

**Choice and Constraint in a Swahili Community: Property.
Hierarchy and Cognatic Descent on the East African Coast**

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From the cover blurb

This book is about property and power relations in a Swahili village on Mafia Island off the southern coast of Tanzania. The main concern is with the workings of the cognatic descent groups, which are important in many areas of village life, namely land-holding, marriage, residence, Islamic activities and spirit possession cults. Some anthropologists have contented that groups with multiple membership cannot be viable social units, but this book demonstrates that such a system can work perfectly well on the ground.

Although the focus is on the descent groups themselves, they are shown to be one of a number of idioms which are used by the village to talk about their social relations. Other such models are the personal network, and the socio-religious hierarchy. Each of these has its own norms, but together they form a dynamic system which leaves the individual with a wide range of options in any given situation.

In seeking to show how the cognatic descent groups in 'Minazini' village actually operate, both an ideology of descent group membership and numerical material about patterns of choice are presented. This involves the construction of both mechanical and statistical models. However, in discussing the constraints governing choices, a third type of model, a decision model, has also been constructed.

Addendum

The fieldwork on which this book was based was carried out in a number of villages in northern Mafia Island, Tanzania, between 1965 and 1967, for a period of 18 months. It is based upon my 1968 University of London Ph.D. 'Non-unilineal descent on Mafia Island, Tanzania' and an article "Cognatic Descent Groups on Mafia Island, Tanzania" published in *Man: the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (*Man* 4, 3: 419-31, 1969). The field research was supported by the University of London and the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths.

The gap between completion of the Ph.D. in 1968, and its revision and publication in 1975 is attributable to beginning work on South Asia: Nepal (1969) and Madras (1974), as well as to the birth of two children, Emma (1970), to whom this book is dedicated, and Mark (1972).

Since the 1960s, the land tenure pattern in northern Mafia has changed somewhat because of government policies. For further information see the following works:

'Socialism from above: the view from below' in Peter Forster (ed.) *Tanzanian Peasantry: Economy in Crisis* Gower Press 1992: 103-23 (also as 'Socialism from above in Tanzania: the view from below' in ASA volume *Socialism in Anthropological Theory and Local Practice* ed. Chris Hann. Routledge, 1993: 77-91)

'Democracy and Development: Contested Notions in the Changing Political Climate of a Coastal Village in Tanzania' in D. Parkin and F. le Guennec-Coppens *Autorite et Pouvoir dans les Societes Cotieres de l'Afrique Orientale*. Paris: Karthala.