ONE

The Art of Connection

AN INTRODUCTION

> Now it is so much easier and better because of the Internet and cell phones. It is really incredible. In the old days, there were always problems with communication and nothing seemed to work right. Before these things, you had to arrange everything ahead of time: When to call. When to be at the pay phone. What time it would be. It was very problematic because communicating was so difficult.
>
> CRAFTS EXPORTER, NAIROBI
> *(Author's Interview, January 9, 2006)*

SINCE 2000, FEW VISITORS TO URBAN EAST AFRICA could help but experience the popularity and usefulness of cell phones and Internet cafés. These new technologies were at the center of a cultural negotiation and performance of modernity, decorated with the advertisements and billboards of service providers selling access to new means of communication and social and economic connection. Corporate marketing of new digital technologies to Kenyans in the twenty-first century was dangling the chance of economic success and social mobility before those who had long been denied full and equal participation in world affairs and economic development. The possibilities were as numerous as the unanswered questions: How were the obvious benefits of new digital technologies being distributed? Were the marketing slogans empty promises, or could these new technologies help boost the economy by jumping more Kenyans into the global economy? To what extent do education, age, gender, ethnic background, and personal connections continue to shape peoples' lived experiences of risk, success, and failure?

To answer these questions, I spent nearly fifteen years interviewing and following Kenyan crafts traders and exporters to see how they adapted new digital technologies to their business strategies at a time already characterized by economic insecurity, informality, and immobility. The importance of new digital technologies to my research participants must be understood within this context. This book is, therefore, more than just a study of digital technologies in Kenya. It is also an exploration of Kenya's tourism and crafts industries, the history of cooperative development in Kenya, and the lived experiences of risk and insecurity that characterized the lives of my research participants as they struggled to maintain business connections during a time of economic upheaval. Because of this, my research shifted frequently from Mombasa's roadsides to the city's Internet cafés, cooperatives, and tourist venues.

Throughout this time, I have remained interested not just in the digital component of the research but in the broader context of Kenya's handicrafts, or "curio," industry of ethnic and tourist arts.[1] Kenya's tourism and crafts industries are not only economically substantial, but they also play a central role in representing and producing knowledge about Kenya and Africa for the rest of the world. This book focuses on the Kenyan exporters, intermediaries, and production organizations that are the foundation of Kenya's crafts industry, including the popular product lines of Kisii soapstone and Kamba (or Akamba) wood carving.[2]

Unlike new digital technologies, which represent globalization and modernity, Kenyan crafts and carvings have typically represented Kenya as "local," "natural," "indigenous," "tribal," "ethnic," or "traditional." Kenyan arts and crafts are rarely signed by individual artists and are more typically marketed through ethnic product lines like Kamba wood carving and Kisii soapstone. By labeling this handmade art as ethnic crafts, it aligns with classic colonial understandings of Africa as "primitive," closer to nature, or still "developing." It is no surprise that most Kamba woodcarvings feature either a tribal-looking figure or a wild animal, saying more about the legacy of colonialism than Kenyan culture.

But beneath the façade, Kenya's art traders and exporters are modern businesspeople who have spent well over a decade adapting cell phones and other digital technologies and apps to their business models. They are anything but local or small-scale. Kenyan businesspeople today are carrying on centuries-old traditions of East Africans working as intermediaries in the global economy (see Prestholdt 2008). By no means are digital technologies suddenly connecting Kenyans to the rest of the world for the first time. The shock value of the typical media trope of an African holding a cell phone is rooted in popular assumptions about culture and change. Considering East Africa has been a center of international trade for centuries, it should not surprise us to see Kenyan traders using the latest technologies. This book is an invitation to think critically about the deeper politics of such images and take a deeper look into the lives of the East African men and women who are very much connected to new digital technologies and have long been active players in the global economy.

As I discuss in the next chapter, Mombasa is not only East Africa's biggest port, but also an ancient city that has for centuries been a center of contact and connection. Cross-cultural connections have a long history on the East African coast, although the power dynamics of those who are meeting and interacting are constantly changing (McIntosh 2009; Meiu 2011). The lived experiences of connections and interactions that make up what we often abstractly call the "global economy" have always come with a fair amount of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls "friction": "the grip of worldly encounter" (2005:1) or "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (4). The challenge to ethnographers is to recover the noncorporate components of globalization and the stories of those who lack power but have "presence" in the world today (Sassen 1998:xxi).[3] Kenya's art traders and exporters are just such noncorporate and often immobile yet transnational actors who, despite being politically and economically disempowered, play an important role in representing Kenyan culture to the rest of the world while also shaping the culture of Kenya's small-business economy.

The research in this book also speaks to two separate but related topics of debate in African studies today: Afropolitanism and the Africa Rising narrative. The image of a cell phone in the hand of an African has been a dominant trope of the Western media since the turn of the twenty-first century. This image has also been used prominently to support the Africa Rising narrative.[4] In 2011 and 2012, both the *Economist* and *Time* magazines ran cover stories titled "Africa Rising."[5] Ironically, in 2000, the *Economist* had titled a cover story about Africa "The Hopeless Continent."[6] *Time* is no newcomer to the Africa Rising narrative, having published an Africa Rising cover story in 1988, just four years after a 1984 cover story titled "Africa's Woes."[7] In all of these cases, the complexity of Africa's history and diversity is erased through the creation of singular entity: Africa. Through this denial of the right to history and complexity, Africa and Africans are relegated to a position where they can be understood only within the binary of Afro-optimism and Afro-pessimism. Despite sounding positive and optimistic, the Africa Rising narrative frames Africa as either rising or falling, moving forwards or backwards.

The image of the Maasai herdsman walking through the savanna while speaking on a cell phone and the accompanying stories of poor Africans revolutionizing their lives with phones and mobile money have amused Western readers and supported the Africa Rising narrative. I do not deny the significance of herdsmen having access to new mobile communication technologies. But we must think carefully about who is producing the Africa Rising narrative and the images that accompany it. I look forward to more herder selfies on social media. But as several analysts have pointed out, much of the Africa Rising hype (and the accompanying statistics) come from North American and European investment banks, whose directors view Africa as an exciting and risky new frontier for investment (Lemma 2013).[8] As the continent that maintained a respectable, growing gross domestic product (GDP) through the most recent global financial crisis, Africa has become for the international banking community, in Lemma's (2013) words, "a brand, a product to be packaged and sold on the merits of its financial worth." Despite the excitement about a growing African middle class and growing GDP in many African countries, a majority of Africans are still regularly affected by poverty (see also Ellis 2011a).

In this book, while I am eager to represent Africa and Africans as modern, global, and connected—and my research participants most certainly were—their lives are not romantic. Connecting to the global economy has proved an insufficient pathway out of poverty. Rather, connecting to the global economy and relying on new technologies for doing international business has come with all types of new risks. I am, therefore, challenged to carefully balance optimism with reality in the way I represent people's lives and experiences here.

Analysts and critics of Afropolitanism are similarly faced with the challenge of balancing optimism with reality. In brief, the idea of Afropolitanism is rooted in a departure from racialized and static thinking about identity to construct alternative, proud, modern, and mobile African identities unified through an aesthetic of cultural and symbolic blending and hybridity (Dabiri 2014; Mbembe 2007).[9] Afropolitanism is rooted in creative innovation and mixing, the "traditional" images and tropes about Africa having always been constructions (Mbembe 2007). In many ways, Afropolitanism is a form of resistance to disparaging Western tropes about Africa, like those famously described in the biting satire of Kenyan writer Binyavinga Wainaina in his now-famous "How to Write about Africa" (2006). Wainaina sarcastically instructs the reader: "Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book. . . . An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these."

He continues, "If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress." An important aspect of Afropolitanism is the production of counterrepresentations to tropes of Africa as impoverished, violent, and tribal. The Afropolitan is modern, global, and connected.

But as with the discourse of Africa Rising, Afropolitanism has also been critiqued for elitism and the central role consumerism plays in its cultural assemblages. Emma Dabiri (2014) has argued that this exclusive consumerism sidelines Afropolitanism's more important insights into race, modernity, and identity. While Afropolitanism has succeeded in giving a voice to Africans, she writes, the narratives of the underprivileged are still largely missing. Referring to Afropolitanism as the "handmaiden of the Africa Rising narrative," she points out that when one searches for *Afropolitan* on Google, many links take you to luxury lifestyle magazines and shops selling jewelry, art, and new types of Afropolitan designs.

Originally catering to white tourists, even Kenya's decades-old crafts industry, which has always also had some customers among the African middle class and bourgeoisie, has adapted to the demand of Afropolitans. Kenyan artisans and craftspeople—especially those who are Afropolitans themselves—are now proudly producing Afropolitan aesthetics through jewelry, fabrics, and handbags that are being sold to both the African middle class and the rest of the world. While these new markets and economic opportunities have the potential to be liberating and empowering, we must remember that they also come with new risks and contradictions. I see this book as an opportunity to further evaluate Afropolitanism and the Africa Rising narrative by providing the stories of the marginalized and underprivileged African traders whose businesses are economically central to producing crafts for Afropolitans and are making at least some analysts say that Africa is, indeed, "rising."

Davis was one such trader.[10] Born in Western Kenya in the early 1970s, he moved to Mombasa at the age of sixteen and soon found employment selling curio art. After ten years working outside Fort Jesus, Mombasa's most frequented tourist attraction, selling handicrafts and carvings to tourists, Davis lost his roadside kiosk in a wave of municipal demolitions in January 2002. But with the help of a cell phone and a personal e-mail account, he found that he could maintain long-term connections with overseas buyers even after being abruptly displaced from his prime location outside of Fort Jesus. Using his cell phone and e-mail to access customers meant Davis was no longer doing business at the whim of the Mombasa's tourism industry. Instead, he was able to shift his business almost entirely into exporting, although only because of connections he had made along the roadside during face-to-face interactions in a predigital age.

Examining a variety of such individuals' experiences allows a more robust understanding of how Africans have adapted new digital technologies to their lives. During my time in Kenya, I was concerned with traders' economic histories in relation to state policy and to local and global events and trends. For example, in another reversal of fortunes, by 2007 Davis could no longer afford his website and had stopped receiving orders from his American and British customers. His major foreign client in the United States, who had even supplied him with his own ATM and business cards, told him quite directly (although through e-mail) that his services would no longer be needed and that his employment was being put on hold indefinitely. The U.S. economy was declining, the dollar was weak, and with fewer Americans traveling and spending money on small souvenirs, the company was cutting back on orders from their overseas suppliers. With no orders and no income, he was suddenly stranded—ejected from the international networks in which he had been a major actor. He had even lost his beloved mobile phone to a moneylender who took it as collateral until the money he had lent to Davis was returned.

In 2014, Davis was struggling to raise chickens to sell eggs to a local tourist hotel.[11] He had been one of the first Kenyans to bridge the "digital divide" but struggled to find an economically productive use for the smartphone I had bought him. He regretted that I could no longer stay with him when I visited Kenya because the small room he shared with two other men was neither secure nor spacious. The economic success he had once experienced was a thing of the past. Amid all of the hopes of Africa Rising and his previous optimism—for jumping scales into international markets, meeting new buyers, and realizing the potential of new digital technologies—Davis found himself between mud walls and under a rusty roof. His story and those of the nearly one hundred other carvers, artisans, traders, and shop vendors I interviewed for this book illuminate the contradictions, hopes, and anguish of so many aspiring Kenyans competing within an economic environment that despite seeming more free and internationally connected is by no means stable or secure.

The insecurity and challenges experienced by Mombasa's small-business class are not new and are rooted in a history of migration and shifting development models. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 1970s, Kenyans from Nairobi, Machakos, and Kisii Districts (now counties) found the trade in handicrafts and carvings very lucrative in the coastal port and tourism hub of Mombasa. With substantial state assistance and insistence, organizations like Mombasa's Kamba woodcarving and Kisii soapstone cooperatives became the foundation of Kenya's handicrafts, or curio, trade during the 1970s and 1980s (see chapter 3). Thousands of mostly Kamba-speaking men from rural Eastern Province, many of whom remain active in carving today, spent decades developing connections with international buyers through the Kamba woodcarving cooperative's showroom and wholesale shops. Many older cooperative members I interviewed had stories of the "glory days" in the 1970s and 1980s, when the woodcarving cooperative's profits allowed poorly educated carvers to make a living and educate their siblings and children. While unique, Kenya's crafts cooperatives have a story similar to that of many thousands of other cooperatives in the country: they had early success, they are remembered nostalgically, and they have now become flooded with an unmanageable number of young people looking for employment.

Kenya's nine thousand registered cooperative societies supported over 2.5 million people in 1999 (Kenya 2002:37). But by then, the cooperatives' relationship with the central government was rapidly changing. Kenyan government support of cooperatives through direct assistance and subsidized services ended with the passage of the Co-operative Societies Act and the Sessional Paper No.6 of 1997 on "Cooperatives in a Liberalized Economic Environment." This act officially marked end of the government's obligation to assist and subsidize cooperatives by making them "free enterprises" forced to compete directly with other privately owned businesses (Kenya 2002:37; Muthuma 2012). While additional legislation was later passed in 2003, 2004, and as recently as 2008 to try to reverse some of the damage and create better government oversight and regulation of cooperatives, the "liberalization" of Kenya's cooperatives just prior to my research greatly increased economic insecurity and instability for everyone in Mombasa's crafts industry.

In addition to cutbacks in support for cooperatives, the municipal government's inconsistent approach to the city's informal and roadside economy was another major source of insecurity in the city. While traders were allowed to remain in a semiformal state along the roadsides through the 1990s, the politicized demolition of at least ten thousand roadside kiosks in Mombasa in late 2001 and early 2002 illuminates the problem of inconsistent and contradictory government policy in regulating the economy, particularly the microenterprise, or "informal," economy. Further, the political tensions surrounding the demolitions and other political activities often played on ethnic tensions in the migrant city. As I will discuss, the demolition of Mombasa's roadside kiosks in Mombasa continued a trend practiced since colonial times of removing marginalized and disadvantaged traders from Mombasa's downtown roadsides. The demolitions further isolated migrant traders and craftspeople like Davis from the potentially lucrative curio and tourism industries while simultaneously politicizing ethnic identities. The ethnic aspect of these political tensions and how they shaped my research participants' sensibilities and strategies is central to the story told in this book.

During the same years that Mombasa experienced its roadside kiosk demolitions (2001–02), access to cell phones and Internet expanded rapidly,[12] providing many disenfranchised traders like Davis with a potential means to negotiate and overcome the many political and economic barriers to enterprise and industry development. By 2005 and 2006, all of the thirty crafts exporters participating in my study were regularly using their cell phones and e-mail for business. But as Davis's story demonstrates, new digital technologies alone are not sufficient for the expansion of Kenya's handicraft industry or growth in profits for producers and small-scale traders. Rather, the stories of the individuals I have followed since 2001 point to the continuing importance of patron-client relations, education, and ethnic politics in shaping successful strategies. Personal connections and networks are as important as ever in an age of social networking, with mobile apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, and M-PESA often reproducing inequalities and the advantages of the wealthy and the well-connected.

Yet the Africa Rising hype around the importance of new digital technologies for economic development and mobility remains in the minds of marginalized and immobile individuals like Davis, who blames himself for his businesses' failure. The dual emergence of digital hype and mobility hype (or the digital-mobile) has been a fundamental aspect of neoliberal globalization in Kenya, with all of its contradictions. Marketers have actively associated digital technologies with freedom and mobility in advertisements and on billboards. For example, a 2006 advertisement for a Kenyan cellular provider featured an image of a young girl hanging from a tire swing and read simply, "Experience Freedom." Associating digital technologies and the new economy with abstract ideas such as freedom is an effective branding and marketing strategy that masks the increasing informality of the economy. Further, this new informality as an organizing logic for small businesses in cities around the world (Roy 2005), while an offshoot of neoliberal thinking, both subverts *and* preserves state power (Hansen 2014; Goldstein 2016). The state has minimal responsibility over regulating the economy, but it has the justification to intervene and tax at will. Just as Mombasa's roadside kiosks had enjoyed a semilegal formality before being violently removed when it became politically expedient (see chapter 3), so too a new generation of Kenyans occupies a semiformal economic space based not on access to urban roadsides but to international networks and mobile technologies. With this shift, the risk from direct government interaction has been mitigated. The new danger lies in becoming dependent upon a fickle global economy and precarious long-distance connections for doing business. Meanwhile, the roadsides that were once lined with kiosks and small shops are now decorated with billboards and advertising for various telecom companies.

Risk is inherent in an informal economy, where the state has withdrawn and the responsibility to manage risk has been left to individuals. Risk has long been theorized as a driving force in a globalized world or during a period of late modernity (Beck 1992, 2000; Giddens 1991). But as the economy changes, so do the risks. With a few important exceptions, there is still little anthropological literature on the precarious nature of new digital technologies and how they relate to risks—both their mediation and their encounter. Scholars have written extensively about how the modern global financial system has globalized risk (LiPuma and Lee 2004) and about the value Western businesspeople and bankers place on investing in "risky" marginalized environments (Orta 2013). Yet risk is not an objective measure but a social construction and in a state of constant flux. Indeed, it seems that what Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky asserted in the early 1980s still holds true today: that due to the uniqueness of individuals' situations, "substantial disagreement remains over what is risky, how risky it is, and what to do about it" (1982:1). Kenyan businesspeople struggling in this new age of the digital-mobile and microinformality have much to teach us about risk and how risk relates to experiences of connection and mobility (and immobility).

The recent increase in mobilities research, often termed the "mobility turn" or the "new mobility paradigm," has been helpful for its focus on the performance of mobility and the power relations that shape individual experiences of mobility and immobility.[13] I am particularly drawn by Nina Glick Schiller and Noel Salazar's call to "move beyond the ready equation of mobility with freedom by examining not only movement as connection but also as an aspect of new confinements and modes of exploitation" (2013:190). The stories in this book are meant to demonstrate how new types of mobilities and opportunities available to struggling Kenyan traders come with not just new types of risks but also new forms of informality and exploitation, a new identity politics, and a new ethics and moral understandings of economic development.

AFRICAN ART AS GLOBAL COMMODITY

During my first months in Kenya as an undergraduate, it was not African art but the art traders, with their precarious livelihoods and their innovative strategies, who really fascinated me. Of course, being able to turn their precarity into my novelty was evidence of my own privilege. But I have continually been drawn to Kenya's art traders because their stories have allowed me to, as James Ferguson has suggested, "conceive, theoretically and politically, of a 'grass-roots' that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well-connected, and opportunistic" (2004:394). Kenya's curio traders and other small-scale tourism operators were modern businesspeople with dreams of moving out of Kenya and operating transnationally as empowered social and economic actors. But the individual stories of semilegal entrepreneurs who are central to the global economy are often purposefully silenced. As Christopher Steiner writes, "the African art trader has been relegated by silence to an invisible cog in the wheels of a complex transnational market—a market which functions because of, *not* in spite of, the African middleman" (1994:10).

Writing about the commercial or economic side of the African art trade seemed surprising and counterintuitive to many Americans with whom I discussed my research. African art in North America and Europe is generally understood to represent a romanticized, precolonial ritual setting that was ostensibly free of the political and economic pressures that structure the world today. But it is important to remember that Kenya's handicrafts industry is rooted in colonialism and economically substantial. The woodcarving component alone was estimated during the mid-1990s to earn as much as US$20 million annually (Choge, Cunningham, and Ellery 2005, citing Obunga 1995 and Choge 2002). While it is nearly impossible to calculate the number of carvers, sanders, decorators, and vendors working in the woodcarving industry, Raymond Obunga (1995) estimated during his mid-1990s survey that there were 60,000–80,000 active carvers in Kenya with over 400,000 dependents (see Choge, Cunningham, and Ellery 2005:33).

One way to construct an ethnography that pushes beyond earlier anthropological preoccupations with bounded social systems or the "tribal unit" has been to follow the change of a commodity's meanings through its "social life" from production to consumption (Appadurai 1986; Steiner 1994). As Sidney Mintz (1985) did with sugar and Eric Wolf (1982) did with numerous commodities, the contributors to Arjun Appadurai's (1986) collection on the "social life of things" sought to examine the movement of commodities around the world and thus the *process* of change of objects' meanings as they circulated. African woodcarving industries, as Steiner (1994) has demonstrated, are a fertile ground for such studies (see also Jules-Rosette 1984). Kenya's handicrafts industry is just one example of many such industries that are struggling to adjust to the challenges of the global economy.

Kenya's crafts industry is especially interesting because it has long been at the center of global conversations about the meanings of Africa—as both an idea and a place—and its relationship with the rest of the world. Objects are, for example, assigned meaning when placed in the home or the "curio cabinet," as the artifact is removed from the public space of the museum to a private, domestic space. This practice has a long history. The continued terming of Kenya's commodified carvings and crafts as *curios* is traceable to the initial categorization of African art by Europeans as "curiosities," or objects that were considered "worthy neither of scientific investigation nor aesthetic appreciation" (Steiner 1994:108). Often termed *ethnic and tribal arts,* these arts and crafts have long figured into generalized cultural comparisons that hinged on underlying ethnocentric assumptions of cultural evolutionism. Using art to place diverse human cultures into an evolutionary hierarchy was useful to Europeans and Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "because [art] constituted . . . the ultimate measure of human achievement" (Phillips and Steiner 1999b, 7). As Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner described, "The presence or absence of 'true art,' defined as free creation unfettered by functional requirements, could be used as a kind of litmus test of the level of civilization a group of people had supposedly achieved" (1999b, 7). Art informed nineteenth-century debates about whether Africa was rising or falling in the same way that digital technology does today. I would suggest that the image of an African holding a cell phone has become the litmus paper of twenty-first-century African achievement.

While the initial twentieth-century demand for African art, especially in France, was limited to the Cubists, a curiosity about Africa following the First World War helped slowly stimulate demand for African art among European consumers in other sectors of society (Steiner 1994:4–5).

Particularly with the onset of mass international tourism following the Second World War, ethnic and tourist arts became what Phillips and Steiner call “a special category of exotica, . . . constructed not just to represent the idea of the handmade, but also to display iconographic motifs and forms that signified ‘old’ ways of life imagined as simpler and more satisfying” (1999b:13). As Europe modernized through the twentieth century, exporting ideas and dreams of technological breakthrough and global economic integration, the art of the non-West provided the “Others” and their handmade, unsigned crafts against which white Euro-American intellectual-tourists could compare themselves for reassurance of their own modernity and civility.[14]

Kenya’s handicrafts industry is inseparable from its tourism industry and the tourist imagination (Salazar 2011). Kenya’s tourism industry is one of the oldest in Africa, first gaining fame in the early twentieth century for its big-game hunting.[15] Because tourism in Kenya has generally been accepted as an economic boon and a valuable asset to the national economy, tourism development was initially subsidized by the government, especially in the form of transportation infrastructure to connect the parks and beaches to Mombasa and Nairobi (Ondicho 1999:49–51). Kenya, long the center of international capitalism and investment in East Africa (Miller and Yeager 1994:3; Cooper 2002; Leys 1975; Throup 1987), came to dominate East African tourism after the 1947 establishment of the East African Tourist Travel Association (EATTA) (Alila and McCormick 1999; Ndege 1992; Sindiga 1999; Ondicho 1999). This regional association was based in Nairobi and was considered to privilege the development of Kenyan tourism over Uganda and Tanzania within British East Africa (Alila and McCormick 1999:7).[16]

After independence in 1963, President Jomo Kenyatta’s government followed the colonial lead and developed Kenya as one of Africa’s most popular tourist destinations. During the 1960s, international tourism was largely seen globally as enabling economic development and therefore a public good. The United Nations, for example, declared 1967 International Tourism Year (Crick 1989:315). That same year, the U.S. government gave $3 million to Kenya for tourism development, most of which went to strengthening infrastructure in Nairobi and Mombasa (Akama 1999:15). By 1969 tourism took the place of coffee as the country’s single largest source of foreign exchange.[17] Large government-supported bodies such as the Kenya Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), the Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC), and the Development Finance Company of Kenya (DFCK) became important actors during the early independence period, when development policy was focused on enabling the government to carefully control investments (Leys 1975:131–32).[18]

These investments in infrastructure created the slate upon which the messages of Kenyan tourism could be written and consumed by the world's leisure class. The constellation of symbols and language central to Kenyan tourism "is as much a structure of power as it is a structure of meaning," writes Edward Bruner (1991:240). In Kenya, much of that meaning and representation is produced, conveyed, and consumed through arts and crafts sold to tourists. The vendors of those crafts, therefore, have a certain degree of power and influence over the messages of Kenyan tourism.

Kenya's tourism and curio industries initially derived their symbolism from images of "tribal" Maasai pastoralists and wildlife motifs, largely because these were the stereotypical images of Africa desired by white Westerners and tourists. These relatively tame primordial images successfully marketed Kenya through the 1970s and 1980s, when the young nation was perceived internationally as "an 'island' of stability in a 'sea' of political turmoil in the African continent" (Akama 2002:8). These early depictions were firmly rooted in the British colonial imagination and had been nurtured by the colonial settlers, administrators, and travelers who were Kenya's initial tourists and the original consumers of Kenya's carvings and crafts. To meet this demand, Kenyan artisans and businesspeople had first begun developing new products to sell specifically to the British following the First World War. By Kenyan independence in 1963, major networks for the production and distribution of arts and crafts connected Kenyan artisans and cooperatives to the rest of East Africa and the world.

The desire and allure underlying Western curiosity about Africa and its art had not dissipated by the end of the century. In a discussion of late twentieth-century museum presentations of African art, Steiner (1996) discussed how African art still relies upon a process of mystification and discovery to be palatable and desirable for Western consumption. He describes how African art, while often unchanging in form, has continued to be represented for the American public (specifically in New York City museums and exhibitions) as a newly discovered form of primitive art that is proof that Others are capable of exotic masterpieces. Steiner compared New York City's late-twentieth-century attraction to African art to that of the 1930s, arguing that the production and reproduction of images of Africa in the West relied on a continual erasing and rediscovery of Africa's past. It is, indeed, the erasure of Africa's past that has allowed the singular concept of "Africa" (or Africa

Rising) to emerge as a sociocultural reality in the early twenty-first century. This erasure also speaks to the illusion and mystification inherent in the presentation of all African art, although my research participants were slowly shifting away from presenting Africa as a place of wild animals, tribal peoples, and colonial discovery toward representing it as a connected but marginalized place in need of help.

I often asked myself whether revealing rather than erasing the recent history and economic realities of Kenya's crafts industry potentially damages the value of the art itself. Not necessarily, I have concluded; value is always a slippery construct. Products labeled as Fair Trade, for example, generate value by explicitly informing altruistic consumers about production conditions (see chapters 6 and 7). In later chapters I will discuss the phenomenon of marketing marginality, or revealing producers' marginality or poverty to attract altruistic customers.[19] Amid this tension between revelation and obfuscation, ideas like transparency, trust, and ethics would also become central to traders' strategies for brokering the meanings and the value of the arts and crafts they sold.

TRANSPARENCY AND THE ART OF CONNECTION

In this book, I use "art of connection" in two primary ways. In one sense, it is a means by which businesspeople create and maintain economic ties, in the case of my research participants, after being physically displaced. In other words, it is an economic strategy or series of strategies involving both material transactions and symbolic performances. Digital technologies are central to these evolving strategies for maintaining business connections and for producing representations of connection and transparency. Digital technologies also expand the types of connections that can be repeatedly made at multiple scales: between intermediaries and their local, regional, and global networks; between producers and consumers over great distances; between producers and consumers in face-to-face encounters; and between citizens and states. As much as the art of connection is about enabling mundane business transactions and face-to-face interactions, it is also about fantasy, idealization, illusion, and obfuscation. The art of making and maintaining connections looks very different for producers than it does for Kenyan exporters, intermediaries, or overseas buyers.

In a second sense, the art of connection is an artistic motif that has become very popular since the 1990s. The art-of-connection motif, to which I return in chapter 7, displays interhuman connection, often through abstract anthropogenic forms that lack gender or race. These carvings and sculptures generally depict balanced connection, or even equality. As I argue in chapter 7, they are popular among Kenyan vendors as well as tourists and buyers because they depict an ideal of egalitarian global connectivity that is free from the constraints of racial or gender inequality. One might even call these sculptures and their ideals Afropolitan. While these sculptures are fundamentally ideological—we indeed live in a world structured by racial, gender, and other forms of inequality—they artistically display the importance of and value placed upon equality and transparent and trusting connection in the world today.

While transparency is experienced in fleeting moments, it is crucial for forming the connections (especially long-distance, digital connections) essential to economic survival, risk management, and the balancing of multiple identities and affiliations in the modern world. In an age of neoliberalism, transparency has globally become a powerful form of intervention into a world of understandable and controllable relations (Ballestero 2012, 160; Bessire 2005; Gaonkar and McCarthy 1994; Hetherington 2011). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), for example, work under the guise of transparency to rationalize their interventions. As Martin Webb has argued, "the work of transparency activists is directed at producing an 'ethical scene' in which their poor clients are encouraged to understand themselves as potentially empowered citizens of a nation wounded by corruption and bad governance" (2012:206). Transparency, an idea based upon a deceptively simple visual metaphor, is rooted in illusion and has a deep politics that ethnography can help us to better understand (Ballestero 2012; Hetherington 2011; Poggiali 2016).

I am interested in the connections between digital technologies and transparency, and particularly the idea that digital technologies will make relationships among long-distance traders or between citizen and state more transparent. I have found that rather than having any automatic impact, new digital technologies like cell phones challenged long-distance traders and exporters to appear transparent in ways they may previously have not had to. Long-distance impersonal business has brought a new challenge of trust. New linguistic and symbolic practices—from web-page designs to business cards—have become essential for negotiating inequality over distances and making and maintaining new connections—or the art of connection.

The best example of the production of a sense of transparency as central to the art of connection comes in the form of the Fair Trade sticker, ethical branding, or what I refer to as "NGO aesthetics" and the marketing of marginality.[20] Fair Trade's ethical philosophy involves connecting craftspeople and producers directly to Western importers, thus bypassing intermediaries (Reichman 2008:108). But in addition to the implicit assertion that buyers are being connected directly and fairly to nonexploited producers, Fair Trade companies also regularly claim that their crafts are made by "single mothers," "disabled girls," or "homeless children" as a way to attract altruistic buyers who want to participate in African "development." It is generally assumed that these marginalized artisans are treated fairly, although *fair* is rarely clearly defined, and even when it is (such as by Fair Trade labeling organizations), there is insufficient oversight. What makes this economically profitable from the perspective of the Kenyan crafts traders and exporters is that now they can attract customers by presenting their often exploitative business practices as transparent. They can openly market that the products they are selling are being made by marginalized and exploited groups.

In other global industries, such as textiles, this search for the cheapest labor to maintain the highest profit margins is known as the "race to the bottom" (Klein 2002; Rudra 2008; Tonelson 2002). Naomi Klein has documented how corporate lifestyle-branding works to obfuscate the realities of the sweatshop labor that actually drives the global textile industry. But the Fair Trade brand is different. It succeeds by not only erasing the exploitative realities of the global economy but revealing the realities of marginality and need. The only remaining challenge for intermediaries is to erase their potentially exploitative existence, or render themselves invisible. This is crucial to avoid fears of exploitation among customers.

Not only do most Kenyan carvers and craftspeople make very little money, but even the exporters and intermediaries—the actual people who apply the Fair Trade stickers—live lives that are surrounded by insecurity and shaped by the uncertainties of Kenyan politics and the global economy. If a trader is ever slow to adapt and innovate, competitors can quickly use their advantages to cut him or her out of the business (as with Davis). Individual entrepreneurs with personal connections were generally the fastest to adapt cell phones and e-mail to their businesses, setting the stage for intense competition with the more established workshops and cooperatives (see chapter 6). Throughout this competition, the Fair Trade sticker has continued to represent a transparent, ethical, and trusting relationship that makes the intermediary and the exploitative realities of production invisible. By balancing revelation and obfuscation—what is revealed and what is not—Kenyan art traders can produce a sense of trust and transparency that is central to the art of connection.

In summary, I use and have observed transparency being used in two ways. First, from a more emic perspective, being transparent implies being ethical or trustworthy. The word *transparency* itself has had great significance in Kenya since at least the 1990s, and it is often used within a political context as the opposite of corruption. When applied to the economy, *transparency* suggests trust, honesty, and fairness. A business might be seen as ethical because it is transparent with its customers and employees. But traders, governments, and corporations alike can produce a sense of transparency today in order to simplify very complex and potentially exploitative economic networks and their political realities. Transparency as the deployment of an ethical scene emphasizes intelligibility and simplicity over complexity, which brings us to the more complicated usage of transparency.

In a second, more etic sense, transparency is also about erasure or strategic invisibility. Transparency, Andrea Ballestero (2012) has argued, is about much more than making the opaque visible. For example, with the application of a Fair Trade sticker, Kenyan exporters are not only revealing but also simplifying complex economic realities by branding them as "ethical." By doing so, they render their own roles as potentially exploitative intermediaries invisible, leaving the eventual consumer with the opportunity to purchase not just a material commodity but a direct connection to a needy artisan. Therefore, while transparency can make the opaque *visible*—by revealing the marginality of artisans to attract altruistic buyers—performing or producing a sense of transparency can also serve to erase complex economic realities and render potentially exploitative intermediaries *invisible*. Transparency, therefore, is not just about revelation but also erasure. The art of connection relies upon maintaining trust by balancing revelation and obfuscation.

Transparency thus becomes central to the art of connection, both through the idealistic connections depicted in the artistic motif and in the form of the new branding and symbolic strategies used by traders to maintain the fleeting notions of trusted long-distance connection in the minds of their business partners and the eventual consumers. Clever labeling and branding tactics—which also involve removing all the original labeling placed on products by the actual producers—are essential for exporters and intermediaries to maintain their jobs and positions within the commodity chain. The art of connection I discuss in this book is, therefore, a story of how disadvantaged Kenyan exporters and intermediaries balance the intimacy and distance afforded by new digital technologies to perform trusting and ethical connections and practices while erasing unappealing political and economic realities (such as ethnopolitical violence) and the complexity of the commodity chain itself.

This book speaks to ethnicity in Kenya—its tenacious reifications and conflicts, its lived realities, and the efforts to challenge ethnic divisiveness (see Bravman 1998; Lynch 2011; McIntosh 2009; Osborne 2014). Beyond being dutiful presentations of political and economic history, the first several chapters of this book focus specifically on situating ethnicity in Kenya. But the stories I tell are not just of conflict and reification of difference but also of how businesspeople have struggled to overcome ethnic divisiveness to find economic success and to manage risk. The businesspeople who participated in my research were operating within an extremely insecure and risky political and economic environment. As ethnic identities were politicized by Kenya's political elites in feuds over election votes (especially in 1997 and 2007–08), traders I knew who depended upon tourism and economic stability became perturbed by ethnic or "tribal" rivalries and performances.

Meanwhile, Kenyan art that showed the nation to be modern, changing, and new, represented Kenya as welcoming to tourists without playing on labels, brands, and symbols that were often politically sensitive. It appealed to tourists on its own terms, as modern or worldly with a cosmopolitan identity and neither "tribal" nor "traditional" in either a cultural or economic sense. Although John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff have demonstrated in their book *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009) that ethnic symbolism has a powerful value when marketed in a neoliberal era, I found that ethnic tension in Kenya was one of many reasons for crafts producers and traders to de-ethnicize their products and downplay ethnic or "tribal" symbolism. Ethnicity can generate value in the world today, but only in relation to the lived realities of ethnic conflict as experienced in real-world locales and contexts. As I will discuss, it is at times advantageous to replace the ethnic brand with the Fair Trade label.

PROJECT DESIGN, LANGUAGE, AND METHODS

This book is the product of a longitudinal study and my long-standing relationships with people who could be termed informants or research subjects.

I prefer to use the term *research participant* because terms like *informant* deceptively suggest that such individuals were passive subjects in the overall project and simply gave me information or were observed. The research was in many ways a collaboration between me and the Kenyans who steered and directed my lines of inquiry. This ethnography is also the result of my ability (or inability at times) to stay in contact with traders for more than a decade as I worked to continue my studies and research and they tried to sustain and expand their businesses. Digital technologies played a central role in my ability to keep in touch with participants, breaking down the oft-described boundary between "the field" and "the home."

At the core of this research and my own exercise in international social connectivity was my ability to communicate and use language to my benefit rather than allow it to be a hindrance. Fluency in colloquial Kenyan Swahili and overall linguistic flexibility gave me the social mobility needed to live and function within the array of communities found in urban and semiurban coastal Kenya. Urban and well-educated Kenyans tend to be multilingual, usually knowing at least conversational English and Swahili as well as other indigenous or foreign languages. I found that many urban Kenyans, especially those from multiethnic areas of Nairobi and Mombasa or those who had gone to school with Kenyans from around the country, knew at least some of the language of their parents' ethnic group (or groups), as well as bits and greetings of Kikuyu, Luo, and the languages of other large Kenyan ethnic communities. Kenyans with whom I interacted daily, ranging from roadside vendors to academics, found it peculiar that a foreigner like me would take interest in the local languages of Kenya. But Kenyans tended to view my language skills positively if for no more reason than the novelty, and language became an important way to demonstrate that I was not just another tourist. I could explain my interest in language by pointing out that it was, indeed, my job to know the bits and pieces of Giriama, Kikuyu, and Luo that were slipped into everyday speech in Mombasa just as it was theirs to learn enough German, French, and Italian to greet the variety of foreign tourists that frequent Mombasa and conduct a simple business transaction with them. I also felt it was important to conduct interviews in people's first languages so that they could feel comfortable expressing themselves. As a result, many of the quotes in this book are translations from Swahili or, more commonly, a mixture of Swahili and English.

My research began in early 2001, when I lived in the Hermes Hotel in downtown Mombasa and walked ten minutes to Fort Jesus daily to sit and chat with the roadside vendors and tour guides.[21] At the time I was studying Swahili intensively as a twenty-year-old study-abroad student. Those first months of research were spent on the roadside or in the park outside of the fort, playing chess and checkers, getting rained on, and primarily just talking and telling stories. I learned about Swahili slang and Kenyan popular culture while explaining how Americans *really* felt about George W. Bush and who *really* killed Biggie and Tupac (both questions I was regularly asked in the early days of research). Beyond developing rapport and cultural competency, my goal was to understand the basic components of the traders' businesses, how they had come to occupy their dilapidated roadside structures, and how they related to the residents of the immediate Old Town community. I also considerably expanded my knowledge of Swahili and developed strong friendships with many of the vendors, who were in some cases as interested in being friends with a young American as I was in learning about their livelihoods.

As I got to know the Fort Jesus curio traders better, I realized that they offered an interesting window onto larger social and economic processes in Mombasa, largely challenging the simple arguments about coastal ethnopolitical allegiance and conflict. For example, Davis was a vendor whose father was Luo and whose mother was Kisii but who spoke Kikuyu (in addition to Kisii, Swahili, and English) fluently after growing up in Nairobi. As a result, while he lacked a formal education or wealth, Davis had several situational ethnic identities to draw upon. His ethnic identity carried a great deal of ambiguity, challenging the notion that ethnic categories in Kenya were rigid and inflexible.

Wanjiru, a woman of eighteen when I first met her in 2001, was socially categorized as Kikuyu despite the fact that she was born and raised in Mombasa and did not speak Kikuyu fluently. In 2005 she self-identified as one of the *Mombasani,* a term used by many young Kenyans in Mombasa from noncoastal ethnic groups who stressed that they had no home other than Mombasa. While she and other Kenyans were often seen as migrants or outsiders on the Kenyan coast, claims to tenure and belonging along Mombasa's roadsides were complicated (see chapter 2).

Other curio vendors like Simon, born in 1978, had migrated to Mombasa in the mid-1990s from near the town of Samburu in Kwale District of Coast Province. He had lived in Mombasa for less time than either Davis or Wanjiru, but he was generally categorized by the government, scholars, and local communities as a "coastal person" (*mpwani*) and a Mijikenda, whereas the others were seen as migrants or "upcountry people" (*watu wa bara*).

The contradictions of ethnoregional identity were numerous, and the ironies were pervasive around the tourism industry and curio trade, which sold its own form of "tribalism" to a Western audience through Kamba woodcarving, Maasai beadwork, and Kisii soapstone. This was despite the constructed nature of these categories and the fact that Kenyan handicrafts were often made by individuals from backgrounds other than those of the labels used to market the art. The traders lining the roadside outside of Fort Jesus in 2001 represented to me all of the complexities and contradictions not just of identity but also of economic necessity for Mombasa's struggling businesspeople.

When the kiosks that provided the basic infrastructure for the population of my original study were demolished with the rest of Mombasa's roadside structures in December 2001 and January 2002 (see chapter 3), the new regime of economic change and urban "cleaning" began to steer my project. The ethnic politics and tensions that surrounded elections and events like the kiosk demolitions were also central to the stories I collected. I had initially been interested in the realities of conducting a business along the roadside in urban Mombasa. Now my research participants, many of whom could barely keep in touch with me by phone or e-mail, were struggling to find any opportunity available.

The importance of cell phones and e-mail access to my participants at this particular time of crisis was something that I felt needed emphasis, especially as Kenya would soon be dubbed Africa's "Silicon Savanna" (Perry 2011). A longitudinal research design allowed me to follow the larger patterns of how digital technologies and economic changes influenced traders and their business strategies. Rather than sidelining new tools like cell phones and the Internet, I decided to bring them to the forefront of my research agenda, making the impact of new communication technologies a central component of my Fulbright-funded, year-long dissertation research project (2005–06; see Mahoney 2009).

Beginning in 2005, I began to focus (in person or remotely through contacts) on three research zones: (1) Mombasa's Old Town outside of Fort Jesus; (2) Changamwe, home to the Kamba and Kisii cooperatives, Magongo Curio Market, and many of my research participants; and (3) the beaches of the North Coast, including the tourist venues and informal economic networks built up around the public beach locally known as "Pirates" after a local club and performance venue. In 2005 and 2006, I rented an apartment in the middle of Mombasa Island overlooking the city's football stadium and roughly geographically in the center of my three research zones, allowing me daily access to each. In 2007 and 2008 I lived just north of Mombasa in the area between Kikambala and Mtwapa, and in 2014 I stayed in the city very close to the train station. On many mornings, I would ride with other commuters into downtown Mombasa, alight at the General Post Office, buy a newspaper and walk down Makadara and Nkrumah Roads toward the Town Hall, municipal offices, and Fort Jesus. After a few hours of chatting with the vendors as they set up their businesses and began their days, I would head back toward the Post Office to catch a *matatu* to Changamwe. Coming back into Mombasa in the late afternoon usually afforded enough time to eat before heading to the North Coast for the evening (see map 1, in the next chapter).

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

In total, well over 150 individuals participated in the research on which this book is based. Of those participants, a majority were involved in the curio industry as carvers or traders, although many had no direct connection to the handicrafts business. Roughly one-quarter of eventual research participants were part of the research beginning in 2001, while the rest were slowly added with time and through snowball sampling. While most of those who participated were male, more than twenty women participated. As I will discuss in future chapters, although men were historically at the center of the carving industries, and the populations of Kenyan cities have been disproportionately male since the colonial era, women have found their own niche in the crafts industries making certain products like baskets and beadwork or as vendors along roadsides or on beaches. I am indebted to the Republic of Kenya for allowing me to conduct this research and to everyone who participated in this research, and I feel a great burden in trying to represent their experiences as best I can.

A NOTE ON NAMING

To further complicate the task of writing about ethnicity in Africa, many categories, politically constructed or not, exist as linguistic or geographic entities. For example, "Swahili" people are called the *Waswahili* in the Swahili language, and their language, *Kiswahili*. Kenya's coast is also often simply called the Swahili Coast, despite the minority status of Swahili in the region. This is a separate issue from the old question "Who is a Swahili?" (see Eastman 1971), the answer to which is largely historically and geographically dependent. While it is necessary to refer to ethnic communities in this book, I only do so with hesitation. My goal is not to problematically essentialize ethnic communities that are themselves colonial constructions and under continual contestation and negotiation. Rather, I wish to capture and represent the linguistic and political realities I found. To give another example, Kamba speakers are called *Wakamba* in Swahili and *Akamba* in their own language, Kikamba. It is therefore common to hear the Kamba cooperative called the Akamba cooperative. For convenience, I have used the common English root terms *Swahili, Kamba*, and *Kikuyu* to refer to ethnic communities and languages. But this is an admittedly imperfect attempt. I have tried to problematize ethnic categories when possible, and I have noted in backnotes cases that are less clear.

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

Another problem arose in naming the types of wood carved. Anthony Cunningham has raised this issue regarding the wood carved and sold across East Africa, asking: "When you are told that a wood is mahogany, ironwood or ebony, for example, which one of the 30 tree species commonly called 'mahogany,' 100 species called 'ironwood' or 40 species called 'ebony' do you think this refers to?"[22] To further complicate the linguistic reality, most trees and woods sold in Kenya have names in Swahili and other African languages as well as in English. The very dark-colored African blackwood, for example, is called *mpingo* in Swahili. *Mpingo* in turn is translated into English as "ebony," even though African blackwood *(Dalbergia melanoxylon)* is not a "true ebony" of the *Diospyros* genus. In a similar case, the wood most preferred by the carvers, called *muhugu (Brachylaena huillensis)* and usually translated as "mahogany," is actually a hard guava wood and not a "true mahogany" (Jules-Rosette 1984:119). However, because these woods are commonly sold and marketed as "ebony" and "mahogany," I often use the same terms as the traders and note any inconsistencies in the backnotes.

How have preexisting inequalities along lines of education, age, gender, ethnic background, and personal connections been reproduced historically? What role does a history of British indirect rule and cooperative development play in shaping how Kenyans from diverse backgrounds understand and navigate the risks and opportunities created by new digital communication technologies? The next two chapters of the book blend history and ethnography to give the reader a fuller understanding of the historical struggles over belonging in Mombasa.

In chapter 2, I explore the history of social inequality and the conflicting discourses of marginality predominant in the city. One view shared by many struggling migrants holds that they have been denied their rights as Kenyan citizens. Another represents various coastal communities that have been actively disenfranchised and manipulated by both the colonial and postcolonial governments of Kenya. Both groups make claims to land and political representation in Mombasa—one from a national perspective and one from a regional perspective. This comparison frames a decade of individual stories of ethnic insecurity and the struggle to access cooperatives and municipal markets, local and international economic networks, tourist hotels and beaches, and ethnic neighborhoods and communities. This chapter is also important for providing background on ethnic politics and tensions that were so central to the precarious economic environment in which my participants were competing.

Chapter 3 then traces the development of Kenya's tourism and handicraft industries from their roots in twentieth-century British colonialism. I draw on archival as well as ethnographic data collected just before the 2002 demolition of Mombasa's roadside kiosks, which form the starting point for the larger longitudinal study. I focus on the array of experiences of Mombasa's roadside traders of diverse backgrounds as they struggle with the privatization and segregation of urban residential and commercial space both before and after the demolitions.

Chapter 4 engages with the theme of economic informality and economic regulation in Kenya. In 2002, Mwai Kibaki was elected on an anticorruption platform that stressed job creation, telecom liberalization, "city cleaning," and increased revenue collection. I am interested specifically in how the relationship between the informal economy and the Kenyan state changed during Kibaki's presidency (2002–2013), particularly in Mombasa and among my research participants. I am concerned with how residents of Mombasa, including those who work around the tourism industry, understood their rights and economic opportunities following waves of urban kiosk demolitions between 2001 and 2004. I also use detailed ethnographic examples and economic histories to demonstrate the effects of government attempts to license and tax coastal handicrafts traders and tourism operators.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the impact of new digital technologies on artisans, exporters, and cooperative organizations. Chapter 5 provides a comparison of Simon and Davis, two traders who developed very different strategies after the demolition of the roadside kiosks. Building on my argument about the importance of risk for assessing new mobilities developed in chapter 5, chapter 6 explores the ideas of transparency, Fair Trade, and "ethical" development. I argue that the art of connection in an economically informal age when digital technology has become essential is rooted in the production and maintenance of a sense of trust and transparency, however illusory.

In chapter 7, I turn to changes in the aesthetics and forms of the art itself to demonstrate how connected and savvy Kenyan traders have adapted to an ever-changing and diverse tourist demographic, including Afropolitans. Can the community of Kenyan culture brokers alter the notion of what constitutes an "authentic" experience of Kenya through their economic strategies and the shifting aesthetics of the art they sell? In questioning a singular and static notion of an authentic Kenya or Africa as produced through tourism and tourist art, I explore how Kenyan tourist art and handicrafts have been marketed in new and creative ways: as Fair Trade, as a particular tree species, or as representing modern global interconnectedness. I focus on the art-of-connection motif and its artistic representation of an ideal of egalitarian and transparent human interconnection acceptable to both tourists and Kenyan vendors.

I conclude with a discussion of what the experiences of Kenyan traders and culture brokers can tell us about globalization, development, and digital-power divides today. Talking strictly of a *digital* divide in Kenya distracts attention from the historical formation of social inequality and masks the actions of certain powerful political, corporate, and development elites. This masking is an important aspect in the illusion of transparency so artistically mobilized today by innovative East African entrepreneurs.