

THE SOAPSTONE INDUSTRY IN GUSII, KENYA: A FIELD STUDY EXAMINING WORKERS' LIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT Western Kenya's Gusii region is famous for its carved soapstone products, and the native industry largely sustains the Gusii people. For a duration of eight months, this research involved field interviews to capture the economic conditions of and relationships among the people making a living off the soapstone sculpture industry. To understand the economic situation, 14 people who were engaged in the soapstone sculpture industry—carvers, polishers, decorators, shining workers, and suppliers—were interviewed about their daily income. Further, to evaluate the importance of this livelihood for the Gusii people, this research uses the case study of a decorator, his household account book, and daily activities and expenses. Analysis of the household account book reveals the actual income and expenditures incurred in this industry. Parallely, this study focuses on the industry processes and close interactions and relationships between various industry professionals, as well as their relationships with customers. The participant observation and interviews indicated that the soapstone sculpture industry is based on diverse and subtle relationships, sometimes with mutual help and sometimes with dishonest responses and reluctance. It was found that these relationships of interdependence and engagement help the soapstone sculpture workers survive and the industry thrive.

KEYWORDS: Gusii; Household account; Interpersonal relationships; Soapstone industry.

INTRODUCTION

Soapstone is a type of talc that is smooth to the touch and is abundantly available in Kisii County in the Gusii region of western Kenya, where the bulk of its production takes place.⁽¹⁾ The Kisii District Development Plan states that soapstone is a regional resource (Republic of Kenya 2001). Soapstone items are sold not only in Kenya but also in East Africa and all over the world as art and handmade artifacts. A book on contemporary art in East Africa introduces these sculptures as 'Kisii Stone' (Miller 1975). The majority of all processes, from quarrying to carving, occur here, making the industry a major source of livelihood for the Gusii people in the region.

The soapstone sculptures produced in the Gusii region are diverse, such as figures, plates, trays, coasters, vases, and chess sets, and in a wide range of shapes and sizes (Figure 1). For example, figures can be animals (Figure 2), families, hearts, or lovers (Figure 3), and plates and trays can be anything from circles and squares to animal-shaped objects. These sculptures are sold as souvenirs at tourist destinations and airports in Kenya and are largely produced for the tourist market. For this reason, some studies on the soapstone carving industry in Gusii consider the small number of tourists visiting the Gusii region



Figure 1 A variety of Kisii soapstone sculptures (photo taken by the author on September 11, 2017)



Figure 2 Animal figures (photo taken by the author on October 2, 2019)

a problem relative to the size of this industry (Akama et al. 2015; Njoroge & Buyeke 2015; Ogembo 2015; Nyamogosa & Murimi 2020). Some of these studies (Akama et al. 2015; Njoroge & Buyeke 2015; Ogembo 2015) and those discussing the industry from an economic perspective (Amimo 2010; Obwori et al. 2012) and based on industrial development (Onyambu 2013; Akama & Onyambu 2020) commonly note the need for increased government intervention.

Onyambu and Akama (2018b), who analyzed the historical development of the Gusii soapstone industry and its problems, indicate that only this industry has survived from the colonial era, while other industries, such as ironworking, basketry, leather works, and weaving have disappeared from the Gusii region. They state that while the soapstone industry is an economically important traditional industry that supports the livelihoods of the locals, much of the profits are exploited by the middlemen, and the producing area is in an economically disadvantageous situation. Middleman exploitation has been noted



Figure 3 Undecorated nature-colored lovers (photo taken by the author on October 22, 2018)

by Njoroge and Buyeke (2015), Ogembo (2015), and Onyambu (2013) as well. Mahoney (2017), who focused on the people involved in trade, mainly in Mombasa—a tourist city in Kenya—found it dangerous that fair trade seems to have a direct connection between the producers and consumers and makes invisible the structure of exploitation by intermediaries in Kenya’s handicraft industry, including soapstone sculpture; however, like the producers, the intermediaries in Kenya are also in a state of economic instability.

While previous studies have noted the hardships of the people engaged in the production of soapstone sculptures, the actual workload and income of such people have not been examined in detail, making the research conducted so far superficial and inadequate. As Akama and Onyambu (2020) indicate, what does soapstone carving mean as a sustainable livelihood? Therefore, this study focuses on the incomes of the people involved in the production of the sculptures and presents their economic situation as well as their interactions, which influence and determine their livelihoods. In summary, this paper highlights the importance of this industry to the survival of the Gusii people and its uncertainties as a regional industry. Additionally, this paper indicates the role of the workers’ relationships in Kenya’s soapstone sculptures industry, which has an export value for the region.

The people engaged in the soapstone carving industry in the Gusii region belong to the informal sector. Coined by Keith Hart (1973), the term ‘informal sector’ stands in contrast to the formal sector, encompassing regular employment, and refers to informal economic activities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the informal sector is characterized by several key factors: ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small scale of operation, labor-intensive and adapted technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system, and unregulated and competitive markets (ILO 1972: 6). In addition, the term ‘informal economy’ is now used to refer to various workers and businesses that lack protection and recognition within the framework of laws and regulations, rather than sectors. The soapstone carving industry aligns with these characteristics, making this research relevant to the economic situation of the industry workers. Therefore, this research is positioned as informal economy research.

It is also important to mention the moral economy. The moral economy in today’s sense is a concept that was originated by Thompson (1971) through an analysis of food

riots in the 18th century, and was brought to prominence by James C. Scott (1976). Scott (1976) took the norm of reciprocity and the right to subsistence as central analytical concepts in understanding peasant politics, and defined moral economy as denoting the traditional economic norms of peasants. The concept of moral economy has been applied not only in the Southeast Asian context, as discussed by Scott, but also in studies on rural societies in Africa. Particularly useful among these is the affective economy, which Hyden (1980) proposed as a characteristic of the African peasant economy. Furthermore, in Japan, the *Journal of African Studies* ran a special feature in 2007 titled ‘Contemporary [sic] Perspectives [sic] on African Moral Economy Introduction’ (e.g., Hyden 2007; Sugimura 2007). In addition, there is also research on whether ‘market economic behavior’ and ‘moral economic behavior’ are incorporated into peasants’ livelihoods and society (Ito 2016), and they remain essential concepts when studying African peasant economies.

The Gusii region is largely rural, and the heart of the soapstone carving industry is surrounded by rural villages. This study briefly considers the relationship between moral economy and the soapstone carving industry.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the soapstone carving industry in the Gusii region and the Gusii people. Section 3 describes the methodology and the production processes and flow, and the workers’ earnings at each stage. Section 4 uses a case study of a decorator and his weekly household account book to highlight how precarious the industry is and how precious it is for the survival of the Gusii people. Section 5 describes what role the relationships between the professionals play in the thriving indigenous soapstone sculpture industry that has an enormous export value. Section 6 concludes the paper with a discussion about the soapstone sculpture industry and Gusii people’s life.

SOAPSTONE CARVING INDUSTRY AND THE GUSII

I. History of soapstone carving in Gusii

According to Eisemon et al. (1988), who compared the soapstone industry between the Inuit and the Gusii, Gusii soapstone was originally used as ceremonial powders applied to the face and body by the Inuit women or to decorate shields for men. The Gusii people began manufacturing practical items out of soapstone, such as smoking pipes and cooking utensils in the 1910s, and then, animal statues for visitors in the 1930s (Eisemon et al. 1988). According to Miller (1975), by the end of the 1950s, soapstone was widely sold inside and outside East Africa. Around that time, the soapstone carving industry started expanding its range of products and, along with the growth of the tourism industry in Kenya, established itself as a supplier of art for tourists or handmade artifacts in Kenya and East Africa. According to Onyambu and Akama (2018a, 2018b), an overwhelming majority of the soapstone sculpture industry today is dominated by tourism market products. The Gusii soapstone carving artists who produce works for galleries and art markets around the world, whom Onyambu and Akama (2018a, 2018b) call the ‘elite’, have also become active in these markets.

According to Mahoney (2017), apart from the domestic tourism market, taking advantage of the fair-trade boom, soapstone sculptures have expanded their sales to the international craft market (Mahoney 2017). The ‘Integrated National Export Development and Promotion Strategy’ by the State Department for Trade, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Cooperatives, includes soapstone carvings, alongside leather products and beads among the handicrafts



Figure 4 An item labeled Zanzibar but produced in the Gusii region (photo taken by the author on September 20, 2019)

for export trade (Republic of Kenya 2018).⁽²⁾ Gusii's soapstone sculptures have a certain popularity, as introduced in the East African contemporary art overview as 'Kisii Art' (Miller 1975). The Kenyan government aims to strengthen the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium enterprises through the long-term development strategy 'Vision 2030',⁽³⁾ which was formulated in 2008. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supports this initiative by modeling the One Village, One Product (OVOP) movement in Japan,⁽⁴⁾ and the soapstone sculpture group was selected as one of the model groups (Japan International Cooperation Agency Industrial Development and Public Policy Department 2011). It is their joint project with MUJI, a major Japanese retailer, which began in 2010 and continued until 2015. This project developed soapstone sculpture products (animal figurines, pen stands, and so forth) to be sold as Christmas gifts (JICA Home Page Topics & Events 2012; MUJI websites).

Just as Mahoney (2017) found soapstone sculptures sold as fair-trade products in the United States, they may also be sold as fair-trade products with implications to help people in the production area.

These products are also exported to neighboring countries as one of the representative arts of East Africa that does not emphasize the place of origin or production, or as a souvenir of an African country (see Figure 4). Thus, today's soapstone sculptures are sold both inside and outside Kenya, where both sides of the production area are recognized and unrecognized.

II. The Gusii people

The Gusii are Bantu-speaking people who currently inhabit the Kisii and Nyamira counties in western Kenya (Akama 2017). They are surrounded by non-Bantu ethnic groups, such as the Luo, Kipsigis, and Maasai. According to the 2019 census, the Gusii are the seventh largest ethnic group, with a population of approximately 2.7 million out of Kenya's total population of approximately 47.56 million (Republic of Kenya 2019b).

The Gusii are traditionally farmers; 85% of Kisii County's total population is engaged in agriculture (Republic of Kenya 2002: 9). Nowadays, many work in cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa. Major crops include corn, millet, and sorghum; vegetables such as kale for both self-consumption and sale; and coffee and tea as cash crops. The main livestock are chickens, cows, and goats. Although some people are engaged in agriculture, many have other jobs to boost income. Most workers in the soapstone carving industry combine crop

and livestock farming. The degree to which farming is balanced with other jobs varies from person to person. Some engage in farming solely for self-consumption, while others do so primarily for commercial processes. The main source of income for the individuals featured in this article is from soapstone carvings.

STUDY SITE AND METHODS

I. The Gusii region and Tabaka

According to Onyambu and Akama (2018b), soapstone is found in the Gusii region, particularly in Tabaka and Gotichaki. Carving either takes place close to the quarries or in nearby carving and selling centers. The Gusii people are in charge of the production process, ending in wholesale and retail sales.

Sculptures are made not only around the quarry, but in an industrial center, Tabaka, where carving, decoration, and sales are all carried out. Tabaka is located 25 km from Kisii Town, the main city of Kisii County, and is a ward in the administrative division (Figure 5). Tabaka has 8,419 households and a population of 34,650 (Republic of Kenya 2019a). The nearest quarry is approximately 700 m from Tabaka and is the most distant, approximately 13 km away.

Suppliers collect soapstone items from carvers and sell them to customers. In this study, the suppliers considered work in the local area of the Gusii region and customers buy soapstone from both Kenya and abroad (Figure 6). Customers denote retailers, wholesalers in the consuming area, middlemen, and tourists. However, tourists rarely visit Tabaka due to its poor access, so suppliers are primarily wholesalers in the production area. Many suppliers have wholesale stores in the local area, but some do not.

Suppliers, carvers, and decorators are concentrated in just two 500 m streets in Tabaka. The intersection of these two streets is the center of the soapstone industry. The central area

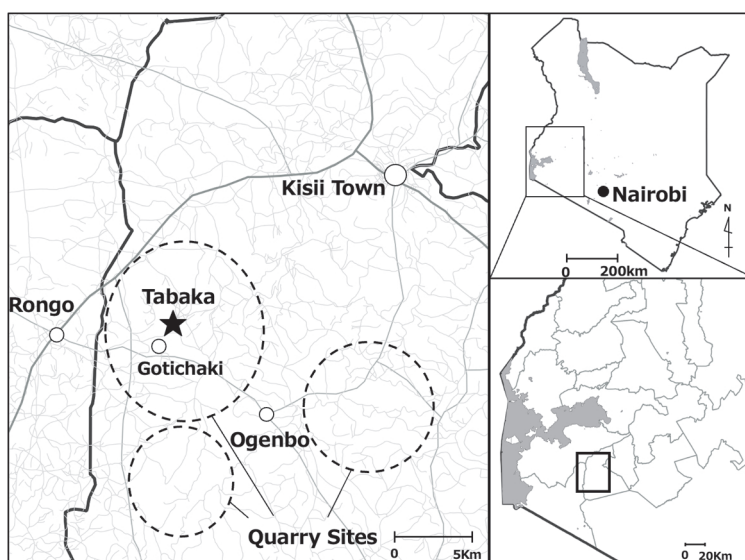


Figure 5 Tabaka and the quarry sites in the Gusii region (maps created by the author)

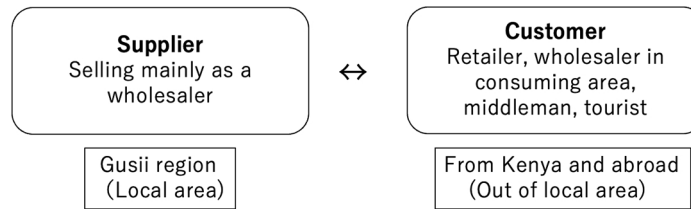


Figure 6 Supplier and customer (created by the author)



Figure 7 Sculptures stocked at a private store (photo taken by the author on September 14, 2017)

in Tabaka is traditionally home to the Bomware clan, and even today, most workers are from this clan. There are approximately 60 stores in the central area, the majority of which are private stores for small businesses with fewer than five people working together, and a few more for larger companies (Figure 7).

As Mahoney (2017) notes, the internationalization of Kenya's handicraft art market and the spread of the internet and mobile phones are closely linked: payment is made through M-Pesa (a mobile money transfer service), and the customers and suppliers negotiate and order through text and WhatsApp messages. Some customers visit Tabaka once or twice a year, or suppliers are introduced to the next customer by a current customer; in the latter case, some suppliers in Tabaka have never met the customer face-to-face. In addition to suppliers, some suppliers have their own shops in neighboring countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, and frequently travel between Tabaka and these shops. Although tourists are expected to visit these shops, they never do because they are not tourist spots and because of transportation problems. Therefore, products are shipped wholesale to Nairobi, Mombasa, and other countries.

II. Methods

All the data used in this study were collected from fieldwork and interviews in Tabaka

and nearby quarries for a total of eight months—from August to October 2017, from September to October 2018, and from August to November 2019.⁽⁵⁾ People who live in the Gusii area and their families, mainly those involved in making soapstone sculptures, cooperated with the researcher to conduct the survey. I explained the purpose of the study to the research participants and commenced data collection with their permission while staying at the house of a soapstone industry worker in the Tabaka area. The research methods utilized are semi-structured interviews conducted in English; this method was used as it facilitated securing more detailed answers from the research participants through a range of questions such as what their motivation was for being in the soapstone industry, and by changing the questions in response to their answers.

III. Production process

The soapstone carving work process is divided into five stages: quarrying, carving, polishing (soaking soapstone in water and sandpapering it), decorating, and shining (removing dust and shining soapstone with wax as finishing work) before selling. Although the person who decorates the item occasionally does the finishing work, each of the above processes is performed independently and is a division of labor. Most workers do not belong to companies; they work independently as individuals. Additionally, they do not work on the Sabbath, as Christianity is the dominant religion here. The artifacts are paid according to the type of carving and the amount of work done. The payment of carving, polishing, and decoration is a piece work system, except for shining, which has a fixed daily allowance. The price of soapstone carving is not regulated or fixed by the industry but decided by negotiation.

This section briefly introduces the production process and flow, focusing on the work after carving. The carver pays the quarry owner for the stones he has quarried and the quarrymen for the work to procure the soapstone. The products are mainly carved by hand; a machine is used sometimes, for instance, to make a small hole for a key chain or to carve a deep object such as a box (Figure 8). The carver then sells the sculpture



Figure 8 Carving artists (photo taken by the author on October 2, 2018)

to a supplier in Tabaka, who wholesales to customers outside Tabaka. Both carvers and decorators sell directly to customers when they have regular customers in markets inside and outside Kenya, but usually go to suppliers in Tabaka. After purchasing the sculptures, the supplier asks a day laborer to perform the polishing work and finish it smoothly with sandpaper before they can sell the items (Figure 9). Undecorated items are either decorated by the purchaser who is a supplier or a decorator or traded in the natural color of the stone. In the decoration process, the sculpture is colored and patterned with a black permanent marker and knife (Figure 10). Alternating with decoration is the shining work of applying floor-polishing wax or shoe polish and polishing with loosened sisal laces (Figure 11). Shining workers are hired by a decorator or supplier to perform various miscellaneous tasks, such as shining, removing dust with a cloth, and transporting sculptures. After the decorator



Figure 9 Women polishing sculptures (photo taken by the author on October 29, 2019)



Figure 10 A decorator (photo taken by the author on October 3, 2017)

designs animals and plants with a pen, the shining worker performs the shining work, then the decorator carves the pattern again with the knife, and the shining worker finally lends the finishing touches. The decorator and the shining worker work alternately, so they often work in the same place.

This production process is basic. This process can be broadly divided into two types of flow: when there is no order from a customer and when an order is received. First, there is a pattern where the carver sells the work to the supplier, who then requests tasks, such as polishing and decoration (Figure 12). The next pattern involves the supplier receiving an order from the customer and requesting the carver to produce it (Figure 13). In both cases, the supplier is central.

Carvers and decorators often produce at the customer's request. In addition, carvers may create their own original products and sell them to customers. While sculpture and decoration require a certain amount of skill, it is surprisingly easy to get started with such



Figure 11 A woman shining sculptures (photo taken by the author on August 27, 2019)

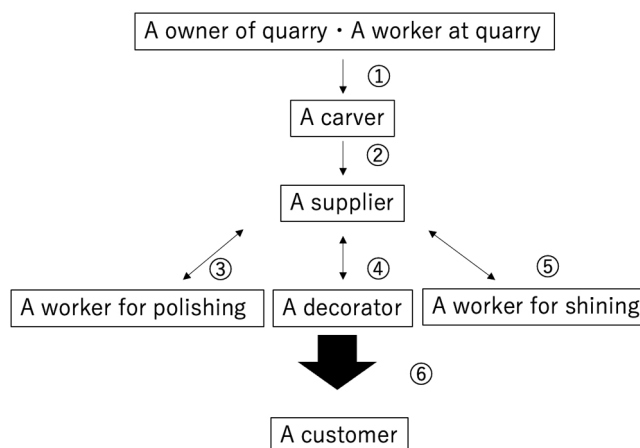


Figure 12 Basic flow diagram of the soapstone carving process: the case of no order from the customer; the numbers refer to the order of movement of the soapstone (created by the author)

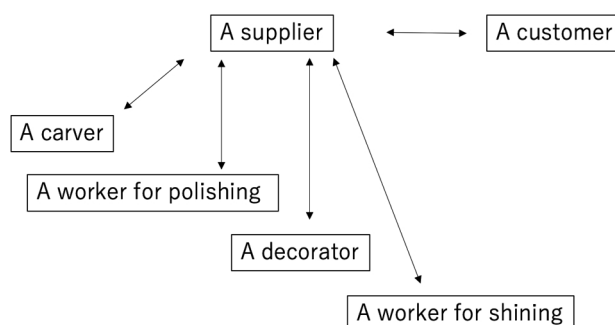


Figure 13 Another flow diagram of the soapstone carving process: the case of the customer placing an order (created by the author)

Table 1 Participants interviewed about daily income and average daily income for each task (in KSh)

	Carver			Polisher			Decorator			Shining worker			Supplier	
Age	35	34	48	42	48	51	38	41	47	24	32	46	28	48
Sex	M	M	M	F	F	F	M	M	M	M	F	F	M	F
Partner	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○
Child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	×	○	○	○	○
Full-time/Part time	P	P	P	P	F	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Average daily income	673	333	537	152	71	90	473	1,458	715	267	250	317	2,233	6,557
	514			104			882			278			4,395	

Note: Age as of August–November 2019.

Source: Based on the interviews conducted by the author from August to November 2019.

work; there is no apprentice system for skill acquisition. The thresholds for polishing and shining are low too. When asked about the reasons for engaging in this industry, the general answer is: “I thought it would be a good business because my family, relatives, friends, and neighbors were doing it.”

IV. Daily income

A total of 14 people were interviewed regarding the details of their daily income. Among them were three workers each for carving, polishing, decoration, and shining, along with two suppliers in Tabaka (Table 1).

Out of 14 individuals, five are listed as full-time, but this refers to those who are engaged in the soapstone industry and do not have their own lands for cultivating food, regardless of gender or land ownership status. The remaining nine own land primarily to cultivate food for self-consumption. However, even if it is for self-consumption, it is difficult to draw a clear line because surplus food is sometimes sold to nearby markets or neighborhoods. Furthermore, those engaged in farming for their own consumption still recognize themselves as ‘farmers’ and are thus included in the framework of side business here. In this way, nine people are also engaged in agriculture, but the work balance is primarily focused on the soapstone carving industry, except for the busy seasons, and the main income is obtained from the soapstone carving industry. These 14, and many others, are involved in the soapstone carving industry because they cannot make enough money

from farming. People who can earn enough money from farming are fully occupied such that they neither have the time nor the need to engage in the soapstone carving industry. In the Gusii culture, where land is passed from father to son, the inherited land is diminishing each year, further hindering the possibility to earn money from farming.

Taking a broader view of the industry, some have land for sale and others have large tracts of land, whereas some grow coffee, tea, sugar cane, and other crops, and earn more from that than from soapstone carving. In the future, it will be necessary to expand the scope and investigate further. However, according to my research so far, there are many people securing their main income from soapstone carving across the industry. Nonetheless, in such cases, many people working in the soapstone carving industry consider their earnings from this industry adequate to meet their daily living expenses, while additional earnings from farming are required to pay their children's school fees and for funding larger businesses. People spend most of their day working on soapstone carvings, except for planting and harvest season. The respondents in this research were not chosen intentionally but coincidentally. None of the respondents in this research said that farming income exceeded soapstone work, making soapstone carving a way to earn a living.

Based on the weekly income of the 14 interviewees, the average income per day from the production work (carving, polishing, decoration, shining) summed less than 1,000 Kenyan shillings or KSh (Table 1).⁽⁶⁾ According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2020, the average annual salary of the formal sector was 778,248 KSh (Republic of Kenya 2020), or 64,854 KSh per month/2,494 KSh per day (when working six days a week). Thus, the average income of workers in the soapstone sculpture production process, excluding sellers, was significantly lower than the formal sector average. According to the Kisii County Household Baseline Survey Report in 2014, their average annual salary was 487,100 KSh (Republic of Kenya 2014), which is lower than the national average of 553,138 KSh that year (Republic of Kenya 2016). Even compared to the average annual salary in Kisii County of approximately 40,592 KSh per month and 1,561 KSh per day, based on the above, the income from this industry is low. All 14 interviewees say that their main source of income is their soapstone work. The household income situation differs depending on whether there is another income from agriculture and/or from the spouse. Some of the interviewees had extra income. However, all the people interviewed are engaged in this industry and consider it their main livelihood, and none of them are in an economically stable situation. The situation is similar for suppliers that have produced high-income results in the production process. Since the number of orders changes weekly, the suppliers have different incomes from week to week, and if there are no orders, they may have no income. The suppliers earn money from customers' orders and do not have daily income like other carvers, polishers, decorators, and shinning workers. During the week of the interviews, one of the two had one order, and the other had three orders. One person prepares the sculptures every time she receives an order, while the other person has enough stock, so the cost of purchasing and polishing the sculptures does not appear in response to weekly orders. This study focuses on the exchange of money on a weekly basis, and the average income presented in this paper is not the net profit after deducting costs such as labor costs but the sales after deducting expenses from the income within a week.

However, it is necessary to investigate not only income but also their actual living expenses to assess if this income is really enough. The next section focuses on decorators for this evaluation.

MAKING A LIVING FROM SOAPSTONE SCULPTURES: THE CASE STUDY OF A DECORATOR

The previous chapter shows the average income of each process. In this chapter, to clarify the real living conditions of the soapstone carving industry workers, I will specifically explain what kind of income and expenses they live on and what a typical day looks like in the industry.

One example is the decorator named Ulysses. We take a closer look at his family, work, income, and expenditure to learn how a professional engaged in the soapstone sculpture industry earns a living. The information was collected from August to November 2019.

I. Basic information

In this section, I will first describe the basic information of the decorator Ulysses. While Ulysses has customers who directly deal with orders and he also has a supplier, he considers himself a decorator; hence, in this paper, he is referred to as a decorator.

Ulysses, a 28-year-old decorator lives in Tabaka with his 24-year-old wife, a four-year-old daughter, and three-month-old twin sons. Ulysses became independent after learning decoration work from his friends. His hometown is approximately 5 km away from Tabaka, and he lives in Tabaka in two adjacent rooms, one of which is used for work. Workers in this industry balance crop and livestock farming with their work. However, Ulysses decided to make a living from soapstone sculpture away from his hometown. As a result, he does not have crops or a cow for milk for his own consumption. His wife has just given birth; she helps Ulysses in his work as he is the only earning member. Compared to the lifestyle of other workers who have sofas and wooden beds, this family lives humbly and sleeps on a mat directly on the floor.

The landlord of the apartment is a supplier of soapstone sculptures, and Ulysses lives in the apartment behind the supplier's shop. The landlord/supplier has several decorators working on his products, and Ulysses is one of them. Ulysses has customers not only in Tabaka but also outside of it; when he receives an order from outside Tabaka, he purchases sculptures, decorates them, and sends them to the customer. Thus, he is responsible for purchasing as well as decorating. Transactions from customers outside the Tabaka area are usually made via telephone, and payments are made through M-Pesa.

Decoration work includes coloring the entire sculpture, marking with a marker pen, and marking with a knife. Among them, the patterning of the knife requires the most skill. Ulysses can perform all these tasks. Materials such as pigments, black pens, and cotton are used for decoration, but the most essential tool for decorators is a knife; the decorator has his own knife. Because the number of orders is large and cannot be completed by a single person, Ulysses employs an average of two to three decorators to help with his work. They arrive when Ulysses calls them, when he has a job. Ulysses gives the decorators only the knives to decorate and does not ask them to do other decorations. They do not have a job until Ulysses finishes coloring the entire sculpture and patterning it with a black marker pen. Ulysses sometimes hires another worker, whose work involves coloring the sculptures, transporting them, and performing various miscellaneous tasks from 8 am to 6 pm a day, in addition to shining. Ulysses' wife cannot draw patterns on knives, but she can color the base and draw simple patterns with a black pen.

Ulysses belongs to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, which is a major Christian community in the area, like the Catholics. The SDA church he attends in the Gusii region observes Saturday as the Sabbath and does not permit polygamy or the use of flamboyant

decorations, alcohol, or tobacco, which are considered indulgences.

II. Weekly household account book

The Ulysses family has three main types of expenditure: labor costs; living expenses such as food expenses and the purchase of goods; and school fees. This section focuses on Ulysses' household account book for a week and clarifies the economic and business conditions of the soapstone carving industry worker by showing the number of orders, actual amount of work, income, and expenses. First, let us inspect weekly orders and income (Table 2), weekly spending on his work (Table 3), living expenses (Table 4), and weekly income and spending (Table 5).

When observing Ulysses' orders and income for a week, a gap is noted in the amount earned depending on the day of the week (Table 2). Furthermore, regarding the orders he receives, Ulysses receives orders not only from within the Tabaka district but also from various places such as Nairobi, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. Here, I focus on the fact that the same item has a different price depending on the customer.

The unit price of decoration is higher for requests from customers outside Tabaka. In

Table 2 Ulysses' weekly order and income

	Order	Income
Mon	Order from supplier ① in Tabaka worth KSh 2,000: 3-inch Bowl 400 pieces × KSh 5	KSh 2,000
Tue	Order from Nairobi customer KSh 5,000: 4-inch Bowl 100 pieces × KSh 30 = KSh 3,000 (←Buy one piece at KSh 18 from Supplier ①) African shape magnet 100 pieces × KSh 20 = KSh 2,000 (←Buy one piece at KSh 12 from carver in Tabaka)	KSh 2,000
Wed	Order from two suppliers in the Tabaka area of total KSh 2,900: Order from supplier ① KSh 1,700: 6-inch Bowl 100 pieces × KSh 12 = KSh 1,200 4-inch Bowl 100 pieces × KSh 5 = KSh 500 Order from supplier ②: KSh 1,200 4-inch Bowl 200 pieces × KSh 6 = KSh 1,200	KSh 2,900
Thu	Order from Mombasa customer KSh 5,800 Africa shape magnet 160 pieces × KSh 20 = KSh 3,200 (←Buy one piece at 12 KSh from carver in Tabaka) 4-inch Bowl 20 pieces × KSh 30 = KSh 600 (←Buy one piece at KSh 18 from Supplier ①) 8-inch Bowl 20-piece sets × KSh 100 = KSh 2,000 (←Buy one piece at KSh 40 from Supplier ①)	KSh 2,720
Fri	Order from Zanzibar KSh 12,200: 3-inch Bowl 650 pieces × KSh 6 = KSh 3,900 4-inch Bowl 500 pieces × KSh 8 = KSh 4,000 Coaster 50 pieces × KSh 30 = KSh 1,500 African shape magnet 400 pieces × KSh 7 = KSh 2,800	KSh 12,200
Sat	Rest day for Sabbath	KSh 0
Sun	Work on orders received on Thursday and Friday (Only U and his wife worked)	KSh 0
		Total Income KSh 21,820

Source: Based on the interviews conducted by the author in October 2019.

addition, the price range of carving differs depending on the trading partner. For example, the price of decorating a 4-inch bowl is 5–6 KSh for customers in the Tabaka area, 8 KSh for orders from Zanzibar customers, and 12 KSh for orders from Nairobi and Mombasa customers. In transactions within Tabaka, people are familiar with each other's market prices for sculptures, but orders from outside tend to be expensive because the unit price can be negotiated high and the money for collecting materials is also included.

For example, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the cost of purchasing sculptures is not included in the item price, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the unit price includes the purchase of sculptures. For example, one 4-inch bowl is purchased for 18 KSh, and the customer pays 30 KSh including the purchase of the sculpture. That is, the difference of 12 KSh is the income. On other days, the same 4-inch bowl will be priced at 5–8 KSh, so if the purchase of the sculpture is included, the income is greater. However, this is the case when labor and material costs are not considered.

For decorators, carvers, or suppliers, a stable income depends largely on the presence or absence of customers from outside Tabaka. However, customers from outside Tabaka are not regular, and orders may be placed several times a month or once a year. In addition, communication with customers from outside is mainly through conversations and messages via mobile phones, and the contractor always runs the risk of an abrupt end to the negotiation. In contrast to customers outside the Tabaka area, suppliers inside the Tabaka area can also directly ask for an order when they need money. In addition, orders from within the Tabaka area are obtained every day, and even with a single or small order, people can earn enough for a day.

Looking at the income from a week, he consistently earns 2,000 KSh. In particular, he earns 12,200 KSh on Friday, which is significantly higher than other days of the week. However, Saturdays are considered a Sabbath day; therefore, no work takes place because workers go to church, and there are times when they have work that cannot be finished in one day; then, they do not receive any income on those days, such as on Sunday in this example. Additionally, orders from Zanzibar on Fridays do not occur every week, but rather irregularly and at most once a month, or sometimes every two to three months. On the contrary, jobs from suppliers in the Tabaka district are constant, almost daily. The frequency of orders also affects income.

Next, we examine the expenses for a week's work (Table 3). The average labor cost is 846 KSh per day, which is the highest component of the daily costs. For example, it costs 3 KSh to insert a knife into a 4-inch bowl, so if the customer pays 12 KSh per piece, 9 KSh is received, and if payment is 5 KSh per piece, only 2 KSh is received. Since pigments and the like are also applied to these costs, the amount of profit is even lower. Excluding no spending, the lowest spending was 200 KSh, and the highest was 2,130 KSh, on Wednesday. On Wednesdays, he also purchases materials, such as pigments. The frequency of purchasing pigments varies from person to person, but in the case of Ulysses, it is approximately once every one to two weeks. Ulysses minimizes costs by having the decorator only carry out the knife work and not do anything, such as coloring the base of the entire sculpture or inking it with black markers. Decorators A, B, and C specialize in making knife patterns, which require more skill than do coloring the base and making patterns with a pen. The unit price of each piece increases if such work is included. When there is no work, only those who polish and dust are employed. Moreover, when it is possible only with the help of his wife, he does the work without calling anyone. In addition, workers such as decorators who have no work will travel in search of work. Ulysses hires a small number of decorators and does not have a hierarchical relationship with them. Regarding the payment to the decorator, there is a daily range between 180 KSh and 600 KSh.

Table 3 Ulysses' weekly spending on his work

	Spending	Cost
Mon	Two decorators: Total KSh 600 3-inch Bowl 100 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 300/person A worker: KSh 200	KSh 800
Tue	A decorator: 4-inch Bowl 100 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 300 African shape magnet 100 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 300 Another decorator: 3-inch Bowl 200 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 600	KSh 1,200
Wed	Goods cost for work Paint: Orange KSh 100, Bright blue KSh 100, Red KSh 300, Cotton KSh 80, Thinner for paint 2 pieces \times KSh 80 = KSh 160 Labor cost: Two decorators: Total KSh 900 6-inch Bowl 30 pieces \times KSh 5 = KSh 150 4-inch Bowl 100 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 300 Another decorator: KSh 290 4-inch Bowl 30 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 90 6-inch Bowl 40 pieces \times KSh 5 = KSh 200 A worker: KSh 200	KSh 740 KSh 2,130 KSh 1,390
Thu	Decorator: African shape magnet 50 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 150 4-inch Bowl 10 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 30 Another decorator: African shape magnet 50 pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 150 4-inch Bowl 20-pieces \times KSh 3 = KSh 60, A worker: KSh 200	KSh 590
Fri	A worker only	KSh 200
Sat	Rest day for Sabbath	KSh 0
Sun	Only Ulysses and his wife worked	KSh 0
Total spending for work		KSh 4,920

Source: Based on the interviews conducted by the author in October 2019.

Living expenses are required on a daily basis. During the week of the interviews, no expenses other than food expenses could be confirmed (Table 4). In Gusii, which especially favors ugali, most people grow maize for self-consumption before any other vegetable. Since Ulysses does not have land for self-consumption, he also has to pay for maize and milk, which others normally do not have to pay for.

The Ulysses family bought vegetables every day. Food expenses ranged from 300 to 730 KSh, with an average of 478 KSh per day. A 4-inch bowl costs 2 to 9 KSh, vegetables cost at least 10 KSh, and sugar costs 100 KSh per kg. The Ulysses family children are still young, so their meal costs are set to rise as they grow up. Furthermore, on Fridays, he bought more food than on other days of the week. This is believed to be due to large orders from Zanzibar. The next day, Saturday, has fewer living expenses than the other days of the week because lunch is not charged as it is taken at the church.

Observing Ulysses' household account book for a week, one finds variations in income and expenditure every day (Table 5). For example, there were days when he received 11,270 KSh per day and days when he did not have any income and the balance became negative. He saved any surplus income. For example, on Monday, Ulysses saved 200 KSh out of his income of 770 KSh after labor and food costs. The total balance for this week was 13,602 KSh.

Ulysses does not intermediate suppliers, has direct customers from outside the Tabaka area, and does some supplier work himself, such as purchasing sculptures. In this case, the

Table 4 Ulysses' spending on living expenses

	Spending on living expenses	Cost
Monday	Food cost: Kale KSh 20, Tomatoes KSh 20, Onions KSh 10, Milk KSh 200, Eggs KSh 60, Sugar 1kg KSh 100, Another type of vegetable KSh 20	KSh 430
Tuesday	Food cost: Doughnuts KSh 70, Milk KSh 100, Tomatoes KSh 20, Rice KSh 50, Meat KSh 200	KSh 440
Wednesday	Food cost: Chapati KSh 80, Milk KSh 200, Sugar 1kg KSh 100, Bread KSh 50, Eggs 4 pieces \times KSh 12 = KSh 48	KSh 478
Thursday	Food cost: Milk KSh 150, Chapati KSh 70, Fish and Ugali KSh 300	KSh 520
Friday	Food cost: Sweet potatoes 100 KSh, Milk 200 KSh, Beans from restaurant 50 KSh, Bananas 20 KSh, Rice 1kg 120 KSh, Beef 500g 200 KSh, Kale 20 KSh, Tomatoes 20 KSh	KSh 730
Saturday	Food cost: Doughnuts KSh 80, Milk KSh 200, Kale KSh 20, Tomatoes KSh 20	KSh 320
Sunday	Food cost: Kale KSh 20, Bananas KSh 60, Sugar 1kg KSh 100, Potatoes KSh 50, Milk KSh 100, Pumpkin leaf KSh 50	KSh 380
Total spending on living		KSh 3,298

Source: Based on the interviews conducted by the author in October 2019.

Table 5 Ulysses' weekly income and spending (in KSh)

	Income	Spending for work	Spending for living	Balance
Monday	2,000	800	430	+770
Tuesday	2,000	1,200	440	+360
Wednesday	2,900	2,130	478	+292
Thursday	2,720	590	520	+1,610
Friday	12,200	200	730	+11,270
Saturday	0	0	320	-320
Sunday	0	0	380	-380
Total	21,820	4,920	3,298	13,602

Source: Based on the interviews conducted by the author in October 2019.

unit price will be higher; so, unlike other decorators who only accept orders from within the Tabaka area, this is an economically favorable situation. For example, decorators listed in Table 1 earned 473 KSh, 1,458 KSh, and 715 KSh, respectively, with an average of 882 KSh, and Ulysses paid 180–600 KSh per day. Compared to these decorators, Ulysses has a higher income. But when you look at given days, Ulysses also has financial trouble at times. The next section illustrates how the days are spent in concrete terms.

III. A day in the life of Ulysses

This section presents the specific day-to-day life of the soapstone carving industry workers, using the decorator Ulysses as an example. This section reveals how industrial workers spend most of their day at work.

The day began at 6 am with prayer. Ulysses started work a little early on this day to clear up pending orders from Mombasa. He was planning to start by coloring the base, but

when he checked the animal statues that he bought from the carver the day before, some of them did not seem to be as desired, so he started by polishing and flattening the bottom with sandpaper. He worked while having breakfast (milk tea and donut) prepared by his wife. Around 8 am, three of his two decorators and a worker arrived. Ulysses asked them to decorate the bowl. After sanding, he left the workshop for a bath. Before returning to work, he visited decorator Victor, who worked in a nearby workshop, talked for a while, and asked Victor to draw Masai people (Figure 14) on 16-inch plates. This is because Ulysses does not know how to draw people. Victor told him to bring the plates in the afternoon, and Ulysses returned to the workshop. He then began to color animal statues. As his wife finished the housework, he asked her to take over the coloring and started drawing patterns on the colored coasters with a black marker pen. After lunch, the supplier, a wholesale shop owner in Tabaka, asked him to decorate 400 3-inch bowls (approximately 7.6 cm) and informed him that the supplier's assistant would deliver them later. Ulysses told his worker to do some coloring work with his wife and took the plates to the decorator, Victor. Victor drew Masai people on five plates with a black marker pen. During this time, Ulysses helped Victor with his work, while talking to me about how well Victor draws: "Victor told me and my cousin how to decorate soapstone. He is a good artist."

Waiting for the plates to dry, Victor used a knife to etch the Masai drawing. When the plates were complete, Ulysses thanked Victor and returned to the workshop to start working with the black marker pen again. At the end of the work, he handed over the remaining knife-work to his decorators. Next, he checked the work completed by the decorators and worked with his worker to shine the items and remove the dust. The worker then packed the finished items in cardboard. The supplier's assistant brought over the sculptures, but Ulysses could not work on them today. Near evening, the carver brought the animal statues that Ulysses had ordered three days ago. Ulysses carefully checked each one for any deficiencies and paid the carver. A different carver arrived with some items and after a short conversation, Ulysses told the carver he could not pay for them. In the evening, as his decorators left, Ulysses promised to pay them the next day.

Ulysses said: "It's not easy to save money, so if I have 200 shillings left, I'll save it. Tomorrow I will get money from the Mombasa customer. I can then pay them (my Decorators). This customer was introduced by a different customer. Because I am good.



Figure 14 A plate with a Masai illustration (photo taken by the author on September 14, 2017)

(While showing the plates): How do you think? This is nice? This is a tree, an animal... Is it good?" As he talked, the sun went down; he checked the goods and talked to his children. After supper around 8 pm, he prayed and went to bed at 9:30 pm.

This is how Ulysses spends most of his days, apart from Saturday, which is the Sabbath, and is spent on various jobs, such as decoration work, meals, conversations with nearby friends and family, sleep, and prayers in between. For decorator Ulysses, his life revolves around soapstone sculpture work. The family sometimes spends more than it earns, eats meat as a rare luxury, and is occasionally in financial distress until paid by the customer.

This case reveals a lack of financial resources given the inability to pay decorators to work full-time in the soapstone carving industry. Although the soapstone carving industry is a local industry in the Gusii region, the reality is that many people do not have enough money to live on. Ulysses, in particular, is dedicated to the soapstone carving industry and has no homegrown food. Moreover, although Ulysses has an advantage over other decorators as he has customers from outside the Tabaka area, even then Ulysses sometimes has difficulty paying other decorators. Making a living solely from the soapstone carving industry is not an easy task.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY

In the previous chapter, I focused on one decorator as a worker in soapstone carving industry and described his real-life situation. In this chapter, I will look at the specific types of people involved in the production of soapstone sculptures.

In the previous chapter, when Ulysses asked decorator Victor to illustrate the Masai people, it showed the subtle technical differences between decorators' skills in tourist art, and that relatively less skilled decorators like Ulysses, who need skilled decorators like Victor to draw difficult motifs. While investigating the working process and the trading process in this industry, I found many such examples of people's engagement and interconnectedness, and their relative dependence on each other. This chapter considers their relationships.

Section 1 presents the relationship between decorators, and Section 2 presents the relationship between sculptors and suppliers. Section 3 shows the relationship between the decorator and the customer from within Tabaka, and then the customer from outside Tabaka.

I. Relationship between decorators

When Ulysses asked Victor for an illustration of the Masai people, the author asked them whether Ulysses would pay Victor. Both of them laughed it off, "We are friends. I do not pay him." Instead, while Victor was working, Ulysses helped with Victor's work and decorated seven pieces; however, the number was not decided in advance. In addition, Ulysses did not bring his own work tools, a knife, or a pen from his workshop. Marker pens are normally shared, but knives are decorator's own. Ulysses worked as a small token of his appreciation or because he could not sit idle, or because helping each other is an accepted practice. Such practices are also found in the soapstone carving process.

In addition to friendship, kinship or old relationships also play a role. For example, decorators Ulysses and W are cousins, and W is also a decorator. They visited and helped each other. They start by casually picking up a piece while talking. When W has a large number of orders and is at risk of being delayed, Ulysses helps him out after finishing his own work. Even in this case, I could not confirm any payment arrangements; every time

they were asked, they laughed or pretended to joke by saying, “Yes, yes, he has to pay me.” A similar relationship applies to the carver and the supplier, discussed next.

II. Relationship between carvers and suppliers

A carver usually sells the sculptures of the day to a supplier in the evening. When in need of money, the carver goes to the supplier in the morning and asks the supplier to pay the price in advance. If the negotiations are successful, the carver will receive the money before starting work. For example, carver Xavier needed money, so he visited several stores asking the suppliers to pay the money in advance. Xavier works at a workshop that belongs to his friend, who is also a carver. This workshop is conveniently located near his house, resembling a home office, on the outskirts of Tabaka. In this workshop, approximately seven people work together, but unless someone receives a large order, each produces and sells individually. Xavier was refused by all suppliers that day and eventually visited supplier Yolanda’s shop. Yolanda granted Xavier’s request and asked him to bring the sculptures that evening. Yolanda said to me: “I don’t really need items right now, but he needs money. We have to help each other.”

Supplier Yolanda also said that she rarely bought sculptures from Xavier because she had her regular carvers, and also because Xavier’s specialty was animal statues that did not sell well at her store. That day, Yolanda ordered 20 pieces of 4-inch hippos, leading to a 400 KSh order for Xavier.

Yolanda said, “we have to help each other,” but it could also be said that Yolanda created a sense of indebtedness with Xavier. However, she is a devout Christian. Yolanda, who belongs to an anti-alcohol sect, avoids interacting with Xavier, who is often drunk. Xavier also knows Yolanda will not buy animal statues, so he does not visit Yolanda. Additionally, for Yolanda, buying an animal statue is not notably beneficial from a business perspective. The price of items in the district is generally fixed, and she sells these animal statues to other suppliers when they need these items. From the above, considering the usual relationship between Yolanda and Xavier, it is undeniable that she gained his favor, but he helped people living in the same area when they were in trouble. Thus, the workers survive on empathy; each helps to the extent they can afford.

III. Relationship between decorators and customers

The way the supplier and the carver work is similar to the relationship between a job client and contractor. The cases discussed in this section have a similar relationship, except that the client is a customer who places orders on a regular basis. This section depicts, through the case study of decorator Watson, how carvers maintain relationships with their customers. This case clarifies that the relationship between the inside of the Tabaka district and the outside transaction is different; the priority and the sense of distance are different. Let us begin by considering internal transactions.

1. Orders from inside Tabaka

Watson has several customers in the Tabaka area. Among them, supplier Zara is an old acquaintance and has been ordering from him since Watson was a fledgling decorator. That is, Zara is a benefactor of Watson’s business. However, in the fall of 2019, Watson’s approach to Zara’s orders changed. Largely due to the acquisition of overseas customers, Watson prioritized orders from abroad and only took up Zara’s work after a delay. Overseas orders are larger than those from Tabaka and need time and effort. Therefore, small orders

from suppliers in the Tabaka area get postponed. In addition, overseas orders are traded at a higher market price, making them more lucrative to work on. While Watson finished the work from the new supplier within three days, he postponed Zara's work for more than a week.

When visiting Watson's workshop every day, the author noticed that the basin with the animal statues had been lying in a corner for over a week. Watson said that he could not afford to work for Zara right now. When I asked how he was going to manage the situation, he replied he was not talking to Zara and that he did not want to explain to Zara his situation. He would avoid any opportunity to meet Zara. Considering that Zara's shop was about 10 m away and needed to be crossed to reach the center of Tabaka, I kept quiet and decided to observe the situation as it developed.

Five days later, I was preparing to visit Zara when Watson arrived and asked me to accompany him to the hospital. On the way, I said I would meet Zara. Watson refused to come with me and met me across the road. They were visible to each other. After three days, when I visited Watson's workshop, Watson smiled and told me that Zara had just arrived. I was surprised as it was difficult for elderly Zara to climb the steep and slippery hill to get to the workshop. Watson said Zara had reviewed the state of the order and left, and there had been no ill will.

I surmised that the situation here was one of not refusing an order and delaying delivery because of another big order; this was acceptable because both Zara and Watson had been in business for many years. This can also be regarded as modest resistance to low-wage work. Watson was probably making a rational choice to prioritize the order that paid the most.

In addition, workers do not understand each other's orders. In the case of Watson and Zara, Zara does not know that Watson has other orders. Furthermore, Watson does not know when Zara received what order. Watson uses his own judgment to decide when to start ordering from Zara. Watson was aware that he was being disrespectful to Zara because he avoided meeting with her. Thus, apparently orders from local customers can be delayed. However, Watson's attitude toward customers from overseas is completely different. Sometimes he works through the night to meet deadlines for international orders.

2. Orders from outside Tabaka

The supplier usually ships soapstone items to customers outside the Tabaka area after a deposit. Therefore, even if the items are ready, they may not be sent because they have not been paid for. In some cases, the order price is paid first, or half the price is paid as an advance payment, but basically, the supplier has to reimburse various expenses until the payment is completed. Collecting raw materials, paying hired decorators and polishers, and buying paint materials are large expenses. Moreover, for a large, time-consuming order, the household budget becomes more strained, but the supplier works on the belief that he will be paid and delivers on time.

If there is a relationship of trust between the supplier and the customer, a small amount of money can be put on his tab. If the order is large, the next transaction will not be carried out until the money is deposited. Customers outside the Tabaka area, in particular, must be carefully urged to pay. The author confirmed that the supplier did not contact the customer, who said, "It would be difficult if the relationship got worse and I couldn't get an order."

Decorators and suppliers confirmed the practice. For decorators, customers outside Tabaka are direct customers without a supplier in the town. Since the supplier is not involved, the amount of money that can be obtained is large, and one can negotiate better with overseas customers for a higher unit price than domestic customers. Therefore, from the decorator's perspective, such orders are more attractive, yet come with more financial

distress until the order is completed. For example, decorator Watson was in financial distress for a month because he was not paid by an overseas customer on the promised day: “Money is not paid and the customer did not come to pick up the items. He did not even contact me. But I have to pay them (carvers, decorators, polishers). How can I pay? I am very stressed these days.”

However, despite domestic troubles over money, Watson did not force the customer to pay, and sometimes, he would stay up all night to meet the deadline. Unlike orders from domestic customers, even if overseas customers were late with payment or were in financial difficulty, he still produced external orders and met the deadline.

Transaction payments from overseas were delayed, and even though he wanted to complain, he could not as they were important customers.

Even if an order does not process smoothly, orders from outside Tabaka are welcomed and encouraged as continued orders from overseas customers are expected to bring stability to the workers. Moreover, large orders from outside also work as a confidence boost and a reward. As Watson said, “Do you know why overseas customers have ordered from me again? That’s because my job is great.” Even though Watson was in financial distress, he spoke proudly, showing me the decorated items.

Thus, the strength of existing relationships and building new relationships form the basis for growth and survival for the workers in the soapstone sculpture industry. Help comes from others not only because all are in the same business, but also because they are friends, relatives, and local acquaintances.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the economic situation of the Gusii people involved in the soapstone sculpture industry and their relationships. The findings show, first, the actual income and expenditure of people who make a living from soapstone sculpture through a case study and provide evidence of the locals’ reliance on soapstone sculpture as their primary livelihood. While there are certainly people engaged in this industry who live in affluence and there are also people who probably earn more from agriculture than from this industry, my study found that only a few people have built sizable businesses by themselves. One can easily infer this from the size of their stores in Tabaka and the amount of stock. However, most of the people I met during field research, including the interviewees, earned their livelihood from the soapstone industry; they talked about meeting living expenses and school fees,⁽⁷⁾ and found their job to be a lifeline.

Second, the interactions between the professionals provided a fascinating glimpse into the relationships and informal ways business is conducted. Specifically, the relationship between the decorator and supplier in Tabaka, who are usually the contractor and the contractee, respectively, was interesting as it reversed from time to time. When the decorator receives an order from within Tabaka, they receive carvings from the supplier to decorate. In contrast, if the decorator receives an order from outside Tabaka, such as Nairobi or Mombasa, or from another country, the decorator must start by collecting the sculptures as raw material from not only carvers but also the suppliers who are their internal customers. In this way, the seller becomes the buyer. Similarly, if the carver has a direct customer from outside Tabaka, they need to supply to the decorator, reversing the usual relationship and changing the direction of wage payments. These relationships of interdependence keep this industry and the professionals thriving. While I have discussed the lives of only a few workers, given space constraints, it is clear that the renowned

soapstone sculptures of the Gusii region are created through these lively and engaging interrelationships.

In addition, this study reveals aspects of the moral and affective economy from the interactions among the people in this industry. For example, when a supplier, Yolanda, bought sculptures which she did not need from the carver, Xavier, she did not negotiate for a reduced price. Normally, everyone in the community has a tacit understanding of the price of a sculpture, and although they may negotiate within the bounds of common sense, no one seems to be pushing beyond this limit. Yolanda likely bought the sculptures because then she would have stock in reserve, even if she did not need the sculptures at that moment. However, this case can also be considered as an example of moral economy within the region. Furthermore, the mutual help within the production area as reported in this paper is an act of affective economy.

The soapstone carving industry often spreads from its production location to global markets, and its basic stance is to pursue profit as a business. However, if paying attention to the interactions that take place within the region, it can be seen that while people make rational choices in pursuit of economic profit, they also make choices based on the moral economy and affective economy. This case illustrates that the social aspect of the East African peasant economy is also maintained. However, the relationship between the moral economy and this industry should be considered in more depth in separate research in the future.

This study reveals to some extent the economic situation of people engaged in the major souvenir and handicrafts industry in Kenya. However, there are possible limitations to this study. First, although this paper presents an actual representation of the household account and life of people engaged in the soapstone sculpture industry, the number of people interviewed was small. Moreover, the data in this paper could be considered temporary because the production and transaction rates increase and decrease depending on the season. Therefore, for more representative results, data need to be collected over a longer period of time. Despite these limitations, this study evaluated the importance of the soapstone sculpture industry to the livelihood of the Gusii people and described the reality of the African handicrafts industry. Future research should identify the entire status of the soapstone sculpture industry. This could be achieved by conducting surveys of other workers, increasing the number of people surveyed, and conducting long-term surveys.

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NOTES

- (1) Since Kenya gained independence, there have been 71 districts across eight provinces. However, since 2013 the administrative divisions have changed, leading to the establishment of 47 counties. These counties encompass various areas that were previously classified as districts.

- (2) According to the Economic Survey (Republic of Kenya 2020), the export value of Kenya in 2019 was KSh 596.7 billion. The main export revenues, which account for 59.0% of the total domestic exports are horticulture, tea, articles of apparel and clothing accessories, coffee, and iron and steel. The highest amount was contributed by horticulture, namely KSh 122.9 million and the second is tea, at KSh 113.6 million. However, the survey does not list the export value of handicrafts. According to the NEDPS Handicraft Sector Working Group (as cited in Republic of Kenya 2018), the average annual export value of handicrafts is USD 15 million and according to data based on ITC Trade Maps (as cited in Republic of Kenya 2018), exports decreased from USD 67.2 million in 2012 to USD 28.3 million in 2016. However, stone carving recorded slight growth from USD 3.0 million in 2012 to USD 4.1 million in 2016 (Republic of Kenya 2018). According to Economic Survey (Republic of Kenya 2020), the highest amount, which approximates KSh 124.5 million was contributed by tea in 2016.
- (3) Vision 2030 has three pillars: 'economy', 'society', and 'politics' (Kenya Vision 2030, About Vision 2030). For 'economy', the priority sectors listed are Tourism, Agriculture and Livestock, Wholesale & Retail, Trade, Manufacturing, Financial Services, Business Process Offshoring, and IT-Enabled Services (Kenya Vision 2030, About Vision 2030). A report by JICA states that the field considered to be most closely related to the One Village, One Product (OVOP) movement is the 'manufacturing' industry (Japan International Cooperation Agency Industrial Development and Public Policy Department 2011). The Kenyan government has formulated a five-year medium-term plan to achieve Vision 2030, and the OVOP program is one program sought to address 'manufacturing' during the 2008–2012 medium-term plan (Japan International Cooperation Agency Industrial Development and Public Policy Department 2011). In the first medium term plan, from 2008 to 2012, the OVOP program focused on village-level institutions and aimed to "increase the total factor productivity from an average of 2.8 for MSEs (Micro and Small Enterprises) to more than 5.0" (Kenya Vision 2030, Second Medium Term PLAN [2013–2017]). The second medium-term plan, from 2013 to 2017, aimed to "increase communities' incomes through targeted value addition and market access" (Kenya Vision 2030, Second Medium Term PLAN [2013–2017]). In the third medium-term plan (2018–2022), manufacturing is listed as one of the Big 4 Agendas alongside food security, affordable housing, and affordable healthcare for all (County Governance Toolkit; Kenya Vision 2030, Big Four Has Not Replaced Vision 2030).
- (4) The MUJI website explains JICA's OVOP project:

The One Village One Product movement, which began in Oita Prefecture, is an initiative that aims for the revitalization of the region through the cultivation of specialty goods utilizing regional resources. There is a big difference between life in the rural areas and that of urban areas of developing countries, and there are not many opportunities for cash income. Based on the Japanese One Village One Product movement, JICA has addressed rural development through the One Village One Product movement for rural areas in developing countries. Specifically, they are implementing projects that support the revitalization of regions through the utilization of regional tourism resources and the promotion of local industry through the development and sale of products that use local raw materials in countries in Asia, Africa and Central and South America. (MUJI. *MUJI × JICA PROJECT Kenya* website)
- (5) For this study, I received permission to conduct research from the National Council of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya. Further, I also explained the research to Tabaka's chief.
- (6) 1 USD = 103.75 KSh (Based on the rate at the time of the research on Oct 1, 2019, freecurrencyrates.com).
- (7) School fees are based on primary, secondary, and higher education (the school education system

changed from the previous 8-4-4 system to the 2-6-3-3-3 system in 2020), whether it is public or private, and whether students live in a boarding school. According to the study participants, the school fee for children varies between 4,000 KSh and 46,000 KSh per year. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's (2015) guidelines, the school fee for national secondary schools is 9,374 KSh per year and 53,553 KSh along with boarding.

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