DOCTORAL THESIS

Becoming and Being

Embodiment, Materiality, and Sociality Among Artisanal Fishers in a Fishing Village on the South Coast of Kenya

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An Ethnography of an Artisanal Fishing Community on the South Coast of Kenya

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Abstract

I present an ethnographic account of the Gazi fishing community in coastal Kenya through an exploration of what it means to be an artisanal fisher, what it means to live in a fishing village, and how a sense of meaning-making is nurtured to navigate around an uncertain world. Since fishing is the mainstay activity in this village, an increase in fishing effort during the past 20 years and overall catches remaining relatively unchanged has led to a decline in catch per fisher. I conducted a quantitative study in the village in 2008, focussing on marine resource use, relations, conflicts and governance. In this study, I investigate how the people manoeuvre in an environment of uncertainty using participant observation, informal interviews and 32 in-depth interviews, each lasting about an hour with active and retired fishers, fish traders and the former village chair. I shall show in chapter 3 how fishing communities learn how to fish. In chapter 4, I show the conditions under which residents evoke witchcraft or predetermined destiny in everyday conversations to explain misfortunes and eliminate coincidence. I explore, in chapter 5, how the uncertainties in fish catches lead to rumours to enrich our understanding of fishing skills and the sensory perception of fishers. In chapter 6, I explore how uncertainties in landings have led to what I call the 'forced' gift economy where residents increasingly force fishers to give them fish gifts to make a living and get food for their families. My study contributes to four main areas: 1) instalment and sensory engagement, 2) rumours constructed to resolve confusions or contradictions that experience in daily life contains, 3) anthropology of ethics and morality and 4) anthropology of destiny. Finally, I suggest the need to integrate knowledge derived from such ethnographic studies into fisheries policy and management programmes.

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I sincerely thank all my interlocutors who sat with me for long hours at the beach and at the village, accepted me to accompany them to the sea to fish both during the day and at night and all those who volunteered to allow me to be part of their everyday lives. I will not mention their names for anonymity. Thanks to the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI) management for granting me the study leave to undertake my PhD studies. Gratitudes go to my colleague Dr Kairo for accommodating me throughout my stay in Gazi, and all my colleagues at the KMFRI Gazi station and Mombasa headquarters.

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Chapter 1: Into the field

1.1 Introduction

This research forms part of the Rising from the Depths (RftD) network, an interdisciplinary network funded by the United Kingdom Global Challenges Research Fund through the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The network aims to identify the ways through which Marine Cultural Heritage (MCH), which includes the tangible submerged and coastal heritage of Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar and Mozambique, and its associated intangible aspects, can stimulate ethical, inclusive and sustainable community development in the region to deliver sustainable development. It is premised on the fact that the coastal and marine heritage of East Africa is a valuable cultural and environmental resource, which is largely unstudied and undervalued. In addition, natural and anthropogenic processes of change significantly threaten the region's rich submerged and coastal heritage. The fast rate of increase of this change is continuously exposing the vulnerable coastal populations of East Africa to more risk of exploitation and insecurity because of climate change, food, shelter and land.[1]

I joined this network as a social anthropology research student to study MCH in East Africa. An interesting challenge in Kenyan marine research is that scientists have conducted few studies with people whose world it is to fish.[2] Therefore, we lack detailed descriptive data that is drawn primarily from fieldwork experience of living with fishing communities and learning their ways of knowing and being by actively participating in their activities, interacting with them and

[1] See Henderson *et al* (2021)

[2] Yusuf (2011) applied an on-site non-participant observational study, unstructured in-depth interviews with key informant and focus group discussions to understand how people's cultural repertoires and religious beliefs mediate their participation in fisheries comanagement. Kawarazuka, Locke and Seeley (2019) conducted an ethnographic study on a Mijikenda fishing community in coastal Kenya. They explored contradictions in gendered power relations and how women deploy these to reinterpret gendered practices without directly challenging local patriarchal structures.

interviewing them over a long period, at least a year or several years and using these observations and interviews as data.[3]

My previous research focused on collecting quantitative data among fishing communities. The RFtD network introduced me to qualitative research. Therefore, in this study, I moved from quantitative to qualitative research by conducting an ethnographic study of marine fishing cultures. This allowed me to obtain an insider's view of a fishing community for the first time. I got inside its culture for an extended period to understand the lives and social worlds of the people. Hence, I provide an extensive and in-depth understanding of their ways of knowing and being.

Fishers along the Kenyan coast derive their livelihood, food security, and cultural identity from fishing. However, as we shall see, fish catches per fisher have declined considerably from the past when there were plenty of fish stocks. Therefore, fishers and residents navigate a world of uncertainties. To appreciate a nuanced understanding of everyday practices of accessing fish, it is important to understand the lived realities and daily struggles of residents to access fish. In my research, I aimed to understand what it means to be a fisher and to live in a fishing village and how a sense of meaning-making is nurtured to navigate around an uncertain world in Gazi fishing village on the south coast of Kenya. In what follows, I shall discuss how I gained access to this fishing village and describe my study site. I shall then explain how I chose my study site and interlocutors and how I gathered data and then give a justification of why I chose the data

[3]Before I submitted this thesis, a colleague working with one of the NGOs at the Kenya coast told me that he was collaborating with the son of a deceased fisher to translate into English and publish a manuscript that the fisher had written in Swahili. According to him, the manuscript describes traditional fishing methods and practices in Kenya. This includes seasonality in fishing, how fishers understand the weather, how they target fish, species of fish targeted and how traditional fishing gears are constructed.

collection methods I used, how I wrote my fieldnotes, how I analysed my data and finally discuss ethical considerations.

1.2 Gaining access

I arrived at Gazi village, which is located about 50 km south of Mombasa, one evening at the end of July 2019. It was drizzling, and the ground was already wet as I alighted from the *matatu*.[4] I walked along a path made of cabro paving blocks that passes through one part of the village to meet the village chair. The houses in the village had cement or mud or stone block walls. The roofs were made of metal roof (iron sheets) or thatched using palm tree leaves referred to as *makuti*. The village chair was selling coffee and tea to some men who were playing dominoes and checkers and chatting outside his café. Next to his café, there was a video room where other men and children sat watching an African-American movie and a shop selling basic household commodities. The video room was also, where various men and youths regularly converged to sit and watch European football matches. Most of these men would later become my interlocutors.

I briefed the village chair about my study, and the data collection methods that I will use, and requested his permission to conduct my study in the village. I did this for ethical considerations before commencing my research. He did not object to my request to conduct my study in the village and assured me of his support for my research. He told me what I already knew: that several researchers have conducted their studies in this village before. It was still drizzling when I left the village chair's café and made my way to the then beach management

[4] A *matatu* is a privately-owned vehicle used for public transportation in Kenya.

unit (BMU) chair's house.[5] Bakari Siraj's house was a rectangular-shaped Swahili type of house made of coral stones and an iron roof. It was located on the farthest end of the path made of cabro paving blocks close to the middle of the village. Bakari Siraj acted as my gatekeeper because he could permit access to my interlocutors. However, even after promising he would pass the message to every BMU member in the village introducing me as a research student interested in understanding the fishing community's way of knowing and being, I soon discovered that Bakari Siraj did not do so after I overheard some fishers inquiring what I was doing at the beach every day.[6] I had assumed that by telling him to inform them about my presence in the village it would be easy for me to introduce myself to all the fishers I met.

Even though I had informed Bakari Siraj that I was planning to stay in the village for approximately 12 months, I later learnt that he had his own reasons for not doing so. Firstly, there were two warring factions in the BMU membership. According to Bakari, many BMU members and non-members (those who had not registered with the BMU, but were residents of the village) wanted him to be ousted from the position of BMU chair. This is because he was allegedly mismanaging BMU funds. He had allegedly embezzled BMU funds and built a 'permanent' house. They considered him arrogant and that he did not want to work with the then vice chair and other officeholders of the BMU and he had overstayed his term. For various residents, Bakari was colluding with the county fisheries officers to help him remain in power. This group wanted elections to be held as soon as possible to oust him and elect a person of their

[5] Under the Fisheries management and development ACT, No. 35 of 2016, a BMU is an organisation of fishers, fish traders, boat owners, and other beach stakeholders who traditionally depend on fisheries activities for their livelihoods. It aims *inter alia* to strengthen the management of fish-landing stations, fishery resources and the aquatic environment and to support the sustainable development of the fisheries sector.

[6] Before a researcher conducts interviews using questionnaires with respondents, she/he first notifies the BMU chairman and/or the village head about her/his research. It is usually the duty of the BMU chair and/or the village head to inform the interlocutors and to make it easy for the researcher to have interviews with them. In this case, the BMU chairman did not inform my interlocutors about my research.

choice.[7] I, therefore, opted to introduce my research to the fishers I met and the boat captains without relying on any of the officeholders to do so for me.

On the second day of my stay in Gazi, Bakari Siraj introduced me to Fadil Mohammed, a young man in his early 20s who had just completed his secondary school education.[8] Fadil Mohammed introduced me to fishers, who used hand lines, spear guns, gill nets, and basket traps to fish. He directed me to their homes, alerted me whenever they landed fish and where they spent their time in the evenings while resting. I continued interacting with these fishers even after I had ceased going around with him approximately three months later. He also played an important role in introducing me to migrant fishers when they began their *ago*.[9] For fishers using the small-scale purse seine gear (commonly referred to as ring nets), which is usually used by 30–40 fishers, I later held a brief meeting at the beach with Bakari Siraj and three boat captains (Ramah, Kopa and Omari) to introduce myself and my research. The boat captains agreed to participate in my research with their crew.

[7] There was even a meeting organised by the county government administration to solve issues about election of BMU officials after an anonymous letter was sent to them. Finally, after he was reelected as the vice chair with another resident installed as the chair, I never heard about the infighting again.

[8] After his secondary school education, Fadil tried his hand on fishing, but was reluctant to become a regular fisher because he did not like fishing. He never explained to me why he did not like fishing, although he occasionally went to the beach to solicit fish gifts from his friends and relatives. He tried to apply for jobs elsewhere away from the village particularly in the hotel industry and in the military and police but was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, he did manual (casual) jobs in the village and helped scientists to collect mostly socioeconomic data. After I had completed my fieldwork and left, he eventually secured a job as a casual worker in Dubai through an agency. He traveled to the UAE in October 2021 with other youths from the village. When I visited the village in early October 2022, exactly a year later, some residents told me that Fadil has never returned to Kenya since he left. They told me that he was doing well and was constructing a permanent house in the village.

[9] *Kwenda ago*, also *dago*, refers to migrant fishers in the east Africa region – especially Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique – traveling from their homes to camp and fish elsewhere within the region (Jiddawi and Öhman, 2002; Wanyonyi, Wamukota, Mesaki, *et al.,* 2016). They fish for several weeks or months and return home after accumulating savings from the sale of fish in the villages located close to their fishing grounds (Fulanda *et al.*, 2009). The fishers travel from one place to another in a group, cook together, live in a camp and share the money at the end of the *ago*.

The second reason Bakari Siraj did not talk to fishers about my research is that migrant fishers usually arrive at this village every year at the beginning of the southeast monsoon season (SEM) in late October or early November for *ago* to camp and fish in the village and leave in March. During this period, there are usually many fishers in the village using plank wood boats with daytime ring net fishers increasing by two or more boats, while those using nighttime ring nets increase in number by three, four, or more boats. In addition, there are usually several day and night hand line and gill net fishers from Pemba, Tanzania. Since I arrived in July 2019 for my fieldwork, I had to reintroduce myself to the migrant fishers that arrived at the beginning of November.

Initially, I nearly abandoned my inquiry into fishing in the village of Gazi to conduct my research in Vanga on the south coast of Kenya, which is a historical fishing village in Kenya. I thought I would not find rich, detailed information about fishing in Gazi village as I would find in Vanga. This is because, according to residents, many of the youths in Gazi who I expected to be fishers were lazy individuals who were not interested in fishing, but in waiting for hardworking fishers to return from the sea to solicit fish gifts from them. In addition, most of the fishers in the village were migrants from Pemba, Tanzania; therefore, the proportion of migrant fishers was higher than that of local fishers. My colleague exacerbated my fear when she told me that Lamu, also, a historical fishing site on the northern part of the Kenyan coast, and Vanga, were the best sites one could conduct an ethnographic study like mine. According to her, on these sites, “one can listen to beautiful accounts from fishers about how they learn to fish and how they use their senses in fishing, such as through sensing the winds by smelling.” Another colleague had also warned me from his experience how one’s research project could easily fail because of the Gazi community turning against the researcher. I fought these thoughts with time

somehow as my contacts increased. I had already stayed in the village for quite some time, therefore, I would spend a lot of time gaining access to another field site while there was little time left for me to conduct my fieldwork before I resumed school.

When I finally met Musa whom I had known before I began my PhD studies during my previous research as a social science research assistant in the village in 2008, he was excited to become my guide.[10] He alerted me whenever new migrants arrived in the village and introduced me to the captains of the boats or canoes and the crew. Gaining access, therefore, took more time than I had initially expected and this was facilitated by my gatekeepers–Fadil Mohammed, Bakari Siraj and Musa–who took me "under their wings" and helped to introduce me to many of my interlocutors (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). My gatekeepers had previous experience working as field guides with other research scientists in conducting quantitative and ecological surveys.

As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) pointed out, negotiating access involves drawing on the intra- and inter-personal resources and strategies the researcher has developed in dealing with everyday life. However, achieving access depends on theoretical understanding, the discovery of obstacles to access and effective means to overcome them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Here, the process of negotiating access generated useful insights about the social organisation of the fishing community under study and the positioning of the people in this fishing village. However, gate-keeping issues had serious implications for being able to work confidently in this fishing community and illustrated ethical dilemmas in accessing interlocutors and conducting interviews and participant observation (Miller and Bell, 2012). Such issues could include whose permission ought to be asked as well as whose permission needs to be obtained if initial access is

[10] Musa is a handline fisher in his 50s originally from Pemba, Tanzania and has lived in Gazi for over three decades.

to be granted (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As Lune and Berg (2017) point out, an approach such as the one I took while negotiating access initially affected my study, but did not affect my entire study and my long-term relationship with the community.

My prior knowledge about the fishers I studied and familiarity with their routines facilitated my entry as well as establishing rapport once I had gained entry. I built a rapport over time by knowing how to listen to my interlocutors, learning appropriate behaviour in a setting, and eating local food in cafés and at the homes of my interlocutors. I also engaged in reciprocity by telling the truth about my research, and my life stories, learning to answer truthfully to questions about religious beliefs and practices, values, and opinions, respecting the point of view of my interlocutors, and not betraying confidentiality (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011: 48). Reciprocity also meant sharing what I had with interlocutors who asked for them, helping in solving conflicts between fishers, offering expert scientific advice, occasionally buying meals for fishers at the cafés, making monetary contributions during funerals and attending funerals and other social events, and participating in beach clean-up events with community members. In the end, my interlocutors agreed to help me in my research because they understood it – I frequently reminded them what I was doing – although they viewed it as unique compared to what previous researchers had done in the village. In addition, my knowledge of Swahili, which is both the national and official language in Kenya, assisted me in easily gaining access and in understanding local meanings once I gained access.

Initially, some fishers suspected my intentions even though I had frequently explained my research to them. This gave me multiple identities. As I later learnt from Musa and Mzee

Hamadi, [11] some of my interlocutors initially thought I was some kind of undercover agent working for the government's Criminal Investigation Unit, while some thought I was a fisheries officer out to investigate people engaged in illegal fishing practices or migrant fishers without permits and arrest them.[12] These identities reflect my interlocutor's experiences with the power of the state as Chege (2015) observed among men commonly referred to as 'beach boys' who act as participants in 'sex tourism' at the Kenyan south coast region at beaches close to my study site. They reflect as Kawarazuka et al. (2019) found out among their interlocutors in a fishing village along the Kenyan coast, ascendancy over local people. In my case, the associated ascendancy could be because I was a government official and the assumption that I held economic and educational status and had connections with donor agencies and the government. This could lead to the researcher having limited access to local people. However, as Kawarazuka et al. (2019) found out, speaking Swahili, living in the local community, and the researcher's behaviour could lead the interlocutors to question their initial negative perceptions of the researcher in this area.

I will not forget one Saturday about two weeks after I arrived in Gazi village. It was during the low spring tide when the sea water level is normally at its lowest. Children were gleaning squids while fishers had gone out to fish. When I approached Mzee Daudi, who was conducting fishing using illegal fishing gear, the senior man literary fled into the deeper part of the sea thinking I was going to arrest him. About two weeks later, after he had learnt from other fishers that I was not there to harm him and after we had become friends, he told me he stopped fishing using that fishing gear for fear of being arrested and that he had resorted to begging for

[11] Mzee is a Swahili word meaning an old person.
[12] Chege (2015) also had multiple identities with her interlocutors during her fieldwork in the south coast of Kenya being considered as a journalist, a writer and an undercover agent from Kenya's Criminal Investigation Department.

fish gifts from fishers instead. (He did not stop using the gear because of me, but because the fisheries officer had ordered him to stop using it or else, they would arrest him and confiscate his fishing gear). He told me: "I stopped fishing using that gear because I do not want to be arrested. Do you remember what Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the former Tanzanian president, said? He said, 'You would rather be poor and free than rich and oppressed.' I choose to be poor and free." In another incident that I will not forget, when the local police invaded the village in the wee hours of the night on the seventh day of my stay in the village in search of a wanted criminal, this was the subject of discussion at the beach that early morning as fishers were preparing to leave for the sea. I overheard one fisher warning the others, while not referring to me directly, about being extremely careful with visitors who arrive in the village and whose intentions are unknown because some of them were spies sent by the government. During the conversation, one fisher narrated a story about a visitor who arrived in the fishing village pretending to be a fisher and who eventually ended up being a wanted criminal. In addition, during my stay in the village, two young men who were not originally from the Kenyan coast visited the village and stayed for a few months, preaching Christianity in a predominantly Muslim community. Local fishers told me they suspected that the young men could be spies in the government's Criminal Investigation Unit pretending to be preaching the gospel while looking out for criminals. This exacerbated local people's suspicions of visitors.

Some ring net fishers initially hesitated to allow me to accompany them during fishing trips. For instance, Kopa, a permanent resident originally from Pemba and owner of a wooden plank vessel, and his captains frequently refused to go fishing with me by postponing our agreed date. This was because they feared I would investigate how they fished and report them to the authorities. Later on, however, they allowed me to join them after they learnt I was not there as a

spy. Therefore, suspicions circulated freely around this village where residents, although hospitable, did not trust visitors. This was because of events that had happened before that had instilled fear in them. Ultimately, in my case, these suspicions dissipated within the first few weeks as my contacts increased. My interlocutors also learnt that I was not the person they initially suspected I was. As a result, they allowed me to participate in fishing activities and conversations with them, listen to their opinions and their stories and learn what it meant to be a fisher, to live in this fishing community and to learn how a sense of meaning-making is nurtured to navigate around an uncertain world.

I exploited different roles while conducting my fieldwork and gaining access to data (Burgess, 2006a; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I took up the 'participant-as-observer' role where I participated in as well as observed fishing practices by developing relationships with my interlocutors to have some understanding of their world (Burgess, 2006b). My field roles also developed: 'researcher as a student', 'researcher as an officer,' 'researcher as a scientist,' and 'researcher as participant', although finally, I was simply referred to as 'officer' because of the position I held as a research scientist at the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI).[13] My position as a research 'officer' or 'scientist' in a government institute had its advantages and disadvantages. The advantage was that it made it easier for me to get information from my interlocutors even when I did not request it. The disadvantage was that some of my interlocutors gave me information thinking that I could help them because I worked for the government. Some fishers sought help from me or responded to my questions or gave me information because they thought that being a 'government officer,' I could assist them to access

[13] Historically, government officers used positions of power to influence communities. Chiefs, for instance, are deeply inserted into local social networks, thus, receive free gifts from communities because their offices have historically been accorded great respect (Baldwin 2016: 8). Since I worked as a research scientist in a government institution, many community members simply called me 'officer'.

government funds or donations from NGOs or the private sector to purchase fishing gear, or fishing vessels and help improve their livelihood. For instance, one day, Mzee Imara's ring net boat nearly capsized in the middle of the night while his crew were waiting for fish to shoal on the surface of the water around the lantern light.[14] This made them lose all their ropes and anchors. Members of this fishing boat requested I help them get funds to repair their boat and buy a new anchor and ropes. When I asked questions about land ownership and fishing in the village, some fishers hoped I asked them such questions to link them up with powerful people in government to reduce their suffering and poverty. Some immigrants originally from Pemba who were not Kenyan citizens but had lived in the village for decades hoped I could help them get Kenyan citizenship. Some thought that I could help them. Kopa, an immigrant and owner of a daytime ring net boat, for example, wanted a loan of KES 300,000 from me to upgrade his fishing equipment or to purchase his boat and fishing gear for a total of KES 1 million. He assumed I was a rich man because I was a government officer. Some gave me the identity of a messenger – they kept sending me to the fisheries officer to inform him about their problems.

Although I frequently joined my interlocutors for fishing trips or had informal interviews with them on land and explained to them several times about my research, some of them still questioned the benefits of my research in their day-to-day life. According to many of my interlocutors, this was because of many years of research that had taken place in the village involving fishers without tangible benefits from the fishers themselves or the village itself. For instance, when I visited Kopa's home one evening, I found him with his captain, Chengo, cleaning their diving gear and planning for the following day's fishing activity. His wife was washing utensils while listening to Tanzanian parliamentary proceedings. Kopa and Chengo

[14] See chapter 4.

complained they did not benefit from fishing gear donated to the BMU by the county governor through the Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) when he visited the village earlier that day together with his deputy and other politicians to distribute fishing gear to fishers of Gazi and neighbouring BMUs. According to them, this was because they were not Kenyan citizens but immigrants originally from Pemba Island in Tanzania, referred to as guests/visitors by Kenyan citizens. Therefore, they could not join the BMU. Chengo told me that the purpose of conducting fisheries research or any other research in the marine environment is to enable all fishers to get help from the government and improve their livelihood. However, the county governor had distributed the fishing gear donations resulting from years of research conducted in the village by several scientists only to Kenyan citizens who were members of the BMU leaving out residents like them that had emigrated from Pemba and permanently settled in Gazi. "We have never benefited from the research that you scientists often conduct here. Even though the entire village relies on us (*immigrants from Pemba*) for fish and economic prosperity, whenever the government and NGOs distribute aid to the fishers of this village, only the residents (*wenyeji*) benefit. Why then should we participate in your research?" Chengo told me and then continued, "If you want to conduct your research with me, give me money. I will take you to the sea wherever you want to go and then we will be done." Here, my interlocutors' initial everyday resistance to research studies was because of previous and ongoing experience with other researchers.[15] Hence, the only option for fishers like him was to demand money from scientists who wanted to conduct research with or on them because they did not benefit from research

[15] I witnessed fishers intentionally lying to a foreign social scientist and a Kenyan social scientist conducting interviews in the village. They later told me that it was because there was no benefit in telling them the truth. I also witnessed some fishers refusing to give out data about their day's fish catches and their catches to be weighed by a Kenyan fisheries scientist conducting a fish catch assessment survey because according to them the research was not beneficial to fisheries development and social and economic life in the village.

projects targeting them, anyway. I tried to overcome these challenges and reduce potential biases by making clear my position as a research student and researcher and openly informing every interlocutor about my intentions and reasons behind my research.

I entered the field with an open mind and tried to refrain from integrating preconceived ideas onto the research site. My background as a marine research scientist was crucial in the production of data. It influenced my choice of the study site, the research problem, and the collection and analysis of data. Furthermore, the Rising from the depths project on Marine Cultural Heritage (MCH) influenced the direction of my research. Indeed, my long-term experience as a marine research scientist in fisheries, ecological marine management, and social science and particularly my prior experience in quantitative social studies with local and migrant fishers (e.g. Wanyonyi et al., 2016a; Wanyonyi et al., 2021) helped me to develop and ask questions about fishing, fishers, fish traders, fish porters, as well as fish as a symbol of the relationship between residents and migrant fishers.[16] Hence, I did not enter the field as a blank slate. However, my specialised knowledge as a marine research scientist did not make conducting my research easier. I faced challenges during data collection as I have explained above. In addition, I did not command access based on authority because I am a research scientist at a government research institute. Indeed, I gained access through the trust that emerged through establishing relationships and reciprocities (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, I believe that the fine-grained analysis of my interlocutors throughout my study has enabled me to contribute new insights to the understanding of the ways of becoming and being in a fishing

[16] Porters are male residents that transport fish from the fishing vessels to the fish *banda* for weighing and subsequent selling.

community that is filled with uncertainties about fish landings and ultimately on the relationship between embodiment, materiality and sociality.

Gender also influenced my field research. In Gazi, men conduct fishing, while both women and man's conduct fish trading. The rural south coast of Kenya is extremely patriarchal, where women and girls are often confined indoors and doing household chores. The gendered division of labour in this fishing village is based on the perception of women as having social roles in the domestic sphere. They have household responsibilities of cooking, collecting firewood, washing clothes, fetching water and child-rearing while men are wage earners in the fishing industry. This produces asymmetrical effects on gender status and logically presupposes women. Since fishing is the mainstay of this village, women's relatively limited participation in the fish value chain has resulted in gender disparities in income, with their activities underpaid or unpaid and considered an extension of their household responsibilities. Men continue to control the income from fishing and farming, while women have little opportunity to work for wages because of their household responsibilities. A few women are engaged in fish trading, seaweed farming, ecotourism and the selling of foodstuff. Since a small proportion of women have opportunities to earn income through their efforts, most of them depend on their husbands or the young men in the household to give them small amounts for their use (Ciekawy, 1999).

The everyday practices in this fishing village reify men's subordination of women while providing opportunities for women to employ a creative agency to change actual power relations without directly challenging local patriarchal structures (Kawarazuka et al., 2019). Previous studies have demonstrated the existence of a mixed cultural context among the Digo (Mochache *et al.*, 2020). These studies show that the Digo community has a patriarchal culture because of their close interactions with Arab/Persian traders, who strongly influenced their culture during

the time of migration. They have also maintained their Bantu culture, which is predominantly matriarchal (Werner, 1915). Therefore, women in this fishing village constantly employ strategies to maintain the supply of daily meals and secure long-term well-being for their families, just like men do (Kawarazuka et al., 2019). In Gazi, women play a key role in fish marketing and distribution by buying fish from the beach and transporting and selling them to consumers in nearby villages and/or marketplaces (Ochiewo, 2004).

Please note that women are not absent from this study. My interlocutors during participant observation also included women. I also conducted informal interviews with female fish traders at the beach while they were waiting for fishers to land their catches and while they sold fish in the village. Therefore, although there could be a perception that women's voices are missing in this study, as we shall see, women are implicated particularly in gift-giving and witchcraft. In chapter 4, for example, although implicated in witchcraft accusations, I shall show that women shun discussing witchcraft. I shall also show in chapter 6 how fishers prefer to give women fish gifts or sell fish to them than men, which sometimes leads to sexual relationships.

Finally, my ethnicity from the western part of Kenya did not influence my research to a large extent because Swahili is the national language spoken in Kenya and because of the over 10 years of experience I possess of living and working as a marine research scientist along the coast of Kenya. Indeed, it was easy for me to communicate with my interlocutors save for cases where they inadvertently switched to their local dialect – especially Digo.[17] In addition, although I could understand the Swahili spoken by the migrants from Pemba, occasionally it was difficult for me to understand them whenever they switched to a deeper Pemba accent during their conversations. I solved this by later asking them for clarification in simpler Swahili.

[17] Digo is a sub-group of the Mijikenda.

Since ethnographic fieldwork is itself distinctive insofar as it relies on 'undesigned relationality', I did not have a fixed identity as a researcher (Lederman, 2013; Bell, 2019). I participated simultaneously as an outsider and an insider (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 87). Being an outsider, a research scientist, and someone who is originally from outside the Kenyan coast commonly referred to in Swahili as sing. *Mbara,* plur. *Wabara* and not from indigenous coastal communities such as Mijikenda, Swahili and other indigenous coastal communities such as the Waata, I did not have access to certain sorts of information, or my study could have been exposed to different kinds of methodological dangers. Being an insider – a Kenyan who has lived and interacted with coastal people in the Kenyan coast for over a decade and with a long-term background in marine research, which involved working closely with fishers and occasionally with fish traders – could also have led me to miss important aspects of the setting and misunderstanding the behavior observed. Lastly, although the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to halt my fieldwork in March 2020 and leave the field about three months early, I had enough data for my PhD. I also continued to interact with fishers during the pandemic through phone calls initially on almost a daily basis and later occasionally. This is because of the long-term interaction we had had. Some fishers updated me on daily catches – especially the initial decline because of the pandemic setting in – and the effect of night curfews, lockdowns and social distancing on fishing activities. They also updated me on the effect of the pandemic on the marketing of fish and everyday life.[18] I also visited the village occasionally when the government of Kenya eased restrictions and opened up the economy because of a drop in the number of reported cases of COVID-19 in the coastal region.

[18] Initially, some claimed COVID-19 was a hoax and if it truly existed, could be cured through swimming, drinking seawater and eating fish.

Before I submitted this thesis, I visited two adjacent fishing villages of Jimbo and Vanga during a two-day research trip in early June 2022. This was part of a research project focusing on the social and ecological assessment of the Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area, which is located at Kenya's southern border with Tanzania. Vanga and Jimbo fishing villages are part of the Shimoni-Vanga seascape that derive their fishing benefits among other benefits from the Kisite-Mpunguti Marine Protected Area. As I explained above, I initially thought of abandoning my inquiry into fishing in Gazi village for Vanga village. This is because of the rich history of fishing in this area. During my informal interviews with residents, one daytime ring net fisher told me it is impossible to predict which fish species fishers will catch the following day unless they are pursuing a shoal of fish that they saw the day before. He told me it is normal for fishers to catch fish along their migration routes on two consecutive days and fail on the third day. This is because of the difficulty involved in predicting whether fishers will catch fish the following day.

Two women fish traders told me that residents of Vanga solicit fish gifts in two ways: *kurunza* and *kunyaa*.[19] *Kurunza* refers to a beggar soliciting fish gifts from fishers belonging to only one boat. This type of beggar usually ends up selling the fish gifts. Some residents have made *kurunza* their source of livelihood. *Kunyaa* refers to residents soliciting gifts from nighttime fishers who usually land sardines early in the morning. Here, the beggar asks for small portions of sardines from fishers belonging to several boats to fill his bucket with fish. One fisher told me that forced giving is also common in Vanga village. Here, the fisher is not literary forced to give out a fish gift. The beggar solicits a fish gift in such a way that the fisher has no other option but to give it out. One woman said, "Gift-giving is so ingrained in the village such that a

[19] These were commonly used terms during my fieldwork in Gazi.

fisher can completely refuse to sell fish to a fish trader to make money, but give it for free to a fellow fisher. He does so hoping that the receiver will give him a fish gift whenever he doesn't go to the sea, and it becomes a cycle."

A 25-year-old nighttime ring net fisher in Jimbo village called Chidzo told me that some fishers use witchcraft to fish. According to him, even witch doctors pray to and believe in God. He said, "If you believe the witch doctor and go to the sea, and God already planned by God that you will get your livelihood that day, you will certainly catch fish." For Chidzo, the witch doctor can choose to rub leaves against others and lie the fisher will catch fish. The intention is to make the fisher believe in the witch doctor. "When you go to the sea, you will catch fish. This is what we refer to as *shirki* (from the Swahili word *shirikisha* meaning to involve). That means you have 'involved' Allah by going through a witch doctor who believes in God." Here, I show that the ways of becoming and being in many fishing communities along the Kenyan and wider East African coasts (Kenya and Tanzania) are similar. Many of my interlocutors in Gazi pointed out how practices such as gift-giving are common in all landing sites along the East African coast. Therefore, although there could be subtle site-specific differences, I believe that the information I discuss in this thesis reflects the ways of becoming and being in many fishing communities along the East African coast.

1.3 Description of my study site

Gazi village (also referred to as Gasi) is located on the western shore of Gazi Bay about 50 km south of Mombasa city (see Figure 2). According to the 2019 national census, the village is situated in the Kinondo location, Gazi sub-location that covers an area of 58.3 square kilometres. There are 6,733 people, out of which 3,470 are male and 3,263 are female with a density of 115 persons per square kilometre. In the Gazi sub-location, there are 1,401

households. I define a household as a social and economic unit in which individuals live, cook and eat from the same pot, and share resources and tasks (Ochiewo et al., 2010). The average household size in Gazi village is estimated to be 5 (Ochiewo et al., 2010).

Artisanal fishing is the main economic activity acting as a source of protein and supporting livelihood in Gazi village. Today, Gazi Bay is one of the most important landing sites along the Kenyan coast because of its location near productive fishing grounds. There are approximately 200 fishers in Gazi, but the number increases considerably annually during the NEM season when migrant fishers from Vanga/Jimbo/Jasini villages in Kenya and Pemba in Tanzania arrive to camp and fish in the village. Wanyonyi et al. (2016b) and Wanyonyi *et* al. (2021) recently estimated the number of migrant fishers to be higher (58%) than resident fishers (42%). The main fishing gear used includes ring nets, hand lines, gill nets, monofilament nets, spearguns and basket traps while fishing vessels used include dugout canoes, fibre-glass boats, and wooden-plank boats (see figure 1). Some fishers walk to their fishing grounds at low tide, referred to as foot fishers. The residents also conduct gleaning of squids, octopuses, crabs, lobsters and mollusc shells.

Figure 1: A newly constructed dugout canoe and a fibre-glass boat and wooden-plank boats at the shore.

Photo credits: Victor Alati 17/01/2020.

Livelihood activities are highly gendered with men working as fishers, and in boat and canoe building, boat repairs, net repair and basket trap making. Although a focus of their lives is indoors conducting household chores, women are also involved in seaweed farming, ecotourism, mat weaving, fish trading, fuelwood collection and the selling of foodstuff. Residents of Gazi also practice crop farming, which includes mangoes, coconuts, maize, bananas, pawpaw, vegetables and tomatoes, and livestock farming, including goats, cattle and chicken. There are also small-scale businesses, such as shops and cafés. The subsistence lifestyle and the high poverty rate in the village lead to a high dependency which exerts pressure on primary natural resources such as fish and firewood (Jung and Huxham, 2018).

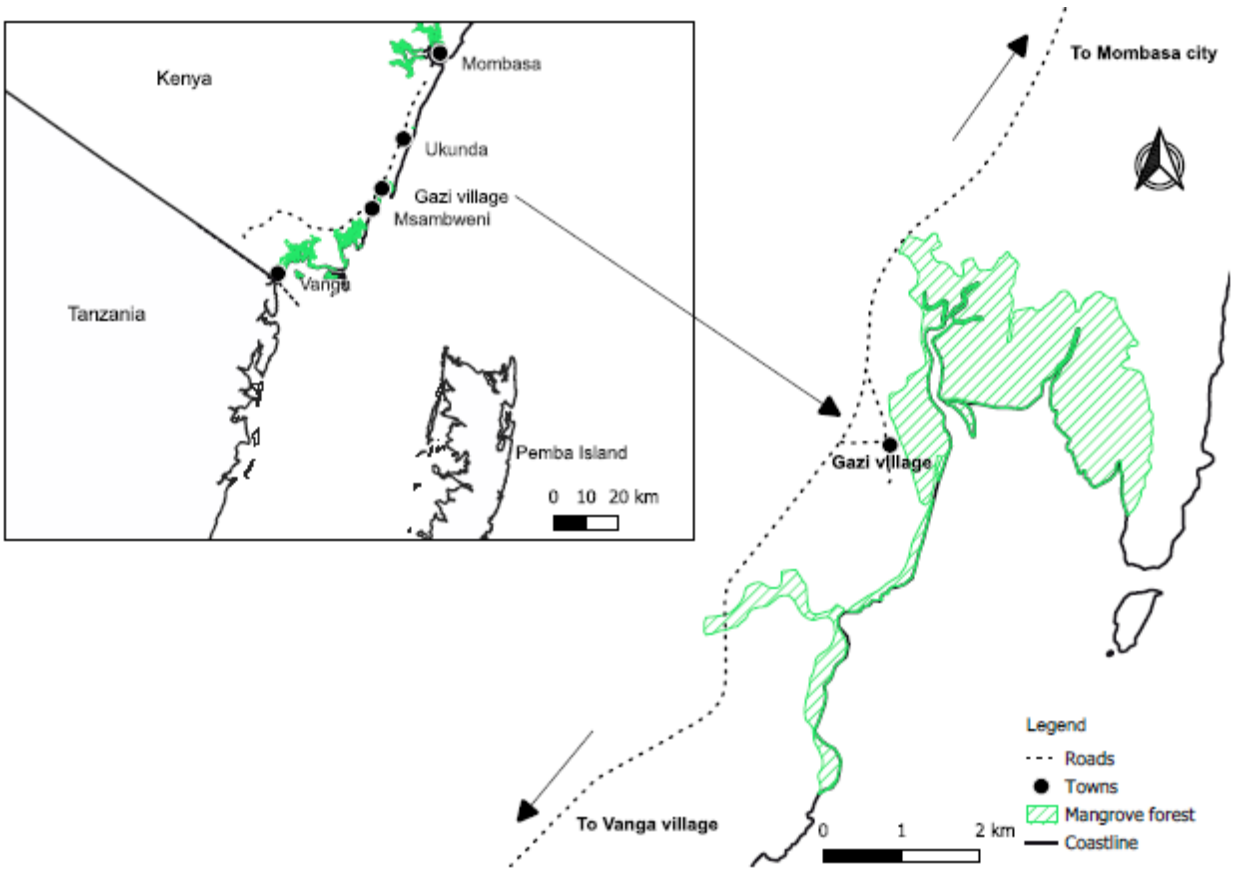

Figure 2: Map showing the location of Gazi village

Figure 3: A photo showing two rival ring net fishing crews playing a friendly football match at Gazi fishing village.

Photo credits: Victor Alati 11/09/2020.

Material style of life (MSL) is an indicator of relative wealth or social status within a community in developing countries (Pollnac and Crawford, 2000). It measures wealth based on household possessions or structure (Cinner et al., 2009). The presence or absence of a list of household items such as television, radio, boat, refrigerator, toilet, electricity and bicycle shows the differential social status in Gazi village. In addition, the presence or absence of the type of material one's house was constructed from, such as the type of walls, roof and floor, shows the difference in social status among residents (Pollnac and Crawford, 2000). Although many households in Gazi are poor, fisher households in this village have higher levels of human and social capital that can assist them, particularly in times of crises, than non-fishing households (Cinner et al., 2010). Research has shown that fishers with the least MSL are more engaged in migrant fishing than those with higher MSL (Jiddawi and Öhman, 2002; Wanyonyi *et al.*, 2021).

Although there are many Christians in the village, Islam is the dominant religion. There are three mosques and one church. There are three boreholes, three wells and piped water. The government has connected the village fully with electricity, although a few households still use

paraffin lanterns and paraffin tin lamps. There is one primary school, one secondary school and one community dispensary, one clinic, four cafés, and about ten shops in the village. The government is currently constructing a Technical Training Institute in the village. To the west of the village, close to the ocean, are the ruins of an old village. Mzee Maza told me that initially, they referred to the village as Kaukaban. They moved it to the present-day Gazi village. There is also an ancient building that used to house today's equivalent of a district commissioner and district officer during the pre-colonial era. This building connects Gazi village to its painful past. My interlocutors told me that, before the British brought slavery to a halt, Arabs tortured and killed Africans and transported many Africans to Saudi Arabia for sale as slaves as they built it, as Mzee Maza explained:

> That building you normally see there on your way to the beach used to be very large, nearly five or four stories. By climbing up to the top, one could see the city of Mombasa. The British colonialists reduced its size. They reduced it to the size you presently see. The history of that building is this: while they built it, they placed a human being (*an African*) on each of the four corners of the building and covered his body with mud while he was still alive until he died. They are there to date.

Two seasonal rivers, Kidogoweni/Makongeni to the north and Mkurumuji to the south of the village, discharge freshwater into the bay. The rainy season occurs during the SEM season, which causes 'long rains' between late March and July and the northeast monsoon (NEM) season, which causes short rains between November and December. These rains are increasingly becoming unpredictable because of climate change. As we shall see later, these seasons (NEM and SEM) influence fishing in the village.

Despite its seeming remoteness, Gazi village is connected to other parts of the Kenyan coast and the world. The Gazi landing site is one of the most productive landing sites along the Kenyan coast. Every day, traders from Ukunda and Msambweni towns, to the north and south of

Gazi respectively, and from the village converge at the landing site to buy fish, which they sell to customers in the two markets and within the village. The fish also find their way into hotels and households in Kwale county and Mombasa city. During the NEM season, residents dry tons of sardines and transport them to markets as far as Zanzibar and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Migrant fishers also travel from Pemba, Tanzania, and Vanga/Jimbo/Jasini in Kenya to come for *ago* (see page 5 for definition) in the village. Through this process, there is intermarriage between locals and migrants and an improvement in the economic and social life of residents. Fishers from Msambweni in the south also occasionally land their fish in the village. Fishers from the village also travel to other fishing sites, particularly in the north (e.g., Malindi, Lamu, Kilifi, Mtwapa) for *ago*. Men also take up casual employment and in the service sector outside the village in Mombasa city or towns like Ukunda, Mombasa and Malindi because of the seasonal nature of subsistence activities (Huff and Tonui, 2017), the hard life of a fisher (Parkin, 1989) which is accompanied by uncertainties in fish catches and to cope with poverty and economic crisis. Some residents also take up employment in the Middle East to improve their living standards and send remittances back to their relatives in the village. For many residents in this village, migrant remittances from within the country and the diaspora are a major source of income supporting household consumption, education, health care, small-scale businesses and housing.

Migrant fishers travel together as a crew from their homes to camp in Gazi (Jiddawi and Öhman, 2002). The size of the migrant camp depends on the crew size ranging between 2 and 30 fishers (Wanyonyi et al., 2021). The fishers share a meal, pay back loans and credits from the proceeds of migration before remitting the rest to their family members to support household needs such as food, gifts and clothes and health care at their sites of origin (Wanyonyi et al.,

2016a). Most of the migrant fishers delegate their responsibilities as heads of households such as the daily provision of food and shopping, farming and house construction while at their destination to their spouses or immediate family members, therefore, disrupting the social support networks of family and friends (Wanyonyi et al., 2016a). Fulanda et al. (2009) established that a migrant fisher supports on average two households, which include the parental family and the fisher's nuclear family. A small percentage of the migrant fishers are polygamous, supporting an average of four or more households. Polygamy spirals a migrant economy through the provision of fish catches and income to migrant families (Fulanda *et al.*, 2009).

The village has attracted several research projects targeting marine ecosystems and local community livelihood from scientists of local and international institutions. It is a site of attraction particularly for education, research and ecotourism activities for primary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, government institutions, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and politicians and foreigners because of the exemplary efforts to restore degraded mangroves and conserve mangrove forests and seagrass beds. Through KMFRI, the community earns about USD 1,200 per year as carbon financing because of the mangrove forest they conserve through the community-led *mikoko pamoja* conservation and restoration project. This has helped in generating other benefits - supporting the construction of buildings for the Gazi primary school, donation of schoolbooks and providing clean, piped water in the village and providing habitat and breeding grounds for fish. It has also attracted more funding to support the conservation of mangrove, seagrass meadows and coral reef resources in other areas along the Kenyan coast such as Vanga and Lamu and improve the livelihood of dependent communities. The Gazi community also engages in seaweed farming. The government is constructing a seaweed storage facility to promote the blue economy agenda in the village.

1.4 The choice of the study site

Why did I choose to conduct my study in Gazi village rather than any other fishing village along the approximately 600km Kenyan coastline? The fact that I am a marine research scientist at KMFRI and a research student under the RFtD project influenced my travel to Gazi village and subsequent research about this fishing community. I chose Gazi village because it represents a typical fishing community in Kenya where residents highly derive their livelihood, source of protein and cultural values from the sea. It is one of the major fishing villages in Kenya. Gazi is also one of the most important sites along the Kenya coast where migrants from Pemba arrive to camp and fish every NEM season (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b; Wanyonyi *et al.*, 2021). Hence, it is of interest because of fishing knowledge transfer from Pemba, Tanzania and the social relationships that have developed over the years between migrant fishers and their hosts, the people of Gazi.

It is also of interest particularly in scientific research because of the conservation initiatives of marine ecosystems such as seagrass meadows and mangroves, as I have discussed in the previous section. Therefore, the people of this community are one of the most informed coastal people in Kenya about the conservation of marine ecosystems. The village is also easily accessible by road from Mombasa city. I had not been involved in any research activity in this village since 2008 when I conducted quantitative studies of marine resource use patterns, relations and conflicts and governance as a research assistant with a local NGO - Coastal oceans research and development in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO) East Africa. Therefore, I conducted my study in this fishing community to build relationships with the people from scratch rather than getting into a fishing community where I had several contacts.

1.5 Sampling

While I had initially sought to work with only male fishers, I soon found out that by using an ethnographic approach it was impossible to conduct such a study without encountering male and female fish traders and everyone else in the community since they all interact in multiple ways. Therefore, I worked with whoever turned up and showed readiness and the ability to provide information. I selected interlocutors based on age, fishing experience, fishing gear used, and origin (migrant or resident). I also categorised migrant fishers based on their place of origin (Pemba Island in Tanzania and Vanga/Jimbo/Jasini village south of Gazi village in Kenya) and duration of stay (permanent residents versus short-term guests who come to the village for *ago*). I used a combination of opportunistic sampling and snowball sampling techniques to sample interlocutors (Bryman, 2012: 424). Through opportunistic sampling, I did not follow a strict, logical plan, but acted opportunistically by resourcefully seizing any opportunity that promised to reward me with relevant information (Honigmann, 1982). This involved observing the availability of fishers and traders, visiting households, asking questions to willing interlocutors, recording remarks I overheard or volunteered to me, attending meetings, and football games and other social events. Through utilising judgment and opportunistic, non-probability sampling, I used I deliberately chose interlocutors for the knowledge they possessed, situations, or events, and not excluding any (Honigmann, 1982). My interlocutors included active and retired fishers, male and female fish traders, fish porters, boat owners, beggars and a former village head because of his long-term experience in the village.

Initially, I asked to be introduced to or given the names of other fishers who I could interview or participate in their activities. In addition, because of my continuous presence in the village, whenever I met a fisher using a certain fishing gear e.g., a basket trap, I would spend

time with him, participating in his daily activities and in the process I came to know others in his circle. Occasionally, some interlocutors learnt about my research from other interlocutors or overheard me interviewing others and became interested and volunteered to be interviewed. Whenever I interviewed one fisher sitting in a group, for instance, others who found the discussion interesting would volunteer to participate in my research. Such interviews mostly ended up in discussions between interested fishers around fishing concerning the social, cultural, and economic life in the village. I deliberately assigned myself from time to time to observe particular situations and events such as fishers leaving for the sea, fishers fishing, fishers returning from the sea, and fishers selling their fish catches or giving fish gifts to residents, to construct ethnographic statements about fishing.

I conducted interviews each lasting about an hour with 32 interlocutors including four fish traders, two basket trap fishers, two gill net fishers, three hand line fishers, two porters, four retired fishers, 14 ring net fishers, a speargun fisher and a former village chair. I also conducted informal interviews with several other fishers, retired fishers, fish traders and porters.[20] The interlocutors I had informal interviews with also included female fish traders who sat every day at the landing site and people who came to the beach every day to wait for fishers to return to beg for fish gifts or to steal fish or just to enjoy the scenery of the ocean and the activities going on. Most of the people in the latter category ended up begging for fish gifts.

1.6 Gathering data

I conducted data collection from July 2019 to March 2020 using participant observation, and informal and semi-structured interviews.

[20] The fishers included migrant fishers and residents who fish during the day and night. Porters carry fish from the boat to the fish *banda* and are paid with a proportion of the catch after their service.

1.6.1 Participant observation

As a participant observer, I gathered data by immersing myself in the daily life of fishers to establish a close relationship with them for an extended period, taking part in activities, "hanging out," and conversing, while consciously observing and, ultimately, recording what I observed (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). I observed my interlocutors to see in what situations they ordinarily met and how they behaved in them (Becker and Geer, 1982; Burgess, 2006b). In addition, I had conversations with them in these situations and discovered their interpretations of the events I observed (Becker and Geer, 1982; Burgess, 2006b). I collected richly detailed data on social interactions based on observations in natural settings. In these ways, I learnt how to interpret ways of knowing and being in my interlocutors' world (Pink, 2015). Therefore, not only did I observe others and learn from them, but I also learnt by observing myself as well (Spradley, 1980).

This took time because I had to go through different "distinct" stages of "hanging out" in my role as a researcher (De Munck, 2009) even though, as a marine scientist, I had some knowledge of the social life of a fisher. I went through the stranger stage where I showed up where appropriate at the shore or other places in the village, then increasingly became aware of my interlocutors' social interactions and finally, they were not surprised when I showed up. I became aware of what people did, where they did it and with whom, while my interlocutors began to respond to me well (De Munck, 2009). In the second stage, the acquaintance stage, I became familiar with my interlocutors and developed friendships while in the final stage, the intimate stage, I had obligations and responsibilities to my interlocutors (De Munck, 2009). I have discussed these obligations and responsibilities in the first section of this chapter.

I tried to begin each morning the same way. I woke up by 5 am to the muezzin's call from the mosque urging the faithful to congregate for prayers in the mosque by reciting the Arabic words hayya ala salah, which means hasten to prayer, and hayya ala falah, which means hasten to success. After prayers, some daytime fishers would leave for the sea. Fishers such as basket trap fishers and stationary gill net fishers would go later to the sea depending on the tides which are predicted using the Islamic calendar and the lunar month. I was there when, occasionally, some daytime ring net fishers went to sea earlier than others did secretly, before the muezzin's call to pursue a school of fish that other fishers had failed to catch the day before and to avoid competition from the rival crew.

During the springtide of the NEM season, night ring net fishers preferred to go out to sea to fish on nights during the dark phase of the lunar cycle, referred to as *kiza ya bamvua* which usually lasts about eight days. These nights are usually dark; therefore, the lights emitted by their paraffin lantern lamps easily attract pelagic fish species. Some gill net, speargun and handline fishers went out to the sea to fish at night. Some handline fishers told me they prefer to fish at night to avoid the direct heat of the sun during the day and because plenty of fish get attracted to their baits during the night. Occasionally, I joined the nighttime ring net fishers in the evenings to fish for an entire night. During this time, I participated in all fishing activities and listened to their conversations as we went out to the fishing ground, slept on cold windy nights while we waited for fish to aggregate around the lantern lights for hours, and as we caught and loaded the fish unto the vessel and as we returned from the fishing ground. Most of the time, however, as I walked to the beach early in the mornings during this period to wait for fishers that had been fishing at night to return from the sea, I observed another group of people that rushed to the shore to wait for them carrying yellow or white or red 10-litre plastic buckets. This group

comprised beggars and fish traders. At the beach, ring net fishers would be preparing to leave. The sound of the engines and fishers shouting would signal ring net fishers leaving for the sea. At other times, I joined daytime ring net fishing trips. There, I participated in all fishing activities and listened to their conversations as we searched for fish, pursued the fish, and caught and loaded them onto the vessel and as we returned from the fishing ground. I observed how fishers and the people waiting for them at the beach reacted as we landed a high fish catch, a low fish catch, or returned from the sea empty-handed. I occasionally joined a basket trap fisher in his dugout canoe to retrieve fish from his traps placed in the fishing grounds. I had informal interviews with him, observed and participated in retrieving the traps, placing new baits in the traps and returning the traps into the water, all the time observing the direction of the water currents and the habitat. I also assisted the basket trap fisher to crack fresh-shelled molluscs he had collected earlier in the morning in the mangrove forest into pieces or those that we had stored in the beach sand for days or weeks. We referred to the beach sand as our 'refrigerator.' We used these cracked, shelled molluscs as baits.

On days I did not go to the sea, I tried to be at the beach always mostly in the late mornings or the afternoons when the daytime fishers return from the sea depending on ocean tides and whether they had caught fish. I spent time at the shore under the shade of mangrove trees or other trees, or at the veranda of the BMU fish storage building, or at the fish *banda* (they later brought this banda down during my stay in Gazi. Fishers currently use the BMU fish storage building to land fish or sell fish at the beach) with fish traders, beggars and fishers waiting for daytime fishers to land fish. During this period, which usually extended up to hours of waiting, I participated in their conversations and occasionally asked questions. When fishing vessels returned from the sea, I observed the behaviour of the people. I observed as they

approached the shore, as fishers docked their vessels, as fish was offloaded from boats and transported to the fish *banda*, as fishers sold the fish to traders, as fishers distributed fish gifts to residents and as the fish was transported to the market. I was always at the shore when other fishers using other fishing gears such as gill nets, hand lines, spear guns, and basket traps returned from the sea and sold their fish or gave out a portion of their catches as fish gifts to beggars. I also occasionally accompanied a fish trader to sell sardines to customers by hawking in the estates of Ukunda town, which is about 20 km from Gazi village. In the afternoons and evenings, I wrote up fieldnotes or conducted interviews. I also had several informal interviews with the people about ongoing activities.

On Fridays, many daytime fishers did not go to the sea because it is a prayer day, although some argued that it is not supposed to be for the whole day, but for only a few hours. Many of my interlocutors informed me they were only supposed to be out of the sea during Friday noon prayers. So, on Fridays, I witnessed some fishers going out to the sea early in the morning and returning just in time for the noon prayers. Those who did not go to the sea repaired their nets and boats until prayer time. I was there and participated in net and boat repair and the cleaning of nets while listening to conversations and having informal interviews. I also witnessed other fishers cleaning their canoes fortnightly, especially on Fridays, by burning fires on the sides to kill the algae that usually accumulates around the canoes and makes manoeuvring in the sea slower. I also helped a basket trap fisher making basket traps and building his dugout canoe from a mango tree.

I ate with my interlocutors in village cafés, attended football games organised between rival fishing crews, and visited their houses and interacted with their family members. I sat with my interlocutors in the afternoons and evenings, occasionally up to past midnight, and had

informal interviews with them. In the afternoons and evenings, when they are not fishing, fishers and male fish traders pass their time by congregating in groups to chat, smoke cigarettes or bhang, chew a psychostimulant plant referred to as *muguka* (khat), watch movies or football, listen to music, play dominoes, or a checkers draught game. Others opt to stay in their houses or alone to avoid being part of gossip that usually ultimately creates divisions among people while others prepare fishing gear and vessels for the next day's fishing trip. I also interacted with female fish traders (*mama karangas*) in the evenings while they sold deep-fried fish in the village. I had informal interviews with my interlocutors about their experiences during all the above-mentioned activities. I also attended fisher meetings, hosted by the State Department of Fisheries, KMFRI and NGOs, and other social events such as beach cleanup activities. As a result, I generated an immense amount of rich, detailed information.

1.6.2 Informal and unstructured interviews

I conducted informal and unstructured interviews since I had established rapport and respectful, ongoing relationships with my interlocutors. The interviews included a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness for the interlocutors to explore purposefully with me the meanings they place on events in their worlds (Heyl, 2001). According to Bernard (2011: 156), this type of interview "goes on all the time and just about anywhere." Therefore, I conducted interviews in the homes of fishers, while walking to and from the beach, while 'hanging out' in the café or the village, at the beach while waiting for fish to be landed, as people scrambled for fish gifts, as fish was being weighed for sale and while fishing. I asked open-ended, non-judgmental questions to encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). I occasionally asked my interlocutors questions to focus on the topic or clarify points I did not understand or to ask naïve questions (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). As Spradley

(1979: 58) writes that "The Ethnographic Interview," … is a sort of friendly conversation in which one introduces additional elements to assist interlocutors to respond as interlocutors. Hence, I did not direct the topics of discussion, but followed them as they went during the natural flow of conversation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). I used receptive 'uh huhs,' a few clarifying questions or comments or their terms or 'tell-me-more' to keep the story going whenever I noticed an interlocutor wanted to tell it (Bernard, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). I did this to understand the interlocutor's words and meanings while simultaneously exploring emerging theoretical interests when the interlocutor brought them up (Charmaz, 2014: 193).

In conducting unstructured interviewing, I had a coherent plan in mind that included topics to be addressed, but exerted as minimum control as possible over my interlocutor's responses (Bernard, 2011). I allowed interlocutors to open up and express themselves on their terms and at their own pace (Bernard, 2011). Throughout the interviews, I paid particular attention to language, meanings, and lives (Charmaz, 2014). I followed threads in the interlocutor's everyday language and discourse at the beach, in the sea and in the village to form questions from their terms and learn about their world. Some of the questions that I explored included "How do you feel about the ocean?" "Tell me what a good/bad day is for you," "Tell me about your life as a fisher," which invited the interlocutors to frame and explore their views yielding rich data around the taken-for-granted meanings supported by queries to elaborate (Skinner, 2012; Charmaz, 2014).

1.7 Justification for choice of methods

Participant observation allowed me to identify and follow up on problems critical to the fishing community and to revise my thinking about the community as I learnt more about it (Becker and Geer, 1982). According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), participant observation

enhances the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork, encourages the formulation of new research questions and hypotheses grounded in on-the-scene observation, and enhances the quality of interpretation of data. For DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), it is both a data collection and an analytic tool. As a researcher, I became the instrument for data collection and analysis through experience (Bernard, 2011). As a participant observer, I entered the field with a dual purpose: to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation (Spradley, 1980). I build explicit awareness by becoming explicitly aware of the most mundane elements (Bernard, 2011), of the fishing community's social life with a wide-angle lens, taking in a much broader spectrum of information and alternate between the insider and outsider experience (Spradley, 1980). By 'hanging out', I could build trust and rapport, and, therefore, trust results in ordinary conversation and ordinary behaviour in my presence (Bernard, 2011). As a participant observer, I captured important elements of human experience that were only visible to those who are there (Guest et al., 2013). This included reporting on unforeseen and unscheduled sorts of behaviours and events (De Munck, 2009). Through this, I could describe what went on in the field firsthand, who or what was involved, when and where things happened, how they occurred, and why from the point of view of my interlocutors' things happened the way they did in particular situations (Jorgensen, 1989). Therefore, apart from gaining access and immersing myself into the social world of the fishers, I produced written accounts and descriptions of many aspects of fishers' lives, including objective observations and subjective feelings that bring versions of these worlds to others (Spradley, 1980; Emerson et al., 2001).

I pursued ethnographic interviewing since it fits grounded theory methods. It facilitates conducting an open-ended, in-depth investigation of an area in which the interlocutor has

substantial experience (Charmaz, 2014). It focuses on the topic while providing the interlocutor with interactive space and time for views and insights to emerge. As the interviewer, I assumed direct and analytic control over data collection, the construction of data, and emerging theoretical ideas (Charmaz, 2014). Since interviews complement participant observation (Burgess, 2006b; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) as a part of it helping access the interlocutors' points of view and local world views (Skinner, 2012), using both of them helped me to maximise the possibility of coming up with unexpected data (Becker and Geer, 1982). My interlocutors used it to find, piece together, or reconstruct a discourse to make sense of their situation (Charmaz, 2014). Because of its flexibility, I discovered discourses and pursued ideas and issues immediately as they emerged during the interview (Charmaz, 2014). I used this method throughout my fieldwork to build rapport and uncover new topics of interest that I might have overlooked (Bernard, 2011; Vannini et al., 2011). In addition, through interviews, I obtained information on events or settings I did not witness or situations where the interlocutors could not allow me to be present (Burgess, 2006b).

Since I stayed for a long time in the field, I returned to my interlocutors several times on separate occasions and gather focused data to answer analytic questions and fill conceptual gaps (Bernard, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). This flexibility and control enabled me to increase the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Ethnographic interviewing, therefore, provided a major tool for generating focused data that I used to develop abstract conceptual categories through data interpretation, taking my interlocutors and me beyond every day (Rapport, 2012). It is important to note here that I am still in contact with some of my interlocutors. I regularly have phone conversations with them. I also visit the village occasionally. Therefore, this was not an extractive study.

1.8 Fieldnotes

I kept substantive fieldnotes consisting of a continuous record of the situations, events and conversations in which I participated and which included a record of the observations and interviews that I obtained every day (Burgess, 2006b). The fieldnotes I kept included producing day-by-day descriptive and reflexive sensory details of interlocutors, settings, objects, incidents, actions, dialogue, social drama, commensality, metaphors, sensory details and sensitivity attributes that are part of the daily round of life as well as personal experiences and reactions (Emerson et al., 2001, 2011). Through this, I learnt how to interpret through multisensory experiences, emplaced practices and ways of knowing and being in fishers' sensual worlds (Pink, 2015). My notes each day comprised a continuous record of the activities in which I was involved and observed and conversations in which I participated. In the fieldnotes, I worried less about what people were saying and more about the actions that happened. I relied on digital recordings to capture what they said accurately. I kept a running file of fieldnotes and interspersed them with extensive memo writing (Sanjek, 1990). My notes focused upon details of activities each day at the beach and in the village: early in the morning when fishers go to the sea and those who went at night returned, conversations and events that took place at the beach while fishers were at sea fishing, and activities as fishers returned from the sea. I also took detailed notes on conversations between fishers and traders in the village in the evenings while they were resting and at nighttime fishers as they left for the sea. I did not to collect data on daily fish catches since the BMU and KMFRI usually collect this data.

Following Emerson et al. (2011), initially, I wrote constant jottings on the Microsoft OneNote app on my phone which I uploaded online whenever I had internet and on a notebook while in the field during the day mostly by ducking in private corners to look as though I am

working on something else. I revised the jottings following the end of an interview session or fieldwork in the evenings by transferring them to my computer and expanding the short notes into descriptive, full fieldnotes of my day's experiences and observations. I wrote the descriptive full fieldnotes in the form of "thick description" as suggested by Geertz (1973). To write full fieldnotes into thick description, according to Clifford (1990: 52), involves moving away from the multisensory, multifocal perceptions and encounters of participant observation toward a "separate place of writing, a place for reflection, analysis, and interpretation." These descriptions are not merely interpretations but are written rhetorical constructions (Clifford, 1990: 67) meaning that the fieldnotes "have been written, rewritten, and written over" ceasing to be wholly "raw" data and are already as minimum partly "cooked" (LeCompte and Schensul, 2012: 37).

I developed my full fieldnotes by recalling in as much detail as possible what I had observed and experienced earlier that day. I reimagined and replayed in my mind in the form of memories or head notes or mental notes or remembered observations, scenes and events and conversations that marked the day by referring to jottings and other memories to reconstruct the day's events (Sanjek, 1990). This led to a logical, step-by-step series of incidents and experiences (Emerson et al., 2011: 51) or recorded fragments of past occurrences whose meanings could be enhanced through progressive ethnographic and theoretical contextualisation and interpretation (Sanjek, 1990). Transcriptions, the word-for-word creation of written texts from Dictaphone recorded accounts or elicitation from interlocutors, also formed part of the fieldnotes (Clifford, 1990; LeCompte and Schensul, 2012).

Apart from the substantive notes I kept about what occurred in the village, at sea and in the village, I also kept a set of methodological fieldnotes which included problems, impressions, feelings, hunches, and processes and procedures associated with field research (Burgess, 2006b).

This allowed me to be reflexive and to engage in some form of self-analysis during my fieldwork. In addition, I kept a private diary in which I could vent frustration and record personal reactions to the field situation, successes and failures (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011).

1.9 Data analysis

I conducted data analysis concurrent with data collection. The data I analysed included fieldnotes from participant observation and transcriptions of interview questions. I used a spiralling, or recursive, process of analysis immediately after I entered the field to the time I left, which involved "constant questioning, getting answers, asking more refined questions, getting more complete answers, and looking for instances that clarify, modify, or negate the original formulations" (LeCompte and Schensul, 2012: 27). A dynamic process occurred throughout the study as I constantly matched information previously collected with new information and the research questions and then modified, and adapted subsequent questions as the study progressed. As it did, I focused my research interests, ask more directive questions, explore interlocutors' stories, and follow up on leads (Taylor et al., 2016).

Recursivity allowed me to respond to variations and contradictions in the field, altering my models and explanatory theories to remain congruent with reality, as it occurred at my study site. After leaving the field, I tidied up the data, organised it, reviewed it and then coded it (LeCompte and Schensul, 2012: 96). I identified themes and patterns strongly linked to the data within the data themselves in an inductive or bottom-up way. The themes were not driven by my theoretical interest in the area or topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I coded the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or my analytic preconceptions – although I could not free myself from my theoretical and epistemological commitments (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I used grounded theory methods where I constructed theories grounded from my data

from the time I began to collect my data (Glaser and Strauss, 2006). I developed theories from empirical analyses and provided explanations for phenomena (Flick, 2018).

As recommended by Charmaz (2014), I studied the early data openly while acknowledging prior ideas and skills and interrogate, sort and synthesise them through qualitative coding (Glaser and Strauss, 2006; Saldaña, 2016). During coding, I attached labels to segments of the data that depicted what each segment was about (Glaser, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008).[21] I also raised analytic questions about the data. I created codes to explain how fishing communities enact or respond to events, the meanings they hold, and how and why the actions and meanings developed (Charmaz, 2014: 238). As I coded my data line-by-line for interview data and by an incident with observational data (Charmaz, 2014), several initial codes that emerged as I scrutinised the data and defined meanings within it included: 'learning to fish,' 'sense of sound,' ' sense of sight,' 'the will of God,' 'begging,' 'jealousy,' 'sense of belonging,' 'ethnicity,' e.t.c. I derived the codes from the settings, observed interactions, and observed interlocutors' non-verbal behaviours, and their voices, which portrayed meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2014: 236). I combined these with methodological notes I kept, as I have described in the section above, to engage in reflexivity and to avoid preconceiving my data. By reflexivity I mean an approach to ethnographic research that enables the ethnographer to be conscious of the social, ethical, and political impact of her/his research; the central, fluid, and changing nature/s of power relations (with interlocutors, gatekeepers, research funders, etc.); and her/his relationship with the interlocutors (Lumsden et al., 2019: 4). Reflexivity is especially important for ethnographers with close connection with the research setting – the social world – and the culture of her/his interlocutors – as conscious and self-aware beings (Davies, 2007: 3).

[21] Coding with gerunds for actions (Charmaz 2014: 252).

Whenever questions arose (e.g. if others knew about it or if others had definitive information) and gaps, I sought more data from my interlocutors through interviews (informal and semi-structured) and participant observation to help answer the questions and fill the gaps. As I continued to interpret the data – through focused coding which highlighted what I found to be important in my analysis and categorisation – my categories coalesced and became more theoretical (theory building) as a result of engaging in successive levels of analysis (Tweed and Charmaz, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). Through the experience of collecting and analysing my data, I learnt that my actual research transcended what I had planned to conduct earlier: how fishers use their senses to understand the marine environment around them. In this thesis, therefore, I explore five important themes characterising a fisher's way of life: "knowledge," "witchcraft," "rumours," "giving," and "predestination." These themes together capture the ways of knowing and being of the Gazi fishing community. I occasionally use long quotations taking up as much as half a page in chapter 3 to bring out a mixture of discursive positions and distinct points of view of my interlocutors – an enunciation of the fishing community's knowledge "making a difficult custom or belief concretely comprehensible" (Clifford, 1990: 62). Here, I fuse fishers' discourses and mine to produce rich descriptions of this fishing community (Clifford, 1990).

1.10 Ethics

Since ethnographic fieldwork commits the ethnographer to gather trustworthy data as a way of understanding social worlds through close relationships with interlocutors as a 'student' or 'apprentice' for an extended time, issues of values and conduct are embedded in the ethnographic encounter (Delamont and Atkinson, 2018; Bell, 2019). Ethical dilemmas in anthropological fieldwork are an extension of the dilemmas confronted by researchers for being human and engaging with other humans (Bell, 2019). They occur from the selection of a topic

and area or population to the conducting of fieldwork, interpretation and analysis of results and the publication of findings. Ethical considerations are, therefore, important throughout the life of the research process and form an ongoing part of the research (Miller and Bell, 2012). According to Israel (2015), ethical considerations matter because they protect others, minimise harm and increase the sum of good in the world, maintain the trust of the interlocutors or redeem trust where it has been violated, promote research integrity, satisfy organisational and professional demands and enables researchers to cope with new and more challenging problems. The University of Roehampton Ethics Committee granted the proposal for this study full ethical approval (see Appendices). Furthermore, I received permission (research license no. 587742) from the Kenya National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI) to conduct my research in the village. Here, I discuss two of the responsibilities with and towards research interlocutors, to which I subscribed in my research: negotiating informed consent and rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

1.10.1 Informed consent

The need to respect the autonomy of interlocutors is a major ethical principle in ethnographic research – the idea that people should be free to exercise control over their own lives, which includes the right to hold certain views, to make certain choices and to take certain actions rooted in personal values and beliefs (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). To make that decision, under this principle, interlocutors should have a reasonable understanding of both the risks and the benefits of participating in the research project (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). This principle underpins the requirement for researchers to obtain informed consent from interlocutors in an unconstrained way before the research begins and that interlocutors have a right to

withdraw from the research at any point (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Therefore, people have the right to know that they are interlocutors in research activity and a right to be in a position to exercise choice around whether or not to give their consent to participate. They have the right to refuse to participate and to know what will happen to them if they agree to participate, the anticipated risks and benefits, how risks will be addressed and minimised, and how their privacy will be protected (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011; Miller and Bell, 2012). This implies that the interlocutors should be as informed as is necessary to ensure they remain as free as possible in making their judgments about how engaged in the research they wish to be, with no obstructions to their discontinuance in the research that could harm them (Hammersley, 2018). Obtaining consent should be an ongoing process, renegotiated between the researcher and interlocutors throughout the research process (Miller and Bell, 2012).

While I obtained access from my gatekeepers as I have described in the first section of this chapter, I had to adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from my interlocutors to whom I was required to access, while considering the gatekeepers´ interest. I made sure I explained to each of my interlocutors my research and the process, for instance, the purpose of the study, the identity of my sponsor, the anticipated uses of the data, possible benefits of the study, and the degree of anonymity and confidentiality. I did this so that they could give informed consent to any participation in the research. I informed them beforehand that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to opt-out at any phase of the study without giving a reason (see Appendices).

In reality, however, since ethnographers frequently study situations and groups, such guidelines as opt-in consent and the right of withdrawal at any time, are inapplicable in these

cases (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), participant observation is ethically challenging because it is usually in a liminal state between overt and covert. This is because anthropologists always yearn for interlocutors to forget that researchers are outsiders. They aim to develop sufficient rapport with interlocutors and to have them become comfortable with researchers as community interlocutors so that they are trusted and interlocutors can share insights and information that only insiders would know (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Others have argued that it may compromise the possibility of gaining genuine consent and assurance of anonymity and that researchers can conduct work in public places and involve public officials without informed consent (Israel, 2015). Since they often carry out research in public settings, ethnographers' control is often limited such that they lack the power to ensure that all interlocutors are fully informed or that they freely consent to be involved (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, although fully informed consent is desirable, it is often not possible in ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Here, it was, in practice, impossible to obtain consent from every fisher and trader at the beach and seeking it would affect my observation. The same applied to participant observation research in ringnet boats with 30-40 fishers and in most cases, where several people were involved. Nonetheless, I tried to make my position as a researcher and student known whenever possible. I also report here what I believe will not cause any harm to my interlocutors.

1.10.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

In addition to negotiating informed consent, interlocutors have the right to remain anonymous and to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected. Maintaining confidentiality – of researchers not revealing who has told them what – stems largely from a

concern about negative consequences for interlocutors if this information is revealed (Hammersley, 2018). The priority is to ensure the protection of the identities of the people, organisations, and places referred to in the data, protection of privacy as well as protection from harm from people who could do them harm by acting on that information (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Therefore, it is important because of the need to consider how researchers handle the data that they collect – since, to varying degrees, some of it will be private, or even secret, in character – and how they report and publish their findings (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). However, anonymity can always potentially be compromised (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). It is especially difficult to preserve anonymity where people and/or places are very distinctive (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). This includes people who play prominent roles in small recognisable communities – such as the BMU chair or the fisheries officer or the village chair or boat captains in my case – and those who lead organisations whose features make them hard to disguise. Those directly involved in the field investigated may also identify some interlocutors, despite the use of pseudonyms.

I informed my interlocutors that I would treat the information they provided in confidence and that I would protect their identity in the publication of any findings. I changed their names by substituting them with pseudonyms in an attempt to ensure anonymity and confidentiality so that they cannot be identified by their responses. I substituted personal names with pseudonyms while writing up fieldnotes, transcribing recordings, and in labelling the data for storage purposes and kept a key to the pseudonyms separate from the data. Where appropriate, I removed identifiers. I took appropriate measures relating to the storage and security of records during and after fieldwork. I also used the same pseudonyms to ensure privacy in field records and in oral and written forms of data dissemination (see Appendices).

Although I endeavoured to anticipate problems likely to compromise anonymity, I made clear to my interlocutors that it might not be possible to conceal their identities, and that their anonymity may be unintentionally compromised. This was especially so when disguising office-holders, organisations, public agencies, ethnic groups, religious denominations or other collectivities without distorting the data to compromise scholarly accuracy and integrity.

1.11 Overview of chapters

Having explained how I gained entry into my study site and how I gathered and analysed data, in chapter 2, I shall explore the **Context of the study**. I shall begin by giving a historical overview of coastal people, then I will explore artisanal fishing along the Kenyan coast, fisheries management, fish marketing and finally about migrant fishing. In chapter 3, **Becoming an artisanal fisher**, I shall describe how fishing communities learn how to fish. I shall begin by examining who can be trained to fish in a fishing community, who trains the others, and how one is trained to fish. In the second part, I shall explore how fishers understand the sea, how they learn to study the sea, and how they memorise the location of fishing grounds in a vast sea. In the final part of this chapter, I shall examine how fishers acquire fishing skills to earn a living from the marine environment through their bodies and senses.

In chapter 4, **Witchcraft and the will of God: Interpreting misfortunes in a fishing village,** I shall examine the interplay between two dominant idioms that are usually evoked in everyday language: witchcraft and the will of God. I shall analyse the conditions under which residents evoke witchcraft or predetermined destiny and the kinds of social environments produced in the course of such discussions and whether or not a fisher's predetermined destiny can be changed by engaging in witchcraft and the occult. In chapter 5, **The 'phone calls' of Gazi: Anxieties of waiting for fish**, I shall examine the anxieties and expectations that arise as a

result of uncertainties in fish landings that permeate many discussions at the beach, and in the village, as residents wait for fishers to return. I shall begin by exploring the rumours that spread every day around the beach about fish catches before the fishers return that help to dispel fears and anxieties about fishers returning from the sea empty-handed due to uncertainties in fish catches. Finally, I shall show how the uncertainties in fish catches lead to rumours, an analysis which enriches our understanding of fishing skills and sensory perception of fishers.

I shall explore how uncertainty in fish landings and the ritual of gift-giving have led residents to force fishers to give them fish gifts to make a living and get food for their families in chapter 6, **"Forced giving": the constant struggle for fish gifts**. Here, I shall begin by briefly tracing the origin of, and driving force behind, the voluntary nature of gift-giving and receiving. I shall then explore the blessings economy by exploring how through the practice of gift-giving, one receives more and the fact that gift-giving is a social insurance against adversity. I shall explore in the third section how even though fishers who deny beggars fish gifts are perceived to lose blessings from God, some fishers use the market-based economy to justify their actions. Finally, I shall explore the strictly compulsory nature of gift-giving that brings pain and suffering to fishers, which I shall refer to as 'forced' giving. In the final chapter, **Fishers and Fishing Futures**, I shall explain the implications of my study and give recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Context of the study

2.1 Historical overview

Gazi village is one of the many old Muslim settlements along coastal Kenya that were established in the nineteenth century by the Mazrui leading to migration from rural areas (Sperling, 1985).[22] The Digo, the majority ethnic community in this area, who often present themselves as the "autochthonous African population of the coast" (Mwakimako and Willis, 2022: 429), had begun to convert to Islam in the early nineteenth century (Herlehy, 1984).[23] It is the Mazrui who had settled in the village that influenced the Digo to join Islam (Sperling, 1988). The early development or emergence of this fishing village was not independent of the establishment of other coastal communities in East Africa, which developed a common civilisation (Chande, 1991). It was established at the time of slavery, during which there were absentee Arab landlords or masters where the local elite had control over land and the African squatters (Brennan, 2008).[24] Most of the original Mijikenda inhabitants had fled into the interior due to slavery (Kanyinga, 2000). They later struggled to assert their identity as the indigenous population of the coastal region and as the only ones who controlled resources and determined the future of the area (Branch, 2011).

In the pre-colonial era (before 1895), the Arabs and Swahili subsisted as merchants and traders. They developed a plantation economy, bought slaves and exploited labour in response to the growing demands of the Indian Ocean commercial system (Cooper, 1980).[25] Before 1865,

[22] During an interview at the veranda of his home one day, Mzee Maza told me that Gazi village came into existence during the colonial reign of Arabs called Mbaruk from Zanzibar.
[23] By the time the Mijikenda arrived at the coast of East Africa during their 16th century migration, the Swahili had already established their settlements in towns.
[24] Each group (Swahili, Arab and Mijikenda) claims to have been the first to occupy the coast, although slavery disrupted the settlement pattern, with consequences for the land question (Kanyinga, 2000).
[25] The British ruled Kenya from 1895 to 1963.

Gazi was already a plantation scheme where the Mazrui lived peacefully with the Digo, although there was continual strife between 1865 and 1895 between Shaykh Mbaruk and the other peoples of the region (Sperling, 1988).[26] Between 1896 and 1914, there was peace and stability in the area and people could move about in relative safety. Trade increased, and Muslim traders from as far away as Mombasa began to frequent the village, Islam began to consolidate among the Digo, mosques were built, and several Muslim immigrants settled in the village and began teaching Islam (Sperling, 1988). During that time, fishing contributed a significant part to the people's diet as it does now (Chande, 1991). As we shall see in the next section, fishing and fish consumption have been in existence in coastal Kenya for centuries (Morales and Horton, 2014).

Studies show that by the mid-nineteenth century, Arabs used to give the Digo – people of the Mijikenda ethnic community of coastal Kenya – gifts, obtain foodstuffs from them, use them as middlemen in the ivory and slave trade and took some Digo as slaves (Gerlach, 1960). The relationship between the Digo and the Arabs was harmonious to encourage important cultural contact and culture change, since Arabs believed that they profited more by keeping the Digo close as business partners (Gerlach, 1960). The Mijikenda have a long history of creating economic networks with other communities, for example, the Swahili through trade in fish, cashew nuts and palm products. The increased economic unity was complemented by the forging of social bonds that linked them with neighbouring communities, particularly through the pledging of blood-brotherhood, intermarriage, joking relationships and the spread of Islam and the adoption of Swahili culture (Herlehy, 1984). These were mutually reinforcing mechanisms creating social and economic cohesion, consequently allowing them to gain access to a variety of goods in a strong demand for consumption (Herlehy, 1984). Presently, there is religious diversity

[26]By 1890, Gasi was still a plantation town where slaves worked in rice-fields (Sperling, 1988).

in the coastal region, which includes Islam, Christianity, and Hindu and African traditions. Traditional religion has a strong influence on fundamental beliefs and values. People who practise Islam and Christianity still associate with it (Sperling, 1985). Therefore, religion influences people's way of life.

During slavery, the large and small plantations produced large quantities of foodstuffs for export, while slaves used proceeds from their work to buy clothing and other items (Middleton, 1992). The slaves were forced to work in the plantations for long hours or were used to perform domestic duties and other services such as fishing by their owners (Cooper, 1977). Due to this, according to one of my interlocutors, Mzee Maza, in the Gazi fishing village, like in many other coastal villages, slaves were tortured, killed, taxed, forced to do manual work, work in the plantation farms and did not have any freedom since "Africans had been overpowered everywhere." For him, slave masters took some Africans by force and transported them in ships and dhows for sale in Saudi Arabia. Some have argued that the slaves were not transported to Saudi Arabia, but were transported to Mauritius and Seychelles to work in sugar plantations. Nonetheless, these people never returned and left their earlier generations behind. Therefore, during Arab rule, slaves were regarded as inferiors in social and religious terms, serving both the Arabs and the Swahili (Cooper, 1980). Arab, Swahili and Mijikenda associations hardened during this era through categorisation by race and ethnicity, which formalised prevailing status hierarchies (Brennan, 2008).

When the British officially abolished slavery in 1907, the practice continued informally, although the ex-slaves did not wish to be either slaves or proletarians.[27] During the colonial

[27] Slavery continued to legally exist in Kenya until 1907 despite the fact that Britain had abolished their slave trade in 1833. In 1907, the legal status of slavery was abolished in Kenya by the British.

period, land, which previously was relatively unimportant in itself, progressively gained importance (Ng'weno, 1997). Moreover, a land reform programme was introduced aimed at the privatisation of land ownership, which resulted in disputes over land ownership, a more skewed distribution of land and produced and reinforced ethnic-based interests in land and made the 'Land Question' even more complex (Kanyinga, 2000). The colonial state introduced legislation that enabled only the Arabs and the Swahili to register land as private property on the coast while neglecting the land rights of the Mijikenda and ex-slaves (Cooper, 1980; Kanyinga, 2000). The private ownership of land by Arabs and Swahili laid the socio-political and administrative base for excluding Mijikenda from land they formerly owned under customary tenure (Klaus, 2020). This led to the institution of squatters or tenants – who were both ex-slaves and 'tribal' Africans from the hinterland (Middleton, 1992). Nonetheless, these social layers persisted until independence, during which the old social order legalised along racial lines broke down as a result of changes in social practices and values, leading to one of a class system, although not in a Marxist sense (Constantin, 1989). Consequently, even after emancipation, poverty persisted and economic change was difficult as ex-slaves and migrants to the plantation region became squatters leading to class conflict between the landed and landless (Cooper, 1980). The position of the plantation owners (Swahili and Arab landlords) became financially difficult to manage since they had to employ wage labourers in place of slaves who had worked for free and fed themselves during slavery (Middleton, 1992). Meanwhile, Mijikenda residents had no option to access arable land but to squat on the land owned by Arab and Swahili landlords previously dispossessed from them (Klaus 2020). It is important to note here that the Swahili founded coastal settlements along the East African coast centuries before the arrival of the Mijikenda, Arabs and Europeans (Chami, 1998).

More than 110 years have passed since the British abolished slavery. To the Africans, the independence of Kenya from British rule in 1963 meant the end of Africans' squatter relationship with absentee Arab landlords and the opening up of opportunities for Africans (Brennan, 2008). Independence for the coastal people meant freedom from the British, an end to Arab domination and a chance for the coastal people of Kenya, particularly the Mijikenda, to set development policy at the local level (Branch, 2011). Even before Kenya gained her independence from the British, the Mijikenda feared that if they did not conclusively establish their identity, they might not be treated well after the independence of Kenya (Branch, 2011). However, to date, the Kenyan coast is a marginalised part of Kenya. Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicates that the region has one of the highest incidences of absolute poverty, high unemployment rates, a high child mortality rate, and a low population of people with the highest level of education reached and completed. The number of households with access to a safe source of drinking water is relatively low and the housing conditions of many households are poor.

Land allocation along the Kenyan coast is based on the short-term logic of patronage politics (Klaus, 2020; Boone, Lukalo and Joireman, 2021). This is because the post-colonial state began by giving land grants to politicians at that time, even in areas already occupied by the indigenous Mijikenda groups, consequently displacing them. This was due to the booming tourism industry along the Kenyan coast (Kanyinga, 2000). This has exacerbated land insecurity and landlessness to date among most of the coastal population who feel permanently, deeply, and unjustly marginalised (Lonsdale, 2008), as a result of the decades of political and economic marginalisation working to deepen an anti-outsider land narrative (Klaus, 2020) and the growing socio-economic inequalities (Kanyinga, 2000). Moreover, since the seventies, the Digo

community was reported to sell valuable plots at knockdown prices for lavish lifestyles or to divide the spoils leading to landlessness along the south coast of Kenya (Parkin, 1989). Presently, the coast's economy that Swahili and Arabs previously dominated is partly dominated by upcountry ethnic groups (McIntosh, 2009). People began to look for wealth and political privilege in modern coastal Kenya, although Islamic fundamentalism persuaded more people that religious status and the desired lifestyle were even more valuable, particularly for the poor (Parkin, 1989). Moreover, Kenya's political elite encouraged Kenyans to "think and act politically in a manner informed first and foremost by ethnicity, to crush demands for the redistribution of scarce resources" (Branch, 2011: 16). Consequently, the people perceive the patronage system that controls resources as a form of political and economic marginalisation; this has, in turn, led to resentment (Willis and Chome, 2014).

Historians and anthropologists have demonstrated that marginalisation has divided the coastal community into smaller communities that are imagined and lived every day (Willis and Chome, 2014). For Willis and Chome (2014), such categories and geographic divides have substantial affective power, shaping and constraining people's sense of their interests and obligations. Gazi village is no exception. Like in many parts of Kenya, in this fishing village, ethnicity is a typical mode of thought in everyday life and social interaction. Here, ethnicity and land or territory are inextricably linked (Jenkins, 2012). Indeed, autochthonous discourses of belonging and exclusion engender an understanding of ethnic others as 'immigrants' and 'guests.' I shall show in the thesis that this aspect of ethnic understanding of belonging to and ownership of space has transcended ocean resources. For the people of Gazi, the ocean is a source of identity, wealth, food, a means of transportation and a physical manifestation of their history. As one young man, Omar Salim, in his 30s, explains to a crowd of women, men and

children that had gathered at the beach under a tree to wait for fishers to return from the sea one Tuesday morning in early October 2019:

> This is not farmland we planted maize and tomatoes, and have to wait for them to mature. No! If I get KES 1,000 today, I will spend all of it because I know I will go back to the sea tomorrow. Do you understand … eeeeh? … The people of Gazi are not poor! Do you think Gazi people are poor? No! Everyone is okay here. Each of these guys is okay. (Points at the people seated around seeking their approval. Some stare at him and laugh. Others nod their heads in approval). All these kids, even the women, are okay. We just come to the beach to knock on the door. This sea is like a money plantation. There are rich people seated here…

What Omar Salim told the men, women, and children seated at the beach waiting for fishers to return from the sea that early morning reveals how residents view the ocean despite the ambivalence that surrounds the everyday landing of fish. Here the ocean is valuable; part of people's lives; reflects the complexity in their lives; historically contingent and its mutability stems from the various ways in which people understand it and engage with the material world (Tilley and Cameron-Daum, 2017). Omar Salim added, hitting his chest hard with his right hand and declaimed,

> We are the owners of this beach (*and the adjacent ocean*). If anyone wants to do anything at this beach, they should come to us and not go around giving money to the village chair. The village chair is the chair of the village and not of the beach!

By mentioning the words 'we' and 'us' he meant the 'citizens' or 'original inhabitants' or 'owners' or 'ethnic groups' (sing. *Mwenyeji*, plural *wenyeji*) of Gazi.[28] Here the people also view the ocean as an ethnic territory. This constitutes a widespread ideology in Kenya where, like land, the ocean is inexorably linked with ethnic identity and where ideas of belonging are

[28] When one behaves in a way to show that she/he is a *mwenyeji* while others are visitors (*wageni*), this behaviour is refered to as *ugasi*.

informed by ethnicity (Lonsdale, 2008). It is the belief that the part of the ocean close to the people is the people, and that this particular people, and no other, are the ocean.[29] Here, two important elements distinguish this community: first, that ethnicity is a typical mode of thought in everyday life and social interaction, and second that ethnicity and territory are inextricably linked (Jenkins, 2012). In other words, in Gazi, the ethnicised understanding of belonging to and ownership of space is strong and has become embedded in everyday social practices, institutions, and discourses (Jenkins, 2012). Indeed, in this village, a sense of belonging which connects people to other entities, human and non-human (the ocean environment, persons, past etc.) (Candea, 2010), and ethnic ties to that part of the ocean are mobilised when resource entitlement needs to be emphasised (Richardson and Weszkalnys, 2014). This is exacerbated by the increasing competition for depleting ocean resources, leading to conflicting meanings of the ocean, identity, and belonging. These are anticipated through ideas of vulnerability and marginality giving importance to 'exclusivist notions of belonging and citizenship' (Chome 2020: 312). Therefore, ordinary terms such as visitors or guests (sing. *Mgeni*, plural *wageni*) from Pemba (sing. *Mpemba*, plural *wapemba*) and residents who are considered 'citizens' or 'original inhabitants' or 'owners' or 'ethnic groups' (sing. *Mwenyeji*, plural *wenyeji* particularly the Digo) are being redefined.

In this fishing village, social and economic inequality is at the core of contemporary environmental conflicts (Walley, 2004). The conflicts over economic and social inequality have been transformed into battles focused on values and identity (McNall, 2018). The moral justification of acts of everyday resistance is manifested through, as we shall see, theft of fish or locals forcing migrants to give them fish gifts, or locals gossiping about migrant fisher's

[29] See Lonsdale (2008: 307) for similar observations about land ownership in Kenya.

behaviour. This is largely attributed to claims of ancestral occupation and customary rights to land, ocean, and resources (Neumann, 1998; Walley, 2004). It also serves to defend a social identity, and an idealised history embedded in the local landscape, both of which act as a declaration of rightful possession of that part of the ocean and resources therein (Neumann, 1998; Walley, 2004). It is because of the expectations that people have about this part of the ocean that they believe to be rightfully and legally theirs (Brigham,1990), their source of wealth and identity, hence the need, in this thesis, to explore how uncertainty shapes social interactions among residents and migrants in such a fishing village.

Mzee Maza told me that none of the residents of Gazi is originally from the fishing village. According to him, most of the people who arrived in Gazi village during the colonial period originated from Malawi, while others came from Takaungu, Shirazi and Shimoni in Kenya, and Tanga in Tanzania. Other communities that arrived in the village during that time include the Bajuni from the north of Kenya, traditional fishers and sailors, and the Makonde from the south. For him, the generation of the original immigrants presently inhabits Gazi village. Most of the parents and grandparents of the present residents have since died. According to Musa, the main ethnic groups that are important, because they have historically been fishers in this fishing village, including the Digo, Duruma and Wapemba although people from other ethnic groups from other parts of the country, such as the Swahili, Kikuyu, Kisii, Meru, Akamba, Makonde, have also settled here.[30] For Mzee Maza, some residents did not migrate to Gazi to fish, but as madrasa students who opted to stay there permanently upon completing their courses. For the Digo, who are the majority and claim to own the village, their proximity to the sea has

[30] Digo and Duruma are subgroups of the Mijikenda.

led them to fish over the years, although they also farmed for subsistence purposes (Parkin, 1989).

As early as the 1960s, writing about "The social organisation of the Digo of Kenya," Gerlach (1960) reported that the Digo of the south coast of Kenya, especially those who lived in villages along the ocean, devoted more of their time fishing than to agriculture and lived more on the proceeds of their fishing than anything else. According to Gerlach (1960), some Digo worked either full-time or part-time for Europeans, Indians, Arabs or other Africans, including fellow Digos. However, relatively few were employed partly because they did not like to work under the supervision of others in physical labour according to a fixed schedule and partly because they were not desired as employees by anyone. Many Digo engaged in markets or trading as a major or supplementary occupation because it allows individualism, is often enjoyable, and gives prestige. Nonetheless, other ethnic groups considered them lazy, troublesome, opposed to authority, dishonest and unreliable, people who believed in witchcraft and the occult, and who considered themselves superior to other Africans like the Duruma whom they regarded as their slaves (Gerlach, 1960). According to Parkin (1989), Digo Muslims possessed medicinal knowledge of the sea and craft knowledge of how to make fishing boats and traps and how to fish.

Along the Kenyan coast, conflicting meanings of land, identity and belonging are projected through ideas of vulnerability and marginality, which are deployed to make claims in the increasing competition for land and resources and exclusivist notions of belonging and citizenship (Chome, 2020). In Gazi, space is used to gain control over other people and define personal and social identities (Ng'weno, 1997). Although most of Gazi village is presently located on private land, most residents do not own land. The Digo are perceived to be the

"proprietors" or *wenyeji*, sing. *mwenyeji*, which translates to "owners" of the land since they claim to be the original inhabitants of the village, and this behaviour is referred to as *Ugasi*. In contrast, "others" are perceived to be "strangers" or "tenants" (*wageni*, sing. *mgeni*) who are "proprietors" elsewhere but have come to live in the present place of occupation as *wageni* (Middleton, 1992) even though they have intermarried. Indeed, through the ethnicisation of space in Kenya, residing in a stranger's territory is understood as accepting a subordinate social status (Jenkins, 2012). As I will show later, this is why, despite their exceptional fishing skills which they claim improve the economy of the village and the years of intermarriage, migrant fishers from Pemba are perceived mainly by residents as *wageni* who exploit fish that is 'owned' by the locals.[31] Residents frequently travel to visit family members in Pemba and elsewhere along the Kenyan coast because of intermarriage.

Writing on "Inheriting Disputes: The Digo Negotiation of Meaning and Power through Land," Ng'weno (1997) showed that in the part of the Kenyan coast where my study site is located, status is reinforced by a social memory of slavery.[32] As I have pointed out earlier, the Digo did not like to work under the supervision of others in physical labour and considered themselves superior to other Africans. In contrast, other ethnic groups considered them lazy, troublesome, opposed to authority, dishonest and unreliable (Gerlach, 1960). In this thesis, I show that for the residents of Gazi, status is informed by freedom from fishing, wealth and being able to fulfil social obligations while prestige is derived through flexible work conditions, not working or not being dependent on someone (Ng'weno, 1997).

[31] Seeking resources which 'belong' to other groups is regarded as unjust (Jenkins, 2012).
[32] During slavery, the luxury not to work in agriculture and having leisure time distinguished slaves from their owners (Ng'weno, 1997).

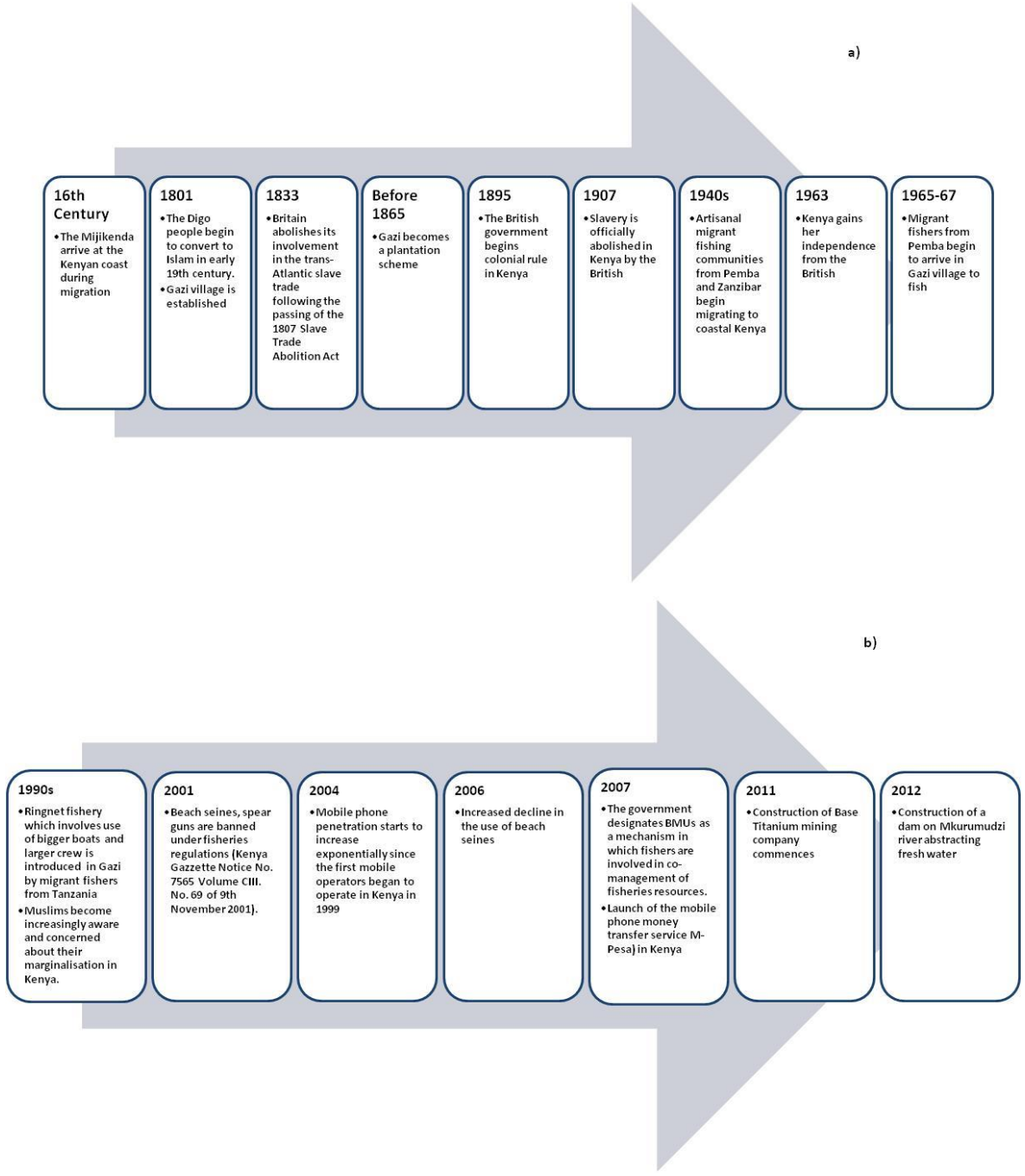

Figure 4: Changes in the community and the fishing systems a) over the past and b) recently

2.2 Artisanal fishing along the Kenyan coast

Qualitative accounts of artisanal fishing in Kenya are few. As we shall see below, most sociological studies focusing on artisanal fisheries in Kenya are quantitative. The few qualitative accounts show that coastal communities of Kenya have had a long-term tradition of coastal exploitation with the fishing sustaining town and village economies (Wynne-Jones and LaViolette, 2017). This is because fishing is among the main forms of production that their exchange system was historically based upon in most parts of the coast and islands linked to economic, political, and cultural ties centred on the entry port towns (Middleton, 1992). Historical data from bone middens indicate that artisanal fishing has been conducted along the approximately 600km Kenyan coast for centuries (McClanahan and Omukoto, 2011, Buckley et al., 2019). Historical and archaeological records of consumption practices indicate that people living along the Kenyan coast relied mainly on fish and shellfish for subsistence from the 7th century onwards (Morales and Horton, 2014). They demonstrate that during that time, fishing expanded from nearshore to offshore waters with early fish catch data indicating seagrass and reef-associated fish species being exploited and later data showing species found at greater depths being exploited, which was attributed to possible improved fishing vessels and gear (McClanahan and Omukoto, 2011). For instance, according to Buckley et al. (2019), only 67 fish species were exploited between 750 – 1500 CE, but the number of fish species exploited along the Kenyan coast increased to 185 species between 1995 and 2014 CE.

Monsoon seasons heavily influence fishing along the Kenyan coast. The northeast monsoon (NEM) season begins in November, is strong between December and February, and ends in March (McClanahan, 1988). During the NEM season, the weather is hot and dry, and there is no rain, but the NEM winds ‘come with fish’ (Middleton, 1992: 9). Some upwelling may

occur due to the movement of currents away from the coast (McClanahan, 1988). This leads to high fish catches. As I will show later, the beginning of this season coincides with the arrival of migrant fishers at their destination sites from their sites of origin (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). At the end of this monsoon season, there are heavy rains and then a period of storms and turbulence of the sea begins (Middleton, 1992). The southeast monsoon (SEM) season begins soon afterwards. It is strongest between July and September, and then light breezes begin until the beginning of the next NEM season (McClanahan, 1988; Middleton, 1992). When there are light breezes, the sea is calm, but winds make fishing and sailing uncertain (McClanahan, 1988; Middleton, 1992). As a result, the NEM and SEM seasons influence fishing activities such that fishers concentrate in inshore waters when the sea is too rough during the SEM season and can access fishing grounds beyond the reef when the sea is calm during the NEM season (Obura, 2001). This means that fishing activities along the Kenyan coast are more intense during the calm NEM season than during the rough SEM season, during which fishers spend minimal time at sea (Ochiewo, 2004).

The semi-diurnal tidal regime varies between heights of 1.5 and 4 metres from neap to spring tides. This creates an extensive intertidal platform and rocky shore, exposed during low tides, occurring twice daily. The south coast where my field site is located is dominated by fringing reef crests, which form a natural barrier to wave energy from the ocean (Obura, 2001). Habitats include coral reefs, seagrasses and mangroves in the lagoons and creeks which are protected by the reef crests.

Presently, fishing along the Kenyan coastline is largely inshore (Obura 2001; Samoilys et al., 2017). Fish remains a major animal protein source that coastal communities in rural areas can access or afford and sustains the livelihood of many coastal people who highly depend on it.

Malleret-King (2000) estimated that fishing contributes 80% of the total income of some 70% of coastal communities. Le Manach et al. (2015) established that the artisanal fishing sector (i.e., small-scale commercial) accounts for 64% of the total catches. However, according to Tuda and Wolff (2015), the actual artisanal fisheries catch in Kenyan coastal waters and its contribution to local people's livelihoods and subsistence is underestimated. These fisheries are characterised by artisanal vessels, usually small, non-motorised, dugout canoes that travel between the shore and the fringing reef within three nautical miles of the shore and below 20-metres depth (Samoilys et al., 2011; Tuda and Wolff 2015). The major fishing habitats include mangrove forests, seagrass beds and coral reefs (Obura, 2001). Although these habitats are interconnected, and fish can move freely between them, different species of fish are exploited using different fishing gear (Samoilys et al., 2017; Obura 2001; Samoilys et al., 2011). Therefore, the fishery in Kenya is multi-species and multi-gear, and catches are dominated by coral reef-associated fish species (Hicks and McClanahan, 2012). Commonly used fishing gear includes traditional gear such as spearguns and basket traps and more conventional fishing gear, including hand lines, gill nets and ring nets (also purse seines) (Samoilys et al., 2011). Despite the high diversity of fish species caught, only three fish species – *Lethrinus lentjan* (Lacepède), *Siganus sutor* (Valenciennes) and *Leptoscarus vaigiensis* (Quoy & Gaimard) – represent 45 - 60% of the catch (see Hicks and McClanahan, 2012; Samoilys et al., 2017). These species already show evidence of growth overfishing (Hicks and McClanahan, 2012).

The quantity of fish landed by the artisanal fishers is influenced by capital, particularly fishing vessels/crafts and fishing gear used; labour, which includes the number of fishers and the number of hours spent fishing; the type of fishing gear used and resource abundance, which defines the size and condition of the fishing ground (Ochiewo, 2004). It is also influenced by

weather conditions, which define the seasonal variations, and the educational level of the fishers. The educational level of the fisher may determine how effective fishers are in terms of awareness of alternative opportunities and may be useful in determining their fisheries' management skills. As such, fishers with a high level of formal education are more likely to save to acquire better fishing equipment and to better manage their fishing unit (Ochiewo, 2004). As we have seen in the section before, census data (2019) shows that in this area, the population of people with the highest level of education reached and completed is low.

According to the Government of Kenya's (2016) "Frame Survey Report," the number of fishers joining the fishery has consistently increased annually, which implies increased fishing pressure on inshore fisheries. The open-access nature of fisheries in Kenya allows easy participation in fishing increasing the numbers of local and migrant fishers (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). Local artisanal fishers live day-to-day on fish they take home as food and money they earn from the sale of fish caught, which averages USD 3 – 4 per day (Mangi et al., 2007). According to McClanahan (2010), this is the per capita revenue of a local fisher at a site like Diani-Chale, an intensively fished reef area on the south coast of Kenya and which is considered overexploited with an average of 10 fishers/km^2/day. This site is located adjacent to my study site. I will expound on artisanal migrant fishers later.

Despite the importance of fishing to many people's livelihoods and food security, coral reef habitats along the Kenyan coast have been heavily exploited and severely overfished, leading to a continual reduction in catches per fisher and the quality of fish (Cinner, 2014). As the coastal population continues to grow, the number of people who depend on coral reef resources also increases, leading to increasing pressure on fisheries resources. The increasing number of fishers has led to the increased fishing effort by more than threefold because the

average catch has declined due to increased pressure on the dwindling fish stocks (Ochiewo, 2004). For instance, according to Samoilys et al. (2017), the average catch rates along the Kenyan coast first declined from the mid-1980s (13.7 ± 1.6 kg/fisher/trip) to the 1990s (3.2 ± 0.1 kg/fisher/trip) and finally stabilised for many fishing gears. According to Tuda and Wolff (2015), yields higher than the presently-obtained levels cannot be expected in the future. Due to this decline, fishers are under increasing pressure to catch enough fish to feed their families. This leads to competition for fish and consequently an increase in gears, an increase in the size of fishing gear, time spent fishing and fishers adjusting their mesh sizes to smaller ones to capture as many fish as possible (Ochiewo, 2004; Mangi et al., 2007). However, the Kenyan coral reef fisheries are resilient and can support high fishing pressure, but this can also lead to a sudden collapse without proper monitoring and assessment (see McClanahan et al., 2008). As I will discuss later, although fishers concentrate much effort inshore, they are increasingly exploiting offshore fisheries resources using fishing gear such as ring nets and modifying fishing gear to access fishing grounds and catch more fish (Samoilys et al., 2011; Okemwa et al., 2017).

According to Cinner (2009), fishers also use destructive fishing gear such as spear guns, which severely degrade marine habitats, capture high proportions of juvenile fish, and eventually reduce yields. Studies have associated the rampant use of destructive fishing gear, such as spear guns with poverty traps (Ochiewo, 2004; Cinner, 2009). As such, there is a change from the use of traditional fishing methods, which include basket traps, fence traps, hand lines, gill nets, cast nets, and long lines, to the use of other fishing techniques such as ring nets which catch more fish, particularly by young fishers in the Kenyan south coast (Ochiewo, 2004). Ring nets target surface-dwelling and migratory pelagic fish species of high commercial value, thereby reducing pressure on coral reef habitats and increasing economic benefits to fishers during the SEM

season when the ability to catch their target species is reduced due to rough sea conditions. Nevertheless, ring net fishers have been observed to target shallow-water coral reef-associated fish, leading to the destruction of coral reef and seagrass habitats (Okemwa et al., 2017; Thoya et al., 2020). According to Mangi et al. (2007), as coral reef fish become depleted because of overfishing and destructive fishing practices, food security is increasingly threatened, placing families of fishers in a difficult financial position since fishers' livelihoods are being threatened. Climate change is another important threat that, together with overfishing, increasingly threatens fish species' abundance and diversity. Cinner et al. (2012) observed that while Kenyan coastal communities have a high level of dependence on fishing, Kenyan coral reef ecosystems experience high exposure to, and high sensitivity to, climate vulnerability, while artisanal fishing communities have a low-level adaptation capacity. Samoilys et al. (2017) proposed that overfishing of several fish species and insufficient areas acting as fully protected areas, exacerbated by climate change, play a part in driving artisanal coral reef fisheries in Kenya to a tipping point. Buckley et al. (2019) identified 15 fish species that are already at risk of local extinction in coral reef ecosystems along the Kenyan coast because of the above-mentioned threats.

As availability and access to fish continually decline because of overfishing, habitat loss and other threats such as climate change which adversely affects the fishing community's livelihood and food security, the fisher is increasingly faced with tough decision-making choices and three plausible adaptation strategies. As I observed among some residents, the first option would be to leave fishing entirely and move into a more secure form of employment. By moving to a more secure form of employment, the fisher would increase the resilience of his household through income stability and the ecosystem through reduced fishing pressure on the natural

resource (Coulthard, 2012). As Musa frequently told me, “As a human being, there comes a time when you get tired of the ocean and you want to do something else.” However, according to Coulthard (2012), the fisher may lose aspects of subjective well-being that are commonly valued among fishers, such as job satisfaction and self-actualisation.

According to Coulthard (2012), the second option would be for the fisher to diversify his livelihood by continuing to fish while diversifying income sources during lean periods, as I observed among some of my interlocutors. Here, the fisher would diversify his livelihood options because diversification reduces the risk of livelihood failure by spreading it across more than one income source, such as farming. This option helps to overcome the uneven use of labour caused by seasonality, reduces vulnerability, helps to generate financial resources in the absence of credit markets, and confers a host of other advantages in the presence of widespread market failures and uncertainties (Allison and Ellis, 2001: 383). In the third and last option, the fisher would struggle and keep fishing despite less income by adapting his preferences for the present day (Coulthard, 2012). This option has kept many fishers like Musa and Mzee Hamadi in Gazi fishing village in fishing activity. They cling tightly to fisher identity despite the uncertainties associated with fishing, as Musa further argues:

> I keep saying, “I hate the ocean,” but because I do not have an alternative livelihood, it forces me to keep on fishing. However, even if I get an alternative job, I cannot just say goodbye to fishing. I will keep my fishing gear somewhere because sometimes things change and you may still go back to where you were.

As fish habitats become increasingly overfished in Kenya, scientists and managers have consistently suggested that the heavy dependence on coral reef fisheries needs to be reduced to support alternative livelihood projects (Cinner, 2014). But why do these attempts fail to result in perverse outcomes? What keeps fishing communities in the fishing activity –fishing, boat and net

repair, canoe making, preparing bait for fishing, buying and selling fish – despite the ambivalence surrounding fish catching and landing? What keeps fishing communities in the fishing activity while they remain poor? According to Cinner (2014), scientists and managers in Kenya cannot convince fishers to leave fishing because they do not understand the fishers themselves – that fishing has non-material benefits and is, therefore, not an occupation of last resort. For Cinner (2014), fishing contributes to the fishing community's cultural or personal identity, lifestyle, and social norms, creating a strong attachment to fishing that keeps people fishing even when it is no longer economically viable.

2.3 Fisheries management

The main policies that regulate and govern fisheries resources in Kenya include the Fisheries Management and Development Act (NO. 35 of 2016), the constitution of Kenya, the Wildlife (conservation and management) Act (No. 47 of 2013), and the national oceans and fisheries policy (2008). The Fisheries Management and Development Act (NO. 35 of 2016), for example, aims to "protect, manage, use and develop the aquatic resources in a manner which is consistent with ecologically sustainable development, to uplift the living standards of the fishing communities and to introduce fishing to traditionally non-fishing communities and to enhance food security," in addition to having regard to scientific, economic, cultural, environmental and other relevant considerations. The national oceans and fisheries policy (2008: 5) aims to "enhance the fisheries sector's contribution to wealth creation, increase employment for youth and women, food security, and revenue generation through effective private, public and community partnerships."[33]

[33] See www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/fr/c/LEX-FAOC147947/

In 2006, the Kenyan government designated BMUs as a mechanism in which fishers are involved in participatory management/co-management of fisheries resources, which requires fishers at each landing site to take on management roles of fisheries resources which were declining (Oluoch and Obura, 2008). Destructive fishing gear such as spearguns, poison fishing and beach seines were also banned. In addition, there have been increased efforts, particularly by NGOs, to establish locally managed marine protected areas (no-take zones, seasonal closures, or gear restrictions) to complement the existing government-managed marine protected areas. Studies have shown that the introduction of such management measures has led to an increase in catches, fish sizes and financial value of fish, therefore, an increase in income for fishers fishing near such protected areas (McClanahan, 2010; Chirico et al., 2017). Gazi bay, my study site, is neither located near any government-managed marine protected areas nor have residents established any locally managed marine protected areas. However, there have been concerted efforts by government institutions, the private sector, and NGOs to restore and protect the mangrove and seagrass ecosystems of Gazi Bay and explore alternative livelihoods such as seaweed farming and ecotourism activities – although these livelihood activities are mostly associated with women.

2.4 Fish marketing in Kenya

Wamukota (2009) vividly describes the structure of marine fish marketing in coastal Kenya. He shows that marine fish marketing in Kenya begins when fishers land fish at the landing site.[34] For Wamukota (2009), this process depends on the prior activity of fishing itself, which owners of fishing vessels finance. According to Wamukota (2009), almost all (95%) of the

[34] In my observations I found out that in some cases, fish traders book fish while fishers are still at sea by calling fishers using their mobile phones

fishing gear and boats in Kenya are owned by boat owners who, in most cases, double as fish dealers taking on the functions of wholesaling, retailing or both. The fishers themselves own only a few boats and mostly dugout canoes. Therefore, for Wamukota (2009), the boat owners, the majority of whom are men, finance fishing by providing fishing boats and sometimes fishing gear to fishers. After the fish is landed, the proceeds of the catches are shared according to agreed sharing methods (Wamukota, 2009). Sometimes, fishers pay a rental fee for the vessels and/or gear, while in other agreements, the boat owner may advance small amounts of the payment to the fishers, with the fishers paying the balance later (Wamukota, 2009).

Fish traders usually arrive at the landing site several hours before fishers are due and wait for them to return (Matsue et al., 2014). Fishers sell part of the catches directly to female traders (*mama karanga*), who usually buy the fish and later process it by deep-frying and selling it to household consumers, or local household consumers (Wamukota, 2009). Matsue et al. (2014) pointed out that this implies that socioeconomically disadvantaged women can take part in this venture. Due to consumer demand, they can sell fish at lower prices to customers with low incomes, thus appealing to all budgets while providing a ready market for the fishers to sell their catch (Matsue et al., 2014). The distance to the market, fish species and market categories (urban and rural markets) influences the price of fish. In contrast, local artisanal fishers sell fish to traders at prevailing prices because of a lack of capacity to invest in cold storage and transport (Wamukota 2009; Wanyonyi et al., 2021).

Mama karangas dominate 95% of the marine fish retailing function in Kenya, buying fish from wholesalers, directly from fishers or industrial fishing companies, while men concentrate on selling fresh fish (Karuga and Abila, 2007). In Gazi, however, I found out that more men participate as fish traders than women. The fish traders sell the fish to household

consumers or the public in towns and villages in makeshift structures located along the main streets and villages. Female traders, who mostly operate as *mama karangas*, usually buy small fish in smaller to medium quantities for local sale while men buy and sell the larger quantities of fish to sell to markets, restaurants, hotels and to the affluent (Wamukota, 2009; Matsue et al., 2014). In some cases, fish traders receive fish on credit from fishers or boat owners. Repayment can involve deducting the equivalent value of fish from the next purchase or repayment in cash (Matsue et al., 2014).

Competitive and individual negotiations sometimes disempower women, creating opportunities for male fishers to pressure *mama karangas* to have sexual relations with them (Matsue et al., 2014). This behaviour of coercion for sexual relationships is referred to as 'women and fish-for-sex' (Béné and Merten, 2008), where fishers make sexual demands on women, regardless of age and marital status, especially when there are low fish catches (Matsue et al., 2014). Female fish traders who refuse such advances may not get fish when fish catches are low. As Diggins (2019: 133) shows in coastal fisheries in the frontier town of Tissana, Sierra Leone, in my field site, these relations are not about sexual exploitation but are characterised by a "real thread of attraction and sentiment." In some cases, they end up breaking marriages.

In Gazi, Wanyonyi et al. (2021) observed that all the fish landed is sold entirely at the local market. Fish traders bought fish directly from fishers. I observed that male fish traders buy the fish from fishers or fish dealers and hawk them in Ukunda and Msambweni towns on the streets or in makeshift structures. These structures are located along the main streets of the two towns. They also sell them directly to hotels or to individuals who traders come across and individuals who have booked them in advance. Therefore, the fish landed have access to urban and rural markets (Wanyonyi et al., 2021).

The fish is normally weighed at the fish *banda* before being sold to fish traders. In some cases, however, fishers sell the fish to traders by estimating the weight using their sense of touch and sight. Small-sized fish species such as sardines (*dagaa/kimarawali*) are measured in 10-litre plastic buckets at the beach and sold to fish traders according to prevailing prices. Fishers also sell the fish to dealers who have made special arrangements with fishers to sell the fish and refund them. Occasionally, when catches are high and traders at the beach cannot buy all the fish, and due to inadequate fish cold storage facilities at the landing site, fishers transport the fish to Ukunda town and sell them directly to household customers or to fish traders. At the same time, sardines are dried and exported to Tanzania or to as far away as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Catches from bigger vessels are shared among groups of fish traders (male fish traders and *mama karangas*) and households, while catches from dugout canoes (such as lone basket trap fishers), which are usually smaller, are mostly sold to individual *mama karangas*. Women who buy fish from dugout canoes are usually regular buyers since they usually have an informal contract with the fisher. This grants them privileged access to fish even during a time of low catches (Matsue et al., 2014). Fishers usually do not sell a portion of their catch but go home with it for subsistence purposes, although some occasionally sell their portion to fish traders or local community members.

2.5 Migrant fishing in Kenya

It is uncertain when fishers started migrating in East Africa. Wanyonyi et al. (2016b) postulated that artisanal migrant communities from Pemba and Zanzibar were among the earliest known migrant fishers in coastal Kenya, dating to before the 1940s. Sperling (1985) argued that the Wapemba had a long history of close relations with Mombasa, forming part of the Mazrui sphere of influence from the middle of the 18th to the early 19th century. For Sperling (1985), due

to the close relations between Pemba and Mombasa from the middle of the 18th century to the early 19th century, there was constant movement of people and goods between the two islands and a group of Wapemba emigrated from Pemba and settled in Mombasa. Parkin (1989) reported that Pemba fishers used to visit Mtwapa in the north of Mombasa, pay for beach rights, and use a mosque during the months they stayed there every year and even tried to marry local Digo women. In an interview with Mzee Maza, he told me that the Wapemba began arriving in Gazi just after Kenya's independence, around 1965-67. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this has had tremendous implications on fishing activities in this village, therefore, the everyday life of residents.

Wanyonyi et al. (2016b) pointed out that migration patterns of fishers in East Africa are mainly seasonal, and strongly influenced by monsoon winds. Fishing trips usually begin at the end of the SEM season in September, with fishers arriving at their destinations between October and February during the NEM season. Fishing along the Kenyan coast is organised by landing sites, where local communities control the use of adjacent fishing grounds. Migrant fishers, therefore, stay at these landing sites regularly for 1-7 months between November and April during the NEM season before returning home using the same vessel they came in either in March or April (Fulanda *et al.*, 2009; Wanyonyi et al., 2016b; Wanyonyi *et al.*, 2021).[35] Migrant fishers who arrive as part of a fishing unit, and those whom boat owners bring, depend on the captains to make decisions regarding the timings and destinations of migration and fishing grounds as determined by fishery conditions. Hence, migrant fishers can be defined as visitors/guests (*wageni*) who travel from their homes for *ago* (see Chapter 1) to camp and fish at

[35] Migrant fishers also seasonally migrate elsewhere e.g. in Bangladesh (Islam and Herbeck, 2013) and West Africa (Binet et al., 2012).

their destinations for several weeks or months and return home after accumulating savings from the sale of fish (Jiddawi and Öhman, 2002; Wanyonyi et al., 2016b) to fish traders at the host landing site or to traders in urban centres (e.g. Ukunda and Mombasa) when the catches are plenty (Wanyonyi et al., 2021). Migrants have a long tradition of seasonally or permanently migrating from their homes to the fishing ground, such that it has become their way of life (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). Their seasonal migrations have been shown to adapt to the natural movements of target species referred to as "following fish" or to target small pelagic fish with the duration of their migrations and routes differing (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b).

The major drivers that lead to fisher migration along the east African coast include accumulating funds, earning more income, searching for good fishing grounds and gaining access to better markets at destinations. Fishers also migrate out of a general desire to improve their lives, and because migration is their culture or tradition (Fulanda et al., 2009; Wanyonyi et al., 2016b; Wanyonyi et al., 2016a). Therefore, along the east African coast, although the major drivers of fisher migration are economic, there are also ecological reasons. These include the search for better fishing conditions at destinations, including the availability of fish, as well as social reasons such as visiting new sites, migrating to gain new experiences, living in a new place and meeting new people or joining family or friends at the destination (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). According to Wanyonyi et al. (2021) and Wanyonyi et al. (2016a), migrant fishers' decision to migrate is majorly determined by access to livelihood assets and social, economic and spatial dynamics. According to Wanyonyi et al. (2021), the social relations of migrant fishers with local communities at destination landing sites play a critical role in integrating migrant fishers by enabling them to maintain a sense of 'place' in the fishing practice. Maintaining a sense of 'place,' provides migrant fishers with access to fisheries resources,

thereby contributing to their life sustenance (Wanyonyi et al. 2021) and sustaining the food security and livelihoods of host communities. Their access to landing sites is facilitated through invitations by traders, through social networks such as relatives and the local community or by return migration to places they had visited before (Wanyonyi et al. 2021; Wanyonyi et al., 2016a; Fulanda et al. 2009). To fish and land fish in an area, they normally seek permission from the local BMUs. The BMUs that receive migrant fishers vet them by confirming their gear type and crew size and determining the landing fees to be paid. The landing fees translate to income for the BMU. Before allowing them to start fishing, the BMUs also confirm that visiting migrant fishers fulfil specific requirements, including presenting introductory letters from their home authorities and valid travel documents if they are foreign fishers (Wanyonyi et al. 2021).

Migrant fishers maintain a site they visit annually due to its suitability, acceptability by local fishers, invitation by traders, ease of access to fishing grounds, and markets. Their numbers continue to increase in destination sites yearly because their fishing grounds are considered common-pool resources, and coastal communities at migrant fisher destinations are closely related to migrant fishers through intermarriage (Glaesel, 2000; Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). This has created strong historical connections with migrant source areas, especially Pemba (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). They have special and reciprocal arrangements with traders who facilitate them to overcome financial challenges. Since migrants from Pemba are mostly invited to destinations by traders, while the fishers themselves determine the price of fish, the traders mostly determine the choice of the markets for fish, finance the main costs of fishing such as equipment, and pay for other costs such as medical, immigration clearance, and housing (Wanyonyi et al., 2021). The fishers typically refund them after sharing profits.

The presence of migrant fishers at a destination site assures traders and residents of increased availability of fish, potentially lower prices of fish and an improved economy since migrant fishers from Pemba possess better fishing skills and are more experienced than local fishers (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b; Wanyonyi et al., 2021). Therefore, while residents experience a site as a home, migrant fishers see it as a source of revenue. Migrant fishers, in turn, transfer fishing knowledge to fishers at their destination. As we shall see later, this is the subject of everyday discussions in the Gazi fishing village. Samoilys et al. (2011) and Wanyonyi et al. (2021) showed that migrant fishers use gear similar to local fishers.[36] However, according to Wanyonyi et al. (2016b), what distinguishes them from local fishers is this: their deployment technique differs for some of the fishing gear, which enables migrant fishers to be more effective. In addition, they employ gear modifications, which, together with deployment techniques, often yield higher catches than those of local fishers (Wanyonyi et al. 2016b; Samoilys et al., 2011). They can also make dramatic movements in distant and remote destinations along the East African coast compared to migrant fishers from Kenya who travel shorter distances within the country (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). Nonetheless, according to Crona et al. (2010), their arrival at a destination site can have adverse effects. The effects include promoting immorality, lack of respect for local traditions and customs, use of destructive fishing gear that can damage fish habitats and lead to conflicts with local communities, the perceived decline in fish catches in their fishing locations, non-compliance with rules and regulations, and fishing without valid permits (Crona *et al.*, 2010).

[36] Migrant fishers use dugout canoes, outrigger canoes, wooden-plank boats and fibre boats while fishing gears include ringnets, drift nets, shark nets, cast nets, basket traps, long line, among others (see Wanyonyi et al., 2021).

Gazi fishing village is among the most important migrant fisher destinations in Kenya that migrant fishers visit during the NEM season and leave at the end of the season (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b) because they are located close to their fishing grounds (Fulanda et al., 2009). Some of the commonly used gear by migrant fishers include cast nets, drift nets, ring nets, shark nets and handlines, while some of the vessels include dugout canoes, outrigger canoes, wooden plank boats and fibre-glass boats (see Wanyonyi et al., 2021).[37] They travel up to 25 km into the sea to depths of up to 400 metres, covering an area of about 304 km^2 (Wanyonyi et al., 2021). The catches are usually sold at the local market at Gazi and the surplus is mainly transported to Ukunda town. As we have seen above, tons of sardines are transported to markets as far as Zanzibar and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The increase in the number of migrant fishers in Gazi has led to the introduction of fishing gear and fishing practices such as the ring net in East Africa (Okemwa et al., 2017). [38] This gear was introduced in Gazi in the early 1990s by migrant fishers from Tanzania and the number of ring nets has been increasing since then (Okemwa et al., 2017).[39] The ring net yields higher catch rates of 9.4 kg/fisher/day than other fishing gears and requires the highest fishing effort in terms of the number of fishers involved per vessel (Okemwa et al., 2017). It accounts for 41% of the total landings in Gazi (Okemwa et al., 2017), although my observations indicate that these proportions could be underestimated. As I have shown earlier, since migrant fishers in Gazi

[37] See Wanyonyi et al. (2021) for a list of commonly caught fish species by migrant fishers.
[38] The small-scale purse seine (ring net) is made of multifilament nylon netting suspended from floats and weighted at the bottom to hold the net vertically in water (Samoilys et al., 2011). There is a foot rope that is threaded through metal rings at the bottom of the net that is used to close the net to enclose a school of fish (Samoilys et al., 2011)..
[39] Resource use conflicts began to emerge few years after its introduction (Okemwa et al., 2017).

village also use other fishing gear such as hand lines and drift nets to catch fish beside ring nets, their overall contribution to the local economy cannot be gainsaid.[40]

According to Wanyonyi et al. (2016b), some of the migrants who arrived in Gazi village with their families and settled permanently from villages adjacent to Shimoni, in the south of Gazi, comprise fishers of Pemba origin who had arrived in Shimoni in the 1960s. However, they have not formally registered as citizens. Their migration to Shimoni in the 1960s may not have been purely for fishing purposes (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b). Nonetheless, the migration of fishers follows monsoon winds, where fishers arrive at the onset of the NEM season and return home when the SEM season begins.

Anthropologists have long established that ethnicity, status and class are used to distinguish many groups along the Kenyan coastal strip and for ranking them in terms of how indigenous (*wenyeji*) or how foreign (*wageni*) they were perceived to be (Askew, 1999: 71). Other categories include people of the coast (*watu wa pwani*) and people from inland regions (*watu wa bara*). All these distinctions emanating from Arab culture and an African slave culture (Eastman, 1988) were used during the days of slavery along the coastal strip in local discourse between established residents, recently settled immigrants, and new immigrant arrivals (Askew, 1999).[41] Anthropological work has illuminated that the coast offered a haven to groups external to the coast, from the Arabian Peninsula as well as from the inland regions of Africa, during the days of slavery who contributed to the development of coastal settlements and created unity out of diversity (Askew, 1999). Later on, however, despite the development brought by visitors,

[40] Fishers from Gazi also occasionally travel shorter distances to other areas on *ago*, particularly Malindi, Kilifi and Kipini.
[41] Everyday resistance towards visitors occurs within a specific social-historical context (See McNall 2018: 8).

there evolved instead growing divisions leading to ethnic and religious tensions (McIntosh, 2009) with a growing risk of possibly violent conflict, especially during elections (Willis and Chome, 2014). During the days of slavery, *wageni* immigrated among the Giriama on the north coast of Kenya, for instance, to seek wealth or due to local shortages as a result of unreliable rainfall or to flee disputes, illnesses or witchcraft which threatened their security. They also immigrated as brides, or because their kin offered them as security for loans or as compensation for the offences of their elders, or because they were captured during warfare or bought from coastal or other traders in return for commodities (Willis and Miers, 1997: 482). When they arrived, they joined homesteads, became kin, and were subject to the authority of the homestead head although their kinship links extended beyond the homestead. They 'could appeal for support and assistance should the homestead head mistreat them or refuse to offer them what they considered fair access to the resources of the homestead' (Willis and Miers, 1997: 483).[42] Some *wageni* were offered for sale as slaves to work in plantations (Cooper, 1977, 1980). In patron-client relationships, some deemed themselves Arabs, 'priding themselves on their knowledge of Islam and their civilised qualities (*ustaarabu*),' therefore, shielding their identity by calling immigrants from the hinterland *wageni* (foreigners or visitors), and pursuing privileged 'Arab-associated activities such as literacy in Arabic and elite or magical forms of Islam' (McIntosh, 2009: 53).

Through being known in the community for a very long time or assimilation through inter-marriage or conferral of land rights, strangers could move from being wa*geni* (guest, visitor, in-comer) to being *wenyeji* (original inhabitants, people who own the land) (Beckerleg,

[42] According to Willis and Miers (1997: 483), homestead heads sought to build up on their followers, so they welcomed *wageni* – except during extreme hardship. Women who came with men were subordinated as wives.

2004).[43] In addition, during slavery, slaves could raise their status by becoming Swahili or becoming Arabs (Cooper, 1977, 1980) or through being acquired as slaves, one could become a child of the house (Willis and Miers, 1997: 481), therefore, a *mwenyeji*. As I will discuss shortly, this is not the case in Gazi as immigrant fishers and their families who have stayed in the village for decades and those who visit the village annually for *ago* and are therefore known for a long time and even those who have married in the village are still referred to as *wageni*. According to my interlocutors, fishers who do not return home settle in the village and become assimilated into the society. These fishers are referred to as *wahamiaji*. By assimilating *wageni* and *wahamiaji,* the society becomes more resilient as both groups become part of the community (Caplan 2013). However, as I will show later, in Gazi, all fishers of Pemba origin (Wapemba) categorised as either *wageni* or *wahamiaji* are often referred to as *wageni.*

In this thesis, I do not have space for a detailed account of Kenyan coastal ethnic politics. I will, however, offer some comments. Citizens who do not originate from the coast (*wabara*) are often categorised as *wageni* due to a long period of marginalisation and political participation (Willis and Chome, 2014; Chome, 2020). In Gazi village, the terms *Wapemba* or occasionally *wageni* are often used in everyday life discourse to refer to two groups of fishers of Pemba origin: 1) those fishers who originally came to Gazi village from Pemba many years ago to fish and have permanently settled there (*wahamiaji*) and 2) those who seasonally come to the village at the beginning of the NEM season for *ago* to camp and fish and then leave at the end of the NEM season. The Digo considered the original inhabitants of the village, refer to themselves as

[43] In Kenya, the problem of immigration is a continuous process where 'native' communities 'welcome' or 'invite' other ethnic groups into their homesteads or territories who are referred to as guests.

wenyeji – this behaviour is often referred to as *ugasi*. All these categorisations influence how individuals interact socially in this fishing village.

In this thesis, I shall argue that migrant fishers have become the foil against which residents understand themselves as unskilled and lazy fishers due to the uncertainty of fish landings in the Gazi fishing village. I shall show that for the residents of this village, migrant fishers have increasingly become the solution towards the ambivalence that surrounds the uncertainty in fish catches particularly during the NEM season when they are present because they are considered highly skilled fishers in comparison to local fishers. Hence, it is essential to understand local/resident fishers' ways of life and understand the marine world around them in this fishing village to understand local-migrant fishers' interactions. By extension, this is also the case for migrant fishers. Therefore, Gazi residents' fishing practices take shape due to their interactions with migrant fishers to whom they relate as fishing subordinates.

The implication I examine is how ethnic boundaries become reinforced (McIntosh, 2009) through the fishing practice. Following Barth (1969), I examine how ethnic boundaries lead members within an ethnic group to self-identify. On the contrary, strangers – members of another ethnic group – are dichotomised because of "limitations on shared understandings, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest" (Barth, 1969: 15). By focusing on fishing skills and experience, I show how residents of Gazi village come to view themselves as more or less skilled in terms of their fishing practices. First, residents emphasise the unpredictability of fish landings as proof of resident fishers lacking fishing skills compared to the skilled migrant fishers from Pemba. Second, they complain about consistently low fish catches or when resident fishers frequently return from the sea empty-handed, particularly during the SEM season. Third,

resident ringnet fishers only land one fish species everyday instead of a higher fish species diversity, which can offer fish traders many options from which they can select for their customers. Fourth, resident fishers rely on traditional fishing methods, such as basket traps that yield significantly low fish catches, rather than on improved fishing methods. Fifth, they also emphasise young people as being active in waiting to solicit for fish gifts rather than in engaging in fishing activities as proof of laziness.

Conversely, some of my interlocutors claim that local fishers' consistently catching low or no fish does not mean that they are unskilled. For them, it creates suspicions that migrant fishers could be engaging in the occult to find fish, have better fishing equipment compared with those used by local fishers, or usually arrive in the village for *ago* during the NEM season when fish are usually plentiful. As I mentioned earlier, the NEM season is characterised by calm seas and high fish catches. The SEM season on the other hand is characterised by rough sea conditions, winds, rainfall, and low fish catches. This creates the anxieties that are experienced when migrant fishers have returned to Pemba or Vanga/Jimbo/Jasini, leaving local fishers to struggle to satisfy the high expectations for fish at the beach. I suggest that these differences in fishing discourse and practice among local and migrant fishers in this fishing village emphasise that fishing is an activity best performed by migrant fishers rather than residents of Gazi.

Mzee Athman Saidi frequently told me that there is no scarcity of fish in the ocean, rather what is lacking among residents of this village among the current generation of fishers is the expertise of catching fish, which results in anxieties and uncertainties. However, residents also recount how, in the past, fish was plentiful and how they used to be completely satisfied. As Mzee Maza recounts:

> Fish used to be valueless. For the present-day KES 10, you could get fish that a family could feed on for even two days. We grew up that way. Alternatively, you could go to the beach and never buy fish. Fishers could just give you fish free of charge. I swear before God! There was no need to buy fish. Whenever fishers used to catch fish, they used to set aside a portion, knowing well that their families would feed on them. It used to be that way.

Here, Mzee Maza is expressing nostalgia for previous fish catches. He remembers the past as "a simpler, more impersonal market economy" (see also Diggins, 2018: 104). The decline in fish catches has led to the anxiety and ambivalence being experienced presently, especially during the SEM season. During a time of low fish catches or uncertainty in fish catches, there is open discrimination in the selling of fish and giving of fish gifts in comparison to the past when fishers sold fish or gave them out free of charge to all who asked.

Against this backdrop, in the present study, I explore how fishers acquire fishing skills and knowledge of the sea, the anxieties and uncertainties associated with fishing and the material strategies residents adopt to navigate the uncertainties in their day-to-day lives. I shall focus on social relations between two main groups of people in this fishing village. To reiterate, the first group consists of Mijikenda fishing communities (particularly the Digo) who are residents of the village and who consider themselves the owners of Gazi land and its adjacent ocean's fisheries resources. The second group consists of permanent residents of Pemba origin and migrant fishers of Pemba origin who come annually for *ago*. Residents categorise both the later groups as Wapemba or guests. Therefore, my focus shall be to explore the social interactions that occur between two categories of interlocutors, residents and Wapemba, through the exploitation of fisheries resources in an environment that is continuously changing.

Chapter 3: Becoming an artisanal fisher

I accompanied Ramah's ring net fishing crew on a fishing trip one chilly morning in early December 2019. It was still dark, around 04.20 hours when we left the shore. I counted 37 of us in the boat. Most of the fishers were standing, while others sat on the big blue fishing net with metallic purse rings joined to a purse line made of sisal (*senga*) and floats around a headline attached to the net. At the stern, below the weathered timber deck on which they lay the net, there was a hollow section where diving gear and other items, used by the crew while fishing, were stored. Caught fish are also temporarily stored in this section, and below the deck at the bow of the boat. The captain ordered us to disperse ourselves at the stern and the bow to balance the boat.

Our boat was the first ring net boat to leave. The night fishing boats had not yet returned and the handline, gill net and basket trap fishers had not yet arrived at the beach. When we were a safe distance away from the beach, where no one standing at the beach could hear him, Ramah told the captain to stop the engine. He was short and stout and wore a grey t-shirt on top of a white long-sleeved shirt that had turned brown permanently due to frequent use, a pair of black trousers and a blue cap. "My brothers in faith," he shouted, "As we go fishing today, let us remain faithful to that Allah will provide what we are going to look for. We shall not collaborate with anyone else to catch fish except the Ushindi crew.[44] Do you remember they reported us to the chief because of this?" We all remained quiet and attentive, only nodding our heads. There were murmurs from fishers seated at the back of the boat with me.

[44] This involves fishers from different fishing crew collaborating in catching a shoal of fish. When landed, the money from the catches is shared among the different fishing crews.

It took us about an hour to get to the fishing ground. We used a long route to avoid going through the coral reef areas, as they were shallower and because of the roughness of the waves hitting the reef. We arrived at the fishing ground when the sun was beginning to rise. It was quiet. I shivered because of the chilly morning weather. I could hear sea birds squawking, the rotating propellers in the water and fishers chatting. The sea was calm, with the water only rippled at the stern by the propellers as the boat moved.

We started searching for fish as soon as we arrived at the fishing ground. The sun was rising, beautifully, from the East. Ramah and three other fishers stood at the bow, chatting and pointing, using their right hands, to direct the captain. They also searched for fish by placing their right/left hands on their foreheads and above their eyes and observing physically for signs of schooling fish. The signs involved a shoal of fish creating ripples on the surface of the water that formed a big dark circle as they came to the surface of the water. Fishers called it *kupanda* when shoaling fish come with the high tide as the tide covers the reef and *kucheza* when schooling fish appear at the surface of the water. We also relied on birds such as the gull-billed tern (*shake*) to locate schooling fish that came on the surface of the water and to determine their direction of movement. One fisher told me that if they cannot find fish, they usually send some of the crew into the water to confirm their presence by swimming and snorkelling, searching for them. If one of them locates fish, they lift their hands to show and give a sign using their fingers to show the type of fish species and the estimated size of the school of fish. The clearness of the water helps in finding fish.

It did not long before we located schooling fish about 100 metres away. We stood to marvel at it as it created bubbles on the water's surface that formed a dark circle as it moved. The first group of fishers stood on the port side of the boat, ready to 'attack' it. Others put on the

diving gear. We had to wait a few minutes. The fish kept moving at a high speed from turbid to calm clear waters. The noise in the boat was deafening. Fishers shouted. Fishers gave directions to each other. The crew leader gave directions to all the fishers. The captain gave directions to the fishers. The engine kept roaring and stopping.

After about 10 minutes, the boat was now in front of the shoal as it moved fast towards us, unaware of what lay ahead. The first group of fishers dived into the water with the rope that was tied to the net. They began hitting the water hard with their hands and legs to make a sound 'pooh' while swimming or snorkelling, to scare the fish towards where the net had already been dropped. The captain increased the speed of the engine as the boat moved in a clockwise direction, releasing the net into the water from the starboard. More fishers dropped in along the way, holding their snorkelling masks, to secure the net and make sure fish did not escape under the net. Others made sure that the net did not stick on the floats, allowing the fish to move easily below it. The captain continued to increase the speed of the boat as fishers released the net to close the circle. After making sure the net was secure from their side, some fishers entered the boat to assist the few of us who had remained on board to pull the net and the heavy purse line made of sisal, which was attached to metallic rings. Sitting in a line of 4 fishers, we struggled to pull the purse line quickly to prevent the fish from escaping below the net. Fishers on board the boat kept shouting as we pulled the purse line, "Pull it! Pull the purse line! Pull!"

Suddenly, the fishers stopped pulling the net and purse line while those who were in the water stopped beating the water. The shouting and issuing of instructions also stopped. One fisher told me that all the fish had escaped below the net. Another fisher estimated we had lost about half a ton of fish. I was tired and hungry.

After the shoal of fish had escaped, another ring net crew, watching from a few metres away, 'salivating' and hoping we did not catch the fish, 'attacked' and caught all of it extremely quickly. We stared at them in disbelief. Some fishers in my boat sat at the back of the boat grumbling in humiliation while avoiding Ramah's eyes. They refused to pull the empty net back into the boat. A few of us volunteered to pull it, slowly singing '…strong, strong…pull…pull….' encouraging each other. To encourage the crew, Ramah said, "We shall get fish next time! They shall not laugh at us!" Some of the dejected ones joined us until we pulled the net into the boat. Amidst all the emotions in the boat, the captain engaged the engine, following directions from Ramah, who stood at the bow with two other fishers scanning for signs of another shoal. I said a quick prayer.

Ring net fishing requires exceptionally high skills in sensing where schooling fish are located to guide them towards the net and catch them. This requires a high degree of sensitivity to the surrounding marine environment. Fishing also involves the fisher's constant bodily movement in and out of the water (Ota, 2006). Before they get into the water, fishers' senses have to be adapted to the ocean environment. As fishers dive or swim in the water, they adapt their senses (particularly auditory and visual) and bodily movements to the ocean environment (Ota, 2006). They claim that the skill of ring net fishing, for instance, depends on the speed at which the boat approaches the school of fish, the speed at which the fishers can close the net around schooling fish before they escape, and the technique of approaching schooling fish successfully.

What follows in this chapter is a close analysis of the enskilment and sensory engagement of fishers. Both enskilment and the senses have attracted the attention of anthropologists and

other scholars. Before returning to my ethnographic material, I would like to offer a brief orientation introduction to some of those perspectives that have shaped what follows.

Bourdieu (1977, 1990) used theories of the nature of practice to describe how, through training and everyday practice, skills in form of the *habitus* develop in the body of the individual. These skills take time to accrue. Initially, the apprentice is usually inexperienced (Wacquant, 2005: 448). As they practise repeatedly, the muscles, mind, and body of the individuals adapt to the environment like those of the experienced ones in their field (Wacquant, 2005: 453). The *habitus* ensures the active presence of experiences which are inscribed in the bodies of the individuals in form of schemes of perception, appreciation and action characteristic of their expertise (Bourdieu, 2000: 138). I acknowledge several debates such as King's (2000) on the notion of the *habitus* and how it relates to enskilment exist. Many of the problems associated with the *habitus* can be resolved in dialogue with the phenomenological approach (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This approach explores embodied and sensuous ways of knowing, practising and experiencing to understand peoples' everyday lives (Stoller, 1997; Geurts, 2003).

Anthropological studies that analyse learning, apprenticeship and enskilment concentrate their attention on the embodied and sensory perception of individuals to understand how people live and act in the world (Ingold, 2000; Marchand, 2012; Gowlland, 2019). Anthropologists have explored how, through their senses, individuals experience their bodies and the world around them, develop their cultural identity and forms of being-in-the-world (Geurts, 2003: 3). As the apprentice enters into another world, his senses are attuned to otherness, and enter into the new settings as she/he lets them flow into them (Stoller, 1989: 5). Individuals, therefore, vary in their sensory skills and perception since they are cultivated through practice and training (Ingold, 2000: 283-5). Previous studies focused on understanding the senses separately in the everyday

life of individuals (Seremetakis, 1994; Howes, 2003). Current studies, however, focus on the multisensorial to understand practices since the senses interact and cannot be separated (Ingold, 2000; Pink, 2013).

In this chapter, I show that learning to fish is a process that requires everyday practice to experience and engage bodily with the sea (Pálsson, 1994). I focus on the fishers' ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and being, and how they bring their past into the present to make choices as an ongoing interactive and evolving process (McGee and Warms, 2013: 652). No study, to the best of my knowledge, has examined embodied ways of learning and knowledge among fishers in the context of artisanal fisheries in East Africa. I use my own experiences, and the experiences of my interlocutors (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Stoller, 1997), to explore the taken-for-granted aspects of how thorough senses and their bodies, fishers experience, enact, shape, and express themselves as they learn about fishing and how to fish.

I show that learning to fish is more than just going to the sea and returning with fish or with no fish. I argue that enskilment is processual (Gowlland, 2019) and it is achieved through careful observation, mimesis, and repeated exercise while words are used to direct focus, coordinate activities and communicate conceptual ideas or values (Marchand, 2008) related to fishing.[45] Training and practice involve bodily engagement in and with the ocean and attunement of the fisher's senses to the wider marine environment: to listen, to see, to smell, to taste, to touch, and to body movement and position. Training and practice, therefore, enable fishers to tune their senses to the marine world and lead to embodied discoveries (see Stoller, 1989: 5). I also argue that embodied knowledge cannot be transmitted from person-to-person (Downey,

[45] See Marchand (2010) for a discussion on the apprentice-style method as a form of learning.

2010: 22); rather, they are regrown into the fisher's body through training and experience and active engagement with the environment (Ingold, 2000: 5). Enskilment transforms the novice fisher, changing his muscles, emotional reactions, attention patterns, interaction patterns, motor control (Downey, 2010: 35) and sensory perception. I show how even if he develops all the required skills and capacities through and within his body, there is still uncertainty in finding and/or catching fish.

In the next part of the chapter, I begin by examining who is trained, who trains who, and how one is trained to fish. In the second part, I consider how fishers understand the sea, how they learn to study the sea, and how they memorise the locations of fishing grounds. In the final part, I discuss how fishers acquire skills to earn a living from the marine environment through their body and senses. I ask how the marine environment becomes embodied through the fisher's movements, memories, and perceptions. I also ask how fishers employ their senses to apprehend the marine environment around them.

3.1 Training to fish

Knowledge of swimming is an integral part of a fisher's way of life. Musa, a handline fisher, told me that they begin their fishing careers at around 7 years of age. Children begin to learn how to swim at around that age. They learn to swim or engage in swimming competitions amongst themselves in shallow intertidal areas during weekends and school holidays while waiting for fishers to land fish. Their participation in the lives of other children enables them to learn to be independent at sea.

After learning to swim in shallow waters, they move to deeper waters to improve their skills. In the initial stages of learning, they pay explicit attention to swimming rules as the body

acquires new skills and habits. They learn more by watching how others swim and by imitating the swimmers' gestures than by listening to instructions. As they try to swim, they tend to monitor their movements, trying to make sure they float and move their limbs and breathe correctly. This brings corporeality to explicit awareness for the swimmer (Leder, 1990: 86).

Through the activities of everyday life, they learn to recognise water depths and clearness as they train to dive to depths of up to about 2 metres, competing to pick sand from the bottom of the ocean and bring it to the surface to prove that they have touched the bottom. They also compete in swimming for long distances and staying underwater for as long as possible. In the evenings, some swim in the tidal mangrove forest while they listen to contemporary English and Swahili music. Others use hook and line to capture small-sized fish in shallow waters around the beach or walk around in the sea catching squids during low spring tide. This builds their confidence as their senses (particularly sight, sound, and smell) increasingly become attuned to the marine environment. It also helps them to learn the behaviour of different species of fish, the topography of the sea, the lunar and tidal cycle and the movement of winds and water currents. Therefore, the young fisher immerses himself in the marine environment and insensibly or unconsciously acquires fishing skills – including those which were not known to his father or grandfather or other fishers through imitation (Bourdieu, 1977: 87-88). When they know how to swim well, they automatically stop monitoring their movements and begin moving their bodies unconsciously. This shows that the skill has finally become incorporated into their bodies (Leder, 1990: 31). In the past, fathers or grandfathers trained children to fish and swim, as Mzee Mohammed revealed when I asked him how he learnt to swim:

> My grandfather taught me. He used to tell me, 'Get into the water… Get into the water.' When I get into the water he used to say, 'hit the water using your hands like this…. hit the water using your hands like that.' He

used to hold me here, on my stomach, such that could I lie on top of his hand; then he used to tell me, 'Fold your legs,' then I could fold my legs. 'Also, fold your hands.' I could then fold my hands. He could then hold me as I swim this way and that way. (Demonstrates how it is done by lying on the left and then on the right-hand side). We did it that way every day until it came a time when he could leave me to float by myself, by removing his hand below my stomach. He could then tell me, 'Now try it on your own. Hit your legs.' Yes, that way. He kept training me that way until a time when he could stand aside while I swim independently. I could move, move, move until I reach where that plant is. 'Okay, come back here.' Once I had done enough practice, I could hit my hands in the water and swim back. I could swim by myself without being held here (holds his stomach). I got used to it that way. Mmh. I started fishing that way … (silence) … mmh…

Nobody is born a fisher. Each must develop the desire and motivation to learn how to fish. As the child grows up into a young man within the fishing environment, he develops an interest in fishing. Through careful observation, mimesis, repeated exercise and asking questions while observing, fishers become skilled in using the fishing gear in which they specialise. The older, experienced fishers use words to coordinate activities and communicate ideas. In the past, children used to go fishing with their fathers or grandfathers, as Mzee Mohammed explained above. They trained to fish by observing what the older fishers did every day and repeating what they did. Mzee Mohammed again:

My grandfather taught me how to fish. He used to take me to the sea. I did not know how to swim. I knew nothing! Then he started taking me to fish using the basket trap. I did not begin fishing using fishing nets. The first fishing gear I used was basket traps. We used to go there (he points at the middle of the bay). My grandfather used to put the basket traps into the water, remove it when there was fish, put the trap onto the dugout canoe, pour the fish in the boat, and then we would come back. Like that. Sometimes he used to tell me: swim, swim, swim (he demonstrates by pushing his hands forward and backwards as if in the water). I could swim up to there, (points with his finger) and back. Every day that way… every day that way… until I got used to swimming. We then fished for a long time together.

I frequently observed, during weekends and school holidays, Mzee Hamadi's two sons (one is 5 years old and the other 9 years old) accompanying him to fish using the basket trap. He told me that the practice is diminishing as fishers are increasingly becoming selfish with fishing knowledge and some children are unwilling to venture into fishing or are just lazy.

Fathers or grandfathers do not teach some fishers to fish. They learn to fish from other fishers who are not necessarily family members. As Mzee Imara once told me one evening as his crew were preparing to go to the sea, "You cannot learn about fishing from anyone. Not everyone in this village understands fishing. You can only learn about fishing from a fisher and no one else." One Sunday morning in mid-November 2019, while chatting with Nasir, a young nighttime ring net sardine fisher, at the beach he told me that other fishers in the village taught him how to fish.[46]

> When I became a youth, I used to come here (*the beach*) … We did not know how to fish but they (*other fishers*) used to tell us to grab the rope (*senga*) and pull it. Just like that until we got used to it. But there are different fishing methods. When fishing at night, you do not enter the water but only pull the rope. You are just told to do this and that. It is not something that someone must have taught you *per se*; rather, it is something that you have to see with your eyes, and you repeat by doing the same thing. If you are told to do this, you repeat the same procedure. Tomorrow, you continue the same way; you do not need to be told again, because it is something that you see with your eyes. 'My colleague is doing it this way. Let me repeat the procedure.' Fishing during the day requires some knowledge of swimming and/or diving because if you cannot dive, you need to first learn how to dive. You need to practise diving to the bottom first… The most important thing is that you must know how to dive.

[46] Nassir later stopped fishing and joined fish trading. He told me that the consistent low or no fish catches caused by witchcraft and the wrangles between fishers in his boat necessitated his decision to exit fishing.

Nighttime ring net fishers, for example, learn by watching what other fishers do and by repeating what they observe. Through practice, they become skilled in the fishery. The nighttime ring net fishers use light to attract fish species like sardines and use nets to pull them into the boats. They also learn how to use their hands and bodies to fish and handle fish. According to Mzee Imara, nighttime fishers do not necessarily need to know how to swim because they do not enter the water while fishing. These fishers have developed an aversion to seawater since it is usually cold during the time they go out to fish. When they arrive at the landing site from a fishing trip, they alight from the bigger boats and board smaller boats in shallow waters to take them to dry land. Juma, the captain of one of the boats once told me, "I cannot step into cold seawater while I have been out all night in the cold. I will get sick!" Swimming knowledge for them, therefore, is for the saving of their lives while at sea and not for fishing. For daytime ring net fishers, however, swimming skills are mandatory as most of their fishing activities involve getting into the water, swimming, snorkelling, and diving while searching for fish or hitting the water to scare the fish into the net.

Fishers have adapted to earning a living from the dangerous marine environments because they are born and brought up in these environments. There are few alternatives and fishing has become part of their lives. As I have discussed in the previous section, fishers must learn how to swim to be safe in case of an accident. In his review of studies on the anthropology of fishing, Acheson (1981) points out that human beings have adapted to earning a living from an uncertain marine environment. In Gazi, strong winds, especially during the SEM season, cause the sea to be rough and make it difficult to navigate at sea. This often leads to the capsizing of boats and canoes making fishing a dangerous occupation. However, one migrant fisher told me they put on life jackets not because of their safety, but because it is a government directive.

For him, every fisher must be an excellent swimmer and can prevent himself from drowning by swimming to safety whenever the boat capsizes while at sea.

First-time fishers often feel nauseous, vomit, and cause disturbance to other fishers when they get to sea. When one fisher becomes badly seasick, this occasionally forces the captain to return the boat to the landing site. Seasickness shows a lack of practical knowledge about the ocean or fishing by an individual and those who 'find their legs' become skilled since they underwent learning in the company of others (Pálsson, 1994). Bakari Siraj clearly articulated this point when he told me the following while we walked from the landing site back to the village one day in mid-December 2019:

> When you go to the deep sea, especially for the first time, chances are that you will vomit. The waves make the boat swing up and down as they hit it. This makes your intestines to move sideways and you feel dizzy and nauseous. By the time I hit the boat with the third wave, going up and down, you will vomit. After vomiting, your joints will be weak, and you will sleep. It is worse if you have eaten food full of fat. Years ago, when one fisher joined us for the first time, there were enormous waves in the sea that day. The new fisher felt uncomfortable and ordered the captain to take the boat back to the landing site. The fishers laughed at him. He became sick for an entire week. It is normally worse when the sea is calm and the sun is hot. It makes you feel dizzy and nauseous and you can vomit anytime. The smell of fish and petrol will also lead to nausea and vomiting.
>
> Fieldnotes 19th December 2019

It takes time and continuous practice for such fishers to get used to the sea and 'get their legs' (Pálsson, 1994). However, while some 'get their legs' within days, others take longer. First-time fishers who go to the sea irregularly may continue to vomit and feel dizzy because they are unused to the conditions at sea. This is because they lack practical knowledge about the sea (Pálsson, 1994). When I accompanied ring net fishers to fish during the night one day during the

NEM, the sea was rough with strong winds, making our boat move violently with the waves. I saw one fisher secretly applying kerosene on his bare chest. When he realised I had seen him, he told me he was hiding from the others to avoid them laughing at him. He told me that applying kerosene on a bare chest protects one from vomiting while at sea. For him, it was especially useful for fishers who have not gone to the sea for months since nighttime ring net fishing is mostly conducted during the NEM when migrant fishers are around. One fisher told me, "People vomit offshore because of the strong smell of the sea and the up-and-down movement of the waves. Moreover, the fear of being in the sea makes one not get used to it easily and he will always feel dizzy." To be part of the sea, therefore, the fisher should be patient and let the sea into him and not impose his will on the sea, as Brown (2017) found out in his effort to become an offshore sailor. Therefore, fishers' senses are not always attuned to the marine environment and, without the regular practice of being at the sea, their bodies react violently against being there.

3.2 Understanding the sea through senses

One afternoon, in mid-February 2020, while at the beach, I met Mzee Athman Saidi. Four ring net boats had returned from the sea. Three boats had landed a combined catch of a ton of mackerel. Only one, Ramah's crew, had returned empty-handed earlier. The beach was full of traders and fishers. Therefore, as we strolled on the beach towards the boats, I felt happy for the crew of the boats that had landed fish who stood in groups, each holding three mackerels in their hands, shouting, chatting and waiting for the daily catch to be offloaded from the boats and sold to traders. I also pitied Ramah's crewmembers as they walked back home, avoiding groups and looking dejected and depressed.

I could hear the sloshing of waves against the shore as the spring tide water was coming back. The NEM season wind was blowing from the north and I could see many white butterflies flying over the sea towards the north. Mzee Athman was wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a white *taqiyah* on his head and a green sarong (*kikoi*) wrapped nicely around his waist. The following is a section of the conversation I had with him that afternoon:

V: I can see you, old man. Where have you been?

H: (He laughs) I had gone to pray.

V: Have you seen those butterflies? There are so many of them.

H: (He laughs and clears his throat). I told people the day before yesterday that these butterflies had not yet appeared. I predicted that when they will appear, they will usher in *bamvua ya masio*, a special season. This normally occurs at the time of planting rice during the coming month and not this one. This is an indication that the calm NEM period is beginning. Yes. It indicates the beginning of the calmness of the sea when the butterflies migrate. The butterflies are currently scattered everywhere including inland and the coast. I told them the only species of fish that they will be landing on now would be the Indian mackerel and not any other species. Here they are! They have only caught mackerel. The youths usually tell me, "Mzee Athman, you are the best." (He laughs). Yesterday I told Ramah, "When you hear the muezzin's call from the mosque, leave! And do not go to this side (he points southwards). At this time, you can only find fish on this side (he points northwards of the bay) because the wind (*baridi wa huu upepo*) will change direction. The wind will not come from this side (he points to the southeast), it will come from the other side (he points to the northeast of the bay). Where is it coming from right now? Is it not here? (he points to the northeast of the bay). When it originates from here (he points to the northeast of the bay), there will be many Indian mackerel in the sea. (He laughs). That is why he went yesterday and caught a lot of fish while the others did not get anything. (He laughs). He (Ramah) asked me, "My uncle, how do you know?" I told him, "You do not observe. There are some signs that I observe. Around 2000 hours at night, I look at the stars. Some specific stars are indicators of calmness (*shwari*) or roughness (*upepo*) of the sea. Then, very early in the

morning, I come out to observe the weather (*hali ya anga*) and the sea. I can know from the beach if it is rough in the deep sea. (He laughs). I know that today the sea is rough.

V: What shows?

H: The first indicator is the water itself when you arrive at the beach in the morning. Or if today the water is turbid up to a point that you cannot see, I will also know from the beach. You can also observe the weather because the sky will show you. Yes! When you look at the sky and see some dirt in it, then know that the sea is turbid. Even if you use a snorkelling mask, you will not see in the water. So, when you see the mackerel, you will catch them easily. There will come a time when you will see the heavens have turned completely blue and ripened. Then, you will never catch mackerel; whatever fishing gear you have, whatever effort you use. He travels like a bullet! Yes! Do you understand me? I keep telling them (*fishers*), "Study the sea!" When I used to own a boat, I could leave here at 0800 hours, even after all the other boats have left. We used to be around 14 or 15 crewmembers using a net that between 30 – 40 fishers currently use. We used to leave here about 10 of us. I used to tell the captain, "Start the engine! Leave through here…" (He points towards the north to Chale Island).

A fisher must have the ability to detect and interpret auditory, visual and somatosensory cues that the ocean offers in his pursuit of fish. This is because fishing in the sea requires exceptional sensitivity to the marine environment, which is filled with visual and auditory cues that guide the fisher to predict the weather and to find fish. Therefore, a fisher should know how to detect and interpret these signs. Fishers mainly apprehend the marine environment through the senses of sight and hearing. However, each of the senses has a particular role to play in understanding the marine environment around them (Classen, 1999) and in transmitting cultural

values (Classen, 1997: 401).[47] Fishers also use other senses such as taste, touch and smell, although they do not use them to find fish in the ocean.[48]

In his "Being and Becoming: embodiment and experience among the Orang Rimba of Sumatra," Elkholy (2016) noted that forest hunters possess exceptional skills to detect and interpret auditory and visual signs. This ability to 'detect and interpret their multifaceted characteristics is critical in aiding the hunter in his active pursuit of the game' (133). An Orang Rimba hunter often pauses while hunting to examine these signs and continually reassesses his strategy as clues reveal themselves as he pursues some and ignore others (Elkholy, 2016: 134). Johannes (1981) found out that the native Palau fisher of Micronesia is in touch with fish and their surrounding environment. This is because he has learnt to use his senses of sight and hearing to search for fish, physically pursuing them to their habitats and understanding the local currents.[49]

In Gazi, fishers can predict the species that might be caught and the weather in advance because they are in touch with fish and the marine environment around them. Early in the morning, fishers observe and study the weather, the condition of the sky, the sea and the speed and the direction of movement of the wind to predict the species of fish that they may land. Sometimes, when they do not catch a shoal of fish, fishers can go back the following day to search for it. It was normal for a fisher, while in the village, at sea fishing or on the beach, to pause to observe or listen to the cues and predict the species that they would likely catch or the location of the fish species or the weather. I frequently heard them predicting fish that would be

[47] See Classen (1997, 1999).

[48] The senses of touch and sight are also used to estimate the weight of fish. The sense of smell is used by nighttime fishers to attract more fish around the lantern light which they refer to as *vumba*.

[49] Johannes (1981) also argued that through learning using his senses, the native Palau fisher possesses practical knowledge of fish behavior, local currents and the weather that assist him in pursuing fish using his rudimentary tools (on foot, goggles and spear) compared to his modern, mechanised counterpart.

landed in the village or at the beach. This ability to forecast the weather is important for the fisher, enabling him to decide whether he should go to the sea and predict whether he would find fish. This knowledge is stored in the fisher's memory and would sometimes inform their conversations while at the beach or in the village. Fishers get the skills and knowledge to detect and interpret these cues in their day-to-day experiences. Omari, of the Nuru ring net crew, however, disagrees:

> I assure you that no one can predict fish species that fishers will land tomorrow. No one! It is just guesswork. In guessing, you can either get or fail. If we already knew that there will be no fish today and tomorrow, we would not have bothered going to the sea and coming back without fish. Because we would say, 'today there is no fish, I will not go,' and remain at home. But how do you go to the sea to search for fish and return empty-handed, wasting fuel worth KES 8,000 – 9,000, yet there are no fish? How? I would have avoided going!

The excerpt above shows there is a richness of diversity in opinions among interlocutors, as shown by Rapport (1993) in his study of an English village. While most interlocutors say they can predict fish species that would be landed the following day or soon based on experience, others, like Omari, believed it was impossible. Mzee Athman Saidi informed me that he was able to predict the fish species that fishers would catch the following day by keenly observing the sky the night before. When I met him months later at a café taking his breakfast and told him I heard a ring net fisher, say it was impossible to predict which fish species would be caught the following day, he quickly agreed and told me that it is impossible to predict fish species that would be caught the following day unless by pure conjecture. He told me that an experienced fisher has to wait until early in the morning, when fishers are leaving for the sea, to observe and carefully study four aspects: the condition of the weather, the sea, the wind and the speed and direction of water currents to predict fish species that fishers would catch correctly. For him,

experienced fishers can only plan to pursue and catch fish species that they or other fishers failed to catch the day before.

Did Mzee Athman Saidi lie months ago when he told me he could predict the specific fish species that fishers would catch the following day at night? At the end of October 2019, one experienced ring net fisher found me chatting with other fishers and fish traders while we were waiting for fishers to land fish. He listened keenly for a while observing the sea and said, "Do you hear that sound? If you hear it when the sea is turbid, it shows fishers will land high catches of Indian mackerel." That day and the following day, fishers caught tons of Indian mackerel. As noted above, knowledge of the sea is not esoteric, and anyone interested can learn by taking the personal initiative to do so. As Mzee Abdallah, a retired ring net fisher, and Abbas, a young fish trader, frequently told me, "There are always fish in the sea; what Kenyan fishers lack that their counterparts from Tanzania possess is the skill and equipment to pursue and catch the fish." I will return to this aspect frequently in this thesis as it influences social interactions in this village. As Metcalf (2002: 97) points out, what I offer here is an outline of distilled conversations I had with my interlocutors, meaning I do not suggest that my interlocutors were trying to conceal information from me.

Each season brings predictable changes in the ocean, which fishers used to understand the marine environment. The white butterflies I saw with Mzee Athman, travelling northwards show the onset of the NEM season. When they migrate southwards, it signals the onset of the SEM season. Fishers told me that when the sun is sighted rising from the left-hand side of the bay, it indicates the NEM season, and on the right-hand side of the bay, it indicates the SEM season. Musa Juma told me that another sign of the seasons is the humpback whales. Between the 1st and 15th of July, migrating humpback whales blow water, something that indicates that soon the sea

will be calm during the NEM season. They appear again at the end of August or September, beating the water with their tail or jumping up and down, ushering the NEM season. They appear again at the end of the NEM season, moving from the south to north, indicating the beginning of the SEM season.

Fishers possess knowledge about seasonality in migratory fish species. When it reaches a certain time of the month, the fishers already know which species of fish they expect to land. "It has nothing to do with witchcraft or education; rather, it relates to their 'scientific' understanding of the marine environment," Mzee Abdallah told me one day. Musa Juma told me that when fishers fail to catch fish, they view it to be a result of the will of God (see chapter 4). The fisher constantly observes the condition of the winds and other cues to guide his fishing activities. When the seawater becomes green and the leaves of some mangrove species begin to rise fishers believe that this is a sign of rainfall. Fishers also know the direction of the wind by listening to its movement. Musa Zawadi told me that to know the direction of the wind, one has to listen keenly to wind movement. "If you feel/hear it blowing on your left ear, then it is coming from the left-hand side, and if you feel/hear it blowing on your right ear, then it is coming from the right-hand side," he said. When there are strong winds in the sea, the fishers would return to land to avoid capsizing because the winds interfere with their navigation in the sea.

Fishers have classified a range of winds that blow across the ocean. They have classified *upepo wa umande* wind, which smells like the mainland soil because it originates from the mainland, into four categories. This wind influences fishing in Gazi. In April, the *umande wa Shimoni* wind which blows from Shimoni in the south in the morning between 06:00 and 07:00 am is believed to usher in the SEM winds that are usually accompanied by rainfall. *Mahibu*, which blows like a hurricane and blows only once a year, originates from Msambweni to

Shimoni. *Katikati* blows between 02:00 to 06:00 am indicating that the sea is calm. *Mwanashanga* blows from Mombasa in the north, pushing away the SEM season. *Mwanashanga* and *Katikati* winds blow between November and March, making the sea calm and suitable for fishing activities. Fishers normally work best between October and December. From 25th or 26th December to around 10th February, the NEM winds increase their strength, making the sea rough. The impact is, however, helpful to the fisher compared to that of the SEM because these winds bring with them fish while the SEM season moves them away.

The winds change their direction between February and March with *Mwanashanga* and *Katikati* decreasing in strength and ushering in *umande wa shimoni*, which brings in the SEM winds. In March, it rains (*mvua ya mwaka*). In August and September, the sea becomes rougher and turbid, accompanied by a thundering sound at the bottom of the sea. For fishers, when the sound originates from the north, it indicates that the sea will be calm and when it originates from the south, especially in September, it indicates the onset of rainfall. The rainwater is usually green, while the sea becomes turbid. During this time, there are usually no fish. Therefore, fishers catch seasonal migratory fish during the NEM from October to December. Later on, during the NEM between 25th and 26th December to around 10th February, the fish stop migrating to the shallow water of the coast and fishers return from the sea empty-handed most of the time. During this time, fishers rely on coral reef fish, which are solitary.

One does not need to go to the sea to predict rainfall or fish species that fishers would land. Fishers use the lunar cycle to predict the weather and likely fish species they will be catching. By observing the behaviour of the sky and clouds, a fisher can predict what the changes imply for the fishery. A white line in a clear blue sky, for instance, indicates the onset of the NEM season and therefore a projected increase in fish landings in the coming days. The sky can

also reveal whether it will rain. A dark cloud over the ocean indicates that there will be rainfall. When there is heavy rainfall at sea, it is difficult to get fish. Fishers can also predict the onset of rainfall by observing the behaviour of insects, such as ants.

Fishers also rely on the Gull-billed tern to locate fish that come to the surface and to determine the direction of their movement. Skilled fishers in Gazi, like those in Palau, have developed skills in reading seabird behaviour and can, therefore, know where the fish are and obtain cues concerning their identity, whether they are feeding and the number of fish feeding below the flock from a distance (Johannes, 1981: 60).

Fishers must learn to listen to, and watch, the sea itself. In Palau, for instance, fishermen decide whether to go fishing when the waves crashing on the outer reef edge cause high swells during high tide and lead to a roaring sound (Johannes, 1981: 42). In Gazi, the action of the waves breaking on the outer reef edge, leading to a continuous roar that can be heard from the beach, signifies different things depending on where it is originating. If it comes from the left-hand side of the bay (the north), it signifies the onset of rainfall. If it originates from the right-hand side of the bay (the south), it shows that it will be sunny and the sea will be calm, and if it originates from the middle i.e. closer to the beach, it indicates that there will be plenty of fish. By listening to the roaring of the ocean, fishers can predict the fish that they would catch. For instance, when turbid waters accompany the sound, fishers could land mackerel. Rainfall causes the sea to calm down and brings plenty of fish.

The sense of touch is also important. By feeling the temperature of the water through his body, the fisher can predict the species of fish that fishers would land. For instance, most fish

species, such as parrotfish, prefer warm water (sunny conditions) – which is the preferred temperature for fishing. Musa Zawadi also told me how warmth indicates the presence of fish.

> When you stand at the beach and observe the reef, you will see that the ocean has considerably reduced its energy. This is because the energy of the wind is reduced, so the impact of waves is decreasing. During the last few months, you could know that the sea is rough by looking at the waves crashing on the reef and forming high swells, creating surges. Now, look at that same place. There are very few or no splashes. The ocean is beginning to get calm. Starting next month, October, it will be calm. When you see the ocean's colour starts to turn green, know that it is beginning to be calm. The water will be warmer and we will have more fish.

As Musa Zawadi explains in the excerpt above, by keenly observing the reef, and the colour of the water, a fisher can predict the future calmness of the sea and, therefore, an increase in fish populations in the sea in the coming days. For him, the sea itself will reveal, but only to a skilled observer, whether there will be fish. If the sea is calm, there is a possibility of catching fish, but if the sea is rough, there is no possibility of catching them, because of the difficulty of navigation because of strong winds.

The brightness of the moon is important for nighttime ring net fishers. The light of the lanterns placed on two smaller boats attracts sardines. Two fishers stay in the smaller boats and alert the other fishers in the bigger boat when they see a school of fish attracted to the light. When the moon is shining brightly, however, these fishers do not go to the sea because the light of the lanterns would no longer lure fish, as the light from the bright moon tends to drown out their light.[50] They are therefore limited to fishing for 20 days a month and resting for 10 days

[50] Fishers in other sites like Vanga, in the south of Gazi, no longer use kerosene lanterns. They consider them to be expensive and outdated. Rather, they use bulbs from generators. "When you observe the sea at night you will think that it is a city. There are usually lights everywhere when dagaa fishers are fishing," one fisher from Vanga told me.

when the moon is shining. Even if there is moonlight, fishers who use lanterns still go to sea to fish before the moonrise.

3.3 Studying the sea

When I visited Mzee Athman Saidi to interview him in early February 2020, we sat on the cemented bench of the veranda of his house. He wore a white shirt, a green sarong (*kikoi*) with white stripes around his waist and a taqiyah on his head. Like many houses in Gazi, his house had a makuti roof and a cemented wall. The wall was painted white – but the colour had faded because of the dust that had accumulated over the years. Fishers and traders played Dhumna (a game similar to dominoes) close to his house, and occasionally a motorcycle or a vehicle passed, as his house was located close to the cabro path. He sat quietly, looking exhausted. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes of the recorded conversation we had:

> V: When did you start fishing?
>
> H: I started fishing in the year 1964 when I was very young. My grandfather taught me. I used to accompany them when they were going to the sea. They used to teach me how the fish approaches, even if he doesn't 'play' or beat the water. When you see a group of fish at a distance of about a kilometre – between here and the road, I would tell which species of fish it is. Even between here and Kinondo – a distance of about 5 km – and I am here inside a boat, I would know the fish species…I would know by observing how it is moving while I am here. You observe the water. Some fish move at the surface of the water. When they move, they create a path in the water. Even if it is 10 tons of fish, you have to observe and determine the leader of the shoal and the speed at which he (*the leader*) moves – while he is in the sea and you are in the boat. It is a gruelling test. How would you know if you do not have a pair of binoculars? (He shows me how to focus or zoom in on an image that is located a large distance away by placing his hands over his eyes and rotating them sideways, slowly). You lack a pair of binoculars, you have naked eyes, and yet the group of fish is at Chale – a distance of about 5 km – and you are here. What would you do? I would know what species of fish it is. I can pursue him using my boat until I establish its leader and the speed at which he is moving. When

you know the leader and time him, you will catch all the 10 tons of fish; but if you 'disagree' with the leader, you will lose all the 10 tons. You will get nothing, and you will come back empty-handed. That is why you hear fishers saying, 'There were a lot of fish but they have overpowered us.' (He laughs) … Moreover, they 'shoal' like those fish that you have to search for using masks. I have to send people using masks to observe them before I release the net into the water. I would then ask, "How are they shoaling?" Fish shoal differently. Some come up like this (he uses his right hand to demonstrate fish moving upwards and then downwards) and then go downwards. You have seen them in pictures. They come up and form a circular shape while moving. You use your brains (*akili*) and to use your eyes to single out who the leader is among them. As a boat captain, you ask him (the one you have sent to snorkel and observe), "How are those fish 'shoaling?'" He has to tell you. There are certain 'games' in which even if you release the net around them, even if they look relaxed, you will never catch them. They will observe you while you drop your net until when you start pulling it, and then they will look for a small opening and use it to escape. (He laughs). Even if the hole is of a small size like this (uses both his hands to show a gap of about 20 cm), they will use that same space. When you see fish that has been caught from the sea know that people are good – they use their brains (He points to the side of his head to show that people are using their brains) to study that fish. You have to be an accomplished fisher.

Fieldnotes on February 2020.

Johannes (1981) discusses the local ecological knowledge that fishers possess, which includes that of fish behaviour and knowledge of the environment that helps them to find and catch fish. Similarly, in Gazi, an experienced day ring net fishing boat captain should study the sea. He has to learn how to use his knowledge and sense of sight to find fish, discern which species of fish it is, know the leaders of the shoal, and understand their shoaling behaviour and catch them. Accepting to learn how to fish is the first thing he must do. He should then understand fishing times, the times fish shoal, species of fish shoaling at a particular time of the day and the time they stop coming to the water's surface or go back to deeper waters. Captains should also understand the winds, species of fish associated with a particular weather event or

season, and their feeding grounds. They should also understand the times the fish will arrive at the fishing ground which is also their feeding grounds, the speed at which a shoal of fish travels, the direction from which the fish is moving, the speed of the currents, fish travelling routes, and current movement.

Fishers in Gazi venture into fishing depending on their seniority, maturity and strength in similar ways to those in Palau (Johannes, 1981). Learning how to fish varies with the fishing gear used and the time of the day. No fisher can master all fishing techniques in Gazi. Fishers, therefore, specialise in the fishing techniques of their choice and fishing skills vary depending on the fishing gear one is using e.g., basket traps, hand lines, spearguns, gill nets, daytime ring nets, and nighttime ring nets. It would be difficult, for instance, for a handline fisher to use spearguns to fish since he is not skilled in using them. It will also be difficult for a daytime ring net fisher to go fishing at night since they are not used to fishing at night. However, as we have seen before, a fisher can begin his fishing career using one type of fishing gear and later change into another of his choice. The technique and the senses fishers use are different, as Mzee Athman Saidi told me:

> Do you know Captain Shukri? He is one of the most experienced fishers here; but if you give him a daytime fishing boat like the one used by Ramah, he cannot fish using it. Although he is an excellent captain, he cannot fish because he has no experience using it. Ramah and Furaha Mapenzi (captains of daytime ring net boats) – who are very good fishers – cannot fish at night using ring nets. (He laughs) …. Do you understand me? I can liken it to a football player; player number 4 cannot play as number 11 and number 8 cannot be told to play as number 6 – you will confuse him in his game. Therefore, you should be experienced in your fishery. When you want to buy a fishing net for a boat captain to work for you, you must ask him about the type of fishery he is experienced in. Do you understand me? There are many fishers in Gazi; for instance, Ramah's boat has 38 fishers, but if he leaves, the boat will not be stable because it lacks a leader. Remember, they (*the crew of the boat*) are all experienced fishers who see every day what is done and how it is done but lack the expertise to see the fish and how they move and to make decisions about how to approach them.

> They are just fishers. Do you understand me? (He laughs). The captain (Ramah in this case) makes the decisions. He is the coach.

In the excerpt above, Mzee Athman Saidi places more emphasis on the role of the captain of the ring net fishing boat as a leader to whom other fishers in the boat look up. The captain directs the vessel and has knowledge and expertise that other fishers in the boat, although experienced in fishing, do not possess. All the fishers in the boat could be experienced because they see every day what fellow crew do. However, the captain possesses the overall capacity and expertise to see the fish, observe how they move and decide how to approach them. The skills other fishers possess about fishing and the ocean are only limited to what they do every day. Mzee Athman Saidi adds:

> Do not assume that because they are fishers, they understand everything. No, they do not. They are fishers who are led and not fishers who can lead. You can call someone here for an interview and he might not have the answers to your questions because he only knows how to swim and dive, and that is enough. (He laughs). He knows nothing else. Do you understand me? If you give this man (he points to a speargun fisher who is waiting to talk to him) a speargun to catch rabbit fishes (*tafi*), he will bring them from wherever they are in the sea. In addition, if you ask him to spear them in the eye, he will; but I cannot. (He laughs) …. Therefore, every boat captain or fisher understands the fishery that he is experienced or specialised in.
>
> Fieldnotes on February 2020.

Not all ring net fishers only know how to swim and dive, as Mzee Athman Saidi describes above. One of Ramah's regular crewmembers told me one day that his ability to identify which species are shoaling and to predict weather events was not a matter of esoteric knowledge. It was a matter of personal interest. Omari, the leader of the Baraka Tele ring net crew, once told me he learnt how to identify a species of schooling fish by observing how an experienced fisher looks at them and by storing it in his mind. He used to observe the fish

movement in the water whenever experienced fishers identified them and note the species that they caught. “So, whenever I see a similar movement to the one I heard them calling the day before the following day, I will know it must be that species. That is how I successfully learnt how to fish.” For him, this involves practice. He told me that 17 out of the 27 crewmembers in his boat could do what the two captains do. “Out of the 17, only 7 have the right skills to distinguish fish species in the sea when they see them. The remaining 10 can only say, ‘Those are fish,’ but they still do not have the skills to know which species of fish they are,” he said. Hence, any ring net fisher can learn to identify which fish species are shoaling and to predict the weather by taking the initiative to carefully observe, memorise, and ask questions, which can be answered through words and gestures. An experienced ring net fisher is, thus, able to distinguish fish from water movement, since it is sometimes difficult, and to identify correctly fish species that come to the surface of the water from a distance before they catch them.

3.4 Memorising fishing grounds

A fisher should understand and memorise fishing grounds in the vast, apparently unmarked seas. Memories of fishing grounds, and how to fish and swim, are in the fisher’s long-term memory. These memories are stored in the fisher’s mind for his entire lifetime. From the modal model proposed by Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin (1968), information from the environment comes in through sensory memory (visual, auditory and haptic) involved in perception, through the short-term store that acts as a working memory for performing tasks such as comprehension, reasoning and long-term learning, into the long-term store that works as the permanent memory store (Baddeley, 1999: 10). The storage of this information in the long-term memory of the fisher is because it is repeated daily (Bourdieu, 1977). Baddeley (1999: 160) points out that while smells are difficult to forget, verbal and visual stimuli require repeated

experiences in conducting an activity and thus can be easily imagined and recreated. Therefore, fishers train and practice using visual and auditory cues to memorise fishing grounds since they do not possess Global Positioning Systems (GPS) gadgets, as Mzee Athman Saidi asserts in the following excerpt.

> A: He has to understand the fishing grounds; for instance, as Captain Shukri crew, the nighttime sardine fishing crew, leaves for the sea, he should understand it – because there are no marks in the sea and he does not have a Global Positioning System (GPS). You should decipher which part of the sea you are going to during the night. You will know where you dropped your anchor the day before and place it right there. (He laughs). This requires extra expertise because you do not have a GPS to direct you and it is at night – you should remember where you caught sardines yesterday. Do you know the big boat that belongs to Mzee Kiti?
>
> V: Yes.
>
> A: They are currently looking for a captain, and they are all fishers; but because they do not understand the fishing grounds, that is why they are catching only sardines. (He laughs). Yesterday they requested I look for a captain for them. I told them I do not think there is any captain here (*in Gazi*) who understands this ocean, because the marine environment varies with location. It's not possible to compare the sea here with the one in Mtwapa. You must experience it to know which species of fish 'play' in different fishing grounds, the water depths of the fishing grounds and the distance from the shore. You cannot use force; you will fail, miserably. We have studied that ocean and if you come out with nothing, it is a livelihood; God has written that you will catch nothing that day.
>
> Fieldnotes 04th February 2020.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue that memories are embodied, arising from bodily experiences with the world. The patterns of actions make the environment meaningful to the person (Glenberg, 1997: 17). Fishers locate fishing grounds by drawing imaginary lines across the water using their experiences and memories to link productive fishing grounds to natural

markers such as mangrove and terrestrial trees to physical features such as telecom masts on land and hills that can be seen from the sea or buoys in the water. Good fishers in Palau, for instance, must learn and memorise the timing and location of fish spawning aggregations, which lead to large catches during new and full moons (Johannes, 1981: 37). When they catch a lot of fish at a certain place, they sometimes secretly drop items such as car tyres or boat anchors in the sea and take their GPS positions or use natural markers or physical features to mark them. The items they drop act as markers and fish aggregating devices to remind them of where productive fishing grounds are located. They also drop these items to help them access fish during uncertain times. In order to understand fishing grounds, a fisher must have fished at a site for a long time and therefore have the experience of knowing which species of fish shoal in different fishing grounds, the water depths of the fishing grounds and the distance from the fishing ground to the shore. The following is a recorded conversation involving Musa Zawadi (a handline fisher), Mzee Imara (a nighttime ring net fisher) and myself one afternoon in early November 2019 in the village. Fishers had returned from the sea empty-handed and almost everyone was in the village.

> Z: … You can learn a lot of fishing skills from an old man like Mzee Imara. You see my friend. Today we have reached the seventh month of the Arabic calendar. Therefore, if you go to the sea in the seventh month, fish will be shoaling around this area (he draws a circle and points at the middle). If you go to that area during that time, you will get them, in the 10th month, at another place… like that (points at another part in the circle). However, if livelihood comes from God, you can be there and still not catch fish while they pass through that route because they have been using it since the time they were juveniles. Fish follow regular migration routes. Therefore, depending on the routes they follow, if you go to another place, you will not get them. You use the same route they follow.
>
> V: How do you mark the places or how do you know their routes?

Z: I want to pass the question to Mzee Imara because he is the one who taught me how to fish. How does he mark his fishing grounds? Who taught him so that he could teach me?

Mzee Imara laughs.

Z: He has to teach me. There is no written work where I will go to read. It is the brain that is being used here.

M: You use the marks that you store in your head. (He emphasises by pressing his forefingers on his head). Yes!

Z: If you do not use the old man's brain, you will fail.

V: From which old man did you learn? Him? (Pointing at Mzee Imara)

(They both laugh)

M: There are many old men.

Fieldnotes 05th November 2019

These discussions reveal that fishers also find fish by determining their migration routes. They can predict the species of fish that they would catch at a particular fishing ground and at a particular time of the year or season or month. Older experienced fishers train younger fishers to determine the migration routes of different species of fish. They do this by using the Arabic calendar to monitor the behaviour of the fish they pursue. These are memorised. Mzee Imara asserted confidently that the knowledge of fishing and fishing grounds is contained in his head and pressed his fingers on his head to indicate that. These claims reveal that fishing skills become intuitive and that fishing knowledge is conserved in the mental templates of skilled fishers, as Trevor Marchand discovered about minaret builders in Yemen (2008: 253). Older experienced fishers transfer these skills to younger fishers.

3.5 The body and senses

Elkholy (2016) describes how a hunter takes years to acquire hunting skills through the continuous practice of moving in the forest. Over time, the hunter's senses of vision and hearing become attuned and conditioned to "the fine nuances and rich detail of the forest environment" (Elkholy, 2016: 143). The fisher, like the hunter, relies on embodied knowledge to locate fish as McCormack established amongst Māori commercial fishers (McCormack and Forde, 2020). He acquires useful skills and capacities through the everyday practice of engaging with the marine environment. The younger fisher learns from the older fishers as he engages practically with the marine environment, using his body to create himself as a fisher through swimming, snorkelling, diving, and pulling or releasing the net or using other fishing gear.

By assisting, carefully observing, and engaging in mimesis and everyday practice (Marchand, 2008), the young fisher acquires fishing skills and embodied understanding in searching for and catching fish and in sensing the weather and sea conditions. In addition, he becomes immersed in the concerns, worldviews, secrets and social behaviours of his mentor/s (Marchand, 2008) to forge his identity as a recognised fisher in his field through listening to the boat leader, captain and fellow crew members. Taking part in a team expands a fisher's understanding of the mores governing fishing in a boat, morality, division of labour, and thinking and acting as a team member. He learns to listen to instructions, follow instructions, issue instructions, intuitively perform his tasks, control anger and frustration, learn from mistakes and reflect on progress and be resilient to pressures of competition from the rival fishing crew and during unlucky days. He also learns to go through the pains and pleasures associated with fishing. His expertise is reflected in his ability to search for, find and catch fish, and to move his body and limbs in the water in search of fish and while catching fish. Kinaesthetic and

proprioceptive senses act together to give a sensory awareness of body movement and body position and balance in the water, respectively. Through learning, the fishing gear (fishing net or handline or basket trap or spear gun), as with any other tool, becomes an extension of his body, particularly his limbs, hands and fingers; becomes socialised to the gear (Marchand, 2008). There is also a coordinated integration of mind, body and tool due to regular practice as he connects the tool to the brain through the sense of touch (Marchand, 2012). The fishing gear (fishing net or handline or basket trap or spear gun) remains part of his corporeality, characterised by background disappearance, when not in use (Leder, 1990).

The fisher learns that the ocean has symbolic, ancestral and temporal significance on which he draws in the day-to-day experience and through which he lives (Tilley, 1994: 38). When he is not active, the acquired skill such as swimming, fishing or diving participates in 'background disappearance' by receding as part of his bodily repertoire temporarily within the structure of his 'taken for granted' body (Leder, 1990: 32). Through his continual interaction with the sea, the fisher gains skills which become embodied 'as a set of unconscious dispositions and "appreciations" that can be effectively summoned at will' (Elkholy, 2016: 144). It takes repeated practice through doing what others do and embodied communication amongst fishers for a young fisher to become skilled in the fishery. Over time, the nuances of the marine environment become embodied in the young fisher through his interaction with the marine environment. Through his habitual pattern of action, skill acquisition is accomplished through incorporation where skill is fully learned when what was extrinsic, grasped only through explicit rules or examples, comes to pervade his corporeality (Leder, 1990). This is a result of a rich dialectic where the marine environment transforms the fisher's body as his body transforms its world (Leder, 1990: 33). His senses also develop to become attuned to the marine environment

as he acquires new skills. This helps him to refine his senses and allows him to express his skills and sensitivities and effectively detect and extract marine resources. The marine environment also grows in him and becomes incorporated through his habitual patterns of actions and perceptions (Ingold, 2000). He is corporeally and sensually immersed in day-to-day fishing activities. The fisher is, therefore, an embodied sensual being who is both a part of the marine environment and coextensive with it, constituting but not constituted, therefore, making it meaningful (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Chapter 4: Witchcraft and the will of God: Interpreting misfortunes in a fishing village

In early November 2019, a nighttime ring net fishing boat belonging to Hakeem nearly capsized while fishers were at sea. Mzee Imara, one of the boat captains, told me that the incident happened at around 2 am, as they were all sleeping while waiting for fish to aggregate around the light of kerosene lantern lamps attached to the *plywood*.[51] Strong winds and the accompanying rough sea caused the rope attached to the anchor to break and the boat to move seawards. According to him, fortunately, one of them woke up before the boat capsized and alerted them when he realised their boat was moving seawards and had no anchor. "We got scared but luckily secured ourselves," he said then continued, "That is how we were rescued, otherwise, many of us would have perished." According to the crew of the boat, a series of incidents happened after they brought their net to the village to mend it a month earlier at a central place where every passerby could see them. This led them to suspect that their misfortunes were a result of witchcraft since their boat was the only one in the village that faced numerous misfortunes forcing them to beach it every time.

In late September 2019, a daytime ring net fishing boat belonging to Kopa capsized while fishers were at sea. The following day, Duwaa's nighttime ring net fishing boat also capsized. No one was hurt during both incidents. One early morning, a week later, I entered a small mud-walled café to take my breakfast and found nighttime ring net fishers taking their breakfast. They had just returned from the sea. One fishers of the Duwaa nighttime ring net fishing boat was

[51] Nighttime ringnet fishers use the term *plywood* to refer to the small boats or canoes that nighttime ringnet fishers carry with them on their boats. When they arrive at their fishing grounds, they normally leave one fisher in the *plywood* who attaches kerosene lanterns at each side of the *plywoods*. The lanterns produce a strong white light that lures sardines and other fish to the surface around them. The rest of the fishers wait in the bigger boat for fish to accumulate in large numbers around the *plywoods* before they catch them.

talking about the two incidents as I entered the café. He said that the fishers of the two boats had met numerous misfortunes. He said, “One small thing caused our boat to capsize. If only we knew it would bring us problems, we would have avoided releasing our net into the water! We had no idea that it was already planned that the moment we release the net, the boat will capsize.” He added the boat had already capsized by the time they started pulling the net. When I asked him why the two boats capsized, he replied, “That is God’s plan, not ours. It is God who decides whether you will travel to the sea and return safely.”

In a sea riven by rivalries over fisheries resources that from time to time lead to secrecy among rival crew and conflicts, these fishing experiences stirred a search for meaning and explanation. Why was Hakeem’s boat the only one that faced numerous misfortunes? Why did Kopa's and Duwaa’s boats capsize on two consecutive days? According to the fishers, the answers to these questions pointed to witchcraft and divine predestination, demonstrating that people can effectively invoke such belief systems to explain otherwise unexplainable events and eliminate mere coincidence (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Lindhardt, 2012). The fishers shared the anxiety that they were struggling to navigate their livelihoods in a world in which much of what affected them was invisible and incomprehensible and had become too real (McIntosh, 2016).

To answer the first question, “Why Hakeem’s boat was the only one that faced numerous misfortunes,” I will relate it to Gluckman’s (1956) idea of why certain events happen to certain people at certain times and places. For the fishers, since a series of misfortunes, which I will discuss later, happened only to their boat, it was possible for the assumptions that malicious individuals in the village were responsible for their undeserved suffering by pursuing witchcraft leading to the question: why only them and why then? According to Gluckman, witchcraft as an accusation is concerned with the singularity of misfortune and is said to be caused by the power

of witchcraft possessed by an enemy who wishes someone harm (1956: 108). In this chapter, I argue that, in Gazi fisheries, witchcraft is not a belief of the world, but part of it, "a force that is both self-evident and solemnly real" (Moore and Sanders, 2001: 4). In this part of the world, the opaqueness and indeterminacy of meanings around witchcraft make it a discursive domain (Lindhardt, 2012).

Maia Green has pointed out that the ubiquity of witchcraft beliefs and accusations leads to suspicions and mistrust amongst kin and neighbours. According to Green (2005), people live in constant fear of those they believe are jealous of their successes. Peter Geschiere demonstrated among the Maka how inequality fuels jealousy and hatred and leads to witchcraft (1997: 42). Among the Maka, people feared to have possessions such as planting cocoa trees and building houses with tin roofs to attract jealousy of their people because they could be displaying their wealth ostentatiously (Geschiere, 1997: 141). In many parts of rural Africa, due to uncertainty in food harvesting, studies frequently identify witchcraft to manipulate forces contained within the domestic sphere of food cultivation and consumption and which constitutes the reproduction of everyday life (Austen, 1993: 91). In this chapter, I shall demonstrate that because of the uncertain nature of the ocean environment, fish is a commodity whose availability can be manipulated through witchcraft and the occult; thus, it embodies evil and danger amongst local consumers (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). For the people I write about, in a sea riddled with rivalry and secrecy in competition for fisheries resources, these uncertainties shape their ways of knowing and being in the world. As Omari told me one day,

> So, witchcraft exists, and there is no physical mark that distinguishes one that practices witchcraft. I do not know what you are planning against me, and you do not know what I am planning against you. So, everyone keeps whatever they have in their heart because the heart always hides secrets. Only God knows.

A recurring characteristic of fishing cultures across Africa, as Jennifer Diggins put it, is that fishers are also "working to navigate an equally complex field of socially produced knowledge, in which their friends and colleagues in other boats are as likely to be working to distort or conceal important information as they are to share it" (2018: 155). Some fishers, therefore, exploit the invisibility of the ocean space by employing invisible agencies and covert strategies in fishing activities which lead to speculations and suspicions by their unseeing neighbours (Diggins, 2018).

To answer the second question "Why did Kopa's and Duwaa's boats capsize on two consecutive days," I will explore the concept of divine predestination. When Kopa and Duwaa's daytime ring net fishing boats capsized in late September 2019, this generated discussions and speculations in the village. This is because their attempt to catch fish eventually resulted in the capsizing of the boat.[52] Retrospectively, the fishers of the Duwaa boat identified releasing their net into the water and their boat filling up with water as signs that fulfilled their destiny. In this fishing village, destiny-related terms in the form of religious expressions such as "it is God's will (*ni mpango wa Mungu*)," "it is (not) my livelihood, or it was not my livelihood (*haikuwa (sio) riziki yangu*)," "it was (not) my luck (*haikuwa bahati yangu*)," "I thank God (*nashukuru*)" or "it was (not) written (*haikuandikwa/iliandikwa*)" are widespread in everyday discursive practices. The fisher's recitation of such religious expressions as "That is God's plan" strongly positions divine predestination in the texture of events, granting them "intrinsic inevitability" (Menin, 2020: 515).

[52] One fisher said that Kopa's boat capsized because of strong winds and the fact that there were many fishers onboard.

Fatalism is often viewed on the premise that believers should utterly submit themselves to the will of their omnipotent creator and is assumed to be the determinant of the way they live their lives (Hamdy, 2009). According to Halstead (1997: 322), in Islam, accepting God's will as supreme implies "submission," which includes accepting "to live with a vision of God's constant involvement in the world" and to "bind oneself to live in harmony with God's creative purposes." Logically, God, being omniscient and unconstrained, cannot choose bad; therefore, He is not subject to factors that are morally evil since His will cannot tend towards evil (Swinburne, 1974). As Omar told me one evening, "A fisher's inability to catch fish is not God's problem. God has given you the brains to make a livelihood." Hence, for him, humans cannot attribute their misfortunes and failures to God.

According to Alice Elliot, among many rural communities "divine predestination" emerges as the universally held understanding that life has, ultimately, a "transcendentally predetermined outcome that is neither negotiable nor avoidable" such that it is so obvious that it rarely requires explanation (2016: 489). Michael Jackson also notes that the evocation of such terms in the Islamic belief in the destiny of an individual is ultimately determined by God as a response to "social upheavals" where people are viewed as seemingly powerless to shape their social world (1988: 198). Therefore, through divine predestination, God manifests His will and purpose, which are beyond human grasp (Elliot and Menin, 2018; Menin, 2020). In many parts of Africa, fishing has been associated with uncertainty (Walley, 2004; Seeley et al., 2009; Diggins, 2018). Hans Lucht, for instance, suggested that the unpredictability of the sea in Senya Beraku was an immediate source of social and economic uncertainty and existential unrest among the Guan of this fishing village due to the connectedness of the people with the marine environment. Despite the fisher's exceptional bodily skills and sensory knowledge of the sea,

having no success in fishing was experienced by the people as a rejection of the will of God because they had sinned too much (Lucht, 2012: 198).

In this chapter, I shall now explore the practicalities of misfortunes in terms of witchcraft and religious beliefs. Here, I am interested in finding out how fishers use local cosmologies to explain misfortunes. Hence, I examine the interplay between two dominant idioms evoked in everyday language: divine predestination and witchcraft. Given the uncertainties and insecurities associated with fishing in this village, it is entirely possible for fishers suffering from misfortunes such as the capsizing of a boat to interpret their afflictions as a form of witchcraft caused by imagined or known enemies. I hope to demonstrate that it is plausible for these fishers to resort to witchcraft to counter suspicion of witchcraft. Another commonly used idiom to explain such misfortunes is divine predestination. This idiom is grounded in concepts of fate and ideas of sin and thus individual responsibility. I analyse the conditions under which residents of this fishing village evoke these idioms and the kinds of social environments produced in the course of such discussions and whether a fisher's predetermined destiny can be changed by engaging in witchcraft and the occult.

4.1 When and under what circumstances is witchcraft evoked by fishers?

I first encountered fishers of Hakeem's nighttime ring net boat in mid-September 2019. The crew of 28 fishers had arrived in Gazi on *ago* from Jasini, a village located at the border between Kenya and Tanzania. Only one of the crew members was a resident of Gazi but was originally from Jasini village. Each year, during the northeast monsoon (NEM) season that occurs between September and April, Hakeem, the captain of the boat, and his crew join other migrant fishers to travel from their homes to camp and fish in Gazi village. Mzee Imara, the senior man of the boat, told me that they used to land high fish catches in the last 5 years, but this season was different.

When I visited their camp for the first time in early October 2019, about two weeks after I had first met them, I found the fishers happily chatting while mending their net under an old mango tree next to the house they inhabited. The house was located almost in the middle of the village. One early morning, about a month later, I had an appointment for an interview with Mzee Imara. When I arrived at their camp for the interview, I found eight fishers seated outside their residence agonising over an incident that had befallen them the night before. When they saw me, two of the fishers said in unison and with a sigh of relief, "We are glad that you have come, officer."[53] Almost immediately, another bare-chested fisher came out of the house and said:

> We are glad that you have come. We have a big problem and need your assistance. Last night as we were fishing, all our ropes — the ones that we usually tie to the boat anchor - broke. It could have been another story… If you do not help us, we will have to beach our boat and go back home and return the next springtide (*bamvua*) period.

The others only nodded. They looked dejected and angry. Mzee Imara sat on a log facing the main entrance of the camp, drawing doodles on the ground. When I noticed everyone was looking at me, I apologised diplomatically for not being able to help them. We had to postpone the interview we had scheduled with Mzee Imara. He told me his mind "was not settled and would, therefore, not concentrate during the interview" as he was thinking about how he would get another rope as soon as possible because they had to go back to the sea that evening. (They went back to the sea three days after they had repaired the boat). Later on, as I accompanied him to search for another rope in the village, which we both knew we would not get without buying, he explained to me what had transpired.

[53] Historically, in Kenya, it is believed that all government officers have the power to intervene and solve problems affecting citizens because of their role in service provision (Ciekawy, 1998).

Mzee Imara told me that mending the net in the open shade under the mango tree in the middle of the village, where every passerby could see them, was the worst mistake they ever did since it marked the beginning of their misfortunes at sea.[54] A black cat wearing a golden chain around its neck began to move around their net while they were still mending it. Every day, the black cat, or some other black cat, frequently visited their camp and kept staring at them as if monitoring their movements. When they went back to the sea to fish, they did not catch any fish for more than a week. They had already lost four boat anchors and ropes, and this was the third time they nearly capsized due to strong winds at sea. Moreover, they were always distressed at sea because their boat engine kept on breaking down. Their boat was constantly under repair, preventing them from going to the sea every night like other fishing crew. This forced them to beach the boat and break their camp for the next spring tide (*bamvua*) several times before the end of the *bamvua*. According to the crew, theirs was the only boat that faced numerous misfortunes.

Writing on "Denial and belonging among white Kenyans" in coastal Kenya, McIntosh (2016: 181) explains how witchcraft and the occult are intertwined in the lives of coastal residents such that it has become a vivid part of it. As one of her interlocutors told her,

> I know that [the Giriama people] are very entwined with the *mganga*, uh, whether good or bad or whatever, it's very much part of their lives and it—a lot of it is mind, you know? Most of it is mind . . . the mind can play the most amazing games . . . all these guys who live on this coast are all deep into this stuff…I tend to take most of—normal common stuff that you hear with a little bit of—pinch of salt…since it's been so much set in their nature, it's, it's part of their lives, and it's effective. It is effective.

[54] Mzee Imara's crew were not the only ones that brought their fishing nets to the village for mending. Throughout my fieldwork I saw other fishers using ringnets, and gill nets mending their nets and basket trap fishers weaving their traps in the village yet none of them complained they were bewitched or they were no longer catching fish because of witchcraft.

McIntosh (2016) continues to explain how the uncanny experience of the encounters with the occult on the Kenyan coast is deeply felt by many residents, provoking anxiety and fear. Her interlocutors often kept open the unsettling possibility that occult forces might have a hand in any form of bad luck, insanity, illness, or death, which is effectively human malice transformed into an invisible, invasive force. Therefore, concerning oneself too much with belief in witchcraft makes one feel vulnerable to these forces that are antithetical to their plans and financial well-being. For them, their economic failures are linked to these "backward practices" (McIntosh, 2016). In his book "Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya" among the Wataita of coastal Kenya, James Smith (2009) argues that in many parts of coastal Kenya, witchcraft accusations and development operate in tandem. For Smith (2009), since development implies spatial and temporal expansion of an individual in this area, it runs parallel to witchcraft. In this chapter, I show that in Gazi village, like in many parts of the Kenyan coast, fishers view the existence of witchcraft in fishing activities to be inevitable and ubiquitous, since it reflects social inequality and competition for fish resources. Musa affirmed this when he told me towards the end of my fieldwork, "Witchcraft exists, my brother, because it existed even during the time of prophets *Issa* and *Nuhu*. If we deny it now, we would be mad. Witchcraft or evil exists and we humans still do evil things unto each other to date." In this fishing village, therefore, contemporary life flourishes on jealousy, fear, speculation and gossip about imagined and known enemies.

One evening about two weeks after the near-capsizing incident of Hakeem's boat, I had an informal interview in the village with Nasir and Abdul, who were both fishers of this boat, and they reflected on the misfortunes that their boat had met so far. It was one of the many nights they

had failed to go out to sea because their boat was always under repair while other night fishing crew were at sea fishing. It was a few minutes past midnight. The village was quiet, as nearly everyone else had gone to sleep. Nasir said, "We are very jealous of each other in this village and that is why I am telling you, if you want to grow in life, leave. Moreover, if you decide to leave, just leave. That is the only way you will develop." For Nasir and Abdul, leaving the village and seeking employment elsewhere stood out as the only promising opportunity to improve one's standards of living. However, it was also difficult for one to leave the village because one would be bewitched to prevent her/him from leaving. That night, Nasir explained to me the origin of the misfortunes fishers of his boat faced. He said that before the misfortunes started, each fisher in their boat used to get KES 200, 250, or 300 per day as proceeds from the sale of fish catches. Being the only resident of Gazi in the boat, he told his fellow crewmembers that he knew there were evil people in the village. According to him, any overt display of fishing equipment in the village could be risky since it could make other people envious and vulnerable as it attracts the evil eye.[55] He said, "I advised my crew members that whenever we go out to sea in the evenings and considering the current problems bedevilling us we do not know who in this village is good or bad, let us not go through the village with our fishing equipment. Let them not see us carrying our fishing equipment through the village."

His fellow crewmembers heeded his suggestion on the first and second days of that *bamvua* period. They carried their kerosene lantern lamps and used another route away from the village via the mangrove forest. They landed fish for two consecutive days, sold them and shared among themselves about KES 250 or 300 each for the "good work done." "We never used to get a lot of

[55] Because of this fear, along the Swahili coast, people often avoid displaying possessions and boasting about their resources and capabilities (see also Ivanov, 2012: 637).

money, but at least each fisher used to get some money for food," he said. For Nasir, the third day of that *bamvua* marked the beginning of their problems when one of his cousins from Vanga, who "thought he knew everything," joined them. His cousin demanded to know why they were not following the route that goes through the middle of the village. Even though Nasir explained to him why they were doing so, his cousin insisted they should instead follow the path that goes through the middle of the village. That evening, while going to the sea, they passed through the middle of the village carrying their lantern lamps. "What work did we do on that day, if you can remember? Nothing! It marked the beginning of our misfortunes. We caught nothing for the rest of the days until we got tired and beached our boat."

In such cases, when fishers keep returning home empty-handed, they risk accumulating major debts or becoming insolvent, and in the end, they may choose to cut their losses or have the boat beached while waiting for better times (Lucht, 2012: 197). For Hakeem's boat, however, there were no better times that season even though fishers consider the NEM season a high fishing season as I have explained before. Every time they returned to the sea after beaching their boat, they encountered a misfortune. If they did not return from the sea empty-handed, they landed a low fish catch, which could not sustain their stay in the camp and pay their accruing debts. Furthermore, they did not have extra money to save, which they could share at the end of the *ago* as the other migrant fishing crew did. Nasir added, "I told them I own nothing, and I know nothing, but I understand this village better than you. When I tell you to let us use this route, I am not a fool. You may have genies (*majini*) while I do not have them, but I know a lot of things in this village."

For Nassir, since many people in this village practice witchcraft, some "greedy," people saw his boat was doing well and began asking questions: "Why does this guy come here annually

to fish, get a lot of money and return home? We will now show him. Let him fish or do whatever he wants." He said, "When we beached our boat and brought the net to the village to mend it, we bewitched ourselves completely. We were finished!" According to him, while the crew had hoped to catch at least a sac of fish when they got back after beaching their boat, they failed to catch fish. "We only caught fish on the first day. We caught only about 130 kg of mackerel. That day they said, 'They have just returned the boat into the water and they have started with speed.' We were given a beating!" he said. Abdul added, "We have a curse on our group from both spirits and witchcraft. So many things happen that even God himself cannot bring livelihoods to us for a single day. There are many things. Other groups are not experiencing witchcraft or such things as we do." I will return later to Nassir's claim that "You may have genies (*majini*) while I do not have them, but I know a lot of things in this village."

Why was Hakeem's boat the only one with a "singularity of misfortunes," to use Gluckman's words? According to Gluckman, belief in witchcraft explains not how a misfortune occurred but why a certain person suffered that misfortune (1956: 82). It comes from someone whose intentions are difficult to understand (Ashforth, 2005), although it is believed to be driven by hostile feelings such as envy, jealousy, resentment, hatred, greed, or desire for revenge, and distrust (Gershman, 2016). Diane Ciekawy established that the people with whom I study employ the idiom of witchcraft to interpret any problem in their daily lives since it contains a set of understandings about relations of power and the creation of inequality. The people largely see witchcraft as a negative power that blocks social, political and economic transformations (Ciekawy, 1999; Smith, 2009). In other words, they employ the witchcraft idiom, which echoes perceptions elsewhere of relationships between communal norms and externally centred market

economies revolving around the concept of a moral economy (Austen, 1993: 92), to interpret virtually any social problem or human relationship (Ciekawy, 1999).

Women in Gazi do not interpret the success or failure by fishers to catch fish to be as a result of witchcraft. One female fish trader called Fatuma told me towards the end of my fieldwork that she never associated fishers' failure to catch fish with witchcraft because she does not fish. She said, “I get surprised when I see only one fishing crew landing high fish catches when others return empty-handed, but I have never associated their success with witchcraft.” I show here that women in Gazi village do not associate failure to catch fish or fishers returning with high fish catches with witchcraft because they do not directly engage in fishing. Ciekawy (1999) demonstrated that women of this area only promote interpretations of witchcraft accusations that empower them. Therefore, witchcraft accusations among fishers in Gazi village are often associated with men because they engage in fishing. As I will show in the next chapter, however, witchcraft accusations between wives of fishers can negatively affect fish catches. Asymmetrical power relations arising from patriarchy and gerontocracy among the people I study prevent women from maintaining control over major resources. These inequalities promote women’s covert role in constructing witchcraft accusations (Ciekawy, 1999).

When I joined 28 fishers of Saidi’s boat (another ring net migrant fishing crew) for a night fishing trip one evening, we lost many fishes as we were pulling our catches back into the boat. The net broke releasing over three-quarters of the fish we had sweated pulling that early morning because of the heavy weight of the sardines. Musa, a handline fisher who is originally from Pemba but had permanently settled in Gazi, told me that in such cases when the captain's return to the camp, they reflect on the events to discern what happened. According to him, the captains can conclude that the net broke for a reason: “Maybe (*pengine*/*inawezekana*) something happened.

Maybe some people do not want it to work so they did something to ensure it doesn't work." For many residents I talked to, while other people may assume that it is normal because of the will of God, which I shall discuss later, some migrant fishers may not accept that misfortunes are simply that; there is always a reason.[56] For them, it is possible the assumption that malicious individuals are responsible for their undeserved suffering by pursuing witchcraft.

In Tanzania, Lindhardt (2012) noted how the verbs *inaweza* or *inawezekana* (it could be/it is possible), "*ni ngumu kujua*" (it is difficult to know) and "*huwezi kujua mawazo ya mtu*" (you cannot know a person's thoughts) appeared in conversations about witchcraft among her interlocutors. They speculated about the identity of witches while carefully avoiding asserting any certain knowledge. Such words were also common in discussions about witchcraft, although in Gazi, witchcraft was not openly discussed.[57] Ciekawy (1999) pointed out that most of the victims of witchcraft that result from jealousy along coastal Kenya are the relatives, neighbours and friends who have ongoing face-to-face social interactions with the witch. Ciekawy adds that jealousy or revenge motivates the witches to harm others for personal power, monetary gain, or personal satisfaction. Witchcraft medicines are usually placed secretly in or near the victim's home, garden, drinking water supply, or sprinkled on paths frequented by the victim (Ciekawy, 1999). In Gazi, whenever migrant fishers consistently returned from the sea empty-handed or with low catches, they were suspected to resort to witchcraft to counter suspicions of witchcraft and to ensure the affected individual achieves 'positive developments' in his life (1999: 229) as I will explain shortly.

[56] See Whyte (1997: 18)

[57] During an informal interview with Musa Bakari one afternoon, one woman who was passing by appeared to be shocked when she heard that we were discussing about witchcraft. She stopped and stared at us for a while and then left without uttering a word.

One morning in early September 2019, I was sitting at the beach with two fish traders, Saidi Omar and Hussein Mohammed, waiting for daytime fishers to return from the sea when we saw two old men and a younger man who appeared to be the owner of the *Twende Zetu* night ring net fishing boat quickly boarding it. It was during *bamvua* and seawater was at its lowest level. No one else was at the beach. All night ring net fishing boats had returned without fish early that morning. As a result, traders who purchased sardines from these fishers had already left. Saidi Omar and Hussein Mohammed stayed at the beach to wait for daytime ring net fishers to return since they would have to travel for about 20 km to Ukunda town where they would stay and return before daytime ring net fishers return from the sea. The crew of the *Twende Zetu* boat had not gone to the sea the previous night, and the boat was still where the fishers had left it the day before. This is because the fishers of this boat had not caught fish for the last three consecutive days since the *bamvua* had begun while the rival boats had managed to return with low catches for the first two days, but had all returned empty-handed on the third day. The oldest of the men, wearing a *kikoi* around his waist and a blue t-shirt, sprinkled some liquid/powder on the boat. Afraid of going there, I asked Saidi and Hussein what the men were doing. Saidi told me that they were "repairing" the boat because they believed it had a bad omen (*nuksi*). Hussein added:

> These migrants are weird people. They fail to catch fish for only two days and start thinking that witchcraft is the reason for their misfortunes. They think they cannot catch fish because the villagers have bewitched their boat. These people do not believe in God, they only believe in witchcraft. Now see, they have called a witch doctor to 'rescue' their boat.

It took them about 20 minutes to complete the activity. Two men left in a huff after they had finished their activity. The other man remained, sprinkling some liquid on and around the boat. The next morning, the crew of that boat landed about 400 kg of sardines. That *bamvua* and the

next until the end of that NEM season, I never saw them return home empty-handed even while the rival crew occasionally did so. Here, Saidi and Hussein believed the fishers enlisted the occult to restore their fortune.

In another informal interview with Musa, he explained to me why migrant fishers from Pemba are the most successful fishers who consistently land higher fish catches in comparison to local fishers. He said, "If you look at any fisher who comes from the Island of Pemba for *ago* to fish here as a fisher that resides here (*in Gazi*) you will feel like you do not know how to fish." According to him, a migrant fisher from Pemba must first visit a witch doctor (*babu*) before he leaves Pemba Island. "It means in Kiswahili that when he visits *babu*, he wants to be given the exact date and time that he should leave the Island. 'When I arrive, what should I do before I begin any fishing activity?' That is witchcraft!" For Musa, migrant fishers come to Gazi on *ago* by strictly adhering to the time the *babu* has instructed them. He pointed out that these fishers do not go to the sea immediately after they arrive in the village for *ago*. When a migrant fisher from Pemba arrives in Gazi for *ago*, he immediately engages in other activities, "this, that, this and that" to lure the minds of residents into believing that he is the best fisher. He said:

> But God doesn't work that way. He will do his job and get that high fish catch and he will leave you there. Are they not here? There are many vessels here. You have been to the landing site, and you have seen. "*Ushindi* crew is coming! Those are the best fishers!" And it is true. When the *Ushindi* crew arrives, they always land fish. How do our fishers in Gazi fish? They go out to the sea, spend a lot of time there, and still return home empty-handed, but when the *Ushindi* crew go out, they will return with plenty of fish. You will then say that Gazi residents are not fishers, but it is not that way.

Many studies have shown how witchcraft is part of fishing practices. For example, Ntara (2015) explains how witchcraft is deeply embedded in fishing practices in Lake Victoria among

the Sukuma ethnic group and is the cause of their success in fisheries. As one Sukuma elder in her study narrates, “We have one tree called ‘malehe’ or ‘hangachalo’. This tree is very important in Sukuma society for providing us with the courage to do what we want to do, including fishing” (2015: 61). Another interlocutor in her study remarks, “Fishers use talismans for protection and to attract wealth and good fortune. There is a lot of superstition in fishing” (2015: 64). Ntara (2015) further shows how some fishers have achieved success in becoming wealthy by choosing to abide by certain principles and strict conditions (banned acts) to meet fortune and to neutralise or repel restrictive taboos, beliefs, and other risks. Jennifer Diggins has argued that due to the increasing unpredictability of fish because of the increased number of fishers and the use of mobile technology in Sierra Leone, sport-like rivalries and secret alliances exist between fishers scanning the same waters and competing to catch the same shoals of fish. In addition to possessing embodied skills in fishing, fishers compete to hire “witch-eyed” fishers who can “hear the fish,” beneath the water, in a way that other fishermen cannot and, therefore, help the boats they board to consistently bring home noticeably higher catches than their rivals (Diggins, 2018: 157). Evans-Pritchard (1937) also pointed out that witchcraft plays part in fishing activities among the Azande. Caplan (1997) demonstrated how witchcraft significantly influences fish catches in coastal Tanzania while Giles (1995) showed how spirit association with fishing in Pemba Island, Tanzania, brought the people an “annual catch of stunned fish” until fishers stopped holding their spiritual ceremonies. Glaesel (2000) described how spirit-based beliefs have shaped fisheries' resource management practices on the south coast of Kenya.

Rumours and gossip surrounding success, wealth, and witchcraft circulate freely in the Gazi fishing village. Some local and migrant fishers are normally accused of going to the extent of sacrificing fellow fishers by making them drown in the ocean while fishing. According to the

rumours and gossip, these fishers agree to "give" or "feed" fellow fishers to blood-thirsty spirits (Ciekawy 1999) in exchange for the ability to get high fish catches which cannot be achieved through normal means, become wealthy, and earn fame as Mzee Imara narrated one day during an interview:

> Sometimes if you have many fishers and you want to be praised in this village, 'Aha! So-and-so is a good fisher,' you have to sacrifice one or two of your fishers at the beginning of the year. It is difficult, but some people can do it…Satan helps him to look for fish. Wherever he goes, there will be fish. When he is asleep, Satan instructs him to go to a specific place where he will get a lot of fish. When he arrives there, he finds a lot of fish. His work is just to cast his net. You just need to agree to their terms. I would rather die poor than kill someone because of fish catches. I cannot do it. It is difficult, but it depends on your heart…

What I am trying to show here is that due to the uncertainties associated with catching fish, fishers, especially migrants, are increasingly rumoured to be using largely invisible methods which Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) refer to as 'occult economies' to catch fish. For residents, mediation or manipulation of invisible forces to make one's dreams come true (Menin, 2020) has become a necessary "power" (Vigh, 2015) by migrant fishers enabling them to land high fish catches and maintain their reputation in the community as the best fishers in the village.[58] As Jackson (1988: 198) points out, divination provides the means of achieving the individual's destiny as the diviner gives him insight into unconscious and normally hidden forces of destiny as well as advising a course of action that should be undertaken. A major thread running through this thesis is the high skills possessed by migrant fishers compared to those of local fishers, which are demonstrated in the high catch rates, and the high diversity of fish species they land on almost a daily basis despite the uncertain nature of the ocean environment. In this chapter, I show that

[58] Moore and Sanders (2001) among others have aptly described why belief in witchcraft and the occult in Africa cannot die out in our modern and modernising world.

rumour and gossip suggested that they engaged in occult economies. Due to these differences, suspicions of witchcraft dominate conversations among resident fishers about inequalities in fishing skills hence success (and wealth) in fishing between migrant and local fishers and intensify them.

4.2 Under what conditions is divine predestination evoked by fishers?

Multiple layers of everyday anxieties fill people's beliefs that indeed, invisible forces shape their lives. Fishers and villagers alike take into consideration the Islamic precept of divine predestination in their everyday language, striving to realise their destined future in specific but hopeful ways. Due to these uncertainties, it has become the norm for fishers to invoke destiny-related terms in the form of religious expressions such as 'it is God's will,' 'it is (not) my livelihood,' 'it was (not) my luck,' 'I thank God,' or 'it was (not) written' whenever they return from the sea. But how do fishers manage to navigate a world that has already been predetermined by God and one that requires action, choice and alert anticipation?

During an informal interview, Mzee Athman Saidi once told me, "Whenever you go out to the sea and find fish you are lucky because God has blessed you along the way and given you a livelihood." He continued, "This is similar to when you are planning to travel from here to Mombasa with your bus fare, but then when you arrive at the bus stop someone gives you a lift. That is luck because you have not used your bus fare." In the Islamic context, 'luck' (*bahati* in Swahili) is the lot that God allocates to people as part of their destiny (Gaibazzi, 2015). Since Islam is the identity and way of life for many residents of Gazi, believers believe that fate is predetermined by God before a person is born and his unfolding is largely unknown by man and cannot be altered. This creates anxiety. Individuals, therefore, continuously work hard in their 'quest for luck' to fulfil their destiny to what they have been allotted in this world (Gaibazzi,

2015).[59] For some fishers and traders I talked to, luck only happens in God's time. As one senior fish trader, Salim, reminded me in mid-September 2019 after all local ring net fishers had returned from the sea for three consecutive days empty-handed:

> Everything has its moment, but never get tired of searching. Yes. Every morning go to work and keep praying. All three days will be rewarded one day till you will forget that you went out to the sea for three consecutive days and returned empty-handed. That is how life is.

As Gaibazzi (2015) points out, luck only happens when God decides the time is right for an individual to obtain his share. Therefore, as fishers confront the uncertainties of fish catches, they must also be ready to experience this unpredictability and potentiality. Evocations, hence religious ideas and practices sustain fishing since they inspire hope and action (Cooper and Pratten, 2015; Gaibazzi, 2015) as fishers remain committed to everyday fishing activities. For an individual to actualise destiny in the face of uncertainty it requires both the power to act within limits fixed by God's decree (free will) and the actualisation of this potential through human action (Gaibazzi, 2015; Nevola, 2018; Menin, 2020). Through action, fishers are open to the possibility that a hoped-for future may indeed be one's written path (Gaibazzi, 2015; Elliot, 2016; Elliot and Menin, 2018). For Menin (2020), the evocation of divine predestination coexists with an individual's attempt to move towards, and precipitate his desired future, and it explains the individual's experiences of failure and misfortune. As Mzee Mohammed pointed out, failing to catch fish is normal since it is part of God's will. As he put it, "When God gives you today, someone else will get tomorrow, and you will not."

When skilled fishers occasionally fail to catch fish or return with low catches, they often claim that they were unlucky. Masumbuko Saidi once told me: "The Ushindi crew members are

[59] Predestination is a belief that infuses commonsense knowledge in Muslim worlds (Menin, 2020).

42 in total. That is why you see they are skilled in catching fish. If they cannot catch fish, it is just because they were not lucky that day." Here, although luck strikes randomly, it is associated with one's fishing skills and effort. In addition, as we have seen, one should always be hopeful. For instance, one afternoon after Omari's ring net crew returned from the sea empty-handed, I saw Masumbuko Saidi, one crewmember, hurriedly leaving the shore. When I caught up with him and asked him what had happened, he replied, "There was a lot of fish in the sea. I do not know whether I can say they were afraid of being caught or that they just refused to be caught. We were so unlucky that we did not catch fish, but the other crew were lucky to catch fish." When I told him I was sorry that his crew had returned empty-handed, he replied, "Do not tell me you are sorry as if I have lost a loved one. You should instead give me hope so that I will be lucky to get fish tomorrow. Failure is to today while catching fish is to tomorrow." However, as many interlocutors often told me, "In the fishing world, no one knows tomorrow."

In his study on artisanal diamond miners in Sierra Leone, D'Angelo (2015) pointed out that having faith in the divine destiny means having guidance on where to find diamonds in the shortest time possible and being at the right place and at the right time. Consequently, faith in 'divine destiny' or the 'doctrine of predestination' is a sign (Weber, 2013: xxxiii) as well as a means of realising hoped-for destiny (Elliot, 2016). For the many residents of Gazi I met, God is the provider of all. Nasir told me one day, "You cannot use force (*to catch fish*), you will fail, miserably. If you come back with nothing, it is your livelihood. God has written that you won't catch anything that day." As one of Elliot's interlocutors told her, "He (*God*) knows everything before you even think it – of course, He does, because He's the one who wrote it!" (2016: 492). In her study "Destiny is written by God: Islamic predestination, responsibility, and transcendence in Central Morocco," Laura Menin has recently argued that when a person says "God did not write

it for me," when talking about events that destroyed their plans to actualise their desired future, it means "it was not my destiny" and is a key notion of people's religiousness. The religious expression "God did not write it for me" positions divine transcendence in the texture of events, granting them 'intrinsic inevitability' (Menin, 2020: 515). This preoccupation with a written, unknown, fate partly propels the action in a hopeful but uncertain direction and is an integral part of realising a divinely determined life (Elliot, 2016).

One Friday morning in mid-September 2019, I witnessed a heated discussion among fishers of Omari's ring net crew as they were waiting for the captain to sell their catches to the fish traders who had gathered at the shore and shared the proceeds. They were arguing about the meaning of *thawabu/thwawabu* and whether or not it was right for fishers to go out to sea on Fridays since it is considered a prayer day in Islam. The crew of 27 fishers had returned from the sea with only 22 kg (at about KES 100 per kg) of a fish species they referred to as *toa*, while the other two local ring net crew had returned empty-handed. During the discussion, Masumbuko Saidi explained what *thawabu* means in Islam. He said, "*Thawabu/sawabu* means rewards. When someone does a good deed, God rewards him. It is something that is written, but not using a pen or paper that you know, there is a special book and pen of eternal life." This means that one's destiny is written by God and cannot be changed. Therefore, when fishers say, "It is my livelihood" (*ni riziki yangu* in Swahili) whenever they return from the sea with fish, it means that God already predetermined the weight, species and number of fish. Mzee Mohammed told me two months later that those fishers who go out to sea on Fridays are disrespecting God, whom both Muslims and Christians believe rested on the last day of creation. For him, one should be satisfied with what one gets for the six days of a week, since God never fails to provide for anyone who lacks. Therefore, according to

him, “One cannot sleep hungry because he did not go out to fish on a Friday unless God planned it that they do.”

I argue that religious expressions such as “God did not write it for me” (*Sikuandikiwa/haikuandikwa* in Swahili), “it was not my livelihood” (*sio riziki yangu* in Swahili), “It is God’s will” (*ni mipango ya Mungu* in Swahili) or “Alhamdulillah!” are used by individuals to rationalise experiences of failure rather than highlighting the “causes of their misfortune(s),” or the “obstacles that hindered a desired outcome,” or on “the mistakes that prevented them from success” (Nevola, 2018: 305). Such expressions serve as a “legitimate alibi,” relieving society of responsibility and guilt for the sufferer’s troubles (Fortes, 2018: 402). As Nevola (2018) further points out, through this invocation, individuals recognise the closure of a horizon of possibilities and a situation of impotentiality. Here, by invoking the expression “God did not write it for me” or “it was not my livelihood” or “I thank God” among other religious expressions after an experience of failure, it prevents fishers – or anyone else – from problematising the causes of their failure, or from even considering it as a failure (Nevola, 2018). This causes individuals to feel better so that they would stay patient and steadfast in the face of uncertainties and insecurities making religion serve as a “comfort mechanism in suffering” (Hamdy, 2009).

Since the plan of God is unknown, hidden and invisible to humans, the individual has no other choice but to act. As Nasir told me when he abandoned fishing with Hakeem’s nighttime ring net crew after the numerous misfortunes, as I have explained above, and started his fish trading business, “If I was guaranteed that whenever I go out to the sea I will catch fish, then fishing is a good job, but here, fishing is like trying your luck by putting your hand in the dark.” For Nasir, a fisher is in a way trying his luck by going out to sea every day hoping to succeed since it is not certain whether he will catch fish or not. Indeed, by trying their luck through ritualised fishing in

an environment of uncertainty, fishers act given their predestined futures. In other words, through a ritualised fishing activity, fishers are able "to get by" to use Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' words, recognising and seizing opportunities as they come. In her ethnographic study in Contemporary Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks describes how her interlocutors share an acute awareness of the unpredictable that "uncertainty permeates every plan, and action is rarely formulated as the fulfillment of a prior intention" (2005: 367). According to Johnson-Hanks (2005), trajectories, only known to God, were seen in part as unfolding but whether the individual would achieve them remained contingent. As Omari once argued when I asked him how fishers could predict fish they would land the following day, he said:

> Therefore, if we had known that if we go out to sea, we would not get fish, we would not have gone. That senior man who told you he knows when fishers would catch fish would not have gone to the beach, but he goes there every day. It is a lie! I can tell him to his face. No one knows that. You are a Christian. In Islam God says there are five things a human being does not know: the day you will die…, the day rain will fall… Livelihood? No one can control it. You will only get what God has planned for you. Let us leave it that way.

The above argument demonstrates the unpredictable nature of life. As Hamdy (2009) argues, the disposition of submission to the utter will of God is a disposition whose achievement requires training of one's senses through acts of piety, such as ritual prayer, reflection, invocation of God, and active and persistent work. One of Nevola's (2018: 306) interlocutors emphasises Omari's point above:

> [If we knew our destiny] the diligent believer who knows that, eventually, success will be on his side, would laze.
>
> And in the same way, the loser would hesitate, knowing that, whatever his efforts, failure is always the destiny of the miserable!

Masumbuko once evoked the idea that human beings are compelled to work when he said, "In Islam, any work that an individual does is a prayer." As we have seen previously, Masumbuko's point is that for one to achieve their destiny, which can only be invoked through action, in this case, fishing, there is a need for God's guidance. In addition, giving thanks to God constantly whenever a fisher returns from the sea is also important as one fisher told me, "When I catch fish, I normally say, 'Alhamdulillah (all praise is due to God)!' and when I do not catch fish, I also usually say, 'Alhamdulillah! Today, God has not given me fish here; I will catch them somewhere else tomorrow.' Give God thanks." One retired fisher also told me, "You cannot plan for anything that comes from the sea. Whether you catch fish or not, always give thanks to God." Mzee Mohammed, a retired fisher, reiterated one afternoon when, while pointing his finger at a ring net boat that has just returned from a fishing trip told me:

> Look over there! That whole boat, they caught only one fish! (He laughs). Do not joke with God, my friend. God is great! Just think about it. A whole boat, which carries up to 50 crew and God, has given them only one fish. There is a lot we can learn from His works about that. Just 3 days ago, the fishers filled the same boat with fish…. about 3 tons of fish. And today they have returned with only one fish. It means you have to fear God. So, today they were unlucky. Maybe God will bless them tomorrow. We do not know. That is how things go. That is why we are told all the time to believe in God. When he gives you, give Him thanks and when he refuses to give, you give Him thanks.

Here, giving thanks to God reveals the extent to which local cosmologies of destiny in Gazi are shaped through the prism of the Islamic ideas of predestination and through specific ways of preparing for, and reckoning with, the uncertainty of the future (Menin, 2020). Some regard failing to catch fish as a reminder of God and as something for which an individual should be thankful. Through failure, fishers appreciate and, to a certain extent embody, authoritative Islamic discourses that give meaning to their failures (Hamdy, 2009). During the SEM season, for instance,

failure to catch fish does not stop fishers from going back to the sea the following day. Believers continually work through constant prayer, reflection, and invocation. By actively engaging in fishing, they remain alert to the possibilities of finding more fish that they would otherwise have risked failing to catch had they not gone out to the sea. Here, God's will is manifested through the individual's effort to realise it (Nieswand, 2010). This in turn enables fishers to overcome uncertainties and insecurities and is a way of dealing with tensions, inequalities and suspicions caused by witchcraft and the occult (Lindhardt, 2012). Through their persistence, 'luck' strikes in unexpected ways and times (Gaibazzi, 2015) even when the hopes of catching fish might appear unpromising as a result of uncertainties of the sea.

In this fishing village, there is a differentiation between orthodoxy and deviance. This occurs when different individuals in a village hold divergent views about the purity or deviance of beliefs and practices current in their society (Holy, 1991). What may be viewed as orthodox by some within the community may be seen as "aberrant and deviant" by others (1991: 9). For some fishers, submission to the will of God through expressions such as "Alhamdulillah" and "Inshallah" may define them as religious. Other fishers, as we have seen in the last section, however, are suspected of using the occult and witchcraft to catch fish or to protect themselves from witchcraft. These actions seem to defy the very idea of believing in, and submitting to, "divine predestination" or "divine destiny" (De Cillis, 2014; Menin, 2015).

I show that having faith in one's identity is important as it enables one to achieve his destiny. As Mzee Imara put it during an interview, I had with him, "And if you do not engage in witchcraft, you will still get your livelihood, although not much. God cannot forsake you. He will give you fish, but if you do it (*engage in witchcraft*) that way your work becomes easy. You need faith in everything." This narrative points out that for some fishers, it requires one's agency to

realise God's will while for others it requires unseen agencies (witchcraft and the occult) to realise one's destiny. The latter group is firmly opposed to the explanation of 'luck' which attributes powers to find and catch fish to be exclusively in God's hands. According to believers, God gives destiny to an individual. Therefore, engaging in witchcraft is sinful. As Mzee Imara pointed out, a fisher who enlists occult means as a means to catch fish is a sinner since he goes against the will of God. For him, when a fisher engages in witchcraft and the occult, "It means you do not worship God, but worship something else." The point I want to stress here is that "orthodoxy" and "deviance," "true belief" and "superstition" are key concepts in the discourse of the culture of this fishing community.

4.3 Can predetermined destiny be subverted?

Gyekye (1995) argued that the Akan of Ghana believe that every human being has a destiny that God fixed beforehand since He created humans; therefore, no human being can subvert His will. For Gyekye (1995), humans' destinies differ hence their fortunes, luck and capacities, which are revealed through the inexplicability and persistence of events in their experiences of everyday life. However, his interlocutors were divided on whether or not one can alter one's destiny. While some of his interlocutors argue that a man's destiny can be changed by magic or religious means, others deny that it can be changed (Gyekye, 1995: 115). Alice Elliot and Laura Menin call this change "malleable fixity," where the quality of an individual's fixed, predetermined, even necessary qualities of destiny varies through being "imposed, willed, or spawned by spiritual, supernatural, or cosmological forces" (2018: 294). Writing about the relationship between destiny and decision among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, Jackson (1988) explains that although people often speak of divine will or ancestral influence in terms of implacable fate, it is always a human choice which, in practice, determines the particular course of a person's destiny. For Jackson

(1988), a person's destiny can never be known beforehand and his fortunes are inextricably bound up with his relations.

References to witchcraft and destiny were plentiful in social interactions among young men. Many youths I talked to told me that their destiny had been predetermined for them to remain fishers or fish traders for the rest of their lives. These youths acknowledge their failure and impotentiality and give them meaning through the idea of a predetermined path. For them, jealousy among evil residents brings about their failure and impotentiality. As Nasir told me one day, "A high proportion of them (visitors) engage in witchcraft to defend their families, but for us, we do it against our own families." Therefore, for them, they can only change their destiny by abandoning fishing and moving out of the village to venture into employment elsewhere. This is because there is no alternative income-generating activity in the village that they could engage in. Hakeem, for instance, told me, "They (*witches*) want you to continue carrying 'the bucket' (*a common phrase referring to being a fish trader in Gazi village*) until you get tired. I have been told by many people that if you want to succeed in life you have to move out of Gasi." For them, whereas exiting the village to find a better livelihood elsewhere will enable them to overcome their cultural, social and economic limitations, this is only a pipe dream because it is continuously threatened by witchcraft. Nonetheless, it gives them hope and motivates them to keep fishing or trading in fish while waiting for their 'luck' at a time only known to God. By evoking the power of God for His intervention, the residents believe He has the power to change things from bad to good. Here, human beings have the power to influence the actualisation of a range of possibilities (potentialities) by manipulating material contingencies and mundane powers. For example, in the village where Nevola (2018) lived, in case of drought, a "prayer for rain" was performed with the slaughter of a bull to solicit the monsoon. In return, God rewarded the people with the rain.

While many residents of Gazi highly depend on fish as their daily source of income and protein, believers view failure to catch fish as God's will. As I have explained in the previous section, failure by fishers to catch fish is also associated with evil forces – witchcraft and the occult. Many of my interlocutors told me that the will of God is more powerful than witchcraft. However, some of them believed that witchcraft played a crucial role in the economies of fish extraction. One morning, during an interview with one young fish trader, Abass, while we sat at the shore waiting for fishers to return from the sea, he said, "This business of fishing and Christianity cannot go together. This is Digo land, my friend. Even if you are a Christian, you have to be 'treated' by a *babu* to protect yourself."[60] For some residents of Gazi, when neighbours plot against an individual by employing occult means, as in the case claimed by the crew of Hakeem's nighttime ring net boat at the beginning of this chapter, the individual's 'luck' is 'tied' such that he is prevented from catching the fish that he should otherwise be caught. I argue here that some believers are always positive that God's will ultimately override attempts at witchcraft and the occult from evil neighbours. For some residents, however, one has to use witchcraft to protect oneself.

Failure, resulting in low and declining catches on the south coast of Kenya, is also connected to the belief in sea spirits and the erosion of traditional beliefs. Since belief in spirits was widespread in the past in my study area, multiple taboos were observed to harmonise relations with the spirits (Glaesel, 2000). The abundance of fish in the nearshore and economic prosperity were negatively affected whenever such taboos were not observed. Consequently, human relations with sea spirits had to be restored through offerings (Glaesel, 2000). Mzee Imara told me that

[60] Belief in witchcraft is widespread among the Digo, therefore, one has to be careful because of the potential threat of witchcraft.

fishers used to conduct rituals in the past by throwing *chano,* a type of offering (*sadaka*), into the ocean to appease spirits when they continuously returned from the sea empty-handed. Referring to the misfortunes I have outlined at the beginning of this chapter, he said, "Like for our boat, all *bamvuas* have not been good for us. Some of the crew members have said, we should make *chano* and throw it into the sea." According to Mzee Imara, such traditional beliefs have been eroded, "If one has faith *in witchcraft and the occult* and does it, he will find fish whenever he goes to the sea." For him, even though God still provides fish catches to any fisher whether he engages in witchcraft or not, witchcraft makes it easier for the one who engages in it to catch fish.

During an interview with Bakari Siraj, a retired beach seine fisher who was my gatekeeper, he recounted how in the past people used to conduct ritual sacrifices (*tambiko*) – which involved taking food without washing hands and after eating, the dirty water they used to wash their hands with was sprinkled around the village. In addition, every year, residents used to play traditional drums around the village for seven days. On the seventh day, they slaughtered goats, ate them and conducted prayers around the *kaya*.[61] On the third month of the Islamic calendar, they also used to conduct *maulidi* celebrations – a religious festival, related to the birth of Prophet Mohammed, held every year to bring God's blessings. Residents conducted these rituals to protect the people from diseases, bring bumper harvests, and increase fish catches. However, according to him, these beliefs have been eroded.

I argue, therefore, that there is a shift away from collective sacrificial rituals to benefit the fishing community towards increased use of witchcraft and the occult for the benefit of

[61] A *Kaya* is a clearing surrounded by a forest regarded as a 'sacred forest' by the Mijikenda people. *Kayas* are reputed to be former settlements which possess a continuing ritual role and seen by the Mijikenda as intimately linked to their culture and identity (Willis, 2009).

individuals in the face of the uncertainty and inequalities brought about in the neoliberal age. As elders die, westernisation and other types of foreign influence, orthodox Islamic opposition, education, government influence and worsening socioeconomic conditions contribute to the decline of collective sacrificial rituals to benefit the fishing community (Giles, 1995; Glaesel, 2000). Some fishers distance themselves from these unseen forces, claiming that they do not work and are largely beyond an individual's control. During an interview with Bakari Siraj, for instance, he dismissed claims that witchcraft and the occult influence fish abundance in the ocean and therefore fish catches. He said, "When we talk about traditional beliefs, it can happen but not so much. These days these beliefs have died because of that culture, when you follow it up, we will be talking about jinn."[62] I can link this argument to Wahhabism, which refers to a movement that seeks to purify the Islamic religion of any innovations or practices that deviate from the teachings of Prophet Mohammed and his companions (Malbouisson, 2007).

The Muslim people of the south coast of Kenya are Sunni with a Shafi'i intellectual tradition with varying interpretations. One group has a longer history referred to as Sufi. The other group comprises reformist Islam from elsewhere in the Indian Ocean which was opposed to Sufi worldly practices of piety and social hierarchy commonly referred to as Wahhabist (or Salafist) (Chome, 2019; Mwakimako and Willis, 2022). Tension and occasional non-lethal violence began in the 1990s when teachers from elsewhere referred to as new Salafists encouraged criticism of newly introduced practices in Islam (innovations) or *bid'a*, denunciation of superstition and the social dominance of men who claimed an inherited ability to dispense blessings (Kresse, 2009; Mwakimako and Willis, 2022).[63] As a result, some practices such as the

[62] Sufi Muslims see such spirits as the creatures of God, though they also distinguish between good, protective and harmful majini (Giles, 1995).

[63] A section of knowledgable youths joined the Ansari community because of lack of formal employment due to the perceived marginalisation by the government. They also aimed to preserve and re-energise Islam from the influence

Maulid diminished (Mwakimako and Willis, 2022). As catches declined over time in the south coast of Kenya, orthodox Muslim fishers, for example, opposed traditional practices which included offering drinks, food and cloth to spirits (Glaesel, 2000). The younger fishers argued such practices are incompatible with Islam and associated them with outdated beliefs in spirits and witchcraft. They instead conducted prayers to God, offered Islamic-friendly sadaka, relied on the will of God to ensure compatibility with Islam and refused to be associated with outdated beliefs in spirits and witchcraft (Glaesel, 2000).

Bakari Siraj told me that there was only one mosque in Gazi village when he was young. According to Bakari, in the 1990s, a new faction of younger residents emerged that argued that older people never went to school and incited people to shift their teachings to contemporary issues. For example, the new group refused to say "Bismillah Rahman Rahim" (In the name of God) at the beginning of the prayer or when reading the Quran.[64] They argued Muslims should instead begin their prayers by saying "Alhamdulillah" (Praise be to God) because the Prophet said "In the name of God" once in his lifetime while praying at his home. Later on, the new group opted to build a new mosque since there were contrasting views regarding the call to prayer, fasting during Ramadhan, and praying during the Eid holidays.[65] Another fisher told me

of globalisation due to reluctance of the older generations, and to transform Islam into a way of life (Mwakimako and Willis, 2022).

[64] Musa Bakari told me that all Muslims in Gazi belong to the Ansar al-Sunna community. However, they only differ in ideology whether or not one should say Bismilahi. He told me that the Pemba community permanently staying in Gazi has also decided to build a new mosque because they considered the older mosque to be a 'family property' owned by locals. The shaking of the index finger and saying Bismilahi quietly was a source of frequent conflicts with residents.

[65] During the national Jamuhuri day celebration on 12th December 2022, the president announced that he had commenced the process of conferring citizenship to the people of the Pemba community living in Kenya. He said it was in order to "…resolve injustices of a historical character that have unfairly relegated people to the margins of statelessness when their inalienable rights of citizenship are guaranteed under the Constitution." During a phone call with Musa Juma on 15th January 2023, he told me that he was supervising the laying of the foundation of a new mosque that they had began to construct that day. He added that the locals have denied the Wapemba community leadership positions in the mosque for a long time forcing them to start building their own mosque.

that the two groups only differ in ideology concerning the start and end of the lunar months, particularly during Ramadan.

In an interview with Mzee Mohammed, he was clear that witchcraft is part of the invisible world.[66] He said, "People only fish because it is their work, but inside those sea waters there are many things which you cannot see." For him, people who use unseen forces to manipulate fish catches "do not know God." He added, "If you believe in yourself and walk in God's ways, keep holding onto your faith and believe in God as you work as a fisher, do not believe in anything else but only in God, you will be a successful fisher because God will protect you." Musa Juma told me that according to the Quran, God abhors witchcraft and all Muslims are told not to associate themselves with witchcraft activities. He said one can only use witchcraft in form of healing, for instance, praying for someone to heal, but not through associating oneself with satanic activities. According to Musa, in Islam, individuals who engage in witchcraft to land high fish catches do not do so at the will of God. For such individuals, while their catches are predetermined by God, their sins are 'written'. Bakari Siraj however, was against the idea that witchcraft influences fish catches. He pointed out that the reason for the decline in fish catches over the years is not witchcraft, but climate change (sea level rise), the use of destructive fishing gear, and an increase in the number of fishers (especially migrant fishers from Pemba), but had nothing to do with witchcraft. For him, the ability to catch fish highly depends on one's practical fishing skills rather than occult economies as claimed by some residents.

In an interview with Omari, he kept witchcraft at a remove when he said, "As Muslims, we are told not to believe so much in witchcraft. If you are hungry, do not say that 'I have been

[66] In the past, spirits have been linked with protection of fish species in this area (Glaesel, 2000).

bewitched.' No, my brother, God also created hunger. So, if you do not catch fish, do not believe so much that you have been bewitched, no. It is God's will." Here, I argue that misfortunes, which arise as a result of witchcraft such as boats capsizing, drowning, or fishers returning home empty-handed or with fewer fish than expected, are interpreted as the general will of God and not due to the intentional will of God (Weatherhead, 2011). Although He does not cause them to happen, God permits misfortunes to happen to fishers through the agency of men, i.e. through the occult and witchcraft, because they are necessary to the goodness of His creation (Broedel, 2018: 72) and to allow humans to exercise their choice (Swinburne, 1974).

For believers in Gazi, God owns everything and is the provider of all. Nothing can happen without His approval. As many of my interlocutors frequently told me, "Only God knows." Here, what may appear to be due to chance or human intercession is part of God's will that transcends human understanding. The view here is that it is God's will for people to be wealthy and successful. Everything an individual acquires from the time of her/his birth up to her/his death belongs to and comes from God, and no one can alter it. Through this belief, believers work to integrate themselves into a heavenly economy of superabundance (Nieswand, 2010). The people I write about can make sense of fateful or extraordinary events and assess the extent of the involvement of spiritual agency or whether such events are a result of human agency. They acknowledge their failures and nonactualisation of their potential, hence giving them meaning through the idea of a predetermined path.

Chapter 5: The 'phone calls' of Gazi: the anxieties of waiting for fish

In the past, fishers of Gazi village used to conduct all fishing activities in the inshore waters within the bay. Fish caught from this part of the ocean was an important source of protein for everyone in the village and could sustain livelihoods. Fishers using beach seines, basket traps, hand lines, gill nets and fence traps used to land plenty of coral reef fish either from the shore or further inside the bay using dugout canoes. They also used to catch migratory fish species that occasionally shoaled inside the bay. However, those days are long gone. Overfishing, use of destructive gear such as beach seines, habitat loss and climate change led to a decline in fish catches and the local extinction of some fish species within the inshore waters. Many fishers abandoned traditional fishing methods, such as fence traps in favour of gear technologies that could catch more fish. The government banned beach seine fishing in 2007 because of the destructive effects it had on fish species populations and seagrass and coral reef ecosystems. Some community members told me that a nearby titanium mining company built a dam across the major river, which drains its waters inside the bay (see figure 4). The construction of the dam led to the abstraction of freshwater input from the river into the bay. As a result, prawns that relied on freshwater input from the river became locally extinct. The abstraction of fresh water from the river also contributed to a significant reduction of fish stocks within the nearshore waters. In a village that relies heavily on fishing and where few are educated beyond secondary school, these threats to fish populations coupled with climate change negatively affected the livelihood and food security of the residents.

The local community did not wait for the collapse of fisheries. Migrant fishers from Tanzania introduced the ring net fishery in Gazi in the early 1990s. The new fishing gear required a high fishing effort because of the large number of fishers involved and yielded high

catch rates compared to the other fishing gear. Using ring nets, fishers could travel further and catch more fish. It took a long time before beach seines were fully eradicated as fishers used to alternate between using ring nets (from other villages like Vanga, Jimbo and Jasini in the south during the NEM season) and beach seines (owned by local fishers during the SEM season) to fish. Presently, the catch rates of ring nets are higher compared with the other gear (see also chapter 2). The village mostly depends on ring net fishers who travel further on wooden plank boats (*boti*) or dug-out canoes with outriggers (*ngalawa*) in search of seasonal migratory fish species such as kawakawa and frigate tuna both referred to as *sehewa,* kingfish (*nguru*), sardines *(dagaa)* and the Indian mackerel (*marongwe*). The fishers also target coral reefs fish species such as rabbitfish (*tafi*) and emperors (*changu*) during the low fishing (SEM) season which is usually accompanied by rough sea conditions.

Unlike in the past when high fish catches used to be landed from within the bay, nowadays, many fishers make their way outside the bay – and mostly beyond the view of those they leave on land sometimes to compete for coral reef fish species with fishers from other landing sites. Men, women and children (during school holidays) go to the landing site early in the morning or late in the morning every day, each carrying a yellow or white bucket to wait for night/daytime fishers to return from the sea. The people can tell what time the fishers are likely to land fish using the Islamic lunar calendar. They use the Islamic lunar calendar to know the day the moon will rise and whether it will be a waning or waxing moon and the duration of low and high neap and spring tide. A sense of anticipatory anxiety fills many discourses at the landing site as the people sit in small groups under the shade of trees and the two buildings at the landing site or in the direct sun at positions that offer a vantage point of the entrance of the bay in the ocean, an area beyond which fishers are busy struggling to fish or searching for fish. During the

conversations at the beach, the residents train their eyes on the sea to observe boats or canoes that are mostly beyond their view. Once in a while during their conversations, a man or woman or child would point towards the sea, 'guessing' or 'predicting' whether boats, most of which had seen better days, had caught fish. They would also predict the fish species that would be landing that day, which boat had caught more fish than the others, what fishers were currently doing, their current location, the time fishers would return from the sea and which boat in the horizon was approaching the shore. One would confidently shout, "I have called Mohammed, and he says he has caught a ton of *sehewa*!" Another would say, "I have heard Omari has caught Indian mackerel." The others at the beach would listen keenly, watching the sea for signs of fishers either fishing or approaching the shore. To pass time, conversations revolved around the weather; the lunar calendar and the condition of the sea; fish species catches; fisheries management; marine research; national, regional or global politics; issues of land injustices; morality; road accidents; living and working in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Europe; religion; European soccer; education; human rights; health; corruption; wealth versus poverty; witchcraft; marriage and infidelity; currently occurring and developing news or narratives about personal lives.

As I listened to the conversations at the landing site about events in the past, contemporary events or future events, the overwhelming hope they brought to the people as they gathered every day at the beach consistently struck me. During a time of low or no fish catches, the people in these conversations could only wonder about what went wrong.[67] During the SEM season, the people would wait for hours for fish that never came. At other times, it would take a few or several hours sometimes up to 12 hours, but the people never give up on waiting, unless

[67] See Diggins (2018) for similar observations in Sierra Leone.

they were certain that fishers would return empty-handed. The fishers would eventually return either with high or low catches that could not satisfy the demand at the beach. This frequently resulted in many residents returning home empty-handed after a long wait. During the NEM season, however, it was almost a guarantee that fishers would return with fish even if they spent many hours at sea. As the people left the beach on days fishers returned with low or no fish catches making some of them return home empty-handed, they remained hopeful that fishers would land high fish catches the following day and they will get fish. This chapter is, therefore, about the un/predictability of fish catches. For the people waiting for fishers at the landing site, the ocean was not only a source of livelihood and protein but also embodied a sense of being in the world. It embodied a world of many possibilities. Therefore, through their anxieties, each of them was trying to navigate a world beyond their reach or power.

Ethnographic studies have established that the ocean along the east African coast is an uncertain environment with many coastal communities that derive their livelihood and protein from the ocean being poor, but very knowledgeable, and continuously interested in understanding the ocean environment and the weather (Caplan, 1997). This is because many of the residents have fished at a point in their lives. Therefore, they can offer detailed information about fish species that are caught, fish habitats, the impact of seasonal changes on fish species populations, and increased loss of fish species or habitats and impact on livelihoods and food security (Walley, 2002, 2004). The residents' worries continuously centre on the sea and the unending difficulties associated with fishing, which usually form the basis for social dramas (Walley, 2004). In the coastal community, I write about, which is characterised by a culture of secrecy (Thompson, 2019) and cynicism (McIntosh, 2009), such uncertainties often lead to

distress over low or declining catches, discord, divisions and complaints amongst fishing communities (Glaesel, 2000).

In this chapter, I will focus on the everyday conversations of the people - fish traders, porters, and other community members - who sit at the landing site to wait for fishers to land fish. I emphasise that while the social life of the ocean and land are interconnected; it is filled with uncertainties that those who sit at the landing site every day to wait for fishers to return are cognisant of, but frequently choose to disregard. However, how do they know which fish species fishers would land? How do they react when their expectations are not met? Why are their expectations not met?

As fishers travel beyond the bay, the activities going on in the ocean are not hidden from the view of the people they leave behind. They seem to possess an immense knowledge of the sea. Many of them were fishers in their lives or are fishers who occasionally go out to sea or who did not go to the sea that day or are individuals who associate with current fishers. I argue that since fishing skills vary between fishers, which is revealed from the daily fish landings, the different fishing skills are a source of anxiety and hope among those who wait for fishers at the landing site. These anxieties and expectations pervade many discussions at the beach. Some wonder how fishers can return empty-handed with fish in a sea with an inexhaustible supply of fish. However, for some, it is normal for fishers to return from the sea empty-handed, particularly during the SEM season when migrant fishers are usually away. Since many residents highly depend on fish for their sustenance, the easiest way of dispelling anxieties in such an environment of uncertainty is through inventing rumours. I begin by exploring the rumours that circulate every day around the beach about fish catches before fishers return from the sea that helps to dispel fears and anxieties and instead bring hope. Finally, I show how the uncertainties

in fish catches lead to rumours, the interpretations of which enrich our understanding of fishing skills and the sensory perception of fishers.

5.1 Waiting for fish

The expectations of the people waiting for fishers to return from the sea often struck me as they assembled at the landing site to wait for fishers. Their everyday life was shaped by waiting for fishers to return and by the uncertainty in fish catches, both of which affected their future lives. During such moments of uncertainty, people often dream of a return or a future located in an idealised past and waiting becomes a way of experiencing the link between time and the power to control the future.[68] Here, I explore the everyday experience of residents waiting for fishers to land fish, especially when artisanal fish catch rates have declined significantly, with no hope of an increase in the future. According to Bloch's (1995) notion of hope, people possess an anticipatory consciousness which endows them with not-yet conscious knowledge of future possibilities. As the people wait at the landing site or in the village, their hopes of fishers returning with fish remain relatively strong and shape how the people go about their everyday lives. The nature of that hope, however, also tends to change over time; therefore, hope is a way of dealing with changing uncertainty and making it meaningful (Brun, 2015).

The waiting time or interstitial time is important because of the meanings of life that can be attributed to it (Gasparini, 1995). Waiting is often rife with doubts and uncertainty that coexist with the potential of hope because what is hoped for may or may not occur (Janeja and Bandak, 2018). This includes waiting for asylum, food, freedom, resettlement, funding, education, health care, shelter, marriage, family, employment or the second coming of Christ (Koselleck, 2004; Jeffrey, 2008; Ramdas, 2012; Brun, 2015; Janeja and Bandak, 2018). The anxious waiting of

[68] See Brun (2015).

asylum seekers, for instance, is filled with pain and suffering due to the uncertainty of the present provoking everyday stress, confusion and depression and is therefore defined by existential insecurity (Haas, 2017). Waiting can either be passive or be filled with unproductive activity or productive activity intended for the realisation of a future moment which is hoped to erase the unbearable present, a future becoming (Johnson, 2020). Here, everyday waiting is for a short duration of time (mostly hours) with unproductive activity but actively filled with discussions about a range of issues, as listed earlier.

The people also hope for a time like during the 'good' old days when fishers used to land high fish catches would return in the following year. Such behaviour has been observed among *Pattinaver* fishers who choose not to diversify their livelihood but to sit and wait out the lean years in the hope of a return to the good days. The fishers hold on to past days of glory and wealth hoping that next year the rains will return and profits will rise (Coulthard, 2008). In Gazi, waiting is also for migrant fishers, who for reasons I discussed earlier in this chapter are more skilled compared to local fishers, to return to Gazi during the NEM season. During the waiting period, the long wait, which is usually months, is also filled with productive activity as some fish traders and fishers engage in other activities such as farming, mending nets or businesses, or go for *ago* to other landing sites and wait for late October or early November when migrant fishers begin to arrive. Some wait by continuing to go to the beach, fishing, or gleaning, despite the unpredictability of landing fish during the SEM season. Some nighttime ring net fishers join fishers that use other fishing gear since they cannot use their fishing gear during the SEM season. This is because they target seasonal, migratory fish species that appear during the NEM season and because migrant fishers using this gear are usually at their sites of origin during this season. When waiting during the SEM season for hours, it is mostly filled with speculations about which

boat has caught fish, the weight of fish caught, the species of fish caught and where fish have been caught.

When the NEM season begins and migrant fishers arrive, waiting is usually for hours. During this season, the beach is busier with women selling foodstuffs, traders and beggars chatting, people waiting and scrambling for fish and fish gifts, motorcycle riders (*bodaboda*) carrying fish traders to and from the beach, women boiling and drying sardines, fishers landing tons of fish, children swimming and hustling for fish gifts during school holidays and occasionally, lorries coming to the beach to carry excess fish catches to be sold at distant markets. Thus, the people I write about live a life in anticipation of fish. For them, the everyday life of waiting is not an absence but engrossed in fascinating conversations about suffering, modernity, agency and difference, and time and space often become the objects of reflection (Janeja and Bandak, 2018: xv).

But, how do they know which boat has caught fish, the weight of fish caught, the specific species of fish caught and where they have been caught? One evening, I wrote in my fieldnotes, "How do they know what goes on in the sea so well, yet I never see them go beyond the low spring tide watermark? Is it because of the everyday experience they possess of waiting for fishers at the beach or because they use their sensory skills and perception? Some could know because they were previously fishers or are currently fishers and some get the information regularly from fishers through phone calls while fishers are still at the sea fishing…." The information/knowledge that I set to explore here constitutes rumours about fish catches that spread around during the short period (hours) between when fishers leave the village for the sea and when they return. Many of those who predicted fish that fishers would land fish said that certain fishers had told them the good news over the phone. Most of the time, however, fishers

came back from the sea either empty-handed or with a different species of fish from what they had predicted. Do they talk with fishers over the phone? If not, why do they say they do?

Rumours constitute part of the occult in Africa. Practices related to the occult and witchcraft are common in modern sectors of African society and discourses of power are continually marked by these notions (Geschiere, 1997). Rumours are usually associated with witchcraft, where they exploit anxieties as a result of mundane situations such as shaking hands with strangers, receiving unidentified phone calls or accepting anonymous gifts (Bonhomme, 2012). Different people in Africa, therefore, are consistently making sense of what witchcraft is, and what it might mean (Moore and Sanders, 2001), although it is mostly motivated by hatred, envy, jealousy and greed (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Therefore, occult economies are palpably present in the normal events of everyday life in many African communities such as fishing, agriculture, and domestic lives (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Ashforth, 2005) and are the source of fear (Ashforth, 2005), panic and anxieties sometimes leading to violent reactions among people (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999). Moreover, some failures and misfortunes happening by coincidence are associated with witchcraft and cause anger and vengeance to victims (Evans-Pritchard, 1937). Both rumours and gossip provide knowledge of what 'others do' increasing people's suspicions and leading to accusations of witchcraft (Stewart and Strathern, 2004).

The social and natural worlds of the people I write about, according to Dingley (2018), are read through a "vernacular hermeneutic of suspicion." For Dingley (2018), it is common for people in this part of the Kenyan coast to hide the truth by making it occult. Here, residents are constantly inventing rumours about the motivation of the people who hide the truth (Dingley, 2018). For the people of this area, development is historically derived from a promise which is constantly threatened by the manipulative actions of others through witchcraft and their actions

flow over the historical fact of their oppression (Smith, 2009).[69] In this chapter, however, I push the discourse on rumours in a direction away from witchcraft (See chapter 4 for a discussion on witchcraft in fishing). Rather, I explore how rumours are used to exploit everyday anticipatory anxieties (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993) as the people wait for fishers to return from the sea due to uncertainties in fish catches through what my interlocutors refer to as the '*Simu za Gasi*' or '*reja za Gasi.*' Such rumours occasionally begin with the term '*nasikia*.' In English, *Simu za Gasi* can be translated as the 'phone calls of Gazi', *reja za Gasi'* as 'news or rumours circulating in Gazi' and '*nasikia*' as 'I have heard.' I show that in contemporary East Africa, while rumours carry or reveal a complexity of meanings (Fontein, 2009), they do not seek the truth by themselves; rather it is the people who tell and the people who interpret them that do (White, 2000).

I use the term 'phone calls' not to refer to actual phone calls, but to describe rumours that circulate among the people at the beach to dispel anxieties associated with the uncertainties about whether or not fishers would return from the sea with fish. When I asked Musa one day to define for me *Simu za Gasi*, he told me he did not know what it meant. When I explained to him what it meant according to the definition I had heard from some residents, he told me they refer it to as *reja za Gasi* and not *Simu za Gasi*. He said, "…For instance, when you meet someone in the village you can ask him, give me *reja za Gasi*, in other words, what is the latest news circulating in Gazi?" Following my explanation, he also told me it is okay to ask someone, "What are *Simu za Gasi* saying?" since they have the same meaning. Musa Juma also told me they also refer to it

[69] In his book, "Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya," Smith (2009) focuses on development that is continuously threatened by witchcraft among the Taita of the south coast of Kenya. According to Smith (2009: 247), witchcraft meddles in time leading to spatio-temporal constraints in ways that are destructive to everyone and by directing and orienting the search for truth.

as "*Redio kifua*," loosely translated as "chest radio." According to him, these residents quickly spread the news around the village.[70] Therefore, several terms are used in this village to signify rumours that spread around the village.

Although as I have shown above there are many terms that refer to rumours, in this chapter, I will use the term 'phone calls of Gazi.' I shall argue that 'phone calls of Gazi' refers to rumours that circulate among the people who are left behind after fishers leave for the sea to relieve everyday anticipatory anxieties caused by the news about uncertainties in fish catches. Through 'phone calls of Gazi', their fears are to a certain extent lulled. Like the boat owners, fishermen and *banda* women who sit at the wharf in Tissana (Diggins, 2018, 2019), the fish traders, fishers, beggars, porters, boat owners, children and other community members who sit or take a nap at the fish landing site in Gazi fishing village share the anxiety through everyday conversations at the beach and in the village that their livelihoods are affected by what is incomprehensible and hidden from their view. Put differently, the spreading of rumours amongst the people waiting for fishers at the beach and in the village about anticipated fish catches creates and maintains hope that continually keeps them optimistic about expected fish catches even hours before fishers arrive at the landing site. As we shall see below, because of these uncertainties, the people show concern or appear to do so about fishers returning with or without fish and in the process, they experience great anxiety. These anxieties lead to rumours about good catches. I focus on how people wait for fishers at the beach, and how they make sense of the uncertainties in fish catches. I show people use rumours to dispel anxiety or make it remain

[70] Rumours about fish landings, while frequent because fishing is the primary activity in the village, cover only a small part of Gazi activities since they also talk about other matters e.g. football or marriage.

latent for some time while giving people hope. This hope helps them to cope with an uncertain future (Brun, 2015).

Late one morning, I sat under the shade of the BMU fish storage building with male traders chatting while gazing at the sea and waiting for fishers to return. The weather was hot. The wind blew slowly. The high neap tide waves washed the shore. I could see some mist on the sea. A woman was selling second-hand clothes while other female traders were selling juices, fruits and snacks anxiously waiting for fishers to return. We sat at a vantage point where I could see, on the horizon, canoes with sails, with hand line fishers' busy fishing. Other men and women sat in the shade under trees, occasionally watching the ocean. On one side of the bay, gillnet fishers were struggling to retrieve their catch from the sea. A basket trap fisher was harvesting fish from his traps and putting new bait in the traps. We could not see where ring net boats were fishing but from our position, we could spot incoming boats from afar.

Hassani was shouting, making sure everyone around us listened to his story about an accident he had witnessed the day before about 10 km to the north of Gazi in which a lorry had run over and killed a motorbike rider and the driver of the lorry had escaped. More people continued to arrive at the beach to wait for fishers to land fish. As he narrated his story, one excited trader approached where we sat and cut him short, shouting, "I have heard (*Nasikia*) Ramah has caught about 2 tons of Indian Mackerel!" This got Hamisi, a fish dealer and owner of Ramah's boat, interested. After the trader had made sure that Hamisi was attentive, he added, "Do you hear the engine?" Hamisi nodded. "They are on the way coming back." Hamisi was getting more anxious. "Let me call him," he told us while the trader hurriedly left, most likely to announce the 'good news' to the other people seated on the other side of the beach. Everyone who sat around Hamisi became interested and tuned their ears to listen as he made the call. The

others moved closer. When he had finished speaking with Ramah, the boat captain, on the phone, Hamisi told us feebly, “He says he has caught nothing.” No one said a word for a few seconds as some traders held their heads in disappointment while others drifted off in different directions to join other groups that were also waiting for fishers to return. Hassani finally told the few of us that remained, “These phone calls are sometimes good, but most of the time they are not good. That statement has already broken my heart. We thank God as Gazi residents that despite us not having good fishing grounds, our ocean is a migration corridor for various fish species…"

Hamisi’s and Hassani’s reaction to the news about fishers returning home empty-handed points to the quotidian speculative pursuit of the truth by the people of the south coast of Kenya (Dingley, 2018). It shows what the people at the landing site go through every day when they keep their expectations high, waiting for fish that never comes and the hope they hold for the future. As Shibutani (1966) argues, each participant in a rumour formation enacts a different role. For example, in this case, the fish trader is the messenger who reported pertinent information to the group from an idiosyncratic standpoint. Hassani is the interpreter. He placed the news that was brought to us in context and evaluated it, considering past fishing events and speculating on the implications for the future (Shibutani, 1966). Hamisi, a fish dealer and owner of Ramah’s boat, was the sceptic. He expressed doubt over the authenticity of the news and demanded proof by calling Ramah. Even the others in the group who showed their interests and merely listened had a role in the rumour formation since their presence affected its development (Shibutani, 1966).

The rumours about fish catch affected Hassani Omari and his brother Mohammed, who both owned two daytime ring net canoes. One Friday morning, I found Omari cleaning the two canoes at the beach. On Fridays, after every 2 weeks, fishers rested, cleaned and repaired their

boats, canoes and nets. Omari was angry. He told me he did not like the people of Gazi because of their persistent rumours that were quite annoying. He said, "*Simu za Gasi* filled my boat three days ago with tons of fish. I did not know I had caught all that fish, yet I was suffering in the ocean while they were idling here." About two weeks later, I overheard one trader at the beach telling the others that a fisher from a rival boat he had called on the phone had told him they caught nothing and that Omari's crew had caught about 400 kgs of fish. That day, Omari's crew landed only 50 kgs of fish. That afternoon, when I asked Mohammed, Omari's brother, why they landed 50kgs of fish while I had heard that they had caught much more, he was angry. He told me, "When they (*crew of rival boats*) see us releasing the net into the water they think we have caught fish and call those who are on land to tell them we have caught large quantities of fish, which is not true…"

'Phone calls of Gazi' reveal the uncertainties associated with fishing in Gazi village. Releasing the net into the water does not guarantee that one will catch fish. What one has to notice is the emotion in Omari and his brother, Mohammed, reply. Omari says "…I was suffering in the ocean while they were idling here," to show his displeasure at the people who spread rumours at the beach who are unaware of what fishers go through in the ocean in search of fish. His anger could be classified as justifiable anger, not because of immorality or a taboo, which are incidences of behaviour that threaten moral order, as Lutz (1988) explains in her study of the Ifaluk, but because of spreading lies. These lies spread so fast around the landing site, raising expectations among the people that fishers have caught plenty of fish when, in fact, they have not. Here, my interlocutors use anger to talk about frustrating events which are both disliked and socially condemned (Lutz, 1988).

My interlocutors also reveal anger and despair when fishers cannot live up to their obligations of landing fish at the beach, as I shall explain below. One day in mid-October 2019, I sat at the beach with some fishers and traders when Kopa, a daytime ring net fishing boat owner, joined us. His crew had not gone to the sea that day since he was repairing his boat. One of the ring net fishing boats had returned earlier that day without fish since they could not find any school of fish shoaling and because the winds were so strong at sea, making navigation impossible. As the captain of the second ring net fishing boat to return from the sea was looking for a place to dock his boat, the fishers began jumping from the boat into the low spring tide water. One trader said, "You can discern those fishers have caught nothing from the way they are alighting from the boat and the way the boat is floating on water." We soon found out that they had not caught any fish. Only one ring net fishing boat was still in the sea. Hopes waned at the beach as to whether they would return with fish. Some traders soon gave up on waiting for the ring net boat and instead focused on the handline fishers who had not returned. However, they were also uncertain whether they would get any fish from the handline fishers.

During the discussions we had, Abbas, a jovial, short, young trader in his late twenties, was bitter with Kopa from the frustrations of travelling every day for 20 km from Ukunda to Gazi and returning to Ukunda with little or no fish to sell to his customers. He shouted, "You fishers like to bewitch each other. Yesterday and the day before, you came back from the sea with fish, but why did Ramah and Duwaa's boats return today with nothing?" I could see that Kopa was not amused by the way he angrily looked at Abbas, yet he smiled sheepishly and said it was not true. The young trader, however, insisted that it was true, throwing wet beach sand into the air while shouting, "You fishers are witches!" Kopa, seeing no point in arguing, silently left with another fisher of his crew in tow. After Kopa and the other fisher had left, Abbas told us

that Kopa had married two wives and yet he was a poor man. For him, that was why Kopa's two wives keep bewitching each other and this affected fish catches in the village. He said, "Whenever he goes out to fish with his crew, the other fishers catch fish, but when he does not go to the sea, the other fishers return empty-handed." Hence, according to Abbas, by not going to fish, Kopa was furtively bewitching rival fishing crews. The other traders who sat with us agreed it was true. The following day, Kopa did not go to the sea to fish because he was still repairing his boat. Only one of the 3 ring net fishing crew caught fish, although the catches were low.

Even though fishers would occasionally return with high fish catches, some traders still complained that they landed the same species of fish daily. These complaints and rumours were prevalent during the SEM season. For instance, one afternoon in mid-October 2019, as we sat at the beach waiting for fishers to return, one fish trader complained that fishers only landed *sehewa* every day while they expected them to land a higher fish species diversity from which traders could select species of their choice. He said, "It is easy to predict the fish species that local fishers would land on every day. They work like masons who cut stones. You always know that the outcome will always be stones." Traders told me that they no longer make much money the way they used to do in the past when fishers used to land high fish catches, which were composed of a high diversity of fish species. They told me that traders do not make money whenever migrant fishers are away because local fishers cannot land high fish catches the way migrant fishers do. One afternoon, two weeks later, in an interview with Abbas, he ruefully explained to me,

> …These days there is no money here. There is no money here, my friend. There is no money because there are no fishers. The fishers are catching only one species of fish! If it is Tuna, they will only catch Tuna, and if it is Indian Mackerel, they will only catch Indian Mackerel. The migrant fishers from Pemba have not yet arrived. Whenever they land fish, they usually land a higher diversity of fish species such that you will find they split their catches into three parts, each part

> carrying a different species of fish. As a fish trader, I can say, today my sales will be good because I can choose the species I want at good prices. We used to pack about 100kg of fish each and we had about 20 motorbikes here, but now, where are they? There is only one motorbike. Traders moved to Vanga (*another fishing village south of Gazi*) because there are no fish here. There are no visitors (*migrant fishers*). For fishers to land fish at Gazi, a fisher has to come from Pemba to catch them. We cannot do that on our own….

There is so much to say about how humans pursue their aspirations for a good life (Fischer, 2014) and how humans have fetishised and reified money and commodities while obscuring associated social relationships (Appadurai, 1994; Taussig, 2010). In this section, however, I will focus on Abbas's response as a representation of the everyday anticipatory anxieties and frustrations experienced by those who waited for fishers at the beach who regularly failed to return with fish, particularly during the SEM season. As Dingley (2022) argues, the people of this area are more likely forced to take desperate measures to make ends meet under conditions of drought, as we have seen in the previous chapter and as we shall see in the next chapter. "Contemporary relationships of patronage and extraversion, prevailing market imaginaries, and the increased vulnerability of dependent populations" under conditions of economic hardship and ecological disruption usually structured such survival strategies (Dingley, 2022: 145).

The anger expressed by Abbas resonated during my discussion with many traders and community members, including fellow fishers. Many of them had little faith in the ability of local ring net fishers to satisfy the demand at the beach by landing high fish catches and catches that had a high diversity of fish species. For Abbas, watching fishers return from the sea empty-handed every day was a revelation and confirmation of what he already knew: that local fishers were not as skilled as migrant fishers. This meant that he was always uncertain whether he would get fish for sale and to support his family, especially during the low SEM fishing season when

migrant fishers were away at their homes. People like him still frequented the beach to wait for fish because they had no other option. To oppose the move by the government to prevent migrants without fishing licenses from fishing, he said, “We create many fishing laws and regulations, yet we (*Kenyan fishers*) cannot fish.” Here, failure to catch fish was regarded as a political failure just like dried fields because of failed rains were associated with political failure (Dingley, 2022).

Abbas’s remarks suggest first, the distress, despair, and shattered expectations that the people who remain at the beach, particularly traders, go through every day when the fishers they have waited for several hours cannot catch fish. Abbas does not live in Gazi but represents an ordinary fish trader who commutes every day from Ukunda town expecting to get fish, which he will sell, uplift the wellbeing of his family and build his own house in the future. He has seen a decline in fish caught over the four years he has engaged in fish trading. He told me that, on average, he spends KES 300 to and from Gazi whether or not he gets fish. “The following day, when you don’t get fish, you will have spent another KES 300. When you arrive home, people want to eat, and they will be looking at you. If initially, you had KES 6,000, you will have spent most of it until you are left with only KES 2,000” Second, his remarks show that fishing skills amongst fishers differ, as I will explain shortly.

Like the fisher, the person sitting at the beach also studies the ocean using his/her senses as I have discussed in Chapter 3. She/he understands the low and high seasons, which species are landing at particular times of the year, the lunar cycle, tides and the weather. All these experiences form part of the conversations at the beach as the people wait for the fishers to return. For the people I write about here, there are good and bad days. Good days represent those days ring net fishers land tons of fish. Bad days represent those days fishers return to the village

empty-handed or with low fish catches that cannot satisfy the demand on the beach. This makes some people who wait for them at the beach go back home empty-handed and leads to the undignified scramble for fish as I shall discuss in chapter 6. Kopa, a boat owner, told me that during bad days, he has to scratch his head to think about how he will recover the costs spent on boat fuel. Sometimes he has to look for loans to pay for fuel expenses. Such debts are inevitable in the fishing industry in Africa (Lucht, 2012; Diggins, 2018, 2019).

The unavoidable question – why did Abbas and the others who sat at the beach everyday claim that resident fishers did not know how to fish, which contradicts studies on repeated practice as I have discussed in Chapter 3 (Bourdieu, 1977; Ingold, 2000)? Why did people like Abbas complain that there were no fishers in a fishing village, yet they habitually came to the beach every day to wait for the same fishers they despised to return from the sea with fish? Why did local fishers land tons of fish even when migrant fishers were away during the SEM season if they were not skilled? Why did they give out hundreds of kilograms of fish gifts to beggars on good days? Do these facts, one might ask, show that they are skilled fishers? I will answer these questions, in the next section, by exploring an intense argument that occurred between a young ring net fisher (Hemedi), an old retired beach seine and ring net fisher (presently a basket trap fisher – Mzee Hamadi) and an old retired ring net fisher (Mzee Juma).

5.2 Rumours about inequalities in fishing skills

For daytime ring net fishers whose fishing skills dominate discussions at the beach, the ability to fish involves using both sensory skills and perception to spot a shoal of fish and to catch all of them. As I have argued in Chapter 3, these skills are grown in the body through training and repeated practice (Bourdieu, 1977). However, debates over inequalities in fishing skills and sensory perception of local fishers and migrant fishers were the source of intense

arguments and discussions both at the beach and in the village, especially during the SEM season when ring net fishers returned from the sea empty-handed for two or more consecutive days as the following anecdote illustrates. In this section, I argue that rumours show the difference in fishing skills amongst fishers, the knowledge about the sea that those who wait for fishers to return from the sea possess, and the interconnectedness between fishers at sea and those who wait for them at the landing site.

One day I joined Mzee Hamadi, a basket trap fisher, for a late breakfast at Mama Mariamu's café. He had just come from the sea and he was hungry and tired. He told me that the sea was still not "good" that day and that he had only managed to catch about 5kgs of small-sized rabbit fish (*tafi*) and emperors (*changu*) which he had already sold to his regular customer, a fish trader called Mama Fatuma, for only KES 500. When we arrived at Mama Mariamu's café, we found two fishers from one of the ring net crew who had just returned from the sea taking their breakfast on credit. As I have indicated before, debts are part of the life of a fisher. Mama Mariamu's café is an open café thatched with *makuti* and connected to a kitchen, which is enclosed with palm trunks running parallel to the ground. In the open part, there are two tables each measuring about 10 metres and 4 benches of the same length on both sides of the tables, which are permanently fixed to the ground. Her café used to be located close to the beach, but the government relocated her to the present location when it began to construct a seaweed storage building under the blue economy initiative.

Mama Mariamu regularly serves meals to fishers on credit, which they repay during good fishing days. Today was not one of those days. Ring net fishers had returned from the sea without fish. Fishers using other fishing gears had returned from the sea with low fish catches, which the traders and beggars at the beach had scrambled to get, with most of them missing. Therefore, most

of the fish traders at the beach had no option but to return home empty-handed. Only fishers of one nighttime ring net boat had returned early that morning at around 0600 hours with about 200 kgs of the Indian mackerel, which they had quickly sold to traders at exorbitant prices. As I sat with Mzee Hamadi to take our late breakfast at around midday, Hemedi**,** one of the *Nuru* ring net crewmembers who had also returned without fish, entered the café. He requested Mama Mariamu to give him tea on credit, which he would repay when he got the money, and sat on the bench on the opposite side to where Mzee Hamadi and I sat. Mama Mariamu started praising migrant fishers while serving him his breakfast. She said that they were more skilled than local fishers and that was why local fishers kept on returning from the sea without fish. She told us that if the migrants had been around that day, fish would have been plenty at the landing site and fishers would be enjoying the taste of a part of their catches at her café. "What are you saying?" Hemedi retorted. "If *Ushindi* crew were around, they would have landed fish, even if it's *vipuju* – a cheap fish," Mzee Hamadi shouted, appearing to have been waiting for that moment. Mzee Hamadi and Mama Asha were getting excited. This was going to be a debate that Hemedi knew he had no chance of winning. It also seemed he had had this kind of argument several times before. He argued nonetheless. "Yes! You cannot refute that fact Hemedi," Mzee Hamadi shouted and smiled. Hemedi was beginning to get irritated as he shouted, "But you must have seen those *puju*!"

Hemedi's point was that fishers only catch the fish they can see. Questions remain, however: Why were the migrants able to see a high diversity of fish species at the sea that Hemedi said they (local fishers) could not? Why were the migrants able to return with a high fish catch every day while resident fishers like Hemedi's crew could not, while they both fished in the same waters and pursued the same fish?

"Listen!" Hemedi retorted. "Let me tell you…You know those migrant fishers come at the best time when, first, the sea is ready for fishing. Do you understand me? What I mean is that they come when the sea is already calm. If you decide…" Mzee Hamadi stood abruptly and interjected.

Mzee Hamadi: You know on land, there are many drivers, but remember they do not have the same skills.

Hemedi: Yes. (We laugh)

Mzee Hamadi: That means those people have better skills than you do.

For Mzee Hamadi, migrant fishers from Pemba possessed better fishing skills compared with their counterparts in Gazi. According to Hemedi, however, migrant fishers had two advantages. First, they usually came to Gazi during the NEM season, which is considered a high fishing season when conditions are favourable for fishing, and second, migrants had better fishing equipment than local fishers did. In their study of factors influencing migrant fisher access to fishing grounds in Kenya, Wanyonyi et al. (2017) found that migrant fishers possess an immense knowledge of natural trends, cycles and oceanographic processes that influence the abundance of target resources on their fishing grounds. This knowledge, according to residents, gives them an advantage over local fishers, as Mzee Hamadi asserts:

If they were around, they would have returned with fish today. (We laugh). Isn't it the case, my friend? (He looks at Mzee Juma and one fisher who had stopped to listen to them. They nod their heads in agreement). Some fishers are more skilled than others are my friend. I am telling you fishing skills differ. You can have all the equipment you need and still not be a fisher.

About three months earlier, I asked one boat captain what skills the Ushindi crew, one of the daytime migrant ring net fishing crew, possessed that made the people praise them over local fishers. He told me that this crew has 24 scuba diving tanks, which enable them to spend more time underwater and can therefore catch any pelagic fish compared to fishers from Gazi who

only have four or five scuba diving tanks per boat. “Ushindi crew are not selective. They catch any species of fish that they come across,” he said. About an hour before the argument at the café began, I sat with traders at the beach waiting for fishers to return, observing one of the ring net canoes approaching the shore on the horizon. It was time for ring net fishers to return from the sea since the tide was flooding the shore. Hassani, a fish trader, said that the fishers came with a good sign because several Gull-billed terns were following them. This was an indication that they were carrying plenty of fish. As the boat approached the beach, some people quickly waded in the water towards it carrying yellow and white buckets, but later realised that the fishers had returned from the sea empty-handed. ‘Phone calls of Gazi’ confirmed that the other two remaining boats had also caught nothing. Dozens of traders started leaving the beach. Others chose to wait for them and confirm whether they had caught nothing, while others turned their attention to the canoes sailing on the horizon and the gill net fishers on the other side of the bay. It would be a long wait for them with faint hopes of getting fish for the day. Hemedi was shouting:

Hemedi: It is not true!

Mzee Hamadi: (groans) Let me go away. (We laugh). We used to fish using only one diving tank during our heydays.

Hemedi: (Tries to shout in a faint voice) Right now, we do not have that kind of fishing!

Mzee Hamadi: Look here, Mzee Juma, in the past when we used to catch *Mizira*…when people used to search for them, did we catch them?

Mzee Juma: They are still catching them.

Mzee Hamadi: It is because they have more skills. They are better than you. They have marked the sea and can recall…do you understand?

Hemedi: No one can refute that.

Mzee Hamadi: And if you agree with me, then do not say that the sea was bad. You are defending yourself that the sea was bad.

Mzee Juma: I am telling you this before I leave: you can have all the fishing gears you desire and still lack fishers who will use them. Do you understand me?

Hemedi: Then that means you have not planned because…

Mzee Hamadi: (Interjects) that is why we are saying we are not fishers, they are still better than us! We are not the same as them!

Figure 5: A photo of a section of traders and beggars that remained at the beach to wait for gill net fishers to either buy fish or solicit fish gifts during the SEM season. That day all ring net fishers returned from the sea empty-handed.

Photo credits: Victor Alati 13/09/2019.

By this time, everyone in the café was standing and arguing, except Musa Juma, a young ring net fisher of another fishing crew. Some fishers and traders had assembled to listen to the argument. Musa Juma sat on the bench, quietly sipping his black tea. A week later, I found him at

the beach scaling one fish he referred to as *togolo* weighing about 4 kgs his crew had distributed among themselves. His boat had landed about 250kgs of four different species of fish, most of which were red snappers, each weighing about 5kgs. Traders and beggars stood on the wet beach sand, which the ebbing of the low spring tide had exposed, hesitating to approach the boat. I asked one porter why the people were afraid of approaching the boat. He told me it was because the species of fish the fishers had landed were too expensive for an ordinary fish trader to afford. Musa Juma told me they came with many species of fish to prove the naysayers wrong.

Mzee Hamadi's point was that fishing skills varied and that fishers from Pemba, Tanzania, had more fishing skills than fishers in Gazi. For him, even within the same village, fishing skills differed. According to the nostalgic basket trap fisher, in the past, when he used to fish with Mzee Juma using the ring net fishing gear, they used to land high fish catches while the other fishing crew stared at them awestruck:

> … every time he (*a rival crew*) released his net into the water to catch fish, he missed. "Oh, my God! These fish are killing us!" Our crew leader (Mzee Juma) used to say, "Increase the speed." He used to pursue them and we could always catch the fish. They used to look at us like this… (Holds his cheeks and stares at a Hemedi's face to show how they always left their rival crew spellbound). Like this (demonstrates), their eyes used to bulge out while we pulled the fish and packed them into our boat. When he (*the rival crew*) tries to catch them, he misses. Why? Because he did not have the skills – the know-how of catching fish. He used to 'attack' them from their tail. The fish used to escape whenever they did that. Our leader used to tell us, "Let us go after them (*the fish*). Go there! There!" When we arrive at their location, we used to just release the net and immediately start pulling the *senga*." They used to stare at us while we pull the fish onto our boats and fill the two boats, with this man, Mzee Juma.
>
> Words in parenthesis are my own, for clarification.

According to Ingold, the skills and sensory perception of an individual varies since it is cultivated through training and repeated practice and involvement with each other and with the environment in people's day-to-day social life (2000: 283-5). I suggest, therefore, that fishing

knowledge is cultivated through a combination of training and practice, as we saw in Chapter 3. I argue successful fishers depend on their possession of sensitive skills of perception and action. These skills are developed through their continuous engagement with other persons and the environment (Ingold, 2000: 289). Mzee Juma's assertion that 'you can have all the fishing gear you desire and still lack fishers who will use them' shows the significance of skills of perception and action towards the fisher. It also shows the difference in fishing skills amongst fishers. Here, the purpose of fishing equipment such as nets and diving gear is not to control the fisher but to reveal the skills of perception and action he possesses (Ingold, 2000: 290). Uncertainties about fish caught in this village elicited considerable anxiety. These anxieties were displayed in heated conversations about what fishing skills constituted. Even though the people were worried and concerned about the ability of local fishers to land fish, there was a consensus that migrant fishers were useful for the village's economy and food security. Therefore, discussions at the beach among those who waited for fish and could not see what fishers were doing in the sea reveal fishing skills depend not only on the ability of the fisher to use his sensory skills to sense the presence of fish, but importantly, to catch them every day and bring them to the landing site as Mzee Hamadi and Juma used to do in the past. Mzee Hamadi and Mzee Juma believed that their rival crew lacked these skills – the reason the rival crew were unable to catch fish they had laid their eyes on and stared awestruck as Mzee Juma's crew caught plenty of fish.

Why did migrant fishers still land high fish catches when their fellow counterparts failed? Hemedi gave me four reasons after Mzee Hamadi and Juma had left. First, migrant fishers had more scuba diving gear than resident fishers did. Consequently, they could secure a shoal of fish as fast as possible and prevent fish from escaping from the net. Second, migrant fishers normally arrive during the high fishing season when the weather is conducive for fishing and the water is

calm, clear and has the right temperature for fish species to shoal. He said, “The onset of the NEM is when both the time migratory fish species and migrant fishers start to arrive.” A week later, I met Hemedi as fishers of his boat landed fish. He was exuberant. The NEM season had begun. He told me that for the past week, local fishers had returned with high fish catches. “Mzee Hamadi is just a basket fisher. He does not know what goes on in there (pointing at the sea outside the bay). I told you fishing is seasonal. When the right time comes, fish must shoal. That’s why they call it the high fishing season!” He dismissed Mzee Hamadi as an inexperienced fisher who did not know what went on beyond the horizon because he conducts his fishing activities mostly within the bay. For him, if migrant fishers would be fishing in Gazi throughout the year, especially during the SEM season, they would be going through similar tribulations that resident fishers go through every day, “because you cannot see anything *during the SEM season* while catching fish, you must first see them…” Third, migrant fishers are used to fishing compared with their counterparts in Gazi. A few months earlier, Mzee Mohammed, another retired fisher, had told me that migrant fishers are healthier than residents because they do not add salt and lemon to their fish when it is being cooked, which reduces an individual’s energy. Rather, migrants only boil fish and take it as soup, which is the why they are consistently healthy. He said, “They are healthy and do not feel cold, never. That is why you see them all the time in the water fishing.” Fourth, and last, migrant fishers go the extra mile to search for any other fish species they can find, even if it is coral reef fish species. These fish cater for their fuel costs and ensure they do not return from the sea empty-handed. This is why Hemedi was keen to stress that:

> In Pemba, fishing is the primary activity. That is what they do. They often ask themselves, “what should we do or what method should we use?” In short, they are intelligent fishers. When they find fish somewhere, they think without hesitating, “What will we do to get this fish?” They think of innovative ways and say, “this fish is of this species, we should do this and that,” and they catch it. If there are a few people in the boat, they look for others to assist them.

Achille Mbembe (2000) argues that in Africa, “one of the basic things at the heart of uncertainty is that it forces people to think in new ways about what acting effectively means.” For people to manoeuvre ambiguities and challenges in a time of uncertainty means that they have to build up a system of intelligibility to which they can refer to and explain the causes and effects of various phenomena (Mbembe, 2000). Therefore, these peoples’ relentless determination to negotiate conditions of uncertainty and to introduce predictability into their lives characterise their daily lives (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004). This is the case for migrant fishers, according to Hemedi. Here, skilled fishers have created a mutualism with the environment that they utilise to get fish (Ingold, 2000). Because fishing is what migrant fishers do best, when they find fish at sea and cannot catch them, they do not give up easily and let them go. They continuously think of innovative ways of catching fish or catching more fish and act, even if it forces them to request extra human resources. They learn to fish early in their lives and make fishing their core business. This distinguishes migrant fishers from local fishers.

As Mzee Abdallah told me about migrants one day during an interview, “Fishing changes every day. People fish but later they ask themselves, what should we do with fish? What innovative gear can we make so that we can catch more fish? Then people change the fishing gear and continue fishing.” For him, “We achieve this through consultation and cooperation among many fishers and not individually.” Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call this process of innovation “intuition in action,” which includes the listening and acting that goes on when the maker works with the material (Ingold, 2011). He draws on all the senses he can: to watch, listen, touch, smell, and taste (Ingold, 2011). His skill ultimately lies in his ability to go where the material goes and bends it according to its evolving purpose (Ingold, 2010).

As we have seen earlier, for the residents who wait for fish at the beach, fishers reveal their fishing skills at the beach. Fishers who return every day without fail with a high fish catch that comprise a high diversity of fish species are more skilled than those who land low catches or a low diversity of fish species. However, according to Hemedi, a fisher cannot land fish every day in a time of uncertainty. Whenever fishers return from the sea empty-handed, it does not mean that they are not skilled, rather, failure should be regarded as part of their daily work. In other words, an individual should view it as normal when he does not catch fish, as it is normal when they catch fish. For him, in the past, when Mzee Hamadi and Mzee Juma used to fish, there were plenty of fish in the ocean and seasonal migratory fish used to shoal inside the bay. Fishing has changed tremendously since then, as I have explained at the beginning of this chapter. About four months earlier, before the heated discussion took place, one fisher told me, "This bay used to have a lot of fish. When fishers used to plan to go far into the sea, they used to come here to fish (points to the middle of the bay) and we used to say that they have gone to deeper waters 'offshore' to fish." In the past, fishers used to go out to sea, land high fish catches and give everyone at the beach fish gifts for their consumption. As I shall discuss in chapter 6, according to Mzee Maza, "This changed about two or 3 years ago when people began selling the free fish they received to get by." Presently, people complain a lot about the reduction in fish catches to the present levels, which is especially prevalent during the SEM season. As the SEM season approaches its end, the people who wait for fishers at the beach prepare for arrival of migrant fishers and discuss the species of fish migrants will catch when they arrive during the NEM season.

The persistence of the traders and community members I spoke to at the beach to return to the landing site every day to wait for hours for fishers to return with fish was because they believed fish were inexhaustible in the sea. For them, Gazi only lacked fishers with the

wherewithal to catch fish. Mzee Abdallah assured me one day during the SEM season no one could say that fish are overexploited or have become locally extinct. He said, "They have just left until sometime later when they will return," to imply that they are seasonal. He continued, "Fish do not get exhausted in the sea. They always come and go with seasons …" The same arguments appeared frequently in discussions among fish traders and local community members at the beach or in the village. According to the people, fishers never cared to save the money they received from the sale of fish in a day. They spent all the money thinking that they will catch more fish the following day. Some traders said that fishers were fools who do not have a plan for their lives as many traders like them do because no one knows about tomorrow. Abbas once told me, "Fishers know how to look for money, but they also know how to use it." Lucht (2012) made similar observations in his study in Ghana. He observed that fishers had a rowdy lifestyle and spent all the money they got from the sea thinking that there will be another catch the following day. Mzee Juma reiterated the same aspect one day when he told me that fish stocks can never get exhausted the way fisheries managers and scientists keep telling them. "…When fish disappear, they (managers and scientists) tell you that fish stocks have declined, not knowing that they migrate seasonally…" In such an environment of uncertainty, this kind of hope was a source of material security.

As Hassani consoled himself at the beginning of this chapter when Hamisi, the owner of Ramah's boat, called Ramah and confirmed that rumours about Ramah's crew catching about 2 tons of Indian Mackerel were not true. He said, "We thank God as Gazi that even though we do not have good fishing grounds, our ocean is a migration corridor for various fish species." Therefore, the not-yet conscious knowledge of future possibilities residents possess lies in the fact that fishers of Gazi fishing village, migrant fishers inclusive, mostly target migratory fish,

which are inexhaustible. In this village, uncertainties about resident fishers returning with fish could have been revealed in the plethora of rumours that circulated freely in the village. However, there are different, conflicting rumours such as those claiming that migrant fishers use witchcraft to catch more fish (see chapter 4). Others claim that migrant fishers go to an extent of agreeing to "give" or "feed" fellow fishers to blood-thirsty spirits (Ciekawy, 1999) in exchange for the ability to get high fish catches which cannot be achieved through normal means, get wealthy and earn fame as Mzee Imara told me. These conflicting rumours may have concurrently emphasised the sense of ambiguity, uncertainty, and anxiety about the fishing skills of migrant fishers.

In this chapter, I have shown that rumours about fish catches increased as fish became unpredictable, particularly during the SEM season. Shibutani (1966) argues that a rumour is a form of collective problem-solving which develops as individuals "caught together in an ambiguous situation" attempt to interpret it from their perspective. It crystallises as people 'entertain and pass on' reports that allow them to reveal the anxieties they are usually reluctant to acknowledge (Shibutani, 1966). White (2000: 30) also argues that people "construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most forcibly get their points across." I argue that the rumours that circulated freely in Gazi were ambiguous sources of "news" that were "poised between an explanation and an assertion" and revealed residents' concerns (Stewart and Strathern, 2004). They showed how residents contribute to the spread of rumours in the face of uncertainties (Willis and Chome, 2014) by gathering and sharing information and making sense of inconceivable and indeterminate events (Osborn, 2008). As such, the rumours that circulated in this fishing village were a quest for truth as well as a method of fabricating it (White, 2000; Stewart and Strathern, 2004), hence, allowing the residents to express their fears (Scheper-

Hughes, 2000). Sometimes, they were understood or acted on as if they were facts (Osborn, 2008). Therefore, the circulation of rumours was not only a deflection of blame but a way for the people to direct analytical attention towards ambivalence and anxieties (Dahl, 2012) that also expressed speculation about fish catches.

Rumours circulating in the village revealed the ontological insecurity of residents, reflecting everyday threats to their well-being (Scheper-Hughes, 2000). As Dingley (2022) argues, rumours in this part of the Southern Coast of Kenya are particularly important during periods of intensified dependence on the redistributive capacities of patrons, such as drought. Adam Ashforth documents rumours of bloodsuckers roaming around villages and sucking African blood for sale to foreign Whites for the benefit of local elites among the people that gathered at a borehole in rural Malawi. For Ashforth (2014), the people were not, unbeknownst to themselves, speaking of their "marginalisation within the global order or reflecting on the ironies of dependence on the largesse of outsiders for survival." Moreover, they were not speaking in metaphors about social structures or global systems. Like the people that gathered at a borehole in rural Malawi (Ashforth, 2014), those that gathered at the beach to wait for fishers in Gazi village were talking about (in)security, which includes the dangers, doubts, and fears that affected their lives and the evils that plagued their loved ones. The rumours of Gazi go beyond the mere contribution of fish production to include the position, worldview, and ambitions of African rural peoples (Allegretti, 2022). Therefore, to take the people of Gazi "seriously", as Dingley (2022) argues, is to analyse their history in the form and content of these dangers, doubts and fears. This history, as Dingley (2022: 148) goes on to say, is that of 'extraversion' in which the area's 'marginalisation within the global order has been inextricably bound up for

centuries with the dependence of residents for survival on the "largesse of a rotating cast of outsiders" (Ashforth, 2014: 846).

In Gazi, the uncertain ambiguity of rumours among my interlocutors reinforced the exceptional fishing skills of migrant fishers, but also illustrated their insecurities (Fontein, 2009). Consequently, during periods of heightened vulnerability, for example, during the SEM season when migrants were away, residents perceived migrants as the only skilled fishers whom they could depend on for survival. I expound further on this in the next chapter, where I shall show how the overdependence of residents on fish gifts, particularly from migrants, leads to what I shall refer to as the 'forced' gift.

Chapter 6: 'Forced' giving: the constant struggle for fish gifts

One afternoon in mid-January 2020, at around 1300 hours, Ramah's daytime ring net crew landed about 500 kgs of tuna. As their wooden-plank boat made its way towards the shore, the crowd that had been eagerly waiting for hours surged towards it. The crowd consisted mostly of beggars who solicit fish gifts from fishers for food and fish traders who buy fish for sale. They waded knee-deep into the low spring tide waters that had begun to flood. Some of them boarded the boat even before the captain had docked it. As soon as the captain docked the boat, porters began to offload and transport the catches in palm leaf baskets to the fish *banda* for weighing and subsequent selling. Chaos erupted as crowds of people jostled for fish around the boat and at the fish *banda*. Fishers stood strategically along the way to protect the fish from being stolen. Nonetheless, the people at the beach watched as young men forcefully took fish from the baskets and walked away smiling, and bragging to their friends and onlookers how they got a lot of free fish easily.

One incident caught the attention of everyone. Rashidi, a young man in his twenties, tried to take fish from one of the open baskets that were being transported by porters. Hamisi, one of the fishers who were tasked to protect the fish from being stolen, held his hand and violently knocked it away. Rashidi claimed he had tried in vain to humbly solicit fish gifts from Hamisi and two other fishers making him turn to violence out of desperation. The bystanders nearby watched as the two young men quarrelled for about 5 minutes, and then out of anger, Rashidi threatened to beat Hamisi up. Everyone burst into laughter since Rashidi looked weaker than Hamisi. Finally, two older men volunteered to pull them apart before things could turn ugly.

Gifts are given to people on call and demand or humbly solicited from givers for help and need (Sahlins, 1972: 186).[71] As Mauss (1954) points out, generosity is an obligation because the recipient possesses some kind of right of property over anything that belongs to the donor.[72] It is collectivities and not individuals that impose these obligations to society, which, while voluntary in theory, are strictly compulsory (Mauss, 2002). These obligations to society, as Mauss (1954) argues, are grounded in the recognition that there is an obligation to give, an obligation to receive, and an obligation to reciprocate.

In some parts of Kenya, since gift-giving is generally seen as a morally approved behaviour, the refusal to engage in the gift-giving practice in a non-Maussian form runs the risk of positioning an individual outside social life (Neumark, 2017) and is a sign of avarice, bad manners, and carries the risk of attracting misfortune (De Sardan, 1999). Thus, while anthropologists emphasise how the circulation of gifts creates relationships between people and integrates society (Gregory, 1982; Godelier, 1999),[73] Strathern (1988: 191) argues that gifts can also "quite crucially sever and detach people from people." The qualities required and enhanced by gift-giving such as other orientation, kindness and creativity are made difficult and even self-sacrificial by scarcity as a result of the exchange economy (Vaughan, 1997: 15). As Melchiori (2007: 321) points out, some are, therefore, at risk of having their values stolen and their rights are taken away through what she refers to as the 'forced' gift economy. With this in mind, I want

[71] Giving is out of generosity. The material advantage is on those of equal social and economic status, especially those on the subordinate side (Sahlins, 1972: 188).

[72] A power is present in the gift of the personality of the giver that compels gifts to be passed around, to be given, and returned (Mauss, 2002).

[73] The Maussian gift transforms into a debt because when the recipient recognises the gift, she/he feels obliged to make a return, hence maintains social relationships (Venkatesan, 2011) as people help their network of friends, kin, neighbors and those they are linked to through extensive personal experience in various ways (Carrier, 1995).

to explore here whether fishers are obligated to give fish gifts to beggars who gather at the shore every morning and whether beggars are obligated to receive fish gifts from fishers.

The 'forced' gift economy I shall explore in this chapter concerns how people become entrapped in the ritual behaviour of everyday gift-giving which is often characterised by a certain degree of forced involvement. Gift-giving begins easily, but as demand pressures, the practice becomes ritualised and an ambivalence attaches to this ritual, which is sedimented in the gift (Sherry et al., 1993). Hence, it is related to the disposition of the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) as we shall see later. It repeatedly turns into a contest or even an ordeal when the giver is forced into the role, ultimately causing resentment and disagreement (Sherry et al., 1993). As Carol Rose (1992) describes it, 'forced' giving is involuntary because the 'gift' is taken without the consent of the 'giver' or her/his informed consent. Therefore, it can also be described as "larceny," as Rose (1992) calls it, the unilateral but nonconsensual transfer.[74] Larcenies occur at the will of the taker; therefore, they are imposed on the 'giver' by force or fraud. The motives of larcenies include "give me" and the wish to display dominance (1992: 298).

In what follows, I explore the practice of gift-giving and soliciting fish gifts, which is an integral part of the everyday life of the people at Gazi and which demonstrates the anxieties, ambivalence and tensions that surround this practice. I shall show that it is common for fishers to distribute a portion of their catch on days when they are successful at sea among the large crowds of relatives, neighbours, friends, lovers, and children that gather every day on the shore. When fishers land fish, crowds of people jostle around the boat, along the way, as it is transported to the fish *banda* by porters and at the *banda* to solicit fish gifts. I classify the people who gather at the shore every day into two major categories: fish traders who purchase fish for

[74] Larcenies include the coarse armed robber, the stealthy thief, the sneaky embezzler e.t.c. (Rose, 1992).

sale and beggars who solicit free fish from fishers for their family's meals. I shall centre my discussion on beggars comprising friends, relatives, and neighbours of fishers who solicit fish gifts for the day's meal for their families, especially from fishers such as ring net fishers who usually land high fish catches. They also beg fish gifts from fishers using other fishing gear such as hand line and gill net fishers whenever these fishers land high fish catches or whenever ring net fishers have landed low catches or have returned empty-handed. Fishers who did not go to the sea or those who returned empty-handed or landed low catches also temporarily transform into beggars when they solicit fish gifts from successful fishers. Beggars also include children who, during school holidays, solicit free fish from fishers.

Fishers mostly give fish gifts to beggars on call and demand for the day's meal, but amongst beggars, there are those like Rashidi who often steal fish or force fishers who deny them fish to give them free fish. This constitutes the 'forced' giving category. Therefore, I will show below that giving fish gifts to crowds at the shore is a historical practice in this village. However, the uncertainty of catches from the nearshore waters because of overfishing, an increase in the number of fishers, destructive fishing gear, loss of habitats, and climate change, among other threats to marine fish species has affected beggars who find it increasingly difficult to obtain fish gifts as people gather every day at the landing site. In addition, changes in seasons exacerbate this insecurity. During the NEM season, which occurs between November and April, fishers usually land high fish catches since the sea is typically calm and fishers can access migratory fish species.[75] During the SEM season, which occurs between April and October, fishers frequently return from the sea empty-handed and occasionally do not go to the sea as a result of rough seas, heavy rainfall and strong winds that make fishing almost impossible. During this season, only

[75] At the beginning of this season, more experienced migrant fishers from Tanzania arrive to camp and fish in Gazi and leave at the end of the season, which is referred to as *kwenda ago* (See also chapter 1).

resident fishers, who are considered inexperienced by community members go to the sea as migrant fishers are only present during the NEM season as we have seen before. Therefore, a deep sense of anxiety and ambivalence surrounds this practice.

Even though anthropologists have established that social relations can sometimes alleviate this anxiety and ambivalence in coastal Kenya, these social relations provide no guarantee and may create further uncertainties (Cooper and Pratten, 2015). For beggars, ambivalence surrounding receiving fish gifts gives rise to anxieties manifested in fears of returning empty-handed to families at risk of going hungry for lack of the day's meal. This is because of the high levels of dependence on fish, which is a daily source of protein for residents of this fishing village. In most cases, whenever a low catch is landed or whenever fishers return empty-handed, many beggars do not receive fish gifts and return home empty-handed, which negatively affects food security in the village. In his study, for instance, Gilbertson (2015) argues that food is seen as an 'idiom' of domestic conflict and power among the poor of coastal Kenya (Gilbertson, 2015; 94). Here, I show that in a coastal village like Gazi, there are high levels of dependence on fish, with many households being food insecure. Therefore, failures, disagreements and misunderstandings concerning the threat of hunger and food among the people of this village initiate or exacerbate experiences of conflict, including physical and emotional abuse, mistrust and a sense of uncertainty about the future (Gilbertson, 2015).

Building on Mauss (1954), I shall begin by briefly tracing the origin and driving force behind the voluntary nature of gift-giving and receiving of fish gifts in this village. I shall explore how the practice began, how the youth inherited the behaviour from their parents and how it metamorphosed into a ritual, which I shall refer to as getting 'drunk'. I shall then explore the blessings economy. Here, I shall discuss how, through the practice of gift-giving, one

receives more and the fact that gift-giving is a social insurance against adversity. I shall explore in the third section how, even though fishers who deny beggars fish gifts are perceived to lose blessings from God, some fishers use the market-based economy to justify their actions. I shall argue that the gift-giving practice persists because it is a ritual as well as a social insurance against adversity. Finally, I shall explore the strictly compulsory nature of gift-giving that brings pain and suffering to fishers, which I shall refer to as 'forced' giving. Here, I shall explore how the ritual of gift-giving and uncertainties in fish catches have led residents to increasingly force fishers to give them fish gifts to make a living and get food. I shall show that a 'forced' gift is not a gift, but rather an act of larceny.

6.1 Getting 'drunk'

I begin this section inspired by the confrontation between Rashidi and Hamisi at the beginning of this chapter. When I began my fieldwork in this village, I often observed that many energetic youths went every day to the shore to wait for fishers to return and give them fish gifts. This forced me to ask myself two questions: Why do energetic youths who can also fish, only wait at the shore to solicit free fish from hardworking fishers? When and how did this practice begin? When I asked Musa these questions one day towards the end of my fieldwork, he revealed to me that the Arabs pampered Gazi residents into laziness during pre-colonial times when they continuously depended on the Arabs for gifts. In his perspective, "the Arabs never wanted us to develop. When they noticed you were knowledgeable, they made sure they gave you a lot of money and comfort to forget your problems. They made you to feel comfortable. By the time you become conscious, things would have already changed."[76] He stressed that as locals

[76] Mzee Maza told me that the village started during slavery when slaves were transported to Saudi Arabia. The Arabs had established their administration headquarters in the village.

'enjoyed' their economic situation, the Arabs continued to enrich themselves. "If you take beer, he will tell you 'Take two bottles of beer my friend'," he said and continued, "He develops while you continue taking beer." As Musa pointed out, this behaviour of laziness and overdependence amongst the local people persisted even after the British expelled the Arabs and Kenya gained her independence since it was already inculcated into them by the Arabs. They passed the behaviour down through generations as youths born after the colonial era 'inherited' it from their parents. "It is their parents that got drunk," he said and continued, "When the youths were born, they inherited the same behaviour."

Musa's opinion is in line with what anthropologists have observed about the culture of gift-giving and receiving along the Kenyan coast. They have observed that this behaviour dates back to pre-colonial times. During slavery, slaves worked daily in plantations owned by Arabs and in other occupations such as fishing and as artisans while depending on their masters, the Arabs, for food and clothing (Cooper, 1977; Curtin, 1983). As I have explained in Chapter 2, slavery continued to exist legally in Kenya until 1907, even though Britain had abolished their slave trade in 1833. Although the British outlawed the legal status of slavery in 1907, emancipation changed little in the lives of the slaves along the Kenyan coast (Curtin, 1983; Cooper, 1980). The slave community regretted its freedom (Cooper, 1980). Even though some of them faced hard times and slipped deeper into poverty, were uneducated and rarely looked for jobs (Curtin, 1982), they depended on the generosity of their more prosperous kin or remained with their masters or depended on alms from former masters during important holidays and in times of old age and crisis such as illness or death (Cooper, 1977; Curtin, 1983). In other words, generosity was part of the general sense of hierarchy (master/superior-slave/inferior

relationships) where the rich gave alms to the poor with such ties showing respect and slaves benefited as part of a group and not as individuals (Cooper, 1977).

Omari, the captain of the Baraka Tele daytime ring net crew in his early 30s, told me how the gift-giving practice in Gazi village has developed. According to him, it is no longer voluntary, but a ritual, therefore, obligatory. “I give, not because it comes from my heart, but because it is the practice that I found going on at the landing site,” he said. In his view, presently, if a beggar asks for a fish gift from him because he did not eat the day before, he would not hesitate to give him three tunas for free. The beggar will then sell two of the tunas, buy maize flour and take one for his family’s evening meal. Ramah, the captain of another daytime ring net captain, disagrees with Omari’s view. He told me he gives out fish gifts voluntarily from his heart. I will return to his argument in the last section. When I asked Ramah about the origin of gift-giving and begging in Gazi village, he said: “It doesn’t have a beginning; no one knows its origin.” According to Ramah, “Its history can be likened to the chicken or the egg causality dilemma, whichever one came first.” He told me that since the practice already existed by the time many youths like him were born, it would be difficult to eradicate it. From his perspective, since the practice of gift-giving and receiving already existed at the time his grandfather and his age mates were growing up, it has become part of the everyday lives of the residents of the village.

The two separate arguments about the development of the practice to date – Musa’s on the role of Arabs in the gift-giving practice and Omari’s and Ramah’s on gift-giving because it is the practice they found going on at the landing site – relate to the theory of practice, learned knowledge. This implies that knowledge is constructed and not passively recorded and that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions – the *habitus*,

which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990: 52). The basis of the generous action is the disposition of the *habitus*, which is acquired by being deliberately taught or through early and prolonged exposure to social worlds in which it is alleged to be the undisputed law of behaviour (Bourdieu, 1997: 233).[77] Even though Musa told me that youths born after the colonial era 'inherited' the behaviour from their parents, I argue that everyday giving and receiving of fish gifts is historical and that the *habitus* cannot be transmitted from person-to-person or 'inherited', rather, they are regrown into the individual's body through training and experience (Ingold, 2000: 5). During school holidays, children carry plastic buckets and join other residents at the shore to wait for fishers to return to beg fish from them. I overheard frequently, while traders and beggars were waiting for fish at the shore how children are more likely to be given fish gifts by fishers than older people. More than one child from one family solicits fish gifts from the boats to increase the chances of the family getting the day's meal and/or to increase the amount fish gifts received by the family. As they grow up, it becomes the cultivated disposition which is inscribed in the body schema and in the schemes of thought that enables each of them to engender all the practices consistent with the logic of challenge and riposte by means of countless inventions (Bourdieu, 1977: 15). According to Graeber (2011), this knowledge, that is learnt from other people is a debt, something that we could imagine paying back – to humanity, society, nature, or the cosmos – however one prefers to frame it. Although it cannot be repaid in full, this debt, according to Émile Durkheim's school of thought, in many ways reflects humans' interdependence for existence even though they may not be aware of how (Graeber, 2011). In this way, humans have a sense of moral obligation to

[77] See chapter 4.

others, therefore, selfishness among people would destroy the social fabric (Appelrouth and Edles, 2020).

In Gazi, gift-giving represents a fundamental part of the everyday life of the residents. It is part of an individual's duty to self and the community. I argue here that fishers are historically disposed to give to one another and that these behavioural practices in the Kenyan context, according to Mati (2020), are consistently shaped by sociocultural worldviews, faith, and socioeconomic conditions. As I will show later, gift-giving serves to maintain the people's standing within the community and risk sharing (Mati, 2020). Here, religion also plays an important role in the reproduction of *habitus* among children where the value of giving is inculcated in them in the *madrasas* with the hope that giving becomes a lifelong value in the lives of the young ones (Mati, 2020). I will also show later that faith-induced giving is always inclined towards giving, whereby those who have should give to those in need and that by giving one receives more.

I argue that, many beggars need help and when they solicit gifts, they give an impression of desperation. However, it is difficult to distinguish those who are genuine. This is because many of them use fish gifts as their only source of income and subsistence. I show, therefore, that the gift-giving ritual eventually emasculates people's independence and influences them to perceive their social identity as needy villagers as the only source of their subsistence (Carrier, 1995: 202). However, some of them are not genuine beggars. They merely give an impression of desperation to receive free fish from different fishers, which they ultimately sell.

Migrant fishers and some residents despise 'begging locals' and refer to them as youths who "do not work", "are lazy," "only want to depend on the sweat of others", "are difficult to

deal with", "do not listen" and "cannot change."[78] In addition, according to some migrants and locals, youths do not take full advantage of the fact that they live close to a productive sea, unlike youths in many other overfished habitats of the Kenyan coast. As pointed out by many people I talked to, Gazi youths only wait for migrant fishers from Pemba, Tanzania to camp and fish in 'their' waters and bring them fish gifts every day. Some youths are only interested in becoming porters so that they can eventually get part of the catch from the work of transporting fish from the boats to the fish *banda* or easily steal from fishers but are not interested in fishing. Musa, for instance, told me that there are over 200 local youths in Gazi village. Only about 10% of them are active fishers who only go out to the sea when they do not have money.[79] For Musa, when the youths get "a lot of money" on a good fishing day, they stop going to the sea until they finish the money they earned from the fishing trip. During an informal interview with Bilal, a resident and a gill net fisher in his early 30s, he told me that two painful questions make many hardworking people like him scratch their heads daily: 1) why do young men in Gazi lack the morale to fish? and 2) why do they only want to be given free things?

Ironically, Bilal had requested me a month earlier to join a crowd of about 40 people who had gathered around Kopa's catches to solicit fish gifts on behalf of two of his friends and himself.[80] That afternoon, Kopa's crew had landed about 400 kg of fish comprising mostly juvenile rabbit fishes and emperors.[81] The fish were packed in 50 kg plastic gunny bags. The fishers had placed the bags on the beach sand close to where they had docked their boat because

[78] Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008: 1350) also found similar observations on street children where plastic bag sellers looked down on the begging boys.
[79] As I have shown earlier, the number of migrant fishers was recently estimated to be higher (58%) than that of resident fishers (42%) (Wanyonyi et al., 2016b; Wanyonyi et al., 2021).

[80] Bilal and his friends had not gone to the sea to fish that day.
[81] This meant that the fishers had failed to catch coastal pelagic fishes which they mostly target and resorted to catching coral reef fishes to compensate for the cost of fuel spent, which was destructive to the marine environment.

the sizeable crowd had prevented the porters from transporting them to the fish *banda*. There was anxiety and uncertainty as beggars and fish traders jostled around the bags of fish. Although I initially objected to begging for fish from Kopa on their behalf, Bilal assured me he 'knew' Chengo, one of the captains of the boat, would deny them any fish gifts but would give them to me without hesitation because I was a government 'officer'. (I show later that it is popularly known that the crew of this boat deny people fish gifts at the shore). Chengo finally filled 'my bucket' with fish, after looking in a different direction every time I shouted his name making me to feel embarrassed after one senior man, Abdi, who had also come to solicit free fish shouted: "Yes! He is an officer! He has to be given fish! The man protects us! Even if I do not get any fish, the officer has to be given fish!"[82] Bilal, his 2 friends and Abdi then took the bucket from me and happily shared the fish amongst themselves. In another incident, one day when Kopa's crew did not go to sea because he was conducting regular maintenance of his boat, I saw him soliciting fish gifts from hand line fishers from Pemba who had gone fishing at night. When the captain of the boat finally handed him about 1 kg of fusiliers (*marongwe*), one trader joked: "Even boat captains are begging for fish!" Here, I show that it is ironic that many of those who strongly condemned the practice of soliciting fish gifts – especially fishers like Bilal and his two friends, Kopa and Musa – also practised it on days they returned empty-handed or whenever they failed to go to sea.

For an external observer, Gazi is a major fishing village with a ritualised routine of fishing. By keenly observing, however, one would easily discern that there are many beggars while there are only three daytime ring net fishing crews (belonging to captains Kopa, Ramah and Omari) that most of the population waiting at the shore every day rely on, especially during

[82] One captain told me they normally pretend to look away to protect the fish from being stolen.

the SEM season, for fish gifts.[83] These boats increase during the NEM season when migrant fishers arrive. Musa told me that when ring net fishers return from the sea empty-handed and in the absence of migrant fishers during the SEM season, most of the people who wait for them at the shore return to the village without fish. According to him, if this happens for only two or three consecutive days, food security, social relationships and economic development in the village are likely to be negatively affected. Therefore, here, I arrive at the answer to Bilal's questions above when he asked why a fishing village that relies heavily on fishing have so many youths who lack the morale to fish and who only wait at the shore every day to solicit free fish. As many residents told me, the reason is this: it is much easier and more profitable for youths to "fish on the shore" and make "easy" money than to struggle to fish during the day or spend the whole night at sea while risking their lives in a dangerous and uncertain sea.

Musa told me that most contemporary youth in Gazi are lazy. They are not interested in either learning how to fish or engaging in fishing activities, but are only interested in soliciting free fish. During an interview with Siraj, a retired beach seine fisher, he told me how youths in the village are lazy and do not want to go out to the sea to fish because they believe that they "own the sea." He said, "It is their behaviour. Therefore, I normally ask them, 'the sea is yours, but that person who goes out to fish spends his energy.' They normally reply, 'But he is using our resource!' I usually tell them, 'The resource is yours, make use of it'." I witnessed one early morning how migrant ring net fishers from Pemba I had accompanied to fish at night were stunned to see a large crowd that had gathered at the shore as we approached it. They claimed that the crowd consisted of more beggars than fish traders waiting to "take what they had not

[83] Fishers using other fishing gear such as handlines normally land low catches that they can only share with a small number of the crowds of beggars that wait at the beach everyday. In addition, they sometimes land fish of high commercial value and of big sizes which cannot be shared.

worked for." The migrant fishers described most of the young people in the crowds as lazy individuals who had no idea of what fishers go through while at sea. "They sleep comfortably in their beds while we suffer for the whole night fishing," one young fisher complained. "There is this notorious senior man called Imani who always makes sure that he gets a bucket of fish (*sardines*) from each of the nighttime ring net fishing boats every day and sells them…," another one said. "What about the children?" another one interjected and continued, "You will find more than one child from one family soliciting fish from the same fishing crew!" Therefore, while begging for fish gifts would appear normal and acceptable to an external observer, migrant fishers and some locals who do not engage in the practice like Mzee Hamadi, a resident basket trap fisher, saw it as low and embarrassing and that it did not conform to the value of being independent.[84] Mzee Hamadi told me one day that he detested being despised by people. He said, "If my son Furaha, a porter, volunteers to bring me a fish gift, it is okay. What I will never attempt to do is to solicit fish gifts from a fellow fisher." For him, he would rather survive on his meagre catches ranging between 2-10 kg per day at approximately KES 100 per kg than subject himself to humiliation and insult while soliciting free fish from fellow fishers. Here, while children have a responsibility of taking gifts to their parents, fishers like Mzee Hamadi who strongly condemned the practice still practised it indirectly. I show that there are two types of begging in this fishing village: ritualistic begging and needs-based begging. In the case of Mzee Hamadi and other residents, begging is more ritualistic than needs-based. In both cases, it can be a mortifying and humiliating experience, as I will show below.

I witnessed one day as Mzee Mohammed and Mzee Abdi were treated with contempt and insulted by fishers of the Baraka Tele ring net crew before they were finally given two fishes

[84] See Kaime-Atterhög and Ahlberg (2008) for similar observations on street children in Kenya.

each of a low-value fish species they referred to as *mkonge* (plural *mikonge*) weighing about 1 kg.[85] That day, the Baraka Tele crew were the first to return from the sea. I found out from one of the fishers of the crew that they had landed about 100 kg of fish. This led to uncertainty and anxiety at the shore as people jostled to receive free fish. Even though there were still two more daytime ring net fishing crew at sea, rumour had it they had caught nothing and that they were likely to return empty-handed. There was palpable tension that many traders and beggars would return home without fish. "You must be happy now that you have eventually been given fish," I told Mzee Mohammed. Seawater was dripping from his drenched clothes. I realised he was instead angry. "After a long struggle," He replied and continued, "After being insulted. After being told that if I want free food, I should go look for or cultivate spinach. Although I need the fish, we felt humiliated and worthless before people."

Figure 6: A photo of beggars and traders scrambling for a share of the catch from daytime ring net fisheries while fish is being offloaded from the boat by porters.

Photo credits: Victor Alati 23/11/2019.

I suggest that the uncertainty of securing fish gifts is particularly damaging for beggars like Mzee Mohammed, who depend on fish gifts for survival. Such experiences, however, do not

[85] The common name of this fish species is Dorab wolf-herring – mostly used as bait in handline fishing.

discourage beggars like him from continuing to beg for free fish from fishers. They ride on the fact that the obligation to share is deeply felt by many (Walsh, 2003). They believe fishers would feel uncomfortable if they do not share fish catches with the people at the beach because good fortune is always assured when they do so, as I will discuss shortly. Mzee Mohammed told me one day that he regularly receives fish gifts from fishers because he was once a fisher; therefore, he is a respected man. I heard fishers repeatedly claiming that he deserves to receive fish gifts because he is a good old man who quarrels with no one.

I saw him sell the *mikonge* he received from fishers to a female trader for KES 100 a few minutes later.[86] When I asked him why he sold the fish gifts while there was the uncertainty of the other fishers returning with fish, he replied, "I am sure they have caught fish." "And if they come back without?" I asked. "It will be God's will," he replied. They all returned empty-handed. Here, ambivalence surrounds the receiving of fish gifts with beggars having to wait for hours for fishers to return. Mzee Mohammed told me that when fishers of the first night-time fishing boat return from the sea early in the morning and arrive empty-handed, he usually has no choice but to wait for the remaining boats. When they all return empty-handed, he has to wait for another 5 – 6 hours, since daytime ring net fishers usually begin returning from the sea at around midday. According to him, whenever daytime ring net fishing boats also return without fish, his family has to go hungry. He said, "It is that way, my friend. It is God's will." On the way back to the village with a group of fishers that afternoon, I heard them vowing that they will never give away fish gifts to residents again since when fish gifts are heartfelt, bestowed upon beggars spontaneously, many of them sell them and still go back to demand for more.

[86] On a typical day when fishers have landed a high catch he would have sold them at a lower price.

In an interview with Mzee Maza, on the veranda of his house one afternoon, he told me that the giving of fish gifts in Gazi started many decades ago when fishers used to land high fish catches. Throughout that time, there were plenty of fish stocks in the inshore waters. According to him, it is the contemporary young men who started selling fish gifts to make money in 2018 due to the uncertainty in the ocean as a result of overfishing, among other threats, that led to a reduction in fish catches inshore. The young men made friendship ties with migrant ring net fishers who came for *ago* every NEM season to camp and fish in Gazi. Whenever the migrant fishers were around, they offered fish gifts to their friends, who were their hosts: "Come, my friend, I give you some fish." The youths, however, capitalised on this friendship and started selling the fish gifts and then it became a habit. He said, "During our time, once you received your fish gift, you would have to take it home for it to be cooked. There was nothing like selling fish gifts. Who would buy them while everyone else was getting free fish?" I argue, therefore, that gift-giving has overtaken and made the logic of the market economy invisible (Vaughan, 2007). Gift-giving continues to permeate everyday life at Gazi.

6.2 The blessings economy

Thierry Kochuyt's "God, Gifts and Poor People: On Charity in Islam" refers to the Quran pointing out that it is Allah in person who provides people with their means of existence (2009).[87] Kochuyt (2009) argues that in the Islamic faith, all that humans have and earn is given by God so that they can make a living, therefore, believers being agents of God on earth, have to be generous towards others who are entitled to gifts, just as God is generous towards them. John Middleton's "The World of the Swahili" emphasises that among the Swahili of the East African

[87] Islam is the religion practiced by the majority of people in Gazi.

coast, while reputation and honour are conferred by the living unto men, a man is not worthy of it unless God has willed that his character merits approval (1992: 194). Middleton stresses that, among the Swahili, when a man behaves with courtesy, sensitivity, and goodness toward someone else, he gains reputation and honour and bestows it to the person addressed, who, by responding seemingly and graciously, in turn, affirms his reputation and emphasises its possession by the original giver. Blessings or an increase in fortune and grace are then bestowed directly by God on the individual, which is realised by the material or miraculous actions upon whom He has bestowed them (Middleton, 1992: 194). In coastal Kenya, therefore, by giving alms Muslims are assured of heavenly salvation or God's blessing (*baraka*) (McIntosh, 2009: 95). According to McIntosh (2009: 95), the council of Imams continually press members of the community to "open their pockets to others" to be rewarded eternity.

In Gazi, giving fish gifts to beggars is an important way people use to judge the social character of fishers. Good boat captains or fishers are those who give fish free of charge to the people that gather at the landing site without selectively choosing whom to give to. Residents cherish and openly praise them. Whenever they land high fish catches, their boats often attract sizeable crowds of people who are often assured of getting fish gifts. If a boat captain or a fisher refuses to share his fish catches with the people that gather at the shore, this exposes him to the reproach of being mean. People would gossip about his character in the village. When he lands high catches at the beach, many of those waiting at the shore would hesitate to gather around his boat because their chances of getting fish gifts would be almost nil. Nonetheless, youths will probably take fish from their boat or baskets by force, as I will discuss later. Therefore, phrases referring to fishers such as "They are good/mean people," "We love/dislike them," "They do not choose whom to give to," "They are better givers than the others," "May God bless them," "God

always blesses them because they give," often circulate freely in Gazi. As we will see shortly, such spoken blessings are a powerful mobilising force in the political economy of a fishing village (Diggins, 2018). It is important to note, however, that although fishers give away fish gifts to beggars expecting to receive blessings from God to catch more fish in the future because of their benevolent acts, fishers who are considered 'mean' also commonly catch fish. Indeed, I witnessed numerous instances of days when the so-called 'mean' fishers landed high fish catches while 'good' fishers returned from the sea empty-handed. On such days, the people who gather at the shore are rarely excited because free fish does not easily circulate in the village. They resemble those days when all fishers frequently return empty-handed especially during the SEM season since it is rare to sense the smell of cooked fish in the village that often lingers in the air for a long time whenever 'good' fishers are successful.[88] My interlocutors, however, often reminded me that when a 'good' fisher does not catch fish, he is unlucky (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on the definition of luck in fishing).

Jennifer Diggins had similar observations during her fieldwork in the frontier town of Tissana in coastal Sierra Leone in which, like in Gazi, fish forms the basis of almost every person's livelihood. She observed that fishers often distribute a large proportion of their catches as gifts among the people who gather to meet them on the shore on days when they are successful at sea (Diggins, 2018). In Tissana, the fishers do this not to nurture social ties with receivers, nor to promote a positive reputation for themselves in the community, but to accumulate spoken blessings. These spoken blessings carry weight and material exchange value and are an important force in mobilising the political economy of the frontier town (Diggins, 2018: 176-178). I show that a similar multidirectional blessings economy circulates freely in

[88] During the SEM, fish catches are normally low.

Gazi village, where spoken blessings are held to be extremely powerful. In defining a needs-based type of begging, Musa told me that when a beggar is confronted with the hardships of getting food and is genuinely seeking help to overcome these challenges, the fisher who gives the beggar a fish gift accumulates blessings. “You do not know whether she/he might have money,” he told me. Although giving is a way of life for many Kenyans and, therefore, widespread and ubiquitous in Kenya (Mati, 2020), anthropologists have established that the challenges that merit asking for gifts include among others those related to health care, education, poverty, production of family farms, economic empowerment, and consumption and in response to crises and emergencies (Kusimba et al. 2015, 2016). This is in line with Sahlins (1972: 186), who argues that people should only humbly solicit gifts when they actually need help. In Gazi, however, this is not usually the case, as we have seen in the last section: begging is more ritualistic than needs-based.

According to Musa, when an individual occasionally visits the shore, the fishers are likely to say, “We have not seen that senior man at the shore for such a long time. Take 3 kg of fish and give them to him.” The senior man would then say, “Alhamdulillah. Those fishers have faith. God, please fill them with your grace whenever they go to the sea.” When he receives the fish gift and says this kind of prayer: “Thank you, God. Bless these people and their livelihood to multiply.” God acknowledges this kind of prayer. Therefore, in the case of a need-based type of begging, according to Musa, if a beggar asks for a fish gift to remove his shame and the giver believes him and gives it to him, God blesses the giver with a high fish catch because she/he has shown love to the other person. In such an uncertain economy, fishers invest considerably in earning spoken blessings from fellow residents. The anxiety and ambivalence when fish are landed forces both residents who are genuine beggars (needs-based begging) and those who are

not genuine beggars (ritualistic begging) to jostle at the shore expecting to be given fish gifts, which presses upon the fisher.

My interlocutors frequently explained to me how shameful it would be for one to land high fish catches and deny those who lack even a single fish. For them, the phrase, "When you give, you receive" emphasises the fact that when a fisher gives a beggar a fish gift, the beggar will pray to God before she/he feeds on the fish and God will bless the giver. God will reward the giver in future with good fortune in terms of high fish catches in a perpetual cycle. This affirms the rules of reciprocity, in line with the Quran, since when he receives a gift, the receiver is obliged to pray for the giver and the giver becomes the owner of a legitimate fortune and whose wealth may increase in size (Kochuyt, 2009). Here, there are three actors in the reciprocity triad: 1) the receiver of the gift – the beggar, 2) the fisher who gives generously, and 3) God the divine authority who is rewarding the fisher for his generosity to the needy (Kochuyt, 2009). As we will see in the next section, fishers also give fish gifts to each other as social insurance against adversity. Hence, in Gazi, there are two types of fish gifts: those that are reciprocated (*i.e.*, between fishers) and those that are not (i.e., between fishers and other community members), both of which the fisher expects rewards from God when he gives them out. However, in terms of reciprocation, fishers do not reciprocate the same fish species or weight or number of fish they received from fellow fishers who are part of a gift transaction as fish gifts they give because they are obligated to.

6.3 Denial of the requested gift

Caroline Bledsoe (1992) describes how people who do not share generously may receive curses from their benefactors. For Bledsoe, God will subsequently render ineffective their blessings or the knowledge that they have learned, hence, they will return with nothing (Bledsoe,

1992: 193). Kochuyt (2009: 110) argues that since the receiver is entitled to a gift, God will not offer returns, but will punish the one who refuses to give gifts with famine and scarcity. Given that the giver is already part of a gift transaction, he must give selflessly; if he refuses, "the gift will not be rewarded by God, nor will it be accepted and returned by the receiver" (Kochuyt, 2009: 112). Therefore, as we have seen, religious beliefs contribute to the culture of giving and receiving. When people deny others' gifts, they are seen as lacking charity to God (Bonhomme 2012; Iliffe and John, 1987: 18). Moreover, according to Mauss (1954), the refusal to give gifts leads to social differences that are difficult to ignore. Many of the people I talked to told me that when a fisher refuses to share a portion of his catches for free with the people who gather at the shore, he will chase away his blessings. This means that the chances of him catching fish in the future would be very slim. For instance, during an interview I had with Mzee Abdallah one day at the beach, he told me that when a boat captain refuses to share a portion of his catches with the people at the beach, he receives punishment from God. He said, "If you catch fish, share it with those who did not get it. However, if you refuse to share, then God also reduces your grace, then you will say, 'I have been bewitched.' No one has bewitched you. You would have lost the God given grace by denying others a share of your catches."

Kopa, the owner and captain of another ring net crew, however, explained to me why he denied beggars fish gifts one day when he had returned from the sea with his crew of 38 fishers.[89] They had caught only one sack of fish weighing about 40 kg and opted to sell all of it to fish traders instead of sharing part of it with the beggars at the beach. As I have explained in the previous section, the crew of this boat still catches fish even though they frequently refuse to give fish gifts to the people who gather around their boat. According to Kopa, a fisher can only

[89] This is the same crew that Bilal had requested me to solicit for fish gifts from since he was confident that they would deny him.

give a fish gift to a beggar if he returns from the sea with a high fish catch. However, it is impractical for that fisher to fulfil the demand of all the people who assemble at the shore every day to solicit fish gifts especially when he lands a low catch. “It is not mandatory for me to give. Giving is optional. When you solicit free fish and they give you some, it is because the fisher has volunteered to give it to you,” he said. From his perspective, if giving were to be obligatory, fishers would agree among themselves how they would distribute their catches before they land their catches. They would then agree to sell their catches to fish traders and earn their income for the day as well as remain with a fixed portion of the catch that they would distribute to beggars.

Why then does Kopa usually deny beggars a share of his catches? The reason according to him is this: before a daytime ring net boat leaves the shore for a fishing trip, the captain would require not less than KES 10,000 even if he doesn’t catch fish. This means that the captain requires about KES 1,000 to fill scuba diving cylinders with air, about KES 5,000 to purchase 40 – 50 litres of petrol, about KES 1,200 to purchase boat oil, about KES 1,000 to hire the boat engine, and about KES 2,500 for other boat costs. In addition, if there are six divers out of 30 fishers and each of the crewmembers earns KES 1,000 from the proceeds of the sale of fish caught, each diver would then be entitled to an additional KES 300 or 400. “We do not just go to the sea,” he told me. Given such expensive costs, Kopa argued it would be difficult for fishers to share their catches with everyone at the shore whenever they land low catches and still make profit.

As Marcoux (2009) reminds us, fishers like Kopa use the market-based economy to free themselves from the straightjacket of social expectations, from the sense of indebtedness and emotional oppression, which constrains them in their reciprocity relations inside the gift economy. However, occasionally, demands or asking for money, food or goods fail when the

asker is sneered at or scolded or turned away (Durham, 1995). In such cases, denial of a requested gift can be construed as a denial of the relationship or an acknowledgement of the independent nature of the requester or viewed as unreasonable, which sometimes provokes anger (Durham, 1995). Neumark (2017) argues that in some parts of Kenya, there is a reluctance to give gifts to others and to ask for gifts from others because people 'care for relationships' believing that by engaging in the practice others could be a burden to them and they could also be a burden to others. In Gazi, refusal to give gifts creates rifts between people. For Kopa, if a beggar solicits food from him, yet he landed a low catch, or his crew returned empty-handed, he has the freedom to tell the beggar: "Today you will not get any fish. I will give you it tomorrow." According to him, however, this never happens in Gazi. Rather, what happens is the infuriating habit of everyone on the shore expecting to receive free fish forcefully whenever a fisher returns. This forces him to deny them gifts, causing anger and hatred among residents.

Omari, the captain of another ring net fishing crew, however, disagrees with Kopa. During an interview I had with him in front of his house one afternoon, he told me that gift-giving should be obligatory and not voluntary. According to Omari, even during times of uncertainty, a fisher must always distribute a portion of his catch as fish gifts to the people who gather every day at the shore. For Omari, if the fisher catches, for instance, 100 kg of fish, the fisher would not plan while at sea on how he would distribute his catches and say: "I will distribute 10 kg of fish for free to the people that I will find gathered at the shore." For him, the fisher always aims to sell all the fish that he has landed. However, this is not always the case: "If you come to me, and I know that you and I have not quarrelled, I can give you 5kgs, another one 2kgs, another one 1kg, another one 0.5kgs as long as we all live." For him, therefore, the giver gives fish gifts only to people with whom he already has an amicable relationship. I shall discuss

shortly how, although according to him gift-giving is obligatory, he cautions against the excessive distribution of fish gifts. In the following excerpt from my fieldnotes, Omari explains that giving and receiving of fish gifts persists in Gazi because it is a ritual and a social insurance against adversity:

> It is a loss, yes, but I do not see it as a loss because I am used to it. It is a loss because if I give 10kgs of fish for free, I would have lost KES 1,500 if a kilo of fish costs KES 150. I would have given out KES 1,500 as *sadaka*.[90] It is a loss. You cannot just give out KES 1500 like that, it is very difficult; but if it is something you are used to doing, you will share it. Therefore, it is both a loss and not a loss. If I give you a fish gift, this will motivate you to give me a fish gift tomorrow. That is how we develop each other.

Here, Omari emphasises the social code of rules concerning giving and receiving. He shows that the social code, "to possess is to give," by far overrides the fisher's natural acquisitive tendency (Malinowski, 1922: 180). This implies that gift-giving requires limiting acquisitiveness. For him, the fish gift is not "free" or "pure" (Parry, 1986; Venkatesan, 2011), but resembles a Mausian gift with the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate (Mauss, 2002). As pointed out by Laidlaw (2000), for an unreciprocated gift, it is impracticable for one to know when or in what manner the resulting good fortune will come. This is because it is given with no expectation of any worldly return (Parry, 1986: 467). As I have discussed above, fishers habitually give away fish gifts to beggars to meet their obligations and to receive blessings for more catches in the future.

In the example given above by Omari, by giving 10 kgs of fish worth KES 1,500 as *sadaka* (sacrifice) to the people that gather at the shore, this means that the fisher would have foregone a substantial benefit or accepted to incur an unnecessary burden. Such a sacrifice is

[90] *Sadaka* means a "sacrifice," where something material, in this case fish, is given up as an offering.

virtuous because gifts are given at substantial cost and are often highly valued (Larsen and Watson, 2001), making it literary a gift economy (Yan, 2020). These costs include the financial cost viewed in terms of the giver's economic constraints and psychic cost or the giver's investment of time and psychic effort, the mental energy (Larsen and Watson, 2001) used in thinking and searching for fish. Since it is a sacrifice, the value of the fish gift would then go beyond the economic and psychic cost. Here, to give would be to do more than just transact an object and introduces the idea of the "relationship as essential to material life" (Sykes 2005; Hénaff 2010: 18). It would also be expressive of the self since gifts are thought of in terms of the giver (Sherry Jr., 1983; Mauss, 2002).

Omari's statement in the excerpt above, therefore, emphasises the fact that fishers in Gazi, like many other Kenyans, practice impulsive giving, institutionalised self-help and mutual aid prosocial behaviour practices, which are characterised by reciprocity and motivated by both altruistic and self-interest-rationality (Mati, 2020). Such practices are informed by a belief that by giving, they are sowing for a future, expecting to reap some benefit in their time of need shaped by widespread socioeconomic precariousness (Mati, 2020). One fisher once told me: "Today others can miss and you get, tomorrow they can get and you miss. Therefore, it is good for fishers to share their catches so that when you miss, you can get the day's meal from other lucky fishers." This induces fishers to practise strong reciprocity as social insurance against adversity. Hence, many people in the fishing community I discuss here survive through the internal generation and redistribution of economic resources and through emphasising ideals of group commitment rather than individualism, a cultural response where people could meet the needs of their poor neighbours (Wilsworth, 1979). Even though some fishers like Kopa often refuse to share their catches and some migrants and residents like Mzee Hamadi despise this

practice, the ritualised context of begging for fish gifts in this village makes begging normal and acceptable. It has become part of everyday life for people to make ends meet as individuals increasingly become lazy and helpless. I argue they cannot afford to stop because they are used to "receiving without working for it" (Bonhomme, 2012).

Although soliciting fish gifts has become part of everyday life in Gazi, Omari told me he constantly warns his crew members against being unduly generous and distributing fish gifts to everyone who begs for fish at the shore because they could ultimately lose their day's income. For Omari, evil always exists amongst humans in a society. Therefore, there is nothing good that anyone does in this world that everyone will appreciate. He said, "If you decide to give out 2 kg, just give out only 2 kg as fish gifts, but not me giving out 2 kg, another fisher gives out 2 kg and another fisher gives out 2 kg. You might come to realise in the end that you have given out all the fish in the canoe for free." Therefore, as Omari suggests, while gift-giving is a good thing, fishers should exercise a lot of restraint: "Tell the other person; 'you will get fish tomorrow' so that you, the fisher, can also remain with something." I can compare this with Annette Weiner's notion of inalienable possessions in the Kula shell exchange under the principle of keeping-while-giving. In this notion, authority is vested in keeping inalienable possessions out of circulation while giving. According to Weiner (1992: 6), while it is easy to give out most commodities, some other possessions are imbued with the "intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners" which are not easy to give away. These are what Weiner (1992) refers to as inalienable possessions, which are kept by their owners from one generation to the next within their family, descent group, or dynasty and whose loss can diminish the self and by extension, the group to which the person belongs.

6.4 The ‘forced’ gift

In this last section, I shall return to the problem I introduced at the beginning of this chapter as the people at the beach watched Rashidi out of desperation resorting to violence to get fish gifts. Later on, when the commotion was over and everything was back to normal, with traders buying fish and beggars jostling for fish gifts while waiting for the other boats to return from the sea, I found Rashidi seated under the shade of mangrove trees chatting with his four friends. They were among the many youths I had seen taking fish from baskets being transported by porters and selling them cheaply to traders. I asked Rashidi what had happened. “I am also a fisher!” He shouted, making sure everyone around us heard him. “They pretend by telling us to be patient that they will give us fish gifts, but when ‘their’ people come, they give them to fish without delay, and eventually deny us! These migrants are openly discriminating against ‘others’ and they have to be told! They should not continue discriminating against us!”

Even while Masumbuko Saidi, one of the ring net fishers of a different crew, warned Rashidi not to generalise all the migrant fishers since they are not the same, one day in mid-October 2019, Mzee Mohammed similarly complained to me about migrants. When I met him at the shore, he was fuming even after receiving a fish gift. “I only got one fish, only one. Look inside my bucket. These migrants are practising tribalism,” he said, then continued, “They give each of their fellow tribesmen between five and ten fish and each local only one fish. They are not good people! If you are not from Pemba, they give you a few fish or deny you fish.” In both cases above, Rashidi’s and Mzee Mohammed’s, the fish gift is being experienced as alienating and estranging between residents on the one hand and migrant fishers and other non-residents from Pemba. It, therefore, transforms into a symbol of an empty relationship (Sherry et al., 1993), a gift that detaches people from people (Strathern, 1988). Here, the fish gift reveals the

existential differences between the local people and guests, migrant fishers, and permanent residents of Pemba descent.

Because of the high levels of ambivalence and anxiety when fishers land their catches, the personal connection to the fishers or the captain gives beggars hope that fishers will give them a priority. This is because fishers distribute fish gifts between residents because of the links that bind them together without "counting or calculating" and expecting anything in return. There is no guarantee, however, that beggars will receive fish gifts since they compete with many other beggars – relatives, friends, lovers, children, classmates, neighbours, and fellow fishers. If one is not aggressive, one may likely return home with nothing even when fishers return from the sea with high fish catches. In this section, I argue that by continuing to give fish gifts to beggars, even during a time of uncertainty of fish catches, fishers have contributed to continual begging for fish and consequently to the 'forced' gift economy, which has become part of everyday life and an acceptable way to make ends meet.

According to Musa, the 'forced' gift economy occurs because of the increased laziness and claims of ownership to fisheries resources among residents. For Musa, when fishers land their catches, everyone in Gazi celebrates because they know they will feed on free fish. Whenever a fisher lands fish, he must give residents fish gifts. According to him, those who deny residents' gifts are insulted. He added, "They do not want to look for fishing licenses. They just want to stay at home. They are big people who must receive free fish because they own Gazi. They do not want to fish, yet they want to eat fish." For him, while it is normal elsewhere for fishers to give out fish gifts to the people voluntarily whenever high fish catches are landed, "Here, youths force fishers to give them fish so that they can sell it and buy marijuana and khat," at the end affecting fisher livelihoods and food security.

Figure 7: A beached wooden-plank boat used by ring net fishers under repair.
Photo credits: Victor Alati 11/09/2019.

During an informal interview I had with Kopa while he was repairing his boat at the shore one Friday morning, he reiterated Musa's argument. He complained residents were sitting pretty in their houses and no one wanted to come to the beach and help him repair it. "When you return from the sea with fish, they want to force you to give them fish gifts or to steal from your sweat. Some take fish from the boat and others at the *banda* as if they worked for it. In the end, it becomes a business opportunity for them and not for me, the fisher." During an interview I had with Omari, the captain of the Baraka Tele crew, in mid-November 2019, he told me he knows people usually steal fish from him. "As late as yesterday, I saw people stealing our fish along the way as we transported them from the boat to the fish *banda*. It costs us," he said. According to him, although he has taken measures by strategically placing fishers along the way as porters offload a basket of fish from the boat up to the time the fish reaches the fish *banda* to protect it from being stolen, this does not prevent youths from stealing fish. This leads to frequent confrontations such as that witnessed between Rashidi and Hamisi above. According to him,

some beggars usually receive permission to take fish from the baskets. “You cannot just insert your hand in the basket without being given permission. You may lose your teeth!” He said.

Many young people I describe here are interested in getting ‘easy’ money and do not want to invest in productive assets, choosing instead to “live for the moment” to fulfil immediate desires such as taking drugs, which is an irresponsible way that many Gazi residents expect of young men. This kind of behaviour is a means to the momentary realisation of fantasy (Walsh, 2003; Donovan, 2021). When the fisher gives a fish gift to a beggar, he expects that the gift will be consumed soon after acceptance. However, I argue that even in times of uncertainty about fish catches, beggars often sell the fish gifts. This means that the fisher does not see the fish as a gift. He sees it as food, a ‘priceless gift’ (Hénaff, 2010), a ‘gift money cannot buy’ (Strathern, 2012), which when you give you receive more from God. The receiver looks at it as an item with a ‘future exchange value.’ The well-meaning fisher is thus manipulated for material or monetary gains as a means of survival for the beggar in the village, just like beggars on the Kenyan urban streets manipulate outsiders for survival (Kilbride, 2010). Therefore, fishers sell some fish gifts to traders, and exchange some with beggars who were unlucky. Some beggars receive fish gifts on behalf of their relatives, neighbours and friends, and others as coercion for sexual relationships often referred to as ‘fish-for-sex’. [91]

In early February 2020, I wrote the following in my fieldnotes: “Some fishers do not give out fish gifts cheerfully, but reluctantly or under compulsion.” However, while it may seem simple when phrased this way, fishing is a very difficult job, which involves a lot of effort in a dangerous and uncertain sea (see chapter 3). Kopa once told me that when a fisher returns from

[91] See Béné and Merten (2008) for a discussion on women and ‘fish-for-sex’.

the sea after a day or night of fishing, he is usually tired and hungry. “You just want to get out of the boat, go home and rest, and not be disturbed by anyone.” For him, it is agonising when people gather at the shore to oppress the fisher by forcefully taking fish away from him. As he pointed out, some beggars demand fish gifts from fishers as if it is their right to receive them. According to him, a fisher is a weak person who does not have a right to defend himself as he is already under a system of oppression by the government, the BMU and individuals. This leads to continual financial loss and untold emotional suffering.

I attended an awareness meeting between the State Department of Fisheries and fishers on the impending elections of BMU officials on the 28th of November 2019 organised by one of the non-governmental organisations working with fishers in the area. During the meeting, one hand line fisher asked the fisheries officers in attendance whether it was right for BMU officials to force fishers to give them fish gifts because of the position they held in the community. One fisheries officer assured the fishers present that no such law existed. Many fishers in attendance clapped. However, their joy did not last long. One morning, a few days later, I witnessed one young man forcing two migrant handline fishers who had returned from a night fishing trip to give him free fish. He took their fish and told them he will not pay them and that they will do nothing. I witnessed several other incidences thereafter, although occasionally, some fishers refused to be forced to give out free fish. In line with Mauss (1954), therefore, I argue that giving fish gifts is only voluntary in theory, but in reality, successful fishers obligatorily give out fish gifts.

Of all the examples addressed in this chapter, the following experience may be the most difficult since it deals with the painful consequences of fishers who refuse to give fish gifts to people who gather around the boat. It also exposes the deep tensions that permeated social

relations that were potentially dangerous between migrant fishers who come for *ago* every NEM season to camp and fish in Gazi and the residents. Here, the forced taking of fish from a fisher who is reluctant to share his catches with the people that gather around his boat is morally justified even by the very people the fisher harbours the expectation of defending him against aggressive youths. Such a fisher finds that as long as he continues to deny the people at the shore fish gifts whenever he lands fish, he will continue to count losses and move on as if nothing happened. He finds out that no one will be willing to help him to protect his catches from being taken away by force or stolen by youths that gather at the shore. Rather, he will be blamed for being mean. Moreover, he risks receiving no help from the community in case misfortune befalls him while at sea.

One early morning exactly a month after the BMU meeting, I joined a BMU official, the fisheries officer and three senior men (Maza, Abdi and Amadi) as they were chatting at the beach. We watched as fish was being offloaded from three nighttime migrant ring net fishing boats that had returned with a combined catch of about a ton of sardines. Hakeem, one of the three captains, approached us as we watched the pandemonium that ensued and reported an incident. (As usual, a large crowd had gathered around the boats and individuals were jostling to board the boat to either buy fish or solicit free fish or steal fish). Hakeem complained how youths were forcefully taking tens of buckets of sardines (each bucket valued at KES 700) from his boat while the porters were offloading them from the boat and that they were abusing him and treating him like a guest, yet he is a Kenyan from Vanga.[92] Furaha, one of the accused youths, however, vehemently denied that he neither forcefully took fish nor abused anyone. During the brief meeting, while it was clear youths were forcefully taking fish from Hakeem's boat, none of the

[92] Vanga is a village south of Gazi located close to the border between Kenya and Tanzania.

people who attended the meeting condemned such acts or offered any solutions. Rather, they insisted it was Hakeem's crewmembers who were colluding with porters like Furaha to steal fish from the boat and distribute them among themselves. After the meeting, when Hakeem had returned to his boat having received no help, a visibly angered Mzee Maza told us that Hakeem was a fool. For him, guests must give fish gifts to residents if they expect to be treated well. The BMU official agreed and said that Hakeem was not a good man because he had refused to share his catches with the people that had gathered around his boat that morning like everyone else does: "When you beg for fish while he is looking at you, he pretends he has not heard you and he quickly looks the other way." "Wait until his boat faces a problem while at sea. He will not receive any help. We will show him who we are," Mzee Maza replied as the others nodded their heads in agreement.

Such incidences reveal a great deal of anguish that fishers go through that remain silenced because of the obligation to give. Writing on Kwakiutl potlatching as an institution designed to protect private property, Johnsen (1986) argues that in the salmon fishery among the Southern Kwakiutl Indians, those whose fishing seasons were relatively successful, transferred wealth through the potlatch system to groups whose seasons were not successful to increase the other's opportunity cost of encroaching. Here, gift-giving was conducted to provide an incentive for the would-be-encroachers to recognise exclusive property rights over future generations of salmon, hence averting the risk associated with theft or violence.[93] Through this method, they prevented overfishing and managed the salmon fishery properly, and hence increased their wealth by investing in the sustainability of the fishery. In other words, as Carol Rose points out,

[93] Potlatching, viewed as an alternative to violence and encroachment, directed the flow of resources toward relative scarcity and away from relative abundance.

potlatching was a form of insurance. It was a kind of unilateral gift where the successful kin group gave away wealth in a kind of a rough circle of reciprocity to ensure that they would not go hungry in a season of bad luck and to protect themselves from attack and have their wealth taken away by force (1992). For Rose (1992), therefore, as in the 'forced' gift economy I describe here, what looks like fish 'gifts' is a scandalous and illegitimate larceny, where a fisher gives out a fish gift only because he has been forced, threatened or tricked to give. He gives to protect himself from being forced to give or to prevent youths from stealing his fish. This gift is thus unilateral because it moves from the rightful owner to the wrongful taker involuntarily (Rose, 1992: 300). This includes such cases as in the first section where Omari told me, "I give, not because it comes from my heart, but because it is the practice that I found going on at the landing site." Since it is not voluntary, this is in reality theft. Moreover, as Rose (1992) suggested, many of the reciprocal transfers, in this case between fishers, may really be exchanges in disguise since they may also be involuntary.

Musa told me that when a fisher such as Hakeem is humiliated and youths take fish away from him by force in a larceny transfer, the fish received is not accompanied by spoken blessings. This is because the individual who takes it by force will not pray to God and the fisher will curse him, saying, "They are stealing from us. Those people! They are torturing us like that!" Consequently, fishers will not accumulate blessings and blessings will not circulate in the village because God becomes angry with people since they do not love one another. This in turn will lead to low fish catches or fishers returning from the sea for consecutive days without fish, which seriously affects the economy of a village whose heavy reliance on fish cannot be gainsaid. Kopa told me he longs for a day when giving fish gifts would be voluntary, where the frequent pandemonium experienced at the landing site when fishers land fish would be a thing of

the past. According to him, a beggar would politely request him for a fish gift: “Hey Kopa, could you please give me fish?” and the fisher would reply, “No. I will give you tomorrow or I will give you what I can.” When looked at this way, however, fish gifts given in small amounts or after postponement can also easily strain relationships to the point of possible collapse (Sherry Jr., 1983; Strathern, 1988).

We have seen that giving fish gifts is expected to be a voluntary exercise, and a relaxed event leading to excitement, satisfaction, and extreme pleasure (Larsen and Watson, 2001). From a religious point of view, since it is an act of devotion, the giver is obliged to give “straight from the heart, selflessly, without ulterior motive” (Kochuyt, 2009: 111). Since the giver is already part of an existing gift transaction, he is morally bound to give. God gave him generously; therefore, the receiver must return voluntarily (Kochuyt, 2009). Given that gift-giving is a morally accepted behaviour in Kenya, fish gifts that circulate freely across the shore every day instigate and nurture relationships. However, I emphasise here that many residents have become entrapped in a gift-giving ritual. The anxiety and ambivalence generated by the fish gift have turned the ritual into forced involvement. In the ‘forced’ gift economy, residents take with impunity “what they have not worked for.” This denies fishers their values and rights, disentangles, and collapses some relationships. Indeed, fish gifts have become a source of stress, pressure, humiliation, anxiety, disappointment, and conflict in the village; therefore, gift-giving has turned out to be a torturous endeavour for both the giver and the receiver. I have revealed that while some fishers give away fish gifts to beggars from their hearts and cement social relations, others do it as a way of avoiding gossip, disdain, and violence.

CHAPTER 7: Fishers' and Fishing Futures

In this study, I have provided previously understudied everyday realities in a fishing community just before the COVID-19 pandemic set in and which I suggest ought to be integrated into policy. While fishing is the mainstay of the village's economy and source of protein, it is clear that residents whose stories are told here are increasingly facing the challenge of uncertainty in fish catches. A decline in the primary industry of the village has become an immediate source of social and economic uncertainty and existential unrest, which makes the people anxious about the future.[94] In the past few decades, people have seen an unprecedented decline in fish catches to a stable level and a loss of fish species, which has signified a loss of ontological security. Therefore, the once rich and inexhaustible near-shore area of the bay has been overfished prompting fishers to begin to venture offshore with the entry of migrant fishers and the introduction of new fishing gear. However, over the years, this has also become unpredictable, leaving the people with a sense of futility and despair as they progressively moved from a familiar past characterised by plenty to an uncertain future characterised by growing uncertainty.[95]

I have situated this study within related research that aims to shed light on how people weave their existence in conditions of extreme uncertainty amid realities of lives lived in poverty in East Africa and beyond. I immersed myself in the daily life of the fishing community to establish a close relationship with them for a long duration of time and recorded what I observed (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). I established, firstly, that artisanal fishing communities warrant the attention of anthropologists since their ways of knowing and being are socially constructed

[94] See Lucht (2012: 197) for a similar analysis among fishers of Senya Beraku.
[95] See Elkholy (2016: 226) for a similar analysis about the forest and its inhabitants.

providing them with the means of livelihood and food security.[96] Secondly, I have gained an epistemological and ontological understanding of artisanal fishing as an ethnographer engaging with multiple identities – a research scientist in a government research institute, a research student, and a Kenyan of non-coastal origin. This knowledge presents valuable evidence that can be fed into fisheries policies.

My study has made four broad contributions to the anthropology of East Africa. Firstly, I have tried to add nuance to existing literature that explores how enskilment intersects with sensory engagement. Running as a thread through chapters 3 to 6, I have shown how, through their sensory and embodied ways of learning and knowing, migrant fishers are considered more skilled than local fishers are. Secondly, I add nuance to existing literature exploring rumours circulating in Africa that are constructed to resolve confusions or contradictions that experience in daily life contains. Through chapters 4 and 5, I have shown how rumours freely circulating in the village, particularly at a time of uncertainty were not only a quest for the truth about inequality and extraction and a method of fabricating it but were both contiguous with social changes and constitutive of modernity (White, 2000; Stewart and Strathern, 2004). The rumours were mostly drawn from historical allusions (White, 2000), which were given renewed meanings by the gossip and arguments of different interlocutor groups – migrant fishers and local fishers. Thirdly, my study contributes to debates within the anthropology of destiny. In chapter 4, I explored how destiny is evoked, enacted and re(theorised) locally in everyday language among fishers (Elliot and Menin, 2018). Fourthly, my study contributes to debates within the anthropology of ethics and morality. In chapter 6, I have shown how anxiety and ambivalence

[96] See Nadel-Klein (2003) for similar observations among fishers along the Scottish coast.

generated by the fish gift have turned the ritual of gift-giving into a 'forced' gift economy, which denies fishers their values and rights and disentangles and collapses some relationships.

Recent ethnographies focusing on uncertainties in Africa have been concerned with attempts by people to interpret, stabilise, and reconfigure relations of existence through embodied and material practice and, in particular, how boundaries between insiders and outsiders are formed around unstable materialities (Nyamnjoh, 2017; Wilhelm-Solomon, 2017). These boundaries are formed when "certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed" (Butler, 2009: ii) to conditions of constant uncertainty which results in inequality (Nyamnjoh et al., 2021), as we have seen in this thesis between residents of Gazi village on the one hand and migrant fishers and permanent residents of Pemba origin on the other hand.

Some of the most influential ethnographic studies of the East African coast have focused on personal narratives (Caplan, 1997), religious and ethnic tensions (McIntosh, 2009), witchcraft and the reinvention of development (Smith, 2009), the roles of women and the relationship between individuals and society (Mirza and Strobel, 1989) and the struggles over access to and use of the marine environment in the face of development and conservation initiatives (Walley, 2004). Moreover, contemporary ethnographers along the East African coast have sought to understand present-day issues, such as sexuality (Boswell, 2008; Beckmann, 2010); tourism and sex trade (Chege, 2015); food insecurity (Gilbertson, 2015); economic, social and political challenges (Hillewaert, 2017); health care (Beckmann, 2012); as well as social identity as seen from the perspective of gender (Kawarazuka et al., 2019), ethnicity (Caplan, 2017), consumerism (Ivanov, 2012) and space (Fabian, 2019). These studies show the diversity of the East African coast world where, despite a cohesive cultural identity built upon shared practices, religious

beliefs and languages, the challenges facing the inhabitants of the East African coast are multiple and complex (Walker, 2017). However, there is an absence of contemporary ethnography among the Mijikenda community on how people utilise marine cultural heritage (MCH) to help develop sustainable social and economic and cultural benefits. The only crucial studies along the Kenyan coast that offer a good understanding of how people utilise MCH were conducted between the 1960s and 1980s (Kawarazuka et al., 2019).

Classic ethnographic literature of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century describe a Swahili world of massive social change, with tensions between older coastal residents and more recent arrivals due to processes of colonisation and large-scale forced migrations, but twenty-first-century anthropologies currently position coastal residents firmly within the global village (Wynne-Jones, 2017).[97] For example, ethnographic studies on the Swahili coast presently focus on the challenge of cosmopolitanism, that is, how the present is negotiated to shape a more agreeable future for the diverse coastal society (Simpson and Kresse, 2008). Since both cultures and identities of the people whose stories I describe here are constantly changing in a globalising world (Wynne-Jones, 2017), Caplan (2013) proposes that they should be viewed in terms of a combination of concepts such as space and time, social context and sensual knowledge. In this study, therefore, I have explored the relationship between embodiment, materiality, and sociality.

As we have seen in chapter 1 of this thesis, marine scientists and resource managers in Kenya have consistently suggested that the heavy dependence on coral reef fisheries needs to be reduced in support of alternative livelihood projects to reduce overfishing (Cinner, 2014). However, such attempts often fail and result in perverse outcomes because marine scientists and

[97] These ethnographies examined issues such as systems of land tenure, urban and village organisation, social categories in coastal settlements, ethnic definitions, political economy and territory (Wynne-Jones, 2017).

resource managers do not understand the fishers themselves – that fishing has non-material benefits and is therefore not an occupation of last resort. Their recommendations only demonstrate their failure to listen to and understand ways of knowing and being in the fishing world. Here, while fish creates social relationships (see also Diggins, 2018), fishing contributes to the fishing community's cultural or personal identity, lifestyle, and social norms, which further creates a strong attachment to fishing that keeps people fishing even when it is no longer economically viable (Cinner, 2014). The physically demanding shared labour of learning to fish, and competing for fish, makes the people of Gazi continually forge relations of care and solidarity that foster individual aspirations of economic gains while asserting the right to life by the sea (Baann, 2022). Fisher's identity is, therefore, valuable because the people can count upon it, despite the insecurities of life and livelihood associated with fishing. Moreover, the general economic pattern of rising unemployment and increased social and economic inequality does not offer fishers an alternative to fishing because of overfished nearshore fisheries resources. For a fisher in this fishing village, fishing is more than a livelihood or source of protein, but a way of life to which he strongly attaches. This makes fishers generally obsessed with the sea. Many of my interlocutors believed that unskilled local fishers and the government create uncertainties since fisheries resources are inexhaustible.

As investments are being put in place along the Kenyan coast for infrastructure development and training of local communities, for instance, in financial accounting, fisheries laws/regulations, conflict resolution and proposal writing (Cinner and McClanahan, 2015), these efforts will only be successful if marine scientists and resource managers clearly understand how and why coastal communities do things, the way they do. As Walley (2004) argues, while management of East Africa's marine and coastal resources is directed toward the needs of the

poor, it should remain subordinated to the analysis of broader social processes – how and why people relate to each other and the environment as they do? Environmental literature that fisheries management has relied upon to develop management policies for a long time pays scant attention to the people and their culture. When it does so, "it is through a scientised or technocentric discourse" that is valuable among conservation and development organisations as well as policymakers, but which "distorts human-environmental interactions by reducing the complexities of human life" to reductionist ideas (Walley, 2004: 263). Among the Mijikenda community of Kenya, culture plays an important role in fisheries management because the marine environment is deeply embedded in the moral and ethical consciousness of the community's culture (Yusuf, 2011). Nonetheless, their culture has been ignored in environmental literature and development issues. With the evolving development, fisheries management institutions I suggest should integrate cultural aspects of coastal communities such that it becomes their way of life (Yusuf, 2011).

In these policies, however, there is no consideration of the local community's way of life. Resource users' culture is completely ignored even as the policies repeatedly refer to participatory management, also co-management. Governance shifts towards co-management aimed at ensuring greater participation among marine resource users so that they can influence the management of marine resources around them through the establishment of BMUs and locally managed marine protected areas (LMMAs) are only about the partnership with local communities. Projects focused on BMUs and LMMAs consistently fail since the cultural aspects of the fisheries are not well understood or taken into consideration. Therefore, as Walley (2004) observed, even though institutional frameworks promise "participation," they continuously leave

existing social inequalities unchanged because they do not visualise issues, targeted problems, and solutions as part of social and political endeavours.

Etiegni et al. (2017) observed that fishing practices in Lake Victoria contravene government regulations with fishers continually using destructive fishing methods even though BMUs were established to implement these regulations in a co-management approach. On the Kenya coast, Cinner and McClanahan (2015) observed that the BMU policy was relatively unsuccessful at improving people's livelihoods after 6 years of governance transformation that transferred decision-making power of nearshore fishery resources to resource users with Gazi village being one of their study sites. This was because two-thirds of resource users felt that the policy had not resulted in benefits for their livelihoods, a perceived inequity that could ultimately influence resource users' cooperation and compliance (Cinner and McClanahan, 2015). On the contrary, participatory mangrove forest management initiatives in Gazi fishing village, based on the assumption that local community involvement would provide incentives for the sustainable conservation of forests and improved livelihoods, have succeeded in ensuring structural development of mangrove forests because of enhanced surveillance and patrols by community scouts (Kairu et al., 2021). However, evidence of illegal logging was observed in open access areas of the mangrove forest due to poor surveillance and patrols in these areas (Kairu et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need to rethink the design of participatory fisheries management (Etiegni et al., 2017) by incorporating the culture of resource users, which is currently missing in policy instruments regulating and governing fisheries resources in Kenya. Here I argue that for policy interventions to succeed in a more socially inclusive and sustainable manner, an ethnographic perspective such as the one that I have taken offers useful contributions that can

unpack some of the social differences and complexities that exist in fishing communities (Fabinyi et al., 2010).

As we have seen above, ethnographic studies have shown that fishing communities have a story to tell (e.g. Nadel-Klein, 2003; Walley, 2004; Lucht, 2012; Diggins, 2018). They can act as a source of knowledge, a basis for action (Larkin, 2006) and be used to reframe policy problems and solutions, and also lead to new ways of thinking about the engagement of these communities (Althaus, 2020: 17). This can help to inform future research regarding fisheries' resource utilisation, conservation and management, which is usually entirely based on quantitative research and not acknowledged in policies. I argue, therefore, that social scientists should take into consideration this new world, which is of critical significance to policymaking. Furthermore, there is a need for regular visits by anthropologists to the study site to monitor the ways of knowing and being in situations of uncertainty since when the anthropologist leaves the field, the lives of the people left behind keep changing. Future ethnographic studies along this coast should aim to increase our understanding of how fishing communities seek to balance their tight livelihoods and generally, the interrelationships between humans and the maritime world. The studies should examine the following questions:

- How the decline in fish catches, the unpredictability of fish catches, marine conservation and development programmes, globalisation, government regulations and threats to marine ecosystems such as marine pollution and climate change are affecting fishing communities' understanding of the marine environment and on social relationships among marine resource users.
- What new strategies do fishing communities continuously adopt to protect their lives and livelihoods against the growing uncertainties.

- As I have demonstrated in the present research, women are not involved in fishing directly in this village but indirectly as fish traders and stay-at-home parent. In other villages along coastal Kenya, women are also directly involved as gleaners of shellfish. How then can gender relations and identities shape discourses of power, knowledge and social action in a fishing village.
- How does the marine environment condition the body and senses of fishing communities and how do skills become integrated into the body of fishers.
- How do migrant fishers impact fishing communities understanding of the marine environment around them.
- How do powerful outside actors, including state officials, non-governmental organisations and marine scientists, generate uncertainties among residents? By studying uncertainty through the lens of institutional ethnography, the anthropologist can understand beyond what people are uncertain about and why to examine how these uncertainties have been engendered and their cumulative implications (Cooper, 2015).

8.0 Appendices

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference LSC 19/286 in the Department of Life Sciences and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 20th June 2019.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project: Sensing the Marine Environment: Everyday experiences of a fishing community in Kenya

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project about how fishermen in your community use their senses to perceive, understand, and respond to the marine world. I will be living in the community at Gazi and conducting a range of informal conversations but I would like to interview you in a slightly more formal way. This interview would not last more than an hour. I will use a pseudonym for you to preserve your identity. Personal data is not held for longer than is necessary.

Investigator contact details:

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Telephone: +44793 285 4943

Consent statement:

I, the respondent (*name*)_____, agree to take part in this research, that the aim of this study has been clearly explained to me and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason by contacting Mr Victor Mwakha Alati. I understand that if I do withdraw, my data may not be erased but will only be used in an anonymised form as part of an aggregated dataset. I understand that the personal data collected from me during the project will be used for the purposes outlined above in the public interest.

By signing this form, you are confirming that you have read, understood and agree with the University's Data Privacy Notice for Research Participants.

The information you have provided will be treated in confidence by the researcher and your identity will be protected in the publication of any findings. The purpose of the research may change over time, and your data may be re-used for research projects by the University in the future. If this is the case, you will normally be provided with additional information about the new project.

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the researcher you can also contact the Director of Studies. However, if you would like to contact an independent party, please contact the Head of the Department.

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