stratification of the Arab-Swahili of Kenya," *Hadith* 6 (1976), 65–85; R. Stren, "Factional Politics and Central Control in Mombasa, 1960–1969," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 4:1 (1970), 36; Prestholdt, "Politics of the Soil," 257–60; Brennan, "Lowering the Sultan's Flag," 845, 853–4; Willis and Gona, "*Pwani C Kenya?*," 53–5.

¹⁵² Willis and Gona, "*Pwani C Kenya?*," 52.

¹⁵³ F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940* (Cambridge, 2002), 157.

scalar levels, in which the past is differentially brought to bear on the present to shape political futures.

The period of decolonization at the coast was thus characterized by protracted debate over the legal status of the so-called “Ten-Mile Strip” (leased by the Sultan of Zanzibar to the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1888, and then to the British Crown by an 1895 treaty), and the rights of increasingly rigidly defined ethnic, racial, and religious constituencies within those territories.¹⁵⁴ Beginning in the early 1950s an Arab, Asian, and Swahili-led movement that became known as *mwambao* (“coastline”) began to elaborate the possibilities of a “layered and shared” sovereignty linked to the history of Busaidi suzerainty and their status as ‘British-protected’ subjects of the Sultan of Zanzibar.¹⁵⁵ These possibilities—developing out of anxiety at the prospect of African “domination”—ranged from independence, to regional federation, to unification with the Zanzibari Sultanate.¹⁵⁶ By the early 1960s, however, the scope of possibilities had been significantly reduced and the question soon became not the independence of the Coast Strip, but rather the relative autonomy of the Coast Province in an independent Kenyan state. *Mwambao*, which had sought to maintain the historical privilege of one section of coastal society against the rest, gave way to a politics of *majimboism* (“regionalism”), setting “coastal people as a whole against those from up-country.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ For detailed accounts of this history, see J. Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:4 (2008), 831–61; J. Prestholdt, “Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony, and Decolonization at the Kenyan Coast,” *Journal of African History* 55 (2014), 249–70; and J. Willis and G. Gona, “*Pwani C Kenya?* Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya,” *African Affairs* 112:446 (2012), 48–71.

¹⁵⁵ Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag,” 834–5, 839.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; Prestholdt, “Politics of the Soil,” 251 and *passim*; A. I. Salim, “The Movement of “Mwambao” or Coast Autonomy in Kenya, 1956–1963,” *Hadith* 2 (1970), 216–20.

¹⁵⁷ Willis and Gona, “*Pwani C Kenya?*,” 59.

Regional autonomy appealed to smaller ethnic constituencies concerned about the concentration of state power in the hands of larger groups, and was central to the platform of the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), led by Mijikenda politician Ronald Ngala. KADU's rival, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), organized around a Kikuyu-Luo ethnic alliance, favored a centralized system of government. To accelerate decolonization, KANU accepted KADU's proposed *majimbo* constitution and then, once in control of Parliament, "systematically undermine[d] the regional governments," organized "a stream of defections from KADU to KANU," and ultimately created a new constitution "abolishing the regions and reintroducing the centralized administrative state that had been established by colonialism."¹⁵⁸ Kenya became a de facto one-party state, and regional autonomy was off the table for the next thirty years.

In 1992, however, under pressure from international aid organizations and foreign donors (on which his own patronage capacities depended), President Daniel arap Moi reintroduced multi-party elections.¹⁵⁹ The question of coastal autonomy, which had remained largely dormant until this moment, posed itself anew: With the apparent expansion of political possibilities in the multi-party era came a nationwide return to decolonization-era debates around *majimbo*. But during this period the question of the proper relation between territory, identity, and power, however, brought with it violence on a scale not seen on the Kenyan coast during decolonization.¹⁶⁰ The worst such

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 60.

¹⁵⁹ World Bank, "Press Release: Meeting of the Consultative Group for Kenya," 26 November 1991 (Paris), 3. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/932051468272358163/Consultative-Group-for-Kenya-Paris-November-25-and-26-1991-chairmans-report-of-proceedings>.

¹⁶⁰ On the violence of the Zanzibari Revolution, however, see M. Lofchie, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1965); and J. Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

violence occurred during the so-called “Kaya Bombo Clashes” of 1997, described in Chapter Three, and the Government’s response to them.

“Kaya Bombo,” recall, is the name of the *kaya* in which the “raiders” were given military training and ritually “oathed.” Oathing, as I pointed out in Chapter Three, was historically the proprietary ritual knowledge of *kaya* elders, and was one of the key techniques through which their authority was performed. But as Diane Ciekawy and others have argued, the figures responsible for the 1997 Kaya Bombo oathing were widely suspected of being “fake.”¹⁶¹ I argue that this suspicion is symptomatic of a more general concern in the late twentieth-century moment about the authenticity of political, cultural, and economic institutions in Kenya.

This concern was not limited to the Coast, but assumed a specific form there. Although the coast is, in many ways, distinct from and peripheral to “upcountry” Kenya, it is not outside “the ignoble patronage competitions of Kenyan national politics,” which is still the only game in town, so to speak.¹⁶² It languishes at the margins, unable to establish more robust links to key nodes of power, but on the coast—as elsewhere—local elites position themselves as brokers or gatekeepers for communities that can hardly be said to benefit from the arrangement, but have few other options.¹⁶³ So when, in the 1990s, “the capacities of Kenya’s political patrons began to fail ... while paradoxically retaining their face value[,]” as a result of the government’s downsizing as

¹⁶¹ D. M. Ciekawy, “Fake Kaya Elders and Fake Oaths: Reflections on the Immorality of Invented Tradition in the 1997 Crisis in Coastal Kenya,” in V. Y. Mudimbe (ed.), *Recontextualizing Self and Other Issues in Africa* (Athens, OH, 2014), 213;

¹⁶² Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag,” 860.

¹⁶³ Indeed, it is worth considering whether the apparent enduring particularity of the coast has, at this point, more to do with the historical forms of its articulation with the Kenyan state than with any positive ‘cultural’ specificity resistant to change.

part of it Structural Adjustment Program, “a new moral ambivalence pervaded patron-client transactions now understood to be evil simulations of morally valorized relations of exchange.”¹⁶⁴

4.6: CONCLUSION

After the end of KANU rule in 2002, a “series of scandals” divided *kaya* elders, who began to accuse each another of “amateurism, fraudulence, greed and disloyalty.”¹⁶⁵ The “scandals” followed a number of widely publicized ritual encounters between *kaya* elders and high-profile politicians, in which certain individuals were popularly believed to have installed non-Mijikenda politicians as a *kaya* elder or, in the case of Kisauni MP Karisa Maitha (who is Mijikenda), as “King.”¹⁶⁶ The exact nature of the rituals and the authority of the elders to perform them were publicly and privately debated in a moment of political change that also saw the proliferation of both recognized *kayas* and their elders, and in which the *kaya* had come increasingly to serve as “a symbol of a distinctive Mijikenda political identity,” where “esoteric knowledge” is the key to leadership (as opposed to the gerontocratic order discussed earlier).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ R. W. Blunt, “‘Satan is an Imitator’: Kenya’s Recent Cosmology of Corruption,” in B. Weiss (ed.), *Producing African Futures* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 295. This suggests deeper parallels with the decolonization era. As James Brennan has argued, during the period between the Second World War and Kenyan independence, “Arab and Swahili administrative power had withered while its symbols proliferated,” including the Sultan’s red flag, flown by his representatives and subjects but “paid for by British administration funds.” Brennan, “Lowering the Sultan’s Flag,” 851, 842.

¹⁶⁵ J. McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds’: Commodified Expertise and Politicized Authenticity among Mijikenda,” *Africa* 79:1 (2009), 35; J. Willis, “The King of the Mijikenda and Other Stories about the *Kaya*: Heritage, Politics, and Histories in Multiparty Kenya,” in D. R. Peterson and G. Macola (eds.), *Recasting the Past* (Athens, OH, 2009), 233–250

¹⁶⁶ Willis, “King of the Mijikenda,” 234–5; McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds,’” 43.

¹⁶⁷ Willis, “King of the Mijikenda,” 236–243, 245–6. For a related phenomenon elsewhere in Kenya, see R. W. Blunt, “Kenyatta’s Lament: Oaths and the Transformation of Ritual Ideologies in Colonial Kenya,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3:3 (2013), 167–93.

Setting aside the question of whether *kaya* elders and rituals are authentic or “fake,” Janet McIntosh and Justin Willis situate these arguments about authenticity and authority within “*ideologies of expertise*” and bodies of “local historical knowledge.”¹⁶⁸ Two related aspects of their analyses are worth highlighting here. The first is the compounding, in the post-Moi era, of earlier debates about coastal autonomy by an ideal of authenticity, and at the same time a lack of certainty about the authenticity of contemporary authorities—part of what I call a “vernacular hermeneutics of suspicion.” The suspicion is that while authenticity and expertise are the keys to proper authority, what appears to be “authentic” may be a part of deception masking connections to outside patrons to whom one (and one’s group) has been betrayed.

The second has to do with the vicissitudes of the *kaya* in Mijikenda political cosmology. On the one hand, *kayas* and elders have, in the context of “a freshly important ideal of ethnic authenticity and segregation,” been reinscribed as important loci of authority.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, there has been a reversal: The ritual media at the center of the *kaya* are not the self-grounding *origo* from which elders’ power and authority radiate. Instead, the “esoteric knowledge” of the *kaya* elders has become a technology of articulation with outside power through their ritual endorsement of political candidates, or through the “external recognition” of national and international conservation groups.¹⁷⁰ Politicians, like the “new men” of the nineteenth century, rose to prominence outside the gerontocratic ritual order of the *kaya*, and look to a new kind of “center” of power: The central government personified in the figure of the President, who stands at the apex

¹⁶⁸ McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds’,” 35. Italics in original. Willis, “King of the Mijikenda,” 246.

¹⁶⁹ McIntosh, “Elders and ‘Frauds’,” 41.

¹⁷⁰ Willis, “King of the Mijikenda,” 239.

of national patronage networks and who may be approached for favors as a child approaches its father.¹⁷¹

Elders, whose power once flowed outwards from ritual media they controlled, now also look “outward” for support to younger men, who themselves look to a new kind of patriarch who controls access to a new kind of power.¹⁷² Coast residents are aware of these dependencies, and this knowledge simultaneously projects an essentialized, idealized Mijikenda identity and social order into the past while undermining the claims of its present-day representatives to that “authenticity.” Here suspicion and speculation into the surface appearances and hidden depths of power and wealth are closely linked to the condition McIntosh calls “structural nostalgia.”¹⁷³ Both are rooted in the Kenyan coast’s long history of political and economic extraversion. In Part Three I explore two moments in which this history is brought into a particularly frightening constellation with the present through South Coast Kenya’s “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion,” in episodes of moral panic around sinister gangs of blood and organ thieves called “*Mumiani*.”

¹⁷¹ At a political rally in Pongwe-Kidimu Location for a 2013 election, for instance, The National Alliance’s Benson Mutisya argued that although he, a Kamba, was an ethnic “outsider” in Lunga Lunga District, he was running as a member of the President’s own party. This meant that he could ask President Kenyatta for resources “just like a son can ask his father.” On the 2013 election, Chapter Five.

¹⁷² Kenyan politicians readily trope upon the association of leadership with rainfall (which on the coast center around *kaya* elders) and of rain with money to describe their own redistributive capacities. Early in his presidency, in response to complaints that some ethnic constituencies were not represented in government appointments, Uhuru Kenyatta chided leaders for “fighting over the morning dew” when “the rains are coming”. R. Jelimo and J. Muchiri, “Uhuru: More Appointments On The Way,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), 5 January 2014. <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000101492/>.

¹⁷³ McIntosh, ‘Elders and “Frauds”’, 35. On ‘structural nostalgia’, see M. Hertzfeld, ‘Pride and Perjury: Time and the Oath in the Mountain Villages of Crete’, *Man* 25:2 (1990), 305-22.

PART THREE:

BODIES, RUMOR, AND HISTORY

CHAPTER FIVE:

MUMIANI: VAMPIRE STORIES AND ORGAN THEFT RUMOR IN COASTAL KENTA

5.1—INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about drought, kinship, power, and unfree labor on the coast of Kenya in the first half of the twentieth century. It is about rumor and history, blood and body parts, moral panics and matrilineal descent. It is about the monstrous—vampires, mummies, and dismembered bodies—and the mundane—bureaucracy, local elections, and the weather. The argument is this: Recurrent rumors on the Kenyan coast about gangs of blood-stealers and organ thieves called “*Watu wa Mumiani*” (“*Mumiani* People”)—sometimes just “*Mumiani*”—condense and represent layers of complex historical experience in a bodily idiom of depletion, danger, and death. These rumors synthesize precolonial medical knowledge, rituals of elder initiation, and social mechanisms for surviving ecological distress into “news” about the value of human life and the nature of political power. They are both an explicit commentary on and critique of the contexts in which they develop and circulate, and a way of talking about history whose truth claims and evidentiary standards are substantially different from those of professional historians. Put differently, rumors are in one sense “documents” of the historical moments in which they circulate, but they also point to more distant pasts and indicate how the former is experienced and understood locally through the latter.

In this chapter and the one that follows, I examine two moments of moral panic about *Mumiani*, separated by almost seventy years. The immediate contexts of the two panics were radically different, as were the specific contents of the rumors that circulated about *Mumiani* in each moment. Nevertheless, there are clear commonalities between the two beyond their focus on

sinister figures called “*Mumiani*.” In one sense, these may be understood as continuities: They are moments in an ongoing development, and depend for their intelligibility on the durability of what I have called an associational nexus of images or motifs. Africanist historians have drawn attention to similar phenomena in a variety of ways. For David Schoenbrun, they are “durable bundles of meaning and practices.”¹ For Steven Feierman, such a “range of metaphors and emotionally charged images” represent long-term forms of “political discourse.”² For Nancy Rose Hunt, they are “the lexicon of debate.”³

From a different perspective, however, continuity is not what is really at issue here. Like the nineteenth-century initiation rituals analyzed in Chapter One and twentieth-century ones analyzed in Chapter Four, the phenomena with which I am concerned here in Part Three are exceptional occurrences far removed from the “everyday life” of the people who experienced them. Indeed, they are interruptions of the usual state of affairs, even as they develop out of them. These episodes of *Mumiani* panic are characterized, moreover, by feelings of extreme differentials in understanding, and of hidden knowledge. One is aware that something is happening, and even has a general understanding of the nature of the process and its internal logic, but what one knows is dwarfed by the magnitude of what one does not: How does one become *Mumiani*? Who, ultimately, is buying the blood and body parts they harvest from their victims? What exactly do they do with them? This feeling of relative ignorance is accompanied by the sense—characteristic of all “occult economies” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; 2018) that *someone* knows. Thus, like

¹ D. L. Schoenbrun, “Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa,” *American Historical Review* 111-5.

² S. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 7.

³ N. R. Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, NC, 1999), 11.

the “secret societies” discussed in Chapter Three, *Mumiani* are shadowy, powerful, and dangerous. Unlike these societies and the age-grade structures with which they were intertwined, however, their power and danger derives *not* from their command of secret ritual techniques and substances incorporated into the domesticated space of settlements, but rather from their connection to *outside others* who command *other* ritual techniques and substances, who know how to turn blood and eyes into wealth and power. Finally, like the Singwaya origin stories analyzed in Chapter Two, these events vary regionally and over time (as Luise White has so ably demonstrated).⁴ Like Singwaya, *Mumiani* and the stories told about them are also claims, arguments, and theories about the present.

Taken together, these aspects of *Mumiani* phenomena—the durability or continuity of certain elements on the one hand, and the episodic, perspectival, and contextual nature of their emergence on the other—call for a dialectical theory of history. Drawing inspiration from Walter Benjamin’s fragmentary writings on historical knowledge, I argue that episodes like the Kwale County *Mumiani* scares of 1945 and 2013 are events in which “what has been comes together in a

⁴ L. White, “Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology, and Labor in East and Central Africa,” *Representations* 43 (1993): 27-50; L. White, “Vampire Priests of Central Africa: African Debates about Labour and Religion in Colonial Northern Zambia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25:4 (1993): 746- 772; L. White, “Between Gluckman and Foucault: Historicizing Rumour and Gossip,” *Social Dynamics* 20:1 (1994): 75-92; L. White, ““They Could Make Their Victims Dull”: Genders and Genres, Fantasies and Cures in Colonial Southern Uganda,” *American Historical Review* 100:5 (1995): 1379-1402; L. White, “Tsetse Visions: Narratives of Blood and Bugs in Colonial Northern Rhodesia, 1931-9,” *Journal of African History* 36:2 (1995): 219-245; L. White, “The Traffic in Heads: Bodies, Borders and the Articulation of Regional Histories,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23:2 (1997): 325-338; L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in East Africa* (Berkeley, 2000); and L. White, “True Stories: Narrative, Event, History, and Blood in the Lake Victoria Basin,” in L. White, S. Miescher, and D. W. Cohen (eds.) *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 103–24.

flash with the now to form a constellation.”⁵ They are moments, in other words, in which certain elements of the past seem, as it were, to shine brighter than others, and to relate to the present in meaningful new ways. The cultural ephemera churned up in such moments (like the volatile fashions of the Paris Arcades, for Benjamin, or episodes of moral panic and rumor like the one discussed below) can be read, in this analogy, as the image formed by such a new constellation.”

This is thus not an argument about either the continuity or radical newness of what Luise White calls “vampire stories,” but rather about how various cultural phenomena are preserved, transformed, and refigured in moments of recognition.⁶ If figures like the *Watu wa Mumiani* are, for White, “an epistemological category, with which Africans described their world,” the stories told about them “are not constructed on a moment-to-moment basis; they are drawn from a store of historical allusions that have been kept alive and given new and renewed meanings by the gossip and arguments of diverse social groups.”⁷ My argument is that identifying which elements these stories draw from the local “store of historical allusions” will help us understand why they become especially relevant under certain circumstances—in episodes of occasionally violent public panics—and not others. In this way, events like the 1945 and 2013 *Mumiani* scares offer important windows into the historical consciousness of their moments—how “the now,” in Benjamin’s terms, was understood to be related to the “what has been,” how that understanding was disseminated and shared, and the terms in which their relationship was debated.

In this chapter, I focus on an instance of collective panic about *Watu wa Mumiani* in southern coastal Kenya at the end of the Second World War and offer an interpretation of the

⁵ W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. R Tiedemann, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 463.

⁶ L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in East Africa* (Berkeley, 2000).

⁷ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 50, 82.

episode in terms of a drought and a labor conscription scheme with which it overlapped. These fears developed out of earlier ideas about a medical technology of the Indian Ocean world called “*Mumiani*,” but also condense (in this episode) a more diffuse set of cultural memories of famine, pawnship, and avuncular authority that had become suddenly relevant under the conditions of drought and labor conscription in which the rumors circulated. In this moment, young men were at risk of conscription for work on agricultural and public works projects deemed necessary for the war effort. Those responsible for their conscription were the senior male heads of the homesteads in which they resided.

In Chapter Six, I turn to a low-level panic about *Mumiani* that occurred during the first year of my fieldwork in southern Kenya, in 2013. I interpret the return of *Mumiani* in light of the announcement of a Parliamentary by-election, the apparent failure of the short rains, and a teacher’s strike. Like the *Mung’aro* ritual of the nineteenth century (see Chapter One), I argue that this episode was thus characterized by a moment of (possible) political transition—the by-election—accompanied by a failure of the rains—historically a sign of the need for such transition. Like *Mung’aro*, this entailed heightened danger along the roads. Children were said to be especially at risk (as they were to the nineteenth-century abductions of which I suggested *Mung’aro* may have been, in part, a ritual dramatization. But in this case their vulnerability is the result of possible betrayal by young men—the products of a failed education system that had improperly prepared them for adulthood in a commodity mediated but jobless environment. A failure, that is, of the kind of social transition that *Mung’aro* was understood efficaciously to have achieved in the past. Note that although the subject of the panic—*Mumiani*—is constant, what they articulate is not: The prototypical victims of the 1945 panic—young men—become the prototypical accomplices of the *Mumiani* panic of 2013.

5.2: THE MUMIANI SCARE OF 1945

In his annual report for 1945, Digo District Commissioner Noel Frederick Kennaway describes an episode of panic that bears all the hallmarks of White's 'vampire stories':

After a lapse of some seven years the ancient and curious belief in 'Watu wa Mumiani' again came to the fore. The scare lasted for several months before dying out. 'Mumiani' is the name of an ancient Persian medicinal drug of great healing power. The present local belief is that this drug is made from the blood of human beings and that the blood is collected by gangs which work secretly at night. These gangs of 'Watu wa Mumiani' are vaguely believed to be organised by Government. The gangs are supposed to come by lorry from Mombasa and to seize any lone native that can be found. The victim is then slung from a tree by the feet and all blood drained from the body, which is then left as a mere bag of bones. During the height of the scare no native would be out at night alone. The people armed themselves and slept in groups. Such was the degree of fear that, had an unsuspecting car or lorry driver stopped on the road at night near an armed village, the villagers would probably have slaughtered the occupants of the car or lorry and asked questions afterwards. Fortunately the scare passed off without any serious incident. The origin of the scare was probably due to two mysterious murders in Kilifi district. In one case the victim's body *was* found hanging by its feet in a tree, in the other case the body was face down in a puddle. The curious thing about these cases was that these bodies had been mutilated in the Boran and Abyssinian fashion.⁸

Two aspects of Kennaway's 1945 account are worth emphasizing. First, the process, known only by its traces (a body "left as a mere bag of bones"), takes place "secretly at night." Like Marx's "hidden abode of production" in which "the secret of profit making" is to be sought, this process of converting life's essence into a consumable substance takes place "outside the limits of the market or the sphere of circulation" where "everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men."⁹ In this understanding—as in Marxian theory—the source of value is "hidden" from view—literally "occult." One does not *see* value produced, only signs of its *having been*

⁸ Kenya National Archives, Nairobi (KNA) CC1/3/26, N. F. Kennaway, "Digo District Annual Report," 1945.

⁹ K. Marx, *Capital, Volume I* (New York, 1977 [orig. pub. 1867]), 279–80.

produced. This is what it means to describe Mumiani as a form of knowledge: it is both a theory of value and a representation of its production.

The second important aspect of Kennaway's report is that "*Mumiani* people" are "vaguely believed to be organized by Government." Behind those immediately responsible for the killing stand powerful, shadowy outsiders who act on the population through them. The power that organizes and controls the production of value derives from a distant source that can only be approached through intermediaries. Visibility and invisibility, proximity and distance, then, are two key dimensions of a vernacular "hermeneutic of suspicion" through which South Coast Kenyans engaged the question of life's relation to the production of value.¹⁰

Kennaway's brief report is the only archival trace of the 1945 panic, and the only hint of a local scare 'some seven years' earlier (although Peter Pels notes that one did occur in Morogoro District, Tanganyika around that time).¹¹ Neither episode stands out in oral histories of *Mumiani* activity in the region either. Any reasonable interpretation of the 1945 panic is thus obliged to rely on abductive inference from indirect, contextual clues. How to approach such a fragmentary account of such an unusual event?

Fortunately, shadowy figures like *Watu wa Mumiani* (and the occasional episodes of panic about them) have been important sites for innovative theoretical and methodological work by historians of African in recent years. These "vampire" figures are, as Luise White has persuasively argued, an "epistemological category, with which Africans described their world."¹² The stories

¹⁰ On the concept of a "hermeneutic of suspicion," see P. Ricouer, *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven, 1970).

¹¹ P. Pels, "*Mumiani*: The White Vampire: A Neo-Diffusionist Analysis of Rumour," *Etnofoor*, 5:1/2 (1992), 165–87.

¹² L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in East Africa* (Berkeley, 2000), 50.

told about them, however, “are not constructed on a moment-to-moment basis,” but rather “drawn from a store of historical allusions ... kept alive and given new and renewed meanings by the gossip and arguments of diverse social groups.”¹³ By treating formulaic elements of *Mumiani* stories not as distortions or distractions but rather as the key ingredients of “a good and thus credible story,” White directs our attention to something like what Nancy Rose Hunt calls “the lexicon of debate.”¹⁴ In this approach, identifying the key elements “kept alive” and—importantly—transformed by rumor helps reveal “wider terrains of belief and theory.”¹⁵

White bases much of her argument on narratives elicited in oral interviews conducted “in Nairobi in the mid 1970s, in Siaya District in 1986, and in and around Kampala in 1990,” several decades after the events they describe.¹⁶ But in being recounted to her in response to an elicitation, these stories are no longer lively circulating rumor or gossip about specific people or events.¹⁷ Partly because of how these stories are narrated (in the continuous past tense: “we were doing x,” “they used to do y”), and partly because of the apparent stability of a genre abstracted from concrete iterations, the ‘vampire stories’ collected by White become historical documents of colonialism. White’s method thus allows her to illuminate aspects of the popular imagination in colonial-era East and Central Africa, and even to parse the concerns and relationships that these stories articulate by region. But it does not allow her to explain why these rumors *as rumors* come and go as they do, capturing public imagination in episodes of moral panic one moment and fading away the next.

¹³ *Ibid.* 82.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89; Hunt, *Colonial Lexicon*, 11.

¹⁵ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 82. On the “vocabulary” of rumor, see *Ibid.* 85

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷ See, for example, the interview extracts in *Ibid.*, 135, 137, 138, 156-7, 167, 172, and elsewhere.

This is related to another aspect of White’s method: its emphasis on the novelty and alterity of the vampire. Echoing E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s pithy insight that “new situations demand new magic,” White’s colonial vampires are “new imaginings for new relationships.”¹⁸ Novel technologies—rubber tubes, syringes, automobiles—articulate novel relationships—labor hierarchy, time discipline, land tenure reform. But however new colonial vampires and their tools may have been, they were not entirely new or alien to African subjects. White acknowledges this, but only pursues (in order to reject – correctly, I think) a genealogical link between “vampire” and “witch” as social types. The “new and improved witches” of the colonial era, she points out, “did not translate into vampires.”¹⁹ Unlike “witchcraft” (which White understands to be an idiom for articulating tensions around intimacy in the kinship order), vampires “had none of the personal malice of witches; it was a job.”²⁰ Vampires were “internationalized, professionalized, supervised, and commodifying,” and “their outsidersness was foregrounded.”²¹

But White’s distinction between “witch” and “vampire” in terms of intimacy and alterity is perhaps overdrawn, at least for the coastal Kenyan case considered below: Vampire stories do indeed mark the foreignness of a *source* of power and its demand for blood, but also an anxiety about the Africans who work for these outsiders, and do the killing on their behalf (those for whom “it was a job”). In other words, they articulate concerns about the more familiar figures who mediate between a foreign power and local communities. One could just as easily argue, then, that

¹⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937), 513; White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 22.

¹⁹ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*

as with local ideas about witchcraft, “vampire stories” express less a fear of “outsiderness” itself than the fear of betrayal by intimates.

Despite the lack of a genealogical connection to precolonial witches, the colonial vampire is, for White, “a synthetic image ... constructed in part from ideas about witchcraft and in part from ideas about colonialism.”²² Both “witch” and “vampire” are, however, composite categories and English-language approximates for a range of positions within local ontologies of personhood.²³ Moreover, the evolutionary logic by which one type is understood to develop out of another is not the only relationship to antecedent social forms that a figure like the vampire might have. My argument is that while such vampire figures may well be “new imaginings for new relationships,” they may also be new imaginings of old relationships, articulating contemporary relationships not only in terms of contemporary technology, but in terms of a history or relationships and technologies. Identifying which elements these stories draw from the local “store of historical allusions” will, in this way, help us understand why they become especially relevant under certain circumstances—in episodes of occasionally violent public panics—and not others. Identifying which elements these stories draw from the local ‘store of historical allusions’ will help us understand why they become especially relevant under certain circumstances – in episodes of occasionally violent public panics – and not others. In other words, if White is interested in how vampire beliefs describe the colonial world of East Africa in a general way, I am interested in why specific *episodes* of vampire rumor *punctuate* that world in an eventful way.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Fortuitously, “synthetic image” is precisely how Rodney Needham characterizes the very category “witch.” R. Needham, “Synthetic Images,” in *Primordial Characters* (Charlottesville, 1978): 23-50.

James Brennan has made a complementary argument with reference to *Mumiani* phenomena, about the selection and prioritization of “explanatory contexts” for historical events with no clear cause or effects.²⁴ Analyzing an anti-*Mumiani* riot in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika in 1959, Brennan notes that the interpretation of such events often “raises demands for speculation on evidence that is generally evocative but specifically elusive.”²⁵ Any plausible explanation of events like these demands inference and interpretation based on indirect, contextual clues, when “no conclusive cause or causes are evident, but some are more likely than others.”²⁶

Illuminating as White and Brennan’s approaches are, there are potential risks associated with each.²⁷ On the one hand, as noted in the Introduction, White’s innovative historical method risks re-inscribing the very opposition between reality and belief that it seeks to overcome. White “takes these stories at face value” to see what they reveal about colonial experience, but ultimately understands herself to be writing “the history of things that never happened.”²⁸ To use these stories as evidence in this way, one may treat them “*as if* they were true, or accurate,” but keep in mind that “the stories are false” and that “their very falseness is what gives them meaning.”²⁹ Brennan’s method, on the other hand, risks imposing an external and purely analytic distinction—one perhaps not shared by the historical subjects themselves—between “event” and “context” in order to posit an explanatory, causal relationship between the two. If White is interested in showing how and

²⁴ J. Brennan, “Destroying *Mumiani*: Cause, Context, and Violence in Late Colonial Dar es Salaam,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2:1 (2008), 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* 103.

²⁷ I stress that these are *potential* risks I see in their respective methodologies, not a characterization of their actual scholarship.

²⁸ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 5, xii.

²⁹ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 122, 41, 43. Italics added. Brennan similarly asserts that “*Mumiani* of course do not exist.” Brennan, “Destroying *Mumiani*,” 96.

why these “vampire stories” are so widespread “even though they do not depict actual events, conversations, or things that really happened,” Brennan is interested in explaining how “a rumour that is ubiquitous relate[s] to a violent event that is rare”—but at the risk of losing sight of why those rumors were ubiquitous in the first place.³⁰

I want to argue that in the case of the Digo District *Mumiani* scare of 1945, a more dialectical approach—one capable of reconciling White’s methodological emphasis on the content of rumors with Brennan’s focus on context of events, while avoiding the risks associated with each—will help us arrive at a better understanding, first, of why these *Mumiani* stories re-emerged when and where they did, and second, what their renewed salience then and there tells us about how that moment was understood by the people involved. Later, I will suggest that Walter Benjamin’s concept of a historical “constellation” is useful in this regard. But such an analytic cannot adequately be employed until all of the relevant empirical material—the elements of the constellation—have been presented. Let me begin, then, by tracing the metamorphoses of “*Mumiani*” and its referents over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This will show how the term was “kept alive and given new and renewed meanings,” in White’s words, “by the gossip and arguments of diverse social groups,” rather than positing an explanatory link between its Arabic-language origins and its significance in World War II-era East Africa.³¹ Following this, I return to DC Kennaway’s speculative explanation for the episode’s origins in the “two mysterious murders” in Kilifi District to the north. Finally, I explore the historical association of famine with the pawning of kin for food loans in the nineteenth century, and argue for the importance of a

³⁰ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 89; Brennan, “Destroying *Mumiani*,” 96.

³¹ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 82. “*Mumiani*” is, however, the only term used to refer to these figures in the archival record for Kwale County, and was the only one that I encountered in two and a half years of fieldwork between January 2013 and July 2015.

contemporary drought, labor conscription campaign, and provision of “famine relief” as more salient “explanatory contexts” for the return of *Watu wa Mumiani* to Digo District in 1945.

5.3: MUMIANI IN WORLD HISTORY

As Kennaway points out, the history of *Mumiani* is, in the first instance, the history of a substance referred to as *mumia*, *momiyai*, *mumie*, and *mummy*. The etymology is variously given as the Arabic or Persian *mum* (“wax”), *amomum* (a perfume), or *mumia* (an embalmed body).³² In the course of translating medical texts by Pliny, Dioscorides, and Galen from Latin and Greek into Arabic and, later, those of Rhazes, Serapion, and Avicenna from Arabic into Latin and Greek, confusion emerged over whether *mumia* referred to preserved and perfumed corpses or to a waxy, bituminous substance that was either an ingredient or exudate of them.³³ By the time *mumia* appears in the writings of Paracelsus in sixteenth-century Europe, it is a medicinal “balsam” derived from a special kind of corpse:

Examine the case of a man who has died by a natural and predestined death. What further good or use is there in him? None. Let him be cast to the worms. But the case is not the same with a man who has been slain with a sword or has died some violent death. The whole of his body is useful and good, and can be fashioned into the most valuable *mumia*. For though the spirit of life has gone forth from such a body, still the balsam remains, in which life is latent, which also, indeed, as a balsam conserves other human bodies.³⁴

Not only is *mumia* derived from the body of one who met a violent end, the best of it is derived, according to Paracelsus, from the young and vital, for “the *mumia* of the aged ... is deficient in

³² T. J. Pettigrew, *A History of Egyptian Mummies* (London, 1834), 1.

³³ K. H. Dannenfeldt, “Egyptian Mumia: The Sixteenth Century Experience and Debate,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16:2 (1986), 163–180.

³⁴ T. Paracelsus, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings, Volume I*, ed. Arthur Edward Waite (London, 1894), 147.

virtue and strength.”³⁵ As a distillate or “essence” of life itself, *mumia* relates (in this understanding) to the body as an integral, systemic whole. It is a universally shared vital force of variable strength which may be transferred from one individual to another through the mediation of a substance (the “balsam”) that is its material bearer and in which it lies “latent.”

The medical community of early modern Europe remained divided over whether *mumia* referred to bodies or bitumen, whether one was an acceptable substitute for the other, and whether either had any medicinal value at all. Despite the uncertainty, European consumption (in this case quite literal) of Egyptian mummies between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries outstripped supply, leading to concerns over counterfeit *mumia* made from the corpses of executed criminals and the unclaimed dead.³⁶ “Mummy” was available in the apothecaries and pharmacies of Europe well into the eighteenth century as a staple of both the Galenic and Paracelsian medical systems. Although popular memory of European medical anthropophagy is repressed, it appears in the work of contemporary artists, scientists, and intellectuals, from Jean Bodin, Francis Bacon, and Robert Boyle to William Shakespeare, John Donne, and Samuel Johnson.³⁷ Sale of medicinal mummy in Europe continued into the twentieth century, with the German pharmaceutical company Merck selling “*Mumia vera aegyptiaca*” (“genuine Egyptian mummy”) as late as 1924.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.* 169.

³⁶ Dannenfeldt, “Egyptian Mumia,” 170–1.

³⁷ J. Bodin, *Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime* (University Park, PA, 2008 [1588]): 7–9; F. Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum, or, A Natural History in Ten Centuries* (London, 1670): 210; R. Boyle, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle, Volume II* (London, 1770): 451; W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, 3.4: 60–6; J. Donne, “Mummy or Love’s Alchemy,” in *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne*, 2nd edn, ed. T. Redpath (Cambridge, MA, 2009 [1983]), 143; S. Johnson, “Mummy,” in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London 1755), 1,338.

³⁸ “Powdered Mummies Used as Medicine,” *M—The Explorer Magazine*, 17 February 2016; http://www.magazine.emerck/darmstadt_germany/culture/mummies/powdered_mummies_used

As European demand fell in the early nineteenth century, concern about counterfeit mummy made from the recently deceased gave way to the idea that authentic *mumia* is harvested not from ancient mummies, but from the bodies of those captured and killed specifically for its manufacture. In 1854, Alexander Cunningham wrote that “the common *momiai* of Indian medicine is of course a manufactured article; although not made, as generally asserted, of the melted fat of Abyssinian boys, who have been roasted for the purpose.”³⁹ A footnote in Raja Sivaprasad’s *History of Hindustan* includes “among the nursery tales we heard in our childhood that in Habash (Abyssinia) men make Momiyái, a sort of medicine, from the blood of the slain.”⁴⁰ And in East Africa, the Mombasa-area missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf’s *Dictionary of the Suaheli Language* defines *Mumiani* as “a fabulous medicine which the Europeans prepare, in the opinion of the natives, from the blood of a man.”⁴¹ This newer conception, however, had not yet fully replaced the older one. In his 1870 *Handbook of the Swahili Language as Spoken at Zanzibar*, Edward Steere defined “*Mumyani*” as “A mummy. Mummy is still esteemed as a medicament,” and Charles Sacleux’s 1891 *Dictionnaire Français-Swahili* gives “*mumiani*” as the Swahili translation of the French “*Momie*” (“Mummy”) with no further elaboration.⁴² His 1939 Swahili-to-French dictionary, however, seems to assimilate these earlier definitions of “*Mumiani*” to what would

[as_medicine.html](#); K. Gordon-Grube, “Anthropophagy in Post-Renaissance Europe: The Tradition of Medicinal Cannibalism,” *American Anthropologist*, 90:2 (1988), 405–9.

³⁹ A. Cunningham, *Ladák* (London, 1854), 237.

⁴⁰ R. Sivaprasad, *A History of Hindustan, Volume III*, trans. B. Joshi (Benares, 1874), 26n1.

⁴¹ J. L. Krapf, *A Dictionary of the Suaheli Language* (London, 1882), 266–7. Although not published until 1882, the Krapf’s dictionary was substantially completed decades earlier. Johannes Rebmann, Krapf’s fellow missionary, made a copy in 1850 that contains the following entry: “*Mumiani: eine fabelhafte Arznei der Wasungu, aus dem Blute eines Menschen bereitet*” (“a fabulous medicine of the Europeans, prepared from human blood”). Church Missionary Society Archives, University of Birmingham (CMS) CMS/MS 9, “Sparshott Manuscripts.”

⁴² E. Steere, *A Handbook of the Swahili Language as Spoken at Zanzibar* (London, 1870), 97; C. Sacleux, *Dictionnaire Français-Swahili* (Zanzibar, 1891), 631.

have been, for him, a more familiar genre of European blood-stealing rumor, namely blood-libel: “Mummy. Used in the medicine of the indigenous, who say that it is made of dried human blood: Jews would be responsible for obtaining it by bleeding subjects.”⁴³

In that same year (possibly drawing upon material appearing in the journal *Man* between 1929 and 1934), Frederick Johnson published a definition of “*Mumiani*” as “a dark-coloured gum-like substance used by some Arabs, Indians and Swahili as a medicine,” detailing its indications (“cramp, ague, broken bones, &c.”) and modes of use (either “as an outward application” or “melted in ghee for drinking”).⁴⁴ Johnson adds, “many natives firmly believe that it is dried or coagulated human blood taken from victims murdered for the purpose, and when a rumour is started that *mumiani* is being sought for, the natives of a town are filled with terror and seldom go out of their houses after sunset.”⁴⁵ The Indian Ocean world of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was thus the scene of protracted disagreement, debate, and reimagination of the nature, origins, and merit of medical techniques and technologies, including *Mumiani*. And among the “diverse social groups” re-vivifying and re-imagining this concept were not only the Arab, Indian, and African inhabitants of the East African coast, but a host of European missionaries, administrators and social scientists as well.

There is good reason, then, to question Pels’s argument that this was an “Indian rumor” brought to East Africa by Indian soldiers and police in the 1890s.⁴⁶ As is well known, East Africa,

⁴³ C. Sacleux, *Dictionnaire Swahili-Français* (Paris, 1939), 625. Translation mine.

⁴⁴ F. Johnson, *Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 314. See also D. H. Gordon, “Momiyaï,” *Man* 29 (1929), 203–5; E. C. Baker, “Mumiani,” *Man* 30 (1930), 73; D. H. Gordon, “Some Further Notes on Momiyaï,” *Man* 33 (1933), 155–6; G. W. B. Huntingford, “Momiyaï,” *Man* 34 (1934), 16; D. H. Gordon, “Momiyaï and Silajit,” *Man* 34 (1934), 64.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Swahili-English Dictionary*, 314.

⁴⁶ Pels, “*Mumiani*,” 167.

South Asia, and the Middle East were part of an integrated, cosmopolitan Indian Ocean world for several centuries before this relocation of a few hundred soldiers.⁴⁷ The navigator who guided Vasco da Gama from Malindi (in what is now Kenya) to Calicut in 1498 was one of several “Gujaratis” he encountered in the “Swahili” city, and Amerigo Vespucci lists “mummy” among the items carried by ships returning to Portugal in 1501 from a voyage that included stops in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, the Persian Gulf and the Swahili Coast.⁴⁸ Pels’s article has the virtue of attempting to account for the timing of an East African *Mumiani* panic in 1904, but the claim hinges on the rough contemporaneity of rumors about “*Mumiani*” extraction *by* Indians in East Africa (in 1904-6) with rumors about “*momiai*” extraction *from* Indians in British hospitals in India during the plague epidemic of 1896.⁴⁹ As we have seen, however, earlier Indian accounts already identified *momiai* extraction as an “Abyssinian” phenomenon. Another colonial Indian source (from 1885) lists “*mimiyai*” as being “a kind of bitumen ... said to be extracted from the heads of coolies who emigrate to the colonies, by hanging them head downward and roasting them over a slow fire.”⁵⁰ Stories about *Mumiani* killings were thus not an “Indian rumor” at all, but rather expressed international concerns about the sources, availability, and effectiveness of global medical technologies on the one hand, and the fate of individuals swept up into global circuits of

⁴⁷ N. Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders* (Baltimore, 1998); A. Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean* (New York, 2010).

⁴⁸ V. Da Gama, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499*, trans. and ed. E. G. Ravenstein (London, 1898), 45–6; A. Vespucci, *Letters from a New World*, trans. D. Jacobson, ed. L. Formisano (New York, 1992), 26.

⁴⁹ Pels, “*Mumiani*,” 167; D. Arnold, “Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896–1900,” in R. Guha and G. C. Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford, 1988), 406–7.

⁵⁰ G. A. Grierson, *Bihar Peasant Life* (London, 1885), 409.

enslaved and bonded labor on the other, combining ideas about health and healing with speculation about the uses of life and the generation of value.

5.4: “MYSTERIOUS MURDERS” AND RITUAL KILLING ON THE KENYAN COAST

Like Pels, Kennaway offers an explanation of *Mumiani* rumor in terms of a roughly contemporary but slightly prior event: the “two mysterious murders in Kilifi district.” Although *The Mombasa Times* reported that the “naked body” of “a murdered native ... was found in the bush on the mainland at Mikindani” in late September, and that “the man’s throat had been cut and he was otherwise brutally mutilated,” I have found no other documentary reference to the body “found hanging by its feet in a tree” in Kilifi District records, raising the question of whether Kennaway may have been reporting (as the “origin” of the *Mumiani* rumor) information related to him in an instance of that rumor’s telling.

On the other hand, there *is* evidence of “an inquest ... into the death of a Giriama whose mutilated body was found in a pond at Kaloleni” in September, 1945.⁵¹ Determined to be a case of “murder by a person or persons unknown,” this is presumably the body Kennaway describes as having been found “face down in a puddle.”⁵² But what such a body would have to do with *Mumiani* is unclear. They leave their victims neither face down in puddles nor floating in ponds, but rather hanging upside down. The only detail common to both, in Kennaway’s account, was their postmortem mutilation “in the Boran and Abyssinian fashion” (a polite way of indicating that the victims’ genitals had been cut off). Such mutilation is not described in any available records as characteristic of rumors about *Mumiani* killings from this period, however—unless we take the

⁵¹ KNA CA/16/71, “Kilifi District Monthly Intelligence Report for September,” 3 October 1945.

⁵² *Ibid.*

“body found hanging from a tree” to be an instance of just such a rumor.⁵³ Yet it is on the basis of this “curious” detail that Kennaway links the incidents in Kilifi District to the “curious belief” in Digo District. While offered as an “explanatory context” for the timing of the 1945 *Mumiani* scare, reports of these deaths may have been more significant for an “historical allusion” that would have called up a rich set of images and associations for Digo District residents, but which would have been lost on Kennaway.

Although descriptions of unnamed East African peoples ritually emasculating the victims of initiatory killings can be found in twelfth-century Chinese encyclopedias (and in early seventeenth-century accounts, in which they are identified as “Mosseguejoes”), recall from the discussion of *mung’aro* in Chapter One that nineteenth-century missionary texts attribute the practice to “the Galla,” Oromo-speaking peoples (which include the Borana) of the northeast Kenyan borderlands.⁵⁴ Though absent from nineteenth-century descriptions of the initiation rituals of Mijikenda speakers, mutilation of the victim’s body was incorporated into twentieth-century descriptions of *Mung’aro*, by which point the ritual was no longer being performed (see for example, the description of Methodist missionary J. B. Griffiths in Section 1.4, above). By the time Kennaway was reporting the “curious” deaths in Kilifi District as the origin of *Mumiani* rumors in Digo, mutilation “in the Boran and Abyssinian fashion” had thus been fully incorporated into Mijikenda understandings of their own ritual history.

⁵³ Mutilation of corpses in precisely this manner does become characteristic of *Mumiani* stories in later twentieth-century and early twenty-first century iterations, however, as will be seen in section 5.3, below.

⁵⁴ P. Wheatley, “Analecta Sino-Africana Recensa,” in H. N. Chittick and R. I. Rotberg (eds.), *East Africa and the Orient* (New York: 1975), 97; J. Dos Santos, *Aethiopia Oriental* (Evora, 1609), quoted in J. M. Gray, “Portuguese Records Relating to the Wasegeju,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 29 (1950): 86–8. “Galla” is considered a derogatory term by the Oromo, and I use it here only when quoting others.

What these accounts of killing and “mutilation” share—and share with twentieth-century *Mumiani* rumor—is a clear sense of the vulnerability of individual travelers along roads and paths: A “solitary traveler” might “risk his life, if alone on the road” during *Mung’aro*. The Oromo were said to “waylay innocent travelers” and “catch the Wanika” for initiation into marriageable social adulthood. Seizure and death along roads and paths is also a central narrative element of twentieth-century *Mumiani* rumor, and both *Mung’aro* and *Mumiani* stories relate this anxiety to political power: *Mung’aro* involves a ritual killing (and in later accounts, mutilation) at the hands of senior men as part of their initiation into precolonial political office. *Mumiani* beliefs highlight such periodic killings as an element of the colonial “Government” power that organizes it. And as the political ritual of *Mung’aro* faded from practice at the end of the nineteenth century, *Mumiani* imaginaries changed as well, from a medicine made from African blood by Indians and Europeans, to murderous gangs of fellow Africans said to be employed by them.⁵⁵

The themes of slavery, subordination, and (in George David’s account, recall) betrayal provide important clues to the timing of the 1945 *Mumiani* panic. Without undertaking a detailed analysis of the nineteenth-century regional slave economy (which has been carefully analyzed by others), a brief discussion of certain key dimensions is in order before returning to the 1945 episode.⁵⁶ In what follows, I focus on “pawning” relationships and the importance of kinship as an

⁵⁵ CMS CA5/O5, G. David, “Ugnaro,” 24 April 1879; KNA CC1/3/26, N. F. Kennaway, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1945.

⁵⁶ F. Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa*, (New Haven, 1977); J. Willis and S. Miers, “Becoming a child of the house: incorporation, authority and resistance in Giriama society” *Journal of African History* 38:3 (1997), 479–95; A. Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770-1873* (Athens, OH, 1987); and R. A. Austen, “The 19th Century Islamic Slave Trade from East Africa (Swahili and Red Sea Coasts): A Tentative Census,” in E. W. G. Clarence-Smith, ed., *The Economics of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: 1989), 21–44.

idiom or ideology of power and patronage, and the role of regional famines in producing mobile and vulnerable pool of refugee labor through contractual forms like pawning.

5.5: SLAVERY, PAWNSHIP, AND AUTHORITY

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a series of treaties between Britain and Zanzibar slowly restricted the exportation of slaves from East Africa into the broader Indian Ocean world. Limitations on slave exports meant that the number of enslaved people available locally for purchase increased until the overland trade in slaves (primarily from present-day Tanzania and Malawi) was abolished in 1876.⁵⁷ During this period, slave raiding in the coastal hinterland also increased, and the paths connecting fortified settlements became increasingly threatening spaces of potential abduction and enslavement.⁵⁸

Following a brief decline in the wake of the 1876 treaty, “a substantial revival of the slave trade took place” in 1884, lasting for several years.⁵⁹ This coincided with a major famine—remembered in southern Kenya as *mwakisenge*—which affected much of the coastal hinterland and the interior.⁶⁰ “Faced with starvation,” many southern Mijikenda “pawned themselves or their children to the coastal plantation owners, who had been spared the drought afflicting the immediate hinterland.”⁶¹ But this was to be only the first in a series of disastrous famines and food shortages

⁵⁷ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 122–130; Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” 487–8; and Sheriff, *Slaves*, 29.

⁵⁸ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 128–9; J. Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, and the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford, 1993), 74; and E. A. Alpers, “Debt, Pawnship and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century East Africa,” in G. Campbell and A. Stanziani eds., *Bonded Labour and Debt in the Indian Ocean World* (London, 2013), 36.

⁵⁹ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 126.

⁶⁰ J. L. Giblin, “Famine and Social Change During the Transition to Colonial Rule in Northeastern Tanzania, 1880–1896,” *African Economic History* 15 (1986), 85–105.

⁶¹ Cooper, *Plantation Slavery*, 128.

coinciding with the imposition and first decades of European overrule: 1889-90 (*Mkufu*), 1894-6 (*Bom-Bom*), 1898-1900 (*Magunia*), 1901 (*Kodi Kwanza*), 1904 (*Rupia Mbirimbiri*), 1907 (*Rupia Tahutahu*), 1912 (*Mwemarongwe*), 1914 (*Madzungu*), 1915 (*Faini*), 1917 (*Pishi Mwenga*), 1921 (*Dzua Bomu*).⁶² Importantly, the names of a number of these early twentieth-century famines and food shortages—*kodi kwanza* (“first taxation”), *rupia mbirimbiri* (“two rupees each”), *rupia tahutahu* (“three rupees each”), *faini* (“fine”), *pishi mwenga* (“[one] pishi [of grain for] one [rupee]”)—are named after contemporaneous extractive arrangements (in taxation, livestock confiscation, or “famine relief”) imposed by the new colonial administration.

Persistent and recurring food shortages during this period put already marginal individuals in a precarious position: At risk of capture while searching for food, their position within the homestead grew increasingly tenuous as potential pawns. “Pawning” (“*kuweka rahani*”) refers to an arrangement in which kinship-based rights in people could be transferred temporarily in exchange for a loan of food or cash in times of hardship. The pawn’s labor during the time of their pawnship served as interest on the loan, and they could (ideally) be “redeemed” at a later date by repayment of the original loan of food or cash. Children were especially at risk of being either kidnapped or “pawned” by senior male “kin” either to retire a debt, as security for a loan, or in exchange for grain to sustain the rest of the homestead.⁶³ At the same time, as Justin Willis and Suzanne Miers have shown, “the increased availability of bought slaves in the latter part of the

⁶² T. J. Herlehy, “An Economic History of the Kenya Coast: The Mijikenda Coconut Palm Economy, ca. 1800–1980” (unpublished PhD thesis, Boston University, 1985), 328–31.

⁶³ R. F. Morton, “Small Change: Children in the Nineteenth-Century East African Slave Trade,” in G. Campbell, S. Miers, and J. C. Miller, eds., *Children in Slavery through the Ages* (Athens, OH, 2009), 55–70. See also E. A. Alpers, “The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth Century East Africa,” in C. C. Robertson and M. A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1983), 185–99; and the accounts collected in A. C. Madan, ed., *Kiungani, or, Story and History from Central Africa* (London, 1887).

nineteenth century enabled ‘new men’ to reduce the autonomy of all their dependants—whether they were bought slaves, or were acquired in other ways.”⁶⁴ Whereas an earlier generation of dependants may have been able to seek favorable terms of patronage elsewhere when threatened with pawning, those of the later nineteenth century were increasingly at the mercy of powerful new homestead heads.

Kinship was the shared “idiom” of excision and incorporation in such circumstances, and pawning is still cited by older Digo and Duruma as the basis of their historically matrilineal inheritance.⁶⁵ As this ideology is articulated, a man would inherit from his mother’s brother because his mother’s brother has the right to pawn him. Although such formulations clearly beg the question, historians and anthropologists alike have often reported them as ethnographic realities rather than as statements of local ideology.⁶⁶ This is not to deny the importance of kinship in pawning practices on the Kenyan coast, but rather to specify the nature of that importance. In a social context characterized by contradictory rights in people on competing grounds, a “classificatory” kinship terminology, and preferential cousin marriage, successful claims to—and public recognition of—specific relationship statuses are less the expression of pre-existing realities than politically and economically inflected social-interactive achievements.⁶⁷ This last point will

⁶⁴ Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” 481.

⁶⁵ J. L. Giblin, “Pawning, Politics, and Matriliney in Northeastern Tanzania,” in T. Falola and P. E. Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa: Debt Bondage in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, 1994), 43–54; Giblin, “Famine,” 88–90; Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” passim; R. F. Morton, “Pawning and Slavery on the Kenya coast: The Miji Kenda case,” in Falola and Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship*, 27–42; I. Kopytoff and S. Miers, “African Slavery: An Institution of Marginality,” in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *African Slavery: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977), 3–81

⁶⁶ See for instance T. O. Beidelman, *The Matrilineal Peoples of Eastern Tanzania* (London, 1967). For a critique, see Giblin, “Pawning.”

⁶⁷ J. L. Comaroff, “Dialectical Systems, History and Anthropology: Units of Study and Questions of Theory,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 8:2 (1982), 143–72.

become especially important in the context of conflicts, discussed below, among homestead heads over who had the “right” to allocate junior male labor during the colonial labor conscription scheme leading up to the *Mumiani* panic of 1945.

Non-kinship-based frameworks of authority and social control in precolonial Mijikenda society included an age-grade system (see Chapter Three), from the highest ranks of which were drawn councils (called “*ngambi*” or “*kambi*”) of senior men (see Chapter Four).⁶⁸ *Mung’aro*, described earlier, was the ritual of initiation from *nyere* to *ngambi*, which had the power to allocate land, adjudicate disputes, and impose fines for legal and ritual violations.⁶⁹ Alongside (and overlapping with the membership of) the age-grade system and *ngambi* council were a number of “secret societies” or ritual guilds responsible for provision of rainfall, administration of “oaths” in disputes, and performance of specialized mortuary ritual among members (see Chapter Three). Membership in these societies was based neither on one’s age-grade nor one’s clan identity, but rather on one’s ability to muster the substantial fees required for initiation.⁷⁰

Partly as a result of the substantial disruption of coastal society in the late nineteenth century (including frequent and widespread droughts, food shortages, epidemics, epizootics, and war) and partly due to the administrative measures of the Imperial British East Africa Company (and, beginning in 1895, of the British Government), the system of age-sets and *ngambi* councils

⁶⁸ A. Werner, “The Bantu Coast Tribes of the East Africa Protectorate” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 45 (1915): 331; Griffiths, “Glimpses,” 292–3; A. H. J. Prins, *The Coastal Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu (Pokomo, Nyika, Teita)*, (London, 1952), 71–6; C. Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government: Age Sets in Pre-Colonial Giriama,” *Africa* 48:3 (1978), 248–64; T. T. Spear, *The Kaya Complex: A History of the Mijikenda Peoples of the Kenya Coast to 1900* (Nairobi, 1978), 58–65; Willis, *Mombasa*, 42–3.

⁶⁹ Griffiths, “Glimpses,” 292–3; Prins, *Coastal Tribes*, 71–8; Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government,” 253–5; Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 58–65.

⁷⁰ Brantley, “Gerontocratic Government,” 255–6; Spear, *Kaya Complex*, 61–2; Willis, *Mombasa*, 43.

eroded and eventually lapsed entirely.⁷¹ Power became increasingly localized: “Homestead heads developed new ritual forms which emphasized their autonomy and their own authority” and “local councils of homestead heads usurped the prerogatives of . . . elders in the dispensation of justice.”⁷² When the Kenyan coastal strip was reconstituted as a British Protectorate in 1895, the “new men” who had risen to prominence in the late nineteenth century were recognized by the administration as traditional authorities, rather than more senior (and within the epistemological frame of the administration itself, more “traditional”) members of the ngambi councils and age-grade system.⁷³ Their large followings made the “new men” into “men of influence” (Parkin 1968) with the ability (it was hoped) to supply labor for the reorganized economy to which the administration aspired.

The administration took important steps to strengthen the position of these “traditional authorities” with respect to the labor question. In 1902, the Village Headmen Ordinance recognized these figures as administrators and gave them legal powers to compel labor “for the upkeep of any public road adjacent to their village.”⁷⁴ This was superseded in 1912 by the Native Authorities Ordinance, under which chiefs and headmen were entitled to 24 days of unpaid labor per year from each “able-bodied” man in their village, for work on projects “constructed or maintained for the benefit of the community.”⁷⁵ It also empowered them to fine any village resident who failed to comply.⁷⁶ The Native Authorities Ordinance was amended in 1920 to include payment for communal work, but also increased the annual labor requirement from 24 days to 60,

⁷¹ Willis and Miers, “Becoming a Child,” 488.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.* 492.

⁷⁴ O. Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya: The Legitimization of Coercion, 1912–1930* (New York, 2012), 24.

⁷⁵ “The Native Authority Ordinance, 1912,” *The Official Gazette of the East Africa Protectorate* 14:312 (1912), 743.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 744.

with exemptions available to Africans who had been otherwise employed for three out of the previous twelve months.⁷⁷

By creating new state-backed forms of power and corresponding incentives for junior men to dodge them (typically by abandoning the Reserves as either casual laborers in Mombasa or squatters on defunct coastal plantations), these measures aggravated existing inter-generational tensions and introduced a new source of intra-generational conflict, as Willis points out.⁷⁸ At the same time, there is evidence that headmen and elders would actively avoid the Administration's labor demands to prevent the flight of women and junior men from their homesteads.⁷⁹ These conflicts over labor—who had the right to dispose of the labor power of others, who the right to compensation, and what the nature of the relationship between parties was—all have roots in precolonial relations of patronage, dependency, and indebtedness that included the pawning, abduction, and sale of individuals in times of scarcity, transacted through the idiom of kinship. The durability of these precolonial concerns and their transformation in the early colonial period are key to understanding the nature and timing of the *Mumiani* panic that unfolded in Digo District in 1945, coinciding as it did with the failure of the short rains on the one hand, and a large-scale wartime civil labor conscription scheme on the other.

⁷⁷ “The Native Authority Amendment Ordinance, 1920,” *The Official Gazette of the East Africa Protectorate*, 22:695 (1920), 93. One of Willis's Duruma informants thus recalled that during the labor conscription campaign described below, “at that time of people being conscripted, I had this job with the PWD [Public Works Department]. My peers went, but I didn't go. I had work.” Willis Int. 66a (translation mine). Copies of Willis's “Mombasa Interviews” are archived at the British Institute in Eastern Africa Library, Nairobi (BIEA).

⁷⁸ Willis, *Mombasa*, 81–94. See also F. Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya 1890–1925*. (New Haven, 1981), 176–91, 215–32.

⁷⁹ British National Archives, Kew (BNA) CO 533/531/10, K. Gandar Dower, “The Aims and Methods of Native Administration in the Reserves. No. 2. First Steps in British Democracy 1943; KNA PC/COAST/1/9/52, H. E. Lambert, “Memorandum on Labour Recruiting,” 5 October 1918.

5.6: CONSCRIPTION, MATRILINY, AND THE “YEAR OF TAVETA”

In Digo District (now Kwale County) 1944–5 is remembered as the *Mwaka wa Taveta* (the “Year of Taveta”).⁸⁰ Between June 1944 and October 1945, the colonial government conscripted over 1,500 Digo men (with hundreds more summoned, who either refused to appear or were rejected on various grounds) for labor on sisal farms and an irrigation project in Taveta District.⁸¹ Although the conscription campaign was formally conducted through the relatively new administrative apparatus of chiefs and headmen—the “traditional authorities” empowered by the administration to supply conscript labor—in practice, conscription was effected through kinship relations of authority and subordination within and between individual homesteads. While monthly intelligence reports record the numbers of conscripts, summonses, rejections, and Tribal Police required for enforcement, what emerged most clearly in oral histories collected in 2015 was a conflict between men and their brothers-in-law over the right to “pawn” their sons (and sisters’ sons) to the colonial government.⁸² What was from the government’s perspective a bureaucratic administrative exercise was, from the perspective of Digo District residents, the imposition by the

⁸⁰ Taveta is the name of an ethnic group and electoral constituency in what is now Taita–Taveta County. So dramatic were the events of that year that the comparatively sparse Historical Calendar of Events for Kwale County used in the Kenya Population and Housing Census used to establish the ages of respondents lists, for 1944, “*Watu washikwa kupelekwa kazi Taveta*” [“People seized to be taken to work in Taveta”]. “Appendix 1: Historical Calendar of Events,” *Kenya Population and Housing Census Enumerator’s Instruction Manual* (Nairobi, 2009), 59. Interviews about the *Mwaka wa Taveta* were conducted in April and May, 2015, and are cited as “INT 1b,” “INT 2a,” etc., with “1,” “2,” etc., indicating the anonymized informant and “a,” “b,” etc. indicating the first, second, etc. interview with that person. INT 1d, INT 2c, INT 28b, INT 39a-b, INT 40, INT 41a, INT 42a, INT 43a, INT 45, INT 49, INT 50, INT 52, INT 53.

⁸¹ KNA CA/16/66, “Monthly Intelligence Reports, Digo District,” June 1944 to October 1945.

⁸² *Ibid.*; INT 1d, INT 2c, INT 28b, INT 39b, INT 40, INT 41, INT 42a, INT 43a, INT 45, INT 49, INT 50, INT 52, INT 53.

government of a form of debt-bondage that it had forbidden them to contract amongst themselves (under which circumstances it was considered to be a form of “slavery”). Importantly, the *Mwaka wa Taveta* coincided with the *Nzala ya Ngano*, “The Famine [literally, “hunger”] of Wheat,” the famine taking its name from the edible form in which “famine relief” rations were provided. The government, in this local understanding, was consolidating the position it had spent the last fifty years establishing at the apex of coastal patron-client networks and was using this position to demand labor in exchange for the “famine relief” food aid it supplied to the drought-affected regions in 1944-5.⁸³

Informants disagreed over whether it was men’s fathers or their maternal uncles who had the authority to force them into these labor contracts.⁸⁴ Most asserted that the recruitment was undertaken on a homestead by homestead basis—that the District Commissioner or District Officer would hold a public meeting announcing the labor requirement for that month, then send Chiefs or Tribal Police to collect a young man from each homestead, for whom the homestead head was responsible.⁸⁵ Who a homestead head was able to send—his son or his sister’s son—thus depended

⁸³ During an elicitation of a famine chronology, for instance, one of Willis’s informants turned the discussion to “forced labour, and labour done for food aid.” The link between conscription and food aid was explicit: “*wazee wanaandamwa kutoa watoto ... halafu unakwenda kwenye mahindi, unakwenda kupima pishi moja*” [“old men are ordered to provide children ... then you go to the place with maize, you go to measure out one pishi [about one half gallon]”] ... Stressed that elders pressured to produce watoto [“children”] for public works like the road to Lunga lunga.” Transcripts of Willis’s “Mombasa Interviews” are available in the Oral History Archive at the British Institute in Eastern Africa, Nairobi (BIEA). Willis Int. 19a. Translation mine.

⁸⁴ INT 2c, INT 40, INT 41a, INT 42a, INT 45, INT 52, and INT 53 favored the Mother’s Brother. See also Willis Int. 60a, BIEA. INT 28b, INT 39a and INT 43a favored the Father. INT 49 and INT 50 emphasized argument and agreement over the arbitrary power of either figure.

⁸⁵ In an interview with Suzanne Miers, for example, one man claimed to have seen young men taken from each household in Kilifi District, tied to one another by a rope around their waists “like you were going to be killed,” after having been sought out by local sub-chiefs. Miers Interview, Katoi wa Kithi, 28 Sep. 1972. Translation mine. Transcripts of Miers’s interviews are available in the Oral History Archive at the BIEA in Nairobi.

on the composition of the homestead in each instance, and his local ‘strength’ and influence relative to that of his brothers-in-law. If he had managed to retain his sisters and their sons, he was in a better position to ‘volunteer’ one of his nephews in hopes of preventing his sons (and their mother) from fleeing to *their* maternal uncles in defiance.

Interviews and archival data confirm that avoidance of conscription by flight from the homestead (or subsequent desertion from labor camps) was a persistent problem.⁸⁶ Two informants went so far as to claim that the demand for labor during the *Mwaka wa Taveta* put such strain on the structural conflict between fathers and mother’s brothers over women and children that it “broke” the precolonial system of inheritance from one’s mother’s brother, ideologically grounded as it was in his “right” to pawn his sister’s son.⁸⁷ Another informant made the connection between conscription and pawning explicit, adding that, like pawning, conscription was not expected to be permanent. These young men and their families hoped that they would return home when the contract was finished (though, as with nineteenth-century pawns, not all did).⁸⁸ Some compared the work to slavery, claiming that the workers were not paid, just fed and clothed.⁸⁹ Others denied this, on the grounds that the government had ended slavery and could not simply take people for work without pay.⁹⁰

Under the terms of the Defence (African Labour for Essential Undertakings) Regulations, 1944 and Central Wage Board Circulars 9 and 10 of 1944, conscripts were to be paid Shs. 10/- per “ticket contract,” each ticket consisting of 30 ‘standard task’ units, with each unit equivalent to

⁸⁶ KNA CA/16/66, “Monthly Intelligence Reports, Digo District,” May–December 1944, June–October 1945; INT 2c, INT 28b, INT 40, INT 42a, INT 43a, INT 45, INT 49.

⁸⁷ INT 39b, INT 43a

⁸⁸ INT 41a.

⁸⁹ INT 2c, INT 39a, INT 43a, INT 45, INT 49, INT 52.

⁹⁰ INT 28b, INT 40, INT 42a, INT 53.

what was deemed to be one day's work.⁹¹ But whereas the Native Authorities Ordinance had entitled chiefs and headmen to 60 days of communal labor over the course of a year, conscript contracts under the Defence Regulations were for nine tickets or twelve continuous months, whichever were completed first.⁹² Conscripts could theoretically return home early by completing all nine tickets before the twelve months had elapsed, but they could not be retained after the twelve month period if they had failed to complete all nine tickets (though estates tried to do this).⁹³ And unlike those compelled to work under the Native Authority Ordinance on projects "for the benefit of the community" while continuing to live at home or nearby, conscripts were given fourteen days "in which to settle [their] affairs and report to the District Officer" before being subjected to a medical examination and then sent to a regional labor camp.⁹⁴

Much of the labor was allocated to private estates owned by settler corporations. This situation "was accepted only with reluctance by His Majesty's Government," and the question of its necessity was "raised from time to time in the House of Commons."⁹⁵ There were widespread concerns in the metropole about "the exploitation of compulsory labour for private profit," including the retention and letting out of conscripts for work in the vicinity of the camps on projects not considered to be "essential undertakings."⁹⁶ Wages notwithstanding, then, the compulsory labor scheme was a disconcertingly *unfree* form of labor for both the British Government and its Kenyan subjects.

⁹¹ BNA CO 533/533/6, Acting Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 August 1944.

⁹² BNA CO 533/533/6, E. R. E. Surridge, "Circular Letter No. 19, Establishment of Conscript Labour Camps," 17 February, 1944.

⁹³ *Ibid.*; KNA ABK/18/89, Thika Camp Commandant to Manager, Dwa Plantations Ltd., Kibwezi, "Conscript Labour Complaints," 2 August 1945.

⁹⁴ BNA CO 533/533/6 E. R. Edmonds, "Kenya. Tel. 95 Secret. 18.2.44.," 23 February 1944.

⁹⁵ BNA CO 533/533/6, O. Stanley to Sir H. Moore, 5 June 1944.

⁹⁶ BNA CO 533/533/6, G. F. Seel, 13 June 1944; O. Stanley to E. R. Edmonds, 10 July 1944.

As I indicated above, the launch of the conscription campaign in Digo District in 1944 also coincided with a regional famine that necessitated the distribution of relief rations by the government (and is popularly remembered as the “*nzara ya ngano*,” named after the form that the government famine relief took: *ngano*, “wheat”). This only compounded local understandings of the situation as one of pawning: As in the precolonial period, domestic groups seemed to receive food aid from wealthy patrons in exchange for collateral in the form of pawned persons. Unlike the precolonial period, however, this was not an arrangement with wealthy individuals at the coast with whom historical ties of trade, labor, or kinship might have been asserted. Nor was it an arrangement reluctantly sought out by the famine-stricken households themselves, but rather one imposed by an inscrutable alien power—“government”—with whom no fictive kinship could be established and whose local representatives changed regularly.

Luise White has emphasized this same quality of novelty and alterity in colonial “vampire” figures like *Mumiani*, as being one way colonized Africans would “speak about the demands of their rulers in ways that expressed their own ... concerns” and “articulate[d] the contradictions of their exploitation.”⁹⁷ Unlike “witchcraft,” understood to be an idiom for articulating tensions around intimacy within the kinship order, vampires “had none of the personal malice of witches.”⁹⁸ Instead, they were seen as “internationalized, professionalized, supervised, and commodifying,” and “their outsidership was foregrounded.”⁹⁹ But in the case of the *Mumiani* panic of 1945, what is being articulated is less a concern about “outsiders” directly than about the more familiar figures who mediate *between* those outsiders and local communities. In other words, while the fear that

⁹⁷ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 47.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 29.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

seized Digo District in 1945 over “*Watu wa Mumiani*” did mark the “outsiderness” of a source of power and its demand for blood (locating it within the colonial “government”); it also articulated, more acutely, an anxiety about the Africans who worked *for* those outsiders (and who performed the actual abductions and killings on their behalf). It thus closely parallels—and seems not only related to, but strongly molded by—the widespread concerns at the time about involuntary conscription on uncertain terms, effected by senior male kin and local government authorities, in service to the foreign power that backed them. When Digo District residents articulated their concerns about *Watu wa Mumiani*, they were thus not describing “a situation that was categorically different from the tensions between siblings, co-wives, and matrilineal kin,” but rather one in which those tensions were suddenly intensified on an unprecedented scale by a colonial administration in need of labor.¹⁰⁰

To be clear, I am arguing against an interpretation that would see famine and conscription as being what the *Mumiani* rumors were “really about.” *Watu wa Mumiani* were not an allegory for (or “reflection of”) other forms of extractive social relations. But they were molded by the experience of those other forms (which is the very reason the rumors were plausible to begin with) and were understood to be part and parcel of them. The claim of a link between certain extractive relations and *Mumiani* is not solely mine, in other words. Rather, as will be shown below, the connection is posited by southern Mijikenda themselves in a variety of ways. This aspect of the *Mumiani* panic gives us the clearest picture of the historical consciousness of that moment—how it was understood as one episode of more general social vulnerability and stress in a series of such

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 22.

episodes—and it is to these explicit local links between *Mumiani* and the history of pawning and famines that I now turn.

5.7: PREDATORY PATRONS AND *WATU WA MUMIANI*

There is another local theory for the sudden return of “*Mumiani* people” near the end of 1945. According to Digo and Duruma hydrological thinking, failure of the rains does not entail the simple absence of coolness and moisture and the presence of an especially hot sun. This environmental condition is understood to have consequences for human physiology, “thinning” the blood and accelerating its movement. The resulting bodily condition is experienced as one of both anxiety and lethargy, agitation and weakness. And as one woman explained it, *Watu wa Mumiani* are aware of these effects, and readily take advantage of them: People are easier to abduct, and their blood easier to collect. In local understandings, then, *Watu wa Mumiani* are pragmatic, rational actors maximizing efficiency within a regionally shared understanding of how environmental conditions affect human physiology. Not only is blood thinner and easier to drain quickly, but food prices go up and money becomes scarce. Under such circumstances, people are willing—as they were in the past, when faced with extreme scarcity—to engage in a variety of unsavory practices to survive. In the nineteenth century, these practices included the kidnapping, pawning, or outright sale of children to wealthy outsiders in exchange for grain or cash. In the twentieth century, they are understood to include cooperation with *Watu wa Mumiani*. In this way, the episodic nature of *Mumiani* predations—like the threat of pawning, which it has displaced—is conceptually linked to the periodicity of drought.

In recent publications, Erin Pettigrew and Adam Ashforth have similarly drawn attention to periods of drought as an “explanatory context” (to use Brennan’s phrase) for the interpretation

of bloodsucking accusations in colonial Mauritania and contemporary Malawi.¹⁰¹ Like Pettigrew and Ashforth, I have argued that stresses associated with drought and the social mechanisms for coping with it are, as they relate to anxiety about *Mumiani*, themselves related to local histories of slavery and other forms of dependency and unfree labor. What stands out in the case of *Mumiani* predations in southern coastal Kenya, however, is that the relationship between drought and blood-stealing is itself an explicit dimension of the local theory of why these “vampires” operate when and where they do. In other words, the claim of a connection between *Mumiani* and drought is both an analytic and ethnographic one. The connection with unfree labor, however, is not an explicit dimension of the local *Mumiani* theory. Nevertheless, the case can be made for a local associational link between uncertain and highly mobile forms of labor and *Watu wa Mumiani* if, following Brennan, one is willing to engage in judicious interpretive “speculation” on “evocative” but “elusive” evidence.

Under conditions of famine or food shortage, there are few local mechanisms available in southern coastal Kenya for the metabolization of life into an edible or exchangeable form of value (like grain, or the cash with which to purchase it). Waged employment—one such possibility - has always tended to be infrequent and insufficient in the region. In the past, “pawning” had been another common mechanism for coping with food scarcity. The British administration had initially pursued its abolition, considering it to be a thinly veiled form of slavery, but unwittingly resurrected it during the Second World War on an expanded scale and in a more bureaucratized form. While from their perspective it was, despite not being freely entered into by the conscripts,

¹⁰¹ E. Pettigrew, “The Heart of the Matter: Interpreting Bloodsucking Accusations in Mauritania,” *Journal of African History* 57:3 (2016), 417–35; A. Ashforth, “When the Vampires Come for You: A True Story of Ordinary Horror,” *Social Research* 81:4 (2014), 851–82.

a modern wage-labor relation (a certain amount of money for a certain amount of work over a certain amount of time), conscripts and their families were—and in some cases remain to this day—uncertain as to whether or not they would be paid, whether they would return, and what the moral basis of the contractual relation was. To them, it bore a much stronger resemblance to an older contractual form, pawning, in which loans of food (now called “famine relief”) were received in exchange for the transfer of junior kin and their labor (which would serve as interest on the loan).

Two of Justin Willis’s informants, in interviews conducted in 1988, indicate a conceptual link between practices like pawning and *Mumiani*, and do so with reference to the same historical figure, Muses Muhammad (also known as “Chuba Muses”). One describes Muses as a Mombasa-born and Arab-dressing—but ethnically a Kauma, one of the Mijikenda peoples—businessman. He was also the founder of the Mijikenda Union, launching the political organization to protect his ethnic compatriots from being robbed of their land by local Arabs.¹⁰² As the interview progresses, however, the picture of Muses begins to change. In a discussion of how Muses’s parents had come to Mombasa, Willis’s interlocutor asserts that they had not been slaves, but that Muses himself had been able to take others and make them slaves.¹⁰³ And when he had approached Muses to redeem a piece of land mortgaged by his grandfather (“*kuwekwa rahani*,” the same term that is translated as “pawning” when used in reference to human property), Muses refused to honor his pledge.¹⁰⁴ He continues:

[Muses] was bad. And some people wouldn’t enter his house, now they enter, but back then it was like he was *Mumiani* ... There were people being killed and their blood taken. ... If they were doing it, like during Ramadhan, you couldn’t walk around, you couldn’t

¹⁰² Willis Int. 68a, BIEA.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

walk around at night in Mombasa, you were told you'll be killed by Mumiani. ... Mr. Muses Muhammad, people were saying he was the real boss of them. It's not me saying it, people were saying it.¹⁰⁵

In a separate interview with a Duruma informant, Willis's interviewee turns a discussion of workers' housing in Mombasa in his father's time to the issue of personal security, and the threat of capture by gangs employed by "Chuba Musis":

...If a person got lost here, they had been captured by the forces of Chuba Musis.

[They had been captured by Chuba Musis? ... Captured how?]

Mm-hmm! Wasn't he an Arab, mister? He sells people over in Zanzibar.

[But when your father was alive, those dealings, selling (people), were still going on?]

Mm-hmm, they were. I mean, people stayed together in force, or walked around in force, people who knew each other, where they sleep. In the evenings you weren't allowed to walk around, like this. I mean if you're caught out on the road by Mumiani, it's your problem. And it was announced, from 1936, when the month of Ramadhan arrived, it's announced that there will be Mumiani, so people shouldn't stay out late.

[It was announced by whom?]

... The government announces that people are not allowed to walk around from 6:00PM to 10:00PM. And when that time arrived, it was Chuba Musis's dealings.¹⁰⁶

In this account, the claims that Muses was involved in processes of enslavement *and Mumiani* are each repeated, as is the association of the month of Ramadhan with the intensification of *Mumiani* activity. What stands out in this transcript, however, is the speaker's seamless shift from enslavement to *Mumiani* as the explanation for the periodic disappearances of workers in early twentieth-century Mombasa. And "Chuba" Muses Muhammad—wealthy coastal patron, Muslim but Mijikenda—organizes them both. The man believed to have founded the Mijikenda Union to protect the interests of his co-ethnics is also willing to betray them, capturing them by night for sale abroad, or to drain them of their blood. There is a clear conceptual link between these two forms of predatory patronage beyond the implication of a moral equivalence. On the one hand

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Translation mine.

¹⁰⁶ Willis Int. 73a, BIEA. Translation mine.

that link is diffuse and associational: Thinking about work in Mombasa leads him to think about enslavement by Arabs, which leads him to think about how “Government” allowed *Watu wa Mumiani* to enforce its curfew in a particularly frightening way. On the other hand, the link is direct and concrete: The same historical figure was actively engaged in both.

The claim of a connection between *Mumiani*, drought, and the patrons to whom one is vulnerable under such conditions, is thus both an analytic and ethnographic one. If the contemporaneity of the *Mwaka wa Taveta* conscription campaign and the *Nzala ya Ngano* famine are, in Brennan’s terms, the most likely “explanatory contexts” for the *Mumiani* scare of 1945, it is only because, in White’s terms, they “suggest genealogies of local concerns and historical fixations that would not otherwise be apparent.”¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the 1945 *Mumiani* panic can be seen as an historical “constellation;” a moment in which elements of the past and the present—between which there may be no necessary or causal links—are seen to come together suddenly in a meaningful new configuration.¹⁰⁸ The particular “constellation” of this moment was made up of elements as diverse as blood medicine and labor conscription, mutilated bodies and matrilineal descent, roads and rainfall. Approaching it in this way allows one to interpret the entire episode without trying to make such a “rich text of half truths and local knowledges” be “about [just] one thing,” as White cautions.¹⁰⁹

Focusing on both the direct and more diffuse associational links that the Mijikenda themselves draw between *Mumiani*, drought, and predatory patronage practices involving the

¹⁰⁷ Brennan, “Destroying *Mumiani*,” 96; White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 83.

¹⁰⁸ W. Benjamin, “Convolute “N””: (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress),” in R. Tiedemann (ed.), *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 463.

¹⁰⁹ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 83.

transfer of rights in people also allows us to relativize our definitions of event and context in this case: Were the contemporaneous *Ngano* famine and *Taveta* conscription the “contexts” for the *Mumiani* panic of 1945, or do *Watu wa Mumiani* form part of the context of these other events, informing popular understandings and responses, as a durable (if also malleable) feature of famine and debt-bondage in southern coastal Kenya since the nineteenth century? The answer, of course, is both, meaning that the empirical material itself calls, in this case, for a dialectical approach like the one I propose. Such an approach interprets the complex, non-linear, “constellation” of meanings at play in Digo District in the dry, waning months of 1945 without flattening them out into metaphorical beliefs for something more “real.” Neither does it impose an outside analytic distinction between event and context in order to then explain the former in terms of the latter. Instead, it allows one to study such moments as the conjuncture of multiple forms of historical knowledge, practices, and images with different temporalities and associations, and to show how such arrangements draw the past implicitly and explicitly into the present, shaping the very concerns they articulate.¹¹⁰

5.8: CONCLUSION

Over the course of the nineteenth century, “*Mumiani*” went from being “an ancient Persian medicinal drug of great healing power” to “a fabulous medicine which the Europeans prepare ... from the blood of a man.”¹¹¹ In the Indian Ocean world—the scene of long-term movements back

¹¹⁰ In this sense my argument is thus also clearly indebted to the work of Rosalind Shaw’s *Memories of the Slave Trade* (Chicago, 2002), but taking rumor, rather than ritual, as its object. For another recent attempt to put Benjamin (via Michael Taussig) in conversation with Shaw’s work, see A. Apter, “History in the dungeon: Atlantic slavery and the spirit of capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana,” *American Historical Review*, 122:1 (2017), 23–54.

¹¹¹ KNA CC1/3/26, Kennaway, “Digo District annual report, 1945”; Krapf, *Dictionary*, 266–7.

and forth of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians—*Mumiani* was variously understood to be made from “the melted fat of Abyssinian boys” or “extracted from the heads of coolies who emigrate.”¹¹² The nineteenth century also saw the last performances of *Mung’aro*, a ritual of male initiation said to involve the abduction and killing of a stranger from a path (and, in later understandings, the mutilation of his body “in the Boran and Abyssinian fashion”).¹¹³ The image of the *Watu wa Mumiani* during the panic of 1945 condenses and reimagines these layers of historical experience in a context in which they had become suddenly relevant—one of drought, disappearance, and death.

The 1945 *Mumiani* scare coincided with both a labor conscription campaign and a regional famine that necessitated the distribution of relief rations by the government. This fact only compounded local understandings of the situation as one of pawning: As in the precolonial period, domestic groups seemed to receive food aid (“famine relief”) from wealthy foreign patrons (“Government”) in exchange for collateral in the form of pawned persons (conscripts). Unlike the precolonial period, however, this was not an arrangement with wealthy individuals with whom historical ties of trade, labor, or kinship might have been asserted. Nor was it an arrangement reluctantly sought out by the famine-stricken households themselves, but rather one imposed by an inscrutable alien power—“Government”—with whom no fictive kinship could be established directly, but whose intermediaries secured its workforce through the language of kinship-based rights and responsibilities.

The *Watu wa Mumiani* are thus not simply “new imaginings for new relationships,” in White’s formulation. They are also new imaginings of older relationships, and of the older

¹¹² Cunningham, *Ladák*, 237; Grierson, *Bihar*, 409.

¹¹³ KNA CC1/3/26, Kennaway, “Digo District Annual Report, 1945.”

imaginings of those relationships. Like a constellation of old and new elements “drawn from a store of historical allusions” (in White’s apt phrase), the image is shaped by—takes its significance from—the shifting circumstances of the present (Brennan’s “explanatory contexts”), following associational links between medicinal *Mumia*, *Mung’aro*, famine, pawning, colonial labor policies, and “native authorities.”¹¹⁴ Drawing on a local repertoire of historical meanings and motifs, the image of *Mumiani* in 1945 transfigured twentieth-century understandings of these nineteenth-century practices of ritual, kinship, and power. As a result, a context in which food scarcity and state power compelled government headmen and elders to pawn their kin to the state also became one in which another group of men “organised by Government” would “seize any lone native that can be found” and drain them of their lifeblood, leaving them “a mere bag of bones.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 82.

¹¹⁵ KNA CC1/3/26, Kennaway, “Digo District Annual Report,” 1945.

CHAPTER SIX:

MUMIANI SINCE 1945: POLITICS BY NIGHT

6.1: INTRODUCTION

In October 2013, several months into my fieldwork in Kenya's rural South Coast region, I began to hear reports that gangs of organ thieves called Mumiani were abducting people from the area's roads in order to steal their eyes, tongues, and genitals. "Mumiani" were said to be strangers from the north who prowled the roads at night in large vehicles with dark windows, searching for people walking alone. After Mumiani have lured someone into their vehicle, they drug them and transport them to a remote location, where the victim is killed and their organs harvested.

News of their presence was communicated as a warning not to walk alone on roads or paths between settlements, especially at night. For weeks, families locked themselves indoors at sunset, and people traveled only in pairs or small groups. The occasional sight of strangers or unfamiliar vehicles fed suspicion, speculation, and gossip. But the only outcome of this anxious talk about Mumiani was more talk. Nothing "happened." No one went missing, no one was accused of being Mumiani, and local authorities took no public measures to address the issue. In this sense, the 2013 Mumiani scare was a non-event, a moral panic that never boiled over into the kind of episode that has been the subject of rich ethnographic and historical study elsewhere.¹

¹ See M. Auslander, "'Open the Wombs!' The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding," in J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and its Malcontents* (Chicago, 1993), 167–92; J. Brennan, "Destroying *Mumiani*: Cause, Context, and Violence in Late Colonial Dar es Salaam," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2:1 (2008), 95–111; K. E. Fields, *Revival and*

Two other developments coincided with the rapid spread of Mumiani stories, putting the southern Kenyan coast in a general state of negative effervescence. The short rains appeared to have failed, threatening the livelihoods of the majority of the population who depend on small-scale rain-fed agriculture. Each day the sun seemed to grow hotter, an environmental condition said to thin the blood and accelerate its circulation, rendering people simultaneously feeble and nervous, lethargic and agitated. But this bodily condition, however unpleasant, paled in comparison to the specter of hunger and hardship that loomed larger each day. Modest household and individual finances were even more jealously guarded than usual, and networks of food sharing slowly contracted toward their nuclear family hubs.

At the same time, a Mombasa High Court decision had recently overturned the results of the March 2013 parliamentary election in Lunga Lunga Constituency, nullifying Coalition for Reforms and Democracy candidate Khatib Mwashetani's victory and ordering a by-election.² Political campaigns are moments of excitement in rural Kenya, when "big men" ply their constituency's roads in large vehicles to engage in competitive displays of wealth and other signs of suitability as patrons. Campaigns also employ large numbers of people, especially young men, who are recruited to organize village meetings, put up campaign posters, hand out t-shirts and baseball caps, circulate campaign songs by mobile phone, and so forth. It is also often the responsibility of these young men to distribute gifts of cash to village residents after rallies. For a moment, these figures go from being regarded with concern as unemployed "idlers" to mobile, highly visible minor "big men" in their own right—all by virtue of their connection to a more

Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa (Princeton, 1985); D. J. Parkin, "Medicines and Men of Influence," *Man*, 3:3 (1968), 424–39.

² "Gideon Mwangangi Wambua & Another v. Independent Electoral & Boundaries Commission & Two Others," 2013. <http://www.kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/91106/>.

powerful patron. October was thus characterized by eager anticipation of the new campaigns, and speculation about the redistributive capacities of the various candidates. Formal campaigning would begin in November, and the election scheduled for early December.

And so, for two hot, dry months near the end of 2013, the roads of Lunga lunga were in the grip of the twinned specter of Mumiani and politicians: The nights belonged to Mumiani, the days to politicians. In what follows, I argue that Mumiani are an important part of what “politics” is understood to entail in southern coastal Kenya, especially in times of heightened dependency on the redistributive capacities of patrons, like drought. This local understanding is rooted in a history of extraversion the layers of which are condensed and represented in the figure of Mumiani. I argue that Mumiani stories are, in this sense, “politics by night,” and that their appearance in late 2013 is to be understood in relation to the “structure of the conjuncture” (Sahlins 1981) of political campaigns and failed rains. As part of this argument, I will make two other closely related claims: First, that shifting our attention away from the operations performed on their victims to the contexts in which they are said to have occurred allows us to see Mumiani not only as an “extractive” practice but as the name of certain “strategies of extraversion” among a range of possible others.³ And third, that framing Mumiani in terms of a history of extraversion helps explain its durability and adaptability by situating it in a broader critical discourse about figures (like politicians) who mediate between vulnerable local populations and powerful outside forces.

³ J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2009).

6.2: THE AESTHETICS OF DEFACEMENT

Almost as soon as the by-election was announced, and well before the candidates themselves began to appear in person, images of their faces appeared throughout Lungalunga constituency on campaign posters plastered to doors, walls, and telephone poles. Shortly after they had appeared, however, these posters (and other images of human faces, including advertisements, discussed below) began to be vandalized in a striking, and strikingly uniform, way: the eyes, and sometimes also the mouth, were carefully scratched out (see Image 5.1, below). Not *every* poster, to be sure. But it was a common, repeated occurrence, and it was geographically widespread throughout the district. Every vandalized poster was defaced in just this way, and no specific individuals or types of people in particular were held to be responsible. One of the tasks of the campaign teams quickly became the removal of these eyeless images and their replacement with intact ones. These replacements were often identically vandalized as well, and the process would be repeated. All of which raises the question: Why, at the very moment South Coast residents were in fear of losing their eyes, were they were busy scratching them out of pictures of other peoples' faces?

One *could* interpret this as little more than the competitive destruction of political advertisements by members of rival campaign teams. But this would not explain the specific form that the destruction of the images took, or the fact that the operation was performed, during the same six-week period, on other images having nothing to do with the campaign. There is no evidence to suggest that it was carried out by members of rival teams and not individuals unaffiliated with any particular candidate (or indeed known to each other). I am suggesting, instead, that the identities—and perhaps also the conscious intentions—of whoever defaced the images may be less significant than the *form* that the defacement took. Defacement, in this

understanding, would constitute a form of creative practice somewhere along what Jean and John Comaroff have called a “chain of consciousness,”

that liminal space of human experience in which people discern acts and facts but cannot or do not order them into narrative descriptions or even into articulate conceptions of the world; in which signs and events are observed, but in a hazy, translucent light; in which individuals or groups know something is happening to them but find it difficult to put their fingers on quite what it is.⁴

The defacement of these images, as a mode of aesthetic objectification, gave “intelligibility, form, and permanence to things that are otherwise distant, murky, and fleeting” in order to disclose their meaning in particular ways.⁵

When asked about the defacement, my interlocutors would often laugh before saying something like, “they forgot themselves” (*alijisahau*), “they were exhausted” (*alikuwa amechoka*), or “they don’t like that one” (*hampendi yule*), all qualified by a “perhaps.”⁶ There was an uncertainty about what it meant, or whether it “meant” anything all. Some attributed it to malice or to discontent with a particular politician, but many chalked it up to unconscious activity, like absentminded doodling. In either case the exclusive targeting of eyes and mouths still called for explanation. None was forthcoming. If pressed as to why the *eyes* were targeted, the response was invariably either “I can’t know” (*siwezijua*), or “they [the vandal] themselves know” (*anajua mwenyewe*).⁷ In answering in these terms, my interlocutors were giving voice to the South Coast intuition, noted above, that the true thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others are ultimately

⁴ J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume I, Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991), 29.

⁵ P. Kockelman, “Enclosure and Disclosure,” *Public Culture* 19:2 (2007), 303.

⁶ The laughter itself deserves interpretation. I would laugh too, as a reflex, with my interlocutor. I tend to interpret our laughter as the shared recognition of the barely submerged resonance of the pictures of eyeless politicians with the Mumiani activity for which they were responsible.

⁷ Recall that this was also the answer to questions about the uses to which the Mumiani’s customers put the stolen body parts.

unknowable, and that others are, for this reason, always suspect and never fully to be trusted. This intuition poses as a problem for interpersonal relations the more general epistemological questions of the relationship between reality and appearances, of the ability to know the former through the latter, and more generally of how to “read the signs” of a world suffused with meaning.

My own interpretation of the defacement of the campaign posters is consistent with this South Coast sensibility, which includes (in the idea that a person can “forget themselves,” for example) the sense that a person’s own motivations can be opaque not only to others, *but to themselves as well*. This is not to say that such activity must be entirely unconscious, however. “Artworks,” as Adorno points out, “do not repress.”⁸ Rather, “through expression they help to make present to consciousness the diffuse and elusive without ... ‘rationalization’.”⁹ To return to the notion of a chain of consciousness, these defaced posters *express* an association of politicians with Mumiani by combining into a synthetic visual image the face of a prospective Member of Parliament with the result of Mumiani predations. The defaced images thus also collapse a series of hierarchical relationships (employer and employee, killer and victim) that represent degrees of proximity and distance and chains of cause and effect. Finally, by robbing the image of the organs of sight the vandal disrupts any reciprocal relationship of visibility: The politician is seen but cannot see. The people become, to the politician, invisible (again, in the social context of “mutually assured deception,” this is a highly desirable quality).

⁸ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*



Image 6.1: A faded campaign poster left over from the March 2013 elections. During the November by-election campaign the image was covered with a new poster for a rival candidate. The new poster was defaced, and then removed, before the old image, already damaged, was defaced in the same way. Lungalunga Constituency, Kenya, December 2013. Photo by author.

Defacement in this context, should be understood as an effort (although perhaps a less than fully cognized one) to bring to the surface—to expose and render perceptible—something hidden, the existence of which is nevertheless sensed. A social relationship between politicians and Mumiani is felt, sensed, or intuited, but cannot be read off the surface of the individual politician’s smiling face. Defacement, in this context, aims to make visible something secret by bringing to the surface what has been hidden “inside.” It is an attempt to bring the phenomenal realm of appearances into consonance with an underlying reality whose existence cannot empirically be demonstrated. In this sense it is an example of the “perfecting mimesis” that Benjamin offers as a possible definition for art: It is “a suggested improvement on nature,” or “an imitation that conceals within it a demonstration.”¹⁰

These defaced images articulate, in “a language which expresses without formulating, an utterance less transparent for meaning than the word itself.”¹¹ But translation between these “languages” can be difficult. My informants had little to say about the defaced images, but something had a hold on the people of Lungalunga constituency. Like local attitudes toward the extraordinary aesthetic productions of the Tswana “madman” described by Jean and John Comaroff, there was “a quality of bemused recognition” in response to these images, “though few could explain this in words.”¹² And so, for two months, fresh posters went up and defaced posters came down, and no one could explain why.

¹⁰ W. Benjamin, “The Significance of Beautiful Semblance,” trans. E. Jephcott. In *Selected Writings, Volume III*, eds. H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 137.

¹¹ M. Foucault, “Dream, Imagination, and Existence,” *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 19:1 (1986), 36.

¹² J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, “The Madman and the Migrant: Work and Labor in the historical Consciousness of a South African People,” *American Ethnologist* 14:2 (1987), 203.

6.3: KENYATTA'S BLUE EYES

In November, after the second of three political rallies that would be held in the village where I was living, I went with some local youth to the village kiosk. Using the cash just distributed by the candidate's subordinates to buy sodas for my family, I received in change a fifty-shilling note bearing the image of Jomo Kenyatta. As Kenya's first and most famous President, Kenyatta (the *Mzee*, or "Old Man") has been the model for all subsequent generations of Kenyan politicians and "big men." On this note, however, both of Kenyatta's eyes had been carefully covered with dark blue ink (see Image 6.2).

What struck me first about the bill was not that the *eyes* had been blacked out, but that a Kenyan had vandalized currency. Kenyans generally take great care to preserve the condition of banknotes in their possession for as long as possible. While there is no sense that the condition of the bill affects its value or exchangeability (see Walker 2017), Kenyans take a distinct aesthetic pleasure in crisp new bills "from the bank." Indeed, the physical condition of the banknotes distributed by campaigning politicians will draw as many comments as the denominations. The condition of bills is interpreted as a clear index, even more than the monetary value of the notes, of the giver's capacities as a patron by virtue of their proximity to distant sources of wealth and influence. The newer the condition of the bill, the fewer hands (and thus intermediary levels of power) it had passed through between the Central Bank and the person now holding it. It is difficult, in other words, to imagine a Kenyan, especially in such a poor, rural part of the country, deliberately vandalizing a banknote. But the ink had been deliberately, almost delicately, applied only to the eyes, and it appeared to have been done recently. Everything about the bill was faded and worn, but the ink was new.

Kenyatta's new eyes evoked the Evil Eye believed (on the Swahili Coast, as elsewhere) to be especially common among blue-eyed persons, and of the pairs of blue eyes one sometimes sees painted on the walls of Swahili houses and shops for warding off its influence. In this form of defensive magic, the controlled incorporation of an image of the thing to be avoided into the building itself reduces its vulnerability to *uncontrolled* invasion later. In this sense, Kenyatta's image had effectively been converted into an anti-Evil Eye charm. But because the eyes were not removed from their owner's face, but rather altered, an ambiguity is introduced: By giving Kenyatta a pair of blue eyes, the artist also seems to be taking an evaluative stance toward him (as the first great postcolonial facilitator of coastal land grabbing) and, metonymically, toward corrupt and untrustworthy politicians in general (on the density of associations around money, elders, and power in Kenya, see Blunt 2016).

Just as words of praise and looks of amazement from those who possess the evil eye mask deeper feelings of envy that bring harm, the generous promises and gifts of politicians can mask a hidden avarice that harms the recipients through their key media (like money). Here the defacing artist transformed the potential medium of misfortune into a charm against it by converting it into a representation of the source of that misfortune—a blue-eyed, evil-eyed, deceiving politician—and then put it into circulation at the village kiosk before a politician's arrival. The diminutive value of the bill—fifty shillings is currently the smallest denomination of Kenyan banknotes—and its dilapidated condition are themselves iconic of the meager resources South Coast residents have at their disposal in their ongoing attempt to limit the predations of a range of powerful outside forces (of which politicians are only one of the more familiar faces).

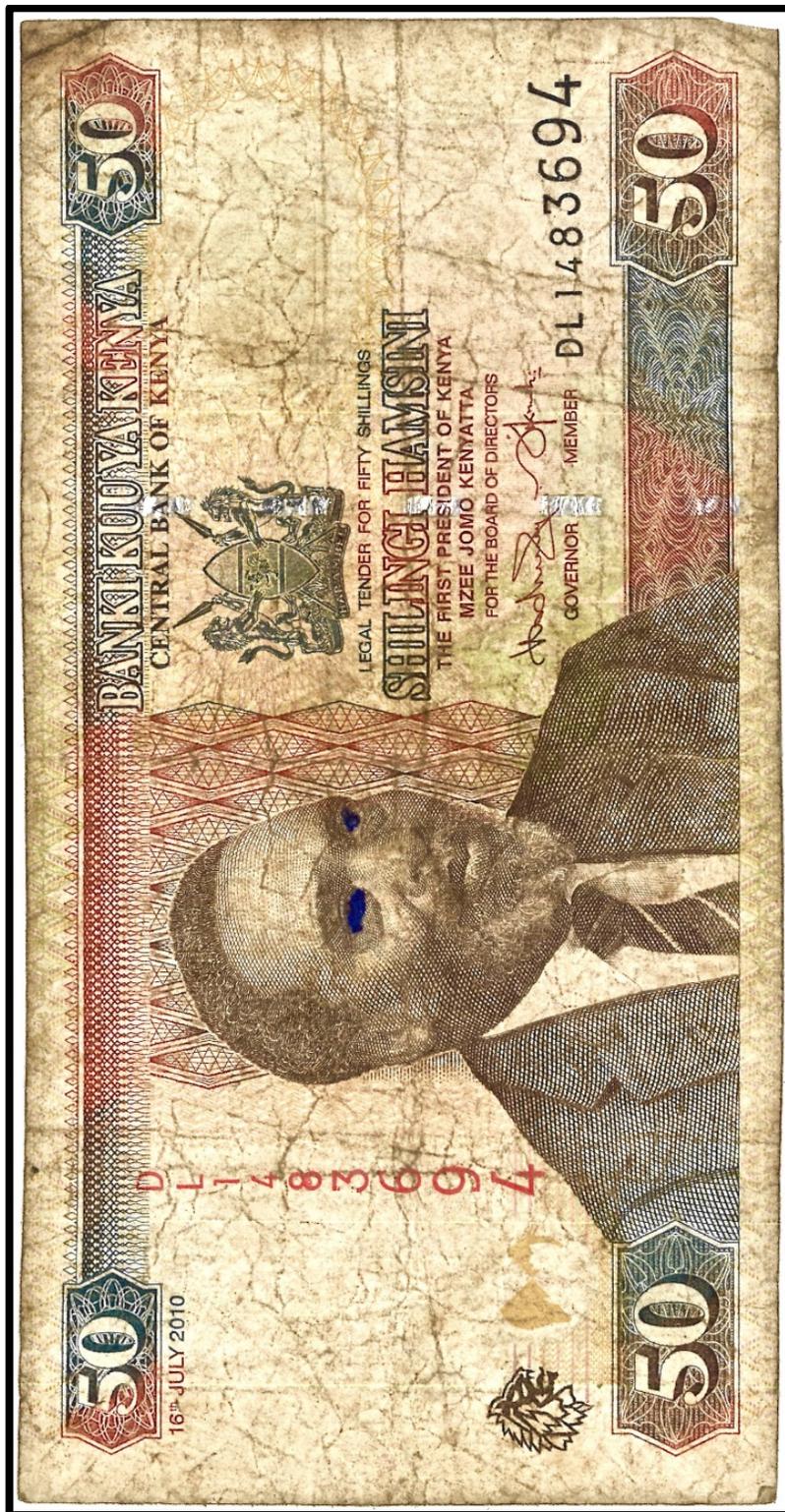


Image 6.2: A defaced 50 Shilling banknote. Former President Jomo Kenyatta's eyes have been carefully covered with blue ink. Lungalunga Constituency, November 2013. Photo by author.

Kenyatta had thus not simply been given a pair of blue eyes as a “suggested improvement” or “demonstration” in a visual medium to reveal his (and other politicians’) true inner nature, as with the campaign posters. Unlike the posters his eyes had not been scratched out, but rather transformed. His image became, in the context of a Mumiani scare, both an artistic suggestion about the danger of politicians and a charm against it—both evil eye and anti-evil eye. Here it is worth noting that in at least one case of Mumiani accusation in colonial Tanganyika, “a pair of rather piercing light blue eyes was the reason for the accusation.”¹³

6.4: MOBILE PHONE ADVERTISEMENTS

At the same time that the campaign posters began to be defaced, other images—notably those advertising mobile phone company services and promotions—were similarly vandalized. In one such advertisement (for the mobile service provider Airtel), a young woman in large glasses and a pink polka dot dress stands by a chalkboard with a large smile, her hands held out in a gesture of anticipation. Her eyes have been emphatically scraped away, leaving scratch marks on the paint beneath (see Image 6.3). The woman is “Wanjiku the Teacher,” a comedic persona created by Carolyne Wanjiku and made famous as a variety act on a late-night Kenyan television program. The act consisted of the inept Wanjiku, dressed up in a clownish outfit, confidently delivering hilariously absurd Kiswahili language lessons to the audience.

Immediately before the Mumiani scare, a nationwide teachers’ strike ended, leaving many parents worried that their children were now unprepared to sit for their end of year examinations. The national exams are always a stressful time for children and their parents, and the strike had

¹³ E. C. Baker, “Mumiani,” *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 21 (1946), 109.

intensified this condition. And although the strike was now over, teachers were threatening not to grade the exams, due to take place in early December.

Parents were unsure where to place the blame. In rural South Coast, teachers (especially those from other regions and ethnicities) are routinely slandered as being not fully competent, and are often felt to be personally responsible for the especially poor performance of students on national exams. At the same time, it is widely believed that local politicians routinely siphon off money from school development projects, as well as being responsible for the policies that have resulted in the failure of the region's schools.

The protracted teachers' strike had also meant that, for weeks on end, children had been left to their own devices during the day and not under the observation and control of teachers. A few village elders had declared that children should be made to attend madrassa each day in lieu of primary school, but this was flouted by all but the youngest and most religious children. Control over where and how children spend their days is, of course, of real concern to parents, and in the months leading up to the Mumiani scare there had been something of a scramble to maintain that control when the usual mechanism—school—had broken down.

With respect to Mumiani, recall that much of the fear surrounding their activity centers around the vulnerability of children. One reason why this is so is that children are thought to be especially susceptible to being tricked by unemployed young men who have struck a deal with the Mumiani (luring them into their vehicles by telling them that their parents had sent for them was one example given to me). With mounting obligations and little to no opportunities for employment, these youth are themselves vulnerable to the temptation of sacrificing their juniors for cash. There is a widespread sense that inadequate education has produced a generation of young men who are unprepared and unqualified for formal employment. It is thus the unemployable

products of an failed education system that pose a threat to the children currently being set up for a future of unemployment by that same system. The unemployed young men have no choice but to sacrifice their younger associates to earn enough money to survive. In this sense the defacement of the image of Wanjiku the Teacher, Kenya's most famously incompetent schoolteacher, functioned, like the defacement of the campaign posters, to condense and express in a single image an association of the responsibility or relationship of a social type with the Mumiani gangs, all of which is organized around questions of value production. In the absence of work, the creation of value seems increasingly possible only through a destructive sacrificial logic in which the products of a failed past have little choice but to give up the future to get by in the present.

This sacrificial logic is key to understanding a second defaced advertisement, this time for Safaricom, Kenya's largest mobile service provider. Two exuberant figures, a man and a woman celebrate as money rains down on them, forming a pile at their feet (Image 6.4). The bills resemble 1000-shilling notes (the largest denomination of Kenyan currency), but instead of the face of Jomo Kenyatta or Daniel arap Moi (Kenya's first and second presidents), these bear the image of a lion, the predatory wild animal to which politicians are occasionally compared. In this case the image also happens to be the logo of Kenya Commercial Bank, with which Safaricom has partnered to provide a range of financial services. In this advertisement the removal of the eyes transforms the couple's expression from celebration to almost theatrical terror or agony, or to an uncanny combination of happiness and suffering, triumph and fear.



Image 6.3: Detail from a defaced Airtel advertisement. The buffoonish Wanjiku the Teacher stands expectantly at a blackboard, her eyes entirely and emphatically scratched away. Lunga lunga Constituency, Kenya, 2013. Photo by author.



Image 6.4: Detail from a defaced advertisement for a Safaricom promotion. Imitation banknotes rain from the sky on two figures whose eyes have carefully been removed. Lungalunga Constituency, Kenya, November 2013. Photo by author.

In beginning to interpret this image, the first thing to note is that it expresses an association of the removal of eyes with the sudden availability of cash. In this sense it is a visual depiction of the production of value, making visible what is ordinarily hidden from view. Mumiani steal eyes to sell on the black market, and in the static image of the defaced advertisement a temporal process and relationship of cause and effect have been collapsed and represented in simultaneity. The figures' eyes have been taken, and the result is the sudden release of a large amount of cash. There are clear resonances here with the spectacular and sudden wealth of suspected "Devil Worshipers," who are also thought to practice forms of human sacrifice. But the ambiguity of this image makes it unclear whether these figures are the recipients or merely the mechanism of the money's appearance, or both.

Importantly, the money does not simply appear: It falls from the sky like rain. Here I would like to adduce one woman's explanation for why Mumiani attack when they do. Mumiani, she explained, appear in October and November *if the short rains fail*, at a time when "the sun is hot and there is no money. There is drought." A direct relationship between rain and money is asserted: The absence of the former entails—is even equated with—the absence of the latter.¹⁴ The Safaricom advertisement literalizes a metaphorical equivalence (common in Kenya, as elsewhere) of money and rain, and Kenyan politicians readily trope upon the responsibility of political figures, historically, to provide rain for their dependents when describing their ability to direct the flow of state resources. Following the March elections of 2013, for example, in response to discontent among leaders that their ethnic constituencies were not represented in appointed positions, newly

¹⁴ Cf. Benjamin's remarks on money and rain in *One-Way Street*: "Money and rain belong together. The weather itself is an index of the state of this world. Bliss is cloudless, knows no weather. There also comes a cloudless realm of perfect goods, on which no money falls" (Benjamin 1996, 481).

elected President Uhuru Kenyatta admonished MPs for “fighting over the morning dew” when “the rains are coming.”¹⁵ But following from the image of money falling like rain on eyeless victims, I want to suggest that Mumiani considered as a form of sacrificing children in times of drought has important resonances with both the “pawning” of junior kin for food (mentioned above), and with a widely feared form of more literal child sacrifice. Called simply *Mvua*, “Rain,” it involves the slow killing of children in exchange for control of the rain.¹⁶ Unlike other forms of South Coast witchcraft which are said to be the work of aggrieved individuals acting either alone or with the help of a specialist, *Mvua* is collective. The *Chama cha Mvua*, the Rain Coven, approaches an individual along a path and forces them to join, demanding a child to sacrifice to a powerful spirit.¹⁷ This, recall from the Preface, was the form of witchcraft of which Chipara Mwachanze and Village Chairman Saidi stood accused. Here, too, the extraction of blood (and the essence of life latent within it, which was also the theory of *mumiani*-medicine’s healing powers) is the key to control over the production of value (whether as money or as rain).

In the present, *Mvua* is strongly associated, among South Coast Digo, with the Chonyi ethnic group to the north.¹⁸ Historically, however, the other group held responsible for the provision or obstruction of the rain were the ambivalently regarded “*kaya* elders.” Recall from the discussion in Chapters Three and Four that the *Vaya* secret society, in particular, was responsible

¹⁵ R. Jelimo and J. Muchiri, “Uhuru: More Appointments on the Way,” *The Standard* 5 January 2014, <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000101492/>.

¹⁶ Following Rosalind Shaw’s convention in *Memories of the Slave Trade* (2002), I use “Rain” to refer to the form of witchcraft and “rain” to the form of precipitation.

¹⁷ *Chama* can refer to any organized group of people but most commonly to political parties and rotating credit or microfinance groups, on which many South Coast households are dependent. The *Chama cha Mvua* neatly condenses both through a shared metaphor of sacrifice and rain.

¹⁸ Interestingly, one of Willis’s Chonyi informants cited a historical figure’s inability to carry out a “custom,” namely “the Chonyi practice of sacrificing a child to ensure the rains would fall” as a cause of *kaya* fission (2009, 240). Recall that Mumiani, like the Chonyi, hail from the north.

for securing the rains through *finjo* charms and other medicines, secretly manipulating the eerie-sounding *mwanza* friction drum, and administering the most powerful and deadly oath in the adjudication of disputes. They were both respected and feared as a necessary evil: “[R]egarded as necessary for ultimate law and order through their administration of oaths in trials of ordeal, the Vaya elders are also regarded [by the general population] as potentially harmful as a result of their own jealousies and misuse of their medicines.”¹⁹ As Willis points out, these figures were occasionally attacked by junior men on suspicion of having held back the rain out of malice.²⁰

The *Chama cha Mvua* thus represents the negative dimension of latent evil that political leadership might “have inside it.” Their power is put only to destructive use, causing draught and famine by directing the rain to fall elsewhere. By acting on the body of a child—sacrifice—the *Chama* produce a transformation of the landscape—drought—that leads to a bodily transformation in those around them: Blood thins out and circulates faster through the body, putting people at risk of predation by Mumiani, who are said to be well aware that blood is easier to drain under such conditions.²¹ *Mvua* and Mumiani thus do not just resemble each other as forms of child sacrifice. As threats to the appropriate flow or movement of subjects and substances (Smith 2008, Taylor 1992, Weiss 1996), they can be causally or sequentially related as well: The interruption of a person’s circulation along a path by the *Chama* and the extraction of a sacrificial victim’s blood

¹⁹ D. Parkin, *Sacred Void: Spatial Images of Work and Ritual among the Giriama of Kenya* (Cambridge, 1991), 152. See also D. Parkin, “Entitling Evil: Muslims and Non-Muslims in Coastal Kenya,” in *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. D. Parkin (Oxford, 1985), 224–243.

²⁰ Willis, *Mombasa*, 45. On rain, sacrifice, and the revaluation of elder value in contemporary Kenya see J. H. Smith, *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya* (Chicago, 2008). It is significant that the mode of recruitment to both the *Vaya* and the *Chama* is the same: Unlike other coastal “secret societies,” one is approached by existing members, rather than applying on one’s own initiative.

²¹ Despite having abandoned the trade in blood, this is still the local explanation for why the Mumiani return when the short rains fail (as it appeared that they had near the end of 2013).

interferes with the circulation of blood in other bodies by blocking the circulation of value in the form of rain. This in turn puts those bodies at risk of themselves becoming the sacrificial victims of an organized group threatening the proper circulation of people on the area's roads: Mumiani.

6.5: BIZARRE CARGO, EXTRACTION, AND EXTRAVERSION

As a final element of the 2013 Mumiani scare, I would like to turn to an event that took place at the Mombasa Port just before the rumors of Mumiani activity began. Tales of the incident—remarkable enough in its own right—were, within a week of being reported by every major print and broadcast news outlet in the country, circulating on the South Coast in a quasi-inverted form alongside the “original” version. While the event as it was originally reported was easily slotted into national anxieties about the presence of “the cult of devil worship” in the country (Kirima et al. 1995, Blunt 2004, Smith 2012), in its inverted form it was brought into line with a specifically South Coast repertoire of ideas about Mumiani. Both versions circulated alongside one another, often told sequentially as accounts of two separate incidents at the port.

On October 10, 2013 a shipping container from China labeled “Household Goods and Mixed Hardware” was opened for inspection at the Mombasa port. The contents turned out to include a large cache of plastic Halloween decorations, much to the horror of the unfortunate Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) inspector who discovered them. The incident was reported in the Daily Nation, Kenya's largest newspaper, as follows:



Image 6.5: “Senior assistant commissioner KRA marketing and communication department Ms. Fatuma Yusuf showing journalists some of the impounded objects related to devil worshipping ... that had arrived in the country and were destined to Nairobi in this picture take [*sic*] on 10 October 2013. The consignment is said to belong to a senior politician in the country.” (Nyassy 2013)



Image 6.6: “Bizarre cargo impounded in Mombasa.” (Beja 2013)

A container packed with an unusual and bizarre cargo was opened at the port of Mombasa Thursday.

The cargo was packed in 10 huge cartons and comprised plastic human skeletons, skulls, limbs, palms, huge black spiders, tombstones, corpses, mummies and bats.

A senior Kenya Revenue Authority official said the grotesque items had been imported from China by “a very famous” Kenyan politician. She said the cargo had not been declared.

The items are normally associated with the American tradition of Halloween, or as props for horror movies, stage plays and amusement arcades.

However, some superstitious people at the port claimed the items are used in the occult and by cults with temples in Mombasa, Nairobi and Kisumu.

Kenya Revenue Authority southern region senior assistant commissioner Fatma Yusuf said investigations had been launched into the cargo and its importer would be named in due course.

Some of the grotesque items portray human suffering, with one of them showing a man groaning in pain as he is being attacked by numerous rats.

The plastic limbs, some dismembered at the knee or elbow, have red paint to represent oozing blood and raw flesh.

There are also plastic boards inscribed in red letters, one of them inscribed “Turn back” and the other “Enter if you dare.”

The cargo is at Interpel container freight station next to the Changamwe roundabout. It arrived on September 3, according to Ms Yusuf.

“The 40-foot container arrived from China as normal household goods and mixed hardware. But on 100 per cent verification, we discovered unconventional goods that include fake human parts like hands, legs, skeletons, among others,” said Ms Yusuf.

She said declared goods in the same container included curtains, fridges, washing machines, ovens, gas stoves, microwaves, tiles, locks and shower cubicles.

Ms Yusuf said the grotesque images and items were the first such import to be seen in the country.²²

The Standard published a shorter, more sensational account of the incident:

Horror and fear struck the port of Mombasa Thursday when Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) inspectors uncovered a container with bizarre looking implements, masks and trophies.

The cargo imported from China sparked apprehension in Mombasa, where belief in occult and clairvoyant sciences is strong as port officials linked the cargo to an unnamed senior politician.

However, some analysts think the cargo which includes fake skulls, skeletons and limbs is a diversionary [*sic*] to conceal some other cargo while others associate it with Halloween.

²² D. T. Nyassy, “Strange Cargo Found in Container at Port,” *Daily Nation* (Nairobi), 10 Oct. 2013, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Strange-cargo-found-in-container-at-port/1056-2027554-g07adqz/>.

KRA has launched investigations to unravel the link between the cargo and the politician.²³

It was later revealed that the items had not been imported by “a very famous politician,” but rather by the owners of Village Market—a high-end shopping mall in Nairobi’s posh Gigiri neighborhood—as decorations for their annual Halloween party.

Before turning to the circulation of this event as rumor, certain aspects of its initial reporting should be highlighted. First is the rhetorical distancing of the news reporters from “superstitious people at the port,” and from Mombasa and the coast in general, “where belief in occult and clairvoyant sciences is strong.” The coast has long figured in the national imagination as a backward and superstitious part of the country. Second, note the commonsensical reporting of the fact that the importer of the container was a politician who was “very famous,” but who could not be named. Indeed, *The Standard*’s article goes so far as to link the fact of its importation by a politician with the sense of apprehension about its possible occult uses. This move—implicating a politician in occult practices without naming them—was strongly reminiscent of the mid-90s *Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Cult of Devil Worship in Kenya* (Kirima et al. 1995), the public unavailability of which for years only fueled suspicions that politicians incriminated in the report were suppressing its release (Blunt 2004, Smith 2012). Note also the sense that politicians derive their true power from elsewhere. Here, “a very famous”—but unnamed—politician was apparently caught importing occult media with which to sacrifice members of his community to increase his wealth and power. One could plausibly suggest that this version of the story was molded by (and read by Kenyans as being of a piece with) stories about

²³ P. Beja, “Bizarre Cargo Impounded at Mombasa Port,” *The Standard* (Nairobi), 10 October 2013, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000095308/bizarre-cargo-impounded-at-mombasa-port>.

the large consignments of drugs that are occasionally intercepted at the port. Coast politicians are widely believed to be major importers of heroin and cocaine into the country, and are blamed for the unemployment and criminality of coastal youths claimed to be the result. In other words, in the South Coast moral imagination the importation of illicit, socially destructive material from elsewhere is an important technique of extraversion by which politicians accumulate the wealth necessary to mount the political campaigns that put them in a position to accumulate still greater wealth and power. All this by effectively sacrificing the region's youth.

Finally, note that as scandalous as the cargo was in itself, The Standard reports a second-order suspicion that the objects were “a diversionary [sic] to conceal some other cargo.” Here the revelation of something sinister is thought to reveal the ongoing occulting of something *even more sinister*. The revelation of a hidden secret does not produce a sense that one has finally discovered the truth. It may only be a sign that deeper truths remain hidden. Even when one discovers “what someone has inside them” (or in this case, what a shipping container has inside it), the sense that one does not know the full truth is not assuaged. It may only be exacerbated.

In a televised newscast later that evening, reporters interviewed a Mombasa resident who voiced the familiar trope of the ultimate inability to fathom the true motivations of others:

Now we the citizens ourselves, we are left ... dumbstruck [*“kinyua wazi,”* lit. “open-mouthed”], we don't know where to turn. We don't know who worships the Devil and who doesn't worship the Devil. You yourself, *you* know if you worship God or you worship the Devil. But if you ask me the question about another person, it'll be hard work. Because that container, didn't it pass through scanning there at the port?²⁴

²⁴ The televised news report from which this quotation is taken is available online at <https://youtu.be/3RAn4ybzHAM>. The broadcast is in English with the exception of the man's commentary, which was in Kiswahili. The translation is mine.

“Scanning” should have revealed what the container had inside it. The implication is that whoever was responsible for ensuring such occult cargo be impounded had allowed it to pass because they are secretly involved in devil worship, or had been paid off by those who are. *Their* hidden intentions were responsible for the admission of the *container’s* hidden contents into the country. Just as one cannot fully trust politicians, whose gifts of cash and promises of “development” divert attention from their relationship with Mumiani, one cannot trust those whose job it is to keep the country safe from the uncontrolled influx of dangerous objects or substances because of *their* relationship with politicians.

In addition to the national ferment about upcountry politicians and their “devil worship paraphernalia,” the shipping container incident quickly morphed and reemerged in South Coast rumor in inverted form. Within days of the initial report, excited acquaintances were telling me that a politician’s container had been discovered in Mombasa filled with human heads—*Kenyan* heads—bound *for* China. I asked if they were sure that it was not a shipping container full of *plastic* heads *from* China? No. They had heard of that one too. This was a second container, full of heads collected by Mumiani, facilitated by the government, to fill an order from the Chinese.

The story of the shipping container was initially taken up through a news-mediated, decades-old national preoccupation with the involvement of politicians in “devil worship.” But it was quickly recalibrated and refocused through a related but narrower and more local set of concerns and then circulated alongside the “original” as a separate incident. In the second version, the terms of politicians’ engagement with foreign sources of wealth involve a different kind of extractive or sacrificial relationship between foreign powers and local populations. It is a relationship these politicians manage and do not suffer the negative effects of. But rather than being the ultimate consumers of the occult goods and the beneficiaries of the powers they channel

(as in the first version), here the figure of the politician is something more like a middleman, only in it—like the Mumiani they employ—for the money.

The apparent *visual* confirmation of elite participation in “the Cult of Devil Worship” (with their Satanic paraphernalia sorted into groups and laid out for all to see) was immediately subjected to what I have called a vernacular hermeneutics of suspicion. Through the circulation of this event by word of mouth—never a simple reporting, but also an interrogation and evaluation—it rapidly transformed to express a South Coast social truth: The “development” and gifts of cash that constituencies seek from their elected representatives come at a social cost. They are the fruit of an amoral patron’s successful execution of a strategy of extraversion that demands, from clients, a sacrifice.

6.6: POLITICS BY NIGHT: MUMIANI AS METAPHOR AND METONYM

Persistent uncertainty about what ultimately backs the authority of civic, economic, and cultural institutions has a specific history on the Kenyan coast, but is also part of a more general problem in the country’s history.²⁵ The multi-party era of structural adjustment was a moment when, as Robert Blunt puts it, “the capacities of Kenya’s political patrons began to fail ... while paradoxically retaining their face value.”²⁶ Under these “neoliberal conditions” (of which stage-managed “ethnic” violence, Government-counterfeited banknotes and title deeds, and the Goldenberg and Anglo Leasing scandals were only the most well-known examples), “a new moral ambivalence pervaded patron-client transactions now understood to be evil simulations of morally

²⁵ R. W. Blunt, *Of Money and Elders: Sovereignty, Meaning and Value in Colonial and Postcolonial Kenya* (forthcoming).

²⁶ R. W. Blunt, “‘Satan is an Imitator’: Kenya’s Recent Cosmology of Corruption,” in B. Weiss (ed.), *Producing African Futures* (Leiden, 2004), 295.

valorized relations of exchange,” giving rise to fears of “Devil Worship” and other “occult” practices on the part of Kenyan elites.²⁷ Importantly, this is also the moment to which local histories date an important transformation in Mumiani’s nocturnal activity: from blood to body parts.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, recall, “*Mumiani*” was the name of a medicine made from human blood, and “*watu wa Mumiani*”—“*Mumiani* people”—were the Africans who did the killing for the drug’s European or Indian manufacturers. In oral histories collected during fieldwork, however, “*Mumiani*” referred to people who, during the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods, killed for blood that was then sold to hospitals, not the medicine made from that blood.²⁸ But with the rise of HIV it became impossible, in these narratives, to know whose blood was “safe,” and the market for blood, as it were, dried up. In response, Mumiani made the entrepreneurial decision to diversify in order to meet a growing demand for human body parts in the rapidly expanding “occult economy” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) of the structural adjustment era.²⁹ Mumiani’s shift away from their longstanding specialization was, in this understanding, due to the inability to know, based on outwardly sensible forms, whether blood—an “essence of life” with healing potential—might instead contain its opposite. This is an important

²⁷ *Ibid.*; N. Kirima et. al., *Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into the Cult of Devil Worship in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1995); and J. H. Smith, “Making Peace with the Devil: The Political Life of Devil Worship Rumors in Kenya,” in J. H. Smith and R. Hackett (eds.), *Displacing the State* (Notre Dame, 2012), 49–81.

²⁸ On twentieth-century associations of Mumiani and hospitals, see Brennan, “Destroying Mumiani,” 96; L. Swantz, “The Role of the Medicine Man among the Zaramo of Dar es Salaam,” PhD diss., University of Dar es Salaam, 1974, 103–5; and L. White, “Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology, and Labor in East and Central Africa,” *Representations* 43 (1993), 32.

²⁹ Although the phrase “occult economies” was coined by Jean and John Comaroff, I want to stress that my Kenyan interlocutors themselves remember the 1990s as the decade in which the black-market trade in “Occult” paraphernalia took off, and that Mumiani’s market logic as I have just laid it out is *their* “rational-choice theory,” not mine.

point: Widespread concern about one's ability to trust outward appearances is understood to have driven Mumiani into a trade in human organs that is itself remembered as undergoing a dramatic expansion at that time, facilitated by the business connections of political patrons. In other words, their activity is molded, in local historiography, by concerns Mumiani share with their fellow Kenyans: concerns about hidden depths, visible surfaces, and the ability to know the former through the latter—a general “cris[i]s of interpretive authority” resulting in a condition Adam Ashforth calls “spiritual insecurity.”³⁰

No one I spoke with could say what exactly these body parts would be used for. Of their eventual use, I was told, “*wanajua wenyewe*,” “[only] they themselves know.” But they were understood to be bound for the market in “traditional” medicine and witchcraft substances, rather than a “global traffic in human organs” for transplantation.³¹ Mumiani themselves have no interest in the body parts, except as articles of sale. And as middlemen, their work is facilitated by politicians: Mumiani are said to operate with the full knowledge of “Government,” if not directly under contract with it.

To the extent that Mumiani are believed to be working either for or with politicians, the stories told about them are part of a broader critical discourse about these figures, mediated by historical experience. This is the crux of my earlier statement that Mumiani are “politics by night”:

³⁰ A. Ashforth, “AIDS, Religious Enthusiasm, and Spiritual Insecurity in Africa,” *Global Public Health*, 6:S2 (2011), S136. See also A. Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago, 2005).

³¹ N. Scheper-Hughes, “The Global Traffic in Human Organs,” *Current Anthropology*, 41:2 (2000), 191–224. See also A. E. Adams, “*Gringas*, Ghouls and Guatemala: The 1994 Attacks on North American Women Accused of Body Organ Trafficking,” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 4:1 (1999), 112–33; A. Regamey, “Comparing Violence: Organ Theft Rumors in Chechnya and Latin America,” *Laboratorium*, 4:3 (2012), 42–66; N. Scheper-Hughes, “Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ Stealing Rumors,” *Anthropology Today*, 12:3 (1996), 3–11.

Mumiani stories are part of an expansive moral critique of how political power operates in the region, in which individual politicians stand in as “character masks”—to borrow a phrase of Marx’s—of larger-scale socio-historical processes. These stories condense and reimagine that broad range of concerns and dissatisfactions in a bodily language of depletion, dismemberment, and death for profit. They are both *part of* a critical discourse about the gatekeeper or intermediary figures who mediate, restrict, and redirect flows of value between home and away and, at the same time, are *representations of* that discourse. They stand in relation to it as both metonym and metaphor.

At one level, the image of Mumiani prowling the roads at night in large vehicles with dark windows is the negative image of the campaigning politician. Rather than the politician’s dawn-to-dusk speeding between settlements in search of crowds for the noisy, public distribution of cash, the Mumiani operate at night, avoid settled areas and creep slowly along the roads that connect them, searching for individual victims for the silent, private extraction of value. Like the well-known descriptions of the night-worlds of witches, with satanic airports, invisible shopping malls, and underwater skyscrapers, these stories present a vision of the normative moral order flipped on its head.

But this is not the only way that these stories represent the use and abuse of power. Mumiani stories are told not as allegories for the evil of our world through a depiction of another one. They are claims about the sources of wealth and power in *this* world. Mumiani are not talked about as the negative image of generous patron, but as truth of where that patron gets his money. Mumiani are not said to *be* politicians; they work *for* politicians. They are one *source* of the wealth—among a range of real and imagined others—to which politicians have access by virtue of their position as “gatekeepers” in a system of political and economic extraversion. These sources

are all “occult” in the sense of “hidden from view,” and are the subject of constant popular theorization and debate. In this sense stories about Mumiani are no different from claims that a politician’s wealth comes from the narcotics trade. Neither claim is “just” a metaphor (although each can productively be interpreted and analyzed in those terms—taking our informants statements “seriously” should not be equated with taking them literally), and each implies an ambivalence about accepting the patronage of such figures. They are speculations into the obscure sources of elite wealth, and arguments about the probable immorality of those sources.

As discourses on the morality of power, they condense and concretize a more diffuse awareness that the highly visible wealth of the political elite is amassed at the expense of others in less-than-visible ways. Just as South Coast Kenyans resign themselves to the truth—that is, to what is widely suspected to be the truth—that politicians sell land out from under them with fake title deeds, or smuggle heroin into the country and elephant tusks out of it, they understand that they are periodically at risk of being abducted, killed, and having their eyes, tongue, and genitals removed by Mumiani. Although they are regarded with horror and fascination as something deeply strange, unsettling, and frightening, Mumiani are an integral part of the political landscape, and *only* make sense within it. Their relationship to government power is an essential, not accidental, feature of their modern form in both their colonial and postcolonial incarnations.

This is what it means to call Mumiani “politics by night”: There is no separating their nocturnal predations from the largesse of campaigning politicians “in the light of day.” They are each other’s reciprocal ground. Mumiani, in this discourse, are a key source of the wealth that politicians distribute to their constituencies in order to remain in office. Politicians, in turn, provide Mumiani with victims from their constituency and with buyers for their body parts through their business connections. Mumiani are the dark half of a relationship of power upon which rural South

Coast Kenyans are dependent, especially under conditions of aggravated economic vulnerability, like drought.

Mumiani, recall, are said to appear most often when the rains fail (as indeed they had at the time of the 1945 panic, and seemed to have done by the end of 2013). Said to be aware of the effects of the intensely hot sun of drought on the body—in local understanding, the “thinning” and “acceleration” of the blood—Mumiani take advantage of what are relatively easier conditions for draining a body of its blood (and this explanation persists despite Mumiani’s shift from blood to body parts, preserving the memory of a recently abandoned layer of their historical practice). These are also periods in which people are increasingly reliant on the cash economy for food, or on “famine relief” from the government, as was seen in Section 5.2 above. Moreover, until the early twentieth century, children could potentially be “pawned” by either their father or classificatory mothers’ brothers in exchange for food in times of drought, or to settle debts.³² The supposed ‘right’ of a mother’s brother to pawn or otherwise dispose of their sisters’ children is still the local ideological justification for matrilineal inheritance among the Digo and Duruma peoples of Kwale County. It was through precisely these figures that the colonial government obtained its conscript labor force in 1944-5, when senior men were made to pawn their heirs to a new, more powerful patron. And in that moment, as in 2013, the rains had failed when Mumiani ‘re-appeared’ after an absence of some years.

At an earlier moment in Mijikenda history, senior matrilineal kinsmen would also have been the figures ritually responsible—as the custodians of proprietary rain magic—for successful rains. Failure of the rains could be interpreted as a sign of being unfit for office, and might mean

³² Morton, “Pawning and Slavery,” 27; Willis, *Mombasa*, 47–59.

replacement—or death. Initiation to that office—the *Mung'aro* ritual—involved the abduction and ritual killing of a stranger from a pathway. In reappearing on the district's roads in 2013 during an election campaign that also coincided with the failure of the rain, Mumiani preserved and represented all of these layers of historical experience simultaneously in dynamic rumors of the nocturnal, sacrificial grounds of power and wealth—of politics by night.

6.7: CONCLUSION

As the 2013 drought wore on and that election campaigns gathered momentum, so too did the reports of Mumiani's predations. But on 27 November, the Court of Appeal of Kenya overturned the High Court's nullification of the original election results. Khatib Mwashetani was reinstated as MP for Lunga Lunga and the by-election—then only days away—was cancelled. The short rains arrived (late, but in sufficient quantity to stave off drought), and Mumiani, in the midst of all this, disappeared.

The simultaneity of the 2013 South Coast Mumiani panic and the widespread vandalization of images with an election campaign and the growing threat of drought and food shortage was hardly coincidental. This not to suggest a neat, causal relationship, but rather to say that the sudden emergence and dissipation of Mumiani stories and the persistent defacement of images *expressed* an intuition of a significance or meaningful connection among these other events. Indeed, South Coast residents drew these connections explicitly. As a form of historical consciousness, then, Mumiani are not simply a way that the past is preserved in the present—a past of pawned children, slavery, and colonial *corvée* labor; of rain magic, live burials, and European medical anthropophagy; of political marginalization and economic underdevelopment—like the forms of

collective ritual memory analyzed by Shaw (2002). They are also a way understanding the present *in terms of* that past.

Again, South Coast residents articulate this history in perfectly clear terms without reference to Mumiani. One easily collects family histories, for example, which include the exchange of junior kin for food during famines, or descriptions of the precise legal mechanisms by which local politicians and wealthy foreigners stole the land out from under them. Critiques of the present are readily formulated in these terms as well. These people would consider anyone who thought the risks associated with politicians were limited to Mumiani as no less a fool than one who thought they were limited to land grabbing or drug smuggling. Mumiani stories are part of a more general critical discourse of some historical depth about the nature, sources, and operation of legitimate authority and control over the bodies and productive capacities of others. At the same time, Mumiani condense this discourse into a figure that is an icon of it, standing in relation as both metaphor and metonym.

This critical discourse is related to a “vernacular hermeneutics of suspicion” through which the people in question seek out—often through forms of speculative or experimental practice—the *hidden* meaning or significance of things. South Coast residents are, as Levi-Strauss said of both scientist and *bricoleur*, “constantly on the look out for ‘messages’.”³³ Surface meanings and apparent significances are coherent bases for thought and practical activity, but there is a persistent feeling that the deeper significance, the *true* meaning, the *real* source of value, remains hidden. As the incident at the Mombasa Port clearly shows, the revelation of such a hidden truth may only be an attempt to camouflage a deeper secret. And it is in this light that the Mumiani rumors and

³³ C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), 20.

defacement of images should be viewed: As local efforts at various points along a “chain of consciousness” to make visible or otherwise manifest something keenly felt, but hiding just out of sight.

CONCLUSION:

This dissertation began in Chapter One by tracing traces the shifts in representation of a ritual of elder male initiation, called Mung'aro, said to have involved the abduction and killing of a stranger or slave. Chapter Two examined Mijikenda traditions of origin in Singwaya, highlighting the various forms—and reasons for the various forms—of violent conflict with outsiders cited as the cause of migration to their present location. Chapter Three began with a discussion of the 1997 election violence on the coast, referred to as “Kaya Bombo” after the “Kaya” sacred forest in which young male participants were ritually “oathed” by elders later revealed to be “fakes.” The chapter then turned to nineteenth-century missionary accounts of the political organization of the precolonial Mijikenda, centered around ritually mediated male age grades operating out of the Kaya forests.

In Chapter Four, I charted the transformation of Mijikenda political organization under the colonial administration of the early 20th century, privileging as it did men who had risen to prominence outside the gerontocratic Kaya order. The chapter went on to show how this colonial order was then haunted by the suspicion that its “native authorities” lacked the ritual legitimacy that was thought previously to have backed their authority, leading to a series of unsuccessful state-sponsored rituals of elder male initiation. Chapters Five and Six, finally, focused on two moments of moral panic about gangs of politically sponsored killers called “*Mumiani*”. In 1945, these were understood to steal their victims blood, and the panic coincided with a wartime labor conscription campaign, a famine, and the provision of government “famine relief” rations. In 2013, during my fieldwork, *Mumiani* had morphed into organ thieves, and the panic about their return coincided

with a parliamentary election campaign, the failure of the short rains, a teacher's strike, and the revelation at the port of Mombasa of a shipping container full of what appeared to be "Devil Worship Paraphernalia," as it was reported in the Kenyan press.

The dissertation has made three closely related arguments. First: that in Kenya's south coast region, the social and natural worlds are read through a "vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion" that "truth" is not self-evident, and must be arrived at through interpretation. This truth is not inherently obscure, but rather actively hidden—literally made occult. Any effort to arrive at "the truth" entails speculation about the motivations of those who hide it. And because it has been hidden, this "truth" easily takes on a sinister quality. Quotidian behavior of the most inoffensive sort—a greeting, or a gift—can easily transform into its uncanny opposite. The interpretive stance of South Coast suspicion is thus less a response to "the opacity of other minds" as an ontological problem than a reflexive "ethics of ambiguity."

The second major argument is that Mijikenda speculative pursuit of the truth—in the discursive and practical forms of rumor and ritual, respectively—are mediated by what I call an associational nexus of images or motifs. These images or motifs—which include roads or paths as spaces of danger or threat, unreasonable or extortionate demands of patrons amounting to a betrayal of social norms, the sacrifice (literal or figurative) of children (especially kin) in times of adversity, and the bringing or blocking of rain by those in command of proprietary magical means—combine and recombine in different arrangements that I refer to as "constellations," following Walter Benjamin.

In the case of the *Mung'aro* initiation ritual the constellation emerges when one examines one phenomenon—a specific ritual form—over a roughly five hundred-year period as claims about its nature and significance change over time. In the case of the origin stories, by contrast, a different

constellation only emerges when one examines the full range of traditions collected at a given moment in time over the full range of Mijikenda distribution up and down the coast. In the case of the politically orchestrated “ethnic” violence of Kaya Bombo it emerges out of a self-consciously traditional ritual enactment of “Mijikenda-ness” haunted by its links to secular national political structures. This haunting has its roots in the efforts of the colonial administration to prop up what appeared to be “traditional” forms of recognized authority through the sponsorship of rituals of elder initiation. In the case of *Mumiani* as bloodsuckers in World War Two-era Kwale District and as organ thieves at the dawn of Kenya’s “second republic,” finally, the constellation emerges out of a “structure of the conjuncture” of a drought, a conscription, “famine relief” in the first instance, and of a drought and a moment of political uncertainty in the second. And

Third, the dissertation has argued that both this vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion and the associational nexus of images and motifs mediating its practical expression are themselves historical phenomena, in two senses. They are, in their various constellations, “documents” of their historical moments, part of a broad critical discourse about the nature, sources, and operation of authority and control. But they also emerge out of, and in relation to, a history of such moments. They are moments in which “the relation of the what-has-been to the now” (which Benjamin distinguishes from “the relation of the present to the past”) is crystallized and precipitated in a “figural,” not “temporal” form. This is Benjamin’s formulation, but also what I take Marx to be expressing in the eighteenth Brumaire when, in moments of “crisis,” humanity “conjures up the dead of world history” to present a new situation in the “borrowed language,” “masks,” and “costumes” of the past. The elements that make up the constellations in question thus emerge out of a history, the experience of which they also helped to shape. The nineteenth-century capitalization of the East African coast, in particular, turned Mijikenda political cosmology “inside

out,” away from secret ritual technologies of elder male ritual centered in the Kayas and toward new streams of cash, credit, and commodities flowing in from the Indian Ocean. In the decades that followed, a colonial administration would attempt repeatedly to “revitalize” or “renew” elder institutions associated with the Kayas to lend legitimacy to its new Chiefs and Headmen. These processes simultaneously reproduced and undermined older political and religious ideologies, debates, and institutions, generating a wide-ranging sense of suspicion not only with respect to these institutions and their representatives, but to the broader social fields they continued to mediate.

The dissertation thus contributes an ethnographically and historically grounded theory of “the occult”—the sense of things not seen—as a form of historical and social “theory from the south.” Or, at the risk of over-use of the adjective, as a form of “vernacular social theory.” Conceptualizing South Coast Kenyans’ speculative engagements with “the occult” as a form of vernacular social theory emphasizes the mode of inquiry rather than its explicit statements, and the guiding, abiding concerns of those involved in its practice rather than their agreed-upon, resolved claims. Like the notion of a “vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion,” it explicitly situates the practical and intellectual pursuits of ordinary South Coast Kenyans squarely in relation to a more familiar body of canonical Western Social Theory that has also sought out “essences” behind “forms of appearance”—like Hegel and Marx—or “drives” behind “symptoms”—like Nietzsche and Freud—or that have theorized the fundamental, structuring importance of concealment and secrecy—like Durkheim and Simmel.

In characterizing the phenomena of ritual and rumor as “constellations” of historical consciousness, the dissertation also puts forward a very different theory of history than as the pursuit of “the way it really was.” It is one that views history not as the linear unfolding of a causal

chain of events, but as something that may, like a specter, return to haunt the present. Like the occult phenomena I describe, history in this understanding both “weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” and is, by the same token, capable of “flashing up” in moments of recognition. Thus while Feierman stresses that “even when forms of discourse are inherited from the past,” individuals “must make an active decision to say that they are meaningful at this moment,” this dissertation emphasizes, instead, those moments when the past exerts itself on the present independently of anyone’s conscious decision-making. I have chosen, in other words, to focus on those moments in which aspects of the past seem suddenly to return with an urgent claim on peoples’ attention. These moments are dialectically related, I have argued, to those aspects of the past that seem to linger, to endure, and to burden the present in spite of efforts to forget them. These aspects of “what has been” may be preserved in highly mediated, sublimated, and transvalued forms, as I have shown. They need not appear, in other words, “as history,” or even in discursive speech, but in forms of practice and habits of thought to which they might not, at face value, seem to have any recognizable relationship.

The use of the Benjaminian concept of historical constellation extends these historical and anthropological approaches by broadening the scope of analysis to include, in addition to ritual and memory, claims about the present in the form of *rumor*. As constellations these are all, I argue, mediated by the same “associational nexus” of images and motifs. And although I describe the elements of which these constellations are composed, then, as “images” or “motifs,” neither they nor the constellations themselves should be understood as purely conceptual or ideal representations. They may include forms of discursive *and* non-discursive practice, and may, in a given constellation, include heterogeneous or “multi-modal” manifestations (as in the case of the defacement of images during the 2013 *Mumiani* scare). Thus, while I highlight the *Mung’aro*

“Ritual” and *Mumiani* “Rumor” as particularly clear instances of these figures coming together in consequential ways, the dissertation argues that the corpus of Singwaya origin stories and political violence of Kaya Bombo can also be viewed as historical constellations in the same way. By treating local forms of discourse and practice as vernacular forms of social theory, the dissertation contributes what I hope is an original approach to the critical historical ethnography of “the occult” in Africa.

APPENDIX:

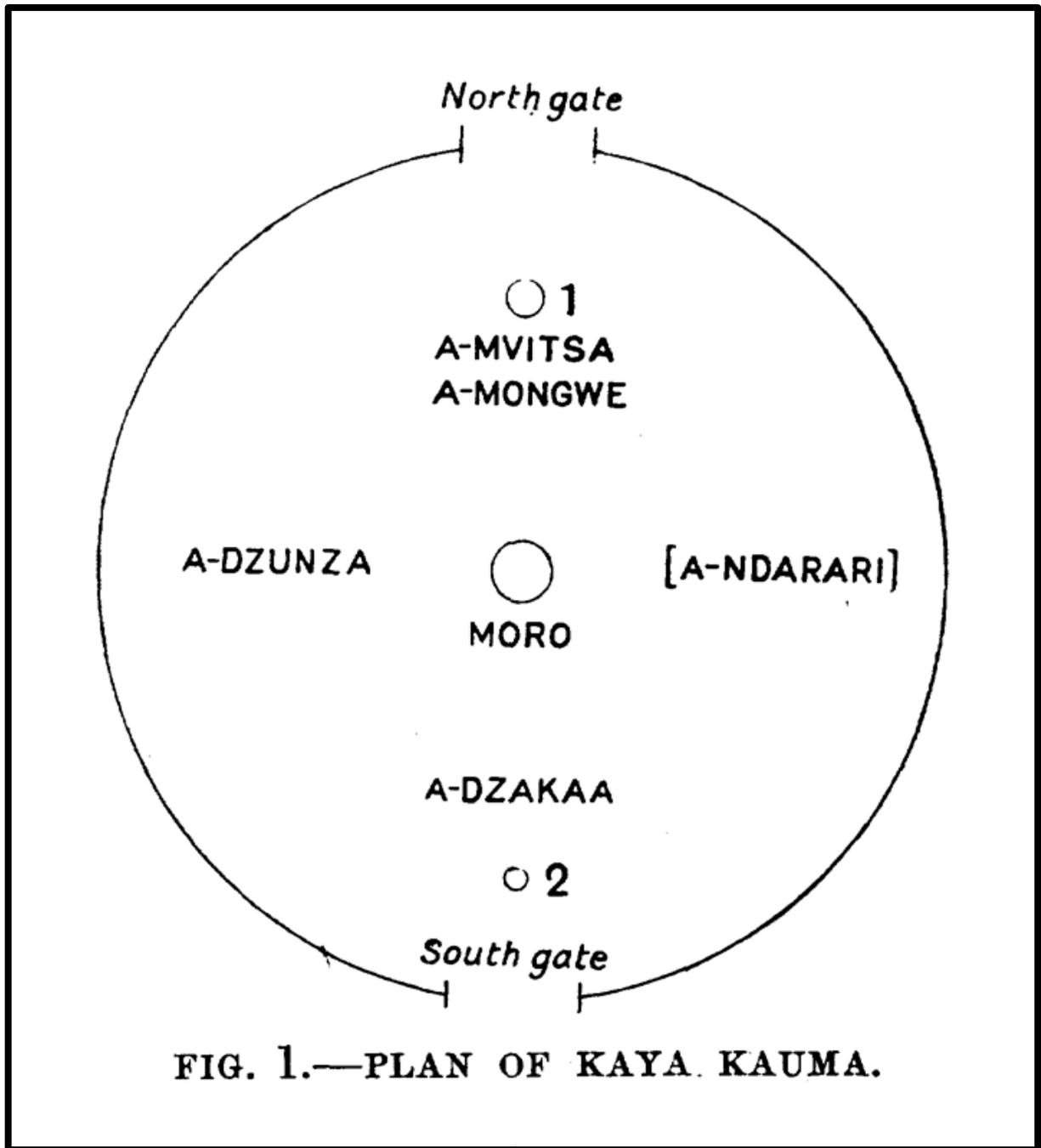
VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF KAYAS AND OTHER SETTLEMENTS



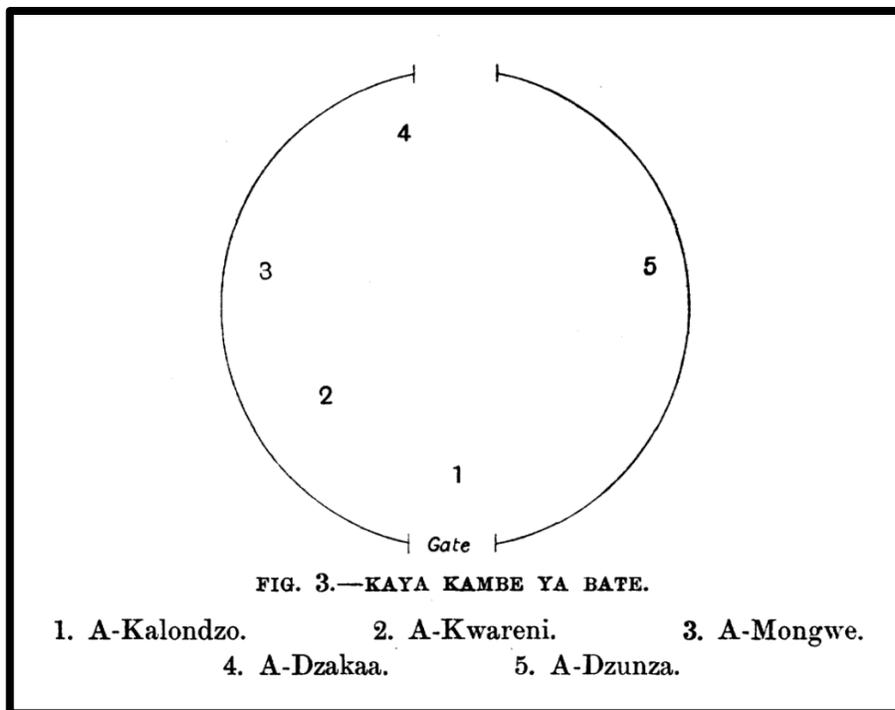
Map A.1: John James Erhardt’s hand-drawn 1852 map of the Rabai Mpya mission station and the surrounding area. North is left. Church Missionary Society (CMS) Archives, University of Birmingham, CMS/B/OMS/C A5/O9, Rev. John James Erhardt, Rabai, 1849–1855, “Map of the Rabai Territory,” 8 April 1852, Kisulutini.



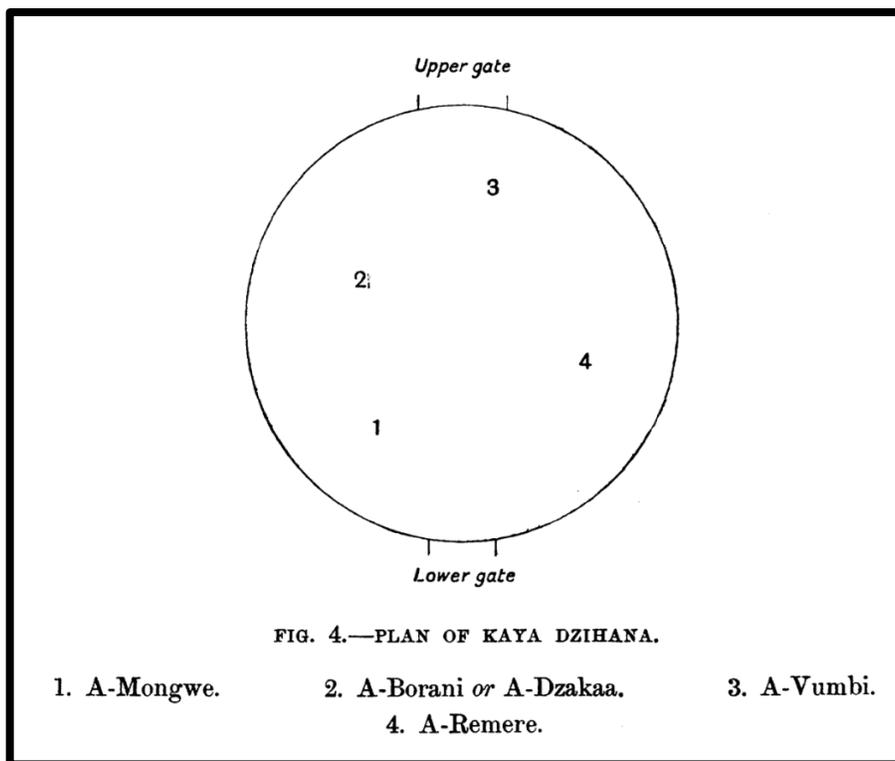
Map A.2: Detail from British Library (BL) War Office Archive, WOOG/127/3, Anglo-German Delimitation, E. Eq: Africa, “A Map of the Mouth of the Umba River and the Town of Vanga,” 1892. A note (not pictured) on the map reads: “The Umba valley is very fertile. The immediate neighbourhood of the river is covered with thick bush. The only cultivation is near the villages, which are built inside a clump of forest for the sake of defence. Rice, Indian corn, Millet, Sugarcane, Coconuts [*sic*], Casuarina, Sweet Potatoes, and a few bananas are produced. The numbers which stand by the villages indicate the approximate number of houses. No cattle. Goats & fowls obtainable. All the villages inhabited by Digo people (Wadigo). The Umba has almost always water, the other rivers in this sheet dry immediately after rain.”



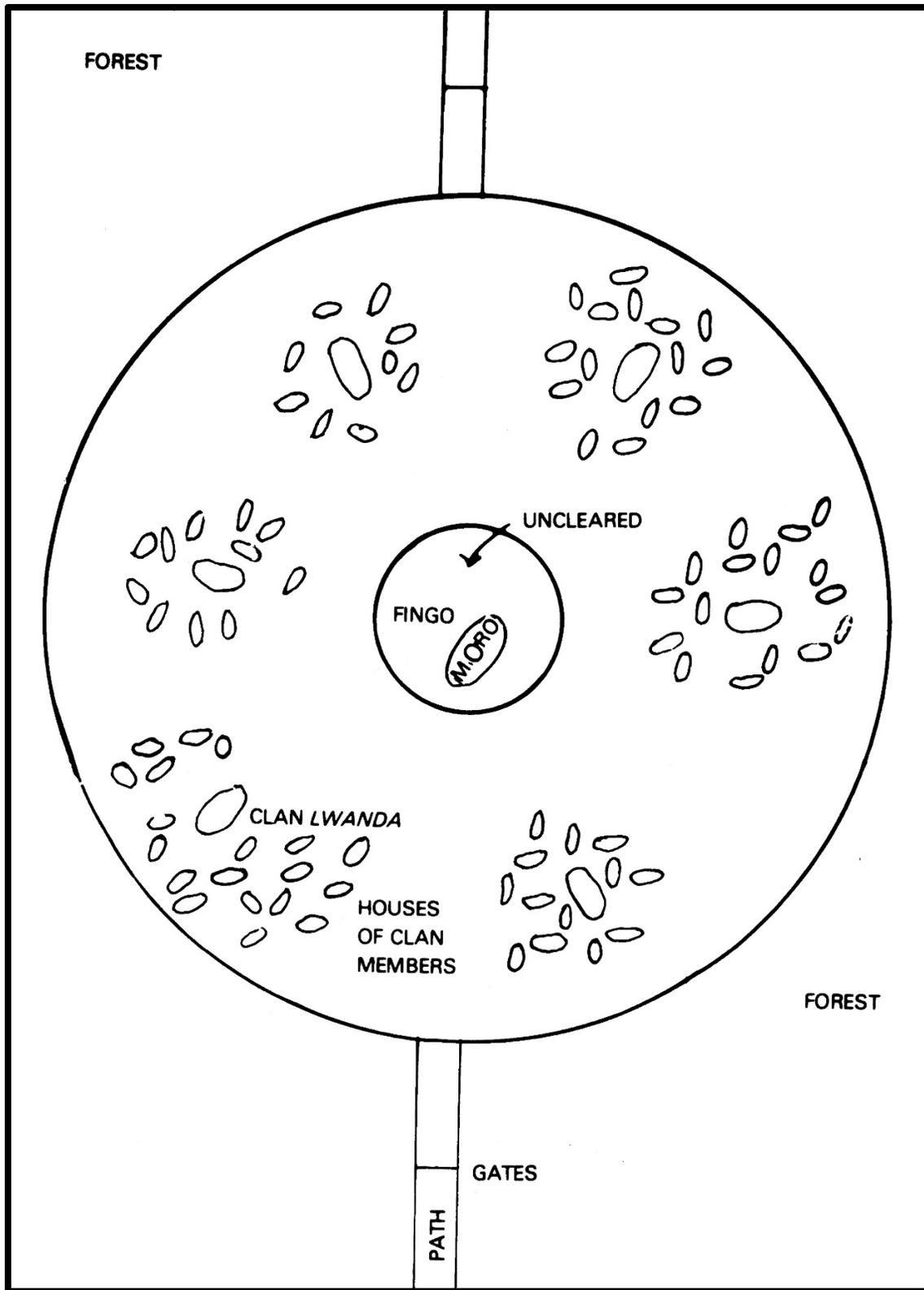
Map A3.: “Plan of Kaya Kauma” (Werner 1915: 343), showing “where the different sections of the tribe live” within the *kaya* and where their “*barazas*” (“meeting places”) are located. (Ibid. 342). “There are still a fair number of houses in it, some of a good size and very neatly constructed; but now that it is no longer unsafe to live near their gardens, many people have moved out, and there are large vacant spaces” (Ibid.).



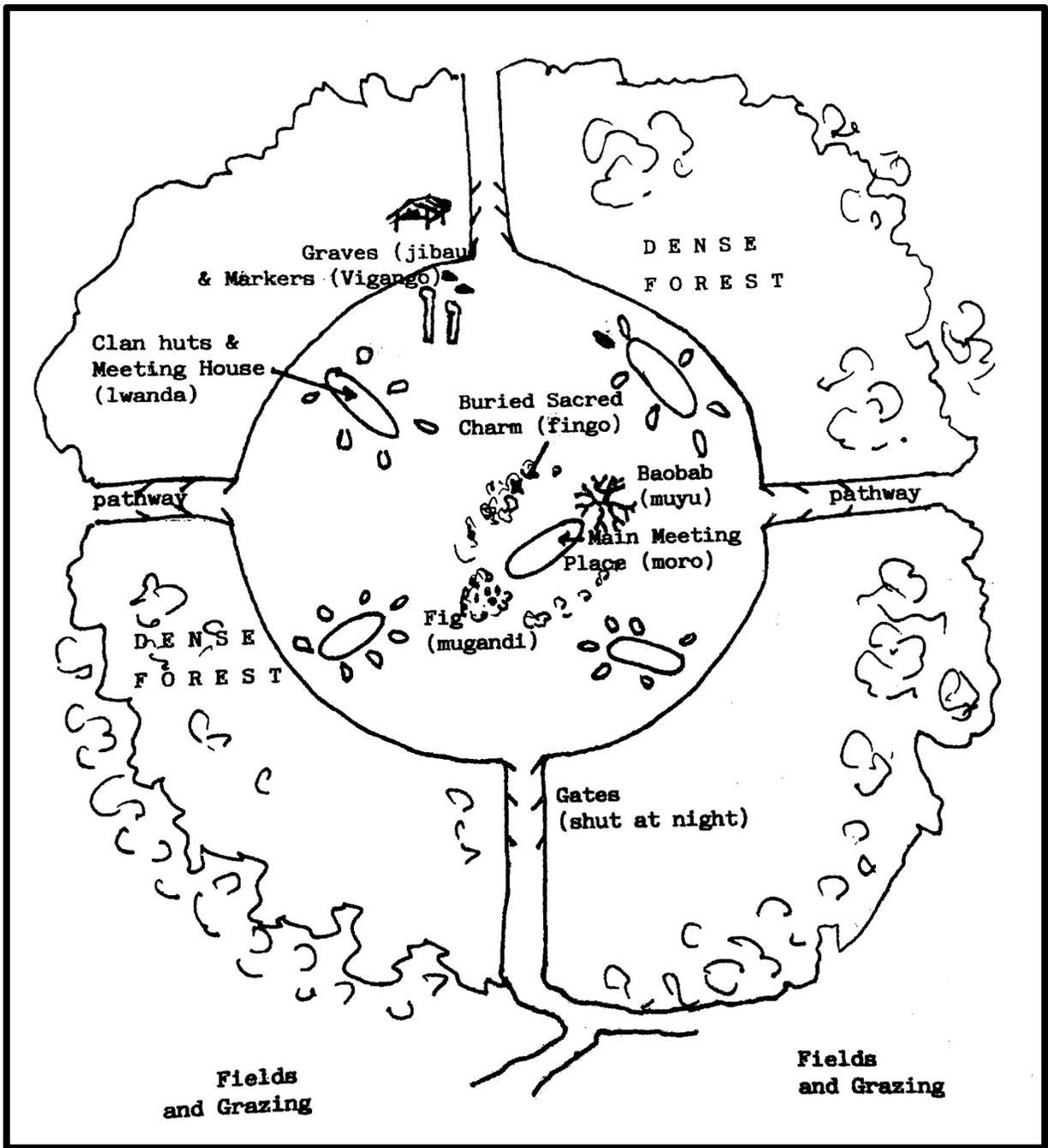
Map A.5: Plan of “Kaya Kambe ya Bate” (Werner 1915: 352) showing relative “section” sites.



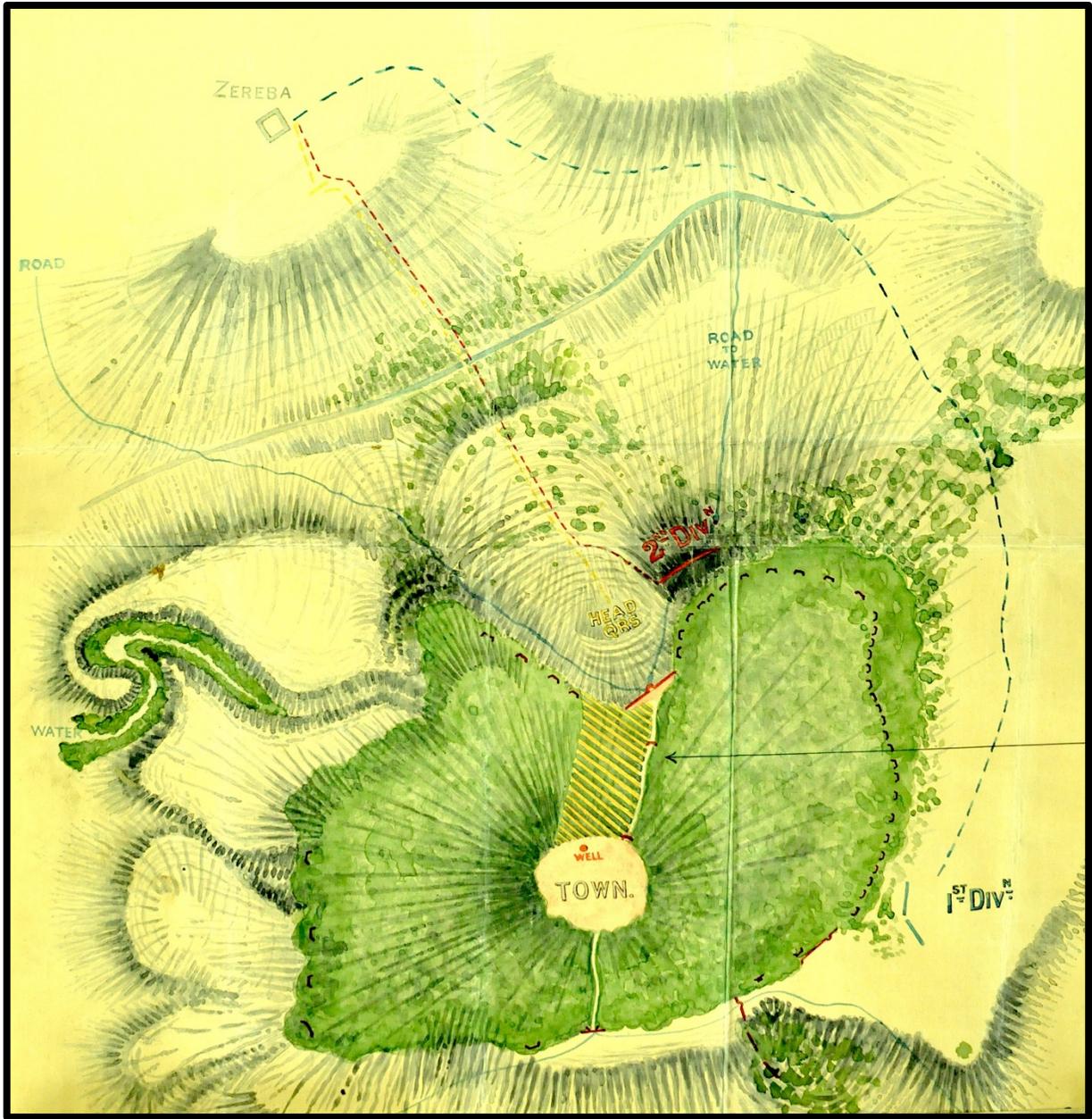
Map A.6: “Plan of Kaya Dzhana” [=Jibana] (Werner 1915: 353) showing relative “section” sites.



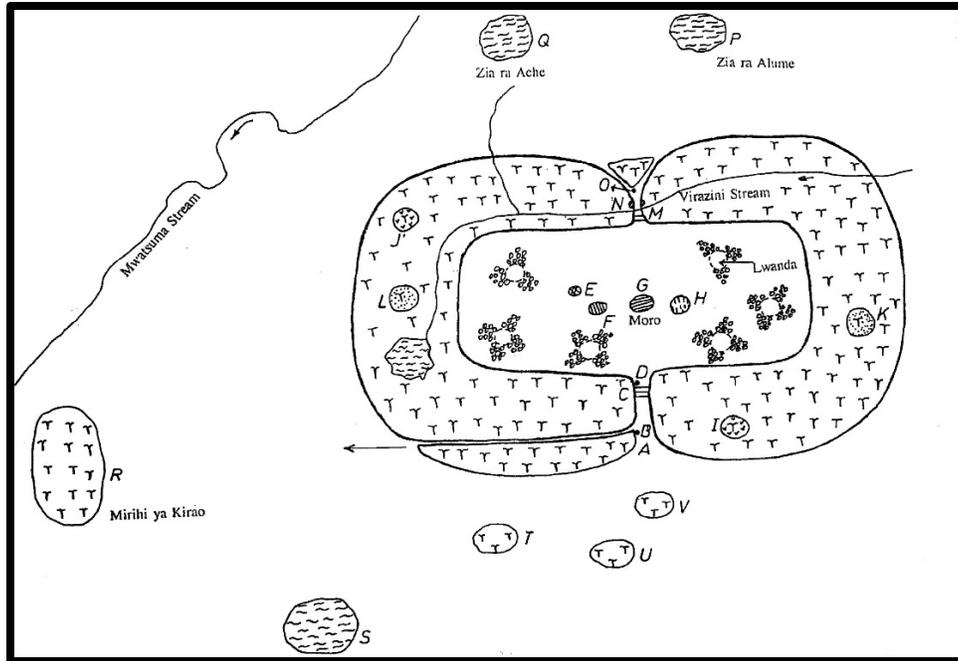
Map A.7: Ideal-typical layout of a pre-nineteenth century Mijikenda Kaya (Spear 1978: 47).



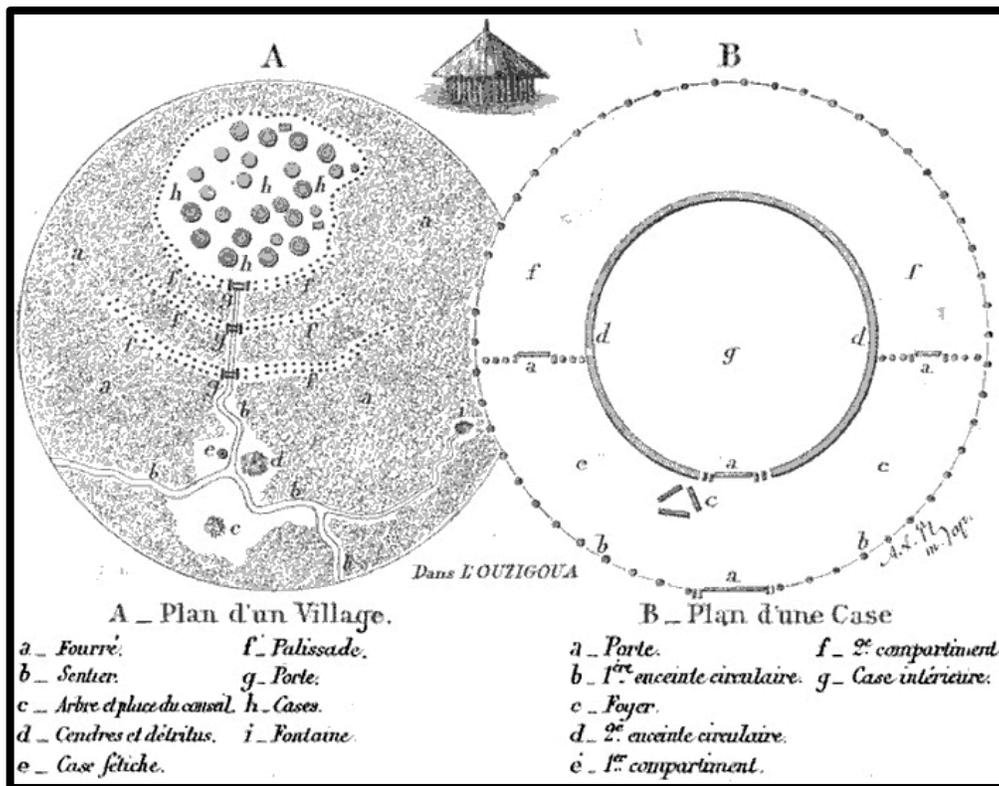
Map A.8: “Diagrammatic representation of a traditional Kaya; a fortified village within a forest. (after Spear 1978, and Hawthorne 1982).” (Robertson and Luke, 1993: 6:31)



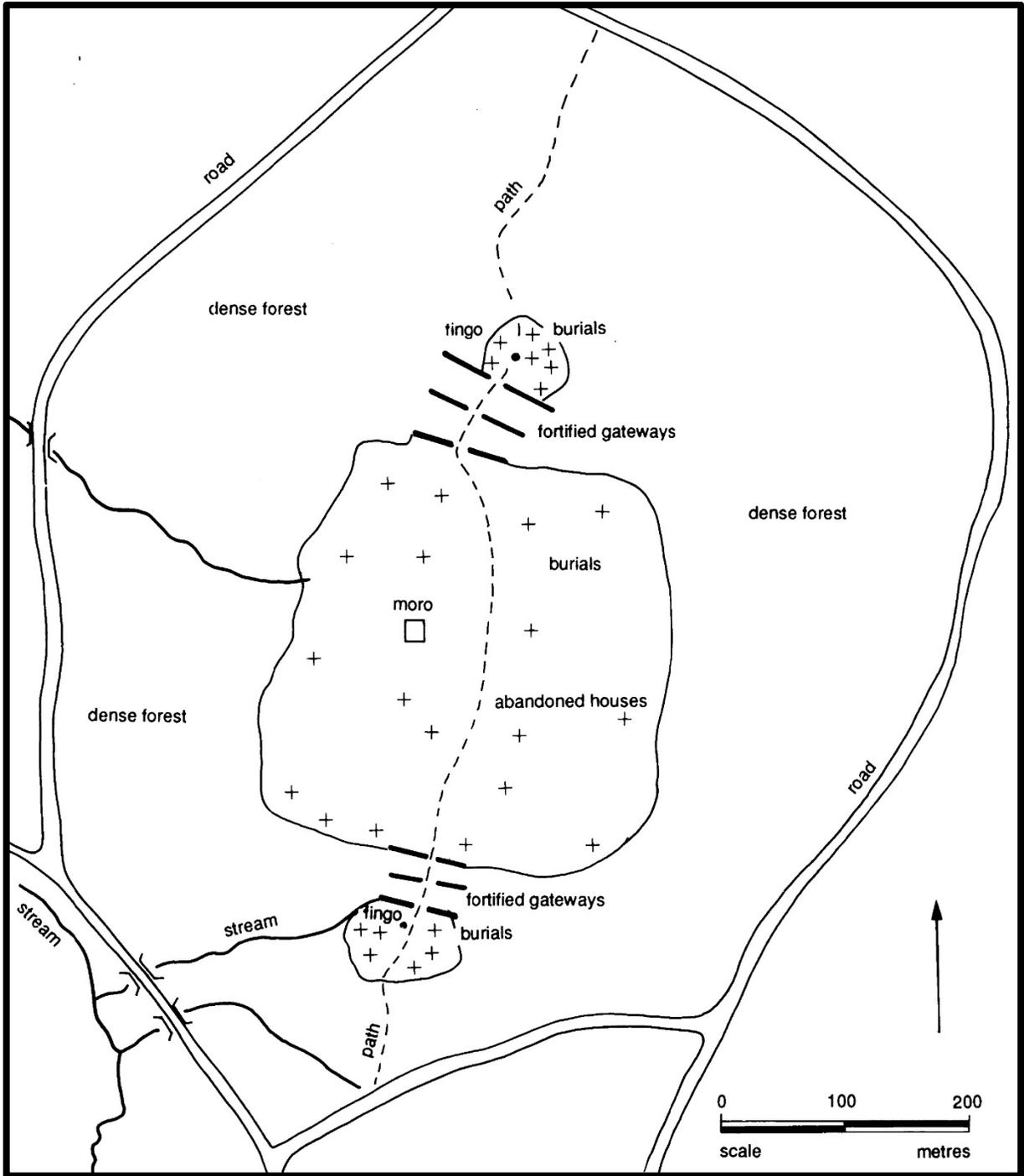
Map A.9: Detail from “Rough Plan of Mwele,” drawn by Captain G. L. Egerton. BNA FO/925/457 “Rough plan of Mwele by G. L. Egerton, Capt RN. MS. 150 yards to an inch,” 1895.



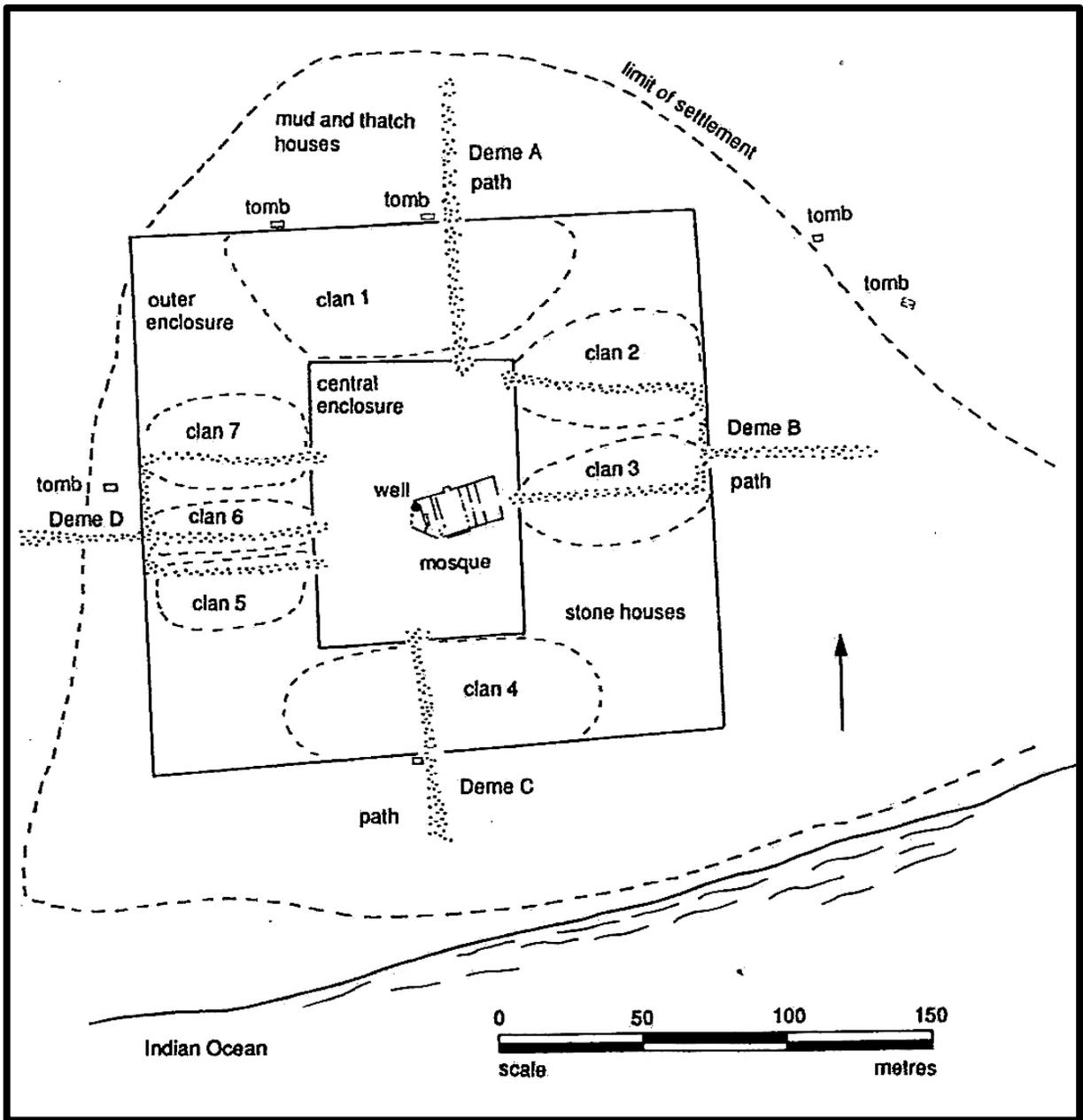
Map A.10: “Sketch plan showing the social set-up of Kaya Giriama.” (Tinga 1997)



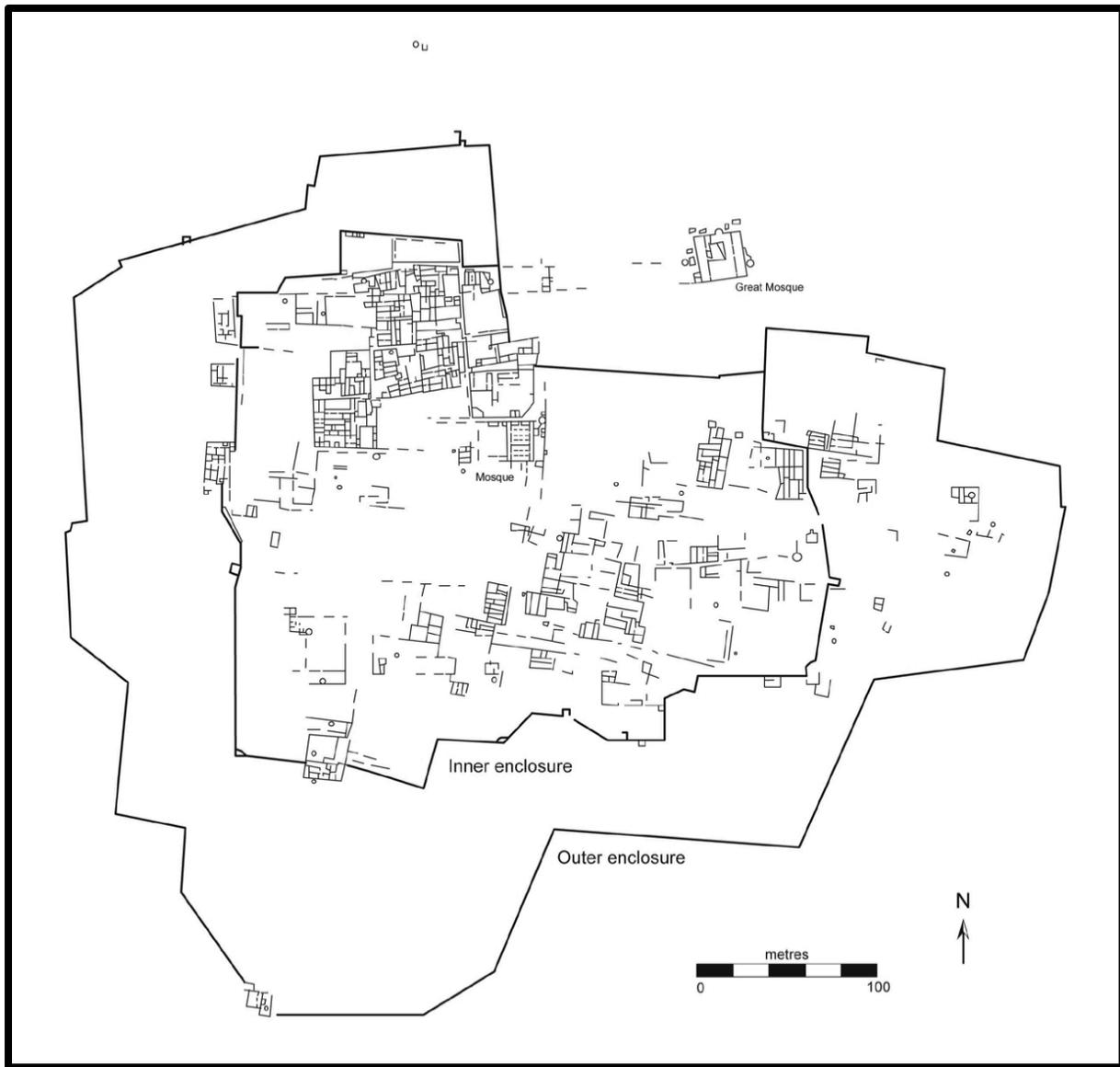
Map A.11: Plan of Zigula village (Picarda 1886: 236). Note the triple gates, fencing, narrow path of approach to the cleared settlement, and the “Case fétiche” outside the gates.



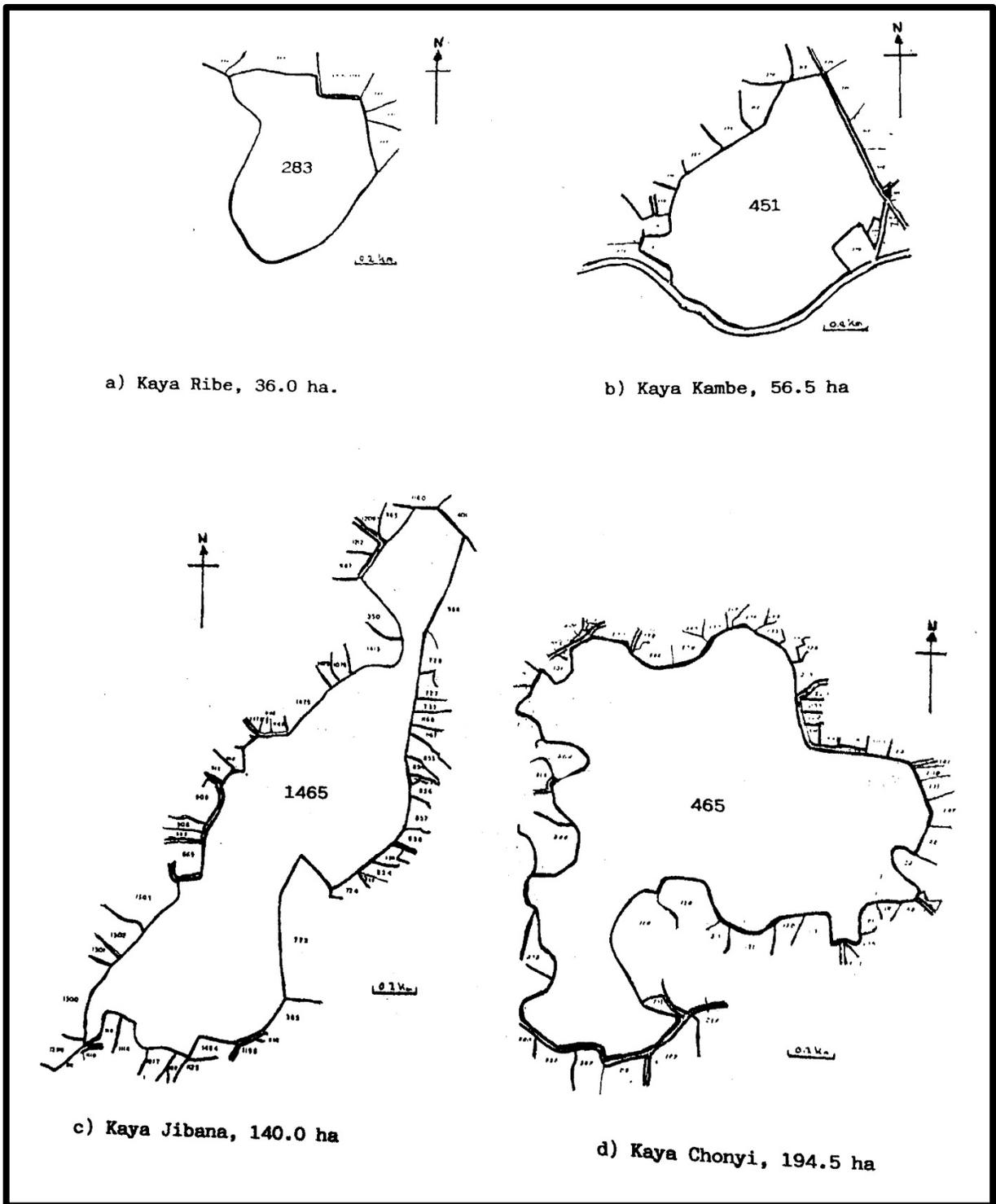
Map A.12: Plan of Kaya Singway (Mutoro 1987). Note the north-south axis, the central *moro* structure, the series of fortified gateways and the presence of *tingo* charms and burials at the outer gates.



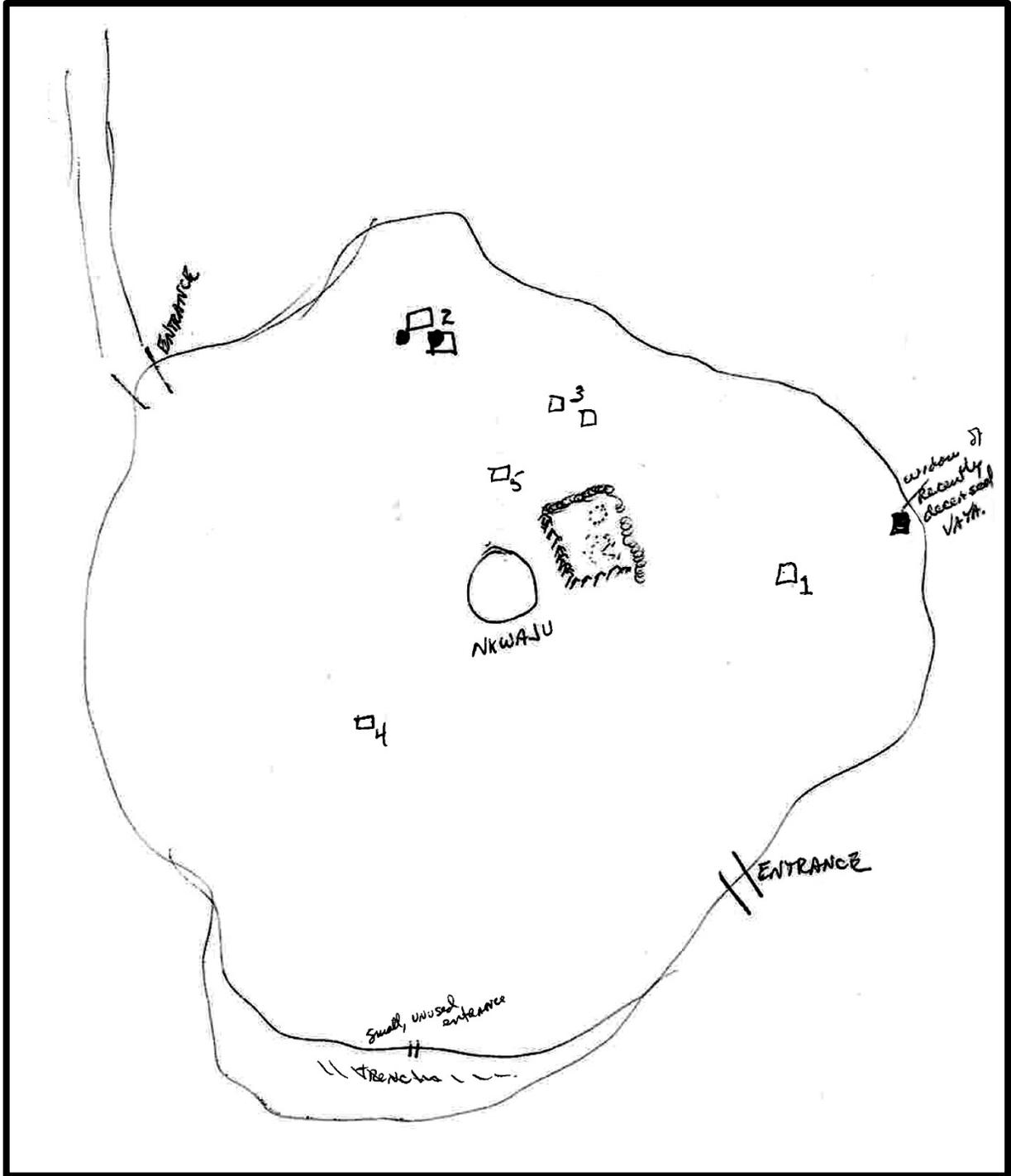
Map A.13: Hypothetical plan of the pre-fifteenth century “Swahili” city of Shanga (Horton 1996: 84). Note the clan layout, the central religious and civic area, and the burials at the outer gates.



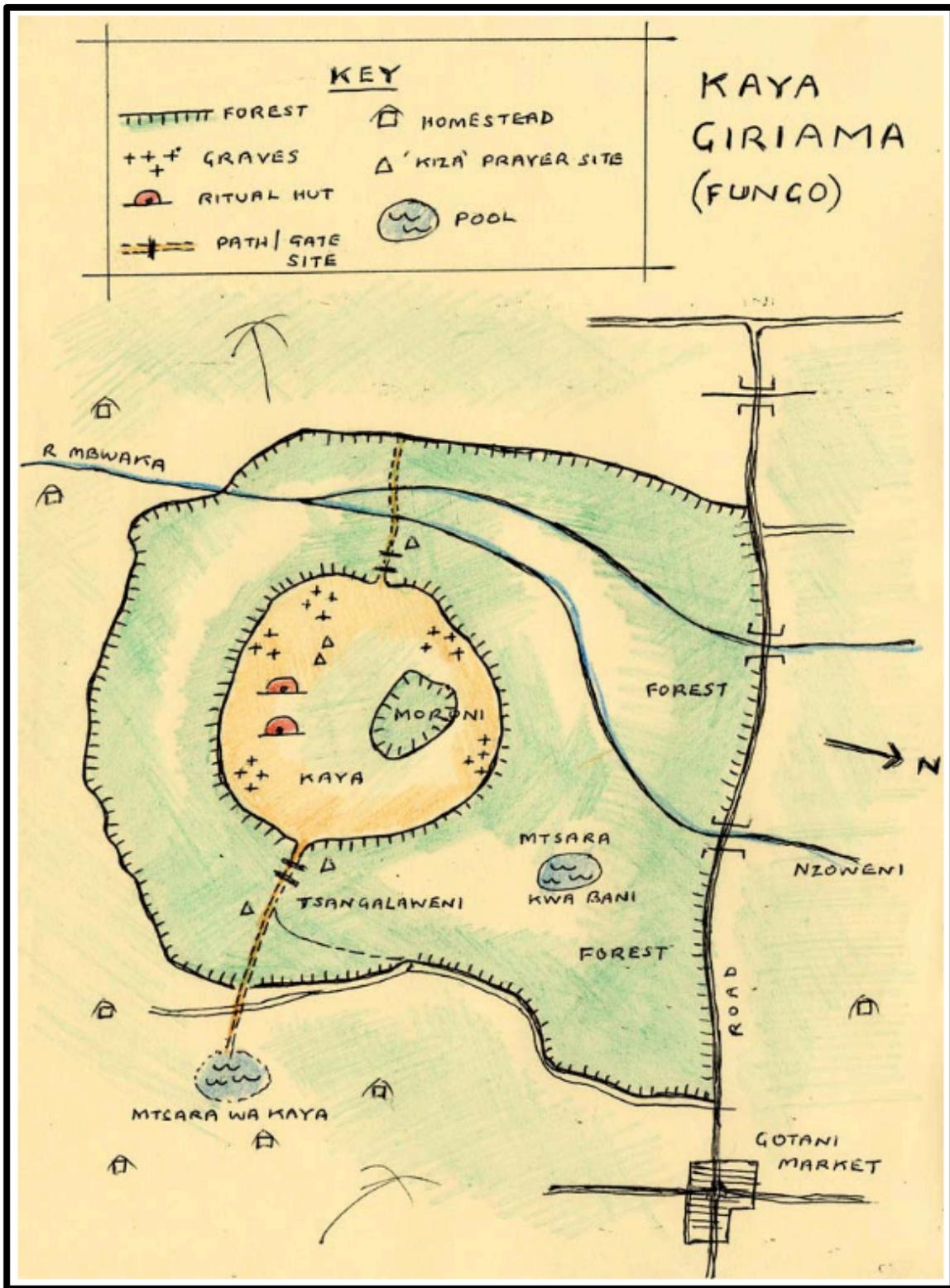
Map A.14: “Plan of Gede, showing shape of enclosure walls to northeast, suggesting possible earlier enclosure.” (Pawlowicz 2017: 221, after Pradines 2004: 119).



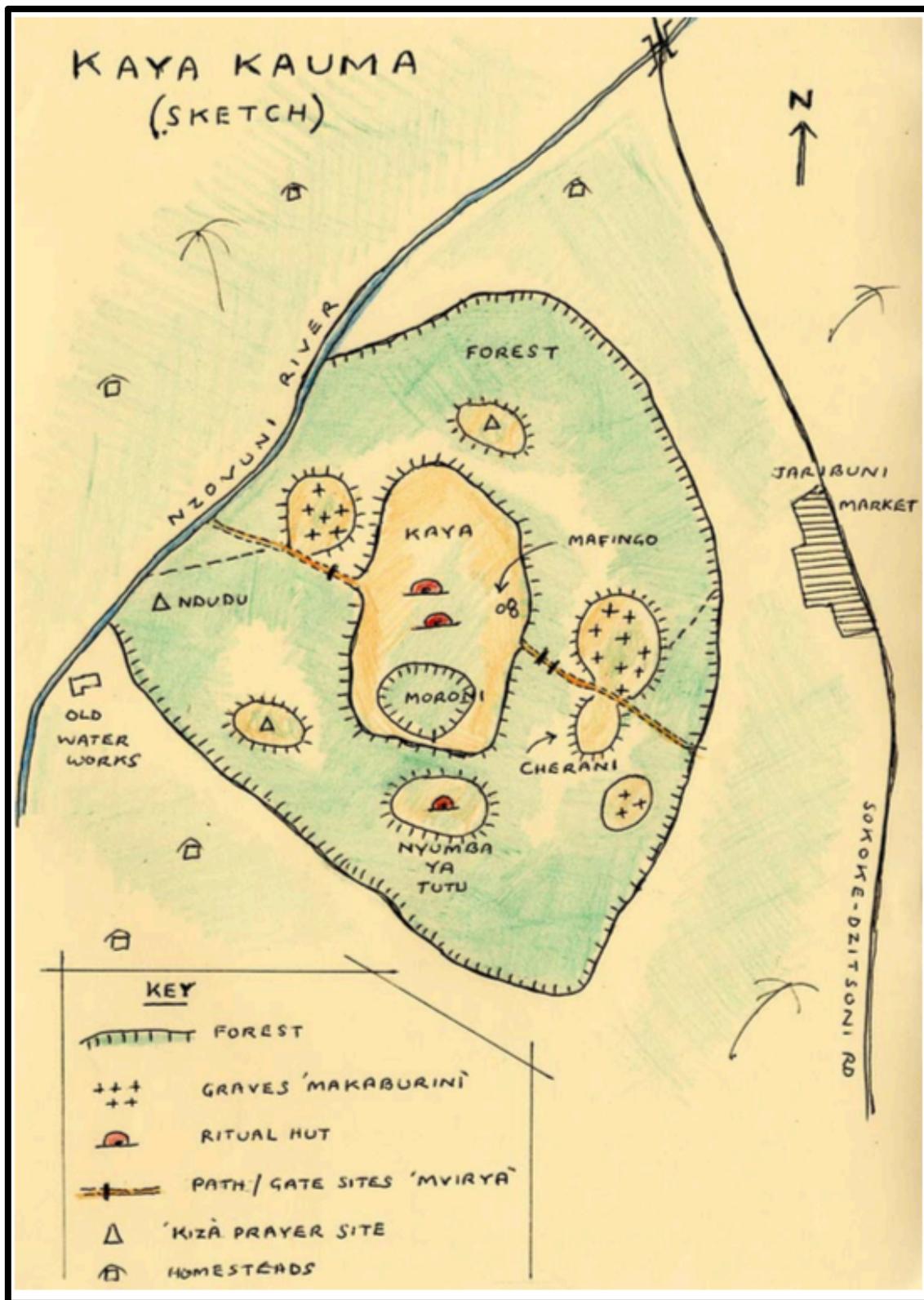
Map A.15: "Boundary maps prepared by F[orest]D[epartment] of a) Kaya Ribe, b) Kaya Kambe, c) Kaya Jibana and d) Kaya Chonyi, gazette as F[orest]R[eserve]s." (Robertson and Luke 1993: 6:34)



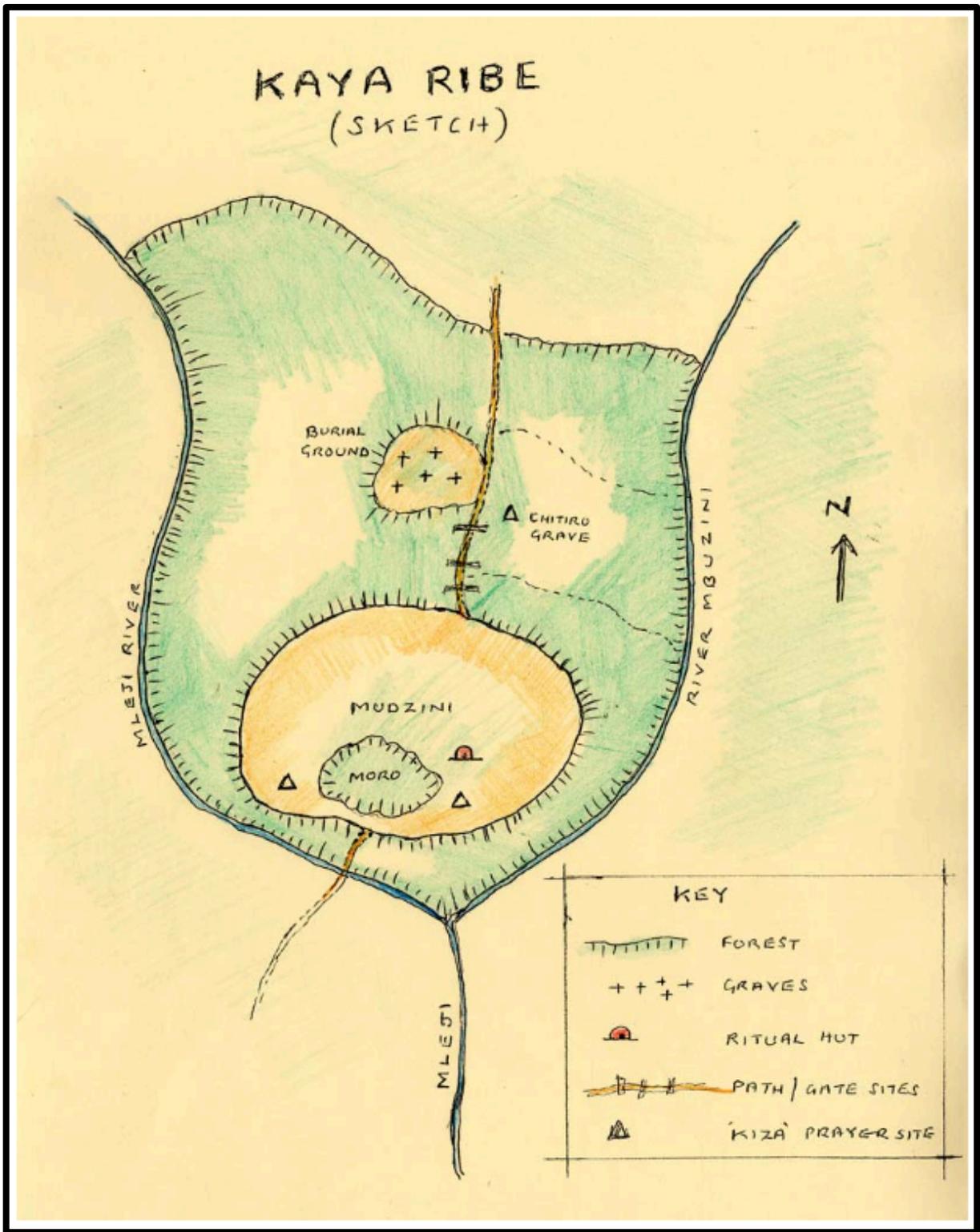
Map A.16: Sketch map of Kaya Fungo by Morton during fieldwork, ca. 1970. Fred Morton Papers, "Oral History" Folder



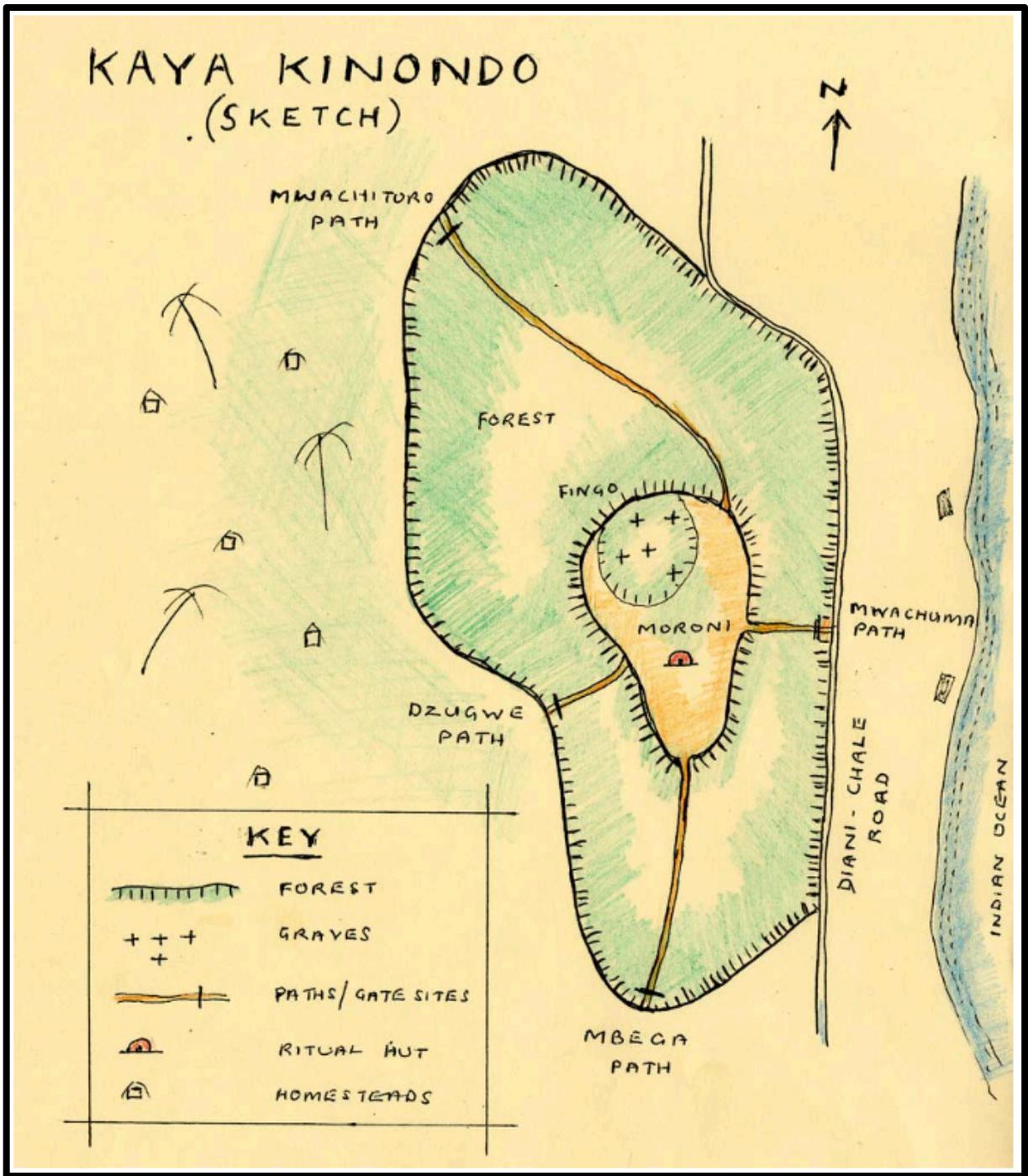
Map A.17: Sketch map of Kaya Giriama AKA Kaya Fungo. Source: National Museums of Kenya 2008: 21.



Map A.18: Sketch map of Kaya Kauma. Source: National Museums of Kenya 2008: 32.



Map A.19: Sketch map of Kaya Ribe. Source: National Museums of Kenya 2008: 36.



Map A.20: Sketch map of Kaya Kinondo. Source: National Museums of Kenya 2008: 50.

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Mzee Abdallah	1 September 2011	Tswaka
	5 September 2011	Tswaka
Mawazo Abdallah	26 November 2014	
Hemedi Ayubu	27 November 2014	Mvumoni
Peku Bodwe	13 August 2017	Magwagwaro
Hassan Shee Bweta	20 August 2017	Tiribe
Karisa Chalis	17 August 2017	Kaloleni
Hassan Charo	20 August 2017	Tiribe
Mohamed Hemedi Chipanga	23 July 2014	Bumbuni Mrima
	26 July 2014	Mrima
	1 August 2014	Bumbuni Mrima
	25 March 2015	Bumbuni Mrima
Omari Chiryauta	29 May 2015	Chigombero Chirwa
Omari Hamadi Chisaga	20 May 2015	Milalani
	26 May 2015	Milalani
	18 June 2015	Milalani
Bakari Hassan Chisuse	12 July 2014	Chigombero
	23 March 2015	Chigombero
	14 May 2015	Chigombero
Bakari Alawi Chombo	27 November 2014	Mvumoni
Mwanasiti Ndaro Bakari Chombo	27 November 2014	Mvumoni
Mohamed Rashid Dzenge	25 July 2014	Majoreni
“Mama Elizabeth”	25 February 2015	Mwazaro Panama
	28 February 2015	Mwazaro Panama
Mohamed Hamisi Fujo	20 May 2015	Bomani
Abdallah Ali Gambere	13 November 2014	Makombani Majoreni
Selemani Mohamed Gambere	30 July 2017	Kikoneni
Haji Hassan Haji	20 August 2017	Tiribe
Mohamed Hamza	3 June 2015	Chigombero
	16 June 2015	Chigombero
Seif Hima	31 July 2017	Shikaadabu

Bakari Abdallah Jereko	11 July 2014	Mshihu
	24 March 2015	Mshihu
	15 May 2015	Mshihu
	18 June 2015	Mshihu
Mwanatama Juma	17 March 2015	Pongwe
Omari Juma	2 April 2015	Chivuleni
Omari Juma	14 May 2015	Chivuleni
Matano Kalama	27 February 2015	Mvumoni
Hilary Mwatsuma Kalama	4 August 2017	Dzitsoni
	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Elius Kalamu	17 August 2017	Kaloleni
Anna Kamwethya	17 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Rose Kanini	26 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
	16 May 2015	Mshihu
	18 May 2015	Mshihu
	2 June 2015	Mshihu
	18 June 2015	Mshihu
Selemani Kassim	28 May 2015	Mwambalazi
Mzee Kassimu	7 September 2011	Tswaka
Josephe Kibungu	28 February 2015	Mwazaro Panama
Charo Kirongo	28 September 2014	Mvumoni
Peter Oloo Kisiengo	20 July 2014	Makongeni
Margaret Kombo	24 September 2014	Mwazaro Nolani
Suleiman Omari Kongoriko	14 June 2015	Bomani
Athman Shee Mahaba	14 August 2017	Mangawani
Ibrahim Malaya	23 August 2017	Gasi
Charo Mananasi	2 October 2014	Mvumoni
Mwanakombo wa Manyuni	11 November 2014	Makombani Majoreni
Ngumbao Masha	17 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Kavumbi Masha	20 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Abdallah Ali Mawazo	19 July 2014	Eshu
Salim Mbwana	26 July 2014	Mrima
Hamadi Kassim Mezaró	15 May 2015	Mshihu
Luvuno Gari Mkambe	13 August 2017	Magwagwaro
Mzee Mkulu	11 August 2011	Pongwe
Abdallah Ali Mnyenze	29 July 2017	Kinondo Makongeni
Kassim Selemani Mnyeto	3 June 2015	Kikoneni
	16 June 2015	Kikoneni
	28 July 2017	Kikoneni
Hassan Abdallah Mvumbo	2 August 2017	Lunga Lunga
Mohamed Hamadi Mwachalika	14 June 2015	Bomani
Mwero Mwachizi	26 February 2015	Kanana
Mwashasha Mwinyiusi Mwakimatu	22 July 2014	Mshihu
	16 April 2015	Mshihu
	17 April 2015	Mshihu

Salim Mwinyiusi Mwakimatu	24 July 2014	Mshihu
Mwakunuka	17 August 2014	Mshihu
Mbeyu Mwapona Mwamuye	28 September 2014	Mvumoni
Mwanahalima	11 September 2011	Pongwe Kidimu
Mwanaisha	15 August 2011	Shimoni
Mwanasha	21 May 2015	Bomani
Caxton Chiphatse Mwanatsi	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Mwanza Mwangiri	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Abedi Abdallah Mwantsumi	11 August 2017	Kwale
Salim Mwabendo Mwasamani	22 March 2015	Ng'onzini Kinango
Kasichana Josephat Mwatsuma	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Mwazema	27 May 2015	Eshu
Kassim Mwero	1 March 2015	Mkono wa Ndugu
Mwinyi	31 July 2017	Shikaadabu
Shabaan Ndegwa	17 August 2017	Kaloleni
Omari Hassan Ndeo	17 March 2015	Pongwe
Simon Ndong'u	28 February 2015	Mwazaro Panama
Ninyiro	16 May 2015	Mshihu Mwachitsozi
	30 May 2015	Mshihu Mwachitsozi
	2 June 2015	Mshihu Mwachitsozi
Nipharu	15 July 2014	Mshihu
	5 April 2015	Mshihu
	13 May 2015	Mshihu
John Nyao	17 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Chari Chimambo Nyawa	30 November 2014	Tswaka Horoziya
Salim Hassan Paku	20 May 2015	Milalani
Juma Pashua	12 August 2017	Jego
Margaret Wanjiru Patrick	26 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Badudu Ramadhan	14 September 2014	Mwazaro Panama
Hassan Saidi Randani	14 August 2017	Viungwani Nyando
Barisa Baruku Rashid	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Benson Mbaruku Rashid	16 August 2017	Kaya Kauma
Jumadari Juma Riko	5 June 2015	Mrima
	6 June 2015	Mrima
	28 July 2017	Mrima
Rumba	28 May 2015	Mwambalazi
Mwanaidi Ibrahim Ruwa	17 August 2017	Kaloleni
Joseph Sanga	21 September 2014	Mvumoni
Bakari Mohamed Sarai	18 May 2015	Mshihu
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	31 May 2015	Mshihu
	18 June 2015	Mshihu
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	16 November 2014	Bumbuni Mrima

	25 March 2015	Bumbuni Mrima
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	2 August 2014	Majoreni
Kassim Mohamed Zema	27 May 2015	Eshu

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2. Gehan Eardley Thomas Wijeyewardene Papers

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ABK	Labour
AH	
BV	
CA	Provincial Administration, Coast
CB	District Commissioner, Kilifi [Formerly DC/KFI]
CC	District Commissioner, Kwale [Formerly DC/KWL]
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
CP	
CQ	District Commissioner, Mombasa [Formerly DC/MSA]
PC/COAST	Provincial Commissioner, Coast
BP	---
RW 967.6204 POU	Copies of Interviews carried out in Kenya, 1974–1975 in Mombasa and Lamu by Rondall [<i>sic</i>] L. Pouwels, PhD.

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CA	Provincial Commissioner, Coast
CB	District Commissioner, Kilifi
CC	District Commissioner, Kwale
CP	
CQ	District Commissioner, Mombasa
DDG	Law Court, Kwale
DDQ	District Cultural Office, Mombasa
DEZ	
DGN	District Cultural Office, Kwale
DTH	
FAJ	Chief’s Office, Takaungu

FAK	Chief's Office, Rabai Location
FAL	Chief's Office, Ribe Location, Rabai
FAM	Chief's Office, Mwawesa Location, Rabai
FAN	Chief's Office, Ruruma Location, Rabai
FAP	Chief's Office, Kambe Location
FBW	District Statistics Office, Kwale
FBX	District Information Office, Kwale
FBY	District Officer, Kubo Division, Kwale
FBZ	Rent Restriction Tribunal, Mombasa
M	
MAA	African Affairs
QJ	

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i. Administrative Files

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ADM	Admiralty
CO	Colonial Office
COPY	Copyright Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
INF	Central Office of Information
MPG	Maps and Plans
MPK	Maps and Plans
MR	Maps and Plans
WO	War Office

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PS MS 17	Papers of Dr. George Wynn Brereton Huntingford
PP MS 20	Papers of James Willoughby Tarleton Allen
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C A5/O 4	Bourazan, Francis
C A5/O 5	Chancellor, Rev. William Bartlett
C A5/O 6	David, George
C A5/O 7	Deimler, Rev. John Gottfried
C A5/O 9	Erhardt, Rev. John James
C A5/O 10	Forster, Edward Wood
C A5/O 11	Handford, John William
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C A5/O 18	Menzies, Rev. Alfred
C A5/O 22	Praeger, Emil Arnold
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C I1/O 103	Erhardt, Rev. John James
C MA M3	Mission Book: Mauritius and Madagascar, 1871–1872
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MS δ [MS 8]	Sparshott Manuscripts (“Kiswaheli vocabulary by Rev. J Erhart [<i>sic</i>] copied by Rev. J. Rebmann.”)
MS ε [MS 9]	Sparshott Manuscripts (“Rebmann’s copy of Krapf’s Kiswahili dictionary. Made in 1850 & added to by Rev. Rebmann during all ___ years of his residence in E. Africa.)
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ACC 95	Papers of the Havergal Family
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ACC 207	Papers of Downes-Shaw family
ACC 211	Photograph Album of Miss Minnie Isabel Culverwell
ACC 258	Diary of Rt. Rev. James Hannington, Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa: January–May 1885
ACC 314	Papers of Henry Charles Binns and Henry Kerr Binns
ACC 393	Papers relating to Florence Instone Deed
ACC 523	Papers of Handley Douglas Hooper
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Hs. or. 9966

Hs. or. 9967

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