

Chapter 5

A family business: The case of Kisii stone

Shiori Itaku

Introduction

This paper aims to demonstrate how various members of a family are involved in the soapstone carving industry in the Gusii region of western Kenya. Soapstone is a type of talc with which Kenyans create sculptures called 'Kisii Stone'; they are sold not only in Kenya but also in East Africa and all over the world as art and handmade artefacts. As soapstone can only be collected in the Gusii region, many of the Gusii people are engaged in this industry as a family business. This paper attempts to indicate how this industry becomes a family business by focusing on one family. Household surveys and interviews were conducted; it was found that there are many clans that are traditionally involved in the soapstone business, although some clans do come from other areas within Kenya. The semi-structured interviews explored the Evans family's history and family life: the data demonstrate that various family members have joined the soapstone industry, although their background and path to this work all vary. It appears that every family business does not form one company, but rather that the members work independently and occasionally collaborate with family members.

Soapstone (Fig. 1) is a type of talc that is smooth to touch and that can only be collected in the Gusii region of Kenya; government publications on the Kisii District Development Plan determine that soapstone is a regional resource (Republic of Kenya 2001). Soapstone items are sold not only in Kenya, but also in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania and Uganda, although a book on contemporary art in East Africa introduces these sculptures as 'Kisii Stone' (Miller 1975). The soapstone sculptures produced in the Gusii region are diverse, such as figures, plates, trays, coasters, vases, chess sets, etc., and each has a wide range of sizes and shapes (Fig. 2). For example, figures can be animals (Fig. 3), families, hearts, or lovers (Fig. 4), and plates and trays can be anything from circles and squares to animal-shaped objects. Each size ranges from the size of a palm to a size that one person cannot carry.

Working with soapstone is a local industry in the Gusii region of Kenya, therefore the majority of all processes, from quarrying to carving, occur in this region. Many families from among the Gusii people are engaged in this industry; as Abuga stated, 'In Kisii, soapstone mining and carving is often treated as a family business' (Abuga 2018).

However, the exact familial relationships and interactions that concern the various soapstone family businesses have rarely been researched and little is known. Therefore, this paper will focus on one Gusii family and indicate how family members became involved in the soapstone industry.



Figure 1. Mined soapstone at quarry (photographed by the author in 2019)



Figure 2. Gusii's soapstone items sold in Kenya and abroad (photographed by the author in 2017)



Figure 3. Animal figurine (photographed by the author in 2019)



Figure 4. Lovers figurines with no decoration (surrounding objects are also humans) (photographed by the author in 2018)

The Gusii

The Gusii are a Bantu-speaking people, whose community currently inhabits western Kenya, in the Kisii and Nyamira counties (Akama 2017). They are surrounded by non-Bantu ethnic groups, such as the Luo, Kipsigis and Maasai. According to the 2009 census, the Gusiis' population is approximately 2.2 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2010b), within Kenya's total population of approximately 38.6 million, and they are the seventh largest ethnic group in Kenya.

Although many work in cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa, the Gusii are traditionally farmers. Major crops include corn, millet, and sorghum, vegetables such as kale for self-consumption and sale at the market, and coffee and tea as cash crops. The main livestock are chickens, cows, and goats. Although there are some people that are devoted to agriculture, many have another job in order to increase their income. Most of the workers in the soapstone carving industry combine crop and livestock farming. According to Akama, 'the Gusii lineage system was based on patrilineal principles and ... the smallest unit of Gusii social structure was the homestead, *omochie*' (Akama 2017: 33). After the homestead is lineage (*riiga*), sub-clan, clan (*egesaku*), and sub-counties. Further, Akama states that the Gusii people have managed to expand and realign themselves into several clans that form the current main grouping of the Gusii: Kitutu, Nyaribari, Mogirango, Basi, Machoge, and Nchari (Akama 2017). Hakansson states 'The *riiga* (pl. *amaiiga*) was the largest group whose members could trace exact genealogical relationships' (Hakansson 1988: 30), and 'the clan had dominion over clan land and its members had incontrovertible rights to use land under its control' (Hakansson 1988: 35). As the Gusii has patrilineal principles, inheritance of land is chiefly inherited from father to sons, although today my research confirms that another clan may occasionally purchase land.

The history of Gusii soapstone

Gusii soapstone was originally used for ceremonial powders that were applied to the

face and body (women) or to shields (men) (Matsuzono 2001). According to Eiseman et al., who compared the soapstone industry between the Inuit and the Gusii, the Gusii began producing works in the shape of practical items, such as smoking pipes and cooking utensils, from the 1910s, and began to occasionally make animal statues for visitors in the 1930s (Eiseman et al. 1988). According to Miller (1975), by the end of the 1950s soapstone was widely sold inside and outside of East Africa: first, the carvings were simple, such as abstract animal images; next, more realistic animal figurines appeared; and then practical household products such as ashtrays and mugs gradually increased (Miller 1975). Following this, Mahoney (2017) states that, since the early 1990s, representations of human relationships, such as sculptures of a mother and her child, of lovers, or sculptures of a sexual nature began to appear. The soapstone carving industry has expanded its range of products, sometimes involving other ethnic groups, and has become established as art for tourists or handmade artefacts in Kenya and East Africa with the growth of the tourism industry in Kenya. While there are markets for such art for tourists and handmade artefacts, there are also niche markets for art, such as those exhibited in museums or collected by art collectors; there are elite artists in this industry who are active in these markets (Onyambu and Akama 2018a; 2018b).

Soapstone industry in the Gusii region

According to Onyambu and Akama, soapstone is found in the Gusii region, particularly in Tabaka and Gotichaki, and carving either takes place close to the quarries or in nearby carving and selling centres (Onyambu and Akama 2018b): the author's research has to date identified 23 locations within Kisii County (Fig. 5). Sculptures are made not only around the quarry, but in an industrial centre, the Tabaka area, where carving, decoration, and sales are all carried out. Tabaka is located in Kisii County and is a ward in the administrative division. It is located in a hilly area surrounded by mountains 25km from Kisii Town, the main city of Kisii County, which has 2,814 households and a population of 12,742, in South Mugirango sub-county (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2010a). The nearest quarry is approximately 700 metres from the Tabaka area, while the most distant quarry is approximately 13 kilometres away.

Wholesalers, carvers, and designers are concentrated on two 500m streets in Tabaka. The intersection of these two streets is the centre of the soapstone industry; customers and suppliers come from both inside Kenya and abroad in order to trade. The central area in Tabaka is traditionally home to the Bomware clan and even today the majority of 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 5 people working together, with a few for larger companies (Fig. 6).

As Mahoney (2017) notes, the internationalisation 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 traders negotiate and order through text and WhatsApp messages. Some customers visit the Tabaka area once or twice a year, or traders are introduced to the next purchaser by a current customer; in the latter case,

some traders in Tabaka have never met the customer face-to-face. In addition to suppliers, some traders have their own shops in neighbouring countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, and frequently travel between Tabaka and these shops.

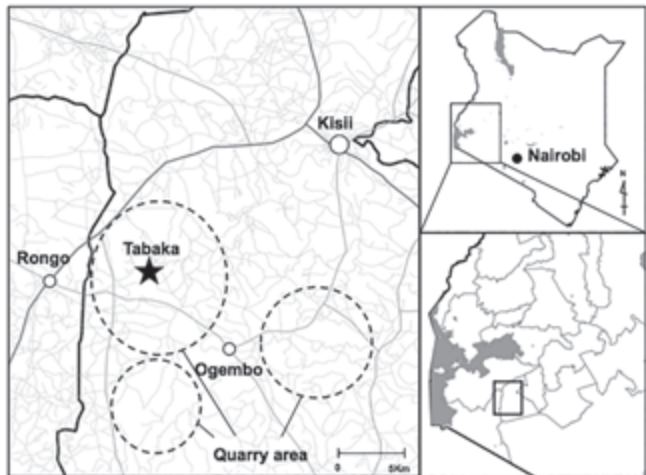


Figure 5. Quarry areas and Tabaka. A quarry area is where there are multiple quarries. There are 23 quarries overall in the areas surrounded by the dotted line (created by the author)



Figure 6. A private store (photographed by the author in 2017)

Tabaka area

The traditional clans that reside in Tabaka are the Bomware, Bombure, Bokimai, Boshinange, and Botabori clans. In my household survey in Tabaka in September 2019, all 171 respondents were Gusii. Among them, 152 households are engaged in the soapstone industry (89%). Of the 152 households, the Bomware clan accounted for 76 households (50%); 25

households were from the Bombure clan, 13 were from the Bokimai clan, 11 were Botabori, and the remaining 27 households were from other clans. In this survey, Bomware was the largest clan in the industry: this result is consistent with previous literature that indicates that soapstone carving is done by the Bomware subclan of the Bogirango clan, who live in Tabaka village (Eiseman et al. 1988). Significantly, both of the largest wholesalers in this area belong to the Bomware clan. Furthermore, 27 of the 152 households that engage in this industry (approximately 18%) had more than two people in their families working in the soapstone industry.

There are currently few companies in the Tabaka area: most shops are private stores and they occasionally receive orders from the aforementioned companies. There are approximately 60 stores in Tabaka, which are principally separated into two types of shops: shop and workshop. The owners differ in their roles, such as supplier, carver, and designer. Although there is no clear difference between a shop and a workshop, it appears that size is taken into account when differentiating between the two. Workspaces with signboards are called 'shops' and are generally large; owners hire full-time or daily workers as carvers, designers, polishers, and finishing workers. Workshops, on the other hand, do not have signboards, and the owners are carvers or designers or women who wash the soapstone themselves.

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), and then selling. Although the person who decorates the item also occasionally does the finishing work, each of the above processes is performed independently and is a division of labour.

A family involved in the soapstone business

This paper focuses on the life history of a single Gusii family, with Dean Evans as the head of the family, and explores how he came to engage in the soapstone industry, followed by the life history of his family. I explained the purpose of the study to his family and conducted research and writing with their permission. Through a life history, I believe that I can fully explore how people became involved in the industry and the ways in which people in this region live today. The survey methods utilised are semi-structured interviews conducted in English. The reason for using this research method is that it made it possible to obtain more detailed answers from the research participants by deciding the question to some extent, such as their motivation for being involved in the soapstone industry and about their family members involved in this industry, and changing the questions according to their previous answers. The data in this paper are based on fieldwork centred on Tabaka area 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.

This paper details the life history of the carver, Dean; the supplier, Gennes; and the designer, Ben, to see how they have entered and engaged in the soapstone industry. All personal names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms. The Evans family consists of seven members: a

father and mother, the eldest son to the third son, the eldest daughter and the second daughter (Table 1). The eldest son, Ben, has a wife and two children: although his family could be treated as a separate household, in this paper, I consider the eldest son as a member of Dean’s family as this is a study of the entire family’s dynamics. Tables 1 and 2 below display the occupations and birth years of the entire Evans family.

Table 1. Evans family names, birth years, and occupations

Name	Relationship	Sex	Birth Year	Occupation
Dean Evans	Father	Male	1968	Soapstone Carver
Gennes	Mother	Female	1972	Soapstone Supplier
Ben	1 st son	Male	1992	Soapstone Designer
Win	2 nd son	Male	1993	Chef in Nairobi
Dan	3 rd son	Male	1997	Student in Nairobi
Dora	1 st daughter	Female	1999	Student in Eldred
Paris	2 nd daughter	Female	2004	Student in Kisii Town

Table 2. Ben’s family members’ names, birth years, and occupations

Name	Relationship	Sex	Birth Year	Occupation
Doris	Ben’s wife	Female	1993	Primary school teacher
Andre	1 st son	Male	2011	Student in Tabaka
Abraham	2 nd son	Male	2014	Student in Tabaka

Gennes owns a shop in Tabaka, with a compound attached to the back where the family lives. At the entrance of this shop, women who wash soapstone, and who are employed by Gennes, are working. One building in the compound is the eldest son’s workshop, where he employs two to four people. Multiple people may share some workshops, but this workshop in particular is for the eldest son.

Dean and Gennes bought this land as the family home was approximately 20 minutes from Tabaka by bike. The motivation for the purchase was that Gennes had a workshop in the area and she wanted to explore the possibility of gaining more customers.

Family history and daily life

Dean

Dean was born in 1968, in his home village, as the second son in his family: he has seven brothers and sisters, and three of his brothers were carvers. In his village, there are many carvers, thus becoming a carver was natural, and Dean learned how to carve soapstone from a friend when he was 16. While working as a carver, he met Gennes, who is four years younger than him, in her village when he visited relatives. When the eldest son, Ben, was born in 1992, Dean paid a bridewealth and he and Gennes were married at church in 2000. Dean brought home carvings from the quarry every day and sold them to brokers when he had made a certain number of products. Gennes stayed home and worked as a farmer for more than 10 years. As she watched her husband sell to a broker, Gennes began to learn the soapstone carving business and

eventually became a broker herself, and in 2002, she rented a small room in the industrial centre of the Tabaka area to use as a workshop.

Dean worked at quarry A from the beginning of his career as a carver, until 2003. He says that the stone in this quarry was soft and easy to carve. Subsequently, he worked in quarry B from 2003 to 2014. The quality of stone in quarry B was good and there were many carvers, therefore it was convenient for Gennes to buy soapstone items. In 2005, Dean and Gennes purchased land in their own name, where they live now, and in 2006 they built their own house and opened a shop. Since then, Dean splits his time between going back to his home village in order to care for his cattle and plot of land and working in the quarry.

In the quarry, Dean created a group of carvers; when he changes quarry, he makes another group there. The research to date has not revealed the details of the group,⁽¹⁾ but Dean's explanation is that the group typically numbers six people, for quarrying together or going together to Tabaka to sell their items. This is because the group can buy more stones from an owner of a quarry and it is easier to sell them together than doing so individually. The group purchases soapstone from the landowner at the quarry, finds a suitable place in the area, and carves there. The carving is done at the quarry in order to reduce the weight as much as possible, and because the members of the group live in different locations.

From 2014 to the present, Dean has worked at quarry C. Although it is a distance from the shop and the house, the stones are whiter in this quarry than those in other quarries. Thus, Dean made a new group and together they rent a room and sleep there; he stays for approximately three days during the week. Dean manages all the items made by his group. He takes the items back to Gennes' shop, who then, through Dean, pays the members. Therefore, even during weeks when he is not working at the quarry, Dean must still collect the items produced by the members. As there is church on Saturday, Dean comes back on Friday at the latest and goes to the quarry on Sunday at the earliest. He is the church's Elder, and hence, he sometimes has to attend church gatherings and funerals on days other than Saturday. Further, he is occasionally absent for a few days in order to help his relatives with their harvest. Dean, who has a full and busy life, nevertheless earns the majority of his income from soapstone carvings.

The group principally produces bowls, as this is one of the most popular items in Gennes' shop; among the bowls, a small size of four to six inches is particularly popular. Although there are differences in personal carving abilities, Dean is particularly good at producing bowls, flower vases, and candles, but cannot carve family figures. The size of the bowls produced depends on the order and stock of Gennes' shop, and the size of the stone.

Gennes

As Dean travels a great deal, he is not typically at home and thus Gennes takes control of the house. However, there is almost no family at home. This is due to the fact that the eldest

⁽¹⁾ The nature of the group needs to be further investigated, for example, whether it is a functioning co-operative or is more loosely organised.

family members, who lived in the same compound until the end of 2017, now rent a house next to the compound, and the youngest children either work in Nairobi or live in a dormitory at their school. However, Dean and Gennes have help in the form of Andre. Andre is Ben's eldest son: he lives with his grandparents to help them, and because, in Gusii culture, sons must live separately from their parents after circumcision. Typically, the parents build another house in the homestead, however Andre lives in the compound, as Ben and his wife live in a single house, not a homestead, and thus cannot expand.

In addition to Dean's co-operative, Gennes purchases items from approximately 20 carvers and brokers. Apart from the transactions between suppliers in Tabaka, her main customers are all suppliers and sellers in Nairobi: there are currently approximately 15 customers. Gennes is busy, because trucks take orders to Nairobi every Wednesday and Sunday night.

Gennes is a Christian, therefore she goes to church and does not work on Saturdays. Carvers and brokers that are from another Christian sect come to her shop after 18:00 when the family has returned from church, as although Friday night to Saturday is a rest day, Gennes does not refuse her suppliers when they come. Further, Gennes has been a leader in the choir since 2008 and goes to church for an hour and a half every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, unless she is busy at work. In addition to the shop and church, there is a small wife's garden (*Ekerundu*⁽²⁾) in the compound, and Gennes occasionally works there. Gennes is typically at the compound or the entrance of the shop, however, even if she is in the compound, carvers, brokers, and customers can come into the compound and talk to her: if they do not find her in compound, they wait for her to come back. When Gennes is out on business, Dean negotiates with the suppliers and customers. When I asked Gennes how she came to be involved in this industry, she replied, 'I thought the soapstone business would be money'.

Ben's life history and daily life

Ben, born in 1992, is the first son and the only householder amongst his brothers and sisters. Ben met Doris when he went away for secondary school: she later became his wife, and their first son, Andre, was born in 2011. Ben graduated high school in 2012, however, the relationship with Doris ended and Andre lived with Doris. Ben completed a computer-training course and went to college to become an electrical engineer, where he again met Doris, who was training to become an accountant. After their second son was born, Ben left college and opened a kiosk in Kisii Town, and in 2015, he went to Nairobi alone to look for higher paying jobs. This was due to his wife moving to a two-year teaching course; Dean's family paid the school fee as Doris' bridewealth.

Ben worked for a paint company, but life in Nairobi was not smooth sailing: living in the city was expensive for the amount of money he earned, thieves entered the house multiple times, and the work was hard. Therefore, Ben returned to Tabaka at the end of the year and started to

⁽²⁾ The wife has her own garden to plant vegetables in Gusii region. It is called *Ekerundu* (pl. *Ebirundu*) in this area. Besides this, it is also called *Egeticha* (pl. *Ebiticha*) (from the author's fieldwork).

live with Doris and their children in a corner of the compound. The 'man's house' has one room on both sides across the middle entrance, and as the name suggests, it was originally a brother's room: this became Ben's family's room. Gennes says that her son and his wife should live in a compound for several years; 'You should live together with your husband's parents for some years since you got married. You will need to learn from your mother-in-law'.

Ben had thought about migrating to the United States since 2016, but gave up and began to learn how to decorate soapstone under a large shop in Tabaka where a cousin taught him how to decorate. After this, Ben built a workshop next to Gennes' shop on the land that she had bought, and started working on orders from the owner of a large shop. In addition to this workshop, a room at the entrance to the middle of the man's house was used as a storage room for work and a workplace when it was raining.

At first, Ben only received orders from one large shop, but after moving to the workshop, Ben's best friend introduced him to a Gusii customer who conducts business in Tanzania. From this time, Ben hired a daily worker. In December 2016, a customer from Mombasa visiting Gennes' shop saw Ben's work and soon became his customer, and the following year, in 2017, Doris began working at a private primary school near their compound. In April, the aforementioned customer from Mombasa introduced him to another soapstone businessperson, and Ben began to receive regular orders. Although this was an election year and business was not good, Ben said that his income was still higher than Doris'; according to Doris, her salary averaged 5,000 shillings per month. However, designer income is unstable, as in the low season, Ben earned 5,000 shillings per month and in the high season, 80,000 shillings. Ben can therefore out-earn Doris.

One day, I asked Ben in an interview why he did not become a carver like his father: 'Carving is a very hard job...they don't have enough income, even if it was hard work... and decoration makes more money'. Is it true that soapstone decorators can earn more money than carvers? Carvers and designers are paid daily and how much they earn depends on the number of items they sell. Suppliers, on the other hand, earn their income based on demand. Therefore, it is difficult to calculate a supplier's daily earnings. As a result of surveys given to carvers during my fieldwork, the daily income of a carver is approximately 200-500 shillings, with no significant individual differences. On the other hand, design skills vary greatly from person to person; some earn 200 shillings per day, while others earn approximately 1500 shillings. Thus, there certainly appears to be a difference in earnings between carvers and designers. However, the difference between carving and decorating could be that carving is hard physical work; even if carvers and designers earn the same 200 shillings per day, carving work is harder (on the body). On the other hand, decoration includes colouring, designing, and sketching. These processes are complex and might consume much time. It is said that Dean's three brothers did not continue working as carvers because of the harshness of the job, and are now dedicated to agriculture. 'I like this business. I make and sell with Gennes. This business is good, but it's a very hard job, so I don't want my kids to do this business. I think it is better to be designer of soapstone', Dean told me.

Similar remarks came from many soapstone industry workers during my fieldwork; however, when I enquired about the number of carvers and designers, everyone answers that there are more carvers than designers. This was likely due to the fact that Tabaka is the centre of designers, except for some tourist cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa. In contrast to designers, carvers' work areas are not restricted to Tabaka, as they can also work in quarries anywhere in the entire Gusii region: however, if you wish to become a designer, it is advisable to work in Tabaka. Although my research was done only in the Gusii region and the number of designers in other cities is currently unknown, the survey respondents all say that there are more carvers than designers; this may be an issue of optics, as whereas the designers gather only in the Tabaka area, the carvers are in Tabaka, as well as in the area around the quarry, thus it would appear that carvers are more numerous. Ben could be a designer because, fortunately, Dean and Gennes built a compound in the Tabaka area.

Ben's family lived communally with Dean's in the compound until the night they suddenly moved into a nearby house, which they rented. Nevertheless, Ben still comes to work at the compound every day. In 2019, because of road extension, his workshop had to move to the back of the compound.

The turning point was the following year. In October 2018, the customer from Mombasa introduced a new Gusii customer to Ben, and additionally, in December, a new customer from South Africa gave an order through Facebook. Orders from outside of Kenya pay better than orders from the shops in Tabaka; Ben told me that he gives priority to international orders and receives local orders only if he has time. When a large international order is received, Ben has to pay for the stones until he receives payment: he first collects 50% of the payment, and after delivery, he receives the rest. If the order is large, Ben needs to hire more people and therefore he has to pay their salary too. While orders from the outside typically bring large payments, they also increase the expenses of the workshop. As a result, Ben's life often becomes difficult until payment arrives.

The business has become quite different. Until 2017, Ben used to finish his work and go home early in the evenings. When work goes well however, Ben continues to work until midnight and he frequently comes to work in the early morning, at 5am. Circa 2018, Ben would occasionally hire temporary workers to polish soapstone, however, around 2019, the number of workers increased: two or three people as polishers and two designers with good decoration technique. Ben said, 'I don't want to do anything other than work. For example, church work. I am too busy and it's impossible.'

Further, Ben receives orders not only from large shops, but also other shops where the owner is a carver. In addition, he occasionally does business with his mother, Gennes; kinship is a method of procuring a job. Several relatives of Dean and Gennes' live nearby the compound; they are carvers, designers, and suppliers, and they occasionally give Ben soapstone orders. He also receives orders from those who go to the same church. When I spoke to a member of the church, he told me, 'We do business together! Because he is a good guy!'

I asked Ben, 'If there were no problems with your work in Nairobi, would you have

worked in the soapstone business?’ Ben replied, ‘Yes, this is a very good business, so I must have chosen this job sooner or later.’

Conclusion

In this study, I conducted household surveys and interviews regarding family soapstone businesses in the Gusii region of western Kenya. As a result of the household survey, it was found that there are many clans that are traditionally involved in the soapstone business. In addition, approximately 18% of the families that engage in the soapstone industry have more than two workers in the industry. As this result is based on a household survey, it will be necessary to investigate further and research the siblings or relatives of the workers.

An interview on a family business was described in the Evans family’s life history. It is apparent from this family that although multiple family members can be involved in the soapstone business, their backgrounds and routes into the business are different: Dean entered the industry as his brothers were carvers and there are many carvers in his home village, hence his career path was natural; Gennes discovered a business opportunity in the soapstone industry after marrying Dean, thus they bought land and opened a shop; and Ben tried different multiple jobs before turning to the soapstone business. The data further demonstrate that although this is a family business, it is not in the typical sense of all members being a part of the same company, rather, they help each other, and do business independently. For example, Dean’s group brings items to Gennes, because Gennes has a soapstone business there; it does not mean that this group is a subcontractor of Gennes. Dean bring the items to Gennes on behalf of the group and Gennes purchases them. In this way, three people from the family are engaged in soapstone. The fact that each of them are employed in different jobs, such as carver, supplier, and designer, demonstrates that the family is linked to each other, while still engaging with the industry independently.

At a glance, the Evans family are migrants in the soapstone business, and thus are different from that of the family that has a continuous carving family ancestry. In particular, buying land and moving the entire family from their ancestral home is rare, given the large number of local clans in the industry. The large shops in the district are typically run by such local clans; when compared to theirs, Gennes shop is smaller, the number of customers is small, and the order quantities from customers are smaller. Furthermore, the large shops have international customers, which Gennes does not. On the other hand, however, they are now rooted in the community as an Elder and a choir leader in the local church, and they receive orders through their church connections.

Similar to constructing local relationships, the network of relatives who originally live in the region is also important. It has been noted in Mahoney (2017) that business is developed using kinship networks, and this study received comparable data. For example, Gennes trades soapstone items with her brother who is a designer and supplier in Nairobi, while Ben takes orders from a maternal relative who is a supplier in Tabaka, and his cousin, who is a designer, sometimes helps Ben. Gennes may have decided to do business in Tabaka, as she has many

relatives there.

So, what do the second son, who is currently a chef in Nairobi, the third son, who is a student, and the first and second daughters who are in school, plan to do in their future? After enquiring about the possibility of participating in the soapstone business, there are no such plans for now. The second son said that he would like to open a shop to show foreign football games in Kisii County, once he has saved money in Nairobi. The third son is planning to go to college from next year to begin an engineer's course. Both the first and second daughters want to teach at high school. At present, neither of them is actively engaged in the soapstone industry; however, they grew up watching their father and mother work, and their older brother too in recent years, so they told me that they are familiar with soapstone. This demonstrates that they have substantial background in the soapstone business, thus it would be easier for them to enter the industry if they so desired. However, in a survey of 30 soapstone industry workers throughout Kisii County, all but one responded that they did not want their children to engage in the industry: 'Because it is hard work', 'I want them to do a better job'. Dean too had the same answer. Despite such parental intentions, Ben chose the path to the soapstone industry. Nevertheless, he also does not want his sons to become a part of the soapstone industry: despite being able to make a living from the soapstone business, Ben's feelings are complicated.

Negative attitudes towards the soapstone industry still exist in the region. In the past, other clans looked down on Bomware carvers, who traditionally did the soapstone working, because they believed that carving was a dirty job. It would appear that the parent's desire to discourage children entering the soapstone carving industry is a remnant of this industry being looked down upon, even though today it has become commercially attractive (Matsuzono 2001). The interviews further revealed that parents did not want their children to engage in the soapstone sculpture industry, because it was a considerable amount of hard, physical work for low wages. This sentiment is an important factor when considering a future in the soapstone industry. However, at the same time, the industry has the advantage of having resources unique to the region, which means that there will always be a job for people in the area. Dean is an example of this: he started to work on sculpture due to the influence of the surroundings, namely the soapstone resource in the Gusii region.

It is the current situation of soapstone industry workers that both the strength of local resources and the negative views on industry coexist. Therefore, there is scope for future research projects to investigate deeper into how workers (suppliers, carvers, designers, etc.) view the soapstone industry.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by JSPS Grant-in-aid for JSPS fellows 19J12441 and KAKENHI 16H05690. The research on which this paper was based was carried out with the research permission of the Kenyan government, and was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Nairobi Research Center. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to them here. I am grateful to the informants for their cooperation with the surveys.

References

- Abuga, E. 2018. Government plans to put soapstone factory in South Mugirango. *Standard Digital*, April 16. Retrieved from <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001277021/plans-for-soapstone-factory-ready-says-ps>. Last accessed: 2020, February 21.
- Akama, J. S. 2017. *The Gusii of Kenya: Social, Economic, Cultural, Political and Judicial Perspectives*. Nsemia Inc.
- Eisemon, T. O., Hart, L. M. and E. Ong'esa. 1988. *Stories in Stone: Soapstone Sculptures from Northern Quebec and Kenya*. La Fédération des Coopératives du Nouveau-Québec and The Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Hakansson, T. 1988. *Bridewealth, Women and Land: Social Change among the Gusii of Kenya*. Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology 10: Almquist and Wiksell International.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2010a. *2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census Vol. 1A*, Kenya.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2010b. *2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census Vol. II*, Kenya.
- Mahoney, D. 2017. *The Art in Connection: Risk, Mobility, and the Crafting of Transparency in Coastal Kenya*. California: University of California Press.
- Matsuzono, M. 2001. Clan and ethnic relationship in Gusii soapstone industry. In (M. Matsuzono ed.) *Regional Ethnographic Study on Globalization Process and Nation Building in East Africa* (『東アフリカにおけるグローバル化過程と国民形成に関する地域民族誌的研究』研究成果報告書), pp.1-15. Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan University.
- Miller, J. von D. 1975. *Art in East Africa: A Guide to Contemporary Art*. New York: Africana (Holmes and Meier).
- Onyambu, M. K. and J. S. Akama. 2018a. The evolution and resilience of the Gusii soapstone industry. *Journal of African Cultural Heritage Studies*, 1(1): 1-17
- Onyambu, M. K. and J. S. Akama. 2018b *Gusii Soapstone Industry: Critical Issues, Opportunities, Challenges & Future Alternatives*. Nairobi: Nsemia Inc.
- Republic of Kenya. 2001. *Kisii District Development Plan 1997-2001*. Office of the Vice-President and Ministry of Planning and National Development, The Government Printer.