

## Inland Villages and Oceanic Empires

In 1720, Portuguese India's outgoing viceroy wrote a lengthy advice letter to his successor. Much of the letter focused on Mombasa, a city that the Portuguese empire had lost to Oman in 1698. The viceroy conspired to retake the city in 1718, but an order of textiles from Cambay meant to accompany his fleet was delayed, causing them to miss the seasonal monsoon. The following year he addressed the textile shortage, assembling a large bounty of cotton cloth to build alliances with Mombasa's locals, but he was again thwarted by a variety of mishaps. Soldiers reserved for the mission had dwindled in number during the intervening year due to disease and degeneracy, and one of the vessels intended for the expedition was shipwrecked in Persia. Despite these trials, the viceroy assured his successor that Mombasa's abundance of ivory, wax, ambergris, and tortoise shell made it all well worth the effort. He added that a properly outfitted fleet could easily retake control of the port city because the "Musunglo on the Mombasa mainland" were "favourably inclined" to the Portuguese.<sup>1</sup>

In just a few paragraphs, the viceroy's advice letter touched on several key themes in the Indian Ocean's historiography. Rivalries between the Portuguese and Omani empires, the role of the monsoon in shaping oceanic travel, and the circulation of ivory and textiles—these themes all emerge from this brief description, unfolding across littoral regions stretching from East Africa to Arabia, Persia, and South Asia. Notably, the "Musungulo" of the town's mainland—an ethnonym that Portuguese writers applied to Mijikenda-speaking communities—also figure prominently into this global narrative. Mombasa's interior influenced trading circulations in the Indian Ocean, as the previous chapter detailed. But this

handing-off letter, written in eighteenth-century Goa, highlights something else: communities on Mombasa's mainland also affected the political trajectories of oceanic empires.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Mombasa became a nexus in conflicts between foreign powers, most significantly Portugal and Oman. Shifting control over Mombasa ebbed and flowed around different inland communities' decisions to collaborate—or not—with those aspiring to control the port city. Because the foreigners' jurisdiction over Mombasa's trade hinged on the support of the mainland, fleets from Portugal and Oman were forced to send textiles to inland leaders. These tributes formed the foundation of commercial, military, and diplomatic partnerships around the city. In faraway locales like Goa and Muscat, officials understood the importance of communities on Mombasa's mainland to their imperial ambitions in East Africa. Mijikenda speakers played their part, using the threat of raids, combined with their monopoly over inland trade goods and food provisions, to extract textiles from oceanic powers and demand a voice in Mombasa's affairs.

As scholarship on other world regions demonstrates, smaller-scale societies living on the periphery of large states or urban centers were frequently able to influence and extract concessions from neighboring polities utilizing geographic, commercial, and political advantages. In upland Southeast Asia, James Scott has shown that valley states were economically dependent on neighboring "hill people" while also being vulnerable to raids from the same nonstate societies. Uplanders traded with neighboring states while using the mobility afforded by swidden agriculture and the defensibility of their terrain to evade state control.<sup>2</sup> Maroon communities in the Americas similarly contributed to European colonial economies while also establishing autonomy from colonial authorities through warfare, banditry, and geographic advantages.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter centers the political decisions and commercial inventiveness of inland communities within the western Indian Ocean's shifting imperial landscapes between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Building on the above scholarship, I show that the very distinctive ways that Mijikenda speakers' social organization and economy departed from oceanic norms enabled them to exert political influence on Mombasa and various imperial powers.<sup>4</sup> They lived in settlements that were difficult to control, being historically mobile and located along forested upland ridges. Moreover, they possessed established strategies for mobilizing people across dispersed village networks for military alliances and raids, using ritual apparatuses detailed in chapter 2. Finally, Mijikenda speakers' access to inland trade goods and provisions offered critical bargaining chips in conflicts and collaborations with the port city and its foreign interlocutors and adversaries. Mijikenda participation in contests over Mombasa illuminates an array of developments in the port

city's interior that influenced the trajectories of global empires in the western Indian Ocean.

#### MOMBASA AND THE PORTUGUESE EMPIRE

In the 1630s, Portuguese cartographer Pedro Barreto de Resende wrote what became a well-known description of Mombasa. His commentary focused on two broad themes: the city's military capacity—specifically the garrison Fort Jesus—and the relationship between the island town and its neighboring mainland. Constructed in the 1590s, Fort Jesus was an imposing physical symbol of Portuguese military power in East Africa, protecting Mombasa's harbor from sea-borne attacks. In addition to the seaward-facing Fort Jesus, the Portuguese also constructed three smaller forts along Makupa Creek on the inland-facing side of the island. While Portugal's nascent Indian Ocean empire faced many challenges, in Mombasa, threats coming from the opposite side of the shallow creek separating the island from its mainland were the most concerning. The people of Mombasa, Resende explained, lived in "continual fear" of neighboring "Muzungulos" (i.e., Musungulos) "crossing to the island."<sup>5</sup> He continued,

These Muzungulos Caffres were regarded as the vassals of the King of Mombassa, Dom Jeronimo, but their submission was mainly obtained by giving them cloths. They were in reality quite different from vassals . . . they would come to murder in the land of the said Dom Jeronimo, who called himself their king . . . Many Arabian Moors live both to the north and to the south along the coast belonging to the fortress of Mombassa. They are like prisoners of the Muzungulos Caffres, because they have to pay them a large tribute in cloth in order to be allowed to live in security.<sup>6</sup>

Resende's comments offer several important details for understanding Mombasa's relationship with its neighbors, making them a useful starting point for this chapter. First, the Mijikenda-speaking Musungulos enjoyed a substantial influence on the island and the surrounding coastal region, in part through their capacity to inflict violence. Second, although they were nominally attached to Dom Jeronimo—the Portuguese-aligned ruler of Mombasa at that time—as "vassals," from Resende's perspective, the town's leader was greatly limited in his ability to enact authority over the adjacent mainland. Third, and perhaps most compelling considering the trading engagements detailed in the previous chapter, Mombasa maintained peaceful relations with its neighbors by sending them regular tributes, paid in cloth textiles.

By the 1630s, Portugal had already spent over a century maneuvering to control Mombasa's valuable port. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Vasco da Gama first visited Mombasa and several other towns along the East African coast in 1498. The Portuguese returned to East Africa in 1502 and established an alliance with Mombasa's rival town, Malindi, located one hundred kilometers north.<sup>7</sup> Like elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, Portuguese fleets disrupted older trading networks and subjugated port cities by imposing restrictive trading policies, often enforced through warfare.<sup>8</sup> When da Gama's fleet first sailed up the East African coast in early April of 1498, they arrived in Mombasa under the belief that the famed port

city was home to a sizable number of Christians. Reaching the town just a few days before Palm Sunday, the Portuguese anticipated spending the upcoming Sunday attending mass in the town's Christian quarter. Instead, their fleet left the town within a few days after suspecting that Mombasa's leader was conspiring to attack them.<sup>9</sup> Seven years later, Portuguese ships returned to Mombasa as aggressors. For one and a half days, they laid siege to the city, burning mud and thatch houses, looting stone buildings, and sinking three Gujarati ships anchored in the harbor. By the time the Portuguese invaders returned to their ships, they had reportedly left fifteen hundred locals dead and the town itself burned to ashes.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their early presence in the region, the Portuguese did not gain a major foothold in Mombasa until the end of the sixteenth century. After sacking the town in 1505, they returned in 1528 and briefly occupied the island before locals regained control the following year.<sup>11</sup> The Portuguese resumed attacks on Mombasa from 1542 to 1543, and again in 1587, but they failed to gain full control over the port city.<sup>12</sup> Even in the aftermath of the attacks, Mombasa maintained a strong position as a trading center. Ultimately, the town's close relationships with its mainland—which provided both trade goods and military support—and its reputation as a major port enabled it to maintain its autonomy while the Portuguese concentrated on controlling traffic in towns like Kilwa and Malindi.

Near the end of the 1500s, the Ottoman empire became increasingly interested in East Africa commerce. Ottoman Turks had been active as traders along the Swahili coast since the 1540s. In 1586, an Ottoman naval commander named Mir Ali Beg began establishing formal alliances with towns stretching from Mogadishu to Mombasa. Hoping to secure their continued autonomy from the Portuguese, Mombasa's leaders welcomed Mir Ali Beg's presence in the town and promised their support. When Mir Ali Beg returned to the Swahili coast for a second time in late 1588, the people of Mombasa helped him erect a stone tower to guard the harbor. The Ottoman commander also supplied five war galleys to protect the city from seaborne attacks. This alliance was brief, however. In March 1589, the Portuguese attacked Mombasa again, driving the Ottoman Turks out of the town.<sup>13</sup> In 1593, they began constructing Fort Jesus. Standing at the entryway of the town's northern harbor, the large military garrison marks an imposing welcome to the port city. For centuries, Mombasa's connections to other parts of the world were primarily based around trading relationships. But by the end of the sixteenth century, the town's place in transimperial conflicts had clearly begun.

#### TRIBUTES, VIOLENCE, AND THE INFLUENCE OF INLAND COMMUNITIES

Inland communities were key players in imperial shifts in East Africa in the centuries following Fort Jesus's construction. Portuguese accounts from this period capture two primary themes, both of which are apparent in Resende's description of Mombasa. First, Portuguese writers regularly portray Mijikenda speakers and other inland groups as ruthless opportunists. Communities on the mainland were

potential allies in military conflicts, but they also posed a serious threat to cities like Mombasa and Malindi if they turned against the controlling authorities. In contrast to their portrayals of the mainland's cruelty, the foreigners' commentaries also illuminate the exchanges in valued trade goods that occurred alongside martial relationships. The accounts, therefore, help illustrate the different means through which inland communities influenced global empires in East Africa.

After Mombasa became part of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, officials in Goa appointed a Swahili-speaking "king" to oversee local affairs in concert with military officials in Fort Jesus. As with other Indian Ocean port cities, political elites were also leading merchants, and vice versa.<sup>14</sup> As a result, local elites desired to maintain control of some aspects of regional trade. One constantly contentious point in Mombasa's relationship with Portuguese officials was the status of Pemba, an island in the Zanzibar Archipelago that was an important source of food provisions for the town. Mombasa's appointed leader retained control over trade with Pemba, but he was forced to pay Fort Jesus a fee of two hundred bags of rice annually for these privileges. In 1610, a new captain at Fort Jesus increased the annual payments to five hundred bags of rice. However, Mombasa's leader, al-Hasan ibn Ahmed, rejected the price hike, claiming that he needed the provisions to keep soldiers from the mainland as his retainers. Shortly after this, a group of Musungulos—allegedly recruited by Hasan—attacked the Portuguese fort that guarded the creek separating Mombasa's western edges from the mainland, killing nine Portuguese soldiers.<sup>15</sup>

Textiles were central to Hasan's ability to maintain the support of neighboring Mijikenda-speaking communities. Urban-to-rural textile exchanges during this period demonstrate the closely connected nature of military support, trade, and tribute between Mombasa and its mainland. By the start of the seventeenth century, a "time-honored practice" was already in place that dictated "when the Muzungulos came [to Mombasa] the sultan was expected to feed them and give to each one of them a piece of cloth."<sup>16</sup> Yet these transactional alliances were often fragile. In 1614, for instance, as tensions between Hasan and the Portuguese reached an apex, the sultan fled Mombasa and sought refuge at the inland settlement of Rabai. The leaders of Rabai initially welcomed the deposed sultan. However, after captains in Fort Jesus offered them two thousand pieces of cloth to murder Hasan, they betrayed their former ally, allegedly returning his severed head to the Portuguese forts at Makupa Creek.<sup>17</sup> This obligation to compensate communities on the mainland shaped the actions of subsequent Portuguese-appointed rulers, including Hasan's son Dom Jeronimo Chingulia, who governed Mombasa from 1627–1632. Dom Jeronimo set aside a large percentage of the annual duties collected by Mombasa's customs house for the "countries of the interior."<sup>18</sup> In return for a portion of the town's profits—paid in rolls of cloth—the Musungulos abstained from attacking Mombasa and acted as soldiers in campaigns against rival towns.

I want to briefly focus on Dom Jeronimo's tenure as Mombasa's leader because it reveals a chain of connections that linked villages in Mombasa's interior to faraway locales in the Portuguese empire. In comparison to his father, Dom Jeronimo represented a new model of Portuguese-affiliated leader: a Christian king with strong connections to Estado da Índia's oceanic empire. Born Yusuf bin Hasan Chingulia, Dom Jeronimo was sent at a young age to Goa, where he was educated at a school for Portuguese elites. By the time he returned to Mombasa in 1626, he had been baptized a Christian and married to a Portuguese woman. Moreover, he possessed significant military experience, having served in Portuguese armies in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea during the first half of the 1620s.<sup>19</sup> Like his father, Dom Jeronimo found that he could sidestep Portuguese authority by sending regular tributes of textiles to communities on Mombasa's mainland. This was critical as his relationships with Portuguese captains at Fort Jesus became increasingly strained over time, in no small part because of the Musungulos's prominent military role in Mombasa and on Pemba.<sup>20</sup>

Dom Jeronimo's affiliation with Estado da Índia reached a dramatic culmination in August 1631, when he confronted the Portuguese at Fort Jesus, accompanied by sixty inland soldiers. Armed with poison arrows, his Musungulo retainers swiftly drove the Portuguese forces out of Mombasa.<sup>21</sup> Dom Jeronimo then renounced Christianity and proclaimed himself once again to be Yusuf bin Hasan, the Muslim heir to Mombasa and Malindi. Mombasa was critical to Portuguese political and commercial prospects in East Africa, so in the months that followed Yusuf bin Hasan Chingulia's revolt, officials in Goa conspired to retake the town. In January 1632, a large Portuguese fleet returned to the port city. Once again, the support of inland communities was critical to the impending confrontation. The Swahili leader—now referred to only as Chingulia in Portuguese records—reportedly had between five hundred and six hundred Musungulo soldiers posted at different parts of the island. When the Portuguese attempted to attack the city, they were driven off by inland archers' poison arrows.<sup>22</sup>

The Portuguese eventually resorted to forming a blockade by sea, thus cutting off Mombasa's access to imported trade goods, including cloth textiles. Taking a two-pronged approach, they slowly chipped away at the king's mainland support by "sending [the Musungulos] presents of cotton goods" and setting bounties for Chingulia's allies.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, this approach proved successful. In May 1632, Chingulia fled Mombasa as the Portuguese retook control of Fort Jesus. Mombasa's former leader spent the next five years of his life traveling the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, angling for support to attack Portuguese holdings across East Africa and becoming a fugitive in the eyes of Portuguese officials.<sup>24</sup> However, his Musungulo supporters did not take up this cause. Instead, they abandoned Fort Jesus without any resistance and returned to the mainland, knowing that the end of the Portuguese blockade would reinvigorate their commercial role in the town.

This dynamic—in which the occupants of coastal cities sent cloth payments to inland neighbors for protection and military support—was not limited to Mijikenda speakers and Mombasa. Southeast Kenya's immediate interior also included hunter-forager groups and, from at least the sixteenth century, a Thagicu-speaking group called Segeju or Daiso. Portuguese accounts portray the Segeju, much like the Musungulos, as a constant menace for coastal towns. In 1569, for instance, a Jesuit priest in Malindi wrote of the Segeju (whom he called “Moceguejos”):

They are very warlike. . . . The Moors here are much molested by these Kaffirs, and to prevent them from spoiling their crops and making war upon them, they buy them off with cloth and other things.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1630s, the Portuguese reportedly had to supply Malindi's governor with “scores of linen cloth” to give to Segeju speakers as gifts.<sup>26</sup> In return, the “warlike” Segeju refrained from attacking the town and provided it with military support when needed.

The Ottomans' defeat by Portuguese armadas in 1589 offers another good example of the roles that different inland communities played in transimperial shifts in the region. In March of that year, Mombasa-aligned Ottomans were preparing to protect the city from an imminent Portuguese seaborne attack when thousands of warriors—whom historical records refer to as the “Zimba”—attacked them from the city's mainland. The Zimba roundly defeated Mir Ali Beg's forces, prompting a total Ottoman retreat from the East African coast and paving the way for the Portuguese to take control of the city. After driving out the Ottoman Turks, the Zimbabwes turned northward toward Portuguese-aligned Malindi, only to be thwarted by three thousand Segeju fighting on the town's behalf.<sup>27</sup>

It is not clear from the available evidence whether the Zimba were Mijikenda speakers. Contemporaneous historical documents refer to other inland raiders from southern Africa by the same name.<sup>28</sup> So, it is possible this was a group from southeastern Africa that invaded the Mombasa region following an overland migration before quickly retreating from the region. Alternatively, Zimba may have been a catchall term for inland communities that Portuguese writers used to reference the broad similarities they identified between Mombasa's inland neighbors and similarly hostile inland groups on the southern Swahili coast. If this is the case, then, by the 1600s, after the Portuguese became more established in the region, they began referring to mainland communities as the Musungulos.<sup>29</sup> Regardless, the episode centers the role of inland communities in major political shifts in the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean.

Historian Giancarlo Casale has suggested that had the Ottomans successfully established themselves in Mombasa, they may have been able to expand into Malindi and other parts of the Swahili coast. Ottoman control of Mombasa, he argued, could have fundamentally altered the balance of power in the western Indian Ocean, potentially leading to “the premature demise of Portuguese Asia.”



Ultimately, according to Casale, “the outcome of a confrontation between two technologically advanced, centralized, and expansive colonial powers” hinged on “a mainland force from the interior of Africa.”<sup>30</sup> Irrespective of whether Mombasa falling under Ottoman control would have had these larger ripple effects, communities in the town’s mainland continued to play an influential role in transregional connections and politics, as is evident in their centrality to Sultan Hasan’s and Yusuf Chingulia’s tenures in the decades that followed. In all these instances, communities from the interior acted as a linchpin within a much larger set of relationships that stretched from Mombasa across multiple nodes of the Indian Ocean’s commercial and political landscape.

#### INVISIBLE DEVELOPMENTS IN MOMBASA’S INTERIOR

A surface reading of the written evidence might suggest that those living adjacent to coastal towns like Mombasa and Malindi were little more than opportunistic extortionists, shifting their allegiances for cloth. Portuguese sources certainly give this impression. For instance, when Rabai betrayed Sultan Hasan, an observer wrote that this occurrence was almost expected since the Musungulos “do not keep faith with anyone, nor were they loyal to anything other than their own interest which is clothing.”<sup>31</sup> Into the 1700s, Portuguese accounts continued to describe the Mijikenda-speaking Musungulos as warriors who were “famously skilled in the art of archery” but who were also considered untrustworthy since they supported whichever party supplied them with the most cloth.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the Segeju, according to historical accounts, were a barbarous group of warriors to whom Malindi’s officials had to send cloth tributes to prevent them from attacking the town.<sup>33</sup>

In documentary accounts, Mijikenda and Segeju speakers mostly encounter the Portuguese during moments of conflict. *Estado da Índia* was a militarized trading empire, and descriptions of their conflicts and interactions with inland communities in the Mombasa region need to be understood in this context. But by paying attention to the important role that Mijikenda speakers played in building Mombasa’s commercial connections, we might also see these accounts in a different light. By the time Vasco da Gama’s fleet reached Mombasa, Mijikenda speakers participated in overlapping local, regional, and global trading networks. Their ready access to valued inland trade goods, such as ivory, beeswax, and copal, facilitated strong trading relationships with coastal markets that continued to thrive even after the Portuguese began controlling the town’s harbor.

Established trading relationships did not preclude conflicts and tensions between Mombasa and its interior prior to the Portuguese era. Duarte Barbosa’s early sixteenth-century overview of the Indian Ocean described the people of Mombasa as “oft-times at war and but seldom at peace with those of the mainland.” Yet, according to Barbosa, people in Mombasa continued to “carry on trade



with [people on the mainland]” for ivory and wax.<sup>34</sup> Trading relationships grew out of long-standing networks and connections in Mombasa’s interior. As the previous two chapters detailed, the region inland from Mombasa was an important exchange corridor for centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese. The arrival of Segeju-speaking migrants from Central Kenya during the mid-second millennium accelerated certain aspects of these inland exchanges. From Segeju speakers, Mijikenda communities adopted new ritual ideas and trading vocabulary. These exchanges and transformations are largely invisible in written records, but they hint at some of the ways that inland communities’ military influence and trading prowess were mutually constitutive. One of the reasons Mombasa’s connections to the Indian Ocean grew and endured was because communities in its interior desired cloth. However, these connections also relied on other material desires and transformations, including exchanges in foodstuffs, cattle, and knowledge.

Before continuing to trace the story of imperial shifts in Mombasa, I want to briefly return to the town’s interior to explore some of the invisible developments behind these encounters with overseas empires. Here, I build on work by scholars like Jeremy Prestholdt, Pedro Machado, and Yaari Felber-Seligman that has demonstrated that Portuguese imperialism reconfigured—rather than destroyed—older patterns of trade and interaction, sometimes offering new opportunities for both coastal and interior traders alike.<sup>35</sup> For inland communities around Mombasa, this era of oceanic imperialism created opportunities to affiliate with new constituencies and to access valued goods. In pursuing these relationships, Mijikenda speakers and other inland groups not only shaped trade into and out of Mombasa, but they also affected the political fates of multiple oceanic empires. To tell this story, however, requires a larger anchoring in the exchanges unfolding in the interior in the critical yet less obviously “global” realm of animal husbandry.

### *Keeping Cattle: The Segeju Influence*

The previous chapter discussed the trading mosaics that thrived in Mombasa’s interior, especially around the arid Tsavo plains during the first half of the second millennium. However, as I alluded, archaeological research shows that, starting in the seventeenth century, many sites on the Taita Hills’ lower slopes were abandoned as people moved their farming villages to the upper elevations of the Taita Hills’ three massifs. Seasonal camps in the adjacent plains also fell out of use around this same time, and some of Tsavo’s pastoralists relocated to fortified rock shelter sites.<sup>36</sup> Archaeologist Chapurukha Kusimba has suggested that these changing settlement patterns might have resulted from an increase in slave raiding and cattle rustling in the interior.<sup>37</sup> Yet documentary records demonstrate that Mijikenda speakers continued to supply Mombasa with trade goods and provisions despite these changes, helping to maintain the town’s position as a leading port. They did so by continuing to build relationships with other inland societies

from whom they adopted new ritual ideas, trading practices, and technical skills in areas like animal husbandry.

To understand Mombasa's political landscape as the town became a nodal point in global conflicts, let's turn to a somewhat anomalous location: the cattle enclosure of a village in Mombasa's interior. Notably, domestic livestock were a very small part of coastal East Africa's economy during the first millennium. For instance, Sabaki speakers' linguistic ancestors possessed a complex terminology to differentiate animals by age, sex, and breeding status.<sup>38</sup> But proto-Sabaki speakers retained little of this vocabulary, suggesting that domesticates played a minor role in their economy and diet, especially compared to their linguistic ancestors. Faunal records support the linguistic picture, showing that settlements in southeast Kenya kept only a small number of domestic animals during the first millennium.<sup>39</sup> From this evidence we can imagine people gradually shedding knowledge of specialized animal husbandry from their lexicon over generations, mainly because domestic animals were not that important for their diet or for their subsistence economy.

The significance of domesticates in Mombasa's immediate interior changed dramatically over time. Like their Sabaki ancestors, early Mijikenda speakers met their animal protein needs by hunting and trapping small fauna, fishing in nearby creeks and streams, and collecting gastropods. However, starting from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the bones of domestic stock like cattle, sheep, and goats dominated faunal assemblages in the same region.<sup>40</sup> As people pressed into drier environments beyond the fertile inland ridge, they filled enclosures in their villages with new sources of food and wealth: cattle and goats.

While archaeological records show a steady uptick in domestic animals in faunal assemblages from Mombasa's immediate interior, these records tell only part of the story. Because Mijikenda speakers inherited very little specialized knowledge of animal husbandry from their linguistic ancestors, to keep domestic stock in larger numbers they would have either needed to develop knowledge of advanced animal husbandry themselves or adopt this knowledge from someone else. For Mijikenda communities, Segeju-speaking migrants were the key source of animal husbandry knowledge. Portuguese records describe Segeju communities as possessing large cattle herds.<sup>41</sup> Mijikenda historical traditions similarly depict the Segeju as expert cattle herders who accompanied them on the mythical migration from Shungwaya.<sup>42</sup> Linguistic records confirm the Segeju's herding expertise. Table 2 shows some of the loanwords that Mijikenda speakers—as well as other inland speech communities like Pare, Dawida, and Gweno—adopted directly from Segeju.<sup>43</sup>

These loanwords reflect changes in the scale and value of domestic animals in Mombasa's interior. As herds grew, people needed to find ways to constrain competition between male animals and develop more intentional breeding practices. By adopting strategies for differentiating animals by age, sex, and breeding status, people obtained a means to keep greater numbers of animals.<sup>44</sup> Written records

TABLE 2 Domestic Animal Loanwords in Mijikenda and Pare from Segeju

Mijikenda form	English gloss
<i>ndzao; kadzao</i>	Bull; bullock
<i>k'uro ~ kuro</i>	Dog
<i>mwati</i>	Immature female sheep (ewe)
<i>mvarika ~ -pharika</i>	Immature female goat
<i>ndenge; kadenge</i>	Male goat
<i>ndewa</i>	Ox, steer, castrated animal
<i>t'urume ~ turume</i>	Ram; immature male sheep

document Segeju speakers' presence on the East African coast—first around Malindi and shortly after in Mombasa—as early as the 1560s.<sup>45</sup> To the Portuguese, communities like Mijikenda and Segeju were “warrior” groups that had to be placated with cloth. The spread of these loanwords among Mijikenda speakers and other inland communities overlapped with the start of Portuguese imperialism in East Africa. Thus, they alert us to inland knowledge exchanges that, though absent from written coastal accounts, formed a backdrop to alliances and conflicts between oceanic empires and societies in East Africa's interior.

### *Provisioning Global Trade*

By scaling up their ability to keep cattle, inland communities opened up new avenues for trade and exchange. During the nineteenth century, for instance, the expansion of global trade in East Africa's highlands supported the growth of cattle-keeping in communities that were not specialized pastoralists. Caravans flocked to the interior in search of ivory while farming communities sold their agricultural surpluses to these passing traders for cloth and beads. They then used coastal trade goods to obtain cattle from neighboring pastoralists. In the process, cattle herds quickly became key markers of political status. Ultimately, the growth of global trade in East Africa's highlands contributed to the rising value of cattle among nonpastoralist communities.<sup>46</sup> Scholarship on transformations in cattle keeping in East Africa's highlands addresses the nineteenth century, a period for which we have ample written records. But the available linguistic and faunal evidence suggests that similar changes took place among communities in Mombasa's near interior several centuries prior.

The earlier shift in the valuation of cattle in Mombasa's interior was likely due to a combination of factors. First, Mijikenda speakers had direct and early interface with coastal trading networks. Second, around the mid-second millennium, two new communities pushed into southeast Kenya's coastal interior: the Segeju as well as Oromo-speaking pastoralists who were documented living around Malindi by 1624. In the centuries that followed, Oromo communities became important

brokers for ivory and cattle with Mijikenda and Waata communities.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the climate may have aided these dynamics. Lake records from East Africa indicate that the coast's near interior experienced a generally wetter climate during the period corresponding to the northern hemisphere's "Little Ice Age," with pluvial conditions between the mid-seventeenth and late eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup> Regular and predictable rainfall would have aided the production of foodstuffs for trade while also creating ample grazing grounds to support larger herds. As Mijikenda speakers established settlements across a wider range of ecologies after the mid-second millennium, they would have gained more and more opportunities to obtain cattle and knowledge from migrant pastoralist groups.

As was the case in Tsavo during prior centuries, oceanic trade goods were enmeshed within these networks. People traded livestock and foodstuffs alongside iron, ivory, and arrow poison, which gave them access to imported goods like glass beads and textiles.<sup>49</sup> Mijikenda communities were not only Mombasa's source of export goods; they were also among the town's main provisioning agents. Nearly all food provisions in Mombasa were brought from either the town's mainland or from Pemba, an island in the Zanzibar Archipelago that is sometimes called Mombasa's breadbasket. Since food from Pemba had to be shipped by sea, land-based provisioning routes were especially important whenever the sea routes were disrupted, giving inland communities a tremendous influence over Mombasa's most basic needs during periods of maritime conflict.

We know less about Mombasa's role in trading foods than we do ivory, but the available evidence indicates that it was a major distribution center for grains and other foodstuffs. In the early seventeenth century, each inland village supplied the city with "twenty bags of meal" annually, and, in turn, the villages were compensated with a fixed rate of cloth.<sup>50</sup> The mainland also provisioned Mombasa with livestock, especially cattle, sheep, and chickens.<sup>51</sup> Mombasa sent some surplus food goods to forts in Portuguese Mozambique. According to Resende, the town's main revenue came from "ivory, amber, and civet," which were shipped to India, but its "large supplies of corn, rice, and cows" made the port "of vital importance to the rulers of the coast." Without Mombasa, he claimed, "it would be impossible to supply the fortress of Mozambique."<sup>52</sup> More detailed records from the early nineteenth century show that provisioning agents from the mainland traveled to Mombasa almost daily, supplying the town with grains, cassava, fruits, vegetables, and cattle.<sup>53</sup> Mijikenda communities were considered "the whole support of the island," so maintaining good relations was essential to the town's survival.<sup>54</sup>

Under Portuguese rule, Mombasa's leaders continued to send large volumes of cotton cloth to communities on the mainland. Despite the disruptions caused by Portuguese incursions, Mombasa remained a major entrepôt for the global ivory trade throughout this period. So, the cloth payments, which the Portuguese characterized as a form of extortion, reflected military partnerships. At the same time, these payments underwrote trading relationships with inland merchants who

supplied them with goods such as ivory and beeswax, as well as essentials like agricultural wares, cattle, and sheep.

Foreign observers found inland communities' influence on port cities like Mombasa and Malindi bewildering. In their eyes, Mijikenda speakers and other groups like Segeju could only be violent "barbarians" at odds with their more "civilized" urban neighbors.<sup>55</sup> The evidence of concurrent transformations in arenas like trade and subsistence within Mombasa's interior alert us to alternative ways of thinking about Mombasa's interactions with its interior. Mijikenda speakers used both their access to trade goods and provisions, as well as their ability to raid Mombasa, to maintain influence in the city. Some of the ritual interconnections detailed in chapter 2 could have also aided in organizing men for activities like warfare. For instance, Mijikenda speakers used a system of age sets, called *rika*, to organize men across different villages and clans into gerontocratic groups.<sup>56</sup> Martial ideas were embedded in the rituals men performed to advance from their youth to elderhood. For instance, during an initiation ritual called the *mung'aro*, junior men kidnapped a male stranger. The initiates killed the victim and removed his genitals for a sacrifice. After the sacrifice, they covered themselves in mud and put on grass skirts, commonly worn by women. At the ritual's conclusion, the initiates donned new adornments: colorful cotton textiles that symbolized their ascension into a new rank.<sup>57</sup> The victim's genitals, according to some accounts, were then kept and used to prepare a war charm.<sup>58</sup> In short, the material signature of oceanic trade and martial rituals were both central to strategies for organizing young men.

The age-set system and associated rituals illuminate how inland communities could have mobilized people across different inland settlements, including for activities like raids. Musungulo leaders assembled hundreds of warriors at a time for raids, as the Portuguese accounts detailed in this chapter indicate. In the 1780s, Oman's imam described the "terrible" Mijikenda who held sway over Mombasa as "a people whom God alone can number" in a seeming reference to their raids on the island.<sup>59</sup> Notably, Mijikenda speakers conducted these raids during a period when archaeological records indicate a clear shift toward smaller settlement patterns.<sup>60</sup> Living in smaller villages, which frequently split and moved around—as oral traditions discussed in chapter 2 indicate—would have offered a means for evading counteroffensives or capture by foreign invaders or partners in Mombasa.<sup>61</sup> Forest groves and associated ritual practices provided the spatial and intellectual framework for connecting and mobilizing people across dispersed communities.<sup>62</sup> Added to all of this, Mijikenda speakers' position as a gateway between Mombasa and its interior meant that they controlled access to valued trade goods and food provisions necessary for the town to function. Village ritual practices, inland knowledge exchanges, long-distance trade, subsistence adaptations, and warfare were all part and parcel of Mijikenda speakers' influence on Mombasa's and the Indian Ocean's trade and politics. The global resonance of these

interconnected developments in Mombasa's interior is especially apparent in one well-documented episode: Oman's thirty-three-month siege of Mombasa from 1696 to 1698.

#### FOOD SUPPLIES AND THE FALL OF FORT JESUS DURING OMAN'S SIEGE OF MOMBASA

Following Oman's rise as a naval power during the second half of the seventeenth century, Mombasa became an even more important theater for western Indian Ocean conflicts. Portugal invaded the coast of southern Arabia in 1507, capturing Muscat and imposing a monopoly over maritime trade in the region. Portuguese suzerainty lasted until 1650, when Sultan bin Saif, who governed Oman's interior, drove the Portuguese from Muscat. This initiated Oman's emergence as a maritime power. Over the next few decades, their fleets waged war by sea against Portuguese-controlled port cities on the Persian side of the Gulf, in India, and East Africa.<sup>63</sup> In 1661, Omani ships attacked Mombasa, allegedly at the request of Mombasa's locals, who hoped to oust the Portuguese from their city.<sup>64</sup> The Omani navy assembled a large contingent of supporters, including Musungulo warriors from the mainland, but the Portuguese maintained control of the town. In 1696, Omani fleets returned to Mombasa and began a prolonged campaign against the Portuguese, which ended when they took control of Fort Jesus in 1698.

A Portuguese text called *História de Mombaça* provides a detailed accounting of the events of 1696 to 1698. The text, written anonymously by a Portuguese academic living in Goa, is based on the testimonies of officers who fled Mombasa during a Portuguese recovery mission shortly before Fort Jesus fell.<sup>65</sup> Although the text primarily focuses on Oman's attempts to capture Fort Jesus, it also illuminates how established commercial and social relationships influenced this period of turmoil in Mombasa. Not surprisingly, Mijikenda speakers' allegiances and support play a key part in the author's narrative of Omani forces capturing Mombasa from the Portuguese empire. When read with the larger context of Mombasa's interior in mind, the account makes it possible to connect the different threads of military support, trade, and provisioning covered thus far in the chapter. To draw out these connections, the remainder of this section offers a blow-by-blow account of the Omani siege while highlighting the central role of one Mijikenda settlement, Chonyi, in the series of events.

The conflict started when the Portuguese assigned Mombasa's commercial administration to a Junta do Comércio (board of trade) in 1695.<sup>66</sup> The Junta granted commercial oversight of Mombasa to a trading company based out of Goa that maintained a monopoly over most of the town's trade goods, including ivory. The trading company became responsible for setting prices on exports, dictating that all trade needed to be conducted through company officials at Fort Jesus.<sup>67</sup> These changing commercial regulations created tensions with some inland

merchants, especially ivory traders, because of the company's decision to cut the purchasing price of ivory in half. The company further tightened their grip over commerce by prohibiting local traders from selling ivory to anyone but company officials. Furthermore, they prohibited local merchants from transporting ivory out of Mombasa themselves.<sup>68</sup> Shortly after these new trading arrangements were established, some people in Mombasa turned to Muscat for assistance.

An Omani fleet entered Mombasa's harbor on March 13, 1696. They quickly captured smaller forts on the island, forcing the Portuguese and their local allies into Fort Jesus.<sup>69</sup> According to Portuguese reports, as many as 2,500 people sheltered in the fort. Without the ability to leave Fort Jesus, save for access to a small stretch of protected beach adjacent to the garrison, they quickly ran low on provisions. They requested supplies and support from other Portuguese outposts in East Africa, but Omani ships guarding Mombasa's harbor prevented most supply missions from reaching the fort.<sup>70</sup> Supplies from the mainland were critical as a result.

The Portuguese had already established partnerships with inland traders for both ivory and foodstuffs during their prior century in Mombasa. However, Oman's arrival fractured some of these ties. For instance, according to *História de Mombaça*, the Portuguese lost access to one of the mainland's most important ivory traders when he began trading exclusively with the Omani newcomers.<sup>71</sup> As a result, alliances with another inland trader—called the “King of Chonyi” in the text—were essential to Fort Jesus's survival.<sup>72</sup> The Chonyi leader was less affected by the changing price of ivory than some other inland brokers since he primarily traded livestock, ambergris, tortoiseshell, and beeswax.<sup>73</sup> This put him in an advantageous position in negotiating with Fort Jesus. He agreed to send the garrison provisions, but, capitalizing on their vulnerability, this assistance came at a hefty price. The demands of the “ambitious” Musungulos at Chonyi increased throughout the occupation, growing, according to the Portuguese account, “in the same measure as our need for assistance” in Fort Jesus.<sup>74</sup>

While access to provisions influenced Chonyi's ability to procure cloth from the Portuguese at Fort Jesus, other details from *História de Mombaça* highlight how these demands were given weight by the capacity of the Musungulos in warfare. Soon after Chonyi's leader affirmed his support for Fort Jesus, the Omanis attempted to work with an intermediary from Mombasa, named Mwinyi Chambe, to form their own alliance with Chonyi.<sup>75</sup> However, Chambe had already brokered Chonyi's provisioning agreement with Fort Jesus, and he remained loyal to his Portuguese partners by ensuring the Omani message never left Mombasa.<sup>76</sup>

After failing to establish direct contact with Chonyi through diplomatic channels, the Omanis resolved to instead settle the matter by force. According to the account, they sent an armed party of five hundred of their best soldiers to Chonyi with orders to “destroy them by sword and bloodshed.” However, Chonyi received advanced word of the attack from allies in Mombasa and prepared a deadly ambush, using the “dense and almost impenetrable forest” surrounding their



settlements as a defensive advantage. Fighting in unfamiliar territory, the Omanis stood little chance. Reportedly only forty to eighty of the original five hundred soldiers survived the ordeal.<sup>77</sup>

When we read these two episodes about the Chonyi together, we can see how an array of exchanges—payments in cloth, trade in food provisions and export goods, and military support—underwrote inland relationships with both foreign and local constituencies in Mombasa. The *História de Mombaça* directly connects the slow demise of the Portuguese in Mombasa to inland trade and provisions. After Chonyi's resounding victory against the Omani soldiers, the Portuguese captain continued sending larger and larger amounts of textiles to the mainland with hope that his inland allies would mount additional offensives and drive the Omani forces from the island entirely. However, the Musungulos "were not willing to strive for another victory," according to the text's author, "because they already had the bounty of our textiles."<sup>78</sup> Inland leaders clearly valued their autonomy within these affiliations with the foreigners and knew their monopoly over provisions and inland trade goods gave them a substantial leverage over both parties. As the siege wore on, Portuguese supply ships continued failing to reach Mombasa, meaning all that sustained the Portuguese were provisions from the mainland.<sup>79</sup> This became a huge problem for the Portuguese by the end of 1697, when people from Chonyi and other inland communities began withholding provisions. In Fort Jesus, they feared that the entire mainland would soon throw its support to Oman.<sup>80</sup>

A series of letters from Chambe and Bwana Dau bin Bwana Shaka—another close Portuguese ally from the northern Swahili town of Faza—illuminates the centrality of Mijikenda-speaking communities at this moment when the Portuguese hold on Mombasa seemed to be slipping. Holed up in Fort Jesus and short on supplies, the two advised Portuguese captains waiting at sea that it would not be long before the Chonyi began "taking up arms in favour of the Arabs." They warned that if this happened, all the other communities on the mainland—most of whom remained neutral in the conflict—would see the Omanis as the obvious victors and would quickly follow Chonyi's lead.<sup>81</sup> Regardless of whether this was entirely true, the two writers employed this rhetoric in multiple letters to Zanzibar and Goa to muster support. Clearly, they believed the looming threat of the Musungulos' shifting alliances would be convincing. While this support never reached the fort, the stories of the Musungulos circulated widely, eventually being reproduced in Estado da Índia's official account of Fort Jesus's fall.

The *História de Mombaça*, written shortly after the events in question, was based on testimonials from informants who escaped prior to the fall of Fort Jesus, which happened sometime before the end of 1698.<sup>82</sup> I am less concerned with the accuracy of the account—which was written an ocean away by a person who had never so much as traveled to Mombasa—than I am with what the source reveals about imperial understandings of the town itself and its inland neighbors. During the seventeenth century, the leaders of Portugal's Indian Ocean empire were

concerned with competition from commercial rivals, not only from Oman but also from English and Dutch trading companies.<sup>83</sup> *História de Mombaça* and other written accounts from this era enable us to squarely situate the occupants of settlements in Mombasa's mainland within these transimperial rivalries. It wasn't only trade goods like ivory, gum copal, and textiles that connected East Africa's mainland to other parts of the Indian Ocean. Stories of communities in Mombasa's interior also traveled across expanses of ocean, from Fort Jesus to Muscat and Goa. While foreigners' accounts often portrayed Mijikenda speakers as ruthless barbarians, a careful reading of these documents and their context reveals the remarkable influence of inland communities to the shifting fate of global empires in Mombasa. Portuguese writers clearly understood that the future of Estado da Índia in Mombasa hinged on the status of communities in the town's mainland.

#### THE MIJIKENDA DELEGATION TO MUSCAT AND THE TRAJECTORY OF OCEANIC EMPIRES

The perception that Mijikenda-speaking communities were central to Portugal's imperial ambitions in East Africa endured after Mombasa's fall to Oman. For the first few decades of the eighteenth century, officials in Goa continued plotting to retake the town. Rumors of waning local support for the Omanis circulated along the coast as early as 1705. In 1710, a spy from Mombasa working for Portuguese officials in Mozambique reported that the Omanis compensated Mijikenda-speaking villages with "generous amounts of cotton cloth." Nevertheless, the Omanis still needed to keep troops at the forts at Makupa Creek to repel the looming threat of raids from the mainland.<sup>84</sup> Civil wars and succession disputes in Oman between 1718–1728 further exacerbated tensions in East Africa, disrupting trade with Muscat and splitting Omani constituencies in Mombasa into two rival factions.<sup>85</sup>

As Oman's hold on Mombasa waned, Portuguese officials schemed to rebuild their alliances with the Musungulos and thus regain control of the town's trade.<sup>86</sup> Like the former viceroy whose letter opened this chapter, officials in Goa understood well that Mijikenda speakers could be compelled to support them for adequate compensation in Indian textiles. Capitalizing on the internal turmoil in Oman, the Portuguese recaptured Mombasa in March 1728.<sup>87</sup> This time, however, local discontent began almost immediately. Some of the most prominent inland leaders were reluctant to recognize Estado da Índia's authority in the town after representatives from Fort Jesus failed to provide cloth tributes "as was a longstanding custom."<sup>88</sup> Although the Portuguese generals quickly remedied the situation, tensions persisted. By early 1729, communities in the mainland had begun withholding provisions from the fort, which had again reneged on its annual duties in cloth.<sup>89</sup> As had been the case many times prior, Mombasa's political fate was contingent on the flow of textiles from the town to its mainland. Within a few months, most inland communities had shifted their allegiances back in favor of

Oman. In late April, Musungulos led attacks to take over Portuguese forts at Makupa Creek.<sup>90</sup> Shortly after this, a large delegation from Mombasa traveled to Oman to obtain support for expelling the Portuguese from the city once again.<sup>91</sup>

The Mombasa delegation's trip to Muscat offers a remarkable illustration of Mijikenda speakers' influence on the western Indian Ocean's political landscape. According to the *Mombasa Chronicle*, the group consisted of representatives from Mombasa's Twelve Tribes confederations as well as leaders from "the cities of Vanikat," which included "Ribah, Shuni, Kambah, Gauma, Jibanah, Rabayi, Jiryamah, Darvmah-Mutavi, Shibah, Lughuh, Diju."<sup>92</sup> The names of these "cities" include all of the groups known since the middle of the twentieth century as the Mijikenda. The chronicle refers to them collectively as "Vanikat," an Arabic rendering of the Swahili term, Wanyika, or "bush people."<sup>93</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the name Wanyika (or Nyika) is a pejorative ethnonym that Swahili speakers, Arabs, and Europeans commonly used to describe Mijikenda-speaking communities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By referring to these communities as "bush people," they emphasized the supposed cultural differences between Mombasa's urban, Muslim residents and their rural, non-Muslim neighbors immediately inland. The paradox this episode presents is that the leaders from the "bush" are shown playing a prominent role in global politics.

This meeting between representatives from the Mombasa region and Muscat took place at a pivotal moment in Oman's history. Only a year prior, the Imamate (or Omani state) had resolved a decade-long civil war that had erupted due to succession disputes. In 1718, Imam Sultan bin Saif II died, and his twelve-year-old son Saif bin Sultan II was appointed Oman's new leader. Due to his age, Saif bin Sultan II was quickly replaced by a series of regents and challengers. None of these individuals lasted long, meaning Saif bin Sultan II was appointed four separate times during his lifetime after different claimants were killed or deposed. The period from 1724 to 1728 was especially volatile, and Oman lost control of most of its overseas territories, including Mombasa. When the leaders of both factions of the civil war died in 1728, Saif bin Sultan II was appointed imam for the fourth and final time. However, he was quickly isolated from Oman's powerful religious leaders in the capital, Nizwa, one hundred kilometers from the coast. As a result, the young leader's authority was limited to coastal regions around Muscat.<sup>94</sup>

We can imagine the delegation from Mombasa arriving in Oman amid this period of internal turmoil. Following the southwest monsoon, they would have reached Muscat as early as May or June, a little over a year after Saif bin Sultan II resumed his position as imam for the fourth time.<sup>95</sup> For the Mombasa delegation, Oman was the natural partner to help rid their city of the Portuguese for good. For Saif bin Sultan II, the Mombasa delegation's arrival would have presented an opportunity for reestablishing Oman's influence in East Africa, which had declined amid recent dynastic struggles. Confined to the coast and controlling Oman's navy, he must have considered the oceanic sphere his best bet for consolidating authority.

Due to Oman's history in Mombasa, the imam's confidants would have undoubtedly been aware of Mijikenda speakers' importance to the city's political fate. The fact that the delegation included "one man from each city," encompassing major settlements inland from Mombasa, was no coincidence.<sup>96</sup> The "Wanyika" delegates' presence demonstrated the mainland's broad support, which was critical to maintaining control of the city. Not surprisingly, the imam responded to their request.

On November 26, 1729, local militias took full control of Fort Jesus. A few weeks later, a large Omani fleet carrying two thousand armed soldiers arrived from Muscat.<sup>97</sup> Compellingly, the *Mombasa Chronicle* explains these shifts through stories of food provisions and alliances with the mainland. According to the text, as local frustrations mounted with Portuguese authorities in Fort Jesus, residents of Mombasa offered to de-husk the rice stored in the fort. Portuguese officials accepted their assistance and sent out "all of the paddy which was in the fort and divided it among the people" in town who promised to return it de-husked. In the chronicle's dramatic accounting, instead of returning the rice, the locals launched a surprise attack, beheading the Portuguese generals and seizing control of the fort.<sup>98</sup>

The chronicle vividly illustrates shifting nodes of political power in Mombasa. When read in context, we can think about the rice in the chronicle as representing not only food but access to resources, trading networks, and military affiliations that undergirded political legitimacy in the town. While there is no other documentation of the people of Mombasa destroying the rice at Fort Jesus, Portuguese accounts directly connect the fort's downfall to a shortage of provisions once they lost the support of the mainland.<sup>99</sup> By taking their food, seizing control of Fort Jesus, and demonstrating the broad support of the mainland with their trip to Muscat, Mombasa's contingent symbolically erased the Portuguese from the town's political landscape. At the hands of an alliance that spanned from southern Arabia to villages in the town's rural interior, Mombasa's Portuguese period was over for good.

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Portuguese writers considered Mijikenda-speaking communities opportunistic mercenaries who would quickly flip their support for textiles. Consequently, these groups represented an ever-present threat to Mombasa's well-being. As Resende expressed, rather than assuming the proper place as rural vassals to the powerful port city, inland communities held the town's leaders as "prisoners" on the island if they were not properly compensated with payments in cloth. Centuries of inland networking and commercial inventiveness were the invisible backdrop to this tremendous influence. Because Mijikenda speakers held a near monopoly over provisions and interior trade goods, they had a powerful means to influence Mombasa's politics under foreign rule. The imperial contests that linked Mombasa at various points in time to the Ottomans, Portuguese India, and Muscat did not

just unfold in the Indian Ocean's seascapes. Oceanic imperialism also implicated trade in foodstuffs, circulating cattle terminology, and inland affiliation strategies.

Mombasa's political fate and imperial arrangements in the western Indian Ocean often hinged on the actions of communities in the town's interior. For centuries, imperial powers established and maintained influence in Mombasa by building alliances with communities on the town's mainland who were their trading partners, military supporters, and rivals—sometimes all at once. Payments in cloth textiles held these relationships together or pulled them apart. The next chapter zooms in on these urban-to-rural tribute practices to trace how Mijikenda speakers themselves understood their relationship with Mombasa and the various global actors that converged at the port city.