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# ON BRANDING, BELONGING, AND THE VIOLENCE OF A PHALLIC IMAGINARY

The Maasai Warrior in Kenyan Tourism

GEORGE PAUL MEIU

MY STORY BEGINS WITH A touristic postcard I bought in Nairobi, sometime in August 2008 (fig. 1.1). At first sight, it is a postcard like any other that one may encounter in airports or souvenir shops in Kenya. It depicts the portrait of a young, slim, black man, smiling, somewhat shyly, while looking away from the camera. The man is probably in his late teens or early twenties. His bodily decorations are of the kind foreign tourists and Kenyans alike recognize as traditional or ethnic. Linear geometric patterns painted horizontally with red ochre sharpen the features of his cheeks and eyebrows. Strings of colored plastic beads and metal chains tied across his forehead and around his neck accentuate his facial shape. His left earlobe is pierced and stretched on a white, ivory cylinder. A short, beaded accessory hangs from the top of his ear. The text on the postcard describes this man as an "African warrior." It does not specify his tribe or ethnicity. But this generic description is sufficient to sell the card. For, together with the image, it echoes long-standing primitivist ideas of Africa and its warrior traditions. Despite the postcard's generic nature, however, most tourists will readily recognize the young man as Maasai. They will have already encountered the prototypical image of the Maasai warrior, or *moran*, on travel websites, airport banners, and safari vans; in brochures and coffee-table books; or in souvenir stores (in the form of wooden sculptures, metal candlesticks, or plastic fridge magnets). The typical Maasai warrior appears throughout as tall and slim, decorated with beads and ochre, dressed only with a red loincloth, his youthful body exuding erotic appeal. From these contexts, most tourists learn that the red color of the warrior's dress is emblematic of his ethnic identity. It is no coincidence then that on the postcard I discuss here, the description

Fig. 1.1. Touristic postcard,
"African Warrior," Kenya.
(Fair use; © Sampra
M.M., Nairobi.)
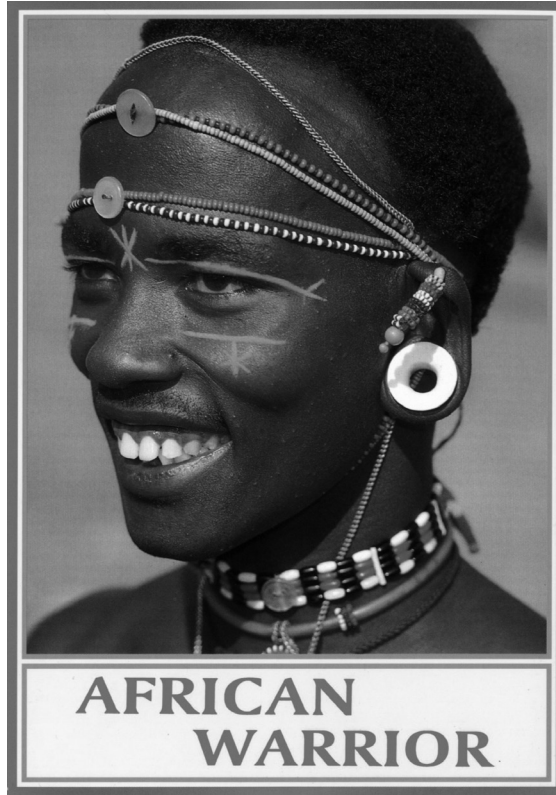
"African warrior" appears in red letters. Thus, the postcard at once invites its viewers to discover the young man's identity on their own while hinting implicitly to his unmistakable Maasainess.

When I bought this postcard, I was researching how the commodification of the Maasai warrior in Kenyan tourism shaped ethnic group and state belonging. One phenomenon interested me in particular. Since the early 1980s, men of the Samburu ethnic group, from northern Kenya, migrated to coastal beach resorts, south and north of the town of Mombasa, to make a living in tourism. They drew on their cultural and linguistic relatedness to the more famous Maasai (who reside mostly in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania)—including their shared custom of the initiation of men as morans—to introduce themselves to tourists as Maasai or, as they would have it, as a more authentic subgroup thereof. At the coast, Samburu men dressed in traditional attire, sold souvenirs at the beach, and performed dances in tourist hotels. Their cultural

Otherness and erotic appeal attracted women from western Europe, who now desired intimate relationships with them. Some women sought Maasai warriors for one-night stands; others, for long-term relationships, including marriages. Through such relationships, some Samburu men gained wealth. With money they obtained from their partners, they returned to northern Kenya, where they acquired houses, land, businesses, and cars, and achieved authority as influential "big men" (Meiu 2015). Indeed, at the time of my research, some of the richest in Samburu were men in relationships with European women. Over the years, this prompted hundreds of young men to migrate to the coast. Between 2005 and 2015, I carried out twenty-five months of research in Kenya exploring how these men performed warrior masculinity in tourism, invested their money, and tried to negotiate emerging conflicts over their respectability and belonging. During my research, I collected postcards like the one described because they exemplified the image that potentially generated spectacular value in tourism. Tourist companies used the image of the Maasai warrior as a logo for their ads, young men I worked with performed this image in different ways to attract Europeans, and tourists themselves sought to meet "real-life" warriors in order to authenticate their sojourns. In these ways, the warrior image had become emblematic of Maa-language speakers like Maasai and Samburu and a successful brand of East Africa as a tourist destination.

But, as I was to discover, the story of the man depicted on the postcard also spoke of another, darker side of the exchanges I was studying. When I showed it to my research assistant, Lteipan, a Samburu man in his early thirties who had been seasonally migrating to coastal resorts for almost fifteen years, he immediately recognized the man in the image. His name was Losolia Lelenguia, though he used to introduce himself as Peter, a name that tourists were more likely to remember. Peter, Lteipan told me, had died in 1997, when "coastal people" (Swahili[1]: *watu wa pwani*)—that is, ethnic groups claiming to belong to the coast—rose to chase away so-called upcountry people (S: *watu wa bara*), or migrants and migrant settlers originating in Kenya's interior regions. I decided then to find out more about Peter and the events that led to his death. I looked up newspapers and reports of the time and interviewed Samburu who had known him.

In April 2011, I met Leramat, Peter's former friend. The two of them had been initiated as morans in the late 1970s and then, since the 1980s, had traveled together to the coast. He recalled in detail how, on the evening of September 5, 1997, he and Peter, along with twenty-five other Samburu men, had been preparing to perform dances in the Shelly Beach Hotel, a major tourist resort south of Mombasa. While they were waiting for the time of their scheduled

performance in a small bar across the street from the hotel, a group of some
hundred young men attacked them with machetes and guns. The attackers were
members of the so-called Kaya Bombo uprising, a violent youth movement
through which young men, mainly of the coastal Digo ethnic group sought to
expel upcountry people. Kaya Bombo youth felt that coastal people had lost
land and jobs to migrants from upcountry (see also Mahoney 2017, chap. 2).
Most Samburu men, including Leramat, survived the incident, despite severe
injuries. One had been killed on the spot. Peter sustained machete cuts on his
head and leg and died in a hospital sometime later. After he finished telling me
Peter's story, Leramat removed the red cloth that covered his upper body. "You
see these scars?" he asked me. His chest, back, and waist were covered in long,
pronounced, linear scars. "These are all from that day. They cut me with the
machetes. I was lucky I survived."

Leramat's story and Peter's death prompted me to think of the potential for
conflict and violence that lay behind the serene erotics of the Maasai warrior
on touristic postcards. Violent events, such as those of 1997, are not instances
of timeless tribal feuds as they often figure in the international media. Nor, for
that matter, can they be reduced to the attempts of Kenyan political leaders
to incite violence between different ethnic groups, by way of manipulating
electoral demographics. This, of course, was part of the problem. That year,
Daniel Arap Moi, who had been Kenya's president since 1978, was coming up
for reelection, and KANU, his party, was trying to secure coastal votes. Some
accused KANU and Moi of inciting coastal youth to violently evict migrants,
because they knew the latter would most likely not vote for them. However,
the meanings and sentiments that informed these violent incidents were not
merely a function of political manipulation. Rather, such events were part of
a wider spectrum of conflicts over belonging. Among these were conflicts
emerging as some people, like Samburu and Maasai, discovered they could
market their culture and ethnic sexuality and thus earn money in ways that
others could not.

This chapter explores how interethnic violence of the kind that Peter, Lera-
mat, and other Samburu encountered on the coast relates to their attempts
to generate value by speculating on and enacting touristic imaginaries of the
Maasai warrior. I wish to understand the historical concurrence of the warrior's
marketability with the violent events that accompanied his touristic perfor-
mance. I ask how Samburu migrants in tourism imagine themselves through
a more general pan-Maa identity and through the youthful masculinity of the
prototypical warrior? How does a certain image of identity shape belonging
and ethnic regionalism? How does the commodification of warrior sexuality

as part of the Maasai brand shape how migrants and coastal people experience belonging—whether violently or otherwise? And what work does violence do in contexts of ethnic commodification?

BRANDING, BELONGING, AND VIOLENCE

In the conclusion of *Ethnicity, Inc.*, John and Jean Comaroff (2009, 143) reflected on how violence may figure in the process of ethnic incorporation and commodification. "Does the incorporation of identity not bear within it a dark energy," they ask, "the potential to foment division, dissension, even homicidal hatreds?" "How, more generally does the commodification of cultural being relate to the kinds of violent confrontation so often associated with assertions of ethnic consciousness, belonging, and birthright?" The marketing of culture and identity, the Comaroffs argued, carries multiple, contrasting potentialities. It has "*both* insurgent possibility *and* a tendency to deepen prevailing lines of inequality, the capacity *both* to enable *and* to disable, the power *both* to animate and annihilate" (139). How different potentialities materialize in any given context is mostly a question of historical contingency. Yet, although ethnic commodification and incorporation unfold differently in different contexts, they also play out, as the Comaroffs showed, by logics that are similar across the world. Branding, for example, now offers people everywhere a means for producing, assessing, and contesting social and economic value. Meanwhile, a preoccupation with belonging has risen globally, sometimes manifesting itself through political conflict and violence. But the concrete ways in which branding and belonging intersect in practice and relate to violence require further theorization.

Belonging has become a hot topic worldwide in recent decades. With late capitalism, people and goods have been circulating more intensively within and across borders, and displacement and mobility have become generalized conditions of social life. But this trend has also produced a counter movement. Following neoliberal economic reforms, in Africa and elsewhere, more and more people have turned to autochthony, ethnoregionalism, ethnicity, or indigeneity as dominant criteria of social attachment. These are not mere attempts to close off social worlds and defend them from foreigners. Nor are they naive ways of shutting out the outside world—quite the contrary. They represent ways to benefit more fully from global flows of capital. Being rooted in land or being attached to seemingly immutable identities are now more effective ways to position oneself, claim rights and recognition, and access resources in national and global arenas. Since the late 1970s, the retraction of the welfare state, the effects of structural adjustment programs, and the rise of an ethos

of speculation and entrepreneurialism have fueled a return to the local. Peter Geschiere (2009) argues that throughout Africa, democratization and state decentralization have led to a rising preoccupation with autochthony or local belonging. Various polities, regions, and social groups now claim autochthonous attachments. Both politicians and commoners, the rich and the poor, find new meanings in the idea of a primordial attachment to land, ethnicity, and culture. Amid intensified flux, such attachments promise not just profit and power, but a sense of stability, durability, and rootedness.

The pursuit of belonging, however, o t en takes the routes of violence, exclusion, and displacement. A central irony, Geschiere argues (2009, 5), animates contemporary understandings of local belonging. On the one hand, it seems natural, self-evident, embedded in blood and emotion. On the other hand, it remains ambiguous, uncertain, constantly requiring validation and reiteration. Under these circumstances, as Vigdis Broch-Due (2005, 1) suggests, "violence is o t en employed as a futile quest to produce certainty, a means to reinforce essentialized ideas about identity and belonging." Violence, Broch-Due argues, is more than the sum of its destructive qualities. It is also a means of identification and differentiation that is meaningful, if read through the "thick" social relations in which it plays out. As the state retracts and global resources shift course in seemingly unpredictable ways, violence becomes a means to claim belonging and appropriate vital forces in the face of people's growing sense of disconnection, loss, and exclusion (Geschiere and Meyer 1998). In this context, violence also represents a way to disambiguate the social differences between autochthons and foreigners (Appadurai 1998).

Like violence, the branding of collective identities is also driven by a quest for certainty. With the commodification and incorporation of ethnicity, branding becomes a means—at once semiotic and sentimental—for owning identities and establishing new parameters for belonging. Martin Chanock (2000, 26) argues that "the international market . . . does not make cultures disappear, but it manipulates them in particular ways, using cultural essences to create loyalty to the universal brand. The cultural element is important because it is the manipulation of identity that creates the attachment." In other words, through branding, culture must become reducible to a set of essential(izing) features that secure both its distinctiveness and its universal recognizability. Cultural belonging is then established through such essences-*cum*-brands. Building on Chanock's point, the Comaroffs (2009, 24) argues that "those who seek to brand their otherness, to profit from what makes them different, find themselves having to do so in the universally recognizable terms in which difference is represented, merchandised, rendered negotiable by means of the

abstract instruments of the market: money, the commodity, commensuration, the calculus of supply and demand, price, branding. And advertising." This means that culture and the commodity are more and more inflected with each other's logics or less and less easy to tell apart (28). As Chanock (2000, 26) puts it, nowadays, "successful and sustainable cultures are those which brand best."

Branding culture, however, is not a straightforward undertaking. Anthropologists have described brands as inherently unstable, indeterminate semiotic processes, which are prone to encounter gaps and failures while circulating or being consumed (Manning 2010; Mazzarella 2003; Moore 2003; Nakassis 2012, 2013). Brands refer to performed relations of signification between the concrete objects or things that one consumes—that is, the *brand tokens*—and the categories, names, or images that the tokens are said to instantiate, that is, the *brand types*. Consuming brands, people also come to inhabit worlds in particular ways, thus generating *brand ontologies* (Nakassis 2012, 631). The semiotic relations between brand types, tokens, and ontologies are often slippery. In various contexts, brands are counterfeited, their names may dissolve into common nouns, or their material components may turn into other branded goods. Or they may fail to generate any desires altogether. In other words, brands are inherently "vulnerable to contingency" (Moore 2003, 334). And if their parts have long been managed by professional specialists, following market liberalization, brands are often strategically left open and inarticulate to allow consumers to become part of—or discover themselves in—the making of these brands (Mazzarella 2003, 194; Nakassis 2012, 629). Recall, for example, the postcard that I described at the beginning of this chapter: While its value is premised on the brand type of the Maasai warrior, it allows viewers to discover themselves that the man in the image is indeed Maasai. Viewers can thus become cultural explorers of their own, as it were.

But what happens when the vulnerability of the brand—the slippery semiotic articulation of its parts—intersects with the uncertainties that haunt contemporary quests for belonging, that is, with the social anxieties that inform people's desires to know who really belongs and who does not? And what happens when, in the process of marketing identity, a specific brand type—such as the young male warrior—suddenly comes to anchor claims to collective belonging, creating new opportunities for some but not for others?

A central contradiction animates my analysis—namely, that ethnic subjects seek to fix, stabilize, and make durable brands of collective identity that promise spectacular wealth, while the reality of their social life in the present is in excess of, or cannot be adequately represented through, their brand image. First, the primitivist fantasies signified by the Maasai moran of touristic postcards do

not reflect contemporary social realities among Maasai or Samburu (although, indeed, the marketing of this brand image now shapes social life there in unexpected ways). Second, in the case of Samburu, what drives the influx of capital and, with it, new pursuits for belonging is a specific body image that is male, young, and sexual. But it is impossible—to state the obvious—that all Samburu suddenly become young, male warriors or that even young men can fully inhabit the narrow contours of their erotic brand image. This body image thus excludes women, children, or older men while also posing myriad challenges for young men who try to perform and assume it. Inspired by Jacques Lacan's concept of the imaginary and the mirror stage and his notion of the phallus, I examine struggles that emerge when men try to embody the image of the ethnic warrior and when a young male body comes to brand ethnicity as a whole. After I examine how these struggles transform the means and terms of ethnic attachment, I return to violence to explore how it makes manifest uncertainties of both branding and belonging. But before I proceed, some background is necessary.

TOURISM, MIGRATION, AND ETHNIC REGIONS IN KENYA

Beneath a widespread political discourse of national unity in Kenya, ethnicity plays an important role in regional belonging and national citizenship. Since the country's independence in 1963, ethnic categories transformed and solidified by the British colonial administration have shaped access to state resources, land ownership, and political authority. More populous ethnic groups, such as Kikuyu, Luo, Kalenjin, and Kamba, have dominated state governance and, at different times, controlled the distribution of national resources and development (Lynch 2011; Oucho 2002). Ethnicity has also served as a key criterion of patronage relations between political leaders and the populations of different regions of the country, thus informing the geopolitical distribution of wealth. Consequently, electoral practices—as well as, for example, the violence that took place around election time in 1997 or 2008—have been anchored in networks of patronage based on ethnicity (Mwakikagile 2001; Ouchu 2002). In this national context, different ethnic groups and their regions did not interact on equal terms. Drawing on colonial and development discourses of progress, some, such as Kikuyu, have appeared modern and progressive, while pastoralists like Maasai, Samburu, Pokot, or Turkana have persistently been seen as backward, underdeveloped, and primitive. Such dominant perceptions have played an important role in legitimizing ideologically the political and economic marginalization of various ethnoregions.

Both the Coast Province and the Samburu District have been largely marginal to the state. But their respective marginalities have been of different kinds and magnitudes. The coast is important economically yet has remained peripheral in national politics. The coastal city of Mombasa, for example, has been an important international port and a major employer in the region (Cooper 1987). What is more, its engagement in trade relations with the Middle East and India have been central sources of revenue for both local elites and the government. Beach tourism too—the most popular attraction in Kenya—has been a significant source of national revenue. Yet coastal politicians have remained marginal (Mahoney 2017). The predominance of Islam in the region and its rule by Arab or Swahili elites has prompted upcountry politicians, most of them Christian, to be wary of the participation of coastal leaders in government. Since independence, those coastal leaders—like Ronald Ngala—have critiqued upcountry politicians for alienating the coast. They have repeatedly called for a form of regional federalism, known as *majimboism*, hoping for greater political self-determination. If only the coast were independent, they reasoned, it would have abundant resources to become self-sufficient.

By contrast to the coast, Samburu and northern Kenya, more generally, have been marginal to the state both politically *and* economically. British colonials saw little potential for profit in the region's semiarid savannah environment. They also saw its mostly pastoralist populations as culturally conservative and reluctant to embrace modernization. Hence, they closed off what was then the Northern Frontier District and governed it—mostly through military repressive power—as a zone of exception (Simpson 1994). Following independence, the Kenyan government continued to neglect the region, postponing investments in infrastructure or economic development. Its administrators were appointed by the central government until very recently; these men came mostly from dominant ethnic groups that were already in power. In this context, stereotypes of Samburu cultural backwardness proliferated and informed how foreign leaders governed them. For Kenya's elites, Samburu were primitive, violent, and sexually promiscuous. And, for them, Samburu morans seemed to congeal these properties most saliently. But, for tourists, their cultural distinctiveness held greater value than that of other Kenyans, creating new possibilities for some Samburu to subvert national ethnic hierarchies by commodifying their culture.

Tourism has grown spectacularly in the past four decades. Throughout the seventies, the tourist arrivals in Kenya leveled at 350,000 per year (quoted in Schoss 1995, 36–38); over the following decades it grew steadily, reaching 1.7 million in 2011 (KIPPRA 2013, 26). In addition to safaris (undertaken mostly

in the southern reserves of Maasai Mara, Tsavo, and Amboseli), the beaches along the Indian Ocean brought in the majority of visitors. The coast, therefore, became central to the tourism industry. Samburu District, however, was far removed from these sites of touristic encounters. Cattle rustling and carjacking also deterred foreigners from venturing into the region. Here, then, was a central conundrum for Samburu: while their ethnic identity was more marketable to tourists than that of other Kenyans, its convertibility into cash required access to regions of the country where tourism thrived, yet these were regions where most of them felt they did not belong.

Samburu, in short, like southern Maasai, had something that visitors wanted. In particular, the image of the Maasai warrior, hunting lions, dancing in vertical thrusts, holding a spear and a club, has long been part of Euro-American fantasies of East Africa. It appeared on postcards, in coffee-table books, and in Hollywood movies (Kasfir 1999, 2007), congealing the authenticity of an African culture untainted by modernity and colonialism. Since the mid-twentieth century, some Maasai and Samburu have benefited, in various ways, from the desires of foreigners to photograph and film them. Some have appeared as extras in movies and others—like Peter, whom I introduced at the beginning of this chapter—are pictured on postcards. But such opportunities have been relatively rare in the north. If they were to be involved more fully in marketing their appearance, Samburu had to participate directly in tourism. In the 1960s, several men worked on the farm of a white settler in Limuru, near Nairobi, where they occasionally danced for tourists (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). With the rise of beach tourism, however, they soon saw more possibilities for selling culture at the coast.

At the time of their first migration to the coast, most Samburu men were members of the moran age grade. In Samburu District, men are initiated through circumcision into moranhood once every fourteen years or so. In this ritual process, initiates aged fifteen through twenty-five come to form an age set. Over the next fourteen years, until the initiation of a new age set, morans are not allowed to marry and are expected to fend for themselves (Spencer 1965, 102–72). Some herd cattle, others are employed as soldiers and policemen, and yet others work informally in tourism. So, since 1979, many morans have migrated seasonally to the coast. There, they live together in small ethnic enclaves in Diani, Mtwapa, Watamu, and Malindi, where they rent and share small rooms. During the day, they sell crafts along the beach or dance in cultural villages, and in the evenings, they perform in tourist hotels. Many of them have had relationships with European women. The image of these men at the coast was truly sensational when they first arrived. In 1980, for example,

Kenya's major national newspaper, *Daily Nation*, published a photograph of two morans resting on the white sands at Serena Beach amid foreign visitors, and looking toward the ocean. The caption read: "They're a long way from home . . . but for these Masai [*sic*] morans, complete with traditional spears and rungus [clubs], the sight of surf pounding on a silver beach is just as fascinating as it is for the tourists."[2]

BECOMING MAASAI MORANS:
BRAND IDENTITY AS PHALLIC BODY IMAGE

Samburu men who arrived at the beach for the first time quickly found that, in order to access tourist spaces, meet foreign women, and build relationships with them, there was much to be learned. One told me that before he started migrating to the coast, he had heard from friends that "in Mombasa, a white woman can fall in love with you even if you don't talk to her." The very sight of the bodies of young men dressed in traditional attire, he implied, o ten led female tourists to initiate intimate relationships with them. Indeed, in Samburu District, there were many stories of how these young men had arrived on the coast—often ten without speaking a word of English—and immediately found rich foreign partners. While such stories motivated many of them to migrate, the reality of their first arrival on the coast was more complicated. As Samburu migrants put it, a man had to learn first how to become a "moran of business" (Maa: *lmurrani lolbiashara*). They had to learn English and Swahili, a bit of German and Italian, how to calculate and negotiate prices for artifacts, and how to entertain foreigners. "The first time I came to the beach I was very *primitive*," one told me in Maa (italicized word in English). "I didn't even know how to speak to a tourist. But one gains *experience* slowly, slowly." Many of my informants saw the time they spent at the coast as part of becoming "modern" or cosmopolitan. Ironically perhaps, to achieve this cosmopolitanism, they had first to learn how to look "primitive" by performing as Maasai warrior in specific ways.

Becoming a moran of business presupposed, among other things, assuming the body image and bodily theatricality—gestures, posture, smiles—that instantiated the kind of erotic warrior desired by tourists. When Zakayo began migrating to the coast in 2005, he was in his late teens and close to finishing high school in Maralal, Samburu District. But because his parents could no longer afford tuition, he decided to make money in tourism. "I was very uncomfortable dressing up in traditional clothes," he told me in an interview in 2008. "At home, in Maralal, I always wore pants and shirts. Only bush people dressed

like that. I thought that people would laugh at me." But Zakayo soon learned
to be proud of "his" traditional attire; it was what, in the eyes of visitors, made
him distinct from other Kenyans. Every day, before going to the beach, he tied
a red loincloth around his waist, placed two strings of colored beads diagonally
across his bare chest, and covered his forearms with beaded bracelets and other
decorations. He tied a handkerchief on his head and placed several strings of
beads around his forehead. When tourists stopped by the beach stand where he
sold souvenirs, he adopted a distinctive posture. He stood up straight, shoul-
ders pushed back, smiled and looked his interlocutors in the eye. When female
tourists asked him for permission to photograph themselves with him, he often
hugged them gently. Smiles, soft touches, and intensive glances were all part of
what produced the ethno-erotic persona of the moran.

    This bodily performance, my informants told me, did not always come natu-
rally to them. "You know," Zakayo explained, "when you go to the beach for the
first time, you are shy. You fear to go up to the white person and talk. So, you
have to learn how to present yourself." While some gestures, gaits, and bodily
postures were part of the habitus of moran masculinity in the north, much
was new at the coast (cf. Kasfir 2007). Here, men seek to perform moranhood
in ways that appeal to foreigners. The likes of Zakayo, who had been in high
school, told visitors stories of lion hunts in which they had participated; how
they had never worn pants or modern clothes; and also reevaluated their own
notions of intimacy and bodily proximity. "In Samburu, you cannot just hold
a woman's hand or kiss her when she comes up to you," Zakayo said. "But at
the beach, that's how it works." Furthermore, while at the coast, some of my
informants had also joined gyms, working out to lose weight or stay in shape
to fit the image of the slim, strong moran.

    Thus, I argue, many Samburu men encountered the "European" image of
the moran body, at first, as patently foreign to themselves. The postcard moran
was something to which they have to aspire, its successful assumption mate-
rializing through the tourists' desires. I read this assumption of a body image,
as I have already intimated, in light of what Jacques Lacan describes as the
processes of the imaginary in the mirror stage. In the mirror stage, Lacan (1977,
76–80) argues, we encounter our body image as something alien from us— a
representation that appears outside us, in the mirror. But soon we desire to *be*
that image, to have its tidy contours to fully represent our lived being. This,
however, is never possible, since the turbulent corporeal flows and affects—the
Sturm und Drang of our existence—are always in excess of the self-contained
image in the mirror. So, Lacan wrote, "the mirror stage is a drama whose inter-
nal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation . . . and to

the final donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark [the subject's] entire mental development with its rigid structure" (78). This assumption of an alienating identity produces a central contradiction between the Real, our own visceral being-in-the-world, and the Imaginary, an image that is given to us as initially alien from ourselves but that we nevertheless must continuously desire to become. Although, with the acquisition of language, we have new (symbolic) ways to refer to the mirror image as being "ours" and to ourselves as independent subjects more generally (in other words, we acquire what Lacan describes as the "*I*-function"), the drama of the mirror stage never ends. We continuously have to desire to assume an image of ourselves that would grant us the recognition and desire of the Other. Echoing the Lacanian mirror stage, men who perform Maasai warriorhood for tourists encounter this persona as something at first alien to themselves—at least in part. It may appear on post-cards, in films, in the touristic fantasy, but it does not fully coincide with what they know. So, in becoming "morans of business," they seek to assume that image in ways that promise to elicit the recognition and desire of foreigners as well as their home communities (if only later, when they will have accessed money). This process is never complete; the desire of the other never guaran-teed. But the quest to embody, fix, and stabilize the relation between the subject and the desired body image drives a dialectical process through which both subject and image are remade.

Understanding Samburu men's assumption of the moran body image as akin to the Lacanian mirror stage requires some clarification. First, encountering their brand image is certainly not the only way in which these men come into subjectivity. Nor is it one of the first moments of subjectivation in their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Samburu District, domestic practices, kinship relations, schooling, humanitarian aid, circumcision ceremonies, and the customary institution of moranhood, among other things, play central roles in the making of masculine subjectivities, from early childhood through adulthood (Spencer 1965). One might even interpret Samburu modes of subjectivity as ontologically opposed to psychoanalytic universalisms (see, for example, Straight 2007). I posit instead that in a wider context of competing means of subjectivation, encountering one's brand image speaks of a particular drama of subjectivity that resonates with what Lacan described as the mirror stage. Rather than describing a universal psychic process, as some psychoanalysts claim, I approach this drama of subjectivity as having come to circulate worldwide as part of globalization and the ever-growing political economy of commodities and visual media. Second, it is important to avoid reducing the drama of the Lacanian mirror stage to a childhood phase of development.

For, as Lacan himself argues, though the drama of mirror stage begins to play out in early infancy, its central contradiction—the irreconcilability of the Real and the Imaginary forces of subjectivity—haunts subjects for the rest of their lives, even as the acquisition of language complicates things further (1977, 78–79). The very fact that Samburu I worked with refer to this image as "theirs," at times ethnicize it as "Maasai," or objectify it in economic transactions, troubles the developmental connotations of a prelinguistic mirror stage. In this sense, my analytic parallel aims to capture the generative contradictions of this mirror drama without its developmental psychological undertones. And, that being said, the life course is not irrelevant to my analysis. The desire of Samburu men to assume the moran body image, as we shall see, takes a different turn, for example, as they age and their bodies no longer correspond to the brand images of the youthful moran.

But why should we understand this process of assuming a body image as *branding*? Is the term merely an analytical import? Or is it how postcolonial subjects themselves understand and refer to the process of marketing their culture and identity? Or is it both? Branding, as both a linguistic signifier and as a process of value production, appears widely in Kenya today in relation to identities. It does so on different, segmentary scales: ethnic, pan-ethnic, regional, religious, and national. In March 2008, for example, the state launched Brand Kenya, a government organization whose scope is "to build a strong country brand that fosters national pride, patriotism, and earns global recognition and preference." According to the organization's web page, its board has "the responsibility of identifying and refining the key attributes of Kenya, that contribute positively to the image and reputation of the Nation." Indeed, the future of a national identity lies here in its ability to market its resources, like a corporation (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 122–36). In an attempt to combat colonial images of primitivity, among other things, the organization seeks to use the achievements of Kenyan intellectuals and images of modern cities and industry to brand the country. But, perhaps ironically, Brand Kenya's website also uses, on its homepage, an image of Maasai warriors dancing. This suggests that, primitivist as it may be, the image of Maasai warriors is too valuable to be renounced completely.

This is no doubt also the case for Maasai themselves who now explicitly approach both their image and their collective name as "brands" of their ethnic identity. In 2013, Maasai made international news when they announced that they will trademark their "brand." The Maasai Intellectual Property Initiative (MIPI), an organization based in Kenya, collaborated with Light Years IP, an international NGO, to copyright the name and the image of Maasai,

estimating their brand value at $10 million per year. Isaac ole Tialolo, the chair of MIPI, told BBC: "We all know that we have been exploited by people who just come around, take our pictures and benefit from it."[3] Although it was not clear which Maasai would profit from the copyrighting process more specifically, what is relevant here is that people thought of their *identity* and *image*—the two inextricably linked—*as* a brand. But even when people did not actually use the word "brand," the logics of branding were already at work in relation to ethnicity. In Samburu District, the Maa-language radio station, Serian FM, brands itself through the logo of the warrior holding a spear; local honey producers label their jars with images of morans; and NGOs like Maasai Cricket Warriors gained international fame by adding a new twist—a colonial sport—to an otherwise older and globally recognizable image of the moran. Young men who belong to this organization play cricket dressed traditionally, while championing the abolition of female genital cutting and early marriage and promoting schooling and development in northern Kenya.

Few of my informants spoke to me of their performances at the beach or in hotels as a way of *branding*, though they often referred to the Maasai moran as "our brand." Nevertheless, the logics of branding—not as a *thing* but as a *process*—were already at work in the wider context of their performances and thus informed the ways they went about enacting this image. There were high stakes in embodying the moran brand image, for with it came the promise of money, wealth, and a respectable future. It is no surprise then that, in claiming a certain brand image, men I worked with spoke of it often as a "thing" they had embodied and owned all along. But, in reality, their brand was a quite uncertain thing, to be performed, claimed, and assumed, always with an outlook to the desire of tourists and its ability to produce cash.

A brand image then is not just any kind of image. It is an image invested with more transformative potential than other images—it congeals a more salient promise for happiness and fulfillment. In this sense, the drama of the Lacanian imaginary stops short of accounting for the intensity of desire that a brand image may generate. If anything, the brand image—its assumed ability to generate value almost magically—is more akin to Lacan's notion of the phallus. For Lacan (1985, 82, 84), the phallus represents a "privileged signifier" of "the desire of the Other." Rather than refer to the penis as such, the phallus is a thing one wants to have or to embody in order to attract the desire and recognition of the outer world (or, the social world—what Lacan calls the big Other). In such desire and recognition, one seeks self-affirmation and fulfillment. In this sense, "The phallus refers to plentitude; it is the signifier of the wholeness that we lack" (Sapur 1988, 16). Samburu men sought that plentitude in the wealth

and well-being that their brand image promised. Meanwhile, for foreigners, as I argued elsewhere, the moran brand congealed another promise of wholeness: the transformative potential of partaking in the cultural difference of the other (Meiu 2011; 2017, 113–22). But like the moran brand image, the phallus is an ambiguous thing for Lacan. On the one hand, it promises "lending reality to the subject in the signifier" (Lacan 1985, 84). On the other hand, it remains elusive, "making unreal the relations to be signified" (84). In this sense, the phallus is also a fetish, one that—like the fetishism of the commodity (see, for example, Krips 1999)—has exceptional generative power.

The intense desire to embody, as it were, the brand image of the Maasai warrior—or, in other words, to become the phallus—transformed how Samburu men understood themselves in relation to the moran image and Maasai identity. For them, brand-making involved (re)establishing genealogical ties to Maasai and internalizing a sense of pan-Maa identity. Tourist advertisements, postcards, dance shows, and cultural villages almost always presented Samburu morans as Maasai and Samburu men also introduced themselves to tourists in this way. "Some tourists read about the Maasai and Samburu," Tiras, a young Samburu man told me, "and they know what's Samburu. They know what's Maasai. But most of them know us as Maasai." "Do you explain the difference?" I asked. "Sometimes yes, sometimes no," he said. "It's just better to say you are a Maasai. Or, maybe a Samburu-Maasai." While it was rare in the north for Samburu to identify with Maasai, Samburu who lived at the coast internalized a Maasai identity. They not only responded when locals called them Maasai but also referred to themselves as Maasai in conversations with other people. The claim of Samburu men to a Maasai identity represented, in part, a way of commensurating their cultural difference through a denominator with which foreign tourists and other Kenyans were more familiar (cf. Kasfir 2007, 295–97). At the same time, I suggest, the fact that tourists and other Kenyans recognized them as Maasai generated a pan-Maa identity and consciousness among Samburu in coastal towns.

"We have something called Maa," a Samburu elder in Mtwapa explained to me in English. "Call them Samburu, call them Maasai, call them Nchamus. Those are all of the universal name we call Maa." The identification of Samburu with Maasai, this informant suggested, was not a *mis*identification or switching of ethnic identities, but rather a form of *pan*-identification (cf. Kasfir 2007, 295–96). The discursive category of the Maa-speaking people to whom Samburu also belonged emerged throughout the twentieth century as linguists, anthropologists, and government officials classified the population of Kenya according to common ancestries, similarities of language and culture, and historical

evidence. This does not mean that previously Samburu had not claimed such relatedness. They certainly have. But the terms of such claims were different: more focused on ties of descent and kinship between specific Samburu clans or lineages and those of Maasai proper and less on the comparative criteria of the social sciences. In tourism, however, Samburu claimed a more generic pan-Maa identity to speak of themselves as Maasai. "Let me tell you the truth about our history," offered Saitoti, a Samburu man I interviewed in the coastal town of Watamu in 2011: "The Samburu are just Maasai. But, long time ago, they separated. The Samburu stayed north, and the other Maasai went south, even into Tanzania. But the Samburu are just Maasai. . . . But, you see, the tourists don't want those Maasai from the south, because they have lost most of their culture. Us, Samburu, we still have the old Maasai culture. If you look at us and you look at them, you will see that they don't wear those beads around the neck like we do. That is the original culture. That is what tourists want to see."

For Saitoti, Maasainess can stand in for a pan-Maa identity of which the southern Maasai, or the Maasai proper are as much part as are Samburu and Chamus. Samburu men like Saitoti took the nominal index "Maasai" to represent at once the Maasai proper and the Maa-speaking people more generally. Here (through what Charles Sanders Pierce calls abduction syllogism), the descriptor of a part was taken to stand in for the whole. In this way, in the context of tourism, Samburu claimed both similitude *and* difference in relation to Maasai. First, by taking the more marketable subcategory of Maasai and substituting it for the category of the Maa-speaking people to which Samburu also belonged, they could legitimately claim Maasainess as one of their identities. Second, by claiming Maasainess as a pan-identity (and not a primary ethnic identity), they could also sustain their distinction from Maasai proper. According to Saitoti, Samburu were indeed the more original Maasai, with "the old Maasai culture" that "the tourists want to see."

In the process of identifying with the Maasai brand, Samburu migrants in tourism also anchored their identity more strongly in the visual appearance of the moran body. For Saitoti, the beads that morans wear around their necks are proof of the fact that their culture is more authentic than that of the Maasai. My other Samburu interlocutors at the coast also emphasized that "being Samburu" is about "being morans." In interviews I carried out in Mtwapa in 2008, I asked: "What does it mean for you to be a Samburu?" By implying an essentialist identity, the question inevitably called for an essentialist response. Interestingly, however, most of the answers I received invoked the moran, in one way or another. "Being Samburu," one man suggested, "is to keep this culture of the moran, with the red ochre [M: *lkaria*] and the long hair [M: *lmasi*]."

"It is about wearing these beads and feathers," another man explained pointing to his moran attire. While, in Samburu District, moranhood had long been indexical of men's adherence to tradition (Holtzman 2009, 169), among men who participated in tourism, the visual icon of the moran adorned in colorful bodily decorations became emblematic of ethnicity in new ways. In tourist resorts, they all wore moran attire and introduced themselves to tourists and other Kenyans as "morans," regardless of whether they actually were in the age grade of moranhood or not. They performed "moran" dances, sold "moran" spears, and enjoyed the sexual freedom of "morans." Here then, the phallic imaginary of the Maasai warrior affixed collective identity to the body of the young man.

While men I worked with embraced this brand image enthusiastically, this was not an image of their own making—at least not entirely. Colonials, missionaries, and travelers have long used the image of the moran to invest a whole ethnic population with an excessive sexual drive (Meiu 2017, 47–56). Tourists themselves came to seek the sexuality of morans for its allegedly exotic nature. Here, then, the Lacanian phallus is suggestive in another regard: it speaks of a certain kind of reduction of identity to genitality, a reduction that concentrates the very possibility of a collective future onto the sexuality of the Maa warrior.

The phallic imaginary that characterizes the individual struggle of men seeking to embody the moran brand image is then also a collective struggle. Through claims such as "we are all Maasai" or "we are all morans," the brand image reorganizes, if only partially, the meanings of collective identity. And so, the collective and the individual come to depend on one another in new ways: it is only through the collective identity of the Maasai (or Samburu) that the body of a specific man can come to generate value, and it is through the bodies of their young men that the group can access resources. This then, as we shall see, also generates a set of conflicts over belonging, age, and gender among Samburu men in tourism.

EXCESS, EXCLUSION, AND ERASURE IN ETHNO-EROTIC BRANDING

For Samburu men at the coast, "loyalty to the universal brand" meant loyalty to the marketable image of the young moran. This presupposed a set of excesses, exclusions, and erasures. First, the brand type excluded women from the onset. A few young Samburu women had joined their husbands or brothers on the coast. But most of them worked as house maids or sex workers and did not participate in tourism as such. If women joined men at dance performances,

they remained mostly in the background. Second, the brand type presupposed erasing the social differences between different men, making them into tokens of the brand. This involved not only dressing up as morans, regardless, for example, of whether a man had gone to school or not, but also regardless of whether a particular man actually was part of the age grade of moranhood. Furthermore, even as men tried to erase generational hierarchies, aging bodies made for tokens that only poorly indexed the ideal brand type.

That all Samburu men were morans for purposes of business produced a set of contradictions and conflicts. The desire of elders to erase generational differences for purposes of tourist commodification collided with their attempts to exert authority as elders over younger men. I became aware of this issue following a conflict I witnessed in March 2011. On a Friday evening, a group of Samburu dancers went to perform at the Bamburi Beach Hotel. As the dancers waited in front of the hotel to be allowed to enter, a European woman approached Boniface, a moran of the Lkishami age set (initiated in 2005), asking to take a picture of him. After the woman left, Boniface called her, trying to sell her some beads. Lkeseyion, an elder of the Lkuroro age set (initiated in 1976, two age sets above Boniface), scolded Boniface for disturbing the tourist. Boniface turned to the elder and asked him rudely: "Is this the white of your mother? Or, why are you telling me what to do?" A fight ensued. Elders of the Lmooli (initiated in 1990) and Lkuroro age sets fought with the morans. The following evening, I joined the dancers at the Bahari Beach Hotel. Before entering the hotel for a dance performance, the leaders of the dance group, two junior elders, called for an emergency meeting in the bushes in front of the resort. The leaders had missed out on the performance of the previous night and asked to be told what had happened. After listening to both parties, one leader stood up to address the dancers: "Stop arguing over who is an elder and who is a moran!" he ordered with a violent gesture of his knobkerrie: "If you want to destroy our business, why don't you all go and work as watchmen? Here, in Mombasa, there is no difference between the Lkishami, the Lmooli, and the Lkuroro. If you want to call us all morans, call us all morans! If you want to call us all elders, call us elders! We are all morans. We are all elders. We are all the same."

This incident points to the perceived incompatibility of touristic warriorhood with Samburu age grade relations. As an elder and a ritual "firestick patron" (M: *lpiroi*) of the morans, Lkeseyion would have been entitled to scold Boniface for his behavior. In coastal resorts, elders like Lkeseyion oftentimes invoked their senior age grade status as a way to exert authority over morans. However, elders told me that coastal morans did not listen to them and explained the disobedience of morans as a result of their financial

independence and of the poor morality of coastal areas. Meanwhile, young morans like Boniface laughed at elders like Lkeseyion, who proudly pretended to be morans two decades after they had become elders. They explained that they refused to accept their authority because, for them, these men did not set an example of respectability. To emphasize this point, morans on the coast very often used the phrasing: "There are no elders in Mombasa. All the elders are at home" (M: *Metii lpayeni Mombasa. Netii lpayeni pooki nkang*). According to the morans, men who aged at the coast were not elders, but neither were they morans as such. Instead, as a moran put it, they were "men who have forgotten that their time has passed" (for a more detailed discussion of this incident, see Meiu 2017, 238–40).

Indeed, elderly men did not have the same chances of success in tourism as younger men. The statement of the leader of the dancing group—"We are all the same"—occluded this reality in an attempt to produce what Chanock (2000, 26) calls a market-driven "loyalty to the universal brand." The brand of the moran presupposed, of course, an erasure of intergenerational antagonisms, if only temporarily, for the purposes of successful business. As men of different age sets dressed as morans to perform in hotels and sell artifacts at the beach, they developed a strong sense that what brought them together, day after day, night after night, was an ethnic identity that was anchored in the bodily appearance of the young, sexual moran. Despite intergenerational conflicts—or as a way to prevent them—these men came to understand themselves as part of a "culture of the moran, with the red ochre, and the long hair."

There are echoes here, again, of Lacan's turbulent processes of the imaginary, with the difference that a drama of subjectivity becomes also a drama of collectivity. Through the branding process, a social group must assume the body image of the young warrior as condition of its continued existence on the market. The Maasai warrior becomes the "symbolic matrix" for collective identity. This however generates both an awareness of a *lack*—an inability to fully produce oneself in one's brand image—and contradictions, such as those of age. Men engaged in ethno-erotic economies were aware that their individual possibilities of success depleted as they aged and their bodies no longer corresponded to marketable notions of sexual desirability. The brand type of the moran depended on brand tokens that were relatively young looking. Aware of their depleting youth, these men sought to speculate on how to produce wealth quickly. Riches that seemed easy to acquire when men were young appeared more and more out of reach as they aged. Younger men dismissively called these elders "beach-boy elders" (M: *lpayian oo bichboi*) to question their respectability (Meiu 2015). Typically, beach-boy elders never acquired

any wealth or had "lost" their wealth drinking alcohol, gambling, or spending money on mistresses. They continued to live on the coast and returned to the beach in search of (further) life-transforming encounters with female tourists. But most of them only made ends meet by working as watchmen or begging money off younger men.

SECURING MARKETS: FAKE MORANS, CULTURAL PIRACY, AND ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS

"The very first thing tourists ask when the planes land in Mombasa is: Where are the Maasai?" A district commissioner (DC) of Kenya's coastal region of Kilifi allegedly uttered these words in a public speech, sometime in the late 1990s. Jeffrey, a Samburu man in his fifties, quoted the DC's words for me one evening in April 2011. We were sitting in an alleyway, in front of the small room he rented in the town of Mtwapa, at the coast. He spoke to me about interethnic tensions that Maa-speaking migrants, like himself, faced while living there. Jeffrey had migrated to Mtwapa for the past twenty-five years. That evening, he proudly invoked what the DC had said to explain to me that "Maasai"—by which he meant all Maa-speakers, including Samburu—were highly beneficial to coastal tourism. That is how, according to Jeffrey, the DC had meant his statement. Following fights between men of the local Giriama ethnic group and Maasai and Samburu migrants, the DC had called a meeting in Kilifi. "The Giriama wanted to chase us away from the coast," Jeffrey remembered, "and that's how the fight started." He recalled the DC asked Giriama youths: "Why are you chasing away the Maasai? Don't you know that it is the Maasai that are bringing us business? It is the Maasai that tourists want to see. There is no need to chase these people away." Jeffrey paused, smiling. "You see? The DC understood this. He told the Giriama: 'The money you pocket, don't you see where it's coming from? You want to kill these people? Now, that food that is in your stomachs, do you really want to throw it up?'" Quoting the DC, Jeffrey invoked a widespread belief in the country, according to which angering those who feed you is tantamount to poisoning the food you ingest. Instead, Jeffrey suggested, Giriama and other coastal people should be grateful to Maasai.

It is important to recall that for Samburu migrants at the coast, Maasainess was a form of pan-identity if we are to make sense of what they saw as instances of cultural theft, piracy, and fakery. In relation to non-Maa speakers, Samburu claimed cultural ownership of Maasainess and often fought collectively alongside Maasai proper against Kikuyu, Kamba, or Giriama young men who dressed

up as Maasai morans in order to do business in tourism. Indeed, some of these men were quick to admit that there was more to be gained by performing the image of the Maasai warrior than approaching tourists in any other way. In 2004, Kenya's *Lifestyle* magazine observed how men of other ethnic groups "don't see anything wrong with disguising themselves as Maasai moran[s] and using that as a tool of trade to earn a modest living."[4] Voicing the opinion of a "genuine moran," the article maintained that "those masquerading as *moran* are soiling the Maasai culture and reputation." My Samburu informants held a similar view. They were concerned, for example, about the growing number of cultural villages that found it was cheaper to ask their coastal Digo and Giriama dancers to dress up also as Maasai warriors and perform Maasai dances. "This is killing our business," the leader of a Samburu dance group told me in Diani in 2011.

While there was little that Maasai and Samburu men could do about the decisions of the managers of hotels and cultural villages, they were more likely to challenge directly the "fake morans" they encountered along the beach. Saitoti recalled in Swahili how, one time, he had been among a group of Samburu who threatened to beat a Giriama man at the beach in Watamu: "I told him to take [the moran attire] off right away, or it will be a fight. I asked him: 'Why do you wear these clothes if you are not a Maasai? Do you have no *culture* of your own? Dress in your own *culture*!' I told him: 'I should not catch you dressed like that or I will take you to the police.' This is *piracy*! They have their own *culture*. Why do they steal ours? *Each person should eat from his own culture* [italicized text in English]." Because in the context of tourism, culture was about bodily garments and decorations, "fake morans" could easily "steal business" (S: *kuiba biashara*) from the Samburu by dressing as morans. Asking the Giriama man to strip his moran attire, Saitoti and his friends claimed ownership of a Maasai culture that was centrally indexed by the visual appearance of the moran. Although, in Kenya, ownership of indigenous culture was not protected by law as in other parts of the world (see Brown 2003), everyday engagements of Samburu men with what they saw as instances of theft of culture already invoked a popular use of the "language of jurisprudence" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 24). The conviction of Samburu men that these were instances of "piracy," and that they could cooperate with the police to prevent them, affirmed their sense of ownership of a Maasai pan-identity. Meanwhile, Saitoti's suggestion that "each person should eat from his own culture" occluded a historical reality in which not all material expressions of ethnic identities carried value for the tourist market. Samburu men knew this well and often allowed a few of their Kikuyu, Kamba, or Giriama friends, who had asked for their permission, to dress up as morans and sell handicrafts at the beach. When I asked Saitoti

why other groups did not perform their own culture to tourists, he responded: "Their culture is not marketable."

In short, for Samburu-Maasai, brand-making through narrative genealogies and the physical defense of ethnic boundaries against piracy and theft are not only conditions for cultural commodification but also sources of pan-ethnic identity and consciousness. As men seek to control who can and cannot market Maasai culture, they affirm their adherence to a pan-Maa identity and express a sense of Maasai collective consciousness. But the language ownership and the practices of exclusion that it legitimized are also forms of violence. They are meant to draw lines of ethnic difference between young men who otherwise are quite similar in that they struggle to build lives in a context of poverty. It was as a way to defend their "rights" to their Maasai cultural difference that some of these men also turned to the incorporation of ethnic identity through state-registered business organizations or so-called self-help groups.

In 1986, Samburu men who lived on the coast registered the Maasai Moran Cooperative Society (MMCS) with the Department of Cooperative Development of the Kenyan government.[5] Based in Mtwapa, MMCS represented the interests of its members with tourist businesses and state authorities, as well as supervised Samburu migrants, managed their finances, and offered them various benefits. MMCS capitalized on both the growing tourist market for Maasai culture and the rising numbers of Samburu male migrants to the coast. It acted as a gatekeeper for Samburu migrants in the tourist industry. Its leaders obtained contracts with hotels and cultural villages and offered migrants the possibility of participating in dance performances. While relatively few of these men were actual members of MMCS (by some accounts 150 in the 1980s), all of them had to collaborate with the organization in order to access tourist venues or obtain permits to sell handicrafts at the beach.

MMCS benefited in various ways from the income of Samburu migrants in tourism, and offered them various benefits in return. Hotels and cultural villages rarely paid the dancers, instead offering them fifteen minutes after their performance to sell their handicrafts to the tourists in the audience. Men who sold handicrafts during this time had to pay a commission (M and S: *ses*) of 10 to 20 percent to the organization. In addition, dancers also had to sell artifacts that belonged to the organization (usually, artisanal Maasai shields). Men who were in relationships with European women were often charged higher prices for beach permits and were asked to contribute higher amounts of money to the organization. In return, MMCS placed individual dancers on the performance schedule and offered them welfare benefits. Among these were small loans to help young men with start-up costs, money for health emergencies, and bus

fares for urgent trips to their homes in Samburu District. The organization also offered banking services to migrants, who could deposit their income in its corporate account to produce interest and resist the temptation of spending while at the coast; nonmembers usually registered with MMCS at the beginning of every tourist season and claimed their savings and profits three months later. Meanwhile, MMCS members divided part of the corporate profits at the end of each tourist season and kept the rest of the money in the corporate account to be invested in a future collective tourist project.

Age set relations played an important role in the process of ethnic incorporation. From the first, MMCS not only branded itself through the image of the moran but was also founded exclusively by morans. All of its members were men of the Lkuroro age set who had been morans throughout the 1980s. In the 2000s, for example, men of younger age sets remembered MMCS as "the Society of the Lkuroro." As the Lkuroro had become junior elders and prepared to return to Samburu District to settle down, MMCS had enabled a few of them to save money in a collective fund. When MMCS finally dissolved in 1994, one elder told me, its members had accumulated KES 24 million (about $290,000), part of which they invested promptly in a piece of prime land on the north coast, by the ocean.[6]

As the number of migrants to the coast grew in the 1990s, the Lmooli age set of morans opened their own organizations. Four organizations now covered respectively different areas of the coast: the Samburu Moran Curio Dealer Association in Mtwapa; the Samburu Self-Help Group in Watamu; the Samburu Moran Traditional Dancers association in Diani; and the Samburu Traditional Maasai Morans, also in Diani. Unlike earlier welfare cooperative societies, these organizations were registered with the Ministry of Gender, Sport, Culture, and Social Services and were no longer subsidized by the government. Because, in the meantime, the number of Maasai migrants from Tanzania and, to a lesser extent, from southern Kenya also grew in tourist resorts, Samburu rebranded their associations as "Samburu" for purposes of further distinction. Yet the moran and the claim of the Samburu to a more authentic Maasainess remained important for purposes of branding.

The incorporation of ethnic identity at once produced new inequalities and regenerated a sense of collective ethnic identity. Unequal access to money and authority cut across the relations between young men and the beach-boy elders, the stakeholders of the ethnic organization, and the migrants on whom they relied. But at the same time, these men all claimed ownership of and adherence to a Samburu-Maasai identity that was centrally indexed through the figure of the moran. Furthermore, ethnic incorporation also represented an

institutionalized mechanism through which elders tried to redirect the cash produced in coastal tourism—albeit in uneven ways—to the making of futures in Samburu District.

THE VIOLENCE OF A PHALLIC IMAGE

Among coastal residents, abject poverty, chronic unemployment, and the loss of land existed alongside the spectacular riches of business owners and the large landholdings of luxurious tourist resorts. Mijikena—a pan-ethnic category that includes the Giriama, Digo, Duruma, Chonyi, and others—understood themselves as historically marginalized by the richer, more affluent Swahili Arabs and, since the 1960s, by the "upcountry people" (McIntosh 2009). The latter category refers mostly to labor migrants and migrant settlers of the Kikuyu, Kamba, and Luo ethnic groups, who bought land, owned businesses, and dominated the tourist economy and other sectors. Here, the autochthonous notion of the "coastal people" is a form of collective consciousness formed in opposition to outsiders, or upcountry people. The two categories most likely emerged in the first part of the twentieth century with the rise of labor migration to the coast from other regions of the country. Nepotism and tribalism, coastal leaders often argued, led these upcountry people to favor members of their own ethnic groups for employment in hotels or other business. As a local put it to the *Daily Nation* on September 27, 1997, "Local hotels [are] 'packed' with upcountry people, while Digos are given 'a raw deal.' . . . The Digos are not being involved in tourism although much of it is taking place on their land."

The coastal category of upcountry people works to erase differences between various ethnic groups (a process typical of ethnic identity in urban contexts [see Mitchell 1956]) and to occlude the socioeconomical inequalities that exist between various migrants in their places of origin. Let us recall that, upcountry, Samburu already occupied a marginal socioeconomic position relative to more dominant groups. Thus, for example, when coastal people accused upcountry people of exploiting them or alienating their resources, they saw Maasai and Samburu as responsible for coastal inequalities as Kikuyu, Kamba, and Luo. Yet, not unlike the vast majority of coastal youth, most Maasai and Samburu young men at the coast lived in poverty while waiting for life-transforming encounters with tourists. Why, then, were they targeted as part of coastal youths' uprisings against foreigners?

The Digo youth movement of 1997, known today as the Kaya Bombo, emerged as one of the numerous historical attempts to chase out upcountry people and establish majimboism, a kind of federalism that would grant the

coast more power of self-determination. Between May and August 1997, local political leaders collaborated with traditional religious leaders to administer oaths (Digo: *kinu*) to over three hundred Digo youths and other coastal young men in Digo sacred forest sites known as *kaya*. It is noteworthy that this movement turned to ancestral rituals and military training to produce warriors of a different kind, mixing the styles of national army soldiers with those of the traditional Digo warriors of the old days. On August 13, 1997, these young men raided and burned down the Likoni police station, stealing rifles and ammunition. Then they began burning down houses, kiosks, shops, bars, restaurants, and vehicles belonging to migrants from upcountry. Throughout the following year, they launched over twenty-five violent attacks. On these occasions, they also circulated leaflets or painted messages on public walls that urged upcountry people to "return to their homes" and called on coastal people to reclaim their land. One such leaflet read: "The time has come for us original inhabitants of the Coast to claim what is rightly ours. We must remove these invaders from our land."[7]

On September 5, 1997, the Kaya Bombo attacked Shirlon Bar near Shelly Beach Hotel, where they encountered the Samburu dancers. Peter Lelenguia, who was depicted on the postcard I described in the beginning of this chapter, spoke to the journalists of the *Daily Nation* just before he died. He said that the "raiders" entered the bar and cut people with machetes. Then they burned down the bar. Samburu men I interviewed on the coast in 2008 and 2011 explained to me that on that day in 1997, Samburu were not targets of violence as such. The Kaya Bombo, they suggested, targeted the owners of Shelly Beach Hotel and the Shirlon Bar, who were Kikuyu. Unlike Kikuyu or Luo, very few Samburu owned land on the coast. Rather, as one informant put it, "the men were in the wrong place, at the wrong time."

I wish to offer a different reading of these events. While indeed few Maasai and Samburu owned land on the coast, they claimed relative monopoly over a cultural and sexual brand that was central to the tourist economy. Recall Jeffrey's words—it is, after all, the Maasai that tourists want to see. As Samburu men sought better to embody and claim ownership of the phallic image of the erotic moran, they sometimes resorted to acts of violence against coastal youths who sought to partake in the tourist economy. In the case of Samburu, loyalty to the brand image of the Maasai warrior involved violent exclusions of those youths. Hence, the latter more readily recognized Samburu (and Maasai) bodies as essentially Other and threatening. So, even though Samburu did not own local land or were not much involved in the formal labor market, their bodies and sexuality, when read through the phallic brand image, represented a form

of mysterious capital that—being ethnically marked and marketed—others could not easily access.

In this context, interethnic violence cannot be reduced to either the manipulations of corrupt political leaders or simple conflict between predefined autochthons and foreigners. It is important instead to understand violence in relation to the phallic image of the Maasai brand, its almost spectral power to both lure subjects with promises of miraculous wealth and evade their attempts to ever fully attain or pin down its image. At some level, Samburu migrants and coastal young men had much in common. They all inhabited a context of rampant unemployment with uncertain speculative economies in which masculine respectability and the pursuit of social reproduction have come sharply into question. In this regard, more often than not, violence emerges at points of similarity rather than difference. For coastal youths, violence against Samburu was then, first of all, an attempt to disambiguate their difference against the backdrop of a socioeconomic predicament they all seemed to share: if we are all living in times of hardship and poverty, so the logic went, how come *they* can suddenly become wealthy and *we* cannot? But Samburu and other Maa-speaking migrants claimed exclusive rights over an image that, like the Lacanian phallus, promised more than it could deliver while also reorganizing subjective and collective life around itself—as a pursuit of its uncertain promises. The fact that this highly desired brand was itself uncertain, elusive, and alien to those who desired to embody it only intensified the force with which Samburu claimed it: they performed, incorporated, and at times defended it violently. For coastal youths, violence against Samburu was then also an expression of their desire to inhabit the plenitude and wholeness of wealth and full citizenship that the Maasai brand image promised to Maa-speakers, but not to them. There was, as such, a desire to become the phallus.

Sex and sexuality were central sites of uncertainty over social reproduction, relatedness, and belonging. Like the orgiastic sexuality of the witch (so well documented in classic Africanist ethnographies), in contemporary Kenya, the imagined sexualities of beach-boy elders, prostitutes, gays, lesbians, and others were held responsible—if to different extents—for the alleged failures of normative expectations of family, kinship, and reproduction. It is this very anxiety and ambiguity over sexuality, its power to yield cash instead of offspring, that plays out centrally in the materiality of violence as bodies are cut, castrated, and disfigured. In this sense too, the Kaya Bombo was also an attempt to pursue some sort of moral rehabilitation: it sought to produce a different kind of warrior, a different kind of masculinity, a different kind of pathway to the phallus—to the possibility to reposition oneself and one's

community in relation to the state and to gain political plentitude and wholeness, as it were.

I suggest that the indeterminacy of ethno-erotic branding—the necessity of its perpetual reiteration through creative performance and violent exclusions—intersects with collective anxieties and uncertainties over both belonging and social reproduction to give particular meaning to interethnic violence. Arjun Appadurai (1998, 906) argued that "the ethnic body [becomes] a theatre for the engagement of uncertainty under the special circumstances of globalization." Here, "violence can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about 'them' and, therefore, about 'us'" (909). Building on Appadurai's insight, I suggest that the cutting off of genitalia, the butchering of bodies deemed erotically desirable, the crashing of heads, all of which are common in interethnic violence in coastal Kenya, represent such a macabre form of producing certainty—to reveal the essence of the commodity fetish, to expose that which seems threatening and dangerous and beyond comprehension. Here, again, the branding of ethnic sexuality is premised on and generates a constant potential for ethnic violence: both the violence of cultural ownership and exclusion involved in the production of the ethnic brand and the violence of a cultural logic of ethnic essences, essences often deemed sexual.

CONCLUSION

If the possibility of rapid enrichment attracted Samburu men to the coast, their chances of success in tourism seemed ridden with uncertainty. Migrants knew that relatively few of them would find foreign partners. They also knew that their chances of success decreased as they aged and became less attractive to visitors—less fit, as it were, to perform youthful warriorhood. Hence, they tried constantly to craft new ways to improve their performances, to pin down and stabilize the concrete ways through which those performances could be converted into cash. Meanwhile, however, they also faced the challenges of living and working in a region to which they felt they did not belong and where interethnic tensions often led to violence. Several Samburu have died throughout the past few decades at the hands of coastal youth. But Maasai and Samburu migrants have also initiated violent attacks on "fake morans," men of other ethnic groups, including the coastal Digo and Giriama, who dress up as morans hoping to find European partners more easily. Interethnic violence is not merely a byproduct of a tourist market venerating Maasai morans but also

an integral part of an economy of ethnic sexuality that brings belonging and social reproduction into question.

At the center of the dialectics between branding and belonging in Kenyan coastal tourism is another dialectical relationship: an open-ended dialectic between an identity anchored in body image and the desires, performances, and subjectivities of those who try to embody it as a condition of producing social and economic value. I understand this dialectic in light of what Lacan saw as the role of the imaginary for the subject in the mirror stage but also in terms of the desire of the subject to become the phallus. Here the constant attempt to assume an image that exists outside oneself produces all kinds of turbulences, contradictions, exclusions, and insufficiencies. Similarly, those who seek to fashion their identity through the image of the young warrior generate exclusions and conflicts along lines of gender, age, generation, and ethnicity. Some of these conflicts play out violently. Here, then, the meanings of violence cannot be reduced to a preexisting ethnicity, but must be understood in relation to the process of cultural branding, through which identity and belonging reemerge in new, albeit messy ways.

NOTES

1. Throughout this chapter, I use the abbreviations "S" and "M" to refer to words and phrases in the Swahili and Maa languages, respectively. Swahili is the national language of Kenya whereas Maa is the language of Samburu and Maasai. (Words and phrases included here are from the Samburu dialect of Maa.)

2. "Seeing the Sights," *Daily Nation*, June 19, 1980, 3.

3. Cordelia Hebblethwaite, "Brand Maasai: Why Nomads Might Trademark their Name," BBC, May 28, 2013, http://www. bbc.c om /news/magazine- 2261 7001.

4. Oscar Obonyo and Daniel Nyassy, "Ways of the Commercial Moran," [*Daily Nation*] *Lifestyle*, December 12, 2004, 2–3.

5. The development of cooperative societies was part of Kenya's national development plan since the 1960s. Dillon Mahoney (2017) argues that in the 1990s and 2000s, as tourism came to be controlled by private investors, the poor had to be removed from the scene. Consequently, government subsidies for cooperative societies were cut. In 1997, the government passed the "Cooperative Societies Act and Seasonal Paper" (No. 6), which, in a response characteristic to liberal market reforms, cut all subsidies to cooperative societies. Cooperative societies became "free enterprises" meant to compete with privately owned businesses (Mahoney 2017, 71–75).

6. Not all MMCS members agreed to invest their money in a collectively owned piece of coastal land for tourism. Some thought it was dangerous for "foreigners" like themselves to purchase land on the coast and preferred to invest their money in Samburu. Those who collectively purchased land in Mtwapa eventually sold it in 2013 and divided the money.

7. Quoted in *East African Standard*, August 26, 1997, 3.

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GEORGE PAUL MEIU is John and Ruth Hazel Associate Professor of the Social Sciences in the Department of Anthropology and the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. He is author of *Ethno-erotic Economies: Sexuality, Money, and Belonging in Kenya.*