



# Leisure Sciences

An Interdisciplinary Journal

ISSN: 0149-0400 (Print) 1521-0588 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ulsc20>

## “Romantic Entertainers” on Kenya’s Coastal Tourism: A Case of Sex Tourism

Rose Omondi & Chris Ryan

To cite this article: Rose Omondi & Chris Ryan (2020) “Romantic Entertainers” on Kenya’s Coastal Tourism: A Case of Sex Tourism, *Leisure Sciences*, 42:3-4, 358-374, DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2020.1712283](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1712283)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2020.1712283>



Published online: 17 Jan 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 854



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 4 View citing articles [↗](#)



## “Romantic Entertainers” on Kenya’s Coastal Tourism: A Case of Sex Tourism

Rose Omondi<sup>a</sup> and Chris Ryan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of International Tourism, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Bondo, Kenya; <sup>b</sup>China-New Zealand Tourism Research Unit, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

### ABSTRACT

This paper results from a year-long ethnographic study spent with a group of women on the Kenyan coastline who provide older male European tourists with friendship and intimacy. However, for the most part these are asymmetric relationships for while in many instances the men experience emotional feelings of tenderness for their girl-friends (albeit based on concepts of being with an “exotic” woman), for the women a *mzungu* (a foreign long-term male client perceived as wealthy) represents a potential richer life-style. The paper describes the practices engaged in by the women as they entertain their clients in a theater of romance based often on a deceit and where to survive emotions are on the one hand faked and on the other require self-delusion and distancing.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 April 2019  
Accepted 22 April 2019

### KEYWORDS

Kenya; romantic entertainers; sex tourism

## Introduction

Studies focusing on romantic relationships between the tourists and locals have been positioned as either sex or romance tourism, with the former being predominately but not wholly seen as the behavior of male tourists whose purpose is to engage in commercial sex with local women in tourist destinations (Ryan & Hall, 2001). When the tourists are female, other researchers argue that there is an element of emotion and courtship rather than solely an exchange of sex for money, thereby leading to the term “romance tourism” (Herold, Garcia, & deMoya, 2001; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995). For both sexes, the tourists are often positioned as white westerners using their First World and racial privileges in search of a sexualized and racialized “other,” who is often perceived as having a need for money (Jacobs, 2010); although Jeffreys (2003) argues that significant gender differences exist whereby the two sexes cannot be equated in terms of motive or action.

The relationship between leisure, sex work and tourism is well recorded, but nonetheless complex. It ranges from expressions of overt masculinity in the *puttan tour* described by Crowhurst and Eldridge (2018) where young Italian men seek out sex workers to jeer at them, to the complexities of male and female erotic dancers, lesbian and gay relationships and the gazers and gazed upon of the London striptease clubs (Pilcher, 2016). Equally, sex performance has spatial characteristics as described by

Spanger's (2013) study of Thai sex performers in Denmark as they steered a course between home and temporary location and equally fulfilled varying roles of gendered performance of straight or gay, "lady boy" or uni-sexual. Sex work raises issues of identities, degradation, empowerment, fun, pleasure and fantasy (Bujra, 1982).

The purpose of this paper is to add to these scenarios by describing the actions taken by women who befriend older white male tourists seeking the companionship of younger Kenyan women on the Mombasa and Malindi coastline. It thereby examines the ways in which these sex workers are able to reverse the power relationship thought to normally exist between client and sex worker through the use of deception.

It is also suggested that this Kenyan case has differences to many reported in past literature because the tourists sampled in this study were looking for romantic relationships rather than sex *per se*, although such romance at times required intimacy of a sexual nature. Indeed female informants indicated that the desired *wazungu* (male client) often do not want sex *per se* for a variety of reasons. Rather the males' desired relationships may be based upon apparent friendship that includes sensuality, intimacy and only occasionally sex. Hence, to use the words of one tourist respondent in reference to his girlfriend, "... my relationship with Janie is more or less like a daughter but sometimes we do have sex, but it is too hot here and again at 73, I cannot do much, so sex is not a priority ...". Other tourists feared the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS and so would not engage in sex acts for that reason. One female informant put it this way:

Some *wazungu* (people of foreign descent) can live with you for as long as two years as a wife in every sense of it except for sex. They would not ask you for this until such a time that he would take you for an AIDS test. Most *wazungu* also don't like sex as such, they just want you to touch them ...

The study suggests that many older male tourists look for some "romantic experience" as they want to be "loved" and consequently can be seen walking hand in hand with young Kenyan women. Equally, often the local women involved in these relationships are also generally uninterested in sexual liaisons with the tourists. A number of reasons potentially explain this - some attributed this to the past years they have spent in the sex industry meaning they are now generally indifferent to sexual intercourse, while others claimed white males were unsatisfactory sexual performers when compared to African males with whom they maintained a relationship as a husband or boyfriend. For many of the women the majority of these relationships lack emotional fulfillment, but these relationships provided the status of having a rich *mzungu*, monetary compensation and/or gifts for the shared "intimate time" of the tourists' stay in Kenya.

## The study

The study was carried out at the Kenyan coast situated immediately south of the equator along the Indian ocean covering an area of 150 km by 450 km with an actual sea front length of about 600 km. The Kenya coast is ethnically quite heterogeneous because of the contact it has had with the outside world since ancient times. Arab traders arrived about 1,000 CE, to be later joined by people from India and Persia, so creating coastal urban centers that were initially based on Islamic culture. Some of these foreigners inter-married with the Africans giving rise to the Swahili people, and Kiswahili is

the predominant language in this region. The other people at the coast are the three African Bantu groups, the Mjikenda, the Pokomo and Taita (Middleton, 2000). There are also a substantial number of migrants from other parts of Kenya, and some from neighboring countries who had traveled to the coast in search of employment.

In terms of tourism, the Kenyan coast has had a long history in tourism development. However, modern tourism at the coast did not begin until after the establishment of British colonial rule in Kenya (Kibicho, 2009). During the 1920s and 1930s, many British white settlers and colonial government officials in Kenya began to frequent the coast for holidays because of its warm climate and sandy beaches. Today, the Kenyan coast accounts for 66% of all the tourism activities in the country and sex tourism has also developed alongside other forms of tourism. This study focused on the two major beach towns of Mombasa and Malindi because of their reputation for nightlife, particularly on their streets where it is common to find women dressed in skimpy clothes, moving from one bar to another in search of a *mzungu* (white) client. A *mzungu* is a person of foreign descent – in Swahili also one “who wanders aimlessly” and in this context a term for more elderly white males who can provide a desired life style. It can be noted *wazungu* is the plural form, and it has given rise to the words “Wachizungu” and “Bachizungu” – literally “wandering people” who adopt the Western culture, cuisine and lifestyle, while historically it is also derived from words meaning “ghost” (Spitzer, 2017; Wane, 2011).

## Literature review

There exists a copious literature on sex work, and its relationship with tourism as implied in the introduction. For the sake of brevity, some of that work is listed at in Table 1. A common theme in the literature is the question of power relationships, and often this is interpreted as an economic power where sex is purchased to generate economic gain for some-one who lacks alternative sources to monetary resources (Ryan & Hall, 2001). Yet the concept implies victimhood, and this role of being the victim has been strenuously denied by many commentators who advance the notion that it is sex *work* and hence should be treated as a source of employment recognizing the rights of the worker (Ryan & Hall, 2001). As in many instances of leisure tourism, context is important. In Kenya, male clients, whether consciously or unconsciously, engage in acts of racial exoticism and self-delusion because they desire to be with a younger African woman and are only able for the most part to do so because of the relative income differences between a developed and developing country. They are akin to the tourists described by Seabrook (1996), the *farangs* who arrive in Bangkok “... and think that love is theirs for the asking” (p.46), yet they are so lonely and isolated individuals (p. 114), so that it seems the city is a theater.

Equally, much of the text is about bodies – bodies as sources of comfort, as meeting and requiring needs, and as means of attraction, as means of expression. Bourdieu (1984, p.190) draws attention to the body as the “materialization of class taste,” as a locus of social location, a *habitus* of social expression and of *taste* – the expression of life style rooted in material constraints (Shilling, 1993, p.129).

**Table 1.** Indicative Sources of Past Research.

Item	Sources	Indicative Content
Females as sexual objects/eroticism/ racial superiority	Alessio and Jóhannsdóttir (2011), Wilson (2010), Yokota (2006), Garrick (2005), Nyanzi et al. (2005), Brennan (2001).	Perceptions of 'others' (usually based on ethnicity – e.g., Asian women, black men) as exoticized, sexual others. Issues of racial superiority.
Male self-enhancement/delusion	Katsulis (2011)	Males with inability to cope with 'western women,' mistaking emotions and not recognizing economic power.
Sex work as means of 'getting ahead.'	Rivers-Moore (2010), Robinson (2006), Brennan (2001).	Sex work as economically empowering for sex workers, contributing to local economies, 'buying' senses of independence.
Spatial/social marginalisations	Karibo (2010), Tagliacozzo (2008), Singh and Hart (2007), Kibicho (2005).	Sex work being spatially constrained by legal/geographical factors. Linkages with concepts of marginality in social terms (also see categories below).
Commodification/power relationships	Hesse and Tutenges (2011), Lagunas (2010), Campbell (2007)	Sex as another commodity to be purchased. Commodification as means of protecting 'identity' – does not purchase 'real me.'
Romance/intimacy	Freidus and Romero-Daza (2009), Jacobs (2010), Sánchez Taylor (2001, 2006), Herold et al. (2001).	Gender differences between males and female motivations. Emotional involvements/friendships between adults/symmetric and asymmetric relationships (see also self- delusion and modern subjectivities).
Modern subjectivities/modernity	Jacobs (2010), Frohlick (2008), Sánchez Taylor (2006), Ragsdale, Difranceisco, and Pinkerton (2006), Jeffreys (2003), Clancy (2002),	Changing gender roles, postmodern and modern worlds, globalization.

Note: The literature listed here excludes material relating to HIV/AIDS and similar health issues, and also issues relating to gay and lesbian sex tourism

## Methodology

### *Interpretive paradigm*

The complexities and controversial issues surrounding sex tourism make it difficult to be studied from a positivist stance that assumes a value-free world (Nyanzi, Rosenberg-Jallow, Bah, & Nyanzi, 2005). Consequently, an interpretive paradigm was adopted because it recognizes that human values have importance, and personal reasons and motivations can only be understood by looking at feelings, emotions and motives at a personal level. The ethnographic method requires (a) researchers to immerse themselves in the lives of the people they study, (b) places the studied phenomenon in its social cultural context with (c) an understanding that reality is culturally bound and socially constructed. The method thus allows a researcher to identify multiple realities and to become part of the situation through participant observation so as to feel what it is like for the people in that situation (Snow & Morrill, 1995).

Such research generates copious textual material, and as David (2006) states, careful readings of the text are a necessity. However, the authors agree with Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 11) that there is a danger that those who emphasis the text over much

“ignore the lived experience.” They cite Snow and Morrill (1995, p. 361) who argue that “... the pre-occupation with discourse and storytelling, will take us further from the field of social action and the real dramas of everyday life and thus signal the death knell of ethnography as an empirically grounded enterprise.” Chambers (2000) notes that ethnographic research is a process, but one that generates various difficulties in analysis. Yet he goes on to note that, “In an applied setting, the strength of ethnography is its capacity to identify cultural patterns that provide reason and meaningfulness to human values and behaviors” (Chambers, 2000, p. 862). In writing this paper we have sought to retain the story telling of a complex reality supported by a text that permits a thematic analysis to emerge.

Such processes are not without controversy. In some instances, researchers have withheld the fact that they are conducting research, and in rare instances researchers have made decisions that cross boundaries into acts of moral uncertainty or indeed illegality (e.g., Hobbs & Robins, 1991).

### **Data collection**

In this case, the first author spent 12 months living on the coast to collect the data. The main focus of the study was twelve women who were studied throughout the year, and the various friendships at which they were the hub or nodal point. A chance meeting with one sex worker at a NGO meeting led to the researcher being introduced to a social circle after which one contact led to another. The women were of varying ages from their late 20s to approximately 45 years of age. They came from the coastline itself, central Kenya, Nyanza, western Kenya, and individually others from Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Zaire also provided information. It was through these networks that the researcher also met the male clients. All the informants were “straight.” Pseudonyms are used in the article.

From very early in the process, it was made clear that the first author was conducting research, and indeed this was a requirement of a university ethics committee. Initial reactions to this varied from the incredulous to the supportive, but it meant that over time the first author became a resource for, and a confidant of, the key respondents. This was both an opportunity and a problem. It allowed trust to develop to the point where the first author was asked to drive respondents to see witch doctors in Tanzania, but at the same time posed moral and financial problems when asked for monetary support. In establishing these relationships it became clear that being both female and Kenyan eased the transition into the circle of women that became the subject of the research project. Participation was limited by not accompanying the women when they were privately with clients, although some clients were met in public arenas. Ryan and Gu (2010) stress good ethnographic research requires reflection, both during the period of research and in the selections of written articulations, and it might be observed that there was much reflection as to the role of the researcher and later what might be legitimate to write in this study.

The sample comprises women romancing foreign tourists in the two beach towns and who was willing to participate in the study. After contact had been established, the research was explained to the women and they were told what was expected, including

the option of nonparticipation at any stage. They were given information sheets and consent forms to sign. When the study started, the women would only be met in public social places like the clubs and discos at night, but after establishing a good rapport, some were interviewed in their houses at their invitation. Information was gathered through participant observation and informal conversations on many different issues not just on sex tourism, the purpose being to establish a relationship within which the matters of sex tourism and daily life could be discussed at length. Probing was undertaken at times by the use of questions such as “what do you mean?,” and “can you give me an example,” and these interactions were recorded in field notes and a diary when time and opportunity permitted. For example, after collecting information in the night, it was not always possible to write notes immediately, so they were recorded the following morning.

During later interactions, the whole engagement appeared to the women more like an everyday “friends” meeting rather than a research study and sometimes it was not clear if the women were still conscious of the research. The women had little interest in reading the notes, so confirmations of the findings were done verbally by bringing up previous topics before subsequent discussions. In this respect the “normal” conversation would include commentary about clients, aspirations and the nature of sex work as well as issues about the costs of food, or of properties. The integrity of the data arises from the repetition of themes mentioned by different respondents and observed patterns of behavior.

To summarize, data existed in the form of formal interviews, recordings, notes of informal conversations, recordings in a diary of both what was observed and responses to those observations, the letters sent to the women by the males and other secondary documentation drawn from official reports, newspaper reports and a gray literature of agency reports including those of non-governmental agencies.

### ***Data analysis***

These mixes of data types posed significant problems in data analysis, and the authors went through a process of reading and re-reading materials and used chronological and thematic modes of analysis while adopting a pragmatic stance related to key questions. The questions basically revolved around “what were the males and females seeking from the relationships?,” “how were these relationships implemented?,” “what were the truths of these relationships?” and finally, with specific reference to the males, “how did the actors react when processes of deceit became obvious?” Data analysis consequently used an inductive approach by organizing data into major themes through data reduction, data displays and constant comparisons (Patton, 1990) and interpretations were checked by both authors. Thus a consensual reality appeared from the data and an understanding reached through the voices of the informants describing the meaning of their lived experiences as “sex tourism workers” on the Kenyan coast and an interpretation of the text derived from direct experience of the first author and past research by the second, while being informed by the wider literature.



## Findings

### *Economic factors*

As opposed to many sex tourism studies that indicate that third world locals enter tourism prostitution because they are economically desperate, this study found that the majority of the Kenyan women encountered in this study and who had entered “sex tourism work” are not initially in this state, but are motivated by a wish for “a good life” that a “millionaire *mzungu*” might provide. Many were not native to the coastline, but they had the initial resources to establish themselves on the coast. The desperation only later arrives when their monetary assets become insufficient to sustain a wanted life style as they wait to fulfill this elusive dream – elusive in that it may take years to come true or even perhaps never eventuate – yet the women keep pursuing these dreams almost on a daily basis. The majority of the women are therefore involved in what they term *jua kali umalaya* (or “fake” prostitution) that provides them with a means to get cash for their everyday needs as well as providing the opportunity to interact with the *wazungu*. In this “fake prostitution,” the women do not distinguish between clientele and serve both domestic and foreign clients. Thus, their involvement in this form of prostitution is only a means to fulfilling their long-term dream of finding a *mzungu*. As noted by this one informant, she said, pointing at her private parts:

*Hi ndiyo benki, chakula, renti, stima na kila kitu!* this is the bank, food, electricity, rent and everything! Prostitution is hard but we have to do it because we must eat, pay rent and meet other obligations. You know prostitution is of two different types, us, we are engaged in fake prostitution so that we can get money for our everyday use as we wait to find a *mzungu* who can marry us and buy us houses, cars or take us abroad. There is also prostitution original, like the one happening abroad where you get rich people coming to collect you in their cars and they pay you good money for being with them. I am hoping to get a *mzungu* this upcoming season and if that happens, I can get a ticket abroad. I can then take my children to live with me there and in this way; they will appreciate what I have been doing.

That female respondents used the terminology “fake prostitution” suggests that this, in the Kenyan context, differs from that found in many red light districts where the client is led through a well-practiced routine of promises that involve the purchases of expensive drinks, yet fails to get beyond a number of “kiss and cuddles” (Hoefinger, 2013). These women used the term “fake” as meaning “one-offs” that can include the sexual act – the “professional,” “real” act is the attracting and keeping the “rich boyfriend.” The distinction made is between the act determined by daily requirements – and the acts required to achieve the desire for “real, substantial” amounts of money – i.e., to be rich. “Real prostitution” requires long-term pretense of intimacy!

### *Travel abroad*

To travel abroad with a *mzungu* is one objective but is not easy, even if the *mzungu* is willing to support the woman. This is due to stringent visa rules in many developed countries that involve elaborate visa interviews and processes. Nonetheless women find ways to deal with visa issues and together with the sponsoring tourist they will travel to



a third country, often in South America, and then apply for a visa from there. One informant described the process thus:-

Myself I have M'England with a 45 year old son and a policeman. If you get an English man you are very lucky because you get the right person [snapping her fingers]. They are rich and when they come here they stay in big hotels and they give a lot of tips when they visit a club like this one as opposed to the Germans who are very poor. He sends me money regularly and he is going to come this November. I would like to go and live in England but getting a visa there is so hard so what we do these days is to get a visa to another country which is non-European such as Argentina or Brazil and then you look for a British visa from there. Like in our case, my *mzungu's* sister lives in Argentina and she has invited us there for one month. We will see if we can move to Britain from there. You know life in Britain is very good because people earn a lot of money. If I go there, I would like to study nursing and get a good job. I have a relative there who earns equivalent of Kshs.4 million per month [This was an extreme exaggeration and cannot be true!].

### **Nature of relationships**

The relationships between the women and *wazungu* can take many different forms such as distant friendships, distance marriages, living together marriages and temporary companionship. In a distance friendship, the woman becomes a tourist's girlfriend after meeting him at the coast. She would then request the tourist to send her money on a regular basis. If he agrees, the woman would become a permanent girlfriend and whenever the *mzungu* is in Kenya, she would "entertain" him. There are other cases when money is not sent regularly, but even in such instances the tourist can still have time with the lady whenever he is back in Kenya. This is not unlike the situations described by Cohen (1982, 1986) where Thai sex workers maintain serial relationships with a number of different men. Distance marriage, on the other hand, is when the two are married with papers but they do not live together, and so often travel to each other's country using a tourist visa. Under this situation, the woman would normally have a number of legal rights with the husband, but as yet may not have obtained a right of residency in her husband's country. In many instances such rights may not actually be desired by a woman because it would mean leaving her own family and friends, but the desire to travel overseas is much sought after. Another key issue is that marriage may bestow the woman with rights over the husband's assets in the case of a divorce.

Indeed it appears that many if not most mature women prefer living apart from their husbands or long term boyfriends, often giving as a reason their distaste of cold weather in the foreign country. Often, however, it is often because she wants to maximize her prospects by having other *wazungu*. As in the Thai situation described by Cohen (1986), many of these *wazungu* remain unaware of the other partners and sometimes the women may be married to more than one "husband" and have the pertinent papers! They would not bother revoking any previous papers unless there was pecuniary advantage in becoming divorced, and if a past marriage becomes known, they may resort to bribing government officials to provide the desired divorce papers. With many partners, the women have become adept at arranging the arrival of their *wazungu* in a serial fashion. Of course the subterfuge requires that their their husbands or companions do not settle in Kenya permanently and often the women do all that they can to stop this. One

woman, for example, went to great lengths to fake her HIV/AIDS status as being positive so as to ensure her partner would stay away. This case was reported to the tourist police. The informant noted:

There was this particular lady who got tired of a *mzungu* and had wanted to get rid of him so she organized for HIV/AIDS test and for the *mzungu* to be declared positive. The *mzungu* almost went mad as he could not believe his status. The lady quickly terminated their relationship saying she cannot stay with someone who has AIDS. The *mzungu* left for his country immediately and on arrival, conducted two other tests in his country - he was found to be negative. He came back to Kenya and, did another test and he was still negative.

In this instance most clients are white males in their “sunset years,” mainly 60 years and over and conforming to Oppermann’s (1999, p. 251) description of “often older and in less than perfect shape.” They are primarily from Europe and while on holiday at the Kenyan coast, they wish to experience “romance” with local women. They learn of the women’s availability mainly through word of mouth, reading materials or from the internet. Others come for holidays and while in Mombasa they find the temptation to experience “romance” with a local woman irresistible. In terms of income, the greater number appear to have relatively low incomes in terms of their own country, but because of the exchange rate between the western countries’ currencies and the Kenyan shilling, and the low median per capita Kenyan income, they appear rich by Kenyan standards. These levels of income, however, cannot provide a high standard of living in their home countries and thus cannot but disappoint women seeking the rich *mzungu*. One woman complained about a payment received from one tourist thus:

I stayed with this *mzungu* for over one month ... He arrived in a terrible state – looking like an AIDS patient, dirty and very thin but now he has put on more weight. I had to do a lot of cleaning for him. Look at his sneakers; they are very clean as opposed to when he arrived with them stinking. In fact the people in my estate block used to wonder where I got the *chokora* (destitute tourist) from.

One tourist police officer noted that most *wazungu* are retirees who spend their retirement years in Kenya with young women, adding that some come for “romance” because they cannot get partners abroad but can use their economic power to “buy” young and beautiful partners in Kenya. The police suggested that some of these tourists rationalized their actions by saying that they engage in these relationships because they want to help poor African women and children.

### ***Sexual and marital relationships***

Due to the functional nature of many of these relationships and the women’s lack of desire for physical and emotional intimacies for the client, many women look to African men to satisfy them sexually even if they are married or in long-term relationships with the tourists. Ironically, many of these African men will also have younger African girlfriends “on the side.” On occasion tourists wish to engage in sex and resort to the use of drugs such as Viagra or a local equivalent called *kukumanga*. The use of such drugs is not much welcomed by the women because they fear the client may

collapse during the sex act from over-exertion, a scenario that women desperately wish to avoid. Touching on this one informant indicated:

*wazungu hawana nguvu* (whites) don't have male strength and that is why some women keep African men even if they have regular *wazungu* ... (but) British and Italians are like Africans. They have strength but Germans are useless. Sometimes they also use drugs (Viagra) to give them male strength and when they do, *hawaishi* (take long) and you know, some of these people are very old, if they do this, it means they are using strength that is not theirs and they may collapse on you. What will you say or do?

Many customers are single men either by choice or divorce. Others are married and engage in these liaisons either with or without their wives' knowledge. Sometimes the wife might be with them on holidays, but in most cases they remain at home. One informant indicated that she once had a married man, a Briton, but that the wife did not know that he had another woman in Kenya and remarked "... *ni umalaya ya wazungu*/it is the prostitution of *wazungu*, they will not tell their wives." For other customers, the wives approve and support the idea of having "African madams" as their "co-wives." One tourist confirmed this despite being married happily for 45 years. He said, "My wife is aware of this other woman in Kenya and they sometimes talk on phone. She is also aware that I am "romantically" involved with her but we do not like to discuss that." As for other clients, they usually travel together but when they reach Mombasa they set each other free to enjoy themselves only to meet again on their departure date.

Other couples may just agree to co-opt the African madames in their relationship and hence she becomes accepted more or less like a second wife by both the tourist and his spouse. Relationships like this can sometimes lead to divorce because the tourists will not go back to their white wives after being with a black woman according to many informants, but the truth of this assertion was not confirmed. The context in which this information was given indicates however a "reverse racial superiority" where the African woman feels herself superior in her ability to satisfy the white man. Yet there is an irony in this given that so many of the women contacted in this study sought to avoid sexual relationships for the reasons given above.

The women do manipulate their clients in ways that many locals cannot comprehend, as indicated by one Mombasa tourist police officer who commented:

*Wazungu wako na degrees lakini wakifika hapa, ni wajinga saidi*/whites have degrees but when they reach here, they become very stupid and foolish!

Thus the women will fake their feelings to double cross clients while retaining relationships with African men. Sometimes the women cheat by claiming they are unwell, so as to avoid intimacy if asked for sex, but nonetheless still seek payment, while at other times they do not tell of their past histories and yet at other times they may hold tourists "hostage" by threatening to expose their infidelities. This vulnerability can be attributed to cultural differences and in the eyes of the women westerners often appeared to be gullible by trusting what it is that they are being told. This view is well understood amongst the women as they believe *wazungu* should never know that they are being cheated, and can sustain an apparent romance over years to inspire trust. One woman described the process thus:

*Wazungu ni wanjinga!* Whites are stupid! Because you can lie to them and they will still pay you. *Unajua wazungu wako na huruma sana!* you know whites have very sympathetic hearts so when you are tired or do not feel like getting intimate, you can fake sickness and they would sympathize so much and not ask you for anything but still pay you the next day.

### **Practicing deceit**

Consequently in the pursuit of “real prostitution” women tend to take advantage of the tourists and fake their “love” and many tourists tend to believe in this “love.” This is evidenced in a letter written to one informant by a British tourist. He wrote in part:

To my beautiful African mountain girl Wendy, you came into my life for just a brief period of time, but in that moment you have stolen my heart, I have this filling of emptiness [sic] that can only be filled by you ... “Wendy” I am serious about my feelings towards you if this is not true for you, please do not reply to this letter, as it would cause me great pain, to find out in the future you really did not care for me. Wishing one day we could be together for always.

In another letter to the same woman, a French tourist wrote in broken English “Dear Wendy, I send a letter for you. I hope you have good health.... I have big regret. Mombasa is too far.”

Given these series of pretenses, on occasion the client may find the truth, but such truths may be disbelieved, or if accepted are often accompanied by sorrow. Thus one *mzungu* expressed his feelings thus:

I loved my former girlfriend “Annette,” I loved her to death, I was madly in love with “Annette,” but she broke my heart because she was sleeping with other guys (he said this sadly), which is the same for many girls here who have African men on the sides.

Indeed examples were found where the women introduced their African boyfriends or husbands into the relationship with the client to the point that the client made additional payments to the African male. For example, they would ask the tourist to employ the men as watchmen in their home or as their taxi drivers. One tourist police officer said, with regards to the tourists:

*Wazungu* are also very stupid, like there is this case here where the *mzungu* has employed the woman’s husband as a watchman and he pays him a lot of money, Ksh.20000 untaxed. When he is back in his country he leaves the wife in the house and the African husband gets to stay with the wife in his house.

In another case, also reported by a different tourist police officer:

The woman bought her African husband a car with the money from the *mzungu* and turned it into a taxi and then introduced the *mzungu* husband to him as a taxi man and a good one to be hired whenever there is that need. The woman would then frequently call their good taxi man to take her to the saloon but in the process, have some time together. On return, the *mzungu* would ... be charged for the waiting time.

### **Being successful**

In addition to obtaining pecuniary advantages from such actions, there are other motives. Prestige and bragging rights is one such reason. The more *wazungu* one has,

the more successful the woman appears to be within her social circle, and many would want to have 5 to 10 *wazungus* and would talk proudly of *mzungu wangu* (my *mzungu*), M'German, M'Denmark M'Franza, M'England etc. Sometimes, they may have a clash in terms of arrival dates but if such is communicated in time, the women would explain an absence by saying that she is "upcountry" seeing her sick mother, or attending a funeral, and then plan for a more appropriate time to meet the new arrival. "Peggy" gave an example of when she obtained a new *mzungu* but in a week prior to his departure to Germany, her usual *mzungu* arrived from Switzerland without notice. She then tried to lie to both of them:

"Tony" was my new *mzungu* from German. He loved me very much and had proposed to marry me. He use to tell me "Peggy I love you, I love you, Peggy" (she said this in German) and I have a big house left for me by my parents so we would have a good life in Germany'. He had a lot of money but in a week's prior to his departure, my regular Swiss *mzungu* husband arrived and came straight to the house since he was paying my rent and everything and was used to come to Kenya regularly, so he knew the house. Luckily, "Tony" was out so I cheated him by saying that I was going for women's *chama* (meeting) and advised him to sleep and that I will be back soon. Instead, I went to spend time with Tony and to figure out how to avoid them meeting. ... ..Anyway before he left, "Tony" came by the house one evening and found the Swiss! He left disappointed not believing his eyes! (She said all this while smiling).

Other women had recourse to a wide range of strategies to enable them to conduct two or more affairs simultaneously. One woman in Diane talked of how she leaves her phone at home so that when her *mzungu* calls from abroad in the middle of the night, her sister would pick it and talk to him on her behalf since they have similar voices, and thus the husband would not know she is not in the house at night. Meanwhile, she was out looking for or being with other *wazungu*. Other women took advantage of their husband's "true love" in many ways. One girl alluded to turning her cell phone off and thereafter she would find several messages from him. She said she teases him a lot by saying she would get another *mzungu* or that she was at the beach looking for another *mzungu*. A number of the girls also do not inform their husbands that they were once a *Malaya* (*prostitute*) and quite often sneak to the bars without their husband's knowledge.

### Costs

The cost of these types of romantic relationships for some tourists may lead to the loss of an entire lifetime's savings or a substantial part thereof. At other times, the tourist can get that "love," but loose other valuables in the process such as money, credit cards, passports and other items like wristwatches, chains or mobile phones. Cases involving the loss of lifetime investments happen when the tourist believes he is at the height of "love" and is either married to the woman or plans to marry in a short time. Many women use these avenues to get rich quick because they know once they are married, they will become co-owners of such properties and soon thereafter, they may become sole owners upon the death of the old man or obtain half of the property upon divorce. The first scenario depends on the health and age of the tourist while the latter is often initiated by the women.

A tourist police officer told of one case about a *mzungu* who periodically came to Kenya to visit his “wife.” He later decided to sell all his possessions in his home country so that he could settle with his “dear wife” in Kenya. He deposited the money in the woman’s account in Kenya, but on arrival they only stayed together for a short while before the lady went missing. He went to the police station and while there, collapsed. The police rushed him to the hospital and later sought the woman whom they apprehended prior to making charges. While they were preparing to arraign the lady in court, they were surprised and to some extent amused, when the *mzungu* blatantly refused to press charges saying “*She is somebody I love; I don’t want her to go to jail.*” In such instances, the police said, they can do very little because the plaintiff is reluctant to press charges.

In other cases, the women get married and even travel abroad, but while there, they initiate divorce cases with the view to splitting the matrimonial properties. Once that happens, some women may decide to return to Kenya with their share of wealth. Other women may, however, decide to stay abroad, but look for husbands of their choice. Other tourists invest in properties in Kenya and when this happens, some women try to acquire the properties and utilize networks that may include police and relatives holding governmental posts.

In terms of other valuables, one police officer described the three main ways used by the women to rob the tourists. Generally, the women have local partners who they use to rob the tourists. They tell the tourists that these are their brothers and sometimes ask for time off to go and see them. Most robberies therefore take place in the villas and cottages rented by the tourists according to the informant officer. The women would know how much money the *mzungu* has, tell the robbers, often including a boyfriend, who would come in a group of 2–3 people and as they enter, there would be drama where the girl would pretend to be pleading with them to spare her *mzungu* and her life. If a case is taken to the police, and the police question the woman, the *mzungu* would often again not initiate a prosecution of his wife meaning that the police have to release the woman, even if they know this is not the first such instance.

The other way in which they steal is that they will book a room and then leave for supper. The girl would then pass a duplicate key to a boyfriend thereby enabling the theft of the valuables. She may delay the *mzungu*, even ordering wine or beer, and by the time they get back to the room, the boyfriend will have completed the robbery. Then there is the case of ATMs. This involves the woman and her client going to withdraw cash from the ATM. She learns of or notes the pin number, subsequently gives the *mzungu* beer laced with drugs, leaves him sleeping, takes the credit or bank card and hires a taxi to a nearby ATM to withdraw the cash and return before the victim realizes what has happened.

## Conclusion

Based on the above observations, this study concludes that such relationships in Kenya’s tourism cannot be positioned as either sex or romance tourism but as “romantic entertainment.” The term “romantic entertainment” is thought to be apt at many different levels. At one level the clients often possess a hope of romantic empathy or affection for

and with the women with whom they engage. Additionally, it is not unknown for the women to find themselves being affectionate toward some longer-term clients. The attitude of the clients may also be based, at least in part, on past images and perceptions of Africa in general (and Kenya in particular) derived from nineteenth century European literature. Such writing described Africa and its women as being “natural,” “exotic,” “close to nature,” “sexual” or as being “the noble savage” as portrayed in the various writings that range from the works of Rice Edger Burroughs to reports of the London Geographical Society (e.g., see Wels, 2004).

Entertainment exists as the women act as local guides offering potential glimpses into the “real” Mombasa coastline – and to places and experiences not promised by the standard package holiday. Additionally, entertainment within its theoretical sense can offer a theater of escape, comedy, pain, introspection and examination – all of those things whereby entertainment reveals “truths” about the human condition. Entertainment also requires performance, and as illustrated below the women can enact a range of roles – from that of apparent faithful companion to successful acquirer of ill-gotten gains. In many ways, the acts described below may be a warning to many older Europeans seeking a dream relationship while on holiday.

This paper has reported but a few results of 12 months of research spent living on the Kenyan tourist coastline among the sex workers and their acquaintances and clients. Of necessity, it has focused on just one facet of the research, namely the manner in which the women negotiate their relationships for monetary gain, and while arguably descriptive in nature – it is suggested that all good social science research begins with observation that becomes more informed over time. It is evident that other scenarios exist as described by Beckerleg and Hundt (2004) who write of violence and drug taking on the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts, but generally this study found little evidence of that. What is an issue is that described by Cohen (1982), who pointed out that the woman who successfully and happily marries a foreign tourist arguably prolongs the problems associated with these asymmetric relationships because her success motivates other women to continue their own search. What remains for other papers are the potential psychological costs endured by the women and the lengths to which they will go to secure their *mzungu*. Yet it cannot be denied that a successful life style can be achieved if they are careful and conservative in their monetary management, and take a long term view and save the money they acquire through their skill as a romantic entertainer. Thus anecdotal evidence indicated that the suburb of Diana, just south of Mombasa, was an area favored by successful “romantic entertainers” for home ownership, and it was said that a significant proportion of the homes are owned by the current or past “romantic entertainers.”

One conclusion is that these women make conscious decisions to get into “sex tourism work” not out of individual initial poverty but from the desire for a better life that *mzungu* can provide, and because that life might be better than the alternatives that would otherwise exist. It is an issue of relativities in income, not of absolutes. However, patterns of dependency can emerge where women retain the hope that they will get *mzungu* the next day or the next high season and for some women, time passes and thus senses of desperation can occur if they have mismanaged their earnings from sex work. Among the factors involved in the situations described above is that for many



tourists and women, the physical acts of sex are not a priority in these relationships. But of interest is extent to which the gender power relationships of conventional sex tourism are reversed. While the clients may well display features described by commentators such as Jeffreys (2003) and Seabrook (1996) by being attracted to eroticised “others,” they are also wanting emotional support. This creates double vulnerability. They are vulnerable by reason of psychological needs for intimacy, and by reason of their own fantasy. The women are able to take advantage of these vulnerabilities for their own ends and thus the tourists are manipulated in these types of relationships – victims of their own delusions, easily manipulated, and disadvantaged by the depth of their own emotions for the desired woman. Hence the term “romantic entertainers,” as the women stage their affections, and gain their reward.

What has not been explored in the paper is whether it is possible, year after year, to engage in acts of distancing as the women disengage their own emotions from a relationship where the tourist is prepared to give so much of themselves. Thus, while it may initially seem devious that the women introduce their husbands and boy-friends into the homes where they entertain the tourist, the presence of important significant others may be seen as necessities for their own psychological well-being. Ryan and Hall (2001) comment that sex tourism is multi- and poly-vocal, and hence voices differ according to circumstances. Certainly the themes identified in Table 1 are all present in this study, but what this paper suggests is that the romance tourism identified by Pruitt and LaFont (1995) has a reverse echo on the shores of the Mombasa and Malindi coastlines.

## References

- Alessio, D., & Jóhannsdóttir, A.L. (2011). Geysers and ‘girls’: Gender, power and colonialism in Icelandic tourist imagery. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 18(1), 35–50. doi:10.1177/1350506810386430
- Beckerleg, S., & Hundt, G.L. (2004). Structural violence in a tourist ‘paradise’. *Development*, 47(1), 109–114. doi:10.1057/palgrave.development.1100015
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brennan, D. (2001). Tourism in transnational places: Dominican sex workers and German sex tourists imagine one another. *Identities*, 7(4), 621–663. doi:10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962680
- Bujra, J. (1982). Production, property, prostitution: ‘Sexual politics’ in Yumbe. In H. Johnson & H. Beinstein (Eds). *Third world lives of struggle* (pp 191–211). London: Heinemann.
- Campbell, H. (2007). Cultural seduction: American men, Mexican women, cross-border attraction. *Critique of Anthropology*, 27(3), 261–283. doi:10.1177/0308275X07080356
- Chambers, E. (2000). Applied ethnography. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp 851–869). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clancy, M. (2002). The globalization of sex tourism and Cuba: A commodity chains approach. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 36(4), 63–88. doi:10.1007/BF02686333
- Cohen, E. (1982). The Thai girls and the Farang men: The edge of ambiguity. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 9(3), 403–428. doi:10.1016/0160-7383(82)90021-4
- Cohen, E. (1986). Lovelorn Farangs: The correspondence between Foreign men and Thai girls. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 59(3), 115–127. doi:10.2307/3317198
- Crowhurst, I., & Eldridge, A. (2018). “A cathartic moment in a man’s life”: Homosociality and gendered fun on the Puttan Tour. *Men and Masculinities*, 1097184X1876657. doi:10.1177/1097184X18766578

- David, J. (2006). On an enigmatic text of Jean Bourdieu. *Paragraph*, 35(1), 115–130 (J. Speller, trans.) Taken from the original ‘Sur un texte énigmatique de Pierre Bourdieu’. *A Contrario*, 4(2) (2006), 71–84.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Freidus, A., & Romero-Daza, N. (2009). The space between: Globalization, luminal spaces and personal relations in rural Costa Rica. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15(6), 683–702. doi:10.1080/09663690903279146
- Frohlick, S. (2008). Negotiating the public secrecy of sex in a transnational tourist town in Caribbean Costa Rica. *Tourist Studies*, 8(1), 19–39. doi:10.1177/1468797608094927
- Garrick, D. (2005). Excuses, excuses: Rationalisations of Western sex tourists in Thailand. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 8(6), 497–509. doi:10.1080/13683500508668233
- Herold, E., Garcia, R., & deMoya, T. (2001). Female tourists and beach boys, romance or sex. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(4), 978–997. doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00003-2
- Hesse, M., & Tutenges, S. (2011). Young tourists visiting strip clubs and paying for sex. *Tourism Management*, 32(4), 869–874.
- Hobbs, D., & Robins, D. (1991). The boy done good: Football violence, changes and continuities. *The Sociological Review*, 39(3), 551–579. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.1991.tb00867.x
- Hoefinger, H. (2013). *Sex, love and money in Cambodia: Professional girlfriends and transactional relationships*. London: Routledge.
- Jacobs, J. (2010). *Sex, tourism and postcolonial encounter: Landscapes of longing in Egypt*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Jeffreys, S. (2003). Sex tourism: Do women do it too? *Leisure Studies*, 22(3), 223–238. doi:10.1080/026143603200075452
- Karibo, H. (2010). Detroit’s border brothel: Sex tourism in Windsor, Ontario. *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 40(3), 362–378.
- Katsulis, Y. (2011). “Living like a king.”: Conspicuous consumption, virtual communities, and the social construction of paid encounters by U.S. sex tourists. *Men and Masculinities*, 13(2), 210–230. doi:10.1177/1097184X09346813
- Kibicho, W. (2005). Tourism and the sex trade in Kenya’s coastal region. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 13(3), 256–280. doi:10.1080/01434630508668556
- Kibicho, W. (2009). *Sex tourism in Africa: Kenya’s booming industry*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Lagunas, D. (2010). The power of money and the power of sex. *Anthropology of sexual tourism. Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 36, 71–98.
- Middleton, J. (2000). *The peoples of Kenya*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Nyanzi, S., Rosenberg-Jallow, O., Bah, O., & Nyanzi, S. (2005). Bumsters, big black organs and old white gold: Embodied racial myths in sexual relationships of Gambian beach boys. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 7(6), 557–569. doi:10.1080/13691050500245687
- Oppermann, M. (1999). Sex tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), 251–266. doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00081-4
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Pilcher, K. (2016). *Erotic performance and spectatorship: New frontiers in erotic dance*. London: Routledge.
- Pruitt, D., & LaFont, S. (1995). For love and money: Romance tourism in Jamaica. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(2), 422–440. doi:10.1016/0160-7383(94)00084-0
- Ragsdale, K., Difrancesco, W., & Pinkerton, S. D. (2006). Where the boys are: Sexual expectations and behaviour among young women on holiday. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 8(2), 85–98. doi:10.1080/13691050600569570
- Rivers-Moore, M. (2010). But the kids are okay: Motherhood, consumption and sex work in neo-liberal Latin America. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 61(4), 716–736. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2010.01338.x
- Robinson, L.S. (2006). Sex in the city; prostitution in the age of global migrations. *Labour, Capital and Society*, 39(2), 48–77.

- Ryan, C., & Gu, H. (2010). Constructionism and culture in research: Understandings of the fourth Buddhist Festival, Wutaishan, China. *Tourism Management*, 31(2), 167–178. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2009.01.003
- Ryan, C., & Hall, C. M. (2001). *Sex tourism: Marginal people and liminalities*. London: Routledge.
- Sánchez Taylor, J. (2001). Dollars are a girl's best friend? Female tourists' sexual behaviour in the Caribbean. *Sociology*, 35(3), 749–764. doi:10.1177/S0038038501000384
- Sánchez Taylor, J. (2006). Female sex tourism: A contradiction in terms? *Feminist Review*, 83(1), 42–59. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400280
- Seabrook, J. (1996). *Travels in the skin trade: Tourism and the sex industry*. London: Pluto Press.
- Shilling, C. (1993). *The body and social theory*. London: Sage.
- Singh, J.P., & Hart, S.A. (2007). Sex workers and cultural policy: Mapping the issues and actors in Thailand. *Review of Policy Research*, 24(2), 155–173.
- Snow, D., & Morrill, C. (1995). Ironies, puzzles, and contradictions in Denzin and Lincoln's vision of qualitative research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22, 358–362.
- Spitzer, H. (2017). Social work in East Africa: A mzungu perspective. *International Social Work*, 62(2), 567–580. doi:10.1177/0020872817742696
- Spanger, M. (2013). Gender performances as spatial acts: (Fe)male Thai migrant sex workers in Denmark. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 20(1), 37–52. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2011.625079
- Tagliacozzo, E. (2008). Morphological shifts in Southeast Asian prostitution: The long twentieth century. *Journal of Global History*, 3(2), 251–273. doi:10.1017/S1740022808002635
- Wane, N. (2011). African indigenous feminist thought. In N. Wane, A. Kempf & M. Simmons, (Eds), *The politics of cultural knowledge* (pp 7–21). New York, NY: Springer Science and Business Media.
- Wels, H. (2004). About romance and reality: Popular European imagery in postcolonial tourism in South Africa. In M.C. Hall & H. Tucker (Eds), *Tourism and postcolonialism: Contested discourses, identities and representations* (pp. 76–94). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Wilson, A. (2010). Post-fordist desires: The commodity aesthetics of Bangkok sex shows. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 18(1), 53–67. doi:10.1007/s10691-010-9145-2
- Yokota, F. (2006). Sex behaviour of male Japanese tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 8(2), 115–131. doi:10.1080/13691050500526068