

## **Mobile Phones and the Petty Crime Economy of Southern Mozambique**

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For young people living in a context of growing disparity and limited opportunities like the one found in the city of Inhambane, Southern Mozambique, petty crime and the sale of stolen goods often constitute the only means to gain access to money and things. Indeed, most of the male youth I work with have spent some time in jail, almost all of them for petty theft, often involving mobile phones. A number of handsets initially make it to the city in the pockets of tourists before being inserted into the local pool of goods that petty crime stirs up further. For many, however, crime is not a way of life but rather a tactic, among others, to address needs and desires unfulfilled by more conventional means. Mobile phones participate in this economy as coveted objects and as communication tools that, in turn, lubricate the circulation of stolen goods. In this paper, I focus on the social dimensions of petty crime that mobile phone use both reveals and animates. I argue that mobile phones (which act as quasi-currency) *and* mobile phone communication, together offer an alternative avenue for young adults to claim a place in the global economy by making petty crime not only more lucrative but also more discreet. By drawing on the experiences of three young men, I tease out the role mobile phones and mobile phone communication play in the workings of petty crime in the region and shed light on the ways in which young people navigate the uncertainties of everyday life.