



# Email from Ngeti: An Ethnography of Sorcery, Redemption, and Friendship in Global Africa

By James H. Smith, Ngeti Mwadime

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*Email from Ngeti* is a captivating story of sorcery, redemption, and transnational friendship in the globalized twenty-first century. When the anthropologist James Smith returns to Kenya to begin fieldwork for a new research project, he meets Ngeti Mwadime, a young man from the Taita Hills who is as interested in the United States as Smith is in Taita. Ngeti possesses a savvy sense of humor and an unusual command of the English language, which he teaches himself by watching American movies and memorizing the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Smith and Mwadime soon develop a friendship that comes to span years and continents, impacting both men in profound and unexpected ways. For Smith, Ngeti can be understood as an exemplar of a young generation of Africans navigating the multiplicity of contemporary African life—a process that is augmented by globalized culture and the Internet. Keenly aware of the world outside Taita and Kenya, Ngeti dreams big, with endless plans for striking it rich. As he struggles to free himself from what he imagines to be the hold of the past, he embarks on an odyssey that takes him to local diviners, witch-finders, Pentecostal preachers, and prophets. This is the fascinating ethnography of Mwadime and Smith, largely told through their shared emails, journals, and recorded conversations in the field. Throughout, the reader is struck by the immediacy and poignancy of coauthor Ngeti's narrative, which marks a groundbreaking shift in the nature of anthropological fieldwork and writing.

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### Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

"Part memoir, part ethnography, and part literary epistle. The authors recount a fabulous tale of sorcery, redemption, and friendship in which the reader comes to know fascinating characters, especially the coauthor Ngeti. Smith and Mwadime use a variety of narrative strategies to capture the complex and dramatic realities of contemporary African social life much more profoundly than could a traditional ethnographic text."—Paul Stoller, author of *The Power of the Between: An Anthropological Odyssey*

"Very few ethnographies capture so well the frustrations faced by many cosmopolitan sub-Saharan Africans. This poignant account of a cross-cultural friendship portrays a common yet extraordinary man as he negotiates the shifting forces of inequality, religion, kinship, and global modernity. Conceptually sophisticated yet vividly human."—Janet McIntosh, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Brandeis University and author of *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast*

About the Author

**James H. Smith** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at University of California, Davis, and the author of *Bewitching Development: Witchcraft and the Reinvention of Development in Neoliberal Kenya*.

**Ngeti Mwadime** lives, works, and looks for opportunities in the Taita Hills and Mombasa, Kenya.

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