1. Fieldwork on Mafia Island, Tanzania, 1965-2010

1. **1960s**
Topics studied: kinship and descent, land tenure, spirit possession
The historical setting: immediate post-independence period, optimism, but issues of Rhodesia and S. Africa. TANU, ujamaa
Problems and issues: my age, getting to know people, trust
What I wrote: about kinship and descent, boys’ circumcision and girls’ puberty rituals
Funding: University of London, Goldsmiths Company

2. **1970s**
Topics studied: gender relations, making film for BBC
Historical setting: aftermath of villagisation
Problems and issues: seeing things from different perspective because of being married and having children but difficulties with making the film; villagisation
What I wrote about: Gender, property, development, households.
Funding: BBC

3. **1980s**
Topics studied: food, health and fertility
Historical setting: economic difficulties in TZ shortly before Nyerere left office and economy began to be liberalised
Problems and issues in fieldwork: realisation that indices for women’s well-being were now very bad
What I wrote about: sexuality, spirit possession, stratification, socialism, doing fieldwork
Funding: Nuffield

4. **1990s**
Topics studied: personal narratives; food, health and fertility
Historical setting: jettisoning of ujamaa, adoption of full-scale economic liberalisation and TZ went over to a multi-party system
Problems and issues: the ethics of writing a personal narrative
What I wrote about: personal narratives, marital disputes, food, health, fertility, old age, politics, spirit possession
Funding: Nuffield, Leverhulme

5. **2002 and 2004**
Topics studied: local perceptions of modernities; food security; risk; tourism; women’s groups
Problems and issues: working with Mikidadi in 2002, the setting up of a prawn farm on Mafia
What I wrote about: modernities, witchcraft, risk
Funding: Nuffield

6. **2010**
Topics studied: research the life of Mikidadi Juma to write an autobiography
Historical setting:
Problems and Issues: memory, permissions from relatives and friends; the proposed Mafia Dance Festival
What I wrote about: biography
Funding: British Academy

2. Methods

• Participant observation
• Interviews – structured or semi-structured, recorded or not
• Asking informants to keep diaries for short or long periods
• Conversations
• Life histories
• Genealogies
• Censuses
• Mapping
• Group discussions
• Case studies
• Use of photos, film/video, audio-recordings
• Secondary data: use of local archives, newspapers
• Letters
• Fieldwork diary

Over time, I have used all of the methods above. They do not always fall into clear-cut categories. Some encounters may best be termed ‘conversations’, others were more purposeful and on this website, I have described them as ‘interviews’.

In the first few visits, most research was conducted in the villages in which I resided, but by 1994, and particularly after 2002, I was becoming increasingly aware of the context of the island-district as a whole, and I carried out interviews in the district capital Kilindoni and the tourist area of Utende. I also conducted research in other areas significant for islanders such as Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar.

Some methods tended to change as time went on. For example, in the first period, I only used my tape-recorder for rituals, not for interviews, but later people became increasingly comfortable with the idea of my recording our encounters, rather than my just taking notes in a notebook. However, transcribing such audio-recordings was a lot of work, and I tended to translate them directly into English, rather than first transcribing the Swahili and then translating.

In the first few visits, I used a rather rickety type-writer to write up notes, and it was not until 2002 that I was able to start using a computer in the field, and then only intermittently, as it was operated through solar power. For this reason, little of my early field date was digitised.

In 2010-2, I held a British Academy award to work mainly on a biography of Mikidadi Juma, but also to digitise some of my existing material. I was fortunate to work with Joseph Bwathondi, a Tanzanian resident in London. He transcribed some of the recorded interviews from 1985 and 1994, as well as some material from 2002. It is mainly this material which has been included on this website. Some of the interviewees
have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, although most of the interviewed prior to 2002 are now deceased.

3. Pat Caplan's publications on Tanzania, in chronological order, as of 020113

1. 1969 "Cognatic Descent Groups on Mafia Island, Tanzania" Man 4, 3: 419-31


3. 1976 "Boys' circumcision and girls' puberty rites among the Swahili of Mafia Island Tanzania" Africa 46, 1: 21-33

4. 1978a "The Swahili of Chole Island, Tanzania" in A. Sutherland (ed.) Face Values BBC/RAI: 140-75

5. 1978b "Hierarchy or Stratification: Two Case Studies from Nepal and East Africa" in J. Fisher (ed.) Himalayan Anthropology Mouton: 53-65


9. 1988 "Engendering knowledge: the politics of ethnography" Anthropology Today 4: 8-12 & 5:14-17


11. 1998-9: "The cross-cultural validity of feminism - a case study from Tanzania" Garcia de Orta 6, 1 & 2 (Lisbon).

12. 1992a Editor (with F. le Guennec-Coppens) Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie Paris: Karthala (216pp.)

13. 1992b "Sex and Spirits: a Swahili informant and his diary". ASA volume Anthropology and Autobiography, edited Judith Okely and Helen Callaway,


20. 1995e "'In my office we don't have closing hours: Gendered household relations in a Swahili village in northern Mafia Island" in Colin Creighton and Cuthbert Omari (eds.) Gender, Family, and Household in Tanzania Avebury, 1995, pp. 118-38.


22. 1997b 'Everyday tale of Swahili folk' Arcadia column in Financial Times weekend section, 28/6/97, p.20.


25. 1999a. "Where have all the young girls gone? Gender and sex ratios on Mafia


30. 2003. Video. ‘Maisha ya Watu Kisiwani Mafia’ (longer Swahili version of the above, 75 mins)

31. 2004. Website for Mafia Island (www.mafia-island-tanzania.gold.ac.uk), updated 2010-11


33. 2004. ‘Struggling to be modern: recent letters from Mafia Island’. In Caplan and Topan (eds.) Swahili Modernities, Lawrenceville, NJ.


36. 2007a. 'But the coast, of course, is quite different': academic and local ideas about the East African littoral’ Journal of Eastern African Studies vol.1 no. 2. 305-320. July.


41. Historical Photo gallery of Mafia Island, 1965-2010 on Mafia Island website (above)