

Who Cares for Orphans?
Challenges to Kinship and Morality in a Luo Village in Western Kenya

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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

by

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses an ethnographic study of how people in a peri-urban, agricultural village in western Kenya have responded to the questions of who will care for children, and how, when those children's parents, or other primary caregivers, have died. It examines the practical and ideological implications of wide-scale orphaning among a population that has experienced increased numbers and proportions of orphaned children mainly due to HIV/AIDS, as well as the gradual depletion of resources in terms of both the availability of middle-aged adults and the security of economic livelihoods. The research explores how specific caring relationships, as well as general sociality, have been challenged, adapted, and affirmed or rejected normatively and practically in this context.

The research revealed a high degree of questioning in people's efforts to forge responses to children's orphaned situations. Rarely was there unambiguous consensus in the study context concerning what should be done in response to children's orphanhood in light of families' diminished livelihood capacities. More broadly, there was a distinctive concern with how such situations might be appraised in moral terms. The analysis therefore focuses on three main concerns, including: how to understand uncertainty as a condition of life, and the implications of this; how a shared perspective of uncertainty has spurred a concern with morality in the study context, and specifically galvanised a moral economy of kinship; and how the concern with morality affected what was deemed at stake in people's lives.

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Chapter 1 Who Cares for Orphans? Introduction to the Research

Introduction

‘Here, in this village, there can’t be a home without orphans.’ So said Cornelia in 2008, as we stood looking out over the low bush fence of her family’s homestead and across the fallow maize fields taking into our view glimpses of the neighbouring homesteads some dozens of metres away. Cornelia’s review was at once vague and pointed; philosophical and factual. It digests the empirical reality that the local population in this part of western Kenya has experienced such a high prevalence of adult mortality as to leave virtually no family intact. One of every three children in this village has had a mother, father, or both parents die. These sheer numbers make it conceivable that every home has orphans in it. But Cornelia’s statement registers at another level as well. It clues that it may not simply be statistical probabilities that has resulted in the widespread distribution of orphaned children. Cornelia’s assertion that ‘there can’t be a home without orphans’ can also be understood as a normative statement. It suggests that the distribution of orphaned children is not merely automatic but rather deliberate. In listening to Cornelia with the knowledge I had already gained of her life, I could recognise that this choice of expression matched resignation with will, acquiescence with approval. She was conveying that orphans in every home are a fact of life in her community, as well as a virtue of life in that community. In effect, Cornelia’s statement poignantly reflects how the practical realities of lives and deaths in her community have been entwined with a locally specific moral filament.

This dissertation explores both turns in the phrase that there cannot be a home without orphans in a community in Kenya’s Nyanza Province, a region otherwise known as ‘Luoland’ (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 132; Whisson and Lonsdale 1975: 52; Southall 1979: 204; Francis 2000: 125; Atieno-Odhiambo 2000a: 247; Shipton 2007: 41). This entails examination of the practical implications as well as the ideological implications of wide-scale orphaning among this population, and I attempt to trace how the practical and ideological converge. Critically, in this context, the increasing demand for orphans’ fosterage and care has occurred simultaneously with depleting resources, in terms of both the availability of middle-aged adults and the security of economic livelihoods. Ultimately,

my research interest concerns how specific caring relationships, as well as general sociality, have been challenged, adapted, and affirmed or rejected normatively and practically. I have pursued this interest through an ethnographic study of how people in a village in western Kenya have responded to the question of who will care for children when those children's parents, or other primary caregivers, have died.

My analytical interest is a departure from the mainstream of research that has been published concerning orphaned children and their care in contemporary Sub-Saharan African societies. To date, a large bulk of the social science research about the impacts of orphaning due to HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa has investigated situations according to the terms of the 'orphan crisis' definition articulated in institutional policy discourse (Hunter and Williamson 2000; Matshalaga and Powell 2002; Bicego et al. 2003; Guest 2003; Nyambetha et al. 2003; Shetty and Powell 2003; UNICEF 2003; Subbarao and Coary 2004; UNAIDS et al. 2004; UNICEF et al. 2004; Foster et al. 2005; Howard et al. 2008: 117; c.f. Bray 2004; Ennew 2005; Meintjes and Giese 2006; deWaal et al. 2009). A significant stream of studies has analysed the demographics of households with orphans and orphaned children's school enrolment rates, thereby reflecting tacit acceptance that these are adequate proxies for evaluating children's and communities' wellbeing (Ainsworth and Filmer 2002; Bicego et al. 2003; Case et al. 2004; Guarcello et al. 2004; Monasch and Boerma 2004; Ainsworth and Filmer 2006; Beegle et al. 2006; Case and Ardington 2006; Evans and Miguel 2007; Beegle et al. 2010; Ardington and Leibbrandt 2010). I have found this body of research inadequate for understanding the multiple and cumulative implications of orphaning for children, families, and wider communities, as I will critically review more fully in this chapter. Existing research has not yet yielded sufficient insights for how past and present circumstances have affected, and continue to affect, adaptations of ideas and practices which will in turn influence the potential futures of individuals and societies.

This study originated from my decision to try to suspend any assumptions regarding what wide-scale orphaning might mean in people's lives in western Kenya. Instead, I preferred to inductively explore people's perspectives and everyday experiences. I conceptualised this approach as akin to the orientation Alex de Waal took in his classic study of emic understandings of drought and food shortages in Darfur, Sudan in the 1980s as written up in his 1989 book *Famine that Kills*. In that study, de Waal analysed the meaning of the

famine from the perspectives of the people who experienced it, rather than from the prescriptions of the aid agencies. As a result of that approach, de Waal could identify the disjuncture between local understandings and corresponding strategies concerning food shortages and the problem diagnoses and responses of the outsiders who presumed their expertise of the situation. de Waal's careful study of what had shaped local Sudanese people's understandings of, and responses to, food shortages demonstrated the importance of history and collective memory for the development of situated logics. Through this approach, de Waal was able to distinguish how 'famine that kills' was recognised differently, and hence provoked different social consequences, from other localised typologies of food shortages. By starting from the perspective and lived experiences of the people who had direct experiences of striving to cope in a particular socio-historical context, de Waal's study identified different questions and consequently different problems than those diagnosed by the aid agencies. An end result was the contemplation of different kinds of solutions, at multiple levels, to prevent future 'famine that kills'.

The potential significance of applying that kind of situated learning in research concerning wide-scale orphaning in contemporary Sub-Saharan African societies is suggested in the clues of dissonance that exist between etic and emic logics of the 'orphan crisis' and AIDS epidemic in Africa. Recent ethnographic research in a Luo community in western Kenya, for example, has illuminated that AIDS is considered by many to be 'the death of today' (Becker and Geissler 2007: 6). The ravages of the disease are situated by the people there in a particular social history. As Becker and Geissler (ibid.) have written, in that context, AIDS is 'widely regarded as but the most recent consequence of longer processes of change that have affected the constitution of sociality itself'. This perspective contests the privileging of the immediate epidemiological and economic symptoms of AIDS-related illnesses and deaths in policy analysts' situation analyses and the programming-focused research questions that flow from these. It makes obvious the interplay of the past with the present, wider contexts with the local, and logic with action. Such insight into local perspectives seems crucial to understanding how people might seek to respond, ideologically and practically, to their changing circumstances.

That people draw from, and actively craft, contextually-specific meanings as they work through their everyday lives, even when these are very difficult and turbulent lives, should not be in the least surprising in light of the long and diverse annals of ethnographic

research. Yet, it is distinctly noticeable that this particular light has not been adequately used to explore the multiple potential recesses of the phenomena of wide-scale orphaning as currently experienced in different Sub-Saharan African societies as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While there is an extensive and rapidly growing body of research about orphanhood in contemporary Africa, there are limited insights about how everyday experiences of orphanhood are affecting people's ideas and practices of living, including their ideas and practices of relating to one another and anticipating their futures. By refusing to design this study in line with the problem definition of the 'orphan crisis' articulated in globalised policy discourse (outlined further below), and to try instead to pursue more independent and inductive academic research, my aim has been to bring to light different kinds of empirically and theoretically-grounded insights than are currently available.

Research Questions

With these concerns in mind, my original exploratory research question was simply: how is wide-scale orphaning experienced? This question suggested to me that I should explore the lived experiences of children and families affected by orphanhood and try to understand the meanings and questions they assigned, individually and collectively, to their experiences. Implicated in this over-arching question were questions about the ideas and practices people bring to bear on childhood (i.e. what is considered and practiced as a good or satisfactory childhood?), the care of children, and the definition and role (including expectations and limitations) of families and different kinds of communities. In my research practice, these questions in turn became more applied to address, for example: how is childhood and children's care organised and experienced?; how do (different) people respond (ideologically and practically) to children's orphanhood?; and what kinds of consensus appear – and how - for an emic problem definition concerning orphanhood?

With my study's concentration on the meanings people developed and derived through their experiences of orphanhood, my focus honed in on what and how ideas emerged and gained salience among individuals and groups. This analytical focus illuminated the over-riding significance of how uncertain and insecure people felt as a result of both the losses of lives, health, and livelihoods due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic as well as long-term experiences of economic vulnerability and widespread poverty. The findings related to

people's sense of vulnerability have been central to my analysis. People's lack of trust in the efficacy of their contemporary efforts to durably improve their life chances seemed integral to how provisionally they conceptualised and practiced their lives, and in particular, their relations with others. I therefore focused on how these perceptions of uncertainty and insecurity manifested in people's heightened anxiety, with associated vigilance or apathy, to the implications of their everyday actions and relationships. Specifically, I found that people were not only worrying about such vulnerability, but also making deliberate efforts to gain some tentative confidence in their ideas and practices of caring relations. For many, these efforts seemed to be motivated by the desire of gaining increased confidence in the trustworthiness of their kinship relations.

In a way, then, this dissertation may be understood as a study of the social life of demographic change, and this includes study of the historiographies and cultural conversations that have emerged through people's interests in grafting their lived experiences of wide-scale orphaning, impoverishment, and family reorganisation with their normative understandings and expectations. In this, I try to account for how the past, present, and future are entwined in different people's appraisals of how life is being lived, and how it should be lived. That effort has required trying to distinguish how different people draw their interpretations and strategies according to different vantages which are often disaggregated according to different combinations of life stage, generation, gender, and other criterion of social genealogies, as well as most critically, differential access to, or control of, economic livelihood resources.

Of course, people's experiences and perspectives were not uniform. In fact, contestation over what constituted the correct way forward came to represent a central (if often tacit) problem in everyday life in Kanyathi. Acknowledging the centrality of this struggle, the overarching theoretical question that this dissertation addresses is: how do norms and practices for the conduct of social and caring relationships emerge in a context that people interpret as fundamentally uncertain? My analysis considers how these emergent norms and practices manifest for individuals as well as particular groups - and are therein constitutive of particular groups; and ultimately how these are indicative of a particular moral ontology.

The Ethnographic Case Study

In Chapter 2 I provide a more detailed description of how I pursued this research. However, it is important to note here how my overarching method of conducting an ethnographic case study was critical to what questions I was able to explore. As described above, it was as a result of my ethnographic study of everyday practices of different people's experiences of childhood, orphanhood, care, kinship, and community that I began to contemplate how people perceived their social relations in general, and caring relations in particular, as vulnerable and in need of fixing ideologically and practically. Through living in one family's homestead in a relatively close-knit community of neighbours (many of whom were members of the same clan and therefore identified as extended kin) over a period of sixteen months between September 2007 and July 2009, I was able to gain increasing familiarity with different individuals, their personal histories, ordinary lives, and changing relationships which enabled me to learn different kinds of insights. Most of my learning was done very gradually and indirectly through piecing together the different things different people told me as well as what I observed over this time span. In this iterative way, I learned to appreciate the rather fluid and variable ways in which ideas and practices interchanged and gave rise to people's tentative expectations and outcomes. As I also describe further in Chapter 2, I also felt that my research interest in people's quite personal and emotionally sensitive experiences required a deliberately cautious approach to learning from what people decided they were willing to share with me.

My case study came to be based in a village which I refer to as Kanyathi in this dissertation. Kanyathi is a pseudonym I have assigned to the study village in an attempt to anonymise the specific identities of the individuals whose lives are detailed in this dissertation. Kanyathi is one of several villages situated in the northwestern periphery of the city of Kisumu in Kenya's westernmost province, Nyanza Province. The population in this part of the country is predominantly Luo. Nyanza Province and Kisumu District (in which Kanyathi is included) are among Kenya's poorest regions (World Resource Institute et al. 2007: 18), as indicated in the maps that follow (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). 48 percent of the local population in and around Kisumu has been classified as living in absolute poverty compared to Kenya's national average of 29 percent (UN Habitat 2008: 7). Kisumu District also experiences some of the country's highest rates of food poverty (53 percent), despite small-scale agriculture being widespread (ibid.).

Nyanza Province and Kisumu District have also been experiencing Kenya's highest rates of infection with HIV and mortalities due to HIV/AIDS (Montana et al. 2007: 13; see Figure 1.3 below). Although Nyanza Province comprises less than 13 percent of the country's population, the region contains a third of the country's HIV infections. Currently, an estimated one of every five adults between the ages of 25 and 49 in Nyanza is infected with HIV (Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey 2007). Correspondingly, Nyanza has the highest proportion of orphans among its child population as well as an increasing population of orphans. 19 percent of children under the age of 15 in Nyanza Province have been orphaned, mainly due to HIV/AIDS (Juma et al. 2007: i). A study in four districts in Nyanza Province, including Kisumu, found that 35 percent of children had lost one parent, while 11 percent had lost both of their parents (Juma et al. 2007: iv).

In the study village of Kanyathi, the village primary school statistics from May 2009 reported that of the 679 enrolled pupils between kindergarten and Class 8, 19 percent (n = 129) have had either their mother or father die, while nine percent (n = 60) have had both of their parents die. This does not account for the entire child population in Kanyathi as some school-aged children do not attend primary school. It is very possible that there is a higher proportion of orphans among the out-of-school population. The teachers at the primary school in Kanyathi were also asked in May 2009 to indicate the 'most vulnerable children' in their classes which resulted in the teachers identifying 30 percent (n = 202) of the school's population. The children that the teachers listed as orphans and as the 'most vulnerable children' were often different, thereby indicating that there was local recognition that orphanhood was not the only, or even primary, risk factor for children's wellbeing in Kanyathi.

As a result of choosing to make practices and ideas of children's care in everyday life in Kanyathi the concern of this case study, my findings have predominantly focused on the activities and relationships that children and adults engaged in as members of households, families, and different kinds of interpersonal communities. I found that these were experienced by most people as the most important sources of caring relations, both ideologically and practically. Of course, there were exceptions, and I try to take account of the implications of such exceptions. Overall, however, my research seems to have diverged from some other anthropologists' recent findings that emphasise how people affected by HIV and AIDS have forged new caring relationships among alternative

communities established through religious congregations and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), for example (Beckmann 2008; Dilger 2008, 2009; Klaitz 2010). I suggest that this difference is because my focus was trained on the care of children, rather than the care of adults known or suspected to be infected with HIV or ill with AIDS. Although, some orphaned children included in this case study were also infected or ill, I discerned there was quite a stronger normative dimension asserting children's claims on family care (even if this norm was often violated in practice) than it seems other researchers have found to exist in adults' claims upon kin-based care. I suggest that this is due to a more pronounced normative judgement of children's moral innocence - and symbolic valorisation of this ideal – in contrast to a notion of adults' moral culpability.

This case study has also limited the analytical scope I devote to other institutions of care, such as the Kenyan Government's Department of Children's Services, and the many NGOs with initiatives for 'orphans and vulnerable children' in the wider area. This is because for the most part these institutions did not factor as highly relevant in most children's or families' lives, especially practically. Nevertheless, certain social histories of both governmental and nongovernmental activities were found to have influenced the lives and perspectives of children and families. Most prominently, changes in access to formal education in the area shifted popular expectations for the content of childhood (and consequently the definition of caring for a child). Less pervasively, yet still influential in encouraging an intriguing notion of chance among some people, were local experiences of the unpredictability in advantages distributed to the few individuals occasionally chosen through child sponsorship programmes. Nevertheless, for the most part, the irregular histories and impacts of governmental and nongovernmental initiatives in the area to influence the lives of children and families ensured that kin-based and interpersonal relationships retained their prominence in people's experiences of children's care. As such, these relationships are the central focus of this dissertation's analysis.

In sum, the population living in Kanyathi provided a case study of how lives in this part of Kenya have been affected by the historic changes associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic as well as fluctuations in the local political economy. In a following section of this chapter, I outline how I have conceptualised studying such changes and people's responses. However, before providing this explanation, in the next section I will review in more

critical detail how other researchers have conceptualised and studied such changes and responses to orphanhood as a result of HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan African societies.

Fig. 1.1: Nyanza Province Poverty Rates at Location Levels, 1999
(World Resource Institute et al. 2007: 15)

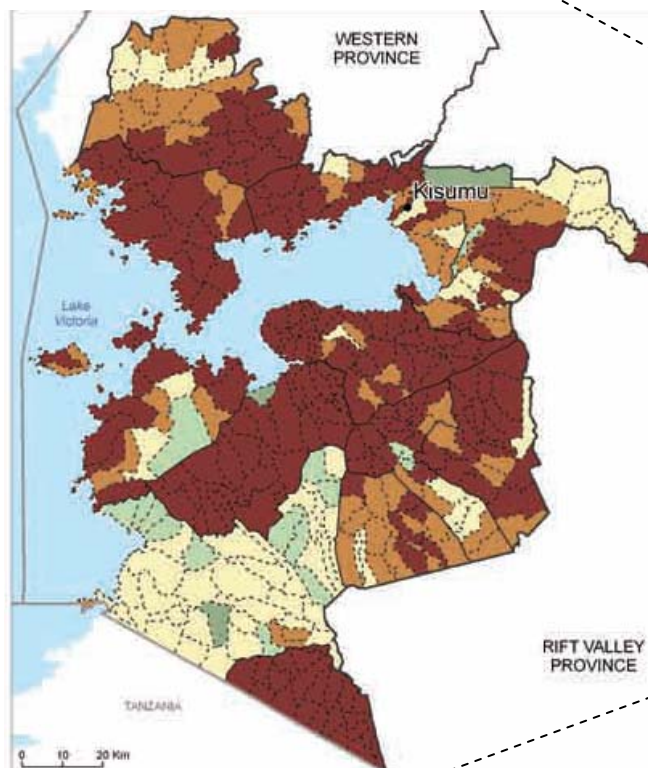


Fig. 1.2: Poverty Density: Number of Poor People per km², Kenya, 1999
(World Resource Institute et al. 2007: 18)

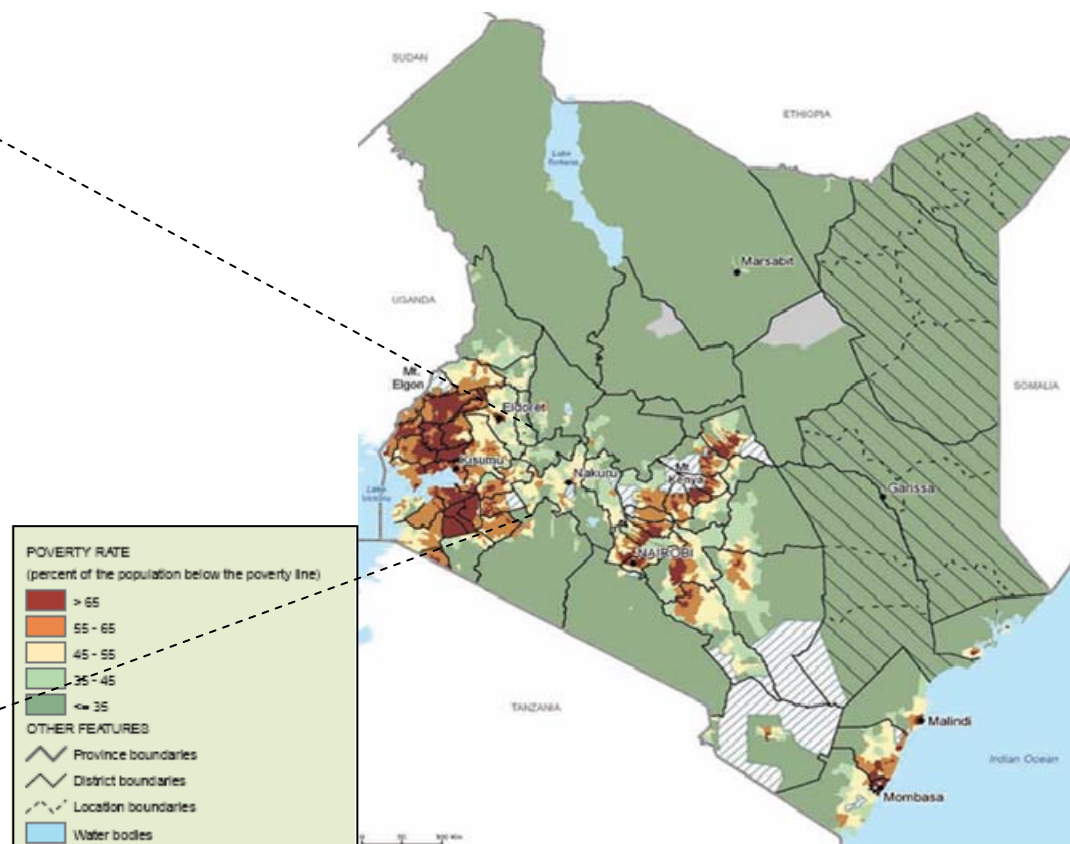
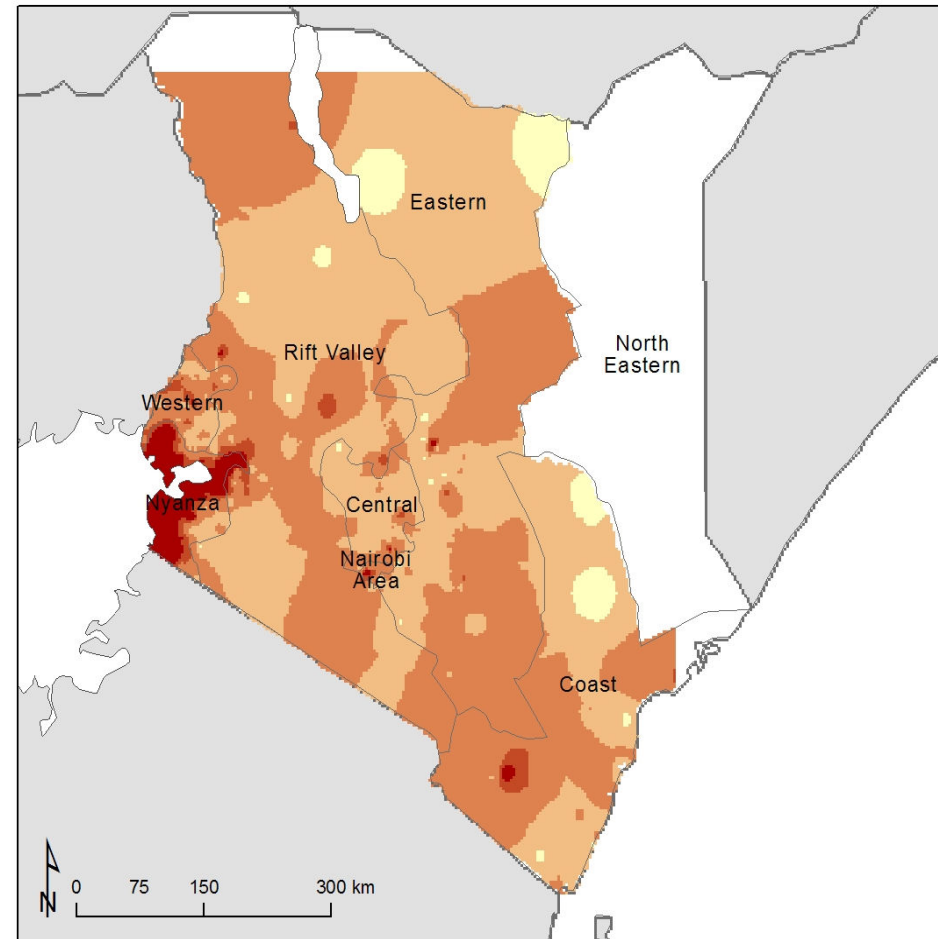


Fig. 1.3: Estimated Probability of HIV Prevalence by Region, Kenya, 2003
(Montana et al. 2004: 13)

Estimated Probability

- Less than 2%
- 2 - 5%
- 5 - 10%
- 10 - 15%
- More than 15%
- No data



Source data: Kenya DHS 2003.

Attributions of an ‘Orphan Crisis’

‘Orphan crisis’ has become a commonly employed term in globalised policy discourse to describe the population of children whose parents have died in Sub-Saharan Africa (Foster 2004; UNAIDS et al. 2004; Madhavan and DeRose 2007; Heymann and Kidman 2008: 5). It is usually linked to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There are currently an estimated 56 million children under the age of 18 in Sub-Saharan Africa that have lost one or both of their parents (UNICEF 2011: 103).¹ While the proportion of children that are orphaned across the continent has not risen significantly over recent decades (from approximately 11 percent in 1990 to 12.5 percent in 2010), orphanhood as a result of HIV/AIDS has increased exponentially in Sub-Saharan Africa: in 1990, approximately two percent of all children had lost one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS; in 2000, this increased to 22 percent; and by 2010 it was estimated that approximately 35 percent of children had been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS et al. 2004: Appendix 1). Presently, between 12.8 and 17 million children under the age of 18 in Sub-Saharan Africa are thought to have lost one or both of their parents as a result of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2010: 186). HIV/AIDS is specifically linked to increased numbers and proportions of children who are classified as ‘double orphans’ (both parents deceased): in 1990 there were approximately 3 million double orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa; estimates for 2010 predicted that 8 million children would have lost both of their parents (UNICEF 2003: 11).

¹ My use of the term ‘orphan’ in this section is consistent with the definition provided in the documents I am analysing and, therefore, refers to a child under the age of 18 who has lost one, or both, of her or his parents. The policy literature also distinguishes between ‘single’ orphans as children who have had one parent die (maternal orphans if the mother has died and paternal orphans if the father has died) and ‘double’ orphans who have had both parents die. See Sherr et al. 2008 for a discussion of these terminologies.

Table 1.1: Numbers and Percentages of Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-2010
(UNAIDS et al. 2004: Appendix 1)

Region	Year	All children 0-17 (thousands)	Total orphans as a percent of all children	Total number of orphans	Total number of orphans due to AIDS	Orphans due to AIDS as a percent of all orphans
Sub-Saharan Africa	1990	260 000	10.9percent	28 400 000	550 000	1.9percent
	1995	290 000	11.2percent	32 500 000	3 000 000	9.2percent
	2000	330 000	11.9percent	39 200 000	8 500 000	21.7percent
	2003	350 000	12.3percent	43 400 000	12 300 000	28.3percent
	2010	400 000	12.5percent	50 000 000	18 400 000	36.8percent

While ‘orphans due to AIDS’ currently monopolise policy and research attention about orphans in Africa, HIV/AIDS is not the cause of the majority of most Sub-Saharan African countries’ orphan populations, as the table above shows. Many countries have large orphan populations as a result of armed conflict, for example. It is worth thinking about why the population of orphans due to HIV/AIDS is more rigorously analysed. One reason is that the population profile of orphans due to HIV/AIDS can be roughly predicted, and therefore planned for, based on HIV infection rates and availability of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs among adult populations. The table above, which was published in 2004, demonstrates this predictive potential. This is obviously different from more unpredictable orphan populations, such as those resulting from conflict. Another possible reason for the emphasis on disaggregating orphans due to HIV/AIDS is that HIV/AIDS has become a major focal point of humanitarian and development assistance for Africa, and there are associated funding opportunities for programmes and research concerning orphans due to AIDS.²

² In 2008, approximately US\$ 275 million was spent on programmes for orphans and vulnerable children in 43 low and middle income countries (UNAIDS 2010a). This represents 1/16 of the total budget of US\$ 4.4 billion spent in those countries, while over half of the total budget was spent on HIV and AIDS treatment and care programmes, 3/16 on prevention, and 1/8 on programme management and administration. In Kenya in 2009, US\$ 55.4 million was spent from international and public sources on programmes for orphans and vulnerable children (UNAIDS 2010b).

Claims of a crisis due to HIV/AIDS have long been made in reference to Kenya, and in particular to Nyanza Province in the west of the country. The rupture associated with the identification of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses and deaths was pronounced in Kenya from the 1990s. While only 964 AIDS cases were reported in Kenya in 1987 (Ocholla-Ayayo 1997: 109), by 2003 it was estimated that 6.7 percent of adults between the ages of 15 and 49 were HIV-infected, and today an estimated 1.4 million adults between the ages of 15 and 64 are infected with HIV/AIDS (KDHS 2009: 210). Mortality among people aged between 15 and 49 years has increased by approximately 30 percent between 1998 and 2007, while age expectancy has fallen from 58 years in 1990 to less than 45 years in 2005 (World Bank 2007: 5). It is currently estimated that fewer than 400,000 Kenyans are being treated with ARV medication (Muchangi 2011). And less than half of the children born to infected mothers were receiving ARV treatment in 2009 (National AIDS Control Council 2010: 12).

These increasing numbers and proportions of deaths of young and middle-aged men and women have meant that the numbers and proportions of children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS have also significantly risen. In 2003, there were 1.7 million orphans in Kenya which represented 11 percent of the total child population. At that time, there were 650,000 orphans due to AIDS in Kenya which accounted for 37 percent of all orphans in the country (UNICEF 2003: 51). It is currently estimated that there are more than 2.4 million orphaned children in Kenya and half of this population is due to HIV/AIDS (National AIDS Control Council 2010: 17).

Having presented the statistics that are used to quantify the ‘orphan crisis’ in Sub-Saharan Africa and Nyanza Province, Kenya, I now turn to how the more qualitative aspects of this crisis have been conceptualised and studied.

The ‘Orphan Crisis’ Meta-Narrative

A meta-narrative of an ‘orphan crisis’ has developed that is so powerful in its epistemological influence that it has managed to train the various spotlights of policy, media, and research at the same focal point, effectively eclipsing the warrant for probes in less conclusive directions. I judge that much of this discipline has emerged as a result of the appropriation of two particular concepts: ‘orphan’ and ‘crisis’, which presume such blatancy in Euro-American epistemology that they manage to crowd out alternative perceptions, and indeed methods of

inquiry.³ Framed in terms of ‘crisis’, this meta-narrative implies a rupture, or breakdown, from a previously normal state into a chaotic state. The designation of an ‘orphan crisis’ implicates a rupture between generations and in processes of socialisation, thereby insinuating a potentially more enduring and insoluble crisis. In this combination, an extremely apprehensive narrative manifests about the unique risks that children, and in some cases a generation of children, face when their parents die, and how these present risks may generate even riskier future scenarios for entire societies (UNICEF 2003; Subbarao and Coary 2004; UNAIDS 2004; UNICEF et al. 2004; Foster et al. 2005; Global Business Coalition 2005; cf. Bray 2004; Meintjes and Giese 2006; Cooper 2007). An example summation is provided in a 2002 editorial in the *British Medical Journal*:

AIDS has devastated the social and economic fabric of African societies and made orphans of a whole generation of children. Although donor agencies initially viewed the plight of orphans as a short term humanitarian disaster, they now acknowledge the long term social consequences of African children growing up without parental love and guidance. The potential for these children to form a large group of dysfunctional adults, which could further destabilise societies already weakened by AIDS, has increased the urgency of finding an effective solution to the orphan crisis.

(Matshalaga and Powell 2002: 185)

Such narration emphasises the magnitude of the ‘orphan crisis’, but instead of doing so in terms of population statistics, it does so in generational terms, highlighting correlated social and economic ruptures. It reads from present situations a forecast for the future, predicting dysfunction and instability. However, it also suggests that future peril could be averted, hence the ‘urgency of finding an effective solution to the orphan crisis’ (ibid.).

Two important implications arise from defining the crisis in terms of the AIDS epidemic. First, the infectious nature and epidemic scale of HIV/AIDS in Africa justifies population-level data collection and analysis. Second, the hypotheses of the potentiality for future social and economic breakdowns appeals to the design and implementation of preventative

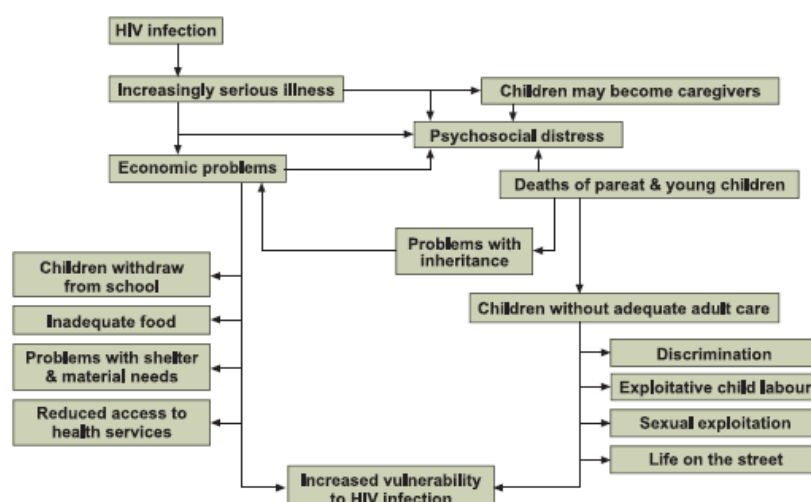
³ Elsewhere I have traced how the extended use of the term ‘orphan’ to connote an abandoned or neglected child gained in effect during European and American experiences of industrialisation and the associated processes of urbanisation and universalised education with attendant redefinitions of delinquency especially for poor families and young people (Cooper 2007; see also Ennew 2005). Combined with psychological theories emphasising the importance of a consistent, uninterrupted parent-child dyadic relationship for healthy child development (Bowlby 1953), a strong theory of orphanhood as individually and socially detrimental influenced European and American child welfare policies, as well as the content of the 1959 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

measures. Together these implications underscore the imperative of positivist knowledge and action. Critically, and as my following review reflects, much of the existing research concerning orphaned children in Sub-Saharan Africa has been commissioned by, or addressed to, policy and programming initiatives. Anthropologist James Ferguson (1997: 69) has reflected on the powerfully directive influence that development (including emergency humanitarian) agendas can wield for narrowing research interests, in the name of the imperative to respond. As Ferguson (*ibid.*) has put it,

An academic analysis is of no use to a ‘development’ agency unless it provides a place for the agency to plug itself in, unless it provides a charter for the sort of intervention that the agency is set up to do.

Helpfully for directing policy and programming interventions, the correlations between parental deaths today and unstable societies tomorrow have been diagrammatically modelled by some social science researchers (Williamson 2000: 5; Subbarao and Coary 2004: 13). The diagram below, for instance, presents a model of the causal pathways predicted for a child orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Following the event of a parent’s death, arrows point to ‘children without adequate adult care’ and outcomes of discrimination, exploitative child labour, sexual exploitation, and life on the street.

Fig. 1.4: ‘Problems among Children and Families Affected by HIV/AIDS’ (Williamson 2000: 5; Subbarao and Coary 2004: 13)



This model presents a positivistic and predictive organisation of knowledge about the consequences of orphanhood due to HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. As the UNAIDS et al.

(2004: 9) report summarises, orphanhood means ‘a long trail of painful experiences’. The predicated cascade of tragedies is presented as linear and teleological, rather than dynamic and contingent. The model emphasises the idea that children without parents are socially isolated and neglected. People other than the parents are not included as variables affecting this model. This exclusion implies that children’s protection from problems such as inadequate food and material needs, poor access to health services, sexual and labour exploitation, and psychosocial distress is provided solely by their parents. Other social actors, ranging from immediate and extended family, community members, and finally the African nation state, are assumed as being uninvolved in children’s protection, care, and development. As well, the orphaned children themselves are not actors in these pathways as they figure nowhere to influence the outcome of their own, orphaned, fate. Instead, children are assumed to be passive objects; each orphaned child is interchangeable given their assumed common dependency on adult care for emotional, material, and educational support.

This interpretation of the problems associated with orphanhood is premised on particular ideas of children as inherently vulnerable, and effectively ‘human becomings’ rather than ‘human beings’ (Qvortrup 1994). Supporting this central idea is the understanding that children are dependents on adults, with care relations focused primarily on socialisation and emotional attachment, instead of any recognition of how children and adults may be involved in interdependent relations, with children contributing to their families and households through their productive and reproductive work. This understanding is promoted, for example, in the calculation of a household’s ‘dependency ratio’ in terms of the proportion of children to adults (UNICEF 2003: 11; Subbarao and Coary 2004: 14). Also underpinning the notion of children’s essential dependence on adults is a theory that relates the healthy psychosocial development of an individual to the uninterrupted maternal-infant bond. This theory, known as ‘attachment theory’ was developed by British psychologist and psychiatrist John Bowlby in the 1950s based on his studies of children separated from their parents during the Second World War. Bowlby (1953) theorised that children who experience inconsistencies in their first fundamental relationship will be prone to insecurity and maladjustment, exhibiting interpersonal behaviour that is either ‘anxiously attached’ or ‘cold and inhibited’. The tenets of Bowlby’s theory came to be increasingly universalised, reflecting the assumption – or interest - that children everywhere share the same needs for their proper development. For instance, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the

Child produced in 1959 – the precursor to the current United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) - echoed Bowlby's theory in its Principle 6:

The child, for the full and harmonious development of his personality, needs love and understanding. He shall, wherever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents, and in any case in an atmosphere of affection and moral and material security; a child of tender years shall not, save in exceptional circumstances be separated from his mother.

Indicating that this theory still influences how orphanhood is understood, various policy documents have cited 'attachment disorders' as a risk for orphaned children (Subbarao and Coary 2004: 23), and some researchers have studied whether orphaned children experience such disorders (Hirsch 2001; Robbins 2003; Xiaoming et al. 2008).

Finally, it is also important to recognise how the theory perpetuated in the above model and similar depictions of orphanhood as intrinsically dangerous for children rest on the assumption that the primary motivation for helping children (i.e. investing in their schooling, protecting them from exploitative labour, safeguarding their access to property, ensuring their health and nutritional status and generally treating them with concern and respect) is parenthood. Parents are depicted as intrinsically caring, or at least, all other types of individuals are considered irrelevant or suspect to children's care and protection. This notion of parents' distinctive capacities to care for children translates into a specific justification for public action to save the lives of adults who are parents:

We must keep parents alive and ensure that orphans and other vulnerable children stay in school and are protected from exploitation and abuse... The future of Africa depends upon it.
(UNICEF 2003: 1)

However, the logic underpinning a theory of parenthood is not examined or explained in the policy literature that uses it. Indeed, since the intrinsic role of parents in children's care is applied indiscriminately across different cultures, parenthood assumes a universalistic definition: parenthood is presented as natural, rather than cultural. As I will review later in this chapter, this assumption has been challenged in cross-cultural studies of children's care (e.g. Whiting and Whiting 1975; Goody 1982; Whiting and Edwards 1988; Bledsoe 1990; Levine et al. 1994; Weisner, 1997; Alber 2004). Furthermore, it remains unsupported by

existing empirical research into orphaned children's care arrangements in contemporary Sub-Saharan African societies (Sabates-Wheeler and Pelham 2007: 8).

Evaluations of Kinship in Crisis

'Are African Families Failing?'

(Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS 2008: 19, sub-section title)

Despite the universalising tendencies in some leading policy and research, other research and policy documents contain notable recognition of the socio-historical salience of adaptable, cooperative, and resilient extended families across African societies (Chirwa 2002; Foster 2004; Madhavan 2004; Oleke et al. 2005; Abebe 2007; Abebe and Aase 2007; Mathambo and Gibbs 2008). Yet, often a political economy analysis interrupts the account of 'traditional' African child care ideas and practices. The argument is that due to years of economic and social change, the traditional safety net of the extended family is no longer plausible (Foster 2000; Guest 2003; Heymann and Kidman 2008: 6; Nyambedha 2007: 292; Mathambo and Gibbs 2008: 27). Monetisation, capitalism, industrialisation, and urbanisation are charged as having transformed African societies from collective, caring communities to individualistic, competitive environments. Even if it is recognised that extended families still exist, the argument is made that family members can no longer afford to extend their benevolence. Impoverishment is a critical factor in this analysis. It is argued that the scarcity of resources intensifies the reluctance of people to care for others. As the authors of a review of qualitative literature on the impact of HIV/AIDS on families in Africa have explained,

For example, an adult's willingness to care for a deceased relative's child may be suppressed by his/her difficulties in providing for the basic needs of his/her children. Poor households, although willing, may find it difficult to take in additional children.

(Mathambo and Gibbs 2008: 27)

The characterisation is that in HIV/AIDS-affected communities, as a result of adult mortalities and correlated economic impoverishment, the 'safety net' has worn too thin to provide cover for everyone that it might have extended to in the past. This implies that while people may want to help their kin, they are practically unable to be so. Under this set of circumstances, it is taken as axiomatic that orphaned children will be vulnerable to neglect. As the United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Africa,

Elezabeth Mataka, summarised the situation in UNICEF's 2007 *State of the World's Children* report (UNICEF 2007:42):

Children can no longer rely on the support of the traditional extended family system, which provided care and support for the aged, orphans and any vulnerable and disadvantaged family member. This coping mechanism has been overstretched by poverty and the sheer numbers of children to be cared for, given the fact that AIDS affects the most productive family members in the prime of their productive and reproductive lives. As a result, children have sometimes gone into homes that are already overstretched and where they are really not welcome.

However, it is difficult to find evidence to support this conjecture. Instead of focusing on the disjuncture between people's willingness and abilities to care for orphaned children, existing policy and research tend to emphasise incongruence between people's abilities and realities, and use this to form judgments about people's willingness. For instance, a review of 14 African countries' national action plans concerning orphans and vulnerable children draws attention to the paradox that these planning documents commonly include 'the basic storyline regarding 'collapsing traditional safety nets'' alongside the claim that the majority of orphaned children 'live in households and communities that have the potential and are willing to care for them' (Sabates-Wheeler and Pelham 2006: 7-8). According to Sabates-Wheeler and Pelham (2006: 9), not only do the claims of simultaneously collapsing yet coping and willing households seem inconsistent with each other, but both lack empirical and verifiable evidence. As such, they recommend that more critical and grounded research be conducted concerning how people are 'coping' or 'collapsing'. Specifically, Sabates-Wheeler and Pelham (ibid: 8) have critiqued:

A number of fundamental questions about the social and economic consequences of HIV/AIDS remain under-researched. For instance, how are different traditional mechanisms (domestic care, fostering arrangements, burial societies, lending/borrowing mechanisms, exchange labour, access to land) changing over time? How are livelihood systems adapting, and what are the consequences? Who is made most vulnerable by these adaptations and social changes?

Although it is recognised that extended families are the 'central social welfare mechanism in most countries' for the care of orphaned children in Sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated 90percent of all orphaned children in the continent primarily cared for in the households of

extended family members (UNAIDS et al. 2004: 10), there has not been significant research focusing on family decision making processes concerning the care of these children. Instead, the research question of how wide-scale orphaning is changing the composition of societies is commonly addressed through the analysis of quantitative data. The use of quantitative instead of qualitative research methods means that while trends can be discerned, the local logics that underpin these trends can only be inferred. As I outline below, such limitations need to be acknowledged, as does the potential contribution of more inductive qualitative research to fill in important gaps in understanding.

A recent quantitative analysis of population-based demographic survey data from 21 different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (accounting for 52 percent of the continent's population) identified significant heterogeneity in the relatives with whom orphaned children live (Beegle et al. 2010). First, as might be expected, there is considerable diversity across the 21 countries. For example, while over 67 percent of maternal orphans live with their fathers in Kenya, only 44 percent and 16 percent of maternal orphans live with their fathers in Zambia and Namibia respectively; while 84 percent of paternal orphans live with their mothers in Kenya, 68 percent and 53 percent of paternal orphans live with their mothers in Zambia and Namibia. The analysis also reports proportions of orphaned and non-orphaned children living with grandparents, 'other relatives', and 'non-relatives', but does not signify whether these are paternal or maternal relatives. Unfortunately, insights from these data are further limited because country-level demographic data sets obscure differences in childcare patterns among different groups within the same country. Many countries have different rates of orphanhood among different domestic populations which can be expected to correlate with different patterns of children's living arrangements (e.g. more maternal orphans may live with their fathers in patrilineal and patrilocal societies than maternal orphans in matrilineal and matrilocal societies). Such considerations are important in the case of Kenya, for example, where the historically patrilineal Luo population has more than double the proportion of orphans among its total children than the national Kenyan rate (UNICEF 2003: 51).

To test hypotheses concerning the economic logic of child care placements, the same quantitative study compares whether orphaned children live in households that are comprised of more children or in households that are poorer than the households in which non-orphans live (Beegle et al. 2010). The analysis found that orphaned children typically live in households with the same number or fewer children (ages 0-14) as non-orphans, and in most

cases if an orphan or a non-orphan is living with a grandparent there are fewer children in that household than in a household headed by a parent or other relative or non-relative. While providing an interesting statistical finding, the analysis cannot indicate if this finding reveals that children (including orphaned children) are deliberately placed in households that are not already 'over-burdened' with the care of other children. However, it might indicate such reasoning. Further indicating 'selective placement' is the finding that orphans (whether maternal, paternal, or double) are less likely to live in the poorest category of households than are non-orphans. The researchers interpreted these general findings to reflect that children 'are not randomly placed in receiving households when they are fostered or otherwise looked after, and that there may be a sophisticated process whereby better-off friends or relatives are sought' (ibid.: 1743). However, further understanding of what might constitute such a 'sophisticated process' cannot be addressed through this kind of quantitative research. This seems an important gap in understanding how families and societies are organising their responses to increased numbers and proportions of orphans.

Concern about orphaned children living 'where they are really not welcome' (UNICEF 2007: 42) has spurred another line of research regarding orphanhood, which is also often organised around the analysis of more survey data. After counting orphans, the most prevalent way of studying the 'orphan crisis' in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past fifteen years has been by contrasting particular outcomes among orphaned children and non-orphaned children. For example, UNICEF has initiated a periodic series of *Progress Report[s] for Children Affected by HIV/AIDS* which use country-based demographic survey data to compare the differences between orphans and non-orphans across 17 different indicators (e.g. malnutrition, school enrolment, basic material needs, etc.) (UNICEF 2010). One of the leading questions taken up by other researchers has been whether orphans are less likely than non-orphans to be enrolled in school. As researchers describe, this approach is purposefully designed to analyse whether there is discrimination against orphans (e.g. Ainsworth and Filmer 2002; Bicego et al. 2003; Case et al. 2004; Case and Adington 2006; Parikh et al. 2007). Discrimination against orphaned children is hypothesised to be practiced because adults are predicted to prioritise the wellbeing of themselves and/or their own children over other people's children (Bishai et al. 2003: 262; Case et al. 2004: 484-5). Case et al. (2004: 484) have explained the hypothesis and its relevance to widescale orphaning due to HIV and AIDS in Africa:

Adults may be willing to invest more in their own children, both because their affinity to their own children is greater and because they are more likely to receive transfers from their children in later life. The idea that parents invest more than nonparents is also consistent with arguments from evolutionary biology. Hamilton (1964a, 1964b) hypothesized that altruistic behaviour between any two individuals is an increasing function of the degree of genetic relatedness between them, so that one's own children would be favoured over grandchildren, nieces, or nephews, who, in turn, would be favoured over more distant relatives and nonrelatives ... These issues are relevant to African orphans, since the death of even one parent often results in changes in living arrangements and the control of household resources. African children who continue to live with a surviving parent may be absorbed into households in which other adults control the available resources or may gain a stepparent who does not have the same incentives as the biological parent they lost.

Such hypothesising that biological kinship is universally correlated with caring relationships is challenged by decades of anthropological scholarship concerning the social construction of kinship, which has highlighted the ethnocentric bias of genetic relatedness – or ‘blood’ - as an objective criterion of kin-based affiliations (Needham 1971; Riviere 1971; Scheffler 1973; Goody 1982; Schneider 1984; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Strathern 1992; Carsten 2000; Alber 2004; Bowie 2004). Furthermore, while poverty is widespread and chronic among many African populations (Barnett and Whiteside 2002; Drimie 2002; de Waal et al. 2009; JLICA 2009), and the possibility of households or families becoming further impoverished as a result of HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths has been established through research (Drimie 2002; Yamano and Jayne 2004; Hosegood et al. 2007), the correlation between impoverishment and effects on willingness to care for others seems to rest more on assumption than evidence. It is a theory of what is happening and why, and specifically it is a theory about human behaviour steeped in the rational choice paradigm. It suggests that decisions to care or not for others are basically economic decisions, which in turn suggests that the study of orphaned children's care can be approached as behavioural economics research.

I argue that it is possible that the judgments that there is an ‘orphan crisis’ stem from a deeply embedded (and barely acknowledged) bias that a competition for survival of the fittest is the predominant force in human motivation and action. This bias is supported by theories that conceptualise humans as acting in accordance with an instrumentalist rationality that is dictated by self-interested competition (Bishai et al. 2003; Case et al. 2004; Beegle et al.

2010). Other possibilities of human motivation are discounted in this survivalist paradigm. Consequently, these theories conceptualise altruism, and its correlates of empathy and sociality and social morality, as cultural add-ons that can (or should) only exist when they can be afforded outside of the individual competitive framework. The potential to care for others is boiled down to a material calculus. I do not think it should be considered beside the point that the language used in social scientists' typologies of households along a 'continuum of survival' that ranges from 'collapsing' and 'failing' to 'adaptive' and 'surviving' - are imported from evolutionary biology, nor that the typology of coping and collapsing families ultimately conceptualises 'resilience' in terms of access to economic resources (Abebe and Aase 2007: 2062-5; Mathambo and Gibbs 2008: 25).

Whether altruism is generated through evolutionary processes is an empirical debate beyond the capacities of the foregoing kinds of research, despite their pretensions⁴ (for reviews of this self-interest/altruism debate see: Badhwar 1993; Sober and Wilson 1998; Post et al. 2002). Indeed, Richard Dawkins, one of the leading evolutionary theorists has clearly stated that 'it is a fallacy – incidentally a very common one – to suppose that genetically inherited traits are by definition fixed and unmodifiable' (Dawkins 1976: 3). The influence of culture, Dawkins (ibid.: 3-4) has argued, is critical for human beings:

Our genes may instruct us to be selfish, but we are not necessarily compelled to obey them all our lives. It may just be more difficult to learn altruism than it would be if we were genetically programmed to be altruistic. Among animals, man is uniquely dominated by culture, by influences learned and handed down. ...

I am not concerned here with the psychology of motives. I am not going to argue about whether people who behave altruistically are 'really' doing it for secret or subconscious selfish motives. Maybe they are and maybe they aren't, and maybe we can never know ...

Recognising that 'maybe we can never know' (ibid.), it is certainly not my intention to try to disprove the theory that orphaned children's care is fundamentally determined by family's or other cooperative groups' unconscious evolutionary strategies. Quite differently, my concern is to look at what logics people seem to be drawing from, and developing, in their responses

⁴ For example, Beegle et al. (2010: 1729) applied biological relatedness as 'an imperfect measure of the true quantity of interest' while Bishai et al. (2003: 262) applied it as a 'proxy measure of the caregiver concern'.

to questions of who will – and should – care for orphaned children. In this, I contend that careful qualitative research is required.

The qualitative studies that do exist concerning families' decision making processes for the care of orphaned children reveal important discretion, even within customary fosterage patterns, thereby indicating consideration of multiple influences. For instance, as Oleke et al. (2005) note in their findings from interviews with older informants among the patrilineal Langi of northern Uganda, it was customary to base the choice of which brother would care for a deceased man's children and possibly widow upon careful evaluations of different individuals' abilities and characters. Nyamukapa and Gregson (2005) have described how in rural Manicaland, Zimbabwe, a widow might decide not to be inherited without this necessarily negatively impacting her and her children's welfare. These researchers found that various different responsibilities for helping such families might be divided among willing relatives, with flexibility in such arrangements. For example, one relative might provide financial support to ensure the household's survival, while another relative might be tasked with paying school fees or practicing the role of a father figure to the children (ibid.). Notermans' (2004) study of the processes and outcomes of Cameroonian Kako married couples' negotiations over the fosterage of both spouses' siblings' children provides insights into how many different factors, including power jockeying within a marriage, might influence decisions to care for different children. As I review further below, studies specific to child fosterage practices and logics also have much to contribute to the various different concerns, including expectations of children's contributions, that have been at stake in different groups' child care decision making processes (Goody 1982; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985; Bledsoe 1990).

In South Africa, Madhavan (2004) has asked the pertinent question of whether the situation of children affected by HIV/AIDS is qualitatively different from that of children who lived under apartheid. Her analysis notes how migratory labour patterns saw children live in stretched – mostly matrifocal - households, often left in the care of grandparents, or fostered by different kin as and when required. Madhavan's point is that historical continuities, as well as context-specific considerations, should both be considered in evaluations that seek to understand how the practices of children and families affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic might be specific, or not, to contemporary challenges. Ansell and van Blerk's (2004) study of orphaned children's care arrangements in Lesotho and Malawi similarly accounts for how

there are well established patterns of children migrating between different relatives' households, often for opportunities to access education, but also because of the wider political economies of labour markets in which the household and extended family are situated.

Existing research concerning practices of distributed care among kin in Luo communities in Kenya indicates the significance of similarly contextualised contemplation of decision making processes in order to understand the contingencies of children's care arrangements (Parkin 1978; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989; Shipton 2007). As well, previous research about fosterage among the Luo indicates how common it has been for children to live apart from their biological parents, as I review in more detail in Chapter 4 (Page 1989: 415). Recognising that discretion and negotiation has long been apparent in decision making concerning the care of children, and that multiple logics (e.g. cultural, economic) are often at play and in competition during considerations of child rearing, in this dissertation I specifically analyse what evaluative schema people put into practice in their determinations of how orphaned children should be cared for.

One of the most important and pervasive findings of my study directly redresses the epistemological positivism perpetuated by various strains of research about an 'orphan crisis'. The limitations of that research are exposed in contrast to the multiple shards of contingencies and ambiguities that cut through people's efforts to work out the care for orphaned children in the context of my study. My focus on how and why people have responded in various ways illuminates new findings that are both specific to the ethnographic case study and potentially enlightening for thinking about other situations.

Questioning Crisis

My analytical approach starts with a problematisation of the very notion of crisis. Crisis is such a blatant term in English. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1997), crisis refers to 'a turning point' or a 'movement of decisive change', and implies an imminent change for the worse. Given the contrastive specificity of the term, it would seem a straightforward task to reconcile a declaration of 'crisis' with empirical observation. The unambiguous designation of crisis should logically be matched with unambiguous, tangible indicators.

But, herein lies the rub with claims of crisis: it provokes the riddle of where change starts and finishes. With crisis manifest in the break from a pre-existing coherent (i.e. normal) state and the emergence of a different, initially incoherent (i.e. abnormal) configuration, the legitimacy of crisis rests on judgments of what is coherent and what is incoherent. Henrik Vigh (2008: 11) notes that these judgments comprise quantitative as well as qualitative criteria: quantitatively, the coherent or normal state is 'that which we do most and/or that which there is most of'; qualitatively, the coherent or normal refers to 'how things should be or how we would like them to be'. The analytical implication is that crisis is defined by appraisals of local context. One can only answer the question of crisis according to that which is valued and counted in acknowledgement of 'normal' life. While this offers the promise of precision - in that crisis can be defined in tangible terms - it also raises the spectre of crisis as a fuzzy concept held in suspension between ontology and epistemology; we can only count what we know, and how do we know what to know?

To define crisis then is to explore how experience grafts with categorisation. Like all categories, crisis is in the eye, or rather the epistemology, of the beholder. This does not mean that crisis is exclusively a subjective experience because it may be possible to establish objective dimensions through consensus and thereby establish a shared definition of what constitutes a crisis. Yet, as a designation staked to contrast, and specifically to tangibly measurable contrast, crisis throws its conceptual weight at a project in concretising realities; that is, in the effort of quantitatively and qualitatively freezing experience into a categorical measure.

Rather than embark on such an attempt to concretise realities, I have chosen instead to suspend the notion of crisis as a temporal rupture or turning point in exchange for Vigh's suggestion of studying how people may perceive and navigate (Vigh 2006: 13) life as persistently fragmented, unstable, and unpredictable (Vigh 2008: 15-16). This approach also necessitates employing a historical – or rather a historiographic – lens to people's changes in experiences and perceptions, but does not require the same emphasis as a crisis-focused analysis on contrasting normative states of being; for example, drawing the distinction between a good and stable state and a bad and unstable state, or how things should be versus how they are. Instead of attempting to draw conclusions as to what triggered a decisive point to manifest crisis and what repercussions have followed, an interest in how people experience

and perceive uncertainty in their lives seems to hold more analytical promise for understanding how people might organise their ideological and practical responses. My analytical focus therefore decentres ‘crisis’ and instead explores uncertainty and its ontological implications. Given my case study’s focus I am particularly interested in the implications of experiences of uncertainty for how people think and practice their caring relations, specifically toward orphaned children living among them.

Vigh (2006) has conceptualised people’s efforts to craft their lives in unstable conditions as ‘navigation’ through ‘social terrain’. Vigh’s intent is to emphasise how actors do not often merely take actions unilaterally across a static field, but rather they act in an environment that is always in motion (Vigh 2006: 171). He explains his conceptualisation of the context of life as terrain as a purposeful distinction from Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field’ (ibid: 164 and 171). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 97) have defined the field as:

A network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in their determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situ*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits which are stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.)

Vigh’s argument is that in very uncertain contexts there may not be a demarcated space, nor consistent rules of the game, nor fixed stakes, structuring people’s struggles through everyday life. This is how he presents everyday life for his young, male informants in Guinea Bissau. In this, Vigh finds that Bourdieu and Wacquant’s conceptualisation of the field as a ‘structural grid’ containing life’s potential situations conceptually inadequate (Vigh 2006: 164 and 171). Vigh makes a compelling case for this argument through his descriptions of the multiple dimensions of unpredictability prevalent in his informants’ lives in Bissau. As well, the incorporation in his analytical schema of the ‘imaginary social terrain’ as an overlay to that which is perhaps more objectively evident in the present moment is productive in its suggestion to consider that people do not necessarily confine their appraisals of their choices to the immediately tangible present, but also consider the implications for their possible futures (Vigh 2006: 13).

In people's struggles through everyday life in Kanyathi, and specifically their struggles to ensure the care of children whose parents had died, I did not find the same degree of constant motion and uncertainty that Vigh did in Bissau. Rather, I found that in some situations there were important concrete realities, or fixed points, that structured the social setting in which people's practices of everyday life occurred, and therefore these practices were not inherently improvisational. Most definitive in limiting different individuals' praxis was the distribution of control over potentially productive resources, and especially land and financial capital. In this, there was a relatively well demarcated space for struggle, for example, in the limited land holdings and their productivity, as well as the limited finances available for investments in education or income-generating activities. There were also rather consistent rules of the game in the sense that land was often controlled by elder males (often through official land titles as well as less formal but persistently salient local social sanctions). Moreover, the stakes were also quite well defined for even if the outcomes of access to land or financial investments were not certain, the deficit of access was quite reliably negative.

However, my ethnographic material also makes the case that economic capital, while fundamental, was not the only structuring force of people's everyday struggles. Instead, a different type of resource, or logic, (or 'capital', to use Bourdieu's terminology) was also an influential factor. I found there was some power of persuasion and resistance available through recourse to moral logics. In my analysis, I therefore suggest that morality was effective in contesting the purely economic calculus of inclusion or exclusion vis-à-vis access to care and support. As a different type of logic, which was not easily commensurate with economic logic, moral ideas could create tension and opposition with economic arguments, and thereby decentre economic rationality and open different spaces for struggle in the social field. As such, I have found it helpful to adopt the concept of moral economy to make explicit this propensity to generate normative tension and thereby affect the parameters of the field of struggle in Kanyathi.

My findings therefore provide a qualified perspective on uncertainty as a condition of life. It is a perspective that does not equate uncertainty with crisis as absolute incoherence and fluidity of praxis. Instead, I recognise that there are likely different kinds and degrees of uncertainty prevalent in different instances. The analytical objective then is to try to distinguish what contingencies interact with each other, and how, to generate varying degrees

of uncertainty. I suggest that such focus may have the potential to discern the differential weighting of structure and agency in particular struggles in life.

The Moral Economy of Kinship

One way of thinking about how people relate and negotiate their practical and moral considerations has been laid out in the concept of moral economy, and I find there is some analytical purchase to be gained in testing this concept against my research findings, especially those concerning how care for orphaned children should be worked out. Moral economy, as a particular concept, has most commonly been used to analyse how moral ideas structure economic systems, and therefore to evaluate the social embeddedness of economies (Booth 1994). In his essay *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in Eighteenth Century*, E.P. Thompson (1971), for example, analysed how the violation of particular ideas of economic justice (specifically, the fair marketing of food in times of scarcity) led people to judge that their participation in public protests was a legitimate action. James C. Scott (1976) similarly used the concept of moral economy to analyse how particular patterns of moral rights or expectations had to be met to legitimise the functioning of the economy. In that case study, Scott found that people's participation in labour and production markets in South East Asia was conditional on their norms of economic justice being satisfied. John Lonsdale's analysis of the moral economy underpinnings of the Mau Mau anti-colonial movement in Kenya led him to reflect on how economic inequalities are differentially interpreted – or 'felt' – as moral inequity. In this, Lonsdale described that, 'Moral economies are stubbornly distinctive, historical bargains between informed people, not the theoretical construct of a trained mind' (Lonsdale 1992a: 351). The social and political contingencies of different economic systems have been well established through such attention to moral economy.

Just as the idea of a moral economy can be applied to analyse how moral sentiments affect economic practices, it can also be used to analyse how economic considerations affect what might be primarily conceptualised as moral practices, including the legitimisation of moral categories and relationships, which – as in the case of children's care – incur economic impacts. As this dissertation's content describes, the provision of child care in the study area can be conspicuously costly in terms of financial expenditures, as well as in terms of expenditures of time and emotional energy. In practice, children's care implicates very specific materiality which includes the provision of food, clothing, medical care, school fees,

and potentially land allocations for young men (i.e. ‘sons’) and bridewealth for young women (i.e. ‘daughters’). At the same time, children’s labour – and especially girls’ labour - can significantly support households’ domestic economies. Commitments to a child’s care can thus incur immediate as well as enduring costs and benefits. I have found through my analysis, as elaborated in Chapter 4, that this economic dimension pressurises how the care of orphans is determined. It stirs particularly materialistic anxieties – and qualifications - into formulations of the moral basis of caring for others. As I will outline in detail in Chapter 4, in this study’s social context, kin are the people who are expected to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and land. As a consequence, a moral economy enfolds kinship in Kanyathi. And in this, kinship becomes problematised.

Considering kinship in terms of moral economy is not without theoretical precedent. Anthropologists, and other social scientists (notably economists) have long been engaged in a debate concerning whether kinship should be understood as fundamentally moral or economic. In what follows I synthesise some key points in this historical debate.

Theories of Kinship and Morality

Anthropology’s early kinship theorists, including Henry Maine (1861) and Lewis Henry Morgan (1877), distinguished kinship from more agentic relationships in which responsibilities and reciprocities are negotiated. Maine’s distinction between societies based on status or contract, and Morgan’s distinction between *societas* dominated by personal relationships and *civitas* based on territorial affiliation and property possession, set kinship up as comprised of a more tacitly accepted bundle of rights and responsibilities than those bargained in other relationships, such as between ruler and subject, state and citizen, employer and worker, trader and consumer, etc. A contrast between ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies was demarcated along such lines (Durkheim 1964 [1893]; Mauss 1967 [1924]; Radcliffe-Brown 1950) with kinship and economy conflated in ‘primitive’ societies. Marshall Sahlins (1972: 76, italics in original) has clearly articulated this thesis in his book *Stone Age Economics*:

... even to speak of ‘the economy’ of a primitive society is an exercise in unreality. Structurally, ‘the economy’ does not exist. Rather than a distinct and specialized organization, ‘economy’ is

something that generalized social groups and relations, notably kinship groups and relations, do.⁵

Significantly, Meyer Fortes shifted the emphasis concerning kinship's cohesive tendencies from efficiency to altruism and sentiment.⁶ In *Kinship and the Social Order*, Fortes (1969: 232) coined the term 'prescriptive altruism' as a rule among kin that leaves reciprocity unquestioned. He described: 'Kinsfolk cannot, as kinsmen, contract debts with one another, for ideally they are bound to share freely' (Fortes 1969: 246). Citing examples from his studies of the Tallensi (1949) and the Ashanti (1950) of Ghana in the 1930s and 1940s, and Raymond Firth's (1936) study of the Tikopia of Polynesia in the 1930s, Fortes confidently asserted that an ethic of free sharing exists among kin in contrast to a notion of exchange and deliberate calculations of reciprocities among non-kin.

Sahlins similarly distinguished kinship as synonymous with economic cooperation. He defined the basic unit of the domestic group as the family which is fundamentally comprised of an adult man and an adult woman complementarily performing the division of labour by sex (Sahlins 1972: 76-77). Yet Sahlins also accounted for the integration of the family as a 'consumption unit' (ibid: 94). In this, Sahlins endorsed Morgan's description of the domestic or household economy as 'communism in living' for, as he described, 'householding is the highest form of economic sociability; 'from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs'' (ibid.). Cooperation – as demonstrated in the 'pooling' of goods and services - is the activity which 'closes the domestic circle', enforcing boundaries of 'a group with an interest and destiny apart from those outside and a prior claim on the sentiments and resources of those within' (ibid.). Kinship was theorised to provide the incentive to cooperate and this cooperation in turn re-enforces kinship: 'Balance is the material relation of distant kinship; closer to home, exchange becomes more disinterested; there is tolerance of delays or even of complete failure to reciprocate' (Sahlins 1972: 127). However, the 'permanent contradiction' of kinship solidarity, according to Sahlins' theory, is captured in the perpetual

⁵ Reflecting on how this type of society leaves no room for a moral economy analysis, Booth has described, 'It is the institutional and value-embeddedness of the economy – the fact that it is lost in the totality of social phenomena – that renders it theoretically indistinct' (Booth 1994: 655). It is not until the economy is perceived as 'disembedded' – a perception very much linked to a characterisation of modernity – that the moral economy approach is spurred into theoretical action to subsequently question the degree of detachment between moral norms and economic practices.

⁶ Fortes explicitly traces his intellectual debts to Morgan and Durkheim through Radcliffe-Brown (Fortes 1969: Chapter IV).

conflict between domestic ties and wider kin relationships. According to Sahlins (1974: 124), this is not a contradiction that is easily apparent because:

Normally it is obscured, repressed by sentiments of sociability that extend to the far reaches of kinship, mystified by an uncritical ideology of reciprocity, above all dissimulated by a continuity of social principles from the family to the larger community ... Only occasionally comes a crisis, a *crise révélatrice*, to lay bare the structural opposition beyond any possibility of mistaking it.

Yet, the moral 'nature' of kinship has been critiqued from several different perspectives. Perhaps most infamous for claims of immorality among people living together as families and households has been Colin Turnbull's 1972 ethnography of Ik people in Uganda in the 1960s (c.f. Barth 1974).⁷ Utilitarian perspectives on kinship have also taken explicit issue with Fortes' notion of an 'axiom of prescriptive altruism' among kin (c.f. Bloch 1973). Peter Worsley (1956: 64), for example, wrote that kinship is a 'form of expression of economic activities'; Edmund Leach (1961a: 305) argued that 'kinship systems have no 'reality' at all except in relation to land and property'; and John Beattie (1964) similarly described kinship as merely an idiom through which other domains operate. Indeed, Leach insisted that 'the student of social structure must never forget that the constraints of economics are prior to the constraints of morality and law' (Leach 1961b: 9). Bolstering this line of argument was the damning critique levelled by David Schneider (1984) and others (Needham 1971; Riviere 1971; Scheffler 1973) which exposed kinship as an ethnocentric analytical construct due to its privilege of western knowledge of biology as an *a priori* definition of kinship. From this point, anthropological studies of kinship have purposefully moved away from a pre-given analytical opposition between the biological and social (Strathern 1992). Many have interpreted their studies instead in terms of 'relatedness' and 'cultures of relatedness' (Carsten 2000).

Earlier anthropological assumptions about unproblematic reciprocities among African kin-based societies were perhaps even more effectively broken down by Marxist- and feminist-oriented studies in the latter half of the twentieth century (Bledsoe 1980; Meillassoux 1981; Whitehead 1981; Guyer and Peters 1987). Jane Guyer's (1981) review of methodological

⁷ For example, Turnbull (1972: 237) described, 'I searched for evidence of love almost from the beginning. I found more of it in . . . two baby leopards than I did among the Ik.' He also described how Ik adults would leave their children to fend for themselves (ibid 135).

change in the study of African societies describes a paradigm shift from an approach which bracketed kinship off from politics to one that explicitly reframes analysis in terms of political economy and focuses a critical lens at relations within and between households and communities. In his book *Maidens, Meal and Money* (1981), for instance, Claude Meillassoux developed the argument that in much of agricultural Africa women's labour and reproductive capacities were exploited according to a patriarchal social order for the domestic community's economic production. Kinship, Meillassoux argued, was used to serve an ideology of power and domination (ibid.: 86). The influential 'wealth-in-people' model of African social organisation, as developed by Miers and Kopytoff (1977), and Caroline Bledsoe (1980), similarly conceptualises kinship relationships and reciprocities as pragmatically negotiated within a particular political economy.⁸ The dismemberment of the unitary model of the family or household also occurred in the field of economics and gave rise to a new type of analysis that focused on intra-household bargaining among 'multiple actors with varying (often conflicting) preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realize those interests' (Agarwal 1998: 3; also see Doss 1996; Haddad et al. 1997).

Highly relevant to my study, the anthropological stream of studies concerning child fosterage has been conducted in the mould of political economy, and attended to the moral and material implications of adult-child relationships. Esther Goody's studies of fosterage systems in West African (especially Ghana) set precedents for this niche of anthropological study. Rather than adopting general theories of kinship as characterised by cooperation or conflict, Goody took as her focus how certain practices aimed at social reproduction influence the patterning of adult-child relations. She analysed parenthood not in terms of biology or even local categorical idioms of relatedness, but in terms of 'the tasks involved in bearing and rearing children, and establishing them in their turn as effective adults' (Goody 1982: 7). Specifically, Goody conceptualised fosterage relationships in terms of societal norms of the requirements to rear children so that they can effectively assume adult roles in society (ibid.: 6).⁹ From this, Goody suggested a framework for the analysis of parent roles that considers several problems she found to be cross-culturally relevant tasks: bearing and begetting;

⁸ As described by Guyer and Belinga (1995: 106), 'Wealth-in-people was launched in the 1970s as a translation into non-Marxist terms of the neo-Marxist kinship or lineage mode of production'. See their article for a critique of this approach as inadequately flexible to account for the social dynamics and social history of a value they term 'wealth-in-knowledge'.

⁹ Goody defined fosterage 'in the present context' as 'the institutionalized delegation of the nurturance and/or educational elements of the parental role' (Goody 1982: 23).

endowment with civil and kinship status; nurturance; training; and sponsorship into adulthood. This framework makes clear that ‘the pattern of expectations governing interpersonal relationships is not established once and for all’ (ibid.: 6), but rather that there are different expectations according to what are judged to be the different and changing needs and objectives of childhood. Fosterage was herein accounted for in terms of the tasks it is organised to fulfill, and several reasons for voluntary fostering have been identified: to fulfil kinship obligations; provide apprenticeship or training; build alliances (i.e. patronage networks); provide domestic labour; and secure education (Isiugo-Abanihe 1985). ‘Crisis’ fostering was distinguished from such ‘voluntary’ fostering according to the basis on which the original fosterage decision was made, but understood to follow a similar ‘charter’ in regard to fosterage roles (Goody 1982: 42-43). At the same time, Goody (1982: 179) was careful to acknowledge in her review of fosterage as a ‘pan-West African phenomenon’ that that ‘no locally appropriate functional explanation will suffice’, but rather the wide range of specific reasons or functions for distributing children’s and parents’ roles are contingent on specific social, economic, and political contexts and circumstances.

The study of fosterage in terms of parenting tasks has lent itself well to the analysis of the moral and material dimensions of child care. The moral dimensions are captured in the considerations outlined above concerning how values for ‘social replacement’ structure parenting tasks. Some of these tasks clearly have material dimensions. In a summary statement of findings from her research about fosterage among a Mende population in Sierra Leone, Bledsoe (1990: 74) described these in economic terms:

Fosterage has clear advantages in many aspects of Mende life. ... parents can buffer the costs of raising the children they bear by sending them out during times of economic hardship. Fosterage also has enormous advantages for guardians. Foster children work hard, performing household and marketing chores and taking care of smaller children

In further studies, fosterage was in fact specifically measured in terms of its material dimensions. Bledsoe et al. (1988), for example, combined ethnographic research with quantitative data to measure how intra-household allocations of food and medical attention among a Mende population in Sierra Leone discriminated between biological and other, fostered children living in the same household.

The combination of studying adult-child relations in terms of cultural logics - ‘the emic definition of parenthood’ (Goody 1982: 18) – while also focusing on the practical implications of these logics; for example, in terms of the allocations of economic costs and benefits; has influenced recent studies concerning the impact of HIV and AIDS on families and households, and especially the care of orphaned children in different Sub-Saharan African societies. One impact attributed to AIDS has been the fragmentation and re-forming of households and families, and much of this has been documented according to the migration of children from household to household (Young and Ansell 2003; Ansell and van Blerk 2004; Haour-Knipe 2008). This circulation of children has been analysed in terms of wider political economies of child rearing as well as the multiple dimensions of local logics of child rearing.

As I have already pointed out, some of the more careful interpretations of present day crisis fosterage of children orphaned due to HIV/ AIDS in Africa emphasise both continuities and ruptures with previous ideas and practices of distributed child care. While it is duly acknowledged that ‘... the extended family has always been changing and adapting to broader shifts in patterns of labour migration, the emergence of the cash economy, urbanisation, famine, war and political change’ (Mathambo and Gibbs 2008: 23), it is also argued that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has intensified the challenges families and communities face in trying to care for ‘their’ children (Drimie 2002; Yamano and Jayne 2004; Hosegood et al. 2007). For instance, Madhavan’s (2004) analysis of orphaned children’s care in South Africa has compared contemporary patterns in relation to a longer experience of distributed child care, specifically in adaptation to apartheid-era patterns of mothers’ and fathers’ migratory labour away from households and children’s fosterage by grandparents and other kin. At the same time, Madhavan (ibid.) has hypothesised that the death of the middle generation due to HIV and AIDS may have changed the dynamics of ‘stretched’ families in this context, perhaps particularly in terms of economics, and she has advocated for exploring how costs and benefits of fostering children affects foster parents’ actions.

Political economy analyses certainly provide some necessary contextualisation of contemporary crisis fostering in terms of particular social histories. However, a gap still seems to exist in understanding how the moral and material dimensions of children’s care interlink and what normative adaptations may be in play and emergent from such mix. It is to this gap in understanding that I intend for my dissertation to contribute.

Bringing Morality Back to Kinship Studies

In this analysis, I conceptualise the moral economy of care and kinship as both a direct experience of bargaining responsibilities as per specific social norms of childhood and kinship, as well as a shared context of uncertain exchanges concerning what the norms of child care and kinship should be, and with careful analysis of power inequalities in bargaining relationships and available strategies. I have chosen to make my analytical interest in morality explicit because I came to understand that how people are troubled by questions of who should be responsible for who, and why, are not just experienced as per a distinctive moment of change in political economic history, but also as a prolonged experience of ‘existential angst’ (Giddens 1990: 100). Regarding the former, I find that despite kinship having been increasingly stripped of its ‘natural-ness’ by post-structural and feminist scholars (Schneider 1984; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Bourdieu 1996; Carsten 2000), and the critical analysis of kinship systems’ social meanings and processes of producing and reproducing power relations, questions of why and how kinship implicate responsibilities, and whether or how these relate to any morality of kinship, remain under-examined and under-theorised. Based on how people in my study conceptualised the material implications of care in terms of the moral dimensions of sociality - and in particular, sociality among kin - I believe explicit theorising of morality is warranted. Regarding the latter, this interest is perhaps the more important contribution of my analysis in that it seeks to account for the experience of normative flux and potential creation that the experience of an unstable moral economy manifests.

This proposition for the use of moral economy is similar to various other approaches that have been designed to conceptualise and analyse the intersection of various different forms of structure and agency, and emergent practice and meaning, in particular contexts. Bourdieu, for instance, argued that relationships between social actors cannot be reduced to calculations of economic hierarchy and exchange, but must rather take into account the many different forms of capital that are perceived and recognised as legitimate in a particular context because these produce ‘differentiation or distribution’ in the relative powers and positions of actors in the same ‘social field’ (Bourdieu 1985: 723-4). In his discussion of how a theory concerning the construction of social space should conceptually be approached, Bourdieu encouraged simultaneous consideration of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic forms of capital. Indeed, he emphasised the importance of considering symbolic capital (‘commonly

called prestige, reputation, renown, etc.’) because this is the form in which the other different forms of capital are perceived and recognised as legitimate (ibid.: 724). This approach thus encourages the analyst to account for the processes and practices by which social relations are brokered according to the competing and combining values of different interests (Morrow 1999). As Wacquant’s analysis of Bourdieu’s work describes: ‘Contention, not stasis, is the ubiquitous feature of collective life that his varied inquiries aim at making at once visible and intelligible. Struggle, not ‘reproduction,’ is the master metaphor at the core of his thought’ (Wacquant 2006: 4). It is this element of struggle that I am most interested in; the struggle to continue living in ways that make sense, in the face of multiple contingencies.

The Study of Morality in Everyday Life: An Analytical Framework

Several anthropologists have recently taken up the issue of the analytical problems associated with the study of morality – or rather, moralities (Howell 1997; Robbins 2004, 2007; Zigon 2007, 2010; Fassin 2008; Lambek 2010). Jarrett Zigon (2007, 2010), for instance, has judged that anthropologists have not effectively carved out morality as a distinctive realm of study, and he attributes this negation of morality as a particular topic to the discipline’s Durkheimian origins. Zigon’s argument traces how Durkheim conceptualised morality as socially constituted, rather than a universal and *a priori* notion that, as Kant had theorised, all rational beings could discern through the exercise of practical reasoning. Durkheim’s equation of morality with society (or culture) led to the proposition that moralities differ by social and historical contexts, and this, according to Zigon, has been the tradition followed by generations of anthropologists who have not analytically separated morality from other spheres of social and cultural life. Didier Fassin comes to a somewhat similar conclusion, in his tracing of how a principle of cultural relativism has influenced anthropologists to judge different cultures as ‘ethically incommensurable’ (Fassin 2008: 336). Meanwhile, Michael Lambek has noted that anthropologists have seemed uncomfortable studying morality (or ethics as he prefers¹⁰), due to ‘an unease with reigning theoretical paradigms whether grounded in evolutionary psychology or political economy, that begin or rest with individual or section group interest or competition’ (Lambek 2010: 6). Yet, Lambek makes the

¹⁰ Lambek (2010: 8) explains that he uses the terms ethics and morality interchangeably so as not to be associated or disassociated too firmly with particular thinkers that have used either term. However, Lambek describes he prefers ethics to morality because of its prominence in philosophy and its ‘possibly greater association with action than propriety and with ‘the good’ than ‘the right’ (ibid.: 9).

argument that the anthropological study of ‘ordinary ethics’ – that is how ethical ideas and practices manifest in everyday life – may contribute to thinking through the relation of culture to social action, without resorting to decisionism and determinism with their polarisations of agency and structure, or choice and compulsion (ibid.: 7).

Zigon has proposed a framework for an anthropological theory of morality which is in parts helpful to my study. Morality, according to Zigon’s schema, is both ‘the discourses articulated by various institutions and public outlets within a society, each of which has varying degrees of power to enforce these discourses’ as well as ‘the embodied dispositions that allow for nonconsciously acceptable ways of living in the world’ (Zigon 2010: 5). This latter interest in ‘acceptable ways of living’, Zigon clarifies, is ‘about being existentially comfortable in one’s world, which is another way of saying living sanely in one’s world’ (Zigon 2010: 5 citing Asad 2003). In regard to this latter notion, Zigon draws from Saba Mahmoud’s analysis of morality as habitus; that is, how embodied dispositions are the product ‘of human endeavor, rather than revelatory experience or natural temperament, acquired through the repeated performance of actions that entail a particular virtue or vice’ (Mahmoud 2005: 137). In this conceptualisation, Mahmoud and Zigon emphasise the conscious and intentional work necessary to acquire a particular kind of habitus, and thus they refute Bourdieu’s (1977) suggestion that habitus is primarily unconsciously acquired and socio-economically determined.

Zigon (2010: 5) explains the implications of conceptualising morality in such ways:

Because these institutions and public outlets do not usually have the power to totally implement their respective moral discourse, and embodied morality is about acceptable existential comfort, it becomes impossible to speak of morality as either obligatory or normative in a strict sense. Similarly, ethics in my terms is the process that is aimed not at the good but rather aimed at cultivating this existential comfort in and between the ranges of influence of these various moralities.

Zigon consequently focuses his proposition that an anthropology of morality should focus on the instances when there are ruptures, or ‘intrusions’ in the unreflective and unreflexive everyday experiences of morality which require people’s efforts to consciously craft their response. In this, Zigon distinctly writes of ‘moments’. Moral breakdown is located in

‘moments that shake one out of the everydayness of being moral’ (Zigon 2007: 133); moments, in Zigon’s (ibid.) view that can implicate the essence of self and sociality:

This moral breakdown not only occurs in those moments traditionally associated with such dilemmas as when a good or right action must be decided upon, but perhaps more importantly is found in those moments when one is forced to reflect on the kind of person one wants to be in her social world.

Such moments of moral breakdown issue an ‘ethical demand’ forcing a person to ‘consciously reflect upon the appropriate ethical response’ (Zigon 2010: 9). For Zigon (ibid.: 8), the ‘moment of ethics is a creative moment’:

In this ethical moment a person becomes reflective and reflexive about her moral way of being in the world and what she must do, say or think in order to appropriately return to her nonconscious moral mode of being. What must be done is a process of working on the self, where the person must perform certain practices on herself or with other persons in order to consciously be and act moral in the social world. In this way, ethics is a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself.

In my study I did not understand each and every instance of children’s orphanhood to issue a ‘moral breakdown’ to ‘acceptable ways of living’ everyday life. In some cases, certainly, such ruptures did occur in individuals’ lives, and this dissertation contains various different examples of such that might be understood as moments of moral breakdown and ethical demand. However, I also try to account for how many different challenges were experienced by people as contingent and dynamic rather than clearly appreciable as collapse.

At the same time, I find that Zigon’s framework cannot adequately account for the enduring experience of uncertainty that seemed a collective condition of life in my study’s context. In addition to moments of breakdown and demand in individual lives, I also found there was a collective, and therefore shared, sense and experience that morality was at risk. The continuing rise in the numbers of adults infected and dying from HIV and AIDS in recent years, combined with enduring poverty, has accentuated the problematisation of who is responsible to care for whom, and thus has been experienced as an ongoing moral dilemma,

with little resolution to provide the return to ‘existential comfort’ that Zigon describes. As such, while I focus much of my attention on how the problematisation of particular relationships and expectations occurred in discrete moments among specific individuals in specific circumstances, I also use these to reflect on how they became enfolded into a collective effort of negotiating the legitimate terms of a moral economy of care, by which all – or at least the necessary some – might be expected to abide.

This concern returns me to Vigh’s argument that in some contexts ‘crisis is endemic rather than episodic and cannot be delineated as an aberrant moment of chaos or a period of decisive change’ (Vigh 2008: 5). As a result, Vigh has suggested that it may be appropriate in some cases to take the analytical perspective of ‘crisis as context’, and in this conceptualise crisis not as a temporal rupture, but as a condition of experiencing life as fragmented and unstable. According to Vigh’s theory (drawing on Taussig 1992), despite the normalisation of crisis, tentative ordering of disorder is practiced in people’s efforts to gain some sense of coherence or security. Vigh (2006, 2008) describes how in uncertain and changing social terrains, actors engage in careful and constant vigilance of the efficacy of their own interpretations of the social terrain so as to navigate their next choices.

My interest in studying how people in Kanyathi were trying to substantiate particular ideals of kinship and care, and more broadly sociality and morality, in the immediate practicalities of their lives – and specifically the imperatives to care for increasing numbers of orphaned children - was abetted by conceptualising these complex and contingent processes in terms of the concept of ‘situated pragmatism’ (Whyte 1997). Susan Reynolds Whyte (1997, 2002) has theorised ‘situated pragmatism’ as a means for studying how people struggle to respond practically and ideologically to changing and uncertain circumstances. This idea draws from John Dewey’s (1929) theory that the world is fundamentally experienced as ‘precarious and perilous’ and people act to confront this uncertainty. Dewey argued that analysts must recognise the difference between two ways of confronting the uncertainty of experience: as a spectator or as a participator; or in terms of being and doing. As Whyte (1997: 19) summarises Dewey’s argument:

The ‘spectator theory of knowledge’, concerned with being, envisions an enduring, timeless, transcendent reality of certainty beyond the contingencies of ordinary experience. It re-cognizes order, examining reality in terms of given antecedent truths. It sees intellectual and spiritual

concerns as separate from and superior to practical ones of health, wealth, and the control of the conditions of life. In contrast, practice, doing, is concerned with the apparent, the particular, the empirical, the changing, perishable, contingent and chancy. Practice looks to the consequences of commitment and action.

Dewey's theory of pragmatism is clearly practice-based. For the ethnographer, Whyte advises, adopting this pragmatic approach 'requires that we see people as actors trying to alleviate suffering rather than as spectators applying cultural, ritual, or religious truths' (Whyte 1997: 20). Central to Dewey's and Whyte's contemplation of people's pragmatism is recognition of the 'embeddedness' of actors. Whyte elaborates that an attempt to understand the meanings of people's actions requires consideration of the whole of social experience, which includes sense perceptions, moral values, scientific ideas, and collective goals, rather than merely an 'instrumental theory of truth' (Whyte 1997: 3 citing Jackson 1989: 14).

Whyte's ethnography of the ways in which people in a Nyole community in eastern Uganda responded to uncertainty and misfortune describes how it was 'a search for security rather than a quest for certainty' which underpinned people's actions (Whyte 1997: 3). As ontology, this search for security instead of certainty engendered a particular kind of pragmatism; an emphatically active response, but one which duly acknowledged the likelihood of failure in alleviating uncertainty and misfortune. In her monograph *Questioning Misfortune*, Whyte noted that while the Nyole were willing to try various different approaches to alleviate their suffering, they did so in a conditional way. She reflected on how the 'qualities of purpose, possibility and hope are central in Nyole dealings with misfortune' (ibid.: 24).

Whyte's concept of 'situated pragmatism' arises from her judgment that appreciation of people's pragmatic tendencies must be paired with cultural analysis. She argues that it is necessary to contextualise people's efforts in 'the symptomatic and explanatory idioms that actors put into practice' (Whyte 1997: 4). This is because pragmatism is a response to symptoms and over-riding explanations (i.e. theories) of affliction, and symptoms and explanations are culturally learned. Pragmatism responds to empirical conditions as well as more general theories that transcend what can be tangibly apprehended, but according to the specific kinds of empiricism and theories that are considered possible in the context. As such, Whyte (2002: 175) does not conceptualise pragmatism as entirely provisional and revisable,

but instead intrinsically influenced by what actors understand to be at stake for them in a particular situation.

Finally, Veena Das' (2007) theory of how events often serve as critical interventions – akin to the 'interruptions' that Zigon conceptualises – is also pertinent to my study because I found that events, and particularly deaths, burials, and purposeful family meetings, were often essential to people's actions to form and practice particular norms of kin solidarity. At the same time, Das' theorises that it is in the 'descent in to the ordinary' of everyday life that the gap is bridged between a norm and its actualisation. Das conceptualises that 'the work of repair' to adjust ideal with reality occurs through the medium of everyday interactions, and moreover 'new norms emerge in experiments with life' (Das 2007: 63). This iterative and reflexive approach to the study of critical events and everyday life grafts well with my experience of learning through sustained participant observation of how people tried to establish and practice, or circumvent, expectations regarding who was responsible to whom and for what. Critical events, including a range of public types of performance, featured as conspicuous instances for articulation and legitimisation of the terms of debate. Yet despite this plotting, everyday life was not a straightforward matter of translating plans into practice. Instead, people were required to navigate their own courses from the markers set down in critical events through the immediacies of everyday relationships.

In combining these ideas of moral breakdown, ethical demand, situated pragmatism, and the critical role of events and the everyday work of repair, I have forged an analytical framework that focuses on people's everyday actions to ideologically and practically respond to circumstances and contingencies that are experienced as a context of uncertainty. This framework makes it possible to discern both patterns and disjunctures between particular ideas and practices, and therefore account for how people in western Kenya have experienced wide-scale orphaning as a specific problem specific to their social history.

Clearly, it has been well argued by other theorists that people's everyday practices are important sites for the analysis of how the struggles for determining the legitimacy of particular ideas play out (Bourdieu 1977; de Certeau 1980; Whyte 1997; Asad 2003; Das 2007; Zigon 2010). In my study of how struggles played out in Kanyathi over who should be responsible for providing care to orphaned children – and how - I found this approach to be valid and fruitful. Moreover, I found a high degree of conscientious and sceptical

engagement with this struggle. As such, much of my analysis, including my discussions of the implications of living in uncertainty, take account of people's reflective discourses on why particular actions are legitimate or not. I suggest that such reflexive efforts, of which some were commonly shared publicly and others only occasionally and privately, underscore how practice is intrinsic to ideology.

Organisation of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into eight chapters. This chapter has outlined my justification and approach to exploring the research topic, and reviewed the existing bodies of literature from which this justification and approach are based. The ideas raised in the latter half of this chapter are revisited in the analysis that develops through the following chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces my study in terms of both how I came to the people and place of Kanyathi around which this dissertation centres, as well as how people living there accounted for the specific historiographies of change and uncertainty with which they perceived their lives entwined.

The third chapter sets out to present the specific conceptual framework for moral questions and conversations that are implicated in people's ideas and practices of relating well with others in Kanyathi. It reviews what I learned through my study to appreciate as the moral landscape within which everyday sociality, and specifically caring relations, are practiced and made meaningful.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explore the specific implications people held to be at stake in deliberations over who should be responsible for the care of orphaned children. Both chapters therefore focus on how families have constituted themselves, both practically and ideologically in such specific circumstances. Chapter 4 reviews people's individual and collective experiences of reckoning with the exigent material and moral dimensions of bringing another child into a family and home, and how this reckoning is structured by two normative registers: the first concerns what is considered the appropriate (or sufficient) content of childhood; and the second concerns who might be considered appropriate carers of orphaned children. I analyse these findings in terms of how they emphasise and pressurise a particular moral economy underpinning kinship. Chapter 5 continues this survey of how

family members think about and practice kin relationships and reciprocities. However, in this chapter I shift the analysis to how some families have tried to actualise a more predictable practical and normative experience of kin-based care, in place of the uncertain and often improvisational experiences of the moral economy of kin-based care that I describe in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 specifically concentrates on how people in Kanyathi have considered sitting together and standing for one another as the ideal ways for families to address specific challenges to their integrity. I focus on how the performative combination of sitting and standing are practically and symbolically critical to the actualisation, and perseverance, of families that care for one another.

In Chapter 6 I aim to examine in far more intricate detail how family relations are practiced and understood through the case study of one particular family and their everyday routines and occasional disputes. This case study highlights how genealogy is not only highly contingent upon the pragmatics of securing livelihoods and the possibilities of memory, but can also be highly contingent for these same matters. Through this close study I focus on different individuals' perspectives, and in so doing discern different degrees of choice and agency in determining relationships and legitimising relatedness.

The seventh and final empirical chapter extends the analysis out of the relatively restricted domain of families and households to consider how care for children was conceptualised and practiced among non-kin community members. Specifically, I address how different community members perceived right and wrong, good and bad, and agreement and transgression in the treatment of children that were not of their own families, as well as how different people chose to act or not on their perceptions.

I conclude the dissertation in Chapter 8 with a discussion that reviews the key arguments and contributions of this dissertation. Specifically, I review what this dissertation contributes to understanding uncertainty as a condition of life, how a shared perspective of uncertainty has spurred a concern with morality in the study context, and how this concern with morality affected what was deemed at stake in people's lives.

Chapter 2 Background to a Study in ‘Kanyathi’

Introduction

Upon arriving in Nyanza Province in September 2007, I initially settled in the provincial capital city of Kisumu and explored the city and its environs.¹¹ I had chosen to start this study in Kisumu because it seemed a hub of activities concerned with orphaned children. Through internet searches before arriving, I had compiled a list of dozens of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including many faith-based organisations (FBOs), that claimed to be focused on helping orphans in the region. I decided to investigate how different organisations defined the problem(s) associated with orphanhood as well as appropriate responses. In the first few weeks, I visited nine so-called ‘children’s homes’ – that is, institutions where children were accommodated (these days they are rarely called ‘orphanages’ in Kisumu; the Kenyan government’s term is ‘charitable children’s institutions’) – where I interviewed the directors and staff of those institutions, and did some limited participant observation in several of the homes. Over the next couple of years, I became familiar with several other children’s homes in the area, as well as staff working for the Kenyan government’s Children’s Department and the City of Kisumu’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs.¹²

As part of this initial scoping, I started regularly visiting the Mama Ngina Children’s Home. Despite its long existence in Kisumu, dating back to establishment by the local chapter of the Lions Club in the 1950s, and its transfer to the municipal council for the City of Kisumu after Kenya’s independence in 1963, Mama Ngina Children’s Home¹³ is not the most well-known or noticeable children’s home in the city. Its compound could easily be walked right past without recognising it as a home for approximately fifty children, although in 2009 a sign

¹¹ Changing boundaries make it difficult to accurately define Kisumu’s population of residents. The District of Kisumu, which includes peripheral settlements over 919 km² (including the study village of Kanyathi), included just over 504,000 people in 1999 (CBS 1999), and the population increased to nearly 970,000 people in 2009 (KNBS 2009a). The actual city’s population was estimated to be approximately 345,000 people in 1999 (UN Habitat 2008: 6), and more recent figures have not yet been published following a 2009 national census.

¹² An officer at the district headquarters of the Government of Kenya’s Children’s Department in Kisumu told me in 2008 that there were only 12 children’s homes registered in the area, with 30 in the process of registration. Yet, an officer working for the Municipality of Kisumu’s Department of Children and Youth Affairs had compiled a list of 54 children’s homes operating in the Kisumu area in 2008.

¹³ Mama Ngina was the name used by the public to refer to the wife of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of independent Kenya. There are several Mama Ngina Children’s Homes in different Kenyan cities.

was erected on the flimsy, often ajar, wire gate, during the construction of a new two-story building, funded by UN Habitat as part of their 'slum upgrading' initiatives in Kisumu (UN Habitat 2008: 19).

In October 2007, when I first started spending time at Mama Ngina Children's Home, there were 52 children between the ages of four months and 17 years living there. The facilities were simple: an L-shaped concrete building with an office at one end, two bathing rooms at the other and six bedrooms in between bent around a dirt courtyard that was framed by the manager's concrete house, the tower container for the collection of rainwater, and a small metal shack that served as a cookhouse with its wood fire and two small charcoal-burning stoves (*jikos*). Most of the children attended a government primary school just a five minute walk away and there were two 'mamas' on staff who came to the home during the days to watch over the approximately 22 children not yet old enough to attend school. The children who lived there, and who knew what life was like back at their relatives' homes, described life in the children's home as easier: it was a lot more comfortable in terms of being able to sleep in one's own bed under one's own blanket; to collect water from the container's faucet just steps away from the bathing room; to have regular meals; and not to be assigned so many chores as to have to miss school or not do one's homework. The children did not, however, consistently describe the children's home as their preferred place of living. Several children described how the ease of even the facilities was compromised by the institutional relationship between them and the management, a kind of problem they contrasted with the more intimate nature of sharing a family home. As 15 year old Sarah¹⁴ explained after I asked her how she felt about returning to stay with her maternal aunt and uncle and cousins for the December school holiday: 'I feel happy about it because I feel free in anything I do there. For example, I might break a cup, but there nobody will force me to pay. But here, everything is belonging to the government. Nobody will pay and we will remain without on'.

In November 2007, one month after I had started spending time at the children's home, the children in primary school were all preparing for their year-end examinations and to rejoin their relatives for the five weeks of school holiday. Several children's homes in Kisumu send the resident children to stay with their extended families during the three month-long school breaks in the Kenyan academic year (in December, April, and August). The principal reason

¹⁴ All individuals' names in this dissertation are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated. I committed to follow this practice in my process of gaining informed consent from research participants.

given for this practice is to encourage continued affiliation between the children and their families so that there is a foundation for children to be 're-integrated' with their families once an institution decides to finish its period of care. This is particularly important for boys, several children's homes' managers stressed, so that they do not lose their claims to inheriting family land. Secondary reasons that several managers identified are cost savings by their institutions, and the need to give their staff holidays, as well as to carry out refurbishments of their facilities. However, the younger children (e.g. under the age of five) stay at Mama Ngina Children's Home throughout the holidays because they are deemed too burdensome for their relatives to care for, even temporarily. And those few children whose relatives' whereabouts are not known always stay at the children's home. Those children are universally pitied by the other children because going 'home' is regarded as a treat for many: it is a chance to spend some time in a 'freer' environment with security in the knowledge that one will return after a month to the children's home with its regular routine of schooling and relatively more abundant food and fewer chores than children tend to find at their relatives' homes.

The end of November in 2007 marked an even more significant transition for seven of the children at the Mama Ngina Children's Home because they were moving back home to their families for good. This was due to a rule the municipal council had recently passed that the institution would only provide accommodation and educational support for a child until she or he completed primary school or reached the age of eighteen, whichever occurred first. In the graduating cohort for 2007 were David, Sarah, Auma, Achieng', Sylvia, Violet, and Robert. Strangely, I thought, David, Sarah, Auma, and Violet, as well as two younger children in the institution, were all from the same village on the outskirts of Kisumu. The coincidence made me wonder what it could be about that village that rendered the families particularly vulnerable to warrant this seemingly prominent practice of institutionalising their orphaned children. This question was a point in favour of electing to try to follow the experiences of these particular children. In the end, David, Auma, and Sarah remained at the heart of this study: I saw them very regularly (until Sarah was sent away to a boarding school by her aunt and uncle); they introduced me to their families and neighbours and schoolmates, and often helped translate in my conversations with other children that they knew; and I ended up living with David's family in their homestead.

As it happened, David and I experienced integration with his family simultaneously. After several small conversations at Mama Ngina Children's Home, David invited me to accompany him on his planned trip in late November 2007 to his paternal uncle's home in the village several kilometres from the city. The purpose of his trip was to remind his uncle and the rest of his family at the uncle's homestead that after his final primary school examinations David would be moving back to live among them. And so one Sunday David and I walked out of the gate from the children's home through the crowded streets of Kisumu to the bus station where we located a *matatu* (shared taxi van) that could drop us off at the correct market town next to the highway, I paid our fares of Ksh30 each (GBP 0.22), we rode the twenty minutes to where the market town could be seen from the highway, disembarked, and then walked for thirty minutes up a dirt road and along footpaths that twisted between homesteads and maize fields until we reached the homestead of David's paternal uncle and aunt in the village that I refer to in this study as Kanyathi.

As we walked toward the homestead, David could not tell me all that much about his family's history, apart from a few memories of his early childhood. He had been sent to live at Mama Ngina Children's Home when he was seven years old, and had remained there for the ten following years, with visits to his family during school holidays. But David was a quick learner, and soon enough we were piecing together his family's stories to make our similar, but separate, senses of these.

Research Practices

Following that first visit, I was invited to return to visit David's family and I began to stay for several nights at a time quite regularly from December 2007. My visits were interrupted from January until March 2008 due to political insecurity in the area following Kenya's disputed national elections, and I also left Kenya for a few weeks in May 2008 and August 2008 to do some paid work and to attend my brother's wedding in Canada. Apart from those absences, I spent approximately five nights each week up in Kanyathi and two nights in Kisumu. By September 2008, David and I and the rest of his family had hatched a plan that I would pay for the construction of a small house in their homestead where I could stay while in Kanyathi, but which would officially and ever after be the bachelor house (*simba*) of the eldest son of David's uncle (see Fig. 2.1). In Chapter 5 I discuss how the construction of that house drew

out many new insights for me and David and other members of the homestead. Living in that house in the homestead of David's family from September 2008 until July 2009 was central to my ethnographic research.

Fig. 2.1: Author's house
(on right)
(Author's photograph).



Also integral to this study was the assistance from June 2008 of Truphena Akinyi (Tufi) who began to regularly travel up from her home in Kisumu to spend between four and six hours each day for four days each week in Kanyathi with me. While I learned to converse competently in Dholuo on most common subjects touched on in this research, Tufi's simultaneous (Dholuo-English) translation in many of the interviews and group discussions allowed me to keep better pace with the people speaking as well as capture their exact phrasing. We also audio-recorded some interviews (especially life histories) and later transcribed these from Dholuo to English together which was an extremely useful method of my language learning. Tufi helped me to understand the different meanings in what people said and did, and also helped the people we encountered better understand me and my project. Much of this latter effort involved Tufi's recognition of when it was necessary to try to manage expectations of the outcomes of this research. During many of our initial encounters with individuals in the village we had to explain how I was not with an NGO or a religious mission, and merely a student, who had no plans to start my own 'project' (such as a children's home) in the area. Over time, as I became a more familiar presence in daily life, these explanations seemed to become increasingly accepted.

After spending the first several months just with David's family members and their nearest neighbours, I gradually stretched this ethnography out to include different people living in the village of Kanyathi. Some of these extensions were purposefully organised through asking different people, like David's aunt and uncle and sister, to introduce me to some of their clan members or friends, and then asking those people to introduce me to others that they were involved in through savings and loans groups or other initiatives. After initial introductions and explanations of the research, Tufi and I gained many individuals' consent to conduct private interviews with them. In explaining the research, I did not usually explicitly mention my interest in 'orphans' (*nyithindo makiya*, sing. *nyathi makich*), but rather I explained that I was interested in how life was in this village, and how life today was different from how it had been in the past, especially in terms of children's lives. My intention was not to bias people's responses, and also not to potentially exacerbate the discrimination of children's orphaned status (Cluver and Operario 2009).

My ethical concerns about how investigating experiences of orphanhood might negatively affect the people from whom I hoped to learn, as well as people's voluntary participation in my research project, circumscribed how I proceeded with this research. I rarely asked direct questions of children or adults, especially concerning how certain losses had made them feel. Instead, I tried to ask very open-ended questions that would allow a person to choose how he or she wanted to tell a story; that is, what a person wanted to include and what he or she preferred to exclude. As my familiarity with certain individuals developed over time and frequency of interactions, I sometimes ventured to ask more probing, personal questions, especially if I felt that the person had hinted at something they might be willing to speak more about. For example, when Marion described to me that her husband had taken a second wife without first asking her permission, and that the new wife barely acknowledged Marion in their shared homestead, I felt I had her tacit permission to make inquiries as to whether their relationship had improved during my occasional visits over the year. Marion's forthcoming responses to my inquiries seemed to further validate that I was welcome to discuss these matters with her.

Most of my interviews, especially with girls and boys and women, quickly delved into very personal and intimate matters related to, for example, people's sorrows, fears, aspirations, and close relationships. As a result, I felt that in each case I was drawn into a kind of personal relationship, with the obligation to listen empathetically during our conversations, and to

continue practicing a sort of friendship throughout my time living in Kanyathi – and in several cases, beyond. In some cases, I think I was made privy to certain personal disclosures because the speakers knew I was a visitor and therefore would take their information with me, rather than retain it in a continuing social relationship in their village which might have been perceived as more threatening. And yet at the same time, I judge that many of the clearest insights from this study were derived from my longest and most familiar relationships, such as I developed with David and his sister and his aunt, for example.

It was in the daily practices of sharing a home and all of the relationships and resources associated with that home that the distinctions between my activities of observation and participation – and hence my role as an outsider and an insider - became the most blurred for me and for the other people involved. It was in this context that I felt most privileged and simultaneously most put upon in regard to my access to other people's lives. Being invited to build a house in the family's homestead was a privilege that changed the possibilities of my research so that I could observe and participate much more closely and continuously. Yet this also drew me into the complex web of tactics played out in everyday interactions between family members and less directly between these people and their extended relatives and neighbours. In taking up a continuous role in that family, I gained rights, but I surely also gained responsibilities, and in both implications I felt I had to constantly monitor and negotiate what to do. I learned to be aware of hostilities and allegiances that existed between different family members so that I could factor these into balancing my own reputation and relationships. I was able to influence events through my own subtle and not so subtle tactics and I had to learn to be careful with this too, given that I wanted to stay for a long time and to try to stay as universally accessible as I could.

While potentially limiting my access to some sorts of questions and answers, I found that my deliberately reserved approach to 'data collection' not only let me feel more comfortable about my ethical conduct as a researcher, but also yielded insights that might not have surfaced if I had doggedly mined for them. For example, I did not pursue a line of questioning about how fair children thought their carers were to them. However, as certain children became more familiar with me and my efforts to listen to what they said with respectful consideration, they volunteered information to me unasked. For instance, 13 year

old Beryl dropped by my house one day to do some picture drawing,¹⁵ and said to me without any prompt of a question, ‘My grandmother took my blanket and gave it to her son’. When I asked her what she was telling me, she said the same thing again and then elaborated: ‘We go to town and see those people and they give things to me and then my grandmother takes them from me and gives them to her son’. I asked her what people these were in town that had given her things, and she told me the name of an NGO that manages the local sponsorship arm of the Christian Children’s Fund. Beryl then described how she thought that her grandmother only wanted to have her in her house because then she could gain donated goods, like blankets and some food and occasionally some money, that Beryl’s grandmother could then give to her own son who was in a boarding secondary school.

Beryl’s surprise revelation to me spurred my interest in child sponsorship programmes in Kanyathi, which became a branch of this research that in turn revealed that approximately 200 children in the larger local area were ‘sponsored’ by two different international organisations. Beryl’s volunteering of this information also made me more attuned to how children might frame their sense of belonging and self-esteem in terms of adults’ demonstrated responsibility for them in terms of the equal distribution of material goods. While there are many other research projects trying to understand how orphaned children might feel discriminated against in households shared with their carers’ biological children, I think that it can be very difficult to discern the meanings of different potential forms of discrimination. Family members, including children, do not always, or easily, disclose such intimate accounts of their relationships. Moreover, what certain kinds of discrimination mean to people may not be readily apparent. It seems to me that sometimes not asking people about what is bothering them might not only be a cautious approach in terms of preventing the cause of distress, but it might also be conducive to gaining enhanced insight from paying special attention to the things that people *choose* to share.

Over time, and through my many different acquaintances, I came to be invited to attend many occasional events, like family burials, as well as regular events, like monthly clan meetings. To further develop the study I also spent time at particular venues in Kanyathi like the assistant chief’s office, the primary school, and Sunday church services. The assistant chief

¹⁵ I had invited several different neighbouring girls to my house on a few occasions to use coloured pens and paper to draw whatever they wished, and over the next several weeks several girls continued to visit me individually or in small groups to draw or just have a cup of juice, and sometimes talk.

let Tufi and I review his records, as well as sit in some of his meetings, including the arbitration of a few local disputes. For several months in 2008 I volunteered to conduct after-school English composition tutorials for the upper primary pupils who would be scored on this subject in their national examinations, and through this activity I was able to learn from how students chose to answer my assigned essay questions, and to become more familiar with different children in the village.¹⁶ I also occasionally shadowed community outreach workers from the NGOs that had child sponsorship programmes in Kanyathi, and regularly checked in with members of the local area's land council on local development concerns.

Through these experiences I grew to appreciate how many different forces – political, economic, demographic, ecological, social, and cultural - had variously woven together and frayed apart to affect people's lives in Kanyathi. The stories that people recounted to me of their shared and individual experiences, as well as the changes that I gradually learned how to witness and interpret for myself, indicated particularly localised historiographies of change. These historiographies are telling of the fragmentation of experience that has long structured the making and remaking of everyday life, as well as how contemporary experiences have emerged from the distillations of past experiences. In the remaining half of this chapter, I recount some of the historiographies that I learned from different sources, and discuss the salience of these for the sense of uncertainty and struggle that pervaded daily life.

Historiographies of Change

In what follows I take several steps back from my central research questions to describe in turn three historiographical perspectives that provide different insights for how life has been lived and interpreted in both the wider study context of Nyanza Province and the more precise study context of Kanyathi. I transition this analysis from 'experience-far' to 'experience-near' perspectives (Geertz 1986: 57), with the purpose of acknowledging how different ways of knowing have influenced contemporary understandings of life in this context as changed and uncertain.

¹⁶ I was aware that the risk of assuming a teacher role could have changed how children related to me, but for the most part I found that this role made most children more confident to engage with me when we encountered each other outside of school. My style of instruction was not very strict.

The first historiography I review is a relatively intellectualist perspective which is widely available about 'Luoland' in published form both within and outside of Nyanza Province and Kenya. This is a perspective that has been constructed through a dynamic combination of ethnic nationalism and specialised scholarship, often in tension with representations of intra-Kenyan ethnic and cultural differences. I describe how this perspective - or rather set of perspectives – has constructed a strong idea of the Luo and their homeland of Nyanza Province as distinct within Kenya's social history. This perspective grafts with empirical findings of difference between the Luo experience in Nyanza and other Kenyan experiences in terms of social organisation, political orientation, economic development, as well as demographic and health trends such as fertility and HIV prevalence. While this perspective has decidedly scholarly tendencies, it has been significant in influencing popular notions of the constitution of Luo culture, society, and morality.

The second historiography is described in terms of the local political economy with attention to how it has changed over time and thereby affected the local context within which people's lives are situated and interpreted. I have used the physical landscape of the study village of Kanyathi with its inscriptions of different histories in the forms of land divisions, buildings, and enterprises to describe how expectations of life have changed over time.

Lastly, I present personal life history narratives of different people reflecting on how their lives have changed, and why, in Kanyathi. I include life histories of both the older generation (e.g. born before the 1950s) and the younger generation (e.g. born after the late 1980s) to highlight the shared and divergent explanations and expectations.

A dominant theme in all three types of historiographies of life in the study context is change. In the intellectualist perspective, the Luo have commonly been portrayed as a paradigmatic example of a traditional culture struggling to adapt to modernity. The extended family has been used as a critical indicator of this struggle with the suggestion that the Luo tradition of extended family care has experienced crisis. My analysis of the political economy landscape also emphasises how life has changed in the local context according to forces often beyond the control of local people, such as national political contests and global economic trends. And in the last set of narratives, I describe how different individuals recount how their own lives have changed, and why, as well as what these changes have meant to them, especially in terms of how they understand they should organise their lives. As two types of local

perceptions, these last two historiographic analyses draw attention to how people's expectations of modernity - and specifically industrialisation, democratic governance, and formal education – have been raised and disappointed over the last several decades. They illuminate a learned scepticism among people in Kanyathi concerning the security of their lives, yet also a common recognition of the imperative to try, or as more commonly stated in Kanyathi, 'to struggle'.

An Expert Lens on 'Luoland'

Nyanza Province is often understood as different from the rest of Kenya. In large part, this is attributed to the region's ethnic homogeneity: an estimated 95 percent of the province's inhabitants are identified in demographic studies as Luo (Adazu et al. 2008: 4). Indeed, Nyanza is often referred to as 'Luoland' in Kenyan national public discourse as well as in international academic discourse (Evans-Pritchard 1950: 132; Whisson and Lonsdale 1975: 52; Southall 1979: 204; Francis 2000: 125; Atieno-Odhiambo 2000a: 247; Shipton 2007: 41). Nyanza's ethnoregional homogeneity has been associated in many different kinds of analysis with political, economic, social, cultural, demographic, and health differences – including HIV prevalence rates - from other Kenyan populations.¹⁷ Such a distinctive profile has been emphasised through ongoing exchanges between public discourses and academic analyses in Kenya.

Indeed, a strong historiography has developed to account for the emergence and predicament of Luo cultural distinctiveness in Kenya. In this, 'the Luo' seem to have been produced (and reproduced) as a paradigmatic case study within the broader frame of Africanist scholarship. For example, 'the Luo', conceptualised as a cultural entity, have been used to inform various histories and theories of subjugation, conversion, hybridisation, and resistance to Christianity, colonialism, capitalism, urbanisation, nationalism, development, science, and medicine, to list

¹⁷ Cultural distinctiveness, for example, has figured prominently in many different explanations for the high rates of HIV infection among the Luo. These include: the Luo cultural custom of not circumcising men since circumcision has been linked to reduced risk of HIV infection (Baily et al. 2002; Mills and Siegfried 2006); high rates of polygamy (Volk and Koopman 2001; KNBS 2007); Luo cultural models of sexual behaviour that reject the use of condoms (Cotts Watkins 2000); the practice of *ter*, a culturally sanctioned re-marriage which is sometimes translated as 'widow inheritance' and 'widow cleansing' through sexual intercourse (Ambasa-Shisanya 2007; Ayikukwei et al. 2009; Prince 2009); as well as the misdiagnosis of HIV and AIDS among the Luo as *chira*, 'a culturally explicit concept' (Parkin 1978: 150) that attributes a person's 'wasting disease' to the faults of an individual's transgressions from normative Luo behaviour (Ayikukwei et al. 2008).

just some predominant themes. As a rather unique combination of specialised scholarship, populism, and a concern with the political and moral economy of ethnic nationalism in Kenya, this polyphonic and iterative trajectory of research has produced a highly self-referential body of knowledge through which the Luo are known by others, as well as by themselves.

Luo History in the Making

‘Strictly speaking,’ historian Bethwell Ogot (2009: 485) has written,

the history of the Kenyan Luo begins only with their settlement in Nyanza, between 1490 and 1517, because prior to that there was no single nationality called ‘Jo-Luo’ [‘Luo people’]. But Luo historical traditions offer us narratives which take us back to the very beginning of the world. We are informed that all Luo are descended from a common eponym – a claim which has caused the false belief that all Luo are ‘Jo-Ramogi’ (that is, ‘Descendents of Ramogi’).

Elaborate genealogies have been produced to prove the common origin of the Luo.

Drawing from archaeologists’ findings and hypotheses, a history of settlement of Luo-speaking people in present-day western Kenya has been strongly theorised. Intriguingly, the deduced history of Luo migration and settlement weaves in several potentially ethnographic insights. Luo historians have detailed an account of how Luo ethnic consciousness developed over 2000 years. In this, the years between 500 and 1500 C.E. are categorised as the period of *Bantunization* during which western Kenya became an ethnically complex region through interactions between moving populations fighting, trading, and intermarrying (Ochieng’ 1969, 1976; Ogot 2009). According to this historical frame, *Luonization* of the region emerged as the dominant social force from 1500. Ogot (2009: 485) describes *Luonization* as an experience during which the interaction of Luo-speaking groups with other groups stimulated the emergence of ethnicity as ‘the feeling of people as a social community with definite identities’ and he reflects that ‘the continuity of a people as a political and social unit increasingly came to depend less on its ‘purity’ or single origin, but quite the opposite, on its ability to accommodate and assimilate diverse population elements’. According to Ogot’s theory, ‘The period also marks the beginning of oral traditions, designed to explain the so-called ‘origins’ or ‘genesis’ of the different western Kenya peoples: the Luyia, Luo, Gusii, Kipsigis, Kuria, Abasuba, and Nandi’ (ibid.). The nearly fifty year period of increasingly sedentary settlement of western Kenya before the incursion of colonial administration, that is

from 1850 until 1895, has in turn been labelled the ‘The Heroic Age of Luo History’, referenced in Dholuo as ‘*mako piny*’ (which implicates making the homeland through defining, occupying, and defending one’s living space). According to Ogot’s historicity, closely related to the Luo people’s definition of geographical boundaries against neighbouring non-Luo groups during this ‘heroic age’ was the work of ‘defining the extent of the Luo cultural world, or the Luo moral community, which sometimes went beyond the geographical boundary. This, in addition involved defining a Luo, his traditions and customs’ (Ogot 2009: 592).

This historical analysis of the Luo as a social and political unit is the fruit of much labour among Luo scholars, working in the first decades of post-independence Kenya. The identities of the authors are noteworthy, as they themselves have explained their project as ‘corrective’ in both empirical and political terms. Ogot, for example, born in central Nyanza Province in 1929 and educated at western Kenya’s first school, Maseno Secondary School,¹⁸ has certainly become one of the most prolific and committed of historians of the Luo. He has described how he and his colleagues and their supervised students at the University of Nairobi, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, appropriated the task of correcting historical and anthropological accounts of the Luo because they judged these had been wrongly influenced by ‘concepts derived from western thought’ and negligent of the diversity of African voices (Ogot 2009: 747). As with other African communities’ experiences, Ogot and colleagues perceived that one of the influences of colonial administration and missionary projects - as well as associated anthropological studies - in the early twentieth century was the crowding out of the plurality of Luo individual and collective histories as narrated orally among Luo family, clan, and neighbours’ gatherings by written accounts which came to be granted greater legitimacy (Ogot 2001). In deliberate response, post-colonial Kenyan historians sought to re-legitimise the complexity of Luo social history.

Somewhat uniquely, however, what students of Luo history and historiography encounter is not a reification of Luo culture and society in written form as developed by foreign professional (or amateur) anthropologists in the first decades of the twentieth century. While

¹⁸ Maseno School was established in 1906 as a school for the sons of African chiefs by missionaries of the Church Missionary Society. Many of the men who would go on to be Nyanza Province’s academic and political leaders during the twentieth century attended and later taught at the school. Indeed, the school has been described by one Luo scholar as ‘the crucible through which Luo neophytes had been forged into would-be elites in the previous half-century’ (Atieno-Odhiambo 2000b: 9).

foreign colonial administrators and missionaries produced descriptions of some specific aspects of Luo history and society (e.g. Hobley 1902, 1903; Owen, 1934; Crazzolaro 1937), an integrated study of the social and cultural life of the Luo was not published by foreigners until after the Second World War. Up until that time, foreign researchers also offered only partial studies of different aspects of Luo social history and cultural organisation (Schapera 1949; Evans-Pritchard 1950). This is different from the early accounts that claimed to provide comprehensive accounts of other groups in present day Kenya, such as the Akamba (Lindblom 1920), the Kipsigis (Peristiany 1939), and the Kikuyu (Kenyatta 1938).

Instead, it was the first generation of missionary-educated Luo graduates that authored accounts of Luo customs, traditions, and histories, often in Dholuo. These authors framed their projects in terms of cultural salvation; they sought to produce for Luo posterity comprehensive accounts of Luo genealogies, ‘traditional’ beliefs, and ways of life. In 1936, Zablon Okala and Michael Were co-authored *Weche Moko Mag Luo (Luo Traditions, Customs and Folklore)* which was published by the Church Missionary Society. In 1938, Paul Mboya authored *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi (Luo Customs and Traditions)*, a book of approximately 60,000 words, with the prefacing statement:

I have written this book as a collection of our beliefs, practices, customs and laws so that current and future generations will have access to them and may not lose them. Our elders had good ethics and moral codes, which helped them to guide their communities. ... No nation can prosper by adopting foreign cultures and ignoring its own customs and practices.

(Mboya 1938: vii as translated in Achieng’ 2001)

In 1940, Maseno Secondary School students worked together to produce *Thuond Luo (Luo Heroes)*. And during the 1940s and 1950s, Luo scholar Shadrack Malo pursued his own project of collecting and publishing the historical traditions of each clan of Central Nyanza. It is well documented that Malo produced these histories by calling together gatherings of chiefs and elders of one clan, or *piny*, so that he could record their recollections about their history which he then wrote and published as individual pamphlets in Dholuo (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989; Ogot 2009). Malo later collated the series into one book entitled *Dhoudi mag Central Nyanza (Clans of Central Nyanza)* which was published in 1953.

These works have been monumentally influential to Luo historiography as well as the debates about what it means to be a 'Luo' that have persisted from when they were published through to the present day (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, 1992; Shipton 2007: 58-59; Geissler and Prince 2010: 90-94). Their authority stems from their claims to authenticity as well as comprehensiveness. As 'first editions' of written text about the Luo, ostensibly transcribed from the words of elders, they are held to represent the linking of past to present; their content of clan genealogies, riddles, proverbs, and origin stories, are the codes of native Luo-ness. Reviewed separately or together, Ogot (2009: 745-6) judges that these works:

... represented the first major movement from orality to literacy in the process of constructing Luo history and identity. They became classics which were read in primary and intermediate schools. They formed part of the cultural baggage Luo children carried along with them in their life cycles from childhood to adulthood and they provided a firm ethnic base as well as an armour against the corrosive impact of foreign cultures. Their value, in fact, increased with the passing of the years so that, today, they have become sanctified as the final authorities on Luo culture and traditions.

The influence of these early Luo scholars' works on following Kenyan and European researchers' accounts seems evident. Anthropologist Aidan Southall (1952), for instance, acknowledged in his publication that his chief host was Paul Mboya and in his descriptions of Luo marriage, inheritance, blood-feuds, and ancestor worship practices Southall cites Mboya's (1938) work. Gordon Wilson (1955; 1961), who was appointed a Government Sociologist to study the Luo in the 1950s, worked with the research assistance of Shadrack Malo, and Wilson explicitly lists Mboya's 'unpublished manuscript' (i.e. not yet published in English) as a key source. Reflecting on his own conduct of research concerning Luo history in Nyanza in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Ogot (2009: 754) has suggested that it was not just the researchers, but also the research informants whose interpretations of history were influenced by earlier publications. Ogot (ibid.) found it difficult to collect narratives different from those that had been authorised in earlier publications, and has described: 'Most of my informants were the same people who had participated in the Malo meetings where standard versions were worked out', referring to Malo's research for his book 1953 publication *Dhondi Mag Central Nyanza*. Evans-Pritchard (1950a and b), however, did not acknowledge any Luo sources, except for a Pastor Ezekiel, in his publications (and in total only included two works by amateur European researchers in his 1950 paper on Luo marriage customs).

Yet, there is not much different information provided by these different studies from what was contained in the works of Okala and Were (1936), Mboya (1938), and Malo (1953), apart from Evans-Pritchard's and Southall's emphases on a theory of the primacy of descent lineage and segmentary divisions for Luo social and political organisation, which has since been heavily criticised as over-simplified by other Luo scholars (Atieno-Odhiambo and Cohen 1989: 13-15, 22-23, 31-33).

The polyphonic, iterative, and politically astute character of Luo historiography has continued. A 'Luo renaissance' is claimed by Atieno-Odhiambo (2000b: 11) to have developed in the 1950s and 1960s, which involved 'articulate citizens' purposefully engaged in the construction of the Luo nation and identity. According to this analysis, the Luo of western Kenya were inspired to distinguish their own socio-political identity and course as a result of finding themselves hedged in a context of increasing socio-political mobilisation among the Kikuyu and the Buganda of Uganda in resistance to the British colonialists in Kenya and Uganda respectively. The 'renaissance' included Luo political leaders Oginga Odinga's and Achieng' Oneko's's promotion of the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation in 1946 and the associated Ramogi Press and Dholuo-language newspaper *Ramogi*, which by 1950 was published weekly with a circulation of 2,500 (Gadsden 1980). Certainly, Oginga's autobiography *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967) was an extremely influential contribution for Luo and Kenyan historiography. In that book, Oginga (1967: 76) explains how he regarded the impetus for the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation in terms of asserting Luo identity:

We had to prove our mettle to the government, to the Whites. We Luo had also to assert ourselves among the other people of Kenya. ... the Luo needed to build a sense of unity, common purpose, and achievement. ... It was time to instil confidence; to show we could stand on our own feet in the modern world.

Luo academics have been included in this same self-conscious project. Simeon Ominde's monograph *The Luo Girl from Infancy to Marriage*, for instance, has been identified as seminal in this effort. Luo scholar Atieno-Odhiambo (2000c) has retrospectively argued that coming when it did – in 1952 - Ominde's written account of Luo indigenous pedagogy constituted 'a challenge to the colonial structure of dominance, to the colonial praxis of hegemony over what constituted knowledge and what did not':

It was ideological implicitly, serving as a cultural critique to the ‘girls’ education’ that the missionary matrons ... were offering. ... The text was witness to a process of *recovery*: the recovery of what was embedded in Luo tradition. ... *The Luo Girl* empowered Luo tradition. It was a message that amplified and reinforced old values. In doing this it made the further ideological statement about continuity between the past and present.

(Atieno-Odhiambo 2000c: 9-10, italics in original)

Atieno-Odhiambo’s (ibid.) analysis also notes that Ominde’s text represented an effort to demonstrate the uniformity of the Luo community which was significant to the greater project of constructing a contemporary Luo identity at a time when there were divisions among the Luo due to influences connected with colonialism, Christianity, formal education, literacy, migration, urbanisation, and the cash economy. Ominde’s emphasis on the efficacious morality of the traditional Luo education system for girls and women can certainly be read as an ideological position significant to the socio-political context of its first publication.

Luo academic efforts in historiography as well as literature studies and fiction flourished in the early years of Kenya’s independence (p’Bitek 1966; Ogot 1967; Were 1967; Ogot 1968; lo Liyong 1970; Ayot 1979). According to Ogot’s (2005: 62) recollections, collegiality among Luo scholars was strong during the 1960s and 1970s and facilitated a shared sense of purpose. This claim is supported by the publication of posthumous collections of essays in memory of Professor Simeon Ominde (Obudho and Ojwang 2000) and Professor Gideon Were (Ochieng’ 2002) by predominantly Luo scholars writing on Luo research topics, as well as the representation of Luo academics at these individuals’ burials. Atieno-Odhiambo (2000b: 147) has recalled that at the 1995 burial of Professor Ominde in Nyanza Province ‘a roll-call of the Luo full professors was taken, globally. The tally registered seventy-five’. Noting how dear Kenyan academics, and particularly Luo academics, have been to one another, Atieno-Odhiambo also notes that seven of the pallbearers at the 1995 burial of history professor Gideon Were were full professors (ibid.). During these years, when Luo politicians were increasingly marginalised and engaged in various contests with one another in national Kenyan politics, Luo scholars remained prominent in both their own projects, as well as in relation to Luo cultural and political identity discourse (ibid; Cohen 2009).

While some Luo scholars were engaged in what Atieno-Odhiambo (2000b: 11) described as a ‘Luo renaissance’, other - predominantly foreign - researchers concentrated their efforts on questions pertaining to how the Luo as a distinctive cultural group with ‘traditional’ models of social organisation were adapting, or not, to the changes wrought by capitalism, industrialisation, urbanisation, and other forms of ‘development’. Such concerns were especially prevalent in the post-colonial period. Anthropologist Michael Whisson, for example, entitled his 1964 monograph *Change and Challenge: A Study of the Social and Economic Changes Among the Kenya Luo*. Published by the Christian Council of Kenya, this book is tellingly divided into three parts: ‘the traditional society’; ‘the process of change and the breakdown of interdependence’; and ‘analysis and recommendations’. It is an attempt, according to the author ‘to sketch some of the major social problems which have developed as a result of the rapid changes’ so as to be ‘useful to those who are able to formulate policy in relation to the Luo’ (Whisson 1964: ii). Whisson evaluated the various parts of the traditional social system of the Luo as ‘reinforcing and self-righting’ a system he described as ‘evolutionary’ in that homeostasis of the social system could always be achieved. This he contrasted with the ‘revolution’ that was set in motion by colonial rule and the change to a cash economy, and which raised many questions for how the Luo would fare in postcolonial Kenya.

Philip and Janet Kilbride, American anthropologists, expressed similar concern for the viability of traditional Luo social practices in modernising Kenya. As they described:

It may be argued that the capitalist penetration in East Africa has produced a movement away from a more ‘genuine’ culture toward that of a more ‘spurious’ one... this is especially true for women and children. ...

One of the primary institutions under threat in East Africa, for example, is the ‘extended family.’ This social unit has been identified globally as the ‘most basic’ human ‘moralnet’ known to mankind (Naroll 1983). It will be shown that this is true of East Africa, too, where moral erosion is threatening children with child abuse and neglect in a hostile modern environment.

(Kilbride and Kilbride 1990: xi)¹⁹

¹⁹ This statement is referencing Sapir’s (1962: 90) distinction between ‘genuine’ and ‘spurious’ cultures: The genuine culture is not of necessity either high or low; it is merely inherently harmonious, balanced, self satisfactory. ... It is, ideally speaking, a culture in which nothing is spiritually meaningless, in which no important part of the general functioning brings with it a sense of frustration, or misdirected or unsympathetic effort.

However, other research done over the last several decades has presented a much more complicated, dynamic, and nuanced reading of how patterns of Luo livelihoods and sociality have been challenged and changed. Excellent among these have been David Parkin's 1978 ethnographic study of a Luo population living in a Nairobi housing settlement in the late 1960s. Parkin's study provides an insightful example of the complex interplay of cultural continuity and change. Parkin's findings led him to argue that the emic logical consistency between the three main Luo institutions of segmentary lineage structure, polygyny, and high bridewealth produced an intrinsically high degree of Luo cultural autonomy which proved resilient to changes in the external structural environment; in that case, the transition to urban living, wage earnings, and the increasing valorisation of children's formal education. His theoretical conclusion that logic underpins the adaptability of cultural institutions to changing circumstances challenges the 'rupture thesis' that cultural practices only survive as long as they are functionally useful. In describing through his case study how practices may adapt as long as they remain meaningful, Parkin argued that the 'conversation' within the socio-cultural group was critical. That is, he found that what was held to be at stake in the conversation among the Luo spanning across rural-urban divides in the late 1960s was what it meant to be Luo in Kenya.

David Cohen and E.S. Atieno-Odhiambo's careful studies of changing ideas and practices of everyday life in a rural district of Nyanza as presented in their 1989 book *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape* also wrestled with questions of meaning, and the underpinning debates over the attribution of different meanings to particular definitions of culture and history. The authors introduced their effort as an attempt to write 'both *about* and *for* the Luo' (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989: 2), and they situated their analysis in terms of 'migrations and wanderings; of tensions between custom and modernity' (ibid.: 4). This fine example of suggestive and provisional, rather than authoritative and conclusive, ethnography was later followed up by the same authors with a detailed case study of the public controversy in the late 1980s over how a prominent Luo professional who had lived in Nairobi and married a Kikuyu woman should be buried (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1992). Their analysis of that debate – specifically over whether the deceased should be buried according to Luo customs or according to his wife's (and perhaps his own) alternative wishes – provides another critical account of how history has been re-interpreted to fit competing claims on (personal and political) identities in 'modern' Kenya.

The complexities of Luo cultural debates, and how these are often framed in terms of the challenges posed by modernity, are also well developed in Ruth Prince and Wenzel Geissler's 2010 monograph entitled *The Land is Dying: Contingency, Creativity and Conflict in Western Kenya*. Geissler and Prince (2010: 2-3) account for how in present day Nyanza, there is a strong nostalgia for the loss of traditional Luo morality, as well as nostalgia for the optimistic engagement with modernity that is remembered as the experience of previous decades (e.g. from the 1950s through the 1970s). In part of their analysis, Geissler and Prince (2010: 92-93) focus on the questions and answers raised among Luo audiences concerning 'Luo ways', as facilitated through the Dholuo radio programme *Chike Luo* ('Luo Ways') and the website www.jalou.com ('The Luo Person'), as well as the emergence of similar questions in more mundane, everyday encounters between individuals living in a rural village in Nyanza. As Geissler and Prince note, many of these recent conversations circle back to enfold the content of earlier texts about the Luo, and most significantly Paul Mboya's 1938 publication *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi (Luo Customs and Traditions)*, but are challenged in other long-established and salient discourses such as that propagated through Christianity, and specifically Christian Salvation (ibid: 80-87).

That Luo history is historiography has been made patently obvious, as has the importance of Luo historiography to present day understandings of life in so-called Luoland. Through earlier studies an important wealth of knowledge, in terms of empirical observations as well as theoretical interpretations, has amassed about how different lives have been lived in Luoland. This existing body of literature about past ways of life has provided me with some helpful points for comparison with what my own research revealed. Therefore, throughout this dissertation I address some of my findings to the existing literature (and note how other people in my study also did). However, my study's purpose was more emphatically ethnographic than devoted to contributing to a more broadly conceived Luo historiography. And so, in what follows, I continue to describe in more ethnographic detail what local histories I learned in my study in Kanyathi and how people living there used these. The next historiographic perspective I take up is that which was available between 2007 and 2009 to a person well versed in the local political economy fluctuations that have been experienced in that part of Luoland.

A Political Economy Panorama

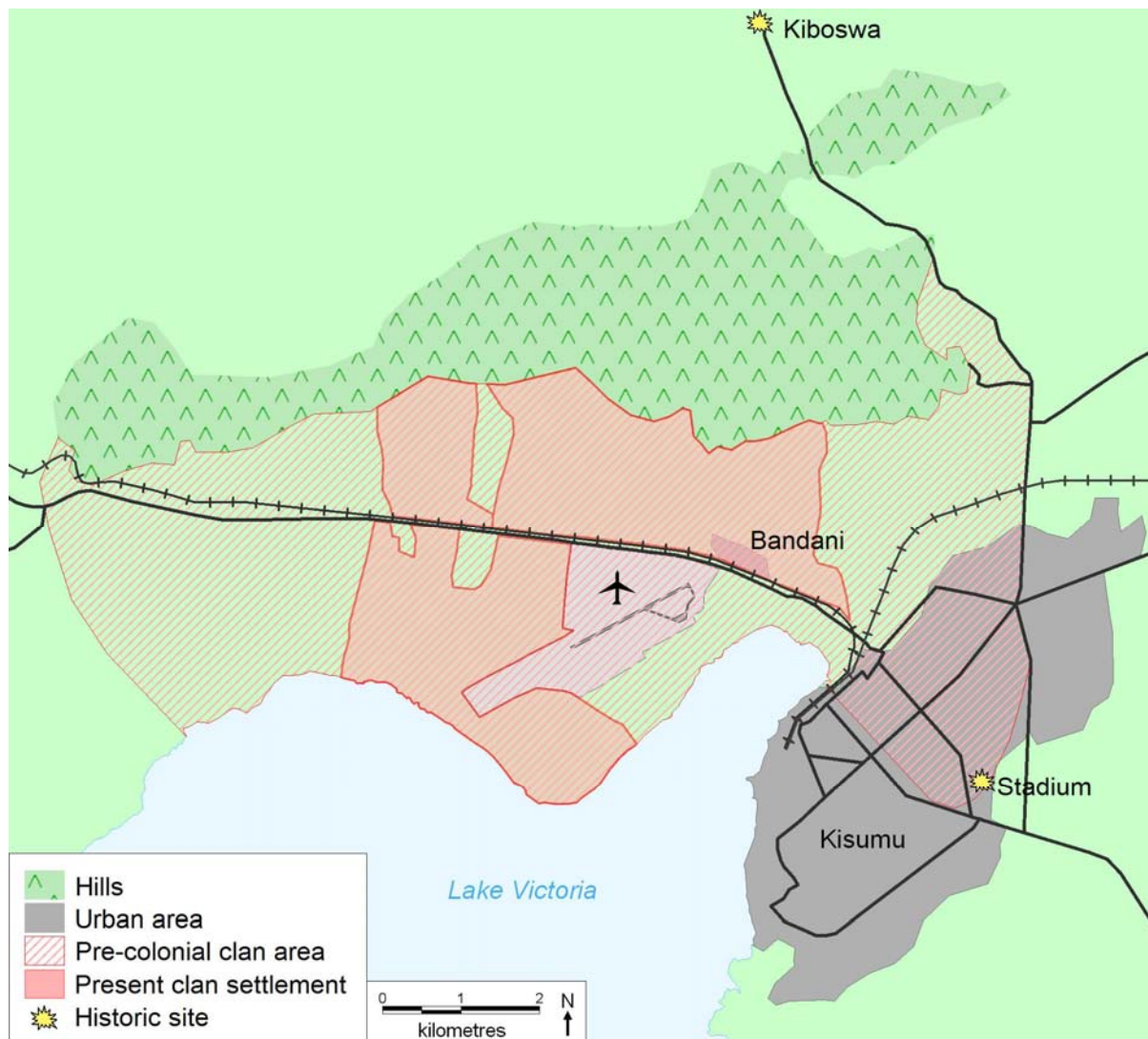


Fig. 2.2: Map of Kogony Sub-Clan Occupied Areas (1900 and 2010)²⁰

The Kisumu Clan occupied all the area from today's Kisumu town to Maseno. The *joKogony* [Kogony people] are a subclan of the Kisumu clan. Neighbouring clans are the Kano, Kajulu, Sakwa, the Seme from Holo, etc. The Kisumu subclans would unite for battles against the clans of Seme, Kano, etc.

²⁰ This map was designed by the author with the kind assistance of Dr. Michael Athanson of Oxford University's Bodleian Library. It is based on oral and written evidence collected in this study. The western and eastern clan boundaries of the Kogony clan's settlement areas are rough approximations since the boundaries between sub-clans have often not been consistently distinct. It does not specifically mark the location of 'Kanyathi' so as to maintain anonymity of research participants. There are at least four villages in the Kogony area which fit the profile of Kanyathi.

The *joKogony*²¹ land was from the lake up to Kiboswa – to the road, with Western Province on the other side of the road - and up to Kondele and Kakamega Road, until the government recently acquired this land.

There were famous Kogony warriors who staked out this territory. They were defending and conquering land – they are our heroes. For example, there was Okore Ogonda who was killed during a land battle at Kiboswa and there was Otiende Luoch who died in battle at the boundary with Holo. There was another hero who died at the Stadium site in town. *JokOnyando* [people of Onyando], for example, are named after Onyando who was persuaded by Hobley [British colonial officer C.W. Hobley who was appointed the first District Commissioner in Kisumu] to guide him to Maseno: he was given heavy luggage to carry and felt he was going too far and got a bit scared as he was getting too far from his relatives, so he dropped the luggage and ran away but Hobley's Arab staff shot him with a gun and he died. This gave us the saying: 'Obogno killed Onyando'. Obogno is the word for an aborted child and because a fetus is so white, in this saying we are referring to Hobley. Onyando was buried in his home. Later, Hobley's home was built on the site of Onyando's home and this was called Duka Onyando. This site became the first town in the area and it is now the airport site.

Then during the colonial era the boundaries became fixed. The colonial officers fixed boundaries based on where they found people. And so the *joKogony* were at the site of Kogony near the lake up to the hill toward Kiboswa road.

The above is an excerpt from a history that was recounted to me in June 2009 by the recently elected Chairman of the Kogony Land Council, Jack Owino.²² He was describing the shrinking land area occupied by members of his clan. By that time, the history of the Kogony people had been told and retold many times. In fact, the account that Mr Owino told me closely resembled the history of the *JoKisumo* as reconstructed by Luo historian William Ochieng' and published in an edited collection of essays entitled *Historical Studies and Social Change in Western Kenya* (Ochieng' 2002, also see Ogot 2009), and I suspect that the Kogony Land Council Chairman had read some version of this published history.

²¹ '*JoKogony*' translates as 'people of Kogony'. Kogony is the amalgamation of the prefix *ka* which means 'place of' and Ogony which is derivative of the name Ogonyo. Ogonyo was the first man of the sub-clan. The genealogy is traced thus: Ogonyo had a son named Onduu who had nine wives: Okong'o, Odongo, Ratip, Asweve, Omore, Acholla, Nyadina, Ang'aka, and Obarone. Present day *joKogony* trace their descent from these different mothers. For example, my host father was a descendent of the Odongo clan.

²² Mr Owino's real name is used in this dissertation by his permission.

As well, elements of the history of *joKogony* had been included in public statements by local politicians and Land Council members in reference to their ongoing disputes concerning access to land in the area. The history was significant to Kogony clan members' claims that they had been - and were still being - displaced from their ancestral land by government expropriations for the expansion of the Kisumu airport, among other public projects. As Mr Owino articulated the clan's case to me:

We still have that attachment to our ancestral land so evicting someone from his ancestral home is very bad. It is where we are meant to be buried. Our ancestral land cannot be played with by taking it to the bank for leverage. I cannot take my father's body to the bank for that. This is very, very inhumane. You can't neglect the loss that goes with leaving your ancestral land.

People's concerns, however, did not just centre on how their connections to the past might be lost. Kogony clan members also argued that the compensation amounts the government had offered for their land were not enough for people to buy other land in the area. In June 2009, the average prices of land per acre in the area were: between Ksh250,000 (GBP 1,969) and Ksh500,000 (GBP 3,937) in the Kanyathi village area; between Ksh200,000 (GBP 1,575) and 400,000 (GBP 3,150) for other Kogony traditional land located near the airport (but not expropriated for the airport); and up to Ksh1.2 million (GBP 9,449) for land in the second row of properties from the lake. The rising land values are linked to speculation on current and future developments. For instance, in March 2011, the website for Kisumu Property Market (www.kisumupropertymarket.com/index.php?pageptr=plots) advertised a property with the statement: 'This Property borders 8 acres plot owned by a very prominent politician'. A 0.5 acre beachfront plot was listed on the website for sale for Ksh1.8 million (GBP 13,235) with the advice: 'A new beach hotel is being developed in the neighbouring plot. If you are an investor be assured the value of this property will almost double under three years'.²³

The government's recent expropriations of people's land at below market prices means that clan members could become scattered across the province to wherever they might find land to afford. An alternative, proposed by the Land Council, has been for the Kenyan

²³ These commentaries allude to rumours that Prime Minister Raila Odinga and his brother have bought two large beachfront parcels in recent years with plans to develop a lakeshore tourist complex.

government to compensate the displaced Kogony people with land elsewhere so that they may continue to live together as a community (Obara 2010). Another more troubling scenario, according to Mr Owino, is that people have been compensated with such meagre financial amounts that many have not been able to afford to buy land anywhere and so they might become ‘tenants’ or ‘squatters’. If the government does not help the people to ‘settle and develop’, the Chairman said, that problems would likely continue: ‘My children are aware of this – maybe my grandchildren will still be aware. It’s not a fight that can be wished away’.

Political Economy in Sight

The observation that ‘The global political-economy is in sight, even from the food gardens of the most peripheral settlements’ (Moore 1994: 1) provides an apt description for the points of view available from the village of Kanyathi. Located on a slight incline above the shores of the world’s second largest freshwater lake, known on international maps as Lake Victoria, or in Dholuo as *Nam Lolwe*, and Kenya’s third most populous city, Kisumu, vantages from the village take in vestiges of many historical changes that have shaped the lives of the people living there.

Looking out from the gardens of Kanyathi, one can look down upon railway tracks that branch off from the railway terminus that was established in present day Kisumu in 1901,²⁴ thereby establishing the port terminus for the Uganda Railways route from the Indian Ocean (Lonsdale 1964). In 2008 there were no scheduled trains plying this track linking Kisumu with a few northern towns and only one train ran weekly from Kisumu to Nairobi. This inactivity has made it easier for people from Kanyathi to use the rail tracks as walking paths to and from ‘town’ (Kisumu); the uninterrupted, even grade of the tracks cuts the walking time to the central market down to approximately one hour. Also at the foot of the village, one can see – and hear - the *matatus* and lorries moving along the highway that links Kisumu to an important border crossing with Uganda. Young men from the village position their bicycles or motorcycles next to this highway to try to entice alighting pedestrians to pay for a ride with them up the dirt roads to their homes on the slopes.

²⁴ The British colonial administration named present day Kisumu City as Port Florence and established it as the administrative capital of the Eastern Province of Uganda Protectorate in 1899 (Lonsdale 1964). This region became classified as part of British East Africa in 1902.

Just further out in the distance, on the other side of the road, lay the flats of the Kisumu airport. First constructed in the 1930s,²⁵ the airport was later expanded to serve as a regional military base in the Second World War, and has been significantly expanded again since 2008 so as to accommodate the larger Boeing 767 and Airbus 300 airplanes which are anticipated to carry more tourists in, and more fish and horticultural products out, thereby establishing a ‘goldmine’ of economic opportunities, according to The World Bank analysts that recommended the project for The Bank’s financing (Menya 2008; David 2011; Kemboi 2010; Wasonga 2011).²⁶ These expansions have required the expropriation of land from members of the Kogony clan who had lived and farmed there. Indeed, many villagers in Kanyathi can discern within the expanded boundaries of the airport the locations of their families’ former homes, farms, and graves, all expropriated according to government orders, and compensated according to government calculations of their relative values.

Across the airfield, views from Kanyathi of the hyacinth-choked shores of the lake²⁷ are interrupted by the concrete husks of a series of industrial projects which bear witness to the area’s changed economic history. These include the enduringly controversial molasses processing plant which the Kenyan Government began to construct in 1977 (with World Bank funding) as the parastatal Kenya Chemical and Food Company on land obtained from local residents, but which the government abandoned in 1982 before it was operational.²⁸ The now foreign-owned plant produces potable alcohol as well as ethanol and employs hundreds of workers. Since being privately purchased, the factory has been touted in business analyses as representing an important economic opportunity for the region (KPMG 2008; Aguilo et al 2007). Under what it identifies as its ‘corporate social responsibility’ initiative the company has funded the construction of some potable water points and a football field in the area, as well as security lights around the plant (Spectre International 2007).

²⁵ The Kogony Land Council maintains that land was expropriated for the construction of the airport during the First World War. However, historical sources indicate the first aircraft landed in Kisumu in the late 1920s and an aerodrome was not constructed until the 1930s (Anyumba 1995: 123 citing Nyanza Province Annual Reports for 1927 and 1928).

²⁶ The expansion of the airport has long been debated in terms of the economic and political potential of the region. For example, in a 1966 session of the first Parliament of the independent Kenyan Government, the Minister of Public Works was asked by a Nyanza Member of Parliament if the government had plans to invest in the airport so as to support the local area’s economy. In his reply the Minister stated that such public investments required ‘the political healthiness of the place’. The MP complained in response that the government ‘as usual, is treating that district with political backwardness’ (Republic of Kenya, 27 January 1966: 175-6).

²⁷ In recent years, only one railway wagon ferry has run between Kisumu Port and the port of Mwanza, Tanzania. Low water levels and the bay’s overgrowth with hyacinth prevent its more regular use.

²⁸ This abandoned project is linked to local suspicions of the government-sanctioned murder of local Luo MP and former Foreign Minister Robert Ouko in 1990 (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 2004).

Next to the molasses factory, one can see further evidence of how the land that was purchased from local residents in the 1970s is still being used for business operations. The privately owned Phoenix Matches (once Kenya Matches) continues its production, although in 2010 the company laid off approximately 150 employees. A Coca Cola bottling factory and the Kenya Cereals depot are still operational. And the regional depot for the Kenya Pipeline Company, established by the government on expropriated land in the mid-1970s, continues to receive and hold petroleum products from Mombasa for export to northern Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Southern Sudan, and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (KPC 2011).

Yet, shifting one's view further due west, toward Kisumu, one sees the decay of failed industrial projects. These include the Kenya Breweries factory, which opened in 1982, only to cease its brewing operations in 1993. Since then it has operated as a much smaller scale dairy farm depot (Menya 2009). And next to that plant sits the empty and rusting structures of what was the parastatal Kisumu Cotton Mills (Kicomi), which went into receivership after the liberalisation of Kenya's cotton sector in accordance with reforms made under Structural Adjustment Programmes implemented in the early 1990s (Aguilo 2007; Menya 2009). Together, the Kenya Breweries and Kicomi plants once employed 5,000 people. However, it seems that this section of the landscape is set to continue its transformation, with the Municipal Council of Kisumu announcing in April 2011 its intention to take possession of the Kenya Breweries and Kicomi sites so as to tender them for new business investments. Other medium-sized industries in view from Kanyathi have also diminished over recent years, laying off local employees and leaving structures to deteriorate: a local plastic bag manufacturing company closed several years ago; a local confectionary manufacturing plant went into receivership in 2009; and five of the nine fish processing plants established in Kisumu between the 1980s and 1997 have closed due to declining fish stocks, the shores' infestation with water hyacinth, and local corruption.²⁹ Some of the fish processing plants have relocated to Tanzania and Uganda, citing better fish hauls and less corrupt business environments (Jansen 1997).

²⁹ The catch per boat involved in Kisumu's fishing sector dropped by half between 1989 and 1999, while the total volume of fish caught dropped from 200,000 metric tons in 1994 to 115,000 metric tons in 2002 (Aguilo et al. 2007). Lake Victoria has transformed since the 1970s from a multi-species fisheries (with an estimated 200 different species) to a 'three species fisheries' due to the introduction in the 1950s and 1960s of the predatory Nile perch species (Jansen 1997).

Spread out from the abandoned and rusting structures one notices the corrugated iron roofs that make up part of the so-called 'slum belt' that encircles the town centre of Kisumu (UN Habitat 2006: 13). The 2.39km² area known as Bandani is one of Kisumu's oldest slums, long occupied by migrant tenants who have been employed in Kisumu and the nearby factories.³⁰ In 2005, this settlement was selected for inclusion in the UN Habitat slum upgrading project along with six other settlements in the municipality of Kisumu (UN Habitat 2005). Bandani has among the highest density of housing structures in the Kisumu area, many of which are rental units. There is now virtually no agricultural activity in the settlement, although some households own livestock (ibid). It has been documented that a number of former employees who were laid off from local factories in the 1990s used their redundancy pay-outs to buy land in the area so as to build more rental units for income (ibid). The UN Habitat's situation analysis reports that 'As a result, the so-called immigrants outnumber the locals. The rural social fabric has broken down and the area has become more insecure' (ibid: 33). This point of view seems to be held within Bandani as well as outside: during my fieldwork I was discouraged from spending the night in Bandani by both residents whom I was visiting there as well as friends in Kanyathi. The fear was that my visit to a home would entice local thieves to target that home for burglary during or even after my visit. Kanyathi's proximity to Bandani sharpens fears among villagers about how their own landscape might soon be absorbed into the slum, and more immediately that their homes are vulnerable to the thieves that they suspect live in Bandani.

Kanyathi's western boundary is more authoritatively marked with fences and armed guards. Behind these lies the Kodiaga Prison complex, which includes one of Kenya's maximum security prisons, and which in total currently holds approximately 5,000 male and female inmates or 10% of the national prison population (Republic of Kenya 2009: 14). The prison has earned a reputation for overcrowding and deplorable conditions, particularly so after the death of ten inmates over two months in 2009 due to the lack of medical treatment for a curable stomach virus (Anumpiu 2009). While most of the Kanyathi villagers do not have much familiarity with the prison, a few sell foodstuffs to the prisoners and the staff, and a few

³⁰ The outskirts of Kisumu have long been described as 'peri-urban' (Anyumba 1995: 8, citing Amunga 1972 and Dakeyne 1963 among others). The original 20km² of the 'old town' of Kisumu restricted African residents until 1958 and so a 'peri-urban shanty landscape' developed around it (ibid). In 1971 the city boundaries were expanded to incorporate the largely rural area northwest of the original old town. A 1978 survey indicated that two-thirds of total Kisumu's population - that is 100,000 of 150,000 people - lived in the crescent-shaped peri-urban area encircling the old town boundary (Anyumba 1995: 8 citing KSP 1989: 29).

others have been incarcerated in Kodiaga. For example, a young man named Juma described to me how after he and two friends stole some CDs in Kisumu they were incarcerated in Kodiaga Prison for thirty days while awaiting trial, and then a further six months after they were found guilty.

And finally, completing the panoramic view available from Kanyathi, one can turn and look up to see where the village's northern boundary lies. The Riat Hills rise to a height of 6,000 feet (1,828 metres) above sea level forming a sort of natural barrier (Morgan 1973: 267). Until 2009, the hilly area above Kanyathi was mainly left undeveloped with wild bush regularly scavenged for firewood. Atop the hill one could make out the outline of a concrete structure that was built in the 1980s to become a polytechnic school. However, according to the memories of members of the present-day Kogony Land Council, after the building was completed and the sewing machines and other vocational training equipment brought in, former President Moi's government decided it did not have the funds for teachers and so the school never opened. Over the following years the building was gradually stripped of its various materials. Some people in Kanyathi could remember that in the 1990s the international faith-based organisation World Vision tried to revive the polytechnic, but there was opposition from the local community, and so the site was again deserted. In 2009, however, the same plot of land was donated by the local Land Council to another international faith-based organisation, SOS, for the construction of a 'children's village' to house 150 orphaned and vulnerable children, as well as a primary and secondary school and medical centre (SOS 2009).³¹ The negotiation of this development became an extremely high profile issue in the local area, sparking a large turn-out of approximately 300 villagers for the 2009 election of the Land Council (who negotiated the deal), and several months later the attendance of Prime Minister Odinga at the project's groundbreaking ceremony. As the photograph below shows, villagers have been curious to see what new changes are planned for their local area.³² In their initial negotiations with the Kogony Land Council, the charity

³¹ SOS presently houses over 78,000 children in more than 500 SOS Children's Villages in 124 different countries (SOS n.d. <http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/sos-childrens-charity/facts-figures/> (Last accessed May 10, 2011.)). The Kisumu Children's Home will be the fifth SOS Children's Home established in Kenya.

³² One change was to influence local land values. For example, in March 2011 the Kisumu Property Market website advertised a 0.5 acre plot of land for Ksh 1.2 million (GBP 8,748) with the following description: '... great view of lake victoria, Airport and Kisumu city. The upper part of this plot touches the lower fence of SOS children home. A smart hotel is being built just a stone throw away from this property. Very ideal for a home' (sic, www.kisumupropertymarket.com/index.php?pagepr=plots. Last accessed May 10, 2011).

promised that local people would be considered for non-technical employment, and many men and women have already been temporarily employed at the site's construction work.



Fig. 2.3: 'Members of the public check the architectural drawings of the proposed SOS Children's Village Kisumu' (Photo and caption from SOS n.d.: <http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/sos-childrens-charity/facts-figures/>. (Last accessed May 10, 2011.)

Crucial to the ways in which these many different signs of economic change have been contemplated by people living in Kanyathi is the fact that they have been viewed from increasingly smaller garden plots. The people who identify themselves as the traditional occupants of Kanyathi and the wider Kogony clan territory also self-identify as farmers. Crop agriculture has long been central to existence in the village area. The area receives two rainy seasons: the long rains from March through May; and the short rains between October and November which allow for two annual crop harvests. Maize is the most common crop, interspersed with some millet as well as smaller crops of beans and potatoes. The average size of people's farms have decreased substantially over the last decades largely due to the widely practiced custom of dividing a father's land holding into equal divisions for his sons' inheritance. As well, many families have sold strips of land to meet other financial obligations. While I did not do a comprehensive survey of land holdings in Kanyathi, another

recent study in a less densely populated, neighbouring village of 160 households found that 70 percent of households owned less than two hectares of land while approximately 20 percent owned more than three hectares (Agatha et al. 2010: 2348). People interviewed in my study commonly described that their own maize yields provide approximately five months of their annual maize consumption, whereas they purchase their other food stuffs.³³ Most homesteads included in my study also owned between two and five head of cattle as well as some chickens, while fewer households also had some goats and sheep. Milk and eggs were obtained from livestock, and occasionally livestock were donated for funerals, but sales of livestock were rare and regarded as last resorts. While my findings indicate that agriculture is still very important to local households' food security, it is clear that it cannot be trusted as the only means by which a household can provide for its basic needs, which in addition to food include resources for shelter, health, and ideally children's education, as well as important cultural ceremonies such as burials. Diminished self-sufficiency from farming in Kanyathi has made integration with the local urban economy increasingly imperative.

There was a great deal of anxiety in local people's speculations about what the outcomes of all of the contemporary developments in the area might mean for them. Some of this anxiety was focused on practical livelihood worries concerning what the privatisation of land in the area harbingered for other local 'public' resources. For example, with more land being bought and developed on the hillside, there was less bush from which to collect firewood. Women expressed worries that they would have to start purchasing firewood or charcoal to fuel their cooking fires. The suggestion that water would be piped through the village – a promise made by the Government of Kenya in 2009 to support the SOS Children's Village development in the area (SOS 2009) – also caused mixed reactions: people wondered whether this would mean a tap with payment fees would replace the option of freely collecting water from the cement drain built into the river. Such changes in local access to resources could be anticipated to introduce new measures of inequalities between households as well as affect the budgeting priorities (financial and labour) of households.

The new developments have also, of course, stirred hopes of accessing new resources, and new entrepreneurial opportunities (e.g. selling food to construction workers or working as day labourers on construction sites). And some individuals have benefited in various –

³³ Maize (and sometimes sorghum or millet) is ground to a powder to mix with water for cooking the local staple food of *kuon* (Dholuo; *ugali* in Kiswahili), which is a carbohydrate-rich, stiff porridge.

usually temporary – ways. However, recent experiences have cautioned against naive optimism. When a Norwegian NGO cabled in electricity – over the tops of people’s homes and businesses – to service their enclosed compound near Kanyathi with its primary and secondary schools and boarding houses for the ‘rehabilitated’ street children they sponsor as well as some privately paying students, local villagers speculated it was just a matter of months before they too would be connected to the grid. However, over three years later, this had not happened, and even the local government school and clinic were still without electricity. The local villagers saw themselves excluded from this new neighbour’s concerns. In fact, people told me that the only thing that had changed for them as a result of the opening of this NGO’s school in their midst was their experience of a higher frequency of Landcruisers driving up the village’s road to the NGO’s gated compound. These vehicles, as symbols of socioeconomic mobility and differentiation, figure prominently in local villagers’ suspicions about what was happening to their world, and their insecure place on the margins of it. The anxiety was matched by an appropriately unpleasant sensory phenomenon. As one man said to me about how the villagers experience these particular neighbours as they sped past in their vehicles: ‘We just swallow their dust’.

Village Life Histories

Clearly, the history of the area has not been a smooth trajectory of ‘development’ nor of a steady plummet of ‘decline’. The uses of the land and lake – as well as human productivity – have changed with changing speculations. As visual as the vestiges of the local area’s changed and changing political economy are from Kanyathi, these were rendered more conspicuously significant through people’s personal narratives of how they had experienced their places at the periphery as both advantages and disadvantages, with shifts from one perspective to the other occurring frequently. Men and women and girls and boys described how they struggled to adapt to keep pace with their changing environments. As recounted below, there seemed a studied ambivalence toward ‘development’ in the area, with a healthy dose of scepticism about its costs intermixed with keenness to the short-term potential of capitalistic opportunities.

Many women living in Kanyathi were not born there. Following the Luo custom of virilocal marriage and patrilineal land inheritance, many married women had moved to the village

upon marrying men who had been born in Kanyathi and had inherited patrilineal land there to build their own homes and farm. I asked many such women to describe how they found life different in Kanyathi from where their natal families lived. In their accounts both elderly (e.g. born before 1950) and ‘middle-aged’ (e.g. born between 1950 and 1980) women described how much more commodified life was in Kanyathi. Elderly women described to me how life in Kanyathi had been increasingly commodified over time. They compared how life was when they arrived as new wives and daughters-in-law in the 1950s, and how it was while they were mothers through the 1960s, 70s and 80s, with how they experienced life more recently as grandmothers and great-grandmothers, often living with some of their grandchildren. Younger women tended to contrast life in Kanyathi as lying somewhere between the intensified commodification of ‘town life’ and the more bountiful access to natural resources available in other more rural areas of Nyanza.

In 2008, when she narrated her life history to me over two long separate, audio-recorded interviews (in Dholuo, later translated), Rebecaa was approximately seventy-six years old. She had married into the village of Kanyathi in 1952. Her life history assigned disillusionment and distrust to the national political economy:

The changes I see are that a long time ago food was abundant but now life is difficult because there is not much food and also, there is no work. A child can be working but whatever he is getting is very little so if you don’t farm then you will just suffer. Now a child cannot eat the good food he wants but in those days there was food, there was enough grains [*cham*] that you could just go and take it. Even the price was cheap so if you go and sell your firewood in the market then you can buy flour at a cheaper price because we used to buy a *gorogoro* [a tin can measure holding 2 kilograms] at a small price. Now when it started to be at 40 shillings this is the time when life started becoming difficult. ...

Elizabeth: So what do you think caused these changes in life?

A long time ago people were farming and farming was the strength of man [*teko dhano*: backbone of man]. That strength of man was what people were using and feeding themselves with. Then work came and people were being employed. The money was little but the food was there. But now, there have been changes since the time when the government of *Uhuru* [Independence] came, when their tribe [referring to the Kikuyu] was in power. We say that during colonial times, life was good. One could go and do some work and come back with food.

The *mzungu* [white man/foreigner] was ready to give you work so you work in his home and you come back with food. But now since the power [*tich*: authority] was put back to the black people this is what has brought problems.

Because now money is dictating [*pesa dhi mbele*: money is going ahead/taking the lead] and problems are also here. This is why you have a lot of theft because that hard work is no more. The people have now gone into saying 'So-and-so is defeating me' [*Aoyaye ngane iloya*] and 'If you give me money then that is when I will give you work'. But those people [colonialists] did not know about 'Give me money'. Someone would just be called to come and work and they knew the problems people had. There was no theft. These days there is a lot of theft. ... But a long time ago there was a lot of food and it was just being kept outside in the granary and the cattle were just outside. You could leave your property outside. There was no killing. But now there are a lot of problems with our people who are in government.

This critical account of how Kenya's political and economic history has created the conditions for people's everyday experiences of struggling and suffering in the village of Kanyathi is shared by many elderly residents. Rebecca's neighbour, Wilhelmina, who was also born in approximately 1932 and came to live in Kanyathi from her marriage in 1953, also described her life in terms of the retrenchment of the economy and the increased commodification of the necessities of daily life. In response to my question of how life today is different from how life was in the past, Wilhelmina narrated to me:

The difference is that when I first came to this homestead [in 1953] there was a lot of love. ... We loved one another. Life was good. But as time went by, life could not be the same as those days. Because in those days, life was good, food was plenty. As time went by, the income was not good enough and by the time I gave birth to my third child and then my fourth, then life starting changing. There was no work. My husband was not working. My father-in-law was also not working so there was nothing good. Then life was starting to become hard. So you start doing some small business to help yourself.

Elizabeth: Why did life become difficult?

It is because my husband was not working so it was me who started doing some small business so that we could have something to eat and that is why life was difficult. And also some of the children starting going to school and it was not easy so it is for you to do some small business and out of this business is how you buy your own clothes, you buy clothes for the children, and

you buy food with it. So that is what we were seeing was hard with life. But it was not that very hard because in those days food was not as expensive as now. You could eat even if you had a bit of money.

During my study, Wilhelmina was caring for three of her orphaned grandsons. I asked her to compare how such situations were different from what had been experienced in the past. She analysed the changes in terms of how demographic and economic changes had affected social relations:

Before at the time when I got married here people dying were few. And at that time there was that love and if there was an orphan everyone would love to take that child. At that time all the people living together would bring their food to eat together and you would not notice an orphan there.

But now there are so many people dying and there are so many orphans so now you find it difficult. Although the love is still there, life is expensive and one hesitates even to take one's own niece.

This account and others that I listened to from elderly women and men living in Kanyathi are similar to accounts recorded by other researchers in other communities in Nyanza, as well as among other Sub-Saharan African societies that have experienced similar economic, political, and demographic changes. In her 2007 ethnography *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family, and Community in Kenya*, for instance, Kenda Mutongi (2007: 3) has described growing up in Maragoli, western Kenya, through the late 1960s and early 1970s listening to her older relatives praise a history of benevolent colonialism and complain about Kenya's postcolonial governments. And when she returned to Maragoli as a researcher in the mid-1990s, Mutongi found the same insistence that life had been better under colonial rule, that present governments were corrupt, and that the elderly generation were unrelentingly disillusioned and despondent (ibid: 195). While questioning the propensity to romanticise the past, Mutongi also had to account for how living standards had worsened in this region over the intervening thirty years. Mutongi was left to contemplate how pervasive lethargy and helplessness seemed to emanate from a lost sense of opportunity; that people's hopes for better lives had been disappointed.

Approximately seventy kilometres northwest of the village where I pursued my study, Geissler and Prince conducted their ethnographic research in a village they refer to as Uhero. In their ethnography they describe:

...what *JoUhero* [the people of Uhero] share is a profound sense of crisis and loss. This undoubtedly encompasses what *JoUhero* call ‘the death of today’ (*tho mar tinende*) – the AIDS-related sickness and death of many villagers during the past decade or more – but this is seen as but the most recent outcome of longer processes of economic and social change that affect the very constitution of sociality itself. Nostalgia pervades everyday conversations, public oratory and popular music (Prince 2006), and generalising statements of loss are ubiquitous; either taken straight from Achebe/Yeats: ‘Things fall apart’ – words that generations of Kenyans have read in school – or in a local idiom: ‘The earth is dying. There is no love nowadays’ (*‘Piny tho. Tinende hera onge’*), which link the loss of life and belonging directly to that of social relations, continuity and sense of direction. Uhero calls forth, then, a sense of longing as much as of belonging. (Geissler and Prince 2010: 2)

There is a pessimistic resonance among these different communities’ experiences. And yet, such laments do not obliterate people’s ongoing struggles to live meaningful and productive lives. In Kanyathi, I rarely heard people characterise their past and ongoing experiences of life in terms of crisis. Instead, people commonly idiomatically framed their experiences as ‘struggle’ and ‘suffering’. These were described as active experiences through the use of verbs: *thagore* refers to being troubled, experiencing difficulties, struggling, and/or suffering; while *chandore* invokes suffering, being troubled, being poor, being restless, and/or exerting oneself. In some cases, the experience of struggle was correlated to that of suffering; in others, the struggle was more simply about trying: ‘What can we do? There is suffering. We just struggle,’ reflected elderly widows caring for their orphaned grandchildren. ‘You just have to struggle. One never knows. So I am just trying,’ young women and men and girls and boys explained as they plotted their ways to make some money or stay in school. The fundamental uncertainty in terms of a lack of confidence about the efficacy of people’s efforts was central in both types of expressions.

These common expressions also revealed how different orientations were simultaneously in play: a person could look from the present backward and narrate how the lack of confidence is the result of a lost confidence; or a person could look forward and describe how the lack of

confidence in the future is a condition of the present. Differences between generations were appreciable, with the elder generation more decisively situating their personal histories in broader, shared histories, and drawing general distinctions of decline and disintegration, as well as in some more rare cases, advantage and benefice. The elder generation - often the grandparent (or great-grandparent) generation in Kanyathi - who were born before the 1950s, could chart changes in their lives' struggles to correlate with the nation's and the region's political and economic histories, as well as the gradually learned familiarity with HIV/AIDS as an epidemic. Of course, they narrated their personal losses – of family members, of employment, and of land, for example - but they also made deliberate efforts to explain these events in terms of encompassing trends including diseases, economic restructuring, and political marginalisation, as the accounts of Rebecca and Wilhelmina transcribed above demonstrate.

At the same time and in the same place, I found that members of the younger generation - often grandchildren or great-grandchildren in Kanyathi – who were born after the late 1980s, tended to narrate their lives in terms of the very specific volatilities they had experienced in their own early years which had taught them not to feel confident that present circumstances would endure – either for better or worse. Some of these narratives are described below. Such perspectives were oriented as more anticipative of the future than intrinsically informed by encompassing historical schemas.³⁴ Nevertheless, the younger generation(s) had grown up hearing the stories of the past, as well as witnessing their grandparents' and parents' occasional bewilderment and disenchantment with the present. Young people knew they were supposed to understand that life had not always been as it presently was, and specifically that their grandparents had experienced life with more abundance and goodness: there had been more food, more land, more love.

Suspicion and blame were also occasionally explicitly assigned by children's grandparents, as well as some children, to children's parents, as well as children's uncles and aunts, and more generally and implicitly to the middle generation as a whole (i.e. those born between 1960s and 1980s) for causing damage by contracting HIV – perhaps through their sexual

³⁴ However, some of the terms of young people's explanatory frameworks were influenced in accordance with local, popular analyses of Kenya's disputed 2007 national election and post-election violence, and to a lesser extent the election of 'Luo son' Barack Obama as president of the United States in late 2008. From my study, I understood these as important historical events through which young people learned through tangible experiences the significance of their Luo identity in Kenya.

promiscuity and generally by ‘not being serious’ in their commitments to farming and developing homesteads in Kanyathi, to their marriages (e.g. through infidelity), their parenting (e.g. through not providing school fees), and their wider family obligations (e.g. through not sending remittances from distant employment, supporting their parents in their old age, or fostering siblings’ orphaned children). While some of these failures seemed excused in narratives that blamed wider political economy processes, including the simultaneous processes of increasing commodification and impoverishment, as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS before people understood its modes of transmission, it was simultaneously common for certain individuals’ choices and actions to be held at least partially culpable.

The pragmatic philosophy that life goes on, despite suffering, and with struggle, was evident daily in the efforts people made to find ways to engage with the local economy. The role of farming in Kanyathi has diminished, but remains important to many people; the majority of families I interviewed continued to produce nearly half of their annual food consumption from their crops. To make up for the rest, people sought various ways to capitalise on the advantages of their position at the periphery with Kisumu. Many women were engaged in small trade between Kisumu and Kanyathi, as women have been for many decades. Some things could be bought more cheaply in Kisumu and sold for a profit in Kanyathi, while other things like firewood could be collected for free in Kanyathi, or food could be prepared at home, and sold for higher profits in Kisumu. Rose (b. 1965)³⁵ described how this potential differentiated Kanyathi from the more rural area where she had been born:

The first difference is that here is next to town which means you can go to town and buy something and sell it here, or make something here, like *mandazis* [a sweet fried pastry], and sell it here or in town. This is unlike [my more rural natal home village] where you only have your *shamba* [garden]. There, there is food from the *shamba* so no one will buy things like *mandazi*. They will eat the sweet potatoes or whatever they have planted. And the food there is a lot compared to here. The *shambas* are big there and if you cultivate, you will have a lot of food.

³⁵ In this dissertation I identify the age of different people according to their birth year or approximate birth year in parentheses. For example, my reference of (b.1965) indicates this person was born in 1965. This information is provided to help distinguish whether there were intergenerational differences in perspectives.

But the idea of Kanyathi's peripheral situation as an advantage or disadvantage oscillated, often continuously and according to the same people. For instance, in a complaint about how expensive life had become in Kanyathi, Augustina described to me: 'We are just the same as the people in town [Kisumu] except that we get water and firewood for free'. But then Tufi responded 'And you don't pay rent'. Augustina conceded that point, summarising 'That's true. Other than rent, water, and firewood, we pay for everything else just like the people in town'. Tufi teased her that those resources amounted to significant savings.

Perhaps it is true that there is more buying and selling of more commodities, including food, than was the case in the past. Over my sixteen months of staying in Kanyathi I witnessed how one of my neighbours, Mama Simon, was able to shift her business from preparing *nyoyo* (a mixture of boiled beans and maize kernels) at home in Kanyathi to take to Kisumu each day to sell, to selling *nyoyo* straight from her house in Kanyathi. As a new resident of the village since 2004 she had had to build up her reputation, but by 2008 children sent by their mothers or grandmothers regularly traipsed up to her door to purchase Ksh10 or Ksh20 of *nyoyo* between seven in the morning and six at night. As Mama Simon said to me, back in her home area: 'They can't believe we sell *nyoyo* here', referring to how it is not regarded as a saleable commodity in more agricultural parts of Nyanza, but rather as something that anyone can just prepare for themselves from their own farms. Mama Simon's climbing sales seemed to be attributable to both her growing reputation, as well as local households' increasing practice of purchasing food rather than producing or preparing their own.

Few men participated in such localised trading business, although some did. For example, David, the young man who I had followed home from the orphanage, began earning some money while he was still a secondary school student by buying paraffin in town and selling it to neighbours in the village. Isaiah, David's uncle, had walked along the railway tracks to the Kisumu bus station every day since the 1970s to sell headache medication to passer-bys. However, the majority of younger men (e.g. under the age of thirty-five) living in Kanyathi were more likely to seek employment on the temporary construction sites in the village area. The most common response I heard from men and women about what work men were engaged in was 'just small jobs' (*Otiyoga tich matin*: He just does small jobs/work). Young men might show up at construction sites in the morning hours to try to be chosen for that day's – or hopefully a longer period's – paid labour for shovelling gravel or mixing cement. However, most men said that the work at ongoing construction sites was distributed

according to local patronage networks, or by paying a bribe to the recruiter,³⁶ and so it was only on small building projects, like the fencing of a newly purchased private land holding or laying the foundation for a new house on such a plot, for which they could be hired. There seemed few other income earning activities that men living in the village could pursue, unless they had a motorcycle or bicycle to turn into a taxi, or a truck to hire out for moving people and heavy things. Some men and women had ongoing employment in Kisumu as gardeners or domestic help in the homes of Indian families, or as cooks or cleaners in Kisumu restaurants, while a few others worked in local daycares or as nurses in hospitals across the district, and some men lived away as migrant workers in factory towns in Nyanza and Western Provinces. I was surprised at how few families had regular contact with a family member who worked in Nairobi or elsewhere, and the very low and inconsistent levels of remittances from distant relatives. It seemed that the relationships of migrant workers had cleaved away even more distinctly from rural families, as the former established their own nuclear families quite independently in urban centres. Such estrangements in family relationships have been documented over time (Hay 1982; Francis 1995).

The life histories of even younger people reflected the importance of changes in the local economy to their prospects. For instance, when I sat down in February 2009 with Dickinson and Fanuel who had just finished primary school in December 2008, I asked them to describe to me their life histories,³⁷ and I learned how they correlated their educational histories with the changing economic conditions of the area. Dickinson's story detailed how the decline of the local fish processing industry had put his father out of work; first, when he lost his job at a factory; and later when he was progressively unable to secure enough fish to privately peddle. This meant that Dickinson started school late, and after he started, he often had to repeat classes because he had to drop out before completing a year due to lack of school fees. For the same reasons, his two elder siblings left school permanently after Class 4. However, with the introduction of free primary education in 2003, Dickinson returned to the local primary school, and his father was 'just trying' so that he could pay enough to keep Dickinson in school. In 2008, when Dickinson was sixteen years old, he sought temporary

³⁶ For example, in June 2008 the Kogony Youth Welfare Association met the press in Kisumu to issue a statement complaining that the manager of the Kisumu airport and a local elected councillor were soliciting money, land, and animals from them and their parents in exchange for casual paid labour opportunities on the airport expansion (Powerman 2008).

³⁷ I had first asked them to draw me their 'life lines' by indicating with a rising and falling line the positive and negative changes over their years of life. This then served as a guide for their narrations of changes over time, including their experiences of specific events.

employment as a day labourer on a local construction site and earned enough money to pay enough of his school fees to be re-admitted. As a result, Dickinson was able to sit the final examination which he passed to receive his primary education certificate.

Dickinson's friend Fanuel was left to earn some of his own school fees because his father was unwilling to invest in his education. As he described: 'My father doesn't listen to you talk about school. He says just work with the livestock because he says there's no job you can get with that schooling'. Because Fanuel's mother could not raise enough for his fees through selling vegetables, Fanuel joined Dickinson and one other boy in their class to seek temporary employment on a construction site to raise the necessary funds. During one week of work Fanuel earned Ksh500 (GBP 3.45) and paid it to the school toward his fees. During a term break he was later able to raise a further Ksh800, but he remained with a balance of Ksh1,100 in February 2009.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Headmaster allowed him to take the final examination which he passed, earning his primary education certificate.

Neither of these boys believed that they would be able to secure enough funds to proceed to the local secondary schools and so both were planning on looking for more casual labour on local construction sites. Both still said they hoped, however, to earn their secondary education certificates eventually. They described that they saw that without that certificate their employment prospects would never change from only finding small jobs for short periods of time. But they also could not articulate how secondary school graduation would secure better futures. Nevertheless, it was deemed worth their ongoing effort, at least for the next few years.

The boys' former classmate and friend, Mercy, was unable to earn money to be readmitted to school. When she had first started school her father had been employed as a technician in a local factory, but he lost that job when she was in Class 1. Because the fees had not all been paid, she had to repeat that class. But her father continued to bring in a small income through fixing umbrellas. When he died when Mercy was eight years old she had to stay at home because the school fees could not be paid. Later her mother's brother started paying her school fees, but he died when Mercy was in Class 6, and so again, she had to leave school because of lack of fees. Eventually, however, Mercy was called to go back to school by the

³⁸ Most of this amount was for the registration fee for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education final examination.

Headmaster. As she told it, she had been very good at drama and other performances (e.g. recitals) and so the Headmaster wanted her back in school so that their school's team could compete well against other local schools. The Headmaster apparently found a way to waive Mercy's fees. Mercy passed her primary examination also, but believed it was highly unlikely she could continue to secondary school since there was no one left to pay her fees. She told me that her older three sisters who had finished primary school had married soon after and were not doing any work other than selling beans and vegetables in the villages where they had married.

Consistently, young women and young men in Kanyathi expressed their hopes that their future livelihoods could be improved if they pursued more education, either through secondary school or college, or vocational training institutes. Mechanics, electrical engineering, and computers were vocations young men listed as potentially promising, while young women in school often mentioned nursing or teaching, while young women out of school mentioned hairdressing and tailoring, although no young woman ever sounded very optimistic about the economic potential of these last two options – they knew there were already many women trained in these vocations. The Catholic Church was another employment opportunity mentioned to me by several young women and men. It seemed to me in listening to these frail guesses at what might be achieved that young people in Kanyathi retained some hope, but not a great deal of confidence or optimism. But, as they said: 'You just have to try'.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped how people's lives in western Kenya have been experienced and interpreted as enmeshed with ongoing historical processes. The three quite different types of historiographies of change in 'Luoland' described in this chapter share a similar concern with how dynamic – and often simultaneous – experiences of marginality and integration, as well as vulnerability and resilience constitute a multi-layered and highly variable context through which life is interpreted. These different ways of explaining the present in terms of the past have been woven into a common perception of how life in Kanyathi (and Luoland more generally) is precarious, which I found influenced a local interpretation of what might otherwise be classified as an 'AIDS crisis' or 'orphan crisis' as part of a longer and broader

experience of change and uncertainty. Yet, while relatively complementary with one another, these different historiographies, as different ways of knowing, evidence how different interests have been at stake for different actors in what is often blurred as a shared experience. The qualitative differences in their accounts (and emphases) also make apparent how the contingencies of experience differentially affect people.

An insecure ontology is palpable in Kanyathi, and can be supported with tangible evidence, both from people's narratives of their individual lives, as well as narratives of how the village has emerged and changed as a context of shared lives and meanings. As the accounts drawn from Kanyathi have related, the people living in that village have been experiencing their lives as vulnerable for a long time. Their position at the edge of Kisumu's boundaries is part of what has contributed to this precarious existence. From experience, people can perceive how their marginality holds the simultaneous potential for opportunities to access the urban economy and services as well as risks of further marginalisation and even displacement. Local trajectories of economic volatilities and declining self-subsistence among families, combined with the demographic impoverishments associated with the high rates of illness and deaths among the middle generation of parents, have validated a pragmatic philosophy of life as struggle. How people in Kanyathi have drawn from their past experiences to engage with contemporary dilemmas of care is the focus of the rest of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 A Local Conceptual Framework for Moral Conversations

Introduction

This chapter foregrounds a different kind of contextual layer, one which often serves as a backdrop against which - as well as a salient current through which - people in Kanyathi tend to gauge the potentiality of their choices and decisions and appraise the propriety of various actions and outcomes. It is the context – or moral landscape - constituted by a particular constellation of concepts that animate how people interpret and experience their lives in Kanyathi. Specifically, I am interested in how a specific conceptual framework for moral questions and conversations manifests in the ideas and practices people bring to bear in their daily lives; the designations of, and distinctions between, good and bad, right and wrong - or more accurately, the designations of, and distinctions between, that which is socially sanctioned and that which is socially censured.

In attempting to articulate a conceptual framework apparent in Kanyathi through people's words and deeds, I seek to account for how people – as individuals and a group - participate in the construction of their perceived social reality, and specifically as this pertains to claims and questions of what is good and right – and sometimes even 'natural' – and, at least, what is acceptable (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Furthermore, I am interested in giving attention to the ideas (including ideals) that people draw upon to formulate their choices and actions, which in turn contribute to the (re)substantiation (or refutation) of those ideas. In this, I analytically approach concepts as embodied, living traditions, drawing in particular on the theories of Alasdair MacIntyre (1994 [1981]) and Talal Asad (2006) (with Asad's drawing from Wittgenstein's theory of language and the concept of *habitus* as developed by Mauss and Bourdieu).

MacIntyre (1994: 222) has described a 'living tradition' as an 'historically extended, socially embodied argument' which manifests as the context for the meaningfulness of life.

Traditions, as MacIntyre theorises, constitute a general frame within which virtues are articulated and maintained and 'the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part' (ibid.). In this, MacIntyre emphasises the potential for historical

(i.e. intergenerational) continuities and discontinuities in the definition and pursuit of what is judged by human societies to be good. MacIntyre's conceptualisation of tradition as a means of transmission for ideas and practices of what is good is useful here for its acknowledgment of how what is practiced and articulated manifests not just as specific actions and ideas, but also as context, thereby affirming the authority of the values that underpin those actions and ideas. MacIntyre also attempts to account for change in such a system by noting how historical conditions affect how effective specific ideas and actions are judged to perform; as he notes, 'a tradition may cease to progress or may degenerate' depending on how well its practice is deemed adaptable to address present circumstances (MacIntyre 1994: 146).

For Asad (1986: 14), 'A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history'. Yet Asad has also clarified that this definition does not mean for the practice of tradition to be understood as an imitation of what was done in the past or 'the apparent repetition of an old form', but rather something that meets 'the practitioners' conceptions of what is an *apt performance*' in relating the past to the present (ibid.: 14-15, emphasis in original). The crux, therefore, in Asad's notion of how tradition becomes historically extended is in how practitioners evaluate the aptness of a contemporary performance to relate to the past. This problem in turn begs the question of who counts as practitioners and how power differentials between various 'practitioners' influence the practice and outcomes of evaluations. Asad (1993, 1986) thus attends to how what he calls 'authorizing discourses' are produced and reproduced.

Where Asad takes issue with MacIntyre's notion of tradition is with what he perceives as MacIntyre's neglect of the critical role of practice in the embodiment - and consequently in the actualisation - of particular moral virtues (or 'ethics' as Asad put it). Asad adopts the concept of *habitus* to account for how the body becomes a mode of transmission through which 'traditional sensibilities' - including those associated with specific virtues - are cultivated and enacted (Asad 2006: 289). He also comes to argue, in line with Wittgenstein, that words - as 'signs-in-use' - are integral to how life is lived, with the understanding that 'The meanings of words-in-use lie, as it were, on the surface of recognizable practices - they are not mysteriously hidden in those practices' (ibid.: 215). Explicating further, Asad has advocated to study 'language as rooted in a somatic complex (hearing-feeling-seeing-remembering) and as involved in people's making/remaking themselves or others over time'

(ibid.: 212). Discourse, Asad has stated, can be a physical process (ibid: 213).

The conceptual framework from Kanyathi which I outline below is the result of my exploration of how people used words in their everyday lives to signify what they were practicing, and what they expected (or not) through their practices of particular types of relationships, as well as what people's practices signified about what meanings were being authenticated and how. I am suggesting that these 'signs-in-use' constitute a particular context of meaning which, in a symbiotic relationship, frames the meanings of their exercise in people's lives. The conceptual framework I have interpreted as existing in Kanyathi was never articulated to me by others as a system or schema, such as a coherent and self-conscious discourse for practice. Of course, people could in some situations link a kind of practice to a certain moral virtue as I describe below with particular examples, but I often learned different insights from different kinds of questions or situations. As such, the explications that follow are organised according to how I learned to understand how I should piece the different insights together. This effort to articulate how these different words and practices and meanings interconnect needs to be understood as driven by my interpretive interest; one which I hope will be helpful for introducing others to what might be conceptualised as the moral landscape of sociality and care in Kanyathi.

In introducing the configuration of this conceptual framework, I put aside for the time being how this particular field has come to be structured, and in turn structures what is contested, and how, among people in Kanyathi. Everyday struggles over how these concepts are used, and what stakes become invested in them, is the content that the rest of the dissertation examines.

The following exploration of what I learned in Kanyathi to appreciate as moral practices and virtues is quite different from the kind of analysis of the deliberations over living correctly – i.e. in correspondence with Luo traditions – that have occurred at a more pan-Luo scope in Kenya, often spearheaded by Luo elites (e.g. Luo Council of Elders and particular Luo authors). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Geissler and Prince (2010) have recently provided a focused analysis of this cultural conversation, as did Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo (1989, 1992) some years before. Those works have been important in accounting for how doctrinaire approaches to instilling Luo values and virtues have been disseminated among Luo publics, as well as how they have raised often troubling practical dilemmas in people's lives. My

current effort is different in that it leaves aside debates that focus more explicitly on Luo identity in favour of the conversations that exist in Kanyathi concerning how one should live as a good person specifically in relation to others. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the merit in Geissler and Prince's argument that some debates about what it means to live as a Luo (i.e. following 'Luo ways') are cosmological debates, and therefore intrinsic to personhood and relationality, as well as the 'flow of life' which includes potentialities for creation and destruction (Geissler and Prince 2010: 12). While certain practices, such as the construction of homes in particular orders which I discuss in Chapter 4, and others such as sexual intercourse that Geissler and Prince (2010: Chapter 7) analyse, correspond with this argument, I generally found that the practices of caring for others that are the focus of this chapter did not pivot on what it means to be a good Luo person, but rather on how a person should practice (perhaps more personalised rather than typified) interpersonal relationships. Some similar conversations have certainly been held among other Luo communities at other times, as I reference accordingly (Geissler and Prince 2010; Shipton 2007; Parkin 1978; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976). My overall interest, however, is to focus on what moral ideas seemed to be substantiated in people's practices of various everyday manners of social conduct and relationships in the particular time and space of my study in Kanyathi, which, of course (and as Chapter 2 has detailed), was hardly alienated from influences that span broader social histories.³⁹

Practices of Care

As I will outline in more tangible detail and with more ethnographic examples in Chapter 4, the care of children in Kanyathi was often practiced as the distribution of various

³⁹ My interest is also different from that of two recent studies of specific kinds of ideas and practices of care in Luo communities in Nyanza Province. Hannah Brown (2011a forthcoming and 2011b forthcoming) has analysed the meanings of care as practiced for people that are ill with HIV by trained community health care workers and volunteers under the auspices of what is called 'home-based care'. Brown (2011a) argues that the globalised concept of 'home-based care' has been easily adapted in the local Luo context because care of the sick, income generation, funeral contributions, record keeping, health education, economic stability, biomedicine, nutrition, and agriculture were all previously integrated aspects of shared home life, and often considered 'women's work' (in some part influenced by interventions of colonial governments and missionaries). Brown (2011b) has also distinguished between how family members and medical practitioners care for ill people's bodies in different ways: as familial and biomedical bodies respectively. Morten Skovdal (2009) has studied how children think about and practice care toward their parents or other guardians who are ill with HIV/AIDS, with an emphasis on children's 'coping strategies' in their caring roles, but his study does not analyse the meanings of locally specific concepts. There are, of course, some commonalities between my findings and Brown's and Skovdal's concerning ideas and practices of care and caring and I note these in my analysis as they arise.

responsibilities among different people (mainly relatives). For example, while a child may have slept and eaten at a grandmother's home, her school fees and other material costs (e.g. clothing) may have been provided by an uncle, while it was possible that an elder sibling would have been acknowledged as able to speak on her behalf and represent her interests in family decision making processes. From recognising this distributed organisation of care practices early on in my study, I became interested in understanding how responsibilities were conceptualised by adults and children.

Two different types of concepts were used to reflect the experiential quality of relationships of responsibility that were held between people. The first concept of responsibility turned on the metaphor of one person bearing the burden constituted by the other's needs. The second concept appropriated the metaphor of standing for another person, perhaps but not necessarily in place of that person, and more commonly as if giving public assurance for the righteousness of the other person's claims. As the descriptions below highlight, both types of relationships implied close practical and symbolic attachments between the two individuals; a sort of mutuality formed from the practice of such relationships.

Carrying the burden of another

There are several Dholuo words and phrases that imply a person's obligation to fulfil some accountability to another. Most of these emphasise how a responsibility is a 'burden' or 'load'; that is, a challenge to be appropriated. The noun *ting'* translates as load, burden, duty or responsibility. As one elderly man counselled another in a meeting regarding the latter's role of providing land to his grandson: '*Ma en ting'ni* / 'This is your responsibility.' The noun *ting'* is commonly paired with the verb *kawo* which means to accept or to take possession of as well as to understand and support. For example, a young man who has taken the orphaned son of his mother's sister into his household explained to me that '*Akawa ting'ne*' ('I accept responsibility for him'). The metaphor of responsibility as a load to carry is also implicated in the common usage of the verb *ting'o*, which means to carry, and the noun *pek*, which means burden, load, responsibility as well as difficulty and problem (*pek* as an adjective means heavy or huge as well as pregnant). A grandmother finished telling me about her experience caring for several orphaned children with the phrase '*Akaw ting'gi*' (lit. 'I carry these burdens'; she could have also said '*Ating'o ting'gi*'). In its meaning of bearing a challenge, the word *pek* can convey hardship and difficulty, but people usually use other

words to distinguish hardship and struggle (e.g. *thagruok* for problems, difficulties, trouble, poverty and anxieties or *chandruok* for deprivation, hardship and suffering) from fulfilling a duty (*ting'o pek* or *kawo ting'*) as a more interpersonal obligation or expectation.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting the negative connotation of these terms: *ting'*, *ting'o* and *pek* all imply a burdensome task which is not necessarily intrinsically rewarding (however, nor is it necessarily intrinsically costly).⁴⁰

People who stand for people

Another verb that was commonly used to communicate responsibility for another person was the reflexive verb *chung'n-* which means 'to stand for' to describe how one individual can represent the interests of another. To stand for someone (*-chung'n-*) is to volunteer or to accept nomination of the role of representative of that person and their interests, potentially serving as a guardian, advocate or both. When I asked children about their various relationships, I occasionally heard the phrase '*Ochung'na*' ('She or he stands for me') and more commonly '*Ochung'na e skul fees*' ('She or he stands for my school fees'). In this, children could designate to me which specific adults were responsible for different aspects of their care. Widows who had accepted a *jater* (a husband contracted through levirate marriage, ideally a patrilineal relative of the deceased husband) also described the man as someone who stood for them. For example, in approaching a male relative of her deceased husband to request that he agree to act as her *jater*, a woman may put the question to him as 'Will you stand for me?' ('*Ichung'na?*'), as my neighbour Mama Simon (b. ≈ 1948) told me she did.

Chung'n- (standing for) does not have the same negative connotations as the other Dholuo words for responsibility described above (although the same person may be the one who carries the burden of another and also stands for that other). Instead, standing for another person seems more assertive, benevolent, and perhaps conscious of hierarchical statuses of dependents and guardians. The reciprocal conjugation of the verbs duly signifies the concept as relational; a person is responsible for or to another person (or, reflexively, for oneself), and not just responsible as a passive state of being. The choice between phrasing responsibility as a physical challenge or an interpersonal relationship may be interpreted in terms of signifying material or moral dimensions and tensions.

⁴⁰ There are different words that translate more similarly to the concepts of debt and indebtedness (e.g. '*An gi gopi*' can be literally translated as 'I am with your debt.') See Shipton 2007: 79 for more on concepts of debt. People in Kanyathi did not use these terms in relation to caring for children.

Both of these ways of conceptualising relationships of responsibility for and to another person may be linked up to the existing literature about Luo patronage practices in which one person accepts the dependency of the other in return for accumulation of social esteem, prestige, or indebtedness (Shipton 2007; Parkin 1978: 93). Similar concepts of being responsible for another person have been noted among other communities. For example, in reference to a Mende community in Sierra Leone, Carolyn Bledsoe (1990: 74-75) has discussed how fosterage 'derives meaning from the politics of patronage' yet she distinguishes:

Of course, the Western categories of 'patron' and 'client' fall far short of the Mende notions I am describing. Closely tied to the notion of clientage is the notion of 'being for' someone else or other people (ngi Sheku loh va - 'I am for Sheku'). As a young man explained, 'being for' someone implies that 'you have made yourself subject to the person. You work for him, fight for him, etc. And he is in turn responsible for you in all ways [such as court fines, clothes, food, school fees, or bridewealth]'. A patron figure ('big person') whom one is 'for' can be a chief, landlord, teacher, parent, senior wife or older sibling.

Mariane Ferme's (2001) ethnography of a small Mende community in Sierra Leone in the mid-1980s offers a careful analysis of how patronage served to increase, as well as restrain, the power and prestige of the society's 'big men' and 'big women' in both kinship and political systems. Through the strategic acquisition of dependents (e.g. wives, children and others), a patron gained access to increased agricultural labour which in turn increased the agricultural yield. At the same time, however, a patron was obligated to provide for his or her dependents. The increased farming would at once display the wealth of the collective group and by association its head or patron, yet at the same time much of this wealth would already be committed to meeting the needs of the collective. In this way, Ferme judges there was a paradox in the practice of becoming a 'big person' (of wealth and social status) through acquiring 'wealth in people' because this unique status remained contingent on the patron's interdependence with his or her dependents.

Luo patron-client relationships - or relationships of 'entrustment' as Parker Shipton (2007) prefers - have been evaluated as reinforcing an ethos of sharing and egalitarianism. As Shipton (2007) has theorised this connection, the act of helping someone today is embedded

in an ideological and practical system of extended reciprocity. However, like Ferme's Mende example illustrates, the contingencies of such strategies can be critical to their ultimate efficacy, as I will explore in light of people's disillusioned experiences of unfulfilled intergenerational reciprocity in Chapter 4.

Virtues of Caring

In this section I explore how particular relationships of responsibility were conceptualised by people in Kanyathi as contributing to a more widely shared social relationship and meaning, such as with the relationship and virtue of being a participant in a family or local community of neighbours.

Sharing the burden

A phrase people commonly used to describe how their families approached the dilemma of how to provide care (e.g. shelter, food, emotional attention, school fees, and enduring kinship identification) to orphaned children relatives was 'sharing the burden' (*kawo ting*'), as in the phrase '*Wakawo ting*' *mar nyithindogi*' (lit. 'We are carrying the burden of those children'). This common statement was consistently translated to me as 'we are sharing the burden' in English, and in this I was meant to understand that the group had practiced this distribution of children's care by consensus and in unity, rather than as individualised, autonomous actors who had split up the children. Further underscoring this significance was the common affirmation that these actions were taken by groups that still considered themselves as unified by common purpose. For this, speakers would state: 'We are (still) together' ('*Wariwore*' or '*Wan pod wariwore*').

Riwo is a crucial concept for the consolidation of social relationships of many different types in Kanyathi, as well as other Luo communities. *Riwo* may simultaneously translate as 'to be together', 'to share', 'to merge through sharing', 'to unite', 'to join', 'to mix', 'to add together', and 'to hold together' (Geissler and Prince 2010: 12; Odaga 2005: 308). *Riwrwok* is the state of 'togetherness' or 'unity', while *riwore* is the verb in the reflexive, meaning 'being together' or 'merging into one'. 'Are we (still) together?' ('*Wariwore?*' and '*Wan pod wariwore?*') is a commonly posed question in Kanyathi, just as it is in other Luo settings (Geissler and Prince 2010: 9). As Geissler and Prince (2010: 234) have noted, *riwore* – as

‘merging through sharing’ is implicated in many different everyday practices and meanings, including: eating (*riwo chiemo*); conversation (*riwore*, *riwo weche* [mixing words]); sharing, from one pot or glass, beer (*riwo kong’o* or *busaa*) or liquor (*riwo chang’aa*); sharing a common grandfather (*riwo kwaru*) or a kinship bond (*riwo wat*); or planting together (*riwore waguru* [group], *riwo tich* [work], *riwo lwedo* [hands]) and subsequent sharing in the harvest (*riwo lowo* [earth]). Indeed, Geissler and Prince (ibid.) offer a very fine interpretation of how merging through sharing (*riwo*) manifests through ‘practices of sharing in the substance of the other (or sharing in substances with him)’ and they carefully consider how touch (*mulo*) can be experienced as a modality of sociality among Luo people.

Sharing among kin has been described by many ethnographers of Kenyan Luo communities as a distinctive cultural ideal and practice (Geissler and Prince 2010; Shipton 2007; Shipton 1989: 17; Parkin 1978). For instance, Geissler and Prince have discussed how Luo social and cosmological meanings were implicated in both concepts and practices of sharing. Their analysis traces the distinctions and complementarities between the Luo concept of *riwo* which implies sharing that can actualise union and the concept of *pogo* which signifies division (Geissler and Prince, 2010: 191). In their analysis of the Luo rituals of a funeral meal, for example, Geissler and Prince note the complementarities of these two actions and their combined power. While the slaughtered animal is partitioned and cooked in different pots and served on different plates for distribution (*pogo*) among subgroups to mark differentiations between kin relations, generations, and sexes, the people who share (*riwo*) through eating the same parts of the animal cooked in the same pot as well as the whole group sharing pieces of the whole animal are able to experience their unity:

While the beast has to be carefully partitioned, on a higher level, people acknowledge that, by sharing in the food cooked in one pot, the part of the animal or the slaughtered cow as a whole, they share in the larger entities embodied by these (*wariwore*, ‘we are together’). Thus, combined with each other, *riwo* and *pogo* can create unity and internal patterns of relatedness.

(Ibid.: 303)

This may well be true, and in Chapter 5 I discuss a particular ontology of solidarity that seemed to manifest from people’s experiences of sitting together and performing reciprocity with one another. However, as some of the case studies explored in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate, the ideal of ‘sharing’ can often be experienced as a sort of bargaining – and the

emergence of a bartered consensus – with significant doses of apprehension and ambivalence among certain individuals concerning how different people's shares do not seem equal or fair, and therefore the implicit question of how 'together' people really are.

Parkin's ethnography of how claims were reasoned and practiced among Luo friends and family in the late 1960s described that requests were made in a 'high moral idiom ... by using a generalized kinship idiom' (Parkin, 1978: 91) and that different arguments of justification were 'based on the Luo egalitarian philosophy that one man's good fortune does not absolve him from caring for the less fortunate' (ibid: 104). Yet, Parkin's (1978: 85) analysis reflected significant tension in the Luo concept of egalitarianism:

On the one hand, egalitarianism is the basis of Luo moral claims for accommodation and general aid from kin and affines. Here, it is seen to be a social leveller. On the other hand, egalitarianism can imply individual freedom of control by others.

Specifically, Parkin challenged the simple reading that family or group gatherings at which individual contributions are made toward a common purpose – such as to fund a funeral or wedding – are guided by an 'egalitarian ethos' among Luo people (c.f. Shipton 1989: 17). Instead, as Parkin (1978: 216) has described, donations can be made competitively, serving to emphasise hierarchies of wealth and social esteem. The public nature of contributions may be used to distinguish generous – and therefore socially important – individuals and groups (ibid: 213).

Similar ambiguity is discernible in the detailed account of customary Luo ideology and ethics collected from elders in the 1970s by Luo scholar A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo. This book includes a Luo premise that: 'Every person is ultimately responsible for his own well-being.' (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 236). However, it is later qualified that this ethical independence is 'good' when it recognises that kin relations are immutable and members of a family are expected to share and sacrifice for one another (ibid.: 238-239). And, yet, at the same time, this selflessness does not have to be extended to those outside of the kin group: 'Your neighbour's poverty does not necessarily prevent you from sleep' (ibid.: 235). The moral ambiguity is palatable, even in this attempt at codification.

Both Parkin and Ocholla-Ayayo raise the question of how one is to distinguish between those people with which one ought to share and those with which one is not expected to share. This then raises the question of why one is responsible to some people and not others. As Ocholla-Ayayo's notes instruct, it is kinship that is the defining feature, and his treatise offers descriptions of different patterns of kinship relationships. Parkin similarly observed that kinship was the principle guiding sharing, or reciprocity, between Luo people. However, he also studied how significant blurring occurred in the classification of relationships between people who once associated as friends but who later, as a result of specific practices such as sharing a home, addressed claims upon one another in the idiom of kinship. Parkin's ethnographic study of the use of the Luo concept '*omera*' ('brother') among unrelated (or distantly related) men in Nairobi in the late 1960s traces how relationships of choice could transmogrify into relationships of obligation.⁴¹ While I did not find the concept of *omera* being used in Kanyathi to portend the potential of claims made in the idiom of kinship⁴² – perhaps because a more restricted 'kinship calculus' has emerged in Kanyathi – I did find that friendship was highly valued for its opportunities for empathetic listening – or perhaps 'moral support'.

Mutual understanding as 'moral support'

An important type of sharing and cooperation that adults and children in Kanyathi valued in particular relationships was that of empathetic listening. This was characterised more simply as one person's interest to share understanding with another person. Being allowed to speak safely with another person because of their willingness to empathise was a special opportunity that demonstrated a uniquely caring relationship.

11 year-old Winnie one day explained to me the role of her 'godparent' while we looked at a series of photographs she had taken with a disposable camera I had given her⁴³:

⁴¹ As Parkin has distinguished, while *omera* commonly translates as 'my brother', it is recognised as '*theoretically* quite distinct from the term of reference and address normally used for my full and half-brother' (Parkin 1978, 104 italics in original). Yet, blurring is easily conjured since the term carries the connotation of ultimate ancestral origin and so 'straddles the conceptual idioms of kinship and friendship' (ibid: 107).

⁴² Although I did hear *omera* being used as a term of address among men (and sometimes women to men), often in situations where one person sought to calm another person (e.g. to dissuade an act of violence, or to soothe acceptance of a lesser offer in a bargaining situation).

⁴³ After a year in Kanyathi, I asked five different children (between the ages of nine and 15) with whom I had grown quite familiar and who had each demonstrated willingness to speak about their personal lives and thoughts with me, if they would take photographs of their daily lives with disposable cameras I gave them and then discuss the content of the photos with me. These photographs were mainly helpful in providing useful

Elizabeth: Who is this? [Pointing to a young woman in a photograph.]

Winnie: Her name is Sally. Her mother is like a godmother to me. They live in their home just up from ours.

Elizabeth: How is her mother like a godmother to you?

Winnie: She took me to church for my Confirmation.

Elizabeth: Are you relatives?

Winnie: Their father was a godfather to this uncle here. [Winnie's uncle, the owner of the house we were sitting in.]

They are not relatives, but people we understand well.

My grandfather asked Sally's mother to be my godmother.

Elizabeth: How is your relationship with your godmother?

Winnie: She teaches me how I should live with my parents [both of Winnie's parents are dead, and by 'parents' she is referring to her grandmother and uncles and aunts with whom she lives] and other people, and when she comes home with things for her children she also gives some to me.

Winnie's explanation that 'They are not relatives, but people we understand well' underscores how social cohesion may develop between certain people – and be recognised as such - through their willingness to demonstrate emotional reciprocity – perhaps best translated as empathy. Talking about problems together in a relationship animated with active, empathetic listening was described in many different people's accounts as a difference that set some personal relationships as more caring than others. For instance, when people wanted to gather together to discuss how to find a solution to a specific issue, the invitation could be stated as 'Let's think together' (*'Wariwore e paro'*, lit. Let's be together in thought or thinking). This kind of openness was often highly appreciated. Linus, a young married man whose parents had died when he was a teenager, described how he found his friendship with one of his elderly neighbours more supportive than his relations with his relatives (for example, his father's stepbrothers and their families living in neighbouring households). When I asked whom he talked with about the challenges he had described to me in meeting the needs of his small family (which included Linus' wife, their two young children, his wife's young orphaned sister, and Linus' young orphaned nephew), he explained:

prompts for conversations about very concrete details of different children's lives (e.g. types of activities, periods of time dedicated to such activities, etc).

- Linus: The person who I can share with when I have problems is my neighbour down here. We can talk together about our problems. We are close like that.
- Elizabeth: *Why do you think you share with this friend rather than a relative?*
- Linus: Because there are relatives here but if you go and tell them you have a problem, they say they are busy. But that friend will just listen and he won't say he is too busy.
- Elizabeth: *Is this because he is a different type of person or because he is not afraid like relatives of being asked to help you at the end of listening?*
- Linus: The neighbour, if I go to him and tell him my small problems, he can see how to give some small help or advice. Because he sees I've been doing all this on my own. And it is in his heart to try to help me.

As my question above indicates, I thought it was possible that relatives might shun another relative's attempts to discuss his or her problems ('they say they are busy') because they feared these represented overtures to come to the person's assistance. Yet, even within families, the willingness to listen and empathise – even without the provision of material assistance - was also a highly valued and distinctive relational quality. It was what 'good' families – those that were 'still together' and genuinely cared for one another – practiced. For example, when I commented, at the end of an interview with 43 year-old Rose, how her natal family seemed to really help one another out, she replied that this was because her family members 'understand one another well'.

Care in Common

These findings have started to point to how there were some notable distinctions between how caring relationships were practiced and conceptualised in the context of kinship and the context of non-kin. Generally, I found that in the context of (unrelated or distantly related) neighbours living in the village of Kanyathi, the concept of care was less linked to tangible responsibilities to and for specific others, and instead correlated with broader virtues of sociality. Nevertheless, these broader virtues of sociality were not limited in their import to neighbours, but were also important to conceptualising care among kin.

The normative idea of 'care' that I found to be in circulation across the village of Kanyathi – regardless of whether people were relatives or not - straddled three Luo concepts. First, *luoro*

is an important social quality that encompasses an idea of care and caring. While in some contexts *luoro* connotes hierarchical qualities such as respect and obedience, in other situations the concept connotes more communal qualities such as consideration, compassion, and readiness to share and to help (Grigorenko et al. 2001). While these connotations can be blended, it is predominantly the latter set of meanings that were conjured in how people used the concept to refer to specific instances of good neighbourliness (as well as good intergenerational relations, in general).⁴⁴ A child or adult might demonstrate *luoro* by bringing water from the river for a person who is too ill to fetch it themselves, for example, or by volunteering some time and effort to help someone build or repair a house that had been damaged in a storm. As people in Kanyathi explained to me, *luoro* is something that children are taught by adults as the proper way of relating to other people, especially people that deserve your careful consideration, like elders, the weak, and family members. It was also described to me as reciprocal. As one elderly woman described, a child learns to respect his parents because the parents have demonstrated their respect for the child. Parents can demonstrate this by listening to and considering what their children have to say, and their children in turn will learn to listen to and consider what their parents have to say. This was considered an important part of a properly considerate relationship between adults and children.

The second important concept of care is implicated in the verb *rito* which means ‘to watch over’ or ‘to watch out for’ (i.e. to protect); although it also literally translates as ‘to wait’ (Odaga 2005: 307).⁴⁵ This verb links one person to another because one person must watch over or out for another (or watch out for himself or herself). This is a different idea from the set of verbs and nouns associated with ‘responsibility’ that I described above, and their implication of bearing a burden. The concept of caring as ‘watching over’ or ‘watching out for’ may imply a degree of omnipotence and even paternalism, but it also leaves open the possibility for anyone to care for another; for example, while an adult might look out for a

⁴⁴ In a study of key concepts used by Luo people in their descriptions of the character and abilities of children, researchers found that ‘*Luoro* has an unequivocal positive meaning and was always mentioned in response to questions such as: ‘What is most important for a good children to have?’ and: ‘What should people have to lead a happy life?’’ (Grigorenko et al. 2001: 369). Interestingly, that study reported that respondents with more exposure to the ‘modern’ world and state institutions (e.g. school, church, and public administration) focused on the importance of the hierarchical connotations of *luoro* while less formally educated or older respondents focused on the communal and cooperative connotations of the concept.

⁴⁵ The noun ‘*rit*’ connotes ‘care, support, looking after, nurturing, protection’ according to a Dholuo-English dictionary (Odaga 2005: 307), however I rarely heard this noun being used in common parlance in Kanyathi. The use of the verb was very common. People often parted ways with the words ‘*Nyasaye oritowa*’ to express the wish ‘May God watch over us’.

child or another adult, so might a child look out for another child or an adult. The emphasis on the safety and security of the other is interesting for how it can be construed in both general and situationally-specific terms. Brown (2011a, forthcoming) has documented how women who were volunteering in a Luo community to provide home-based care for people ill with HIV described what they did as '*warito jatuo*' to indicate 'we look out for or over sick people'.

If *luoro* and *rito* encapsulate ideas of how caring can be practiced in everyday life in Kanyathi, the concept of *hera* as 'love' (*hero* is the verb meaning 'to love') runs parallel as an esteemed – indeed perhaps, an idealised - virtue of sociality. In their recent ethnography of everyday life and relations in a Luo village in Nyanza Province, Geissler and Prince (2010: 8) emphasise *hera* as a central theme in people's characterisations of social life. They have described:

JoUhero [people of the village of 'Uhero'] agree that 'there is no love these days', sharing a sense of loss and – to a greater or lesser extent – of being lost, and locating this loss in the workings of their sociality. 'Love' (*hera*) should here be understood less as an emotion or attitude than as a practice, or, rather, the multiplicity of everyday practices through which people create and enact positive social relations.

The loss of love in laments for how life has changed from cooperative and caring to individualistic and competitive was also common in Kanyathi among the older generation, as recounted in the life histories in Chapter 2. For example, Wilhelmina (b. 1932) described that life had changed because people became less able to tangibly demonstrate love through sharing (of food, for example). The increasing numbers of orphaned children to support, and the decreased number of young and middle-aged adults, were identified as having diminished people's capacity to care for one another: 'Although the love is still there,' Wilhelmina explained, 'life is expensive and one hesitates even to take one's own niece'.

As Geissler and Prince's discussion above indicates, *hera* may be contemplated as a virtue in that it is a quality of an action or practice and ultimately of actors (i.e. their character).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Reflecting how love as an emotion is implicated in particular acts of caring, Geissler and Prince (2010: 211) reviewed how people described specific acts of caring for another such as washing the body of an ill person and

In my analysis, I similarly find it useful to conceptualise *hera* – love – as a virtue that cannot be defined in an absolute sense, but rather as a virtue of life that can be contingently ascribed to specific actions, in specific circumstances.

The Heart is the Matter

Ultimately, an underlying concern with the practice of particular virtues of sociality, and specifically caring relationships, among kin and non-kin in Kanyathi, concerned motivation, and specifically how to understand what motivated different people to participate or not in such relationships. The most common explanation - or, in many cases, question – concerning why people were willing or not to practice care for others was linked to what was in people's hearts (*chuny*).

There was a lot of talk of people's hearts in Kanyathi. Among the many different characterisations of hearts I heard was the good heart (*chuny maber*), the bad heart (*chuny marach*), the strong heart (*chuny matek*), the weak heart (*chuny mayom*), the steady heart (*chuny modhil*), and the wandering (i.e. unsettled, uncertain) heart (*chuny wuotho*). People in Kanyathi commonly told me that it was people's hearts that determined how they related to one another, and more generally to the challenges of life. 'I don't know what can be in her heart,' said a middle-aged woman who puzzled over why her co-wife had not offered to help her own son's young orphaned children. When I asked 16 year-old Julia why she felt closest to one particular brother, she told me: 'It is just my heart that feels that [he] is the right one.' In Kanyathi people often referred to how their own hearts had affected their lives and were affected by their circumstances. 'What has kept me going is my steady heart,' one young man told me. And when I asked another young man why he did not sit his final primary school examination after finishing the school year, he replied: 'My heart just died [i.e. I just became discouraged]. I don't know why'. In so many different ways, people were aware of how central their hearts were to their experiences of their lives.

At the same time, many people also spoke regularly of thinking about their heart as a physical organ. Ageing women, especially, seemed concerned with their blood pressure and some

dealing with their faeces as particularly difficult but also the most clear demonstrations and actualisations of love (*hera*).

visited medical clinics several times each year to have their blood pressure tested and at such visits were often told by doctors to try to not worry so much. A few women I knew were occasionally hospitalised for high blood pressure, and ironically during such medical interventions they seemed to worry even more, often about the children they had left behind at home. For example, Cornelia (b.≈ 1955) described how she had lain in her hospital bed wondering who was feeding her children [her orphaned grandchildren] during her absence, how worried the children might be for her, and what might become of those children if her heart failed. As well, a few children I knew in Kanyathi also told me they had been diagnosed with heart problems. They described that they knew they had to be careful lest they overstrain their hearts. For example, Erick (b. 1994) told me he understood he could not play or work as hard as other children because of his weak heart. While these kinds of biomedical interpretations of the heart's functioning are different from the other, more personalised and emotional meanings described above, I think the parallel discourses about hearts are important to bear in mind. People's hearts were not necessarily conceptualised as separate entities, even if the biomedical discourse refers to a physical object. Rather, I understood both ways of thinking about the heart to implicate different – but conjoined - aspects of subjectivity, as well as life chances and the implications for sociality. People referred to asking themselves in times of worry and confusion: 'What is in my heart?' and 'Is my heart strong enough to bear this challenge?',⁴⁷

Ocholla-Ayayo (1976: 52) likened the Luo concept of heart (*chuny*) to the Christian concept of the soul and described: 'The heart, Chuny, according to the Luo, is the site of the intellect and ethical emotions and wisdom of a person'. Yet, I learned that people's actions were not necessarily conceptualised as determined by innate, unchanging hearts. Rather, there was a strong recognition among people in Kanyathi that individuals could learn (often through good parenting or family demonstrations of care) to act with a good heart (*chuny maber*) and could thus also choose to act in good ways (or the opposite). A good heart, then, could be cultivated

⁴⁷ The heart is a common idiom for different qualities of wellbeing and personhood across many different societies. Byron Good (1977) has analysed 'heart distress' as a 'folk illness' in Iran that reflects psychosocial and cultural dimensions of disease and illness, for example. Frederick Klait's ethnography of people's relationships of care, especially toward people infected with HIV and AIDS, in Botswana also notes a relationship between emotional and physical states through the idiom of a person's heart: 'A person's care, love, scorn, jealousy all influenced the physical well-being of others by communicating the quality of his or her 'heart' (*pelo*)' (Klait's 2010: 5).

and actualised through practicing selfless sharing and sacrifice, and this could cultivate and actualise the greatest of social virtues, love (*hera*).

These provisions for the mix of innate and learned qualities of a heart, also meant that there existed a pervasive distrust in Kanyathi concerning the variability of people's hearts.

Consequently, distrust of individuals' moral character and intentions was palpable in people's daily actions and statements. Most people phrased their distrust in terms of not knowing what was in other people's hearts.

Conclusion

In my study of everyday practices of social relationships in Kanyathi, I found it possible to consider how particular words-in-use – that is, the link between their signification and embodiment through relational practices – imbue meanings that interlock to create a particular – and always emergent - conceptual framework. Based on my observations, I suggest that certain actions – such as 'sharing a burden' (*kawo ting*) and 'watching out for' others (*rito*) – count as actions in themselves, but also provide the scaffolding of a context in which the meanings of particular virtues – such as 'togetherness' (*riwruok*) and 'love' (*hera*) – are authenticated. And to reverse the analysis of this relationship – as occurs in the actual cyclical exchange between discourse and practice in people's lives – is to recognise how particular virtues such as togetherness and love situate the pragmatic choices to act in certain ways, such as to share a burden with others or to watch out for another.

It is not that this conceptual framework existed as a sort of meta-discourse, structuring in a didactic way how tradition – as 'a historically extended, socially embodied argument' (MacIntyre 2007: 222) – must be practiced in the present as imitation of what was done in the past. Instead, I found that this conceptual framework existed as a social and ongoing conversation with specific core concepts and potential conceptual relationships delineated, but nevertheless adaptable to changing circumstances.

It is important to recognise how many of the ideas encapsulated in these 'words-in-use' were not stringent and concrete in their implications. For instance, the characterisations of how a heart manifests as an indeterminate mix of nature and nurture and therefore exists as

mysterious and variable highlight a constant ontological questioning within and between individuals. Furthermore, the qualifications of particular actions, such as ‘watching out for’ and ‘sharing a burden’, are not unambiguous. Rather, much of the definition of these acts – including their moral implications – are emergent through the contingencies of their practice. There are not simple truths – as clear rules, for example – available for gauging how life is being lived rightly or wrongly. Instead, the very key concepts people’s moral lives pivot from indicate a continuously uncertain and deliberative social process.

This brings me back to Asad’s (1986: 15) suggestion that what is important in such interactions between the continuance of ideas and practices is how practitioners – and so, in this case, the people living in Kanyathi - conceive of what is an ‘apt performance’ of relating past to present, or the ideal to the immediate. These processes of judging comprise the social processes by which changes – in ideas as well as practices – may be imagined, challenged, negotiated, and actualised. The rest of this dissertation is devoted to exploring these social processes in finer detail as they were experienced in people’s lives in Kanyathi.

Chapter 4 Questions of Responsibility and Orphaned Children's Care

Introduction

This chapter delves into what is at stake, and for whom, in the forced circumstances of working out how orphaned children will be provided with adequate care. I explore the work that was being done by people in Kanyathi to adjust their normative and practical responses to the questions of who should be responsible for particular children, and how, in light of increasing instances of orphanhood. The case studies reflect that this work entailed shifting discursive debates and practical strategising. I discuss how individual and collective experiences of reckoning with the exigent material and moral dimensions of bringing another child into a family and home has emphasised and pressurised a particular moral economy underpinning kinship. The acts of negotiating responsibilities for family members that occurred in this moral economy have served to (re-)generate the conspicuous cultural significance and practical tangibility of kinship as a system of care.

Dimensions of Care

Responsibility for orphaned children is not a practical or moral mystery without precepts and precedents among the Luo of western Kenya. There are commonly shared judgments on what families ought to do. In this section I describe some of the kin-based principles of social organisation that have long been ideologically and practically relevant among the Luo for raising children, including orphaned children. This overview provides background for the next section's discussion of how particular considerations of the content of childhood have influenced the care arrangements for orphaned children in the present circumstances of high parent mortality rates.

According to Luo custom, as people in Kanyathi commonly identified and existing literature also describes, orphaned children are considered to belong to their father's family (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 37-9, 120-6). Given patrilineal and patrilocal customs, children are commonly raised in ways that establish extensive familiarity with paternal and patrilineal relatives. In accordance with 'Luo ways' (Mboya 1938; Geissler and Prince 2010), each man is supposed

to first build his bachelor house (*simba*) in his father's homestead. Brothers build in the chronological and spatial succession of their birth order. Upon marriage a man is expected to upgrade the bachelor house or build another house to share with his wife. If the marriage becomes polygamous, a different house is supposed to be built for each wife (enclosed within the same shared homestead). At least the firstborn children, if not all of the children, of a husband and wife could thus be expected to live their first years in their father's family's shared homestead, with their own house located just steps down from their paternal grandparents' house and steps across from houses full of their father's brothers and their wives and children, as well as steps away from their father's other wife or wives and children. Eventually, each adult brother (except for the very youngest) and his wife or wives and children are meant to move out of the shared homestead to establish their own separate homesteads (an action referred to as '*goyo dala*': literally, 'beat the home'), which are ideally located on adjoining or nearby pieces of land, usually as allocated by senior family members from patrilineal land holdings. This pattern of proximal living arrangements, with particularly marked affiliations and distinctions, holds many repercussions for the practical and normative organisation of children's care.

The physical familiarity of living proximally is matched with normative familiarity: the children of brothers (including step-brothers) and patrilineal cousins refer to their paternal uncles and their uncles' wives as 'our fathers' (*wuonwa*) and 'our mothers' (*minewa*). Similarly, the grandchildren of brothers and patrilineal cousins refer to their paternal grandfathers and their wives as 'our grandfathers' (*kwerewa*) and 'our grandmothers' (*deyewa*). In contrast, children refer to their mothers' brothers – who live in similar patterns with their brothers at their natal home area – as 'our uncles' (*nerewa*) and their fathers' sisters – who have married elsewhere – as 'our aunts' (*weyewa*). In response, a man and his wife are expected to refer to the man's brothers' sons and daughters as 'our sons' (*yawotwa*) and 'our daughters' (*nyiwa*),⁴⁸ but to call his sisters' sons and daughters by a term that signifies they are children of a different lineage (*okepewa*). This is also how a woman refers to her brothers' sons and daughters. Cousins on the paternal side are 'our brothers' (*omegewa*) and 'our sisters' (*nyimegewa*), while cousins on the maternal side have a different classificatory term to imply they are lineally distinct (*ominewa* for boy cousins and *nyiminewa* for girl

⁴⁸ Pertinent to the discussion contained in Chapter 7 concerning the constitution of community among the wider population, these terms of 'our sons' and 'our daughters' can be used even more widely to refer to boys and men and girls and women who originate from the same village or clan.

cousins). The only exceptions to such categorical distinction by lineal descent is that children also refer to their mothers' sisters as 'our mothers' (*minewa*), implying the potential of close affinity, despite physical separations,⁴⁹ and the terms for maternal grandmothers and grandfathers are not different from those for paternal grandparents. In many different cases, including some presented in this chapter, children and adults used the differentiated terms for their maternal relatives to try to explain to me why certain practices were considered culturally abnormal.

In daily and deliberate references, however, distinctions can be made within classificatory sets of relationships. Within the same homestead, people of different houses are referred to as 'people of the house' (*joot*), and this implies that they share the same father and mother, which often serves as an important distinction in polygamous marriages. As well, biological parents often come to be called by a new name in relation to their firstborn child, or firstborn son, or alternately by several different names according to which child the speaker is most familiar. For example, some clan members and local neighbours commonly addressed my 'host mother' Augustina as '*Min Ben*' in reference to her firstborn son even now that he is dead, and she is addressed by others as '*Min Atieno*' in reference to her firstborn child and daughter Atieno who is also now deceased, but other relatives and neighbours call her '*Min Calvin*' or '*Min Okumu*' in reference to her two surviving sons. However, Augustina was never referred to as '*Min David*' or '*Min Julia*' although she has raised this nephew and niece since their father and mother died when they were very young children. The only examples I heard of adults being named in relation to orphaned children they had raised were in cases where the adults did not also have biological children. Similarly, children may be addressed as the son or daughter of a particular individual (e.g. *Wuod Ben*, 'son of Ben', or *Nyar Ben*, 'daughter of Ben'). However, the use of this type of naming seems to be in decline, especially among orphaned children. To address a child as the daughter or son of a deceased parent was not done lightly, but rather very purposefully to emphasise respect for the child and/or the deceased parent. For the most part, however, adults avoided such references because it was thought that this can emotionally disturb a child by reminding him or her of their bereavement.

⁴⁹ While sisters often marry men in different locations, it is also common for sisters to marry men of the same family, clan, or location. In addition, there is a Luo custom whereby a sister may marry her deceased sister's husband, or join her sister and her sister's husband in marriage if the first sister is unable to bear children. There were cases of both of these customs being followed in the study village.

The associations implicated between relatives of the same lineage, and especially those sharing a homestead or series of proximal homesteads, have many practical manifestations. The sequencing of building individual homes, marrying, and planting and harvesting crops are all determined by a hierarchy of birth orders and marital statuses. Specifically, seniority is recognised according to the order of brothers' births and, in the case of polygamous homes, in order of women's marriages to the same man.⁵⁰ Brothers are supposed to build their own bachelor houses, marry, and later establish their separate homesteads in sequencing that corresponds with their birth order (i.e. eldest first, youngest last). Even if inconsistencies in this sequencing arise in practice, particular sanctions are often imposed to try to retain the primacy of this status hierarchy. For instance, if a younger brother starts to live with a woman before an elder brother has married, the younger brother is not supposed to pay bridewealth before his elder brother has done this. This can cause some upset in instances where the younger brother's wife and her family want bridewealth to be paid. On their side, younger sisters are not supposed to receive bridewealth before their elder sisters. Therefore, in such situations there are many people who can find themselves 'blocked' (*dino*).⁵¹ Senior brothers and their wives – and senior wives within polygamous marriages – are also supposed to take the lead in building homes and planting and harvesting crops. If an elder brother is delinquent in building his house or planting his crop this can block his younger brothers' establishment of their own houses and harvests. In the study area, there were many cases of the problem of an elder brother who had not yet established his bachelor house or own homestead and was therefore blocking his younger brother from building a house. As these examples indicate, people's progressions through life can be stymied symbolically and practically if customary hierarchical sequencing stalls.

In even more mundane ways, children's lives can be patterned by the practical implications of norms of differentiation and affiliation by kinship categories, age, and gender as well as other distinctions such as birth order and individual affinities. The ways in which children are sheltered and fed, for example, as well as the expectations for their own reciprocal

⁵⁰ These distinctions are also marked by nominal categories: a man who is the eldest of a number of brothers is referred to by his paternal nephews and nieces as 'our big father' (*babawa maduong*) while the youngest brother is referred to by his paternal nephews and nieces as 'our small father' (*babawa matin*). Similarly, the first wife to a marriage is often referred to by the children of subsequent wives as 'our big mother' (*minwa maduong*) while the last wife to a marriage is referred to by the children of previous wives as 'our small mother' (*minwa matin*).

⁵¹ See Geissler and Prince (2010, especially pages 113-134) for more discussion on Luo concerns with how ways for growth can be opened or blocked.

labour with the household or homestead, are affected by such qualities. Specifically, after reaching a certain age – approximately five or six - children are expected to no longer sleep under the same roof as their parents, or any conjugal couple (e.g. grandparents). According to Luo ideal practices, boys are to sleep in the bachelor house (*simba*) of an older brother or male cousin, while girls are to sleep in a grandmother's house – traditionally referred to as the *siwindhe* (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 58-87; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989: 92-5). These changes to sleeping locations are commonly explained in terms of a sexual avoidance taboo: it is judged that after a certain age children can become cognisant of adults' sexual relations and therefore they should not be present under the same roof as a potentially sexually active couple.⁵² In addition, in the past, the separation of boys and girls was also associated with gendered learning environments: boys would learn among male groups while girls would learn among other female relatives, including their grandmother (Ominde 1952; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 58-87; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989: 92-95). In the village of Kanyathi most people still disapproved of children older than approximately five years old sleeping under the same roof as their parents and they sent their children to sleep in the houses of single relatives or various cookhouses, including cookhouses next to their own houses.⁵³

Commonly, as night would fall in the village, children would disperse from where they had eaten an evening meal to sleep in different places and would reassemble at their 'home' in the daylight hours. However, the rationale that this is done to provide gendered learning environments was not ever described to me by any adult or child as a motivation. When I directly asked one elderly woman (b. ≈ 1930) about this aspect of child socialisation that I had read about she told me: 'That was the way it was in the past, but not today. Today it cannot be that way because everyone has orphans. The grandmothers have their own orphans to stay with'.

My observations of children's sleeping arrangements in Kanyathi indicated these to be highly contingent on children's relationships, including which relatives had the capacity and willingness to host additional children. Specifically, older male cousins or step-brothers could refuse a younger boy a place to sleep in their *simba*, while a girl's grandmother might have had diminished capacity to take in additional children due to her fosterage of other orphaned grandchildren. However, allegiances among cousins could shift according to

⁵² If one adult is away it is considered acceptable for a child to sleep under the same roof as the other adult.

⁵³ It has become extremely common in 'town' (i.e. Kisumu), however, for children and adults to sleep under the same roof.

various different considerations while a child's helpfulness in domestic chores might change a grandmother's mind, for example.

A more tangible challenge arises from how difficult it has been for many young men (and their families) to raise the required material resources to build their bachelor houses.⁵⁴ Without the construction of these houses, there were fewer obvious places available for young men and their younger siblings to sleep. Given a scarcity of space in actual houses, there was competition among children and children could end up sleeping in poor quality shelters. Many children slept in relatives' or neighbours' cookhouses (with smoky air from wood burning stoves and poor ventilation), and some children slept in animal shelters (e.g. with cows in their roofed and walled pens). Permission to sleep in these spaces could be dependent on children's fulfilment of domestic chores. As well, children could only spend limited time in these spaces because of their other uses: children were often expected to store their clothing, toothbrush, and other personal belongings in a main house, which required them to return to that house early in the morning so as to prepare themselves for the day. Children also rarely had lanterns in the cookhouses or animal shelters where they slept which meant they preferred to remain at a main house into the night so as to read and write, mend things, or do other activities. Two key implications of such patterning of sleeping practices were the high degree of individualism that children could experience in scavenging for a place to secure as their sleeping space, and – perhaps counter-intuitively - the potential for *less* secure and comfortable sleeping arrangements among children who lived with their married biological or other caregivers (and could not sleep under the couple's roof) compared to children who stayed with a single adult (and who could sleep under the adult's roof).

Communal cooking and eating have been documented as common, and culturally idealised, practices among Luo homesteads (Whisson 1964; Ocholla-Ayayo 1976; Francis 1991; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2007). According to Luo patterning, a homestead may have one main kitchen where the different women (and children) take turns cooking for the homestead's several households. Indeed, following custom, a new wife of a son of the family could be expected to cook and farm under the guidance of her mother-in-law (e.g. in her mother-in-law's kitchen and garden) for several years until her own kitchen and garden

⁵⁴ The cost of materials for a basic house measuring approximately 6 meters by 8 meters with mud walls and floors and open windows but a tin roof and a wooden door was approximately Ksh28,000 (GBP 200) in 2008.

had been established. Even if each house in the homestead has its own cookhouse, in an ideal shared homestead if the mother of one household of children is away at work in the fields or in town, another mother or grandmother should cook enough food to share with that one woman's children. This element of communal living arrangements has been described as crucial to absorbing orphaned children's care (Nyambedha et al. 2003a; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2007). As an elderly woman (b. $\approx$ 1936) in Kanyathi described the past way of life to me, 'At that time, all the people living together would bring their food to eat together and you would not notice an orphan there'. Although, certainly, discrimination in the allocation of food by another 'mother' (whether a father's other wife or a father's brother's wife) so that a particular woman's children are favoured or shunned was commonly described in older and younger people's accounts of their childhoods in Kanyathi and has also been included in other popular and research accounts of domestic life among Luo families (Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Nyambedha et al. 2003a). The material in this chapter, however, reveals that many adults perceived that they hold fast to the principle that all children should be fed equally – *if* all of those children are acknowledged to be the responsibility of a particular household.

There is also a well-established principle among the Luo that all children should be provided with some formal education. Children's enrolment in school has a long history of high valorisation among the Luo (Odinga 1967; Ochieng', 2002; Ochwada, 2002; Onyango-Ouma 2006; Ogot 2009). Primary and secondary school enrolment rates steadily increased in Nyanza province since Kenya's independence.⁵⁵ Parkin's (1978: 82) study of Luo families living in Nairobi in the late 1960s described how the principle of universal access to education was significant then:

Fathers, though rarely mothers, are likely to be accused of negligence by sons and daughters whose education has had to be terminated before it is sufficient to qualify them for what they regard as an acceptable job. ... A dominant factor limiting the likelihood that many children will reach a high educational level is the Luo egalitarian view that as many sons and daughters

⁵⁵ **Table 4.1:** Nyanza Province School Enrolment Statistics (based on figures in Maxon 2002).

	1965	1969	1974/5	1980	1984/5	1990	1995
Primary school enrolment	162,299	203,016	562,511	785,537	833,067	977,996	991,687
Secondary school enrolment	-	15,548	31,800	70,900	80,800	90,900	112,700

The introduction of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s increased the costs of education for students' families and throughout Kenya primary school enrolment fell from 95% to 85% (Rugene and Njeru 2003). After the introduction of 'free' primary education in Kenya total enrolment in public primary schools increased by 22.4% between 2000/2 and 2003/5 (Bold et al. 2009).

should be educated as possible. ... In Luo polygynous families, the respective mothers further substantiate the egalitarian view that no children, whatever their birth-order, should legitimately be given preferential treatment.

In present day Kanyathi, the idea that every child should be allowed the chance to pursue his or her education seemed strongly supported among the majority of adults and children. Children especially insisted that access to education should be a critical factor in determining how caretakers for orphaned children be chosen. A point of consensus has formed around the goal that each child should finish primary school at least, and beyond that minimum, as much education as possible and equivalent to other children in the household or wider family. This reflects a shifted perspective in relation to the changed costs associated with primary education. Since the Kenyan government's increased subsidisation of primary education in 2003 (in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education), it has become considered less acceptable in Kanyathi for families to not at least endeavour to ensure each child completes primary school. The expectation of school completion is exacerbated by the general understanding that most employment requires higher and higher education attainment, although there is certainly doubt among many adults and children that primary education, and even secondary education, alone can earn individuals competitive advantage in the job market. Nevertheless, the argument that some parents make that education is a wasted investment because the economy does not have jobs for graduates – like Fanuel's father who 'says just work with the livestock because he says there's no job you can get with that schooling', as described in Chapter 2 – is not generally well received or respected among adults or children in Kanyathi. Such guardians are seen as selfishly shirking an important responsibility to support the child to have 'a chance to try'.

The popularity of the notion that primary education is a requirement for children's proper care may have also been particularly pervasive in my study's context because children's work and schooling were not considered mutually exclusive. Children's full-time labour was not calculated as an alternative opportunity for improving the household's economic lot. With limited plots of land to farm, and specific planting and harvesting periods, there was not regular demand or much potential for increased earnings as a result of additional farm labour. Except for during specific farm labour-intensive weeks in the year, girls – and some boys if there were no girls available – that were not attending school assisted or substituted older women's collection of water and firewood and did some of the household's cooking and

cleaning. Boys out of school were primarily responsible for moving cattle to and from water sources. Yet, girls and boys enrolled in school also did these same chores before and after school hours. For example, in the household where I lived, Julia, the one girl in the family, collected water from the river, washed the previous night's dishes, and swept the compound every morning before she put on her school uniform and walked to her primary school. Each evening after returning from school she helped her aunt with cooking and cleaning tasks – and fetching water - until approximately 9pm after which time she could do her school work. On the weekends she could be expected to do more tasks such as helping to wash clothes and fetch firewood. The household's three older boys (who had already finished primary school and were not attending secondary school) and the youngest boy (who had not started going to school for full days) were only responsible for the tasks of moving the household's two cows to the river to drink or a pasture to graze, and later returning them to the homestead.

Earning additional income for the household through children's employment was not a common option or practice among the people of Kanyathi. As described in Chapter 2, older boys and young men in the village were occasionally hired for a day or several days of paid work on a construction site or in other people's farms, and a few older boys enrolled in school did such paid temporary work when they needed to earn school fees. It was extremely rare to hear of cases of children being pressured by their families to quit school so that they could gain paid work – probably in part because there were so few opportunities for paid work in the area. There was not significant demand experienced among Kanyathi households for domestic help employment (locally-termed 'housegirls'). Such employment opportunities, or just room-and-board-for-service arrangements, were often arranged through family relations and thus opened themselves up to the entire family's judgments. In this study, there was only one case found of a girl not being returned to primary school after her parents' deaths and being taken in by a relative to work as a housegirl. In this case, a distant relative complained to another relative, and there was much local gossip that this was not right, however, no change was made. There were, however, several examples of especially girl orphans being fostered into households that sent them to primary school and expected them to simultaneously help with household chores. This was generally regarded as a sensible plan by both adults and children. For example, a group of twelve year old girls told me that orphaned girls have an easier time than orphaned boys because households want them. However, the girls also explained that this was because girls are wanted for their domestic labour, and not out of love.

The following passage of my interview with Daisy, a fourteen year old girl who lived near me in Kanyathi, reflects many of the features of childhood and distributed practices of child care that continue among some families in Kanyathi. Daisy was one of the girls of the village who regularly came over to my house during the school holidays to use my coloured pens and paper to make drawings and sit around with some other girls of her age, including her class-mate Julia with whom I lived. Daisy was in Class 8 (the final year of primary school) and often had an infant tied to her back and sometimes a toddler accompanying her as well. On one occasion I asked her to draw the people she was closest to and we had the following conversation:

Elizabeth: So you have said your uncle [father's brother] is the person you feel closest to. Why is that?

Daisy: My uncle is kind and likes me. He has said if I perform well [on the primary school final exams] he will buy me the uniform and things I need for secondary school. Those times when I'm sent from school [for fees payment], my uncle gives me what I need quickly.

Elizabeth: And who do you live with?

Daisy: I live with my uncle and aunt. And my older brother who is in Form 1 at a boarding school. And my younger sister. And my uncle's two young children.

Elizabeth: Is this uncle your father's brother?

Daisy: Yes.

Elizabeth: And is there anyone else living in your homestead?

Daisy: Yes, my mother is there. She is a nurse at the [local] hospital.

Elizabeth: So whose house do you sleep in?

Daisy: When my father is not there, I sleep with my mother in her house. When my father returns, I sleep in my grandmother's house.

Elizabeth: So where is your father when he is not at home?

Daisy: My father stays at Busia [city on border with Uganda]. He works there. He comes back home after work closes. My father is a son of this village.

Elizabeth: And who pays for your school fees?

Daisy: My father pays the school fees.

I share this example with Daisy's iterative filling in of the organisation of her life because it reflects how the provision of her care is quite widely distributed. In the first part of our

conversation I had assumed Daisy's parents were dead because she did not identify them as integral to her life. She first volunteered that it is her uncle with whom she feels closest because her uncle is available to her on a day-to-day basis to encourage her and to ensure that she has the basic things she needs. It was only on continuing to ask specific questions that I learned that Daisy's mother and father are, in fact, alive and often present at home. Indeed, the formal employment of both her father and mother make Daisy's circumstances seem much more economically secure than the majority of children living in Kanyathi. As she explained, it is her parents that pay her school fees, which is often the most challenging material component of caring for a child in Kanyathi. Nevertheless, it seems that Daisy's mother and father are less immediately important to Daisy's assessment of her home and family life because her parents are not as participatory in the quotidian nature of her care provision. As well, through my observations, it became clear that Daisy actively reciprocates care with her uncle's family: she works at the uncle's grinding mill in the evenings, often cares for her younger cousins, and Daisy does many other chores such as fetching water and washing dishes for her uncle's household. In my common interactions and observations of Daisy I came to consider her a very well cared for child in Kanyathi.

The absence of Daisy's parents for work and her integration with her other relatives' households reflects a long-established pattern of distributed care among the Luo throughout Kenya. Analysis of World Fertility Survey reports from the late 1970s and early 1980s indicates that over 15 percent of Luo children in Kenya were living apart from their mothers. Age and gender affected which children were fostered into different households: 25 percent of children between the ages of ten and 14 were found to be living apart from their mothers as contrasted with just six percent of children under four years of age; while over 20 percent of girls between the ages of five and nine were living apart from their mothers as contrasted with less than 16 percent of boys similarly aged (Page 1989: 415).

Many different studies have documented how fosterage into relatives' households has been a strategy pursued for many different reasons among Luo families in the past (Parkin 1978; Page 1989; Geissler and Prince 2004). It has been common for children to have moved from one household to another so as to secure particular education opportunities. Parkin's (1978) ethnography of a Luo population living in a Nairobi housing settlement in the late 1960s provides evidence of the common practice of children being temporarily fostered into urban households of relatives from their rural homes so that they could access education and

employment opportunities. Children (whether orphaned or not) have also been fostered out of child-abundant households into child-scarce households so as to simultaneously ease the child care pressures of the former while providing domestic assistance to the latter. Such distributions have resulted in many children living with – not just sleeping in the houses of – their grandmothers. A 2001 study in a small village in Bondo District, Nyanza Province found that nearly all elderly women lived with grandchildren and that most children had at some point lived with a grandmother, regardless of whether their parents were alive or not (Geissler and Prince 2004).⁵⁶ Children's assistance to grandmothers was identified as one of the most important influences for such arrangements (ibid.). A more recent study from Bondo District in Nyanza Province also found that children's labour contributions, including their caring for others, were considered as helpfully reciprocal for fostering households (Skovdal 2009). These kinds of historical patterns and practical implications of fosterage provide precedents and rationale for how many people in Kanyathi consider orphaned children should be fostered. However, as the following section describes in explicit detail, such considerations have come under increasing pressure due to the increasing numbers of orphaned children and the costs that are incurred in providing what is considered adequate care to children.

The Content of Care Decisions

In my first discussion with a group of neighbouring fathers in Kanyathi I asked them how families work out who will provide care to deceased relatives' orphaned children. Their responses flagged multiple considerations:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Father 1 (F1): | The family sits down first together and decides together who is able to take the children. |
| F2: | People sit down as a family, even the aunties [weyewa: sisters to the children's father], and some can volunteer to take the children. One of the |

⁵⁶ Another recent study in Bondo District (Muga and Onyango-Ouma 2009) found that among 100 elderly residents (over 55 years of age, with 50% between 65 and 87 years of age) purposefully sampled as having 'caretaking responsibilities' for 'dependent children' 49 had between three and five 'dependents' while 21 had between six and ten 'dependants' in their households. 'Dependent children' included orphans (37%), children whose parents were too poor to take care of them (34%), children who stayed with their elderly caretakers to give them companionship (10%), children who were neglected and abused by their parents (7%), children from broken marriages (5%), children born out-of-wedlock (4%), and children whose parents were away in urban centres (3%). 65 of these 100 elderly caretakers were widowed women heading households.

sisters can volunteer to take one child. And if she can see that the brother who is to take the children has too great a burden, she may offer to take one or more.

Elizabeth: *What factors do they consider?*

F3: Financial capability is the major factor.

F4: We look at if the child will be comfortable and treated as if by a mother and father.

F5: They also look for if the child will be educated rather than just caring for cattle and doing housework.

These answers emphasise that there are two fundamental features that structure what decisions will be made: norms regarding the content of childhood; and norms regarding the content of kinship. Revealing the latter, the men's responses indicate that decisions are clearly meant to be made within the family – and by this, the men referred to the close relatives of the children's father. As well, these decisions are clearly meant to be reached by consensus following a deliberate process of considering individuals' abilities and willingness to foster. Therefore, a particular idea and practice of kinship is critical to the process and outcomes of such care decisions. These kinds of considerations are discussed further in the next section, while the process of decision making is analysed in greater detail in Chapter 5. This section reviews how there is an index of an adequate childhood that also crucially structures care arrangements. As described by the men above, a child is supposed to feel cared for ('comfortable and treated as if by a mother and father'), and investments are supposed to be made to help the child's advancement, particularly in terms of education. A child is not supposed to be fostered into a household so that his or her labour can be exploited ('the child will be educated rather than just caring for cattle and doing housework').

My study found that if the care of orphaned children was deliberated upon by adults, there was significant consensus in what the content of care should entail. Most prominently, this included the provision of prepared food and school fees. The provision of children's clothing and medical care were rarely mentioned in interviews but were evident through observation of households' activities. Additionally, adults identified as their secondary concerns that a child feel comfortable in his or her household and a preference for children to live among, or at least in regular contact with, their patrilineal relatives.

Children (orphaned and non-orphaned) cited similar priorities, and similarly ordered. Interestingly, older children were the least likely to identify feeling comfortable as an important quality. Instead, they said they preferred access to education, even at the cost of comfort. For example, as 17 year old Nelson reflected on how he had been separated from his brothers and sister at the age of nine so that he could help his single aunt with domestic chores in exchange for her sending him to school (which his older brothers could not afford): ‘I was missing [my siblings], but because of what took place there was no way. But actually I was missing them. But at least I went to school’. Nelson’s older brothers had not finished primary school, but Nelson did. Yet Nelson and his older brothers and younger sister, Auma, as well as their aunts and uncles, all agreed that the child who had been best cared for was Auma who at the age of seven was taken by a relative to an orphanage in Kisumu. This was because Auma had experienced the most uninterrupted and highest quality of education. As well, Auma retained a connection with a potential ‘sponsor’ outside of the family, which represented a potential chance for further assistance in her future.

Despite children’s stated prioritisation of education over comfort, many older children’s actual stories of their different living arrangements tended to emphasise how they felt the adults in their households seemed to value or resent them. For example, Nelson described how after finishing primary school and finding that his aunt could not pay for his secondary education, Nelson decided to return to live with his brothers because he felt it was where he belonged. He said, ‘You know your home is your home so I just decided this is where I should stay’. It is also likely that Nelson calculated that his chances to secure access to land would be improved through returning to live with his brothers on the family’s land.

Children’s accounts of their circumstances, especially when described in their informal conversations with me rather than interviews, also often gave significant emphasis to the need for children to be treated equally. Discrimination among household children through the allocation of material goods or domestic chores was a highly sensitive issue. This also extended to a lesser extent to the importance of children not to be without those basic personal belongings such as shoes and a school bag that other children in the village possessed (and to which teachers tended to draw critical attention). Several different orphaned children confided in me – without my direct asking about household allocations

– that they felt discriminated against by their guardians who favoured their other children. As I described in Chapter 2, 13 year old Beryl had complained to me that her grandmother took the things a local charity donated to her because Beryl was identified as a ‘needy orphan’ –and gave them to the grandmother’s son who was enrolled in a boarding secondary school. Beryl daydreamed aloud about running away to live as a ‘ninja’ on the streets of Kisumu because she felt she was not loved at home.

With material considerations at front of mind for many, the ‘ability’ of potential fostering-in households in terms of their economic resources was a central determinant.⁵⁷ As stated succinctly in the first response from the father’s discussion about what families consider: ‘Financial capability is the major factor’. Estimations of a household’s ability involved efforts to compare a household’s available resources with their current responsibilities. For example, many adults described how it would be unfair to ask a household with limited means and many young children to take more young children. Distributing the economic burden (*ting*) of providing for orphaned children was the most commonly chosen approach, leading to the separation of orphaned siblings among several different households and relatives. Moreover, the immediate circumstances of households, as well as the immediate needs of children, were primarily considered. Long-range plans were not necessarily worked out. Children might be taken into the household of a relative who could only manage to provide shelter, food, and clothing during their pre-school years with the expectation that other arrangements would be worked out to ensure that the child could attend school when he or she became old enough. This type of arrangement reflects the notion that children may be temporarily placed with different relatives or households to ensure that their immediate and changing needs can be met.

According to most adults, the provision of food for additional children did not constitute a major burden for their households. This is despite this study’s findings that the majority of households relied heavily on their harvests for between a third and a half of their annual food consumption and could seldom afford to supplement their two daily meals of the staple food

⁵⁷ *Nyalo* translates as ‘ability’. For example, ‘*En onge nyalo*’, translates as ‘He does not have the ability’. *Nyalo* is often used to express the specific ability to assist or support in conjunction with *konyruok* which translates as ‘assistance’. *Jokony* translates as ‘people that help’.

*ugali*⁵⁸ with anything more than the purchase of beans or green vegetables (e.g. kale, cowpeas, cabbage), and the availability of milky tea, eggs, and local fruits (e.g. mangoes, bananas, and papayas) from the homestead's cows, chickens and fruit trees, with the common exception of a weekly meal of purchased small dried fish (*omena*).⁵⁹ Repeatedly, adults caring for orphaned children explained their attitude with the following statement: 'They will just eat what we eat. If there is no food, we will all go hungry'.

However, it was not just a household's ability to feed children that was considered important. So too was the willingness of a household's adults to ensure orphaned children were provided for. There were cases reported in which the provision of food to orphaned children was neglected by their nominal guardians, even when, as is often the case, the children were living very proximally, such as in the same homestead. This neglect most commonly seemed to occur in instances when adults had purposefully decided not to allocate their household's resources to encompass the needs of other children. Such lack of sharing food with young children was consistently judged by adults and children in this study as purposeful, and avoidable, neglect. For instance, when five year old Anne walked the approximately 12 kilometres from her paternal grandparents' home to her deceased mother's sister's home, with her baby sister on her back, and explained to her aunt that her grandparents had left the two children in the house all day without any food while they worked in their fields, the aunt and her husband, and the girls' other maternal relatives, roundly criticised the grandparents and refused to return the children to their care. While the denial of food to children could certainly be interpreted as a signal that such households are poor and suffering themselves, in Kanyathi it was also taken to indicate a more deliberate, than forced, abdication of responsibility for orphaned children. I elaborate further on this finding in this chapter's last section.

⁵⁸ Throughout Kenya the price of maize flour rose persistently and significantly between 2007 and 2009. In the study area: in June 2007 2 kilograms of maize flour cost Ksh48 (GBP 0.36); in April 2008 Ksh60 (GBP 0.49); and by the end of November 2008 Ksh100 (GBP 0.83). (Time adjusted currency exchange rates used.)

⁵⁹ The majority of children in this study ate two meals daily (at lunch and dinner, drinking tea only for breakfast) and only ate meat on special occasions (e.g. once or twice a month at a funeral or with visitors – however, children received very small pieces of meat on these occasions). However, fish, and especially a small dried fish (*omena*) was eaten more regularly, commonly weekly, by the majority of children interviewed about their regular diets. This is similar to other findings from the region. Grab and Priebe (2009) found that 38% of Luo mothers that lived within 20 kilometres of Lake Victoria allocated protein rich food (mainly fish) to their children at least once a week. Data from the Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey of 2005/2006 (KNBS 2006) reports that households in Nyanza seem to spend 6.1% of their budget for food on fish compared to a national average of 2.1%. A study of 411 Luo children from two primary schools in Nyando and Kisumu districts of Nyanza Province found no significant difference between the nutritional status of orphaned and non-orphaned Luo children (Zidron et al. 2009).

The popular standard of formal education significantly raises the stakes of assuming responsibility for a child. Despite the rather strong normative consensus concerning the importance for each child to attend school, in practice, the provision of children's education was certainly a fractious issue since it posed more practical challenges than the provision of food or shelter. School fees were consistently raised as the most difficult aspect of caring for a child. People described that payment of school fees has always been difficult for some families which has meant that many children did not finish their primary education, much less their secondary. This is also reported in earlier studies (Molnos 1968; Parkin 1978; Watkins 2000). Yet, people in Kanyathi also described that today there is an increased expectation that all children will finish primary school, and increasingly proceed through secondary education. As discussed in the previous section, this expectation has been fuelled by the Kenyan government's policy of 'free' primary and subsidised secondary education, respectively announced in 2003 and 2008. With these announcements and the cutting of school fees, vast numbers of children (re)joined school (Bold et al. 2009). However, despite the policy announcements that primary education would be free and secondary education highly subsidised by the government, students' families have still been required to pay specific costs. For instance, in 2008 the local primary school charged each student a 'supplementary fee' (to pay for additional teachers) of Ksh300/month (GBP 2.20), and Class 8 pupils were charged Ksh1,900 (GBP 13.7) for mandatory extra tutorials during school holidays as well as the Ksh300 examination fee, while the annual fees for a student in the local secondary school were Ksh7,100 (GBP 51) plus a school-specific 'development fee' of Ksh2,000 (GBP 14). In addition, each child attending school was required to have a school uniform and specified text books and notebooks. These cumulative costs require substantially large proportions of many households' budgets, especially when there are several school-aged children in the same household.

School fees were often the most tangible as well as the most individualised costs associated with providing care to children in Kanyathi. Other costs, such as food and clothing were more easily absorbed in households' general sharing, either through accessing what was at hand (e.g. farm produce, used clothes) or consuming in balance with earnings (or harvest). School fees were often required in relatively large lump sums rather than in small daily instalments and therefore could be experienced like economic shocks, despite their relatively predictable schedule. Demands for lump sum payments could result in a child's carers' selling an asset,

such as a goat, or taking a loan, or waiting to pay it from their pay-out from a rotating savings and loans group. Moreover, school fees were not just experienced as individualised in that they required comparably significant one-off, rather than smaller, regularised, payments, but also because they were invested for one particular individual's benefit rather than the shared benefit of the group. As my 'host father' Isaiah explained about his challenges in caring for his children, and orphaned grandchild, as well as the orphaned children of his brother:

The challenge I face is on the side of school fees. On the side of feeding them, that is no problem. They will eat what we eat. If there is no food, we will all go hungry. But paying for school fees and other school costs is difficult.

The juxtaposition of a standard valorisation of children's education with the challenges of households to cover the associated costs had led to many different arrangements. There were many cases recounted and observed in which children who had been living in one household were later moved to another because the former could no longer provide school fees whereas the latter could, or the latter was nearer to a more affordable school. In other situations a specific relative volunteered or agreed to cover the school fees for a particular child while that child continued to live in another relative's household. For example, there were several cases of brothers paying for their deceased siblings' orphaned children's school fees while these children lived with their grandmothers.

The option of trying to place a child in a children's home was also most commonly associated with an interest in ensuring access to education, as described above in the case of Auma. In fact, no adult or child in Kanyathi expressed disapproval over a child's placement in an orphanage if this ensured the child's education. While some adults remarked that it was unfortunate for children to be raised in orphanages because these children would not receive guidance and discipline from adult family members, all adults stated that the benefits of the educational opportunities outweighed any other concerns they might have. When I asked children who had been raised in orphanages as well as their child relatives (e.g. siblings and cousins) to compare the situation of being raised in an orphanage with that of being raised in a family's home, all children responded that those raised in children's homes were better off because they received better quality primary education. Julia's list of how her brother David's ten years in an orphanage were better than her ten years with their aunt and uncle included: he could go to school every day because he did not have other chores; he could complete his

homework after school because his only responsibility was to wash his own clothes; he could concentrate on his school lessons better because he was fed more; and at his school in Kisumu the teachers taught in English and not Dholuo like teachers tended to at the local village's school. With these advantages, Julia and David, and their cousins agreed, David had been the best off.

The prioritisation of economic ability, particularly in light of education costs, in deliberations over children's care arrangements often led to placements that challenge customary child 'inheritance' norms. While Luo children are customarily supposed to grow up in their patrilocal homes and be identified with their patrilineal kin, exceptions have regularly been made in orphaned children's living arrangements. My study found it has been quite common for sisters to volunteer to take orphaned children into their homes in order to ease their brothers' burdens. While this keeps children living with a father's sibling, this means that children move away from their father's home and patrilineal land. In explaining why a sister would step forward or be called upon to take responsibility for the care of a brother's orphaned children, women and men described notions of fairness and 'sharing the burden' (*kawo ting*). I have described this idea in Chapter 3 and will probe it further in the last section of this chapter. More conspicuous in demonstrating that children's care was often determined according to economic ability rather than customary child caretaking roles was the common practice of orphaned children's maternal relatives stepping forward to ensure children's wellbeing.

People in Kanyathi agreed that it is entirely acceptable for maternal relatives to nominate themselves for the care of orphaned children after comparing their means to provide with those of the children's paternal kin. As stated by one woman in the context of a group discussion among several neighbouring mothers and grandmothers:

The parents from the maternal side can talk to the parents on the paternal side. Then if on the maternal side there are people who are able then they can say that 'Where our sister married they are not financially able so we can share them. You bring the children and we will stay with them'. So their uncles [mother's brothers] will help them, but their paternal home is there, and the children will go back home again to the paternal home. Their fathers [father's brothers] can still help them if the children are staying with the maternal family or the uncles [mother's

brothers] can help if the children are staying with the paternal family because they came to an agreement.

Maternal relatives interested in the care of orphaned children were noted to approach the children's paternal relatives carefully. For instance, many adults recounted histories from their families (paternal and maternal) in which at the burial of the children's last parent, maternal relatives to the orphaned children discreetly asked a member of the paternal family what care arrangements were planned for the children. Maternal relatives who then proposed that they might care for some of the children followed the protocol of putting this 'request' to the children's paternal relatives. The specific verb used to describe such actions (*-kwayo*) implies desire on the part of the requesting person as well as courtesy and respect for the discretion of the person of whom the request is made. It was explained to me that such a request does not need to be presented in a formal forum but the wording matters and often explanations for why the maternal kin requests the child are expected. Such careful approaches are intended to ensure the continued good relations between both sides of the family as well as the children's future options. Agreements that were brokered between maternal and paternal families were often based on the understanding that while children might temporarily live among some relatives to meet specific childhood objectives, this did not invalidate other relationships and identities (c.f. Nyambedha et al. 2003: 308). In discussing the many situations whereby children were fostered by maternal relatives, both paternal and maternal family members emphasised the importance of the families coming to an agreement over this arrangement so that the child would not lose his or her claim to the paternal family. (However, as other cases reviewed in this dissertation account, some claims on paternal relatives were challenged because orphans had lived away from them for too long.)

There were also many instances of widowed or ill mothers who moved away from the home they had shared with their husband so as to bring their children to live with or near their own parents or siblings. Such purposeful movements most commonly occurred soon after the woman's husband's burial or during a time when the mother was very ill and concerned she might die. In some cases, women moved voluntarily, and in others involuntarily. Involuntary movements were often precipitated by widows being pressured to leave the home by their husband's family, often through verbal abuse, refusals of assistance, and appropriation of property. Sarah, for example, was brought by her ailing mother to live with her maternal aunt,

who is the second wife to the Kisumu municipal government planner, who later found a place for Sarah at the government orphanage.

There were several cases described to me of ill mothers asking specific individuals to promise to care for their children if they died because these mothers did not believe that their husband's relatives would properly care for the children, although Luo cultural tradition implies they should. Such requests were explained by some individuals to be highly influential to their commitments to care for the children left in their trust. For example, Victoria (b. $\approx$ 1962) told me that when her sister was ill and dying she perceived there was no intention on her in-laws' side to ensure the care of her twin children (their father had already died) and so she went to visit her elder brother and said to him 'I see I am not going to make it so will you please take care of my children?' Such requests for relatives' commitments might also be directed to specific paternal relatives. Victoria also described how she had been asked by her husband's brother's dying widow to care for her two youngest daughters. She recalled:

While their mother was still alive and ailing she was pitying her children and saying 'No one will be there to care for my children and they will suffer'. I said 'No, I will care for them'. As for my husband, he could see she was going to die so it was automatic that he would take them.

Several adults told me that making promises to a dying person was a commitment they could not later deny. Min Helen, who took into her home two of her deceased brother's children, told me that 'I am doing a good thing for my brother and also for the family. Even him [my deceased brother], he knows I am doing this good thing for him'.

The opposite of such proactive concern and action was children's neglect and suffering. As one man who was currently caring for his children as well as the children of his deceased brother and sister-in-law articulated the logic of such situations: 'I have my brother's children but if I am not caring for them properly – if I am mistreating them or not providing for them – then the maternal relatives can take them from me'. My study documented several cases of children running away from paternal relatives' households to their maternal relatives to secure better care for themselves. Such actions often reflected quite extreme cases of neglect or abuse – and often food insecurity was a key factor – as in the case described above of the five year old girl who ran away with her baby sister after they were not fed by their

grandparents. In several other cases, maternal relatives recalled receiving word from neighbours or visitors that orphaned children of their daughter or sister were not faring well due to the poverty and neglect of their paternal relatives and these maternal relatives subsequently sought to intervene to foster these children into their households, as described further in Chapter 5.

In most – but certainly not all - cases, however, despite children living among their mother's relatives, rather than their father's, relations between the children's maternal and paternal families were maintained through continued interaction at family funerals and children's occasional visits. Indeed, a child's claim to recognition as a member of his or her father's family was consistently recognised as fundamental among adults in this study. There was much insistence that even if a child is raised among his or her maternal kin, the paternal home remains the child's home and the child retains the right to make claims of inheritance upon the paternal family. This insistence is based on the tradition and practice that children rightfully 'belong' to the father's family and therefore have rights and are ultimately the responsibility of their patrilineage. This was especially emphasised for boys who, according to Luo custom, have the right to build on and inherit the land of their fathers or patrilineage. It was widely recognised that if this practice is not protected, the young man's future livelihood security could be significantly compromised. Even in cases where there was not sufficient land available for ensuring a livelihood, it was judged as crucial that a man have a place where he can build his future home as this is an important marker of adult identity. Locally-born directors of orphanages in the region also stressed this point in their arguments for why children should regularly be sent back to visit their relatives. So while the exigencies to fulfil children's immediate basic needs and education might prove outside of the ability of their paternal relatives, leading to fosterage by maternal relatives or others, this was explained as not invalidating children's rights to inheritance. When I asked what the effects might be of children growing up away from their paternal homes, one man (b. ~ 1950) described:

They can only be affected if they are missing care where they are staying and then they may run back. But if they are cared for where they are, it is okay for them. Only later they will come back for their share of the land.

Interestingly, the issue of marriage arrangements was not cited as a specific reason for maintaining paternal family affiliations. One might think that because families are involved in negotiating and transferring bridewealth payments from the groom's family to the bride's family, which is customarily the bride's father's family, children's continued good relations with their paternal families would be considered necessary for securing proper marriages. The fact that this was not raised as a major concern might be due to the common incidence of co-habitation without any type of marriage procedures, such as bridewealth transfers. It is also possible that the original reason believed for the existence of bridewealth transfers among the Luo – to compensate those who invested in the development of a young woman, and who would lose the benefits of these investments to those who stood to gain from the young woman's development - is still valid and consequently the shift for bridewealth payments can easily be made from whichever family encompasses the young man to whichever family invested in the childhood care of the young woman.

The common concern that children maintain their patrilineal affiliations encompassed more than just claims on patrilineal land, however. Adults recognised that boys and girls would be disadvantaged in their social reputations and relationships if they could not use their father's family as a reference. It was commonly raised by adults that it would be important in efforts to secure a marriage for a young man and a young woman to be able to refer to their father's family in assuring their prospective spouse's family of his or her good standing and character. Without these markers of origin, an individual is more suspicious and marked by outsider status. As one woman (b.≈ 1955) who was caring for her own teenage children as well as younger orphaned children of a sibling of hers and a sibling of her deceased husband described:

Somebody to know where he or she is from is very important. Even we who are staying with these children we must tell them to know your father was So-and-So and your mother was So-and-So and this is where you are from.

The principle of maintaining orphaned children's affiliations with their paternal relatives was found to be discarded however in many cases when the paternal family was found to have 'cheated' a child of his inheritance. Yet, considerable ambiguity existed in people's perceptions concerning the extent of guardians' rights to use the property of a child's deceased father or parents. For example, adults expressed understanding if guardians used the

property of the deceased to meet immediate subsistence needs or to invest in children's education. Yet, at the same time, children's guardians did not seem to be granted free rein to use a child's rightful inheritance. Other family members and neighbours privately monitored the use of inherited property and in several cases when guardians were judged to have been irresponsible with a deceased parent's property these actions were reported to the local assistant chief who often made inquiries. The sale of heritable land was considered as particularly bad as this permanently removes the land from a child's potential future use.

Nevertheless, questions pertaining to inheritance rights, and especially the rights of widows and orphaned sons to land, often incited family disputes and divisions in Kanyathi.⁶⁰ In one family's dispute that I observed, a nineteen year old man brought a complaint to the assistant chief against his grandfather for selling a plot of land that would have been the young man's inheritance. For his part, the grandfather argued that the grandson's claims on the family and their land had been invalidated because the young man's father and mother had moved to live away from their family, had not helped their family members, the mother had not remarried (*tero*) into the family following her husband's death, and both of the young man's parents had even been buried elsewhere. Yet, a village elder who regularly advised the chief on land matters scolded the grandfather. He said:

You, as the elder of this home, you know what is happening. You know the land and you know these are your grandchildren. In case of anything, you are responsible for them. When they come back you must advise them on where they can build. This is your responsibility. It is so simple.

The case did not prove simple, however. The grandfather refused to concede. He argued that the land title had been in his name and so he had the sole right to decide what to do with it. Moreover, he argued that by his authority as the head of the family, he judged the grandson's claims upon the family invalid. Despite the objections of the assistant chief and the village elder who counselled him, the grandfather remained defiantly confident of his position. He challenged: 'I will meet this boy in court ... I am ready to go to court'. The chief sighed and conceded: 'I hoped to bring peace to this family. But now this is one for the court'. It was predicted that the dispute would not be solved for years and in the meantime the young man

⁶⁰ According to Luo custom, daughters do not inherit land. However, recent legal precedents and draft reforms seem set to challenge this.

would have to find somewhere else to make his life. This case demonstrates the risks that male orphans might face if they move to live away from their paternal relatives and homes.

The final concern that was relatively consistently, although not unanimously, raised as a decisive factor in orphaned children's care placements was children's propensities to feel comfortable or uncomfortable as a household member. The definition of 'comfort' used implied that children should feel that they are loved and treated equally with other children in the household. It did not entail any kinds of exemptions from the distribution of household labour, but it did mean that an orphaned child should not be assigned a disproportionate share of the household's tasks. Grandmothers often described that grandmothers are uniquely able and willing to make orphaned children feel comfortable in terms of showing the children that they are loved and treated equally with other children. As one grandmother (b. 1932) who was living with three of her deceased son's children explained to me why grandmothers want to care for orphaned children:

It is not because of obligation. It is out of love. Grandmothers love everyone whether it is the granddaughter from the son's side or from the daughter's side. It's not like if the husband remarries and the wife has her own children she and her children will treat these other children differently. Grandmothers love everyone alike. I love all of the children the same.

In other situations, how children might enjoy or feel lonely in their foster households was considered. In several cases, orphaned children were deliberately placed in households with other young children that they could enjoy age-mates. A boy described that his maternal aunt volunteered to take him into her household because she did not want him to be lonely staying as the only child in another household when she had a son exactly his age with whom he could grow up. He recalled: 'She loved us all' (Dominic, b. 1989). Such considerations were most likely to be found in cases when children were still young (e.g. under ten years) and especially so in cases where a child was still an infant. As well, some people described concern for ensuring a young child could feel comfortable with their primary caregiver. As one woman described how it came that a two year old girl was raised by her uncle's wife: 'There was nobody who could carry the young child except for the uncle's wife'.

In only a very few cases was the concern for siblings staying together an explicit reason for a care arrangement. One woman explained how her husband's sister offered to take one of

the three young orphaned daughters of their deceased brother but her husband refused stating: 'No, keep them together so they do not feel bad about the separation'. While people recognised that it would be nice for orphaned siblings to live together, it was often not considered a fair burden for one household to meet. In that particular case, the man who chose to add his brother's three children to his own seven children (by two co-wives) had formal employment so judged that he could meet all of the children's needs. In the majority of situations, however, child siblings were divided among the various households of their different relatives.

In sum, this review of the kinds of factors that adults and children considered in their assessments of how care should be arranged for orphans demonstrates a significantly pragmatic approach. At the same time, this pragmatism has clearly been based on several standardised principles concerning the important content and outcomes of childhood, including: physical health; basic education; a patrilineal identity to safeguard future livelihood (i.e. land) and social claims; and a sense of ease and equality with others. As described above, to realise some of these interests, many children have had to change households as their needs or their caretakers' circumstances have changed. Normative and practical responses to children's care have clearly both been adapted to circumstances.

While the content of childhood was noticeably influential in determinations of orphaned children's care so too was a 'kinship calculus' (Fortes 1969: 104); that is, the judgments of which people are appropriate carers of particular children. The next section of this chapter describes such judgments through the description of one family's experience.

Bargaining Kin: A Case Study

The following case study is an example of how the particular moral economy of orphans' care prevalent in this study matched ideas of an adequate childhood with ideas of appropriate kin roles. Many adults told me in various ways that there are only some relatives who *should* take orphaned children into their homes to raise them. These include brothers, sisters, and parents of an orphaned child's parents. However, it is no longer expected for relatives farther removed biologically or by marriage – or by 'blood' as people in Kanyathi often said – to be the primary caregivers of orphaned children. As such, it can be noted that the 'safety net' of the extended family has been drawn more tightly, thereby restricting who is made available to

care for orphaned children. The example below of Cornelia and her relatives describes how a 'safety net' was re-stitched together in response to a particular crisis and as a result of a particular effort. The effort highlighted the role of individuals bargaining according to particular practical and normative considerations to achieve what they ultimately chose to regard as a collective – and specifically, a family - response.

Several weeks after the death of one of her brothers in 2007, a message was sent via a neighbour's mobile phone for Cornelia (b.≈ 1955) to travel to her natal home some forty kilometres away. Cornelia had been at her natal home for the burial of her brother but this time the family was called to gather because of a crisis with the orphaned children left behind. The five orphaned children (their mother had died two years earlier) had continued to live in their house in the homestead they shared with their father's one surviving brother and his wife and children as well as their father's other brothers' widows and their children. However, this had been difficult for the children because they were not being fed regularly by their relatives and could not provide for themselves. The eldest of the five children was then twelve years old. One day, using money he had earned from selling some fish he had caught, the eldest boy travelled alone to his maternal grandmother's home, approximately twenty kilometres away. He told that grandmother that he and his siblings were hungry and not being cared for in their father's home and she told him to bring the other children to live with her. In the end, however, the boy could not manage to carry his three youngest siblings and so only the eldest two children ran away to live with their mother's mother. The three youngest children, aged between three and seven years, were left alone. The children's two widowed aunts (wives to Cornelia's other two deceased brothers) who lived in the same homestead complained to their deceased husbands' uncles that the family needed to come up with a way to share this burden. Hence, Cornelia was called 'home'.

Cornelia described to me that when she arrived she and her brother and his wife and the two widowed wives of Cornelia's other two deceased brothers were asked to sit with their paternal uncles who were the surviving elders of that family. When they were together, Cornelia recounted: 'Our fathers [her father's half-brothers] told us that these children should not suffer while we are there. So we should see how we can help them'. The old men told Cornelia that she should take the children of her deceased brother. Of course, they knew that Cornelia was a widow and was already caring for her two youngest daughters, one of her

grandchildren as well as an orphaned nephew from her husband's side. Nevertheless, it was the uncles' view that they were not the correct relations to provide care for the children of their brother's son. When I asked why not, Cornelia explained that these men were not in fact the sons of her grandmother but of her grandmother's co-wife and therefore not 'brothers of my father by blood'. These men delineated that the grandchildren of their father and a woman other than their mother were not necessarily their responsibility, but more appropriately the responsibility of the 'relatives by blood', even if these blood relatives were daughters of the offspring of the original couple, and lived away from the patrilineal home.

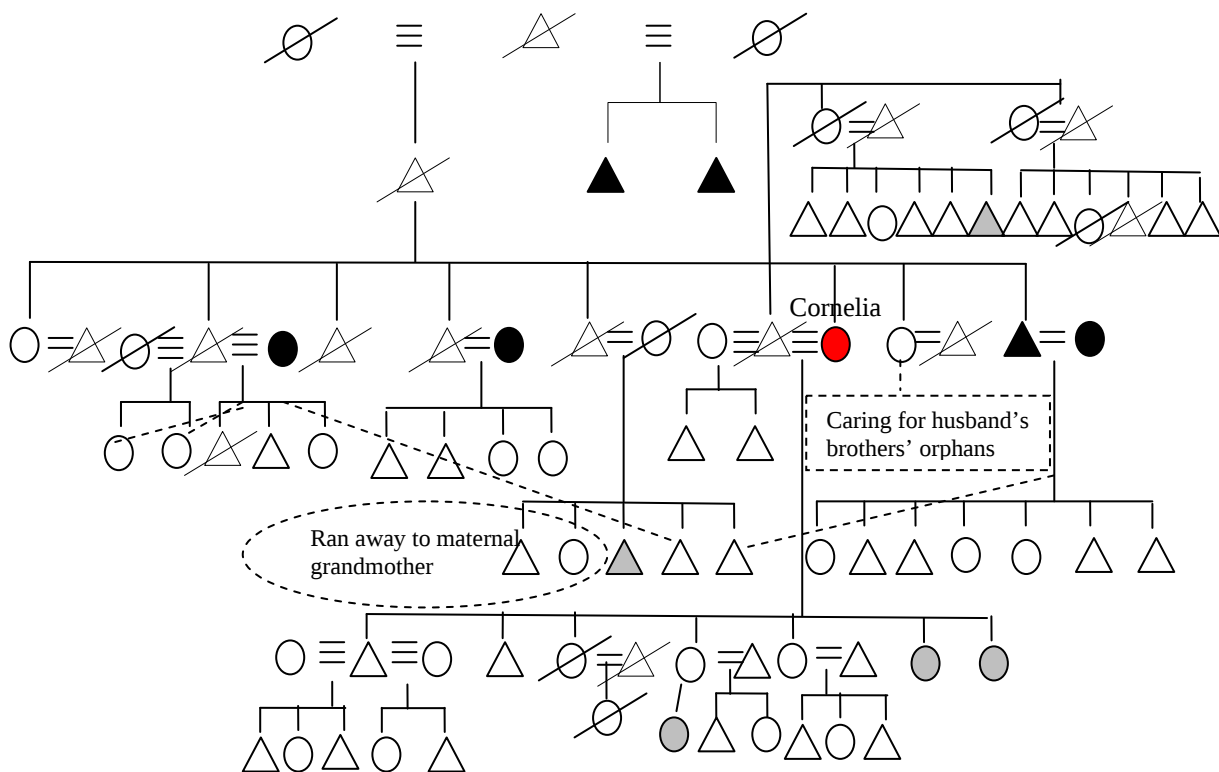
Despite the definition of relatedness and responsibility having been rather rigidly fixed by the supposedly objective content of 'blood', Cornelia's family reckoned in a flexible way with determining how care would be provided to the three remaining orphaned children. This flexibility was reflected in their considerations of ability which was in turn calculated in terms of financial means, age, and willingness. Cornelia and her brother and their deceased brothers' widows sat with their father's brothers to discuss their various challenges. When I asked Cornelia why the children could not continue to stay in the homestead that they had always lived in, and be cared for by her other brother and his wife and their other 'mothers' (widows of their father's brothers) – as Luo custom ideally dictates - Cornelia described the situation:

This brother of mine who follows me is not working, he is just farming, and even him, he has his own children, seven of them. So he did not have good income so as to support the children. As for my brothers' wives, their husbands died and they were also left with children. My elder brother died together with his first wife who left children to the co-wife.

And when I asked if Cornelia's two sisters were also called to this meeting, Cornelia explained that they had not been asked to come because one sister was an elderly widow helping to care for her deceased brother-in-law's thirteen orphaned children and the other sister is 'now very old and she does not want to hear those things'. As for the maternal relatives, Cornelia described: 'Yes, they took them [the two eldest children] without telling us. But then us, we did not want to fight with those people because those children are the children of their daughter'.

In the end, what was decided and actualised was the division of the five orphaned children among their deceased father's and mother's relatives (see Figure 4.1 below). The two eldest siblings stayed with their maternal grandmother, one of the boys joined the household of one of the widowed aunts (father's brother's widow), one of the girls joined the household of the last remaining paternal uncle, and the other boy travelled back to Kanyathi to join the household of Cornelia, his paternal aunt. I observed this boy, John, over 2008 and 2009 as he regularly attended Kanyathi primary school and received much affection from Cornelia and the other children in Cornelia's household and neighbourhood. As Cornelia described him, John is a good boy with an easy nature who always seeks to please the other adults and children around him. Over the two years following his joining his paternal aunt's homestead in Kanyathi, John had seen his siblings once when Cornelia took him with her to attend a relative's funeral.

Fig. 4.1: Abbreviated kinship diagram of Cornelia's relatives and their fostering of children (Author's design).



Index of Symbols:

- Female
- △ Male
- / Deceased
- ≡ Marriage
- ≡ Polygamous marriage
- Biological relationship
(parent/child and siblings)
- - - Fostered relationship
- ▲ Individuals who met to decide who would take which orphans of Cornelia's brother who died in 2007
- Cornelia
- Children living in Cornelia's household

It is obviously very complicated when conventions and contingencies are brought into contact – and often competition - with one another. I think this example of Cornelia and John and their relatives illustrates how ideals and ideas are pragmatically adjusted to fit with the circumstances of everyday life. In this case, the ideal of the patrilineage was clearly violated: five orphaned children were suffering from hunger and the two that were able to do so ran away from their own neglect to their maternal relative. The restoration of the patrilineage as a moral framework for Cornelia's family necessitated its tangible actualisation through a purposeful effort at responding to this violation: the remaining paternal relatives physically came together to articulate their response. The plan they conceived reflected ideational and practical interests.

In framing their response to these five orphaned children, Cornelia's family actively differentiated and defined the 'kinship calculus' (Fortes 1969: 104), or rules of kin membership, that designate responsibilities and rights. There were many such cases in this study and they are interesting because they draw on Luo ways of understanding family relationships, yet often challenge ideal typologies, and in applications to current circumstances these distinctions hold significant implications for the disparate livelihoods of orphaned children. As described earlier, while descent is most ideally patrilineally attributed among the Luo, the *nyieko* relationship - that of differentiation among co-wives and their children in polygamous marriages - has long held significance for distinctions within families and lineages.⁶¹ The matrifocal units that combine biological mothers and sons (and daughter although daughters are expected to marry away) have been observed to give rise to future distinctions of *jokadayo*, 'people of the same grandmother'. Indeed, this is the distinction Cornelia's uncles invoked.

The socio-cultural histories of *jokadayo* designations, however, are mixed. While a study of cultural ideas among the Luo of Nyanza Province in the early 1970s (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976) described that people explained their competitive relationships with each other (even while cooperatively holding land) in terms of which sons were born to which mothers several generations prior, a different study done in Kisumu district in the late 1980s found that Luo people used their identities as descendents of the same grandfather, *jokakwaro*, to regulate relationships of reciprocity (Francis 1991). Concretely, these relationships involved herding

⁶¹ Indeed, scholars of Luo kinship, as well as people I spoke with in Kanyathi, often point out how the Luo word for the polygamous co-wife relationship – *nyieko* – also means jealousy (Parkin 1978; Nyambetha et al. 2003a).

cattle together, sharing food (cooking and eating), communal garden labouring, and sharing the payment and receipt of bridewealth for daughters of this group. As Francis (1991: 145) described: 'Informants related that the *jokakwaro* ['people of the same grandfather'] was the unit within which reciprocal relationships of this type were most common and social interaction most intense'. Meanwhile, Parkin's (1978) study of kinship relations between urban and rural Luo in the late 1960s does not note the use of *jokadayo* (people of the same grandmother) but does note references to *jokawaro* (people of the same grandfather). Parkin reflected on how such terms of reference were used situationally. My own judgment on how these terms of reference were being used in Kanyathi between 2007 and 2009 concurs with their situational manipulation, but also recognises how they can be manipulated in terms of particular family's social histories and therefore cannot be generalised as consistent across 'Luo culture'. At the same time, it is critical to recognise how the Luo segmentary lineage system stresses unambiguity of membership (Parkin 1978), whether people choose to differentiate according to paternal or maternal descent.

When applied in recent circumstances to work out who should foster orphaned children, such as Cornelia's brother's children, distinctions made according to biological mothers can result in the separation of children from their natal home and heritable patrilineal land. For example, the nephew that Cornelia has taken into her home is growing up away from the home and land he was born at and where he would be expected to eventually build his own home. While his two younger siblings have remained living near their deceased father's home, the two eldest siblings are living with their maternal grandmother in another village. Such cases reflect that Luo ideas of what is acceptable and what is not for orphaned children's care even among the extended family have changed. Children are less of the extended paternal family than they are of their paternal and maternal family extended only as far as their parents' nuclear family members. The implications of these separations from place (as well as from each other) for the children's future claims upon family land and other relatives are uncertain.

Bargaining Positions

Deliberate decision making processes to arrange orphaned children's care, as practiced in 2007 by Cornelia's family, in many ways took the form of bargaining; that is, individuals

accounted for their relative rights and responsibilities and contrasted these with others to formulate their judgments of who should provide various forms of care. However, the decisions taken did not often reflect purely rationalistic equations that equalised costs and benefits among actors. Instead, important power differentials were influential. Specifically, while some standardised ideas of the appropriate content of childhood were integrated into decisions, children's judgments – if they were solicited – were often in many ways superseded by adults' judgments. Some children were asked if they agreed to adults' choices for their care placements, although few seem to have been asked with whom they would like to live. These practices likely reflected the limited availability of choices of different placements based on practical circumstances (e.g. financial abilities of households to raise several siblings together), as well as adults' concerns with children agreeing to abide by the decisions that were brokered. Adults were aware that children could choose to run away if they did not want to stay in certain homes. Most adults and children I spoke with knew examples of children who had run away from homes they had been unhappy living in, often to other relatives' homes. Asking children if they agreed with the decisions brokered by adults was therefore an effort to ward against future contestations. However, children seemed to perceive that they had quite limited power to resist what their adult relatives proposed. This was because they perceived that they required – or would at least stand a chance at benefiting from – their access to adults' material support.

I also found that women were generally unequally favoured in such bargaining processes, and especially widowed women who remained living on land that had been inherited by their deceased husbands. Such women could be made to feel that their domestic security was predicated on their demonstrated commitment to the larger family, and therefore they were pressurised into taking additional children into their homes. To refuse to 'cooperate' could be for some women a risky strategy since they could be told that they were living on the 'charity' of their in-laws. As well, child care is commonly a highly gendered practice in the study context with women's roles much more implicated in meeting children's everyday needs (e.g. health, hygiene, and nutrition), while men's roles often took more socially distanced forms, such as occasionally paying specific costs. Thus, the bargaining over which household would care for additional children implicated that it would be women who would bear the brunt of trying to stretch further their household's limited means. Nevertheless, men attested that they often felt under the pressure of public sanction and censure to demonstrably care for children of their family. As one man explained in a discussion among fathers familiar

with one another: ‘Men feel very much obligated [to care for orphaned relatives]. If they refuse even the village – the neighbours – will despise them and insult them’.

The contests and controversies that were often sparked by questions of inheritance claims in Kanyathi exposed how power was differentially distributed among the people who sought to determine how orphaned children’s care might be provided. Yet, as in the case of the dispute between the grandfather and grandson that was taken to the chief’s office, such questions were often still debated in the terms of a moral economy of kinship. In that particular case, for example, the arguments for and against the grandson’s claim to patrilineal land inheritance prominently referenced the moral criteria of being a family member. The grandfather argued that the rights and responsibilities of kinship are not automatically validated by tracing biological paternity, but earned through the decisions and actions of everyday life. From this idea, the grandfather insisted he had the right to sell the land he had farmed throughout his life and the boy had no right to it or any of the proceeds of its sale. On the other hand, the grandson’s case was argued with the moral slant that the grandfather’s authority over the family and their land was authorised according to traditional Luo patrilineal conventions which made his commitment to his family members’ wellbeing imperative. The grandfather, it was argued, did not have the moral authority to make his own rules. In the end, however, the grandfather’s economic power (in the form of a legal land title in his name) seemed to trump the potency of the moral arguments of kinship. While the idea of kinship as a moral economy created opportunities for challenging claims to families and their care in Kanyathi, this did not guarantee outcomes.

Interestingly, a common principle invoked by men and especially women in this study was the importance for families to ‘share the burden’ of children’s care. As described in Chapter 3, ‘sharing the burden’ (*kawo ting*) was a phrase often used by people in Kanyathi to explain why they had helped one another. Cornelia referred to this idea when she described how it would not be fair to expect her younger brother, with his seven young children and no employment, to foster in all five of their deceased brother’s children. Other women and men did the same in explaining why they had elected to foster one or two children into their homes rather than leave all of an orphaned sibling group under the care of a brother, despite the Luo customary ideal that brothers are responsible as fathers for one another’s children. The practical implications of ‘sharing the burden’ imply that individuals do not suffer out of proportion with one another, and in this, the concept can be considered to reflect a specific

moral economy of kinship. Many adults who reflected on their own families' experiences, seemed to use the expression 'sharing the burden' to deliberately and self-consciously conjure principles of empathy, reciprocity, and ultimately solidarity as constitutive of a morality of kinship, as I analyse in detail in the next chapter.

At the same time, however, I question whether the invocation of families 'sharing the burden' does not serve to propagate a false consciousness about kin solidarity. Is it really 'sharing' that families are practicing when they bargain over the care of orphans? It is possible that by calling what they have done 'sharing the burden' people are justifying and reproducing the inequalities among them. This question is not just relevant to me as a relatively outside observer and analyst. It also seemed particularly integral to the ambiguity and apprehension many people experienced concerning their own kinship claims. These uncertainties are further analysed in the next section as well as the next chapter.

This chapter has distilled much evidence of a context-specific – or situated - pragmatism put to work by people in Kanyathi. I judge that the content of my study very much endorses Whyte's suggestion that 'we see people as actors trying to alleviate suffering rather than as spectators applying cultural, ritual, or religious truths' (Whyte 1997: 20). At the same time, however - and as Whyte argues for conceptualising a 'situated pragmatism' - the ways in which people determine what efforts should be taken to alleviate suffering are intrinsically informed by ideas of what is morally right – and therefore socially acceptable - as well as what is practically expedient. Adults and children in Kanyathi were very aware and sensitive to the multiple contingencies of their daily lives and relations, as well as the imperative to negotiate through potential ideological and practical clashes.

In the last section of this chapter I review specific problems that people have identified in their experiences of the moral economy of kin-based care. These problems highlight how a particular ambiguity and apprehension exists in terms of general ideas and idiosyncratic experiences of people's moral character.

Their Wandering Hearts⁶²: The Problematisation of Caring

Responsibility for orphaned children is not automatically generated in Kanyathi. Arguments over who should provide care for orphans have broken out among families who have just buried the children's last parent.⁶³ In other cases, children have been left to their own survival strategies which have prompted some to run away from one home and set of relatives to other people and places, seeking acceptance and care. While there were very few children living entirely separately from their relatives in the study area, there were many instances of orphaned children, sometimes with their widowed mothers, being neglected or rejected in various ways by their relatives. What was most obvious in the pervasive commentaries about such situations among community members (including neighbours, teachers, religious leaders, village elders, the assistant chief, and elected councillors) was the prevalence of conspicuous uncertainties in how people should understand, relate, and respond to their circumstances.

Consistently, adults and children explained that people are finding it difficult to care for children - and some people resist helping to care for orphaned children - due to a context of far-reaching poverty. As Florence (b. ≈ 1949), an elderly widow in Kanyathi, put it:

Now the income is small and the deaths are many. So sometimes you can find it difficult to have many children. For example, your brothers have died, your sisters have died, your relatives have died, now these children are left there, and it is only you they will come running to. So this one makes it difficult for some people. Because now there are many [orphans] and the assistance [konyruok] is small.

This common analysis combines an account of increasing impoverishment with a story of increasing adult mortality and orphaning. As described in Chapter 2, many of the elderly people of Kanyathi described how reduced labour markets combined with diminished land holdings and the increased commodification of daily life has meant that many more people have been experiencing poverty, and for longer durations. This political economy and

⁶² The Dholuo expression '*Chunyi gowuotho*' literally translates as 'Their hearts are wandering/walking/travelling' and suggests that people are experiencing uncertainty about what to do (Ocholla-Ayayo 1978).

⁶³ Explicitly hostile arguments were found to be rare in Kanyathi but one such case occurred between paternal and maternal relatives at the burial of the mother of some totally orphaned children. I was not present at that moment but heard about the dispute soon after it from several different neighbours who had been present. Some adults also said they knew of other similar examples that had occurred in other people's families, elsewhere.

personal historiography has been brought to bear heavily on how orphaned children's care is worked out.

Experiences of impoverishment have directly affected people's willingness to offer care to orphaned children. A paternal grandmother of seven orphaned children told me that she and her husband did not want their grandchildren living with them because of their poverty. She described how frightening it had been for her to watch her family's wealth diminish over the years: when she had arrived as a new bride she had found her husband's homestead full of cattle and people productively farming. This woman was the third of three wives and over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s she and her co-wives and husband raised eighteen children in that homestead. Their sons and daughters married and had several children. But then over the past ten years, six of their sons, four of their daughters-in-law, two of their daughters and two of their sons-in-law died along with three of their grandchildren, as well as two of the grandmothers. Their homestead was inscribed with this diminishment: five houses of deceased sons were crumbling to the ground; there were no cows left, only a few sheep and some chickens. The homestead was eerily empty and quiet. There were few signs of life there as it was home only to the old man and woman and a bachelor son who was not employed and was often drunk. The widows of their sons have left with their children. After the death of his son who left seven children, the grandfather directed his remaining son to take the children to the municipal government's orphanage in Kisumu and leave them there. The director of the orphanage had thrice tried to send the children back to their grandparents' home and even visited the old man and woman herself to argue with them that the grandchildren were their responsibility.⁶⁴ The old man explained in response that their land is not fertile and they cannot produce enough food to feed anyone more than themselves. (In fact, they rent their land out for others to farm.) Eventually, during one of these meetings, the grandfather conceded that they would accept the eldest male grandson (14 years old at the time) to live at their homestead so that this boy could learn to farm to help himself. Instead, frustrated, the orphanage director agreed to keep all seven children for another year so that they could continue their primary education.

⁶⁴ After sending the children back to their grandparents' home for one month during the school holidays, the orphanage staff noticed a marked decline in the children's health. Their reports state that the children returned after one month looking 'shaggy' and 'sick' and the eldest child said it was because there was no one to look after them at that home.

For the majority of people, however, the challenge of poverty for child care was usually not simply about the complete unavailability of resources. It was more often about competition for limited available resources. As one man (b. ≈ 1948) enfolded such explanation into a general example:

People are finding it difficult now because education is expensive. When you take in orphaned children you may not be able to take them to school. A man may also find he is having difficulty paying for his own children's schooling so he may not be willing to take his brother's children.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the contrast of providing food and providing school fees was central to debate and discourse concerning the moral economy of orphaned children's care. In fact, it was not poverty which people in Kanyathi saw as the core problem. Time and time again people reasoned that it was not actual survival that was at stake, but the choice of individual advancement over sharing as a group. Amissa (b. 1978), a mother of four children who is also caring for two orphaned girls from her husband's side of the family, worded this in the following way:

There are some people who do not care for their orphans. I think it is because they don't want to. I don't think it is poverty because someone like me can just try: you start doing something small to earn something small. Even if you can just get vegetables, you just eat that.

Essentially, much of the problematisation of responsibility for orphaned children turned on a specific idea of individual morality. Even when contextualised in terms of widespread poverty, the reluctance or rejection to care for orphans of the extended family was more critically interpreted as a limitation in individuals' moral characters. In fact, repeatedly, people eventually resigned their explanations of other people's behaviour in terms of very personalised distinctions: people either have good hearts or bad hearts. As described in Chapter 3, people in Kanyathi often used the concept of *chuny*, or heart, to invoke a person's ethical proclivities. An elderly, widowed woman (b. ≈ 1943), who lived with three different orphaned children and provided school fees for several others, explained:

People have different hearts. Some people even if they have [foreign] sponsors sending assistance they will not use it for the orphans – not even giving them good clothes. Others will live with them as their own children.... It's all up to the person's heart.

In Kanyathi, it is possible that the pervasive distrust that people seem to experience about each other's moral fortitude is linked to both the Luo cultural idea of personhood that regards individuals as fundamentally unknowable – a mysterious and changeable mix between how one is born and how one chooses to behave - as well as a particular social history of people learning not to trust others.

Importantly, for instance, in addition to being uncertain of how adults might treat children, many adults also expressed distrust of children, and by correlation distrust of the future. Children were also regarded as individuals with different 'hearts', or characters, as a result of both innate and learned qualities. This understanding affects the durability of trust between generations, and specifically it undermines firm expectations of intergenerational reciprocity in the future – that is, that children will grow up to become adults who help their parents (or foster parents). As Winston (b. 1945) said to me, reflecting on his eldest son's purposeful estrangement from his family and the likelihood of his other children to help him and his wives as they age:

Assistance from children comes from the love of the child. When you are giving birth to them, you cannot know that this one is going to help you and this one is not going to help you. I was just raising them up because God gave them to me, but I could not tell this one is the one that is going to help me and this one is not going to help me. So I don't know if the ones who are left behind [still at their father's homestead] are the ones who are going to assist me or if they will just go like the older one.

Much of people's distrust seems to have been learned through life's many disappointments. The accounts of Florence offer insights for how distrust, and specifically distrust of reciprocal care, has been learned. Florence (b.~ 1949) was a widow, who had had eleven children of whom only one daughter and one son were still alive in 2009. During her lifetime she has been involved in many situations of her family members working out how to care for particular children. Most recently, in 2005 and 2007, this had concerned the five totally orphaned children of two of her daughters who were distributed among their fathers'

relatives. Most long ago, in 1969, before they had their own children, Florence and her husband fostered into their household the four youngest of the eight totally orphaned children of Florence's husband's brother. Her experiences prompted me to ask Florence to compare the ways decisions were being made recently with the way they were made in the past for the care of orphaned children. She answered: 'I see that part of it is like before and part of it is not the same'. And she continued to explain:

It depends on people's hearts. There are those people who do not like taking children - even if they are from their family, they just neglect them. But in the past, there was that heart. People had to sit down and it was a must that they take in those children.

I asked Florence why she thought there had been a change in people's hearts and in reply, she chose to illustrate with an example from her own experience. Florence described how she and her husband had paid for the education of the four children of her deceased brother-in-law, including a nephew who they had funded through university. After finishing university, this nephew moved back to Kanyathi to inherit patrilineal land. In Kanyathi, he became employed as a teacher, married, and had two children. According to Florence, however, this nephew had not reciprocated the care of his uncle and aunt. She recounted:

My husband had retired and was also sick. He had some eye infections and could not see so he was just at home and I was the one who was looking for the way for us to survive. Now the children whom he educated could not even think of him, not even to give him Panadol [a painkiller medication]. Those children could not think about their uncle who educated them up to the level where they are now. And we then had a son who had passed Standard 8 and needed to go to secondary. In fact, that son of mine passed very well but he had to repeat Standard 8 again because there were no school fees. And this boy [nephew] is working, earning Ksh35,000 [GBP 252/month].

Now this kind of situation makes others not to have the heart to take orphans because these people living around here they see how you are staying with your brother's children and bringing up the children and suffering with them. So people will say that: 'So-and-So, we saw them raising their brother's children but look, what are they doing in return? They are not helping back'. Especially this one who is here now. He is now working, he is a teacher. And even though in teaching you earn little, he does not have many children – he has only two children – and this son of mine now he is in Form 3 and he cannot afford even a shirt, even

shoes, anything, even socks. And that boy [nephew] has never come to me and asked 'How can I help?'

So things like this make others not want to take in children.

Florence's tale foregrounds how ideas and practices of reciprocity have been critical in the contemporary problematisation of kin-based care. Florence judged that her nephew ought to have asked how he could be 'helping back' his relatives. In this, Florence did not delineate that her nephew should have repaid his uncle and aunt an amount equal to what they invested in him. Instead, she described how he should have helped as per his relatives' specific needs (e.g. medicine for his uncle or school fees for his uncle's son). In some ways, this expectation seems to correspond with Sahlins' concept of 'generalised reciprocity' as implicit reciprocity because 'the material side of the transaction is repressed' and 'the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite', in terms of time, quantity, or quality (Sahlins 1972: 194). Shipton has described such generalised reciprocity as a characteristically Luo pattern. His account describes that 'The patrons usually do not keep strict track of the obligations or hold the junior kin to any particular schedule, quantity of repayment, or 'interest'' (Shipton 2007: 116).

Yet, Florence's critique may be understood as not only defining her nephew's moral transgression - implying his 'negative reciprocity', or 'the attempt to get something for nothing' (Sahlins 1972: 195), but also a shift in her own idea of the moral economy of kinship, specifically in terms of material reciprocity. In explicitly accounting for what she and her husband had invested in the nephew, how much the nephew was since earning, and which payments the nephew should have covered, Florence was not invoking the implicit nature of generalised reciprocity. Instead, her expectations seemed to approximate what Sahlins has termed 'balanced reciprocity'; that is, the expectation of direct repayment. If, as Sahlins' has suggested, the pragmatic test of balanced reciprocity is an inability to tolerate one-way flows and the consequent disruption of people's relations, it seems that Florence's conception of kinship reciprocity is farther along the sharing-exchange continuum than the Luo cultural ideal.

It is not just expectations of intergenerational reciprocity that are going unfulfilled and contested. As Florence's long-time neighbour Wilhelmina explained, estrangements can

occur between the closest of kin, due to historical grievances over broken reciprocal relationships:

Now when people are thinking about these things [fostering orphaned children] there are some disagreements. For example, a brother is dead and one will ask: 'What did he do for me? When my son was in school, he did not help me much'. And a living one with some money will be told by others 'Your kind with your money, you should take them all'. And there is quarrelling.

Such quarrels go to the heart of a potential morality of kinship, indicating profound instability in ideas of how 'sharing' should occur. Complaints about kin-based reciprocity, however, are certainly not unfamiliar in Kanyathi. Distribution of resources, particularly in the forms of urban employed workers' remittances to rural relatives and intergenerational assistance, has been documented as a flashpoint of controversy among Kenyan Luo families for decades (Parkin 1978; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Francis 1991; Shipton 2007). What I suggest is important to consider in their current manifestations in Kanyathi is their coincidence with people's questioning of whether or not to accept responsibility for orphaned children's care. As described, many adults perceive that the stakes of caring for a child are higher today than they were in the past due to the greater commodification of daily life and the normative standard of educating children. At another register, doubts about the reciprocity of helping to raise children make the paradigmatic problem of a moral economy of kinship explicit: if no return is expected from children in the future (although children often help households in the present with their domestic work), then the chief motive for helping to raise children is to be a good person in the immediate moment through recognising these children as a responsibility shared among kin.

Indeed, much of the 'sharing of the burden' of orphaned children's care that occurred among families in Kanyathi was enacted by members of the same generation. This was, as I have already mentioned, often attributed to empathy or concern for siblings. Certainly, empathy borne of shared life experiences is an important quality in many sibling relationships, as I describe more fully in Chapter 6. However, adult siblings' active cooperation might also be encouraged by calculations that these are the people with whom one must stay in good favour. Helping siblings in the present might serve as insurance that those siblings will help you in the future. I discuss how particular practices in Kanyathi actualised this interest in the next chapter.

In bringing her own thoughts on the matter to a conclusion, Florence indicated that despite her own discouragement through the collapse in generalised reciprocity, she still holds to a firm notion of what is good and right:

Sometimes there can be disagreements [about who should take children]. But sometimes I am the only one left so I have to take them in. Whatever small I have to eat, I just have to share with them. Especially if there is any other sister of yours that can have some of the children or a brother to your husband who can take the children, that is good. But if I am the only one left, I have to take them.

Perhaps Florence's insistence on this moral imperative for kin to help each other derives from the Luo dictate of '*Wat wat*' ('family is family'), but it also echoes a young orphaned man's more ambivalent explanation that 'When the relationships are distant, people can decide to help or not'. Which way the moral economy of care tipped in Kanyathi was highly contingent to confluences of norms of entitlement by kinship, practical circumstances, and individuals' 'hearts', all of which were also experienced as changeable. The outcomes of such combinations were, above all else, uncertain. Sociologist Anthony Giddens has written that 'In its most profound sense, the antithesis of trust is thus a state of mind which could best be summed up as existential *angst* or *dread*' (Giddens 1990: 100, italics in original). I do believe there was considerable angst experienced among people in Kanyathi, and that this was an important filter for how care of others was thought about and practiced. Yet, at the same time, people's efforts remained critically engaged with trying to actualise ideas and practices of social justice.

Conclusion

The tenacity of kinship is a very difficult fact of life to explain, particularly when its fragility is often starkly exposed. People's lives in Kanyathi are replete with stories of disenchantment with their kin as well as enduring hope for them. The family has long been understood as a site of crisis in western Kenya (Whisson 1964; Kilbride 1990; Weisner and Kilbride 1997), yet, as this study indicates, the family has retained social legitimacy and significance in both moral ideology and everyday practical realities.

As the case studies in this chapter evidence, the ways in which responsibilities for orphaned children have been questioned and responded to implicate a complex dynamism and interaction among cultural ideas and practical reasoning. It is possible that this complexity can be accommodated in the concept of moral economy. The majority of people identified that their preferences are to raise orphaned children together as siblings and equally well, near their natal homes, and among close kin. Yet they also recognised their need to balance these preferences with the priority of not debilitating particular individuals and households. The contemporary economic reality among many families in western Kenya is a common experience of limited resources for raising children, in particular for educating children. In combination, these preferences and practicalities have conjured a significant degree of consensus that ‘sharing the burden’ is a morally and economically appropriate response. It is moral in its tolerance of generalised reciprocity and its ultimate reliance on shared empathy and motivation to realise the wellbeing of something greater than individuals’ self-interest, namely the presence and future of a family. It is simultaneously economic in its careful calculations of how to divide responsibilities for orphaned children’s care in ways that are feasible for individual household budgets to accommodate. However, at the same time, this moral economy is predicated on critical power imbalances that see particular individuals disenfranchised or made increasingly vulnerable.

Increasingly, the moral economy of kin-based care of orphans is regulated through the institutionalisation of ideas and practices of kinship. This has served as a counterweight to feelings of ambivalence and distrust among family members. In the next chapter I discuss how families are conscientiously trying to fix their shares of trust in one another and correspondingly in the very institution of family.

Chapter 5 The Importance of Sitting and Standing: Fixing Trust in Uncertain Times

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how some people in Kanyathi are trying to fix trust among themselves through the institutionalisation of ideas and practices of kin relationships and reciprocities. I perceive these efforts as an attempt to actualise a more predictable normative and practical experience of kin-based care, in place of the relatively uncertain and often improvisational experiences of the moral economy of kin-based care that I described in the previous chapter.

Specifically, this institutionalisation of family involves the appropriation of two practices that are locally meaningful as continuations of customary practices among the Luo: ‘sitting’ and ‘standing’. ‘Sitting’ (e.g., *Wabedo e achiel*, lit. ‘We sit together as one’) represents a communal initiative of people meeting together to resolve a matter in a cooperative and consensual manner. ‘Standing’ (e.g., *Ochung’ne*, lit. ‘S/he stands for him/her’) signifies the election of one individual to represent the interests of another individual. The two activities are complementary: sitting draws people together and sanctions the designation of someone to stand for another.

This analysis recognises sitting and standing as performative. In their performance, they serve as critical events in which words are used to make things real (Wittgenstein 1953; Austin 1962; Bourdieu 1996; Das 1998; Das 2007). As I describe throughout my study, particular events which bring people into direct contact and communication, like burials and family meetings, have often been integral to the designation of specific responsibilities, such as fosterage and school fee payments, for orphaned children. In this chapter, I take up the proposition that the eventfulness of sitting and standing matter because they hold the potential to establish consensus on the existence and meanings of things, such as who is responsible for whom and how. In this, events prove extraordinarily influential, as Das (2007: 8) distinguishes:

[B]oundaries between the ordinary and the eventful are drawn in terms of the failure of the grammar of the ordinary by which I mean that what is put into question is how we ever learned what kind of object something like grief, or love, is.

As I outline in this chapter, people in Kanyathi are deliberately insisting on the manifestation of family events to establish a ‘grammar’, or set of conventions, for kin-based reciprocity.

While sitting and standing are acknowledged and increasingly esteemed as opportunities to directly claim some control over situations of ambiguity and insecurity, their practice is far from uniform among families in Kanyathi, and farther extended. In counter distinction there are many families that have experienced further fragmentation and attendant uncertainty. In reflection of this risk, sitting has also assumed discursive relevance – it is what families *should* do.

The chapter is organised into several sections. First, I review how ‘sitting’ and ‘standing’ are imbued with particular social histories among people living in Kanyathi and other Kenyan Luo communities. This draws attention to how these practices are granted the legitimacy of tradition (Asad 1986: 14). Next, I discuss sitting and standing as situationally pragmatic (Whyte 1997) in the context of multiple, and often unpredicted, deaths among adults. These are situationally pragmatic responses in that they manifest a flexible – yet locally appropriate – system of allocating responsibilities for orphaned children. In the third section of the chapter, I account for how failures to sit are linked to the lack of families taking responsibility for their orphaned relatives. This is set against the content of the next section which looks at how some families have made concerted efforts to increasingly institutionalise their existence through the practical and normative regularisation of their reciprocal practices. I suggest that such efforts reflect an interest in embedding the economy of care in the norms and practices of kinship so as to ward against the uncertainty that could otherwise prevail. I then describe how sitting and standing are tangibly experienced as performances that signify the existence and efficacy of families and their specific relationships and reciprocities. I close with an analytical discussion that relates sitting and standing to theories of kinship and trust.

Idioms and Social Memories of Sitting and Standing

Sitting and standing are idioms used by Dholuo speakers to encapsulate two different activities. ‘We sat,’ (*Ne wabedo*) people would explain to me when describing how their families determined particular solutions to particular problems. ‘To sit’ means to purposefully convene to discuss something as a group.⁶⁵ Yet when I would question for further detail about which solutions were reached and how, I was told of individuals volunteering or being volunteered and consenting to fulfil specific responsibilities. In this, people could describe how particular adults had been selected to ‘stand for’ a particular child. To stand for someone (*-chung’n-*) is to volunteer or to accept nomination of the role of representative of that person and their interests, potentially serving as a guardian and/or an advocate. It is an admission of accountability both to and for that person. As described in Chapter 3, when I asked children about their various relationships, I occasionally heard the phrase ‘*Ochung’na*’ (‘S/he stands for me’) and more commonly, ‘*Ochung’na e skul fees*’ (‘S/he stands for my school fees’). In this, children could designate to me which specific adults were responsible for different aspects of their care. As described in Chapter 4, children’s care may be distributed with children eating, sleeping, helping, and having their education funded according to different individuals and households. The notion of ‘standing for’ is particularly relevant when a responsibility for a specific aspect of an orphaned child’s care must be assigned, such as in the case when someone must guarantee to cover the costs of a child’s education.

In Chapter 4 I described how Cornelia was called back to her natal home to discuss how various family members would organise a response to the orphanhood of her deceased brother’s children. What Cornelia and her ‘fathers’ (paternal uncles), brother, and ‘co-wives’ (widowed wives of Cornelia’s other brothers) did was to sit together. In such instances, sitting is understood as a special kind of meeting because in its purpose to address a particular problem it convenes select individuals who are recognised to have a stake in the outcome. I described from Cornelia’s account the way in which the participants in that meeting communicated directly with one another and how during that meeting specific individuals were nominated to foster particular children and subsequently agreed, or not, to do so. From that occasion of sitting, Cornelia was appointed the person to stand for her nephew John.

⁶⁵ If Dholuo speakers wish to communicate that they are just sitting without seeking to resolve a particular issue (for example, perhaps they are just resting), they say ‘*Wabedobedo*’ which translates as ‘We are sitting, just sitting.’

Many adults in Kanyathi could recollect from memories up to four decades old similar stories of their families sitting down together to delineate what to do about children orphaned by parents' deaths. Several adults had examples of witnessing their parents and uncles and aunts sit together to discuss what to do about the care of particular children. Eliza (b.1957), for example, told me of how as a child she was taken by her parents to visit some relatives and she heard her paternal aunts and uncles and other relatives talk about who would take which children of a deceased relative. Eliza's parents took two of these children who Eliza said grew up as her brother and sister 'with no difference between us'. The boy eventually built his house in Eliza's father's homestead and raised his children there.

Burials have been important occasions for sitting, and therefore for the authorisation of roles and responsibilities among families.⁶⁶ People in Kanyathi also recounted past personal experiences of sitting with their families to discuss how to care for a widow or widows and paternally orphaned children. As described earlier, it is Luo custom that if a man dies, his wife or wives will remain as members of the man's family living in their matrimonial homes, a condition which is meant to be given added protection by the 'marriage', or 'inheritance', of the widow(s) to male relatives (brothers, and more likely cousins) of the deceased (Mboya 1938; Evans-Pritchard 1965). Adults in this study described the custom that on the fourth day after a man's death – the last day of the burial period for a man - his family should sit down to discuss their situation. The group would most likely be comprised of the dead man's parents and his siblings (those still living at home as well as his brothers and their wives who likely had their own homes nearby as well as the man's married sisters who would have returned to their natal home for their brother's burial), as well as the deceased's paternal uncles and their wives and possibly their children (agnate cousins) who likely also had homes nearby. The deceased man's wife or wives were to attend this meeting as were any of the man's grown children. Later, usually at another burial ceremony commonly held between six months and two years after a man's death, called 'drinking tea' (*madho chai*; recognition of the ancestors) if following Luo custom, or 'raising the cross' on the grave (*gero mslaba*) if

⁶⁶ There have been many studies of the various rituals of death and mourning among the Luo (Mboya 1938; Evans-Pritchard 1965; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989; Shino 1997; Shipton 2007). Recent studies have specifically addressed how Luo funerary practices have been changed or contested according to the influences of Christianity (Geissler and Prince 2010) and modernity (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1992). Distinct from the act of sitting together to work out a response to a specific problem is the practice of *budho* (lit. 'sitting without doing anything') which refers to an aspect of the mourning period in which people are supposed to stay within the deceased person's compound without doing any worthwhile work (Shinto 1997).

following Christian practice, the family would ‘sit’ again and specifically consider the question of which brother or cousin of the deceased man would assume the role of the widow’s replacement husband (*jater*).⁶⁷

Some adults specified that the same deliberateness of family meetings did not necessarily feature after a woman’s death if she was survived by her husband because her husband would either have other wives or would marry another woman to help raise the children whose mother had died. Nevertheless, several adults also recounted instances in their histories when their families sat to strategise their response to the consequences of a woman’s death. If the deceased woman’s husband was still alive, the discussion would center on how the deceased mother’s children would be raised – usually a question of which co-wife or co-wives were best able (and willing) to take more children into their homes. If the woman’s husband was already dead, this meeting would be even more important because deliberate choices would have to be made, specifically concerning where the children would sleep and who would feed them (if the family was not still regularly eating together) and who would provide their school fees.

Among the many studies of social and cultural life among the Luo, sitting and standing are not explicitly emphasised. Yet, they are present, if often only in passing mentions, or analysed according to other concepts. For instance, sitting is most commonly subsumed under the categories of either ordinary visiting or extraordinary social events. Geissler and Prince, for example, have noted how sitting may seem a mundane activity but can conjure profound social significance (Geissler and Prince 2010: 333). Shipton (2007: 160) has observed how special gatherings are particularly relevant for marking social relations among the Luo:

funeral visits are always symbolically significant, with or without substantial material or cash contributions, and the interlineage ties and obligations incurred may be remembered and reciprocated decades later, whether in material or symbolic ways.

⁶⁷ Among the ethnographic and literary record for the Luo of western Kenya is a body of work specifically focused on widows and ‘widow inheritance’, or levirate. Betty Potash (1986) has argued that among the Luo levirate should not necessarily be equated with ‘marriage’ because the rights and obligations of a levir are usually accepted as very different from those of the original husband. Ethnographic studies of Luo widows and practices of levirate by Potash (1986) and Prince (2007) elaborate how individual widowed women make choices about whether or not to take a *jater* and who this *jater* might be.

Other diffuse literature contains further clues to the cultural salience of sitting as a deliberate effort in social organisation among the Luo. For instance, a 1986 report commissioned by the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Planning and National Development on the 'socio-cultural profile' of South Nyanza District, authored by esteemed Luo historian Gideon Were, describes how traditional Luo political systems were tied up with kinship systems, with authority invested in councils of elders which would meet to discuss and take decisions by consensus. In this, Were (1986: 141) summarised: 'All types of disputes, ranging from land problems to theft, would normally be handled at the same sitting. Consensus rather than voting was used in arriving at decisions'. Significantly, it was drawing on this tradition that a strategy was planned by Luo political actors in the late 1960s to try to diffuse the escalating political competition and division between leading Luo politicians Oginga Odinga and Tom Mboya and reconcile these two Luo leaders and their supporters. Under the title of the 'Luo Reconciliation Council', four long and intensive meetings were held at which the key protagonists each made statements and other participants were invited to speak and listen together. Historian Bethwell Ogot (2009: 774-6) was able to review the meetings' transcripts and has described:

The speeches were comprehensive, brutally frank and often personal. The meeting was then adjourned to allow the members to ponder over these shocking revelations. The Council had been subjected to an outpouring of pent-up feelings. ...

There is no doubt that the meetings organized by the Luo Reconciliation Council had provided a necessary forum for discussing serious issues affecting the Luo as a community. They succeeded in diffusing a potentially dangerous situation which threatened to create deep divisions. They were well-organized, well-attended, and well-conducted.⁶⁸

Were's and Ogot's analyses of the organisational principles and efficacies of such practices in sitting are remarkably similar to how people in Kanyathi described to me their perspectives on how families should, and sometimes still do, sit together to resolve their concerns, as I describe in this chapter.

⁶⁸ Parkin's account of public meetings comprised of the two Luo political factions in the late 1960s also describes widespread participation among Luo males and the meetings' emphases on reaching consensus and 'unity', although his account also foregrounds the authoritative and influential roles of specific political leaders, including the chairman of the Luo Union (Parkin, 1978: 229-235).

As I have described in Chapter 3, what I call ‘standing for’ relationships is most commonly associated in the existing literature about Luo social practices with patronage practices in which one person accepts the dependency of the other in return for accumulation of esteem, prestige or indebtedness (Parkin 1978: 93; Shipton 2007). Somewhat counter-intuitively perhaps, these descriptions of patron-client relationships - or relationships of ‘entrustment’ as Shipton (2007) prefers – have highlighted the high value Luo people stake to the ideology and practice of sharing among families, as I reviewed in Chapter 4.

Another past practice that may have some resonance for the contemporary significance of sitting and standing as complementary actions is that of ceremonies performed by Luo communities during agricultural cultivation, as described by Ogot (2009: 495):

At this ceremony, prayers for peace were offered. The community swore not to steal or rob; not to take a neighbor’s wife; and not to engage in any anti-social behavior which would disturb the peace of the community. These oaths taken publicly and communally represented serious moral undertakings.

The link between public oaths and moral norms is an important precedent for what I found in Kanyathi. As I analyse later in this chapter, the performative character of explicitly stating individual commitments before a collective audience - that is, standing from a situation of sitting – is a powerful act in producing and reproducing the moral life of families.

The Pragmatism of Sitting and Standing

Sitting and standing are clearly not new practices for the people of Kanyathi. However, I believe that their contemporary currency in Kanyathi reflects that they are potentially efficacious as responses to particular emergent problems with how to provide care to orphaned children, as well as the larger concern of attaining security, if not certainty (Whyte 1997: 3). This is because of the way they are structured to demand accountability to a group as well as how they in turn structure patterns of sociability and reciprocity.

Sitting down together after a close family member’s death is a derivative of common notions of death and uncertainty of lives. In an early group discussion among women who know each

other well, I described how in my culture soon after a child's birth the child's parents may choose which other adults that child would go to in case of the parents' death and document this in a written will. The women were extremely surprised and laughed awkwardly at the strangeness of this practice. Cornelia took the lead in explaining how such an approach would not work for them:

In our culture, we do not wish death for a person who is still living. But when one dies those who are left behind sit down and decide where the children should go. For example, either they can go with their grandmother or they can go to their uncles' or to their aunties'. We didn't have in mind that someone will know they will die and leave the children. If, however, someone, for example, if someone is sick and almost dying, that is when one can say: 'My sister, please take my children' or 'My children will go to So-and-so'. And what made us not to say where the children would go after they are left alone is because for example, I can say that when I die my children will go to my sister but what about if my sister dies first, before me? So that is one of the things that could not allow us to say where the children will go.

I received a similar reaction from a group discussion with men and in later private conversations several individuals returned to this matter and asked how it could possibly work; ultimately, how could it be useful when no one knows who will die first?

Not knowing who will die first is an extremely valid concern among people in Kanyathi. Adult children have died before their elderly parents; people who seemed healthy one week have died quite suddenly the next. In fact, there are many deaths that people cannot explain to their satisfaction and these are often the cause of much (quite private) speculation. Beatrice who was born in 1986 as the youngest of ten siblings is now the only sibling still alive. The other nine all died during their young adulthoods. She described to me how the recent deaths of two of her brothers lacked clear causes, and she could not elaborate on them: 'The eldest brother went to visit somewhere and when he came back he had a problem in his chest. We tried to treat it but he died quickly. ... The other brother was staying here at [local marketplace] and he was coughing so much. When he climbed a hill to our home he failed and was taken to his home. He died soon after'. Martha, a relative of my 'host family', described to me how her husband died in 2006, at the age of approximately 32 years, after he caught a thorn in his toe which made his leg swell. This swelling could not be healed even though Martha took him first to 'the prayer people' (*jolamo*) and then to the provincial

hospital in Kisumu where he stayed for one week before dying. Martha told me that since her husband died in 2006 she had gone to be tested for HIV four times. She is not infected which makes her believe her husband did not die as a result of HIV/AIDS. The prayer people told Martha that ‘someone did something bad to him’ but they did not tell her who, and she has not explored it further with them since his death.

The prevalence of such mysterious cases offer insight into the insecurity that people experience when confronted with sudden deteriorative ailments and deaths due to unknown causes. Life is not predictable and cannot be taken for granted when there is such familiarity with sudden shocks and loss. Beatrice’s brothers and Martha’s husband died in relatively rapid periods of confusion. When Martha’s ten year old son Wallace stayed in our homestead for two weeks of his school holiday in April 2009 and got a thorn stuck in his foot which quickly became noticeably painful, I witnessed two different neighbours insist he let them inspect it and try to remedy it. They did not do this because they knew that his father had died after catching a thorn in his foot. They did it because they recognised the small thorn as a potentially big risk. When it could be practiced, I found caution was valued.

Such precaution is what I discern to be motivating the proactive organisation of family meetings. While sitting together as one (*-bedo e achiel*) was customarily organised in response to specific circumstances, such as after a death or before a marriage, many families are organising these to occur proactively. The next section describes how people in Kanyathi judge the absence of sitting as a failing and the practice of sitting as an achievement. This is an important and prevalent backdrop against which is set the proactive organisation of family meetings, which I discuss after.

When Families Do Not Sit or Stand

Eliza was visibly struggling to materially provide for the children in her care, including her own children and two orphaned children of her husband’s half-brother. After Eliza’s husband died in 2000, she chose not to take a *jater* (widow inheritor), and as a result of this decision her husband’s family refused to help Eliza or her children. When the roof of her house collapsed, she and the children slept under a makeshift shelter attached to a tree. Her children could not stay in primary school because of lack of fees. Their situation seemed particularly

vulnerable to me. I asked Eliza if she saw that her situation was different from that of other people in Kanyathi. She answered: 'I am no different than others. There are many staying with orphans and other relatives and just struggling'. I next asked if she saw a difference between the way this is now and the way life was in the past. Eliza told me:

There is a big difference. Before people used to sit down and decide who would help. Now I don't know what is happening. This sitting down isn't happening. Is it that people who would have sat down are not there now?

Eliza's rhetorical question registers two concerns. When she asked if the people who would have sat down are not there now, Eliza was in part referring to the physical absence of many adults who have died. However, in posing this as a question rather than a statement, Eliza was also implying that some people could be present, but are not, and therefore that to be absent from sitting together can be a choice.

The absence of a family meeting to discuss orphaned children's living arrangements is often explained as a consequence of poverty. As one man stated and other men agreed, 'There is no sitting down because there are no resources. But, of course, small groups may discuss the circumstances together but they will not have a formal meeting of all the family'. Others lament the practice of relatives leaving a burial ceremony before a meeting can take place to discuss the surviving children. Sometimes such departures have been interpreted as a deliberate strategy of avoiding responsibility. In other interpretations, adults explain that there are so many burials now that it is rare for people to be able to stay for the customary four days. Instead, people come only for one day of a burial ceremony, or one day and one night, so that they can promptly return to their households and work.

Sometimes individuals' absences from their families' gatherings are understood as deliberately isolationist. Indeed, it seemed that every family in Kanyathi had at least one example of a family member who had become 'lost' to them. By this, people meant that the person had not only physically separated from their family, but had also become socially estranged. It was this latter estrangement that was judged by those remaining as the abandonment of kin and therefore immoral. For example, Winson's complaint that his son refused to return home from Nairobi to repair his *simba* house (which had collapsed) in Kanyathi registered his concern that this son had turned his back on the poor conditions at his

father's home, and could not be counted upon in the future to help care for his relatives. Winston judged that due to the corrupting influences of the city (and specifically selfish and conspicuous consumption), his son had lost his respect (*luoro*) for his father and mother and other relatives. Similarly, Cornelia, who had been called to her natal home to help care for her brother's orphaned children, found that her own son who had moved away for paid employment had since changed his phone number and so she had no way to reach him. She described the distress this caused her as she asked herself how a son she had raised with love could now prove so unwilling to love her back. It was suspected by many that such 'lost' family members had decided they could afford to cut themselves off from their kin. (Or perhaps such individuals calculated they could not afford to remain in contact with their kin.) The general understanding was that these people had decided to be selfish instead of caring. Such histories of estrangements between migrant labourers and their relatives in rural Nyanza have been documented by other researchers too (Hay 1982; Francis 1995). In Kanyathi, Winston, Cornelia, and many others who perceived themselves as abandoned, and therefore more vulnerable, tried to frame their protest to such actions in moral terms: how could a person refuse to care for one's own kin?

Sometimes, however, the absence of sitting reflected the assumption that a different custom would be adhered to, namely the absorption of the care of children among their paternal relatives. Such assumptions have proven faulty in many cases. This was the case in the instance of Cornelia's nephews and nieces described in Chapter 4 when after their parents' deaths the children continued living in the homestead shared with their 'other father' and 'other mothers', but were not fed or otherwise provided with assistance. As I described in Chapter 4, such failures among paternal relatives to provide care for children have in some cases resulted in children running away or the intervention of children's maternal relatives. Rose told me of how it came about that her elderly mother was caring for Rose's deceased sister's children:

At the burial [of the father after the mother's death two years before], there was no discussion about the children. The children were left at their home [*dalagi*, lit. 'their home'; i.e. their father's family's homestead], in the grandmother's house. The children were not in school and were doing odd jobs to help provide. The paternal uncle was living at the same homestead with his own children. But this brother and the dead brother [children's father] had not got along. So this uncle refused to take in the children. Neighbours started sending word that these children

were not being cared for well. My mother [children's maternal grandmother] travelled to her daughter's home and requested a discussion about the care of the children. She asked the paternal family to let her take the children. She said that she was not taking them for good ... Now we have the children and we are educating the children. And the children visit their home [their father's family's home] and there is no bad feeling. They know that they will go back to their [patrilineal] home... The children know that their father's home is where their home is.

There is much in this story: how 'tradition' was being followed in leaving children with their paternal relatives in their father's family's homestead; how neighbours monitored the children's care and took action through sending a message to the maternal family; how a maternal grandmother 'requested' to care for the children temporarily and with the assurance that the children would still know 'where their home is'; but what I choose to emphasise here is how Rose opened with the statement that 'At the burial there was no discussion about the children.' This statement identifies that the absence of discussion about the children was critical to the subsequent problems these children faced. I think that this statement reflects a fundamental distrust that what families do can be taken for granted, despite long-standing and idealised customary obligations.

This distrust spurs the contemporary endorsement of sitting as the best practice for families to follow. Correspondingly, to talk of sitting – as in whether people sat or not - is to make social commentary on the integration or disintegration of families and their preservation of a collective ethic. For instance, a person might comment admiringly about another person's cooperative family: '*Unyalo timo; [nikech] un e achiel*', meaning 'You [plural] manage; [because] you are united'. After listening to Min Helen's accounts of how her siblings had divided up among them the orphaned children of two of their deceased siblings, I remarked that Min Helen's family seemed to be cooperative and I asked why they were like this. Min Helen's response gave credit to an ethos of family that had been instilled through earlier interactions:

That one depends on how you raise your children and the rules you set for them. That is what brings that togetherness [*riwruok*]. The respect [*luoro*] you had for your parents when they were still alive is the respect you still have for one another.

To speak of sitting is also to invoke tradition. Not only do people draw from their own families' histories of sitting and standing to find fodder for constructing their valorisation of these, but respect for this 'custom' is also communicated from elders to juniors. As Tufi recounted to me, at her natal family's most recent occasion of sitting together, on the last day of the funeral for one of her cousins, her father's brother, who was the eldest surviving member of her father's family, had solemnly counselled her siblings and cousins on the importance of their unity:

He told us we must try to keep our unity [*wariwore*] because this will be very important for us. We all felt touched after this and we said to each other that we will keep our unity. Everyone felt good about this.

Such self-conscious pride that is manifest in actualising unity or 'togetherness' (*riwruok*) further underscores how this is conceived of as a deliberate project, and not something that can be taken for granted.⁶⁹

'We are like a society': Institutionalising Families

We are like a society. We meet if there is some misbehaviour or a death. We try to meet once a month. ... The floor is open to everyone so anyone can have their chance to speak.

(George, b. 1970)

Today, as George's description above indicates, some families have established their meetings as a regular activity. By comparing his family's organisation with a society, George was not referring to a society in the sense of general membership to the same community, but rather an association of members governed by rules, mimicking the seriousness of a business society. Families' efforts to institutionalise their practices of meeting are consistent with families' primary interests to be able to respond to challenges experienced among them. Indeed, many such family-based 'societies' have been created in the reflexive aftermath of family crises, usually deaths of young adult members, with the explicit purposes of bolstering the families' social and economic unity and cooperation so that they will not be 'defeated' by

⁶⁹ According to Luo scholar Ocholla-Ayayo's analysis, this reflects long-standing counsel by Luo elders: 'Elders always try to encourage their grandchildren to unity, by sayings such as 'One tree has never made a forest' – 'Yath achiel ok los bungu'' (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976: 85).

future crises. Many have been organised along the format of self-help groups that practice systems of saving and loaning money among their members.

Family members organising themselves like ‘societies’ is also not a new practice, however the regularisation of such societies is a more recent innovation. Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo’s (1989) descriptions of everyday life in Siaya, Nyanza Province during the 1970s notes that Luo clan members would convene meetings for specific purposes, such as raising money for a shared project (e.g., a village school), and more commonly clan members would gather in a series of meetings during the period between a death and a burial so as to raise financial contributions among themselves for funeral expenses. Shipton has similarly found in his studies in Nyanza Province since the 1980s that families’ savings and loans groups were usually emergency-initiated, such as in response to deaths for the purpose of fundraising for burials, while more regularised savings initiatives occurred mainly among small-scale merchants and salaried people in and around towns (Shipton 2007: 115).⁷⁰

Today in Kanyathi everyone seems to participate in at least one, but usually several routine savings and loans groups. Some function as a way for people to save for special household or business costs, such as children’s school fees or a wholesale purchase for later retail sale. Others serve the explicit role of insuring for personal emergencies, including death. It is these latter types of savings groups that are the societies in to which many families have transformed themselves.

Isaiah, the father at my homestead, was the secretary for his clan’s burial savings group, their welfare savings group, and their savings and loans group which meet concurrently on one Sunday each month. These three different groups involve the same members but with different degrees of participation. The most regimented and regularly paid-into group has by far been the clan’s burial savings group. Once a month each member of the clan’s burial group is supposed to contribute Ksh100 (GBP 0.72) toward his or her own future burial. The purpose of these monthly contributions is for each individual to eventually save Ksh5,000 (GBP 36). Once this limit has been met, the individual is eligible to take a loan from the group’s collective savings that she or he will repay according to an agreed upon schedule.

⁷⁰ Indicating the patchiness in the organisation of family societies, Shipton notes that a study done in the 1970s in a constituency of southern Nyanza did not find any burial societies operating (Shipton 2007: 241, citing Goldenberg, 1982).

The Ksh5,000 minimum is set at the price of a basic coffin. This implies that once a particular group member has reached the objective of saving Ksh5, 000 his or her coffin is guaranteed. This individual guarantee in turn guarantees that the other costs of his or her burial will be covered by the rest of the members of the clan's burial savings group. If the deceased had also been contributing to the clan welfare savings group then whatever was his or her contribution to that account would be tripled from contributions by other group members. These are the rules that the members have determined for themselves.

I interpret that being an active contributor to one's own future burial through membership in a burial savings group reflects several different interests. Such savings are tangible demonstrations of an individual's sense of accountability for his or her own welfare as well as the welfare of the group. Advance payments indicate a person's acknowledgement that he or she does not want to cause undue hardship to the group, but that he or she also wishes to maintain the right to claim help from the group. As such, the individual is simultaneously proving his or her commitment to the group and consolidating their commitment to him or to her. In making one's own contributions the condition for other group members' contributions, these burial societies are formalising expectations and calculations of reciprocity. In the ledger there is a page designated for each member and a list under his or her name of each contribution and the date on which it was made; the bookkeeping is producing explicit reciprocal balance sheets. The purpose of such institutionalised practices is not just to reserve money as burial or emergency insurance. They are also intended to secure relationships, in the present as well as in the unknown future, through demonstrations of individuals being members in good standing.

These savings groups are not only used as technologies to control family functions, however. They also give people chances to determine their budgeting priorities. As with all insurance savings schemes, they provide opportunities to safeguard certain priorities for the future from the competitiveness of the present. By contributing and recording this contribution and acknowledging it as non-refundable, burial savings group members are exchanging money in their pockets for something less immediately solvent, but nevertheless critical to their lives: the security of a good burial.⁷¹ The quality of one's own burial is increasingly recognised as a

⁷¹ I perceive that some of the significance of such preparation is reflected in how Jean Comaroff (2007: 203) has described people's efforts in South Africa:

choice that individuals are supposed to make during their lives.⁷² If someone in Kanyathi did not demonstrate responsibility for his or her own burial through saving for it, it could be much, much harder for kin or others to raise funds for what is locally regarded as a respectable, or even acceptable, burial. At least one or a few people would have to choose to come forward and stand for the deceased so that he or she may be buried in accordance with the public criteria of what is respectable.⁷³

Such deliberate efforts to formalise, monitor, and enforce the functions of families raise the prospect of families as optive, contractarian, and voluntaristic institutions. In regularising a families' cooperation normatively (with rules) and practically (with schedules), the social contract of the family group is rendered more tangible. Equally, however, this seems to render the family an institution that a person can choose to opt out of, or be excluded from participation.

Practices in Sitting and Standing

After listening to the first collection I had gathered of people's accounts of how their families determined what to do about the care of orphaned children, and recognising from this collection the repeated use of the actual word for 'sitting' (*-bedo*), I grew increasingly speculative about whether 'sitting' is an actual concept, or idiom, and in any case what it could mean for social relations and practices. We have been trained as anthropologists not to confuse words with concepts (Bloch 1998). As explicitly as the word 'sitting' was used by people in Kanyathi to label a practice, albeit often an idealised practice, through participant observation I came to appreciate how 'sitting' envelops a vast array of implicit meanings. I found that despite the tangible character of the word 'sitting', the practice is often less

Communities struggle to find the time and place, and the ritual and financial means, to process the weight of mortality, thus to avoid the ultimate abjection of 'bare death' (McNeil 1998). The prospect of being unable to dispatch the dead with due ceremony — to properly consign them to the ancestral world — marks the null point of social continuity, as threatening to an imagined future as is bare life in the present.

⁷² As one of my elderly male neighbours in Kanyathi told me to explain why a person must stay in the good favour of both church and family members to ensure he or she will have a good burial: 'The people of God will do your ceremony. So at that time when you want to be buried, the Christians are the ones who will be needed to bury you. But the family will take care of [e.g. feed and accommodate] the visitors'. (For an interesting study of a particularly public and controversial dispute over how a Luo individual should be buried, see Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1992.)

⁷³ This finding has parallels in Bahre's (2007) analysis of a case study of a dilemma among neighbours and relatives in Cape Town, South Africa to determine the funding of a burial for a woman who had not actively participated in reciprocal community relationships which informs his concept of 'reluctant solidarity'.

obvious and recognisable. In this, I see that 'sitting', by word and practice, serves as a phenomenological mnemonic for demonstrations of kinship and reciprocity, respect and reputation, belonging and sacrifice.

During the course of my research I attended several family meetings, usually as an observer at several, but also at a few as a participant. It is common for events that already encourage the reunions of families, such as funerals or bridewealth transfers, to have an occasion to sit together planned into them, but other specific purposes can spur a gathering. The meetings I attended focused on planning funerals, preparing to raise and transfer bridewealth for a wife, and on the other end of this relationship preparing for a visit by in-laws to receive their bridewealth for a daughter of the home, organising the building of new houses for sons or wives, strategising for the secondary education of a child of the family, and the mediation of a couple's dispute due to the man's infidelity. As well, I attended several different families' 'society' meetings that were held regularly, usually once a month and hosted at the homes of different members.

Family meetings were experienced as differently as the people and issues which filled them. Some were extremely disciplined bureaucratic affairs presided over by a chairperson (*jakon*), and especially if money was collected, or distributed, or promised, written records were made. Others were seemingly accidental collections of people sporadically engaging - or avoiding engagement - with an issue that someone had voiced for discussion. These latter sometimes felt like cat-and-mouse games during which individuals carefully plotted their next steps and in a few cases, I noticed how such diffident meetings often did not occur in one sitting, but rather were drawn out over hours or days with many negotiations happening in groupings of two or three people and 'off-stage', for example behind the house while cooking food or washing dishes or on brief walks through the maize fields. Other family 'meetings' were certainly more deliberately boisterous affairs that celebrated being together as much as any more particular purpose. In these, the explicit purpose could seem like an excuse for socialising and there was a lot more time moving about, dancing, drinking alcohol, and laughing, than sitting and being contemplative.

Sometimes I was formally invited to attend a family meeting several days or hours before it began, but occasionally I recognised I was in a family meeting only during the moments while I was sitting and listening to a sequence of speakers. In these few cases, I realised later

that our sitting together had been intentionally, if inconspicuously, designed. It was often only me who clued in gradually to the orchestration of an event. However, my naivety was not out of place; some other people often appeared innocent and unknowing to the purpose of certain discussions. This appearance, signalled in non-committal body language (as if not listening) and occasionally clear expressions of surprise (a statement or facial expression), was often deceptive for during the course of discussions it would emerge that the person was actually quite well briefed on the topic and had their talking points at the ready. For example, when the eldest brother and second wife of a man organised for a discussion of when the man would pay bridewealth for this wife, the first wife acted and articulated as if she was unaware that these arrangements were being made. In fact, her husband and her husband's brother had both discussed these with her privately before the meeting and her performance of ignorance may be regarded as a form of protest. Since her husband had brought his second wife home to live next to his first wife in 2001, the first wife had refused to speak to, or otherwise acknowledge, her co-wife. During this meeting - which I attended with honest surprise at its occurrence because I had not been told it had been arranged⁷⁴ - the first wife continued to withhold any tangible elements of participation in the planning of this bridewealth payment, although she stayed long enough in the presence of the discussion to signal that she did not want to be entirely excluded from the deliberations.

‘Sitting down’, I learned, is not just done as it might be organised. Subsumed under the category of sitting together are all the backroom negotiations that take place before and during the theatre of sitting. Particularly in cases where what is at stake is potentially emotional or divisive, group discussions are often approached with tact, the groundwork sometimes laid privately prior to, or in between, the more public events. The following example describes such work.

In Mama Simon's case an attempt to sit down with her deceased husband's relatives after his burial in 2002 ended without resolution when her co-wife - who already had her own house on their deceased husband's allocated parcel of land whereas Mama Simon did not - opposed sharing her homestead with Mama Simon. Mama Simon recalled to me her husband's

⁷⁴ It seems my presence was part of the manipulation of this event. Sylvia, the second wife in this marriage, is a sister of a woman I stayed with for several weeks and she had invited me to stay one night at her home. I accepted the invitation but was not aware that Sylvia had made sure to have my visit coincide with this meeting. Nobody but Sylvia was aware that I was going to be brought to the meeting. It seems that Sylvia thought I could help her bargaining position. On another visit Sylvia asked me to ask her husband when he intended to buy the cattle for her bridewealth. I did not do this.

brothers trying to talk the first wife out of her refusal, but they were unsuccessful. After some time of Mama Simon struggling to make rent payments on her house in Kisumu, Mama Simon's daughter and son-in-law offered to give her a parcel of land in Kanyathi that they had privately purchased. Mama Simon travelled from her rented house to her husband's family's rural home to discuss this option with them. She first approached the eldest brother to her husband. The brother discussed with Mama Simon the option of her moving to Kanyathi and made clear that the family wanted her to agree to *tero* (to be inherited through marriage) with a husband from among them so that she would be establishing a home with a husband so that her son could also build at it and so that her daughter's husbands could bring dowry to that home.⁷⁵ He suggested she choose a relative to be her *jater* (husband through *tero*). Mama Simon approached a cousin to her husband that she thought would agree and asked him to help her move. In short form, she said to him: '*Abiro goyo dala. Ichungna?*' which literally translates as 'I am going to beat [leave] this home. Will you stand for me?' She left him to discuss it with his wife and he came back to her to agree. Mama Simon reported this to the eldest brother and he called a few relatives to sit together at which occasion they discussed what was planned. In front of everyone, the eldest brother asked the wife of the man who had agreed to act as Mama Simon's *jater* if she agreed with the arrangement and she told them she did. During the discussion various family members expressed that even if Mama Simon moved it would not mean she was leaving the family. Mama Simon recounted them telling her: 'You are still in this family and can still come home and we will also come to visit you'. And this is what happened: Mama Simon and her *jater* performed several symbolic acts during the building of Mama Simon's new home and the receipt of her daughter's dowry, while Mama Simon's son visited his father's brothers to plan his own bridewealth payments.⁷⁶

As the examples provided above describe, sitting down entails a calling together of all members of a family according to a specific 'kinship calculus'. During these discussions

⁷⁵ Mama Simon was past childbearing age when her husband died.

⁷⁶ This case may be regarded as unusual for two reasons: most importantly, because Mama Simon's land was donated by her daughter and daughter's husband which is not customary nor common; and secondly, because despite her economic independence from her husband's family, Mama Simon has chosen to stay closely affiliated, indeed 'married', and participative in this family. It is far more common for widows to either *tero* as part and parcel of continuing to live in their matrimonial home (which may otherwise be appropriated by the deceased man's relatives as belonging to their lineage) or for widows to be denied access to family land and not fulfil *tero* with a member of the husband's family (either by the widow's choice or the breakdown in relations between the family and the widow). There are also cases of widows refusing to take a *jater* while maintaining their claim to matrimonial property.

everyone is invited to state their ideas and opinions. According to everyone I asked, the elder family members are listened to for their advice, but they do not make unilateral decisions. In some cases of working out the care of orphaned children, the elder children are asked about whether or not they feel able to care for their younger siblings in their own households. In two such cases that were described to me the older brothers declined and contributed their opinions to making decisions to place their younger siblings in various households (and one in an orphanage). In another case the elder married brother of a ten year old boy chose to take his brother into his new household. As their paternal aunt, Rose, described:

People sat down and they asked in a polite way if the son was able. It was a long talk because they had to give advice. He was being told his responsibilities. Everyone attended this discussion, including me. And he said he was able. But that did not bar that boy from receiving help from others like my husband [the boy's paternal uncle].

As described in Chapter 4, during such deliberations an individual is able to make arguments for why he or she is unable to take children into his or her household. For example, a grandmother may say she is too old to chase children. Or a brother may describe his current challenges in providing for his own children without employment and with little land. The family is expected to consider the reasonableness of each person's case and to try to find a resolution that takes everyone's specific circumstances into consideration and metes out a sort of distributed justice. This process is expected to carry on until a consensus can be reached, and the nominated caretakers agree (including the wife of any man who has agreed to take a child into their household), before they make any decisions. As Wilhelmina, an elderly neighbour, summed up the general attitude toward such processes:

Forcing a decision will not work. It will bring more problems. There will be resentment. If they cannot agree now, it is better to wait until there is agreement. So people will agree to disagree for a while and face other decisions later.

If a representative of a particular household refuses to take in orphaned children while other family members judge that his or her household is able, the family does not insist. However, the good character of this individual and his or her household will certainly be tarnished and it is likely that other family members will complain that the individual has a 'bad heart'.

As the foregoing descriptions reveal, people in Kanyathi elucidated many principles that guide how sitting and standing are determined. These include respect for one another, a sense of equity and a goal of consensus; perhaps all captured in the Luo phrase ‘sharing the burden’, which I explored in Chapters 3 and 4. From these accounts, sitting and standing both seem to represent deliberate and facilitated (often subtly choreographed) occasions where responsibilities for children are cast in terms of the preservation of the family through cooperation and respect for one another as well as for the continuity of the family’s lineage. These are cast as ideal moments, although not often experienced as such.

Yet, this analysis of sitting and standing cannot be complete without a discussion of perhaps the most obvious qualities of sitting; those of the body held in place. This is the focus of the next section.

The Acquired Faculty (Habitus) of Sitting and Standing

‘*Bed piny*’ (‘Sit down’; lit. ‘sit on the ground’; *piny* = ground, territory, homeland⁷⁷) are the familiar words of hospitality after someone has been invited into a house and it is strange for someone to refuse even if they only intend to stay for a few moments. Most of the houses in Kanyathi have mud floors or floors of cracked concrete poured many years ago over mud, and so nobody is expected to take their sandals or shoes off when they enter. Some people’s houses, like Mama Simon’s, have newer concrete floors and in such houses people often do remove their (often muddy) sandals or shoes and leave them outside. The majority of houses only have two or three rooms: a large sitting room which is the room first entered,⁷⁸ and to the left of this main room, separated by doors or curtains, one or two bedrooms. The cooking is done in a separate building, usually directly behind the main house, although also sometimes in the bedroom. Most sitting rooms are styled very similarly; a style that is common beyond this village and throughout much of Kenya. Matching sets of sitting chairs and maybe a chesterfield are set against each of the four walls so that every sitting person faces the middle of the room, possibly quite near or quite far from the other sitting people depending on the size of the room. There are commonly one or two wooden tables in the

⁷⁷ The concept of *piny* is extremely significant to Luo identities merging social, cultural, and political meanings (Parkin 1978: 235-236; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989: 31-35; Geissler and Prince 2010: 44-45)

⁷⁸ The Dholuo word for door is *dhoot* which literally translates to be ‘mouth of the house’, conjuring the idea that a person who enters is ingested by the house.

centre of the room and often a cabinet of wood and glass standing up against the wall opposite the entrance to the room which contains the household's dishes, tea pot, thermos, extra linens, special foods (e.g. bread, jams), and many other small things that might be used in the sitting room (e.g. a radio, photo albums, notebooks). From the tops of the walls are hung calendars, posters, and framed photographs. There are usually at least a few black and white photographs of family members in the 1960s or 1970s in studio portraits or at weddings or with work colleagues and a few more recent coloured photographs of family members on graduation days or at funerals. The posters commonly include a depiction of Jesus with a verse from the Bible, pictures of urban landscapes or large, modern houses or Caucasian or Asian babies with general motivational sayings. The calendars - often including one of the present year as well as several from past years - are almost always advertisements of a commercial product. In 2007, there were many campaign posters for local candidates for the ODM political party as well as more colourful posters of ODM's presidential candidate Raila Odinga, but by 2009 many of these were gone and posters of US President Barack Obama were tacked up. Of the dozens of sitting rooms I visited in Kanyathi, there was not one that did not conform to several of these details.⁷⁹

Noting these similarities is relevant because they structure similar interactions in different people's homes. Their regularity makes the protocol of visiting easy to learn and repeat without social blunders. I also think that this conformity of domestic arrangement and style is another reflection of how social conformity is valued generally, and judged by appearances. More importantly, the way the furniture is arranged structures how interactions occur. The arrangement of the furniture and how it is used combines function and custom. Being arranged around the periphery of the room makes it possible for the room to include more chairs – and therefore more people. Yet, according to local custom, not every chair is available to all. Upon entry, visitors are expected to move to the right hand side of the living room (*kor ka dhoot*, lit. side of the door, or *kor budo*, lit. side of staying) while the owners

⁷⁹ Despite my subtle tactics of resistance, my own sitting room soon looked exactly like all the others: my one double seat couch and one wooden chair were judged as too few and gradually all of the walls were lined with old chairs; when I wasn't looking, bits of crocheted lace were brought in to cover (but mainly slip off) the patches on these chairs and to veil the two small windows as well as the entrance to my bedroom and a calendar was hung (advertising motor oil). A few people remarked that I had used the wrong type of material for the covers of my seat's cushions (I chose patterned cotton rather than the more common velour upholstery). After several times of re-moving it, I explained to my family members that I wanted to use my tall narrow table as a desk at the window rather than as a table in the centre of the sitting room. Visitors expressed approval at my living arrangements and talked of how I could gradually add other things like a cabinet and more matching chairs.

and occupants of the house are the people who are supposed to sit next to the door or with their backs against the wall that separates the sitting room from the bedroom (*kor nindo*, lit. side of sleeping or *kor kamach*, lit. side of the fire; sleeping and cooking may both be done in the private room to the left of the sitting room).⁸⁰ Elderly Winston criticised his daughter-in-law for sitting next to the door when she accompanied us into his first wife's house before he arrived. He told this new, young wife to one of his sons of Winston's third wife that she is not married into the house where we were sitting and so she should know she cannot sit in the place of the owner. Tufi always guided me to the right when we entered houses and when I asked why she said she thought the custom is there because if a visitor sits next to the door it looks like she or he wants to leave.⁸¹ Immediately upon entry, the owner of the house will often say a prayer while all the guests stand. Prayers are sometimes tailored to ask for God to bless the gathering of people and to bring wisdom to the words that will be spoken. After the 'Amen' is spoken, everyone usually shakes hands and takes their seats and there they are expected to remain for the duration of the group's gathering. Men and women may sit next to one another or not. There seems to be no tacit rules about this.

In sitting, everyone is facing the middle and can therefore easily capture the whole group's attention or watch and listen as someone else speaks. Eye contact may be made but is on the whole not emphasised although especially when men were speaking I noticed them seeking other individuals' eye contact and other signs of affirmation, such as nodding, through asking an individual if what they said was true. People can be called upon to speak to the group and must speak or refuse to speak by signalling through shrugging body language and a wave of a hand. I found that it can feel very uncomfortable to be positioned in such a way that pressures active participation. When I asked other people about this they agreed that it can feel uncomfortable because it is difficult to avoid addressing something you do not necessarily want to discuss when you are sitting in the room face to face with others.

It can be rare for the everyday members of a household to find themselves sitting together, even in their own sitting room. This is only likely to occur with some majority of members in

⁸⁰ Geissler and Prince also describe how the associations of different sides of the house with relative degrees of intimacy with the house owners structure social interactions within the house. They judge that 'Rather than binary oppositions (of inside and outside), the 'sides' constitute bilateral relations, create segments, mark their relations and join them within one space. 'Sides' thus provide the spatial frame for the encompassment of diversity in *riwore*, 'being together'.' (Geissler and Prince 2010: 304)

⁸¹ These two examples of Winston's daughter-in-law and Tufi indicate that the younger generation is not commonly aware of the specific 'rules' or rationale of 'Luo ways' (Mboya 1938).

the evenings when they are trying to share the light of one or two kerosene lanterns by which to read and write. On one evening before dinner this is what I thought was the reason for the coincidence of several of my host family members being together in the main house's sitting room. I only realised we were sitting according to my host father's plan when Isaiah reviewed out loud the recent developments concerning Julia's education: her good scores on her primary school exams; her offer of a place at a provincial boarding school; the cost of that school; and my earlier suggestion that someone should go to a local charity organisation to ask if they were going to continue sponsoring Julia's education as they had during her primary education. Isaiah then turned to me in front of Julia's brothers (Julia was away from home) and asked me what I thought. I was surprised to be put on the spot and felt a bit unnerved because I was not sure what the motivation was in asking me. I quickly assumed this was a way to pressure me to pay the extra school fees. But after I had spoken, rather indirectly about the importance of knowing what support might be possible from the charity before we could consider the options, Isaiah called on Julia's eldest brother, Omondi (b. 1979), who was with us on a rare visit from Eldoret, to state his thoughts. In listening to how Isaiah expressed a deferral to Omondi as Julia's eldest brother, I realised this discussion was not only Isaiah's tactic to recruit my commitment to Julia's education, but also to impress on Omondi an expectation for his commitment and contribution. Indeed, Isaiah stated with relative formality that he would not be living forever and so it was important for all of the family to think about the future of young Julia together and as Omondi was the eldest of Julia's siblings he must help to make decisions about Julia. Perhaps Omondi also felt uncomfortable at being put on the spot, but he performed well and seemed to accept the role of sharing family authority with Isaiah in his spoken response. Julia's cousin and brother were also sitting in the room with us, but they were not asked to speak and did not volunteer until at the end of the discussion when each person said out loud that we seemed to have a good plan to proceed. This exchange very much felt like Isaiah's deliberate way of trying to enlist my and Omondi's commitments to be accountable for Julia's future education, and to make more explicit the family's growing expectations for Omondi. Although ostensibly coincidental, this moment of sitting and thinking together actualised an explicit demonstration of the family's constitution and shared purpose.

Sitting as a bodily act fixes people in place and consequently physically enforces a principle of accountability. In entering a house to sit, there is also a concession of the authority of the host. When held in a seat, it is difficult to evade, and even harder to escape, communication

with the group. People do not usually send others to sit as their representatives, and even if a person delivers a message on behalf of another, the group does not recognise the missing person as adequately present or consulted and provisions will likely be made to consult the missing person. Nevertheless, I have watched women use the excuse of cooking to move in and out of sitting sessions; they hover near the backdoor (leading out to the kitchen), either inside the sitting room or just outside with their head directed to listen in, usually standing or squatting on the arm of a friendly female relative's nearby chair. This avoidance of sitting is not always due to the demands of cooking, but can reflect a desire not to be directly involved, either because of the issue or because of their preferred role as a private advisor to their husband or other relatives. It can also reflect a woman's acknowledgment of not being a full member of the family that is sitting, without direct obligations and rights. This is especially true of new wives and young or middle-aged widows living among their deceased husband's family.

Articulating a perspective in front of an audience, even of family, is also an importantly experiential sensation. This act (which in an interesting parallel in English might be described as 'standing up for oneself'), can be a nerve-wracking experience, but also a potentially empowering one. My friend Evelyn prepared in advance for a meeting that she had goaded her husband to call among his family to defend himself of alleged infidelity and to seek guidance on their domestic animosity. When I met with her after the meeting she could recite nearly precisely what she had said and how she had gained the reactions she had wanted. She felt a surge of triumph as a result of this opportunity to say her piece and have it witnessed and endorsed. Evelyn told me that she felt she had gained a stronger position in her relationship with her husband because of the way she had effectively represented herself to earn the support of his family. As she said, he would not mess with her so easily now. It was clear that Evelyn was able to say more and to state her perspective more clearly in this forum than she was previously able to in face-to-face encounters with her violent husband. The sanctions of sitting with the family lessened Evelyn's handicap in her marital relationship by providing a fairer chance to have her perspective stated and listened to and considered. It boosted Evelyn's sense of self efficacy and for a while, at least, her husband lessened his abuse of her.

The oratory that sitting and standing demands is important. During sitting there are opportunities to speak and be listened to as well as to listen to what others have to say.

Eloquence is admired, but so is exactness. While proverbs or clever analogies might be used, it can be complained during or after that an individual uses too many riddles and aims to obscure an issue. Polite and deferent language is the norm, as well as acknowledgment of the good contributions made by others and a commitment to reaching consensus. In my listening, I admired how articulately and sensitively most individuals spoke, and after speaking myself on two occasions, I was told that I had spoken well. These *post hoc* conversations about what was said during a sitting session - and how it was said - were interesting for even when they occurred just hours or even minutes after sitting, they were done in a remarkably more colloquial type of speech.

Sitting and Standing as Fixing Families

We're still together [*Wan pod wariwore*]. There is not someone to offer to help you but the family will still sit together to decide family matters. It is not that we have more financial abilities [than other families]. It is that we understand one another well. (Rose, b.1965)

This chapter has described how people in Kanyathi have considered sitting together and standing for one another as the ideal ways for families to address specific challenges to their integrity. These practices have antecedents that people can use to justify them as traditions, and in the current context they seem to prove themselves particularly efficacious in meeting the emergent - and sometimes sudden - demands with flexible responses. Moreover, I judge that the eventfulness of sitting and standing not only produce tangible outcomes. They also enable the reproduction of the tacit laws of perception and practice that through social consensus provide the basis of common sense (Bourdieu 1996: 21). In drawing this chapter's discussion to a close, I will attempt to appraise how these two objectives may be met through the generative forces of language and performance as critical events.

First, with their emphasis on articulation before a group, sitting and standing as combined events may be regarded as synonymous with the notion of the speech act. The theories of John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969) that speech can be regarded as action, and specifically social action, is based on the recognition that speech can include performative utterances. Performative utterances are distinguished by their capacity to perform an act *through* speech from other illocutionary speech acts that only perform an act *in* speech. For

example, to make an assertion or to give an order is illocutionary because the act is performed in saying something. Performative speech acts do not state what one is 'doing' but are used to actually do something. Austin's examples include how stating a vow of marriage in the course of a marriage ceremony or stating a bequest during the reading of a will have the power to perform acts other than just the locution. Austin classified promises as illocutionary acts, and not performative. Yet, he classified vows as performative. With this theory of the speech act in mind it is useful to question how performative or implicating the declaration to stand for someone is. From what I witnessed in Kanyathi, I judge that if the person stands from a position of sitting, this is, in fact, performative.

What happens when individuals state their intention to stand for another during an occasion of sitting with others fits the mould of a speech act. For instance, when Mama Simon's dead husband's brother stated in front of his sitting family that he would stand for Mama Simon as her *jater*, he was not merely indicating what he would do, he was actually doing it. In this, the words 'I stand for her' (*Achung'ne*) are 'linguistically or grammatically empowered' (Pels 2002: 78). (In contrast, when that man's wife stated before the same group that she had no objections to this agreement, she was only describing something, she was not actually doing something.)

Yet, as Bourdieu (1991) theorised, the symbolic power of the speech act is not only derived from the words themselves, but inextricably from the institutional conditions of their use. Bourdieu's (1991: 25) argument concerning the transmutation of family from social construction to social fact elaborates how the family is often empowered as a legitimate reality through the privileging of it as a site of accumulation and transmission of economic, cultural and symbolic privileges:

The family discourse that ethnomethodologists refer to is a powerful, performative discourse, which has the means of creating the conditions of its own verification and therefore its own reinforcement, an institutional discourse which durably institutes itself in reality.

Consequently, to understand 'how the family turns from a nominal fiction into a real group' one must take into account all of the 'practical and symbolic work' that transforms obligation into disposition (ibid.: 22). I perceive the combination of the events of sitting and standing as critically important practical and symbolic work. By accepting to be present and fixed in

place before others, through sitting in a chair or on the ground in someone's home, an individual uses his or her body to communicate his or her membership in the group and willingness to cooperate with the group. The seemingly simple act of sitting works as a very effective symbol of unity with, and accountability to, the group. It is an expression of openness to the consequences of sustaining a relationship with this group. And the potentiality of being in that place includes that one may be asked to stand for another, and therefore take practical action on behalf of the symbolic entity of the family. My interpretation of the significance of such acts fits well with Lambek's (2002: 37-8) notion of how agency and responsibility can be enacted and legitimated through communicative actions:

... we can see how agents are always partly constructed through their acts – constituted through acts of acknowledgment, witnessing, engagement, commitment, refusal and consent. In assuming responsibility and rendering themselves subject to specific liturgical, political, and discursive regimes and orders, people simultaneously lay claim to and accept the terms through which their subsequent acts will be judged (Rappaport 1999). People are agents insofar as they choose to subject themselves, to perform and conform accordingly, to accept responsibility, and to acknowledge their commitments.

Events of sitting and standing in Kanyathi are critical to the transformation from 'nominal fiction into a real group' (Bourdieu 1991: 22). They clarify for participants through the enactment of 'acknowledgement, witnessing, engagement, commitment, refusal and consent' (Lambek 2002: 37) the regimes of reciprocity to which people therein render themselves responsible (or not, in absentia). They accomplish this through on the one hand explicitly articulating definitions, and on the other, actualising these definitions themselves through their own performance. In this, sitting and standing as a combined event can establish a social consensus, laying the groundwork for social reproduction. Recall Tufi's description of how this happened among her elder uncle and his children, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces following the burial of a family member: 'He told us we must try to keep our unity because this will be very important for us. We all felt touched after this and we said to each other that we will keep our unity. Everyone felt good about this'. In reflection on Tufi's experience, I question whether she was merely describing that her family members' statements (and feelings) were acknowledgements of the importance of maintaining their unity or whether these statements (and the feelings they invoked) were not in fact actualising the unity and its

importance. This experience seems to fit with Bourdieu's idea that the powerful, performative discourse of family has the means to create the conditions of its own verification and reinforcement.

My argument then is that while the purposes of sitting and standing are usually immediately pragmatic, such as determining how to provide care for several orphaned children, their eventfulness also actualises something greater than the sum of these parts. Beyond the practical accounting of particular terms and conditions – which may be highly significant for individual's interests – the combination of sitting and standing prove themselves as critical events in the way that Das (2007) defines: they are different from everyday transactions because they crystallise the 'thing-ness' of family, reciprocity, and solidarity - or as this is better translated from Dholuo: togetherness and unity (*riwruok*).

I perceive that the motive in all of this quite self-conscious and deliberate institutionalisation of what families do is to fix families, in terms of their particular relationships and their enduring reciprocities, and therefore solidarity. I use the term 'fixing' to connote both repairing something so that it may realise a previous integrity and to connote the securing of an attachment. I think that both uses of the term are pertinent to how people in Kanyathi have regarded their efforts although they are not terms I have translated from local language usage. Fixing requires a situating, an anchoring, of what has become detached. As I have already discussed in this dissertation, it seems there are two inter-related facets of life that people in Kanyathi believe have become deleteriously detached to the point of needing to be fixed to ensure family solidarity. First, there seems to be a profound uncertainty about the security of a shared morality. I discussed this in Chapter 3 and 4 in relation to the pervasive commentaries on people's good and bad hearts and the challenges undermining sharing burdens. I believe that the institutionalisation of sitting and standing practices is an attempt at preventing sudden and difficult moments of loss – such as a parent's death - from being experienced as 'moral breakdown' (Zigon 2007). In this, the normalisation of sitting and standing as what families do is meant to pre-empt questions of what a family's response to an unexpected challenge, such as orphanhood, should be. That is, in making sitting and standing patterns and expectations, there is less to fundamentally question at precarious moments. Central to this effort in shifting the experiential field from one of improvisational – and uncertain - ethical moments to normative morality is the fixing of trust among the individuals. Sitting and standing serve to fix trust among individuals through rendering their

relationships accountable to themselves. As this chapter has described, this has the potential of happening through the creation of opportunities for individuals' to become increasingly familiar with one another through face-to-face meetings,⁸² and sometimes, trust is even more explicitly monitored through keeping account of individual members' reciprocal balance sheets (as per burial savings groups' bookkeeping).

Conclusion

At the end of Chapter 4 I reflected on how strange it seems that kinship might simultaneously be regarded as fragile and tenacious. In this chapter I have explored how people in Kanyathi have appropriated particular acts in efforts to tip this balance so that the tenacity of families is clearly demonstrated and consequently persuasive and reinforcing for family members. However, all of this needs to be read as a purposeful response to significant demographic and economic uncertainty which has intensified uncertainties about people's social and moral commitments, and therefore an effort to gain some sense of security, rather than the achievement of predictability. In this, sitting and standing can still be understood as tentative and pragmatic.

I have argued through this material that events clearly matter. What remains to be understood is how sticky these particular – often extraordinary - manifestations of family trust and reciprocity may be. Put differently, how does the 'grammar' or consensus that is worked out in events of sitting and standing become enfolded into ongoing relationships?

The 'cultures of relatedness' thesis is that 'kinship is made in the homes, through the intimate sharing of space, food, and nurturance that goes on in domestic space' (Carsten 2004: 35). In this chapter, I have argued something quite different. I have argued that in the context of great uncertainty in Kanyathi, kinship is actually being deliberately constructed so that it may be reproduced without questioning at future occasions of crisis. However, to take up the 'cultures of relatedness' challenge, in the next chapter I look into the more intimate and everyday practices among adults and children in Kanyathi to explore how the manifestations of family reciprocity and solidarity may be enfolded in everyday relationships.

⁸² This approach reflects the suggestions of Goffman (1955) and Giddens (1990: 80-88) that 'facework commitments' - as demonstrations of physical and social access - are the substance of trust relations.

Chapter 6 Questions of Family and the Everyday Making of Families

Introduction

Most of the time people's roles and relationships of kinship and care are enacted through, and experienced as, ordinary, everyday life, rather than in conspicuously eventful occasions such as burials and family meetings as I have described in Chapter 5. In recognition of this, many anthropologists have trained their analytical focus to explore how 'relatedness' can be created and re-created through the interactions that comprise ordinary, everyday practices of care and affection, cooking and eating, work and leisure (Bowie 2004; Carsten 2000). Beyond documenting patterns in such interactions, Janet Carsten has argued that the behaviours and emotions associated with these interactions should also be considered potentially important and insightful forms of data. Failure to recognise these qualities may result in 'a lopsided view of what kinship is 'about'' which favours more abstracted and idealised functionalist frameworks and does not account for the full range of contingencies and possibilities in the manifestation of different forms of relatedness (Carsten 2000: 18 and 22, citing Stafford and Lambert in Carsten 2000).

In this chapter I analyse findings from my close and sustained study of one family's everyday interactions. My familiar knowledge of this family's daily relations developed through living in their homestead over sixteen months. The advantages of such access included my enhanced ability to recognise different layers of signification invested in everyday interactions as well as changes in relationships over time and according to particular circumstances. This detailed case study provides a different set of important insights concerning how caring relationships are sustained or disbanded. In this, I first trace how everyday interactions between people sharing a home were often practiced in ways that implicitly signified the existence of conflict and cooperation, and specifically signified resistance or adherence to specific expectations for each other. The cautious subtlety of these kinds of tactics was effective in that it allowed people to pose suggestions for how relationships might be negotiated, rather than force direct and explicit confrontations. I think these subtle tactics enfolded in everyday practices are important to acknowledge because they hint at how family solidarities are always works in progress as they are usually predicated on the earning of consensus, rather than the use of force. However, I qualify that this is only

‘usually’ the case because this case study also proved that such delicate negotiations of relationships may be trumped in particular instances when questions regarding claims to specific resources are explicitly posed and brokered according to inequalities in power between those who control access to resources and those who seek to gain access.

Although I have purposefully trained this analysis on everyday practices and interactions, I am drawn to emphasise the vital influence of genealogy. In this family and others, genealogical ideas were used to legitimate relationships, rights, and responsibilities. My general finding that genealogy is an important mode for the determination of kin rights and obligations is not surprising, nor is the finding that genealogies may be strategically adapted and interpreted. As Elizabeth Tonkin (1992: 110) has written: ‘A genealogy is, after all, a selective representation of demography in the light of social rules about succession’, and as Bourdieu (2003 [1977]: 105) described: ‘genealogy substitutes a space of unequivocal, homogenous relationships, established once and for all, for a spatially and temporally discontinuous set of islands of kinship, ranked and organized to suit the needs of the moment and brought into practical existence gradually and intermittently’. Both of these characterisations hold true for what I witnessed among different families in Kanyathi. Bourdieu’s point that ‘the needs of the moment’ influence how various elements of a kinship system are valued and organised has already been demonstrated in Chapter 4’s review of how a particular ‘kinship calculus’ manifests in the intersecting considerations of what care an orphaned child might require and what relationships are available and appropriate for providing this care.

This case study allows for a tracing of how genealogies are continuously constructed through the pragmatics of securing livelihoods and the possibilities of memory. Concerning the latter, other ethnographers of family relationships have made similar observations. In their study of Nyole grandparents and grandchildren in Uganda, Whyte and Whyte (2004: 91) recognised ‘a situational pragmatics in remembering and forgetting’ that allowed individuals to smooth over ruptures in their histories to establish the soundness of their present relationships. Carsten (2005) also recognised in her ethnographic study among people on an island of Malaysia that the construction of relationships entailed a ‘politics of forgetting’. Specifically, she observed that the strategy of forgetting details about the lives of grandparents who immigrated to the island from many different backgrounds allowed for the construction of a common idea of community. In my study, I acknowledge similar propensities to revisionist

narratives, and I also note how the potential indeterminacies in both memories and everyday practices of relatedness are countered with specific types of determinacy. As described above, everyday tactical practices of resisting or adhering to patterns of relatedness can be overpowered in specific instances when unequal access to resources is at issue. Similarly, the tactical uses of history and memory can be constrained by specific norms of authenticity and power. This observation cedes Arjun Appadurai's (1981) contention that 'the past is a scarce resource' with limits to its 'debatability'. It is useful to consider how social memories are enmeshed in local politics while simultaneously held subject to certain local standards of legitimacy.

The chapter is organised into two main parts. In the first half, I introduce the family in terms of the basic narrative I learned concerning their recent genealogy. I then provide a vignette of a typical morning in the homestead where I lived. I follow this vignette with a discussion of how its composition of small gestures enfolded particular significations of cooperation and conflict between different family members. I make the case that in investigating the proposition that relatedness can be made and remade in everyday interactions (Carsten 2000), it is critical to explore the ambiguities and contradictions that lie beneath these patterns. In my study, I found that conditions that appeared as harmonious were often predicated on underlying tensions. I suggest that once these underlying strains are recognised they prompt considerations about the precariousness of relationships and the agency inherent in their practice. Some of the tensions revealed in my study were structured according to gender and age seniority while other tensions were even more exclusively personal, and exploring both helps me to account for the complex dynamism of relationships. In my daily participant observation, I gradually learned to recognise how subtle acts of sharing or discrimination sparked wary questions of fairness and favouritism among those persons – specifically, orphaned children – who perceived themselves as least secure among their families. I argue that the specific context of livelihood scarcity and competition seems to accentuate the social implications signified by material objects and acts, and I demonstrate how it is worthwhile to explore how these can embody different – and often ambivalent - meanings of social histories and potentialities.

In the second half of the chapter I describe a more extraordinary set of interactions that occurred among the same family during my time living with them. This was the outbreak of a family quarrel concerning the legitimacy of one young man's claims to be a son of the

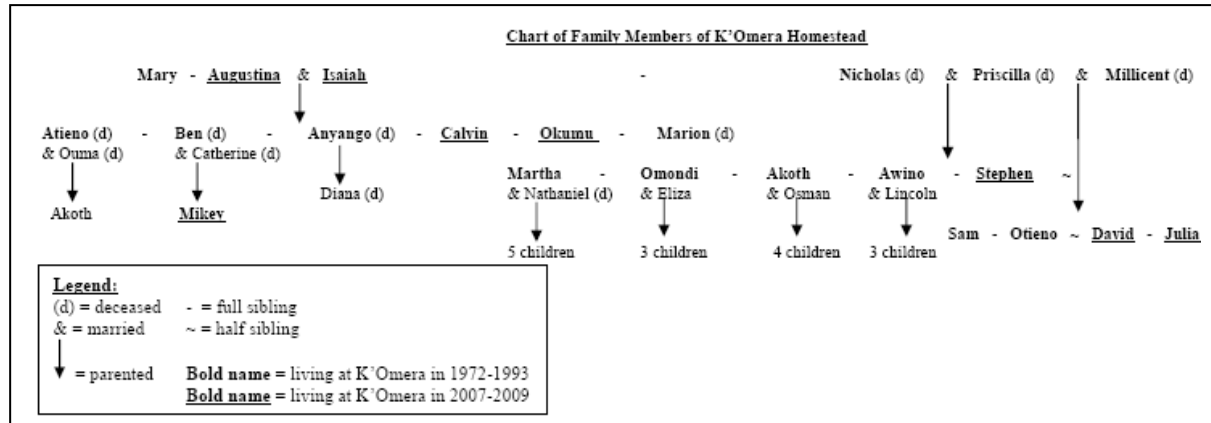
family with attendant rights of inheriting family land. I analyse this quarrel as a ‘critical event’ (Das 2007) because it forced the explicit articulation of a division in the family that had been submerged through years of everyday practices of living together and pragmatic forgetting. Detailed analysis of this event reveals how economic and moral considerations are brokered together. The immediate cause of the dispute reflected the relatively common phenomenon of young men being denied land inheritance by their elders. As described in Chapter 4, despite wide acknowledgement of the Luo principle that each son should be allowed to build a house in his paternal homestead and eventually inherit patrilineal land, land inheritance claims were breaking points in many life histories. This brings to light two qualities of the practice of kinship in Kanyathi: first, the content and expectations of kin rights and obligations were less secure than the cultural ideal; and second, challenges to this cultural ideal were debated in terms of genealogy and the moral economy of kinship.

In the latter half of this section, I trace the repercussions of this quarrel among different family members. I analyse this in terms of Das’ (1998: 62) suggestion that the ‘descent into the ordinary’ entails the ‘work of repair’ through everyday practices in adjusting norms to the exigencies of daily life. Moreover, by focusing on different individuals’ perspectives, I am able to point to different degrees of choice, tactics, and agency in determining relationships and legitimising relatedness. In this, again, I find much to agree with the notion of ‘situated pragmatics of remembering and forgetting’ in the construction of genealogies that fit with cultural norms of kinship as well as the opportunities and constraints of the immediate present.

A Family History

When David and I arrived at his homestead for the first time together in 2007 we found six people living there: his paternal uncle and aunt (Isaiah and Augustina), their two young adult sons (Calvin and Okumu), their grandson (Mikey), and David’s younger sister (Julia). A few months later, one of David’s older brothers (Stephen) returned to live among them, and a year after that, another of David’s older brothers (Sam) did so too. David’s eldest brother and three elder sisters all lived in other parts of the region and were married with young children. The other children of David’s uncle and aunt had died.

Fig. 6.1: Chart of family members sharing the K'Omera homestead (author's design). This chart identifies the 22 family members that shared the K'Omera homestead between 1972 and 1993, and the 8 family members that lived there during my fieldwork between 2007 and 2009.



The shared occupation of the homestead, which I refer to as K'Omera, was described to me in terms of genealogy and history, and specifically in terms of births, deaths, marriages, migrations, and livelihood transitions which most specifically included changes in education and income. After the death of their parents, elder and younger brothers Isaiah and Nicholas and their respective wives Augustina and Priscilla (who were also 'sister-cousins' because their fathers were brothers) had built their separate marital houses in the same homestead, and over the years they raised eleven children there. Recalling those years, Isaiah, Augustina, their son Calvin (b. 1985), and their niece Martha (b. 1976), and nephew Omondi (b. 1979) separately described to me a very busy homestead full of activities related to caring for eleven young children, small-scale farming, and engaging in small income-earning activities.

Those conditions of life were very different from the family's more recent circumstances. The family photo album indicates further evidence of change. There are no candid photographs of everyday life from that period, but a few from special occasions, such as a New Year's Day visit to Kisumu during which several photographs of different combinations of family members were taken and purchased. In these, everyone is dressed in modern manufactured clothes; the women are wearing short skirts and platform shoes. Nicholas in particular looks conspicuously urbane in bellbottom trousers and a patterned synthetic shirt with a very wide-pointing collar. The children are neatly dressed and organised to pose. The content of these snapshots contrast remarkably with the family's present circumstances.

There was no such conspicuous consumerism to witness during my two years of knowing the family. More importantly, the family has since suffered the loss of many of its young members. Augustina made this distinction clear to me as we looked at a photograph taken in 1980 of her three sisters-in-law and a collection of nine of their children, and she pointed to seven of the children who later died during their adulthoods, leaving their surviving mothers and siblings to take care of their grandchildren. As her finger lightly grazed each of the seven deceased children's faces she repeated softly: '*Osetho. Osetho. Osetho. Osetho. Osetho. Osetho. Osetho*' ('He is dead. She is dead. She is dead. He is dead. He is dead. She is dead. She is dead.'). The photograph provided a poignant reminder of the profound losses experienced by the mothers and other family members that still survived.

A turning point in the family's history is documented in photographs of Priscilla's funeral in 1986. Family members separately recounted to me that it was from that point that the family's relatively harmonious pattern changed. Her eldest daughter told me: 'You know, after your mother has died, there is so much that changes'. At the time there was not enough money for school fees for all of the children to continue so the eldest left school after their completion of only two or three years. As well, Nicholas' children found he was too strict and sometimes physically violent with them so one by one they left their home. Omondi left at age thirteen for the streets of Kisumu where he lived with a group of friends – often sleeping rough – and engaged in street hawking. Nicholas' three daughters each ran away in turn and married. Nicholas married a new wife, Millicent, and the two of them established their own homestead on a separate plot of land in Kanyathi.

Accounts of the family's history became increasingly ambiguous after this point. Different people told me different accounts, and I had to sift through the details in the different stories I heard to try to puzzle together how, and perhaps why, they were different. What everyone attested was that Nicholas' second wife, Millicent, had four children survive past infancy and that David (b. 1988) and Julia (b. 1992) were living with Millicent when she died in 1993, and they were also both living with Nicholas when he died in 1997. The mystery in the story concerns the history of the two other children, Sam and Otieno. According to David and Julia, these are their elder brothers – 'brothers by blood' – born to their same mother and father. However, the older members of the family, including Sam himself, separately described to me that these boys were brought by Millicent to her marriage, and so were not in fact Nicholas' sons. Yet, for some reason this was kept as a secret from David and Julia.

Instead, the history that was shared was that after their mother's death, Sam and Otieno had gone to live with their maternal relatives, and the controversy about the two boys' genealogy was debated in terms of how the boys had not since returned to live in Kanyathi, and it was emphasised that they had not even returned for Nicholas' burial. It was perplexing to me as to why the other family members chose not to share with David and Julia the issue of their 'brothers' having a different father. I learned later that this was because David was also brought to the marriage by his mother, and was therefore not Nicholas' son, and so not a son of the family, 'by blood'. Yet, the family had chosen to accept David as Nicholas' son and they had decided to carefully keep this secret of David's birth from him and Julia. As I discuss later in this chapter, this choice reflects how people have chosen that genealogy can be made conditional to practices of living together, rather than restricted to inflexible definitions of descent by birth, but how the strongest claims in this context comprise both.

This particular ambiguity in the family's history might never have become a bigger question. However, one year after David and I had come to live among his relatives his elder 'brother' Sam returned to Kanyathi and asked to build on family land. At this juncture, the family's submerged rifts broke to the surface, and divisions and allegiances were forced into articulation. But before that moment, everyday practices of living together had managed to hold these and other tensions in suspension. Therefore, before describing the outbreak of the quarrel and its aftermath, it is worthwhile to consider how everyday practices of family life managed to suspend ambivalence about various terms of agreement to family relationships.

Everyday Practices of Family Life

Swtch, swtch, swtch, swtch, swtchswtch, swtchswtch, swtchswtch, swtch, swtch, swtch, swtch

...

Rhythmic scratching of a bundle of sticks against the hardened mud ground is the sound at morning, before daybreak. Navigating herself and the broom in darkness, Julia sweeps the small space open to the sky between the cookhouse and the main house. By 5:30am Augustina is also at work, already at a methodical pace that will not ease off until nearly mid-day. The two women, one young and one elderly, both strong, synchronise their different activities of tending fire, boiling milk and stirring tea leaves, fetching water from the river

and washing the plastic cups so that by the time the family's men and boys appear with the day's first light, there is tea to be drunk.

The tea is drunk quietly. It is good to feel it warming in the mouth and down the throat and filling the belly. It offers some comfort of heat against the morning air's chill and the promise of sustenance for the next many hours. Drinking the boiled milk of one of the family's two cows is a habitual practice of concentration. For Isaiah, David, Calvin, and Mikey this act delays the start of launching into another day's set of obligations: for Isaiah the hour's walk to town to sell painkiller pills at the bus station; for David the stretch of school lessons from 7am until 6pm; for Calvin the anxiety and associated rituals of trying to figure out what to do next to gain his way back to secondary school; and for Mikey the little jobs of fetching and following and tending to small things around the household.

In this stretch of five minutes of peace, Julia slips into the house and dresses in her school uniform and soon hurries off to her primary school hoping to arrive early or at least on time. David leaves soon after, more grimly setting out on his march to the secondary school 45 minutes away; he has nothing packed for his lunch and his term's lunch fees remain unpaid so he will hope for another chance of being extended the charity of the school canteen's operator, which is, in turn, dependent on the headmaster's charity. After consulting with Augustina over his planned purchase of soap at the city market and her intended purchase of collard greens from a walking seller, Isaiah lopes out of the homestead, leaving the bicycle with the punctured tire propped inside the house. The savings of time that the repairs would cost have not yet won his calculations. As it rests, it rusts, and its decay conveys Isaiah's resentment toward the son who used it until the tire punctured, and who has not since tried to fix it.

Those of us still in the courtyard of the homestead see Sam stepping past. He either waves and proceeds along his way as some of us call-and-response with him the morning greetings that 'Oyawore!' 'The sky has opened!', or he enters through the opening in the live bush fencing and pauses awkwardly to learn if tea will be offered to him or not. He thinks he is also a son of this family, but this is no longer clear to all of us. If Julia was still present, Sam would probably be offered a cup of tea. This would be an act of defiance by Julia against her uncle and aunt, communicating her loyalty to Sam. If Julia has already left for school, his brothers and cousins and aunt and nephew will often watch him shift off without extending

him the kindness of sharing their tea. Sam is also walking to town, taking the same route as his uncle Isaiah, but they will never walk together. There would be too little said as Isaiah's words of rancour and rejection have already desecrated their relationship. And adding insult to injury, Sam carries to town a bucket of eggs hardboiled by their neighbour Mama Simon. These eggs for sale unmistakably advertise the neighbour's disapproval of Isaiah's recent behaviour towards Sam and their presence in Sam's arms makes Sam's presence even more awkward among his relatives.

Two cows remain tethered in the yard until either Okumu or Stephen appear or Augustina gets fed up with her son's and nephew's late rising and takes the cattle to the river herself. This is the one daily job that is supposed to be done by young males of the household and given that there are five of them, Augustina resents that she has to add it to her choreography of chores. Calvin might step forward to do this job, but it is demeaning for him as the eldest and most educated son of the household to do this, and by doing it he lessens his status against the other young men inside and outside of the homestead. His self-sacrifice in moving the cattle is the result of weighing this loss of personal esteem against that of watching his aging mother do it on the family's behalf. Only families with no sons, or very lazy or drunkard sons, have women moving their cows. Mikey, the 6 year old, should be the shepherd of these cows, but Mikey's grandmother, Augustina, is not able to bring herself to demand much of Mikey. Mikey is more often than not able to shirk chores as well as school lessons because Augustina would rather have his relatively untroubled presence near her. As Augustina explained to me, she feels lonely when there are no children at home.

On such a day as the particular one in November 2008 described above, when the attendance in the courtyard had been whittled down to an inactive one, or maybe two, I retreated the twenty meters from the bigger mud house where Isaiah and Augustina sleep to the little mud house where Julia and I slept. Here I wrote my diary entries describing the details of the morning and the night before and the plan for the day. It was obvious then, even more acutely than now in reflection, that who offers who tea and who drinks together, who moves the cows, why someone walks instead of rides a bicycle, who boils eggs for someone else to sell, - all of these connections - are the most important stuff and substance of these lives and shared livelihood. That was family life, an economy of care bartered daily.

Harmony and discord in everyday practice

On the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. (Giddens 1991: 36)

The suggestion that the study of everyday practices of domesticity can yield understandings of how relatedness is patterned is not as basic as one might hope. This is because daily practices can signify much more than can be recognised by an unfamiliar observer. While normative structures may be relatively easily perceived, the personalistic and idiosyncratic elements that infuse daily practices with meaning cannot. By this, I mean that an observer may be able to take quick note of the normative hierarchies of power according to the distribution of labour and consumption by gender and age, but will be unable to understand the simultaneous narratives of cooperation and conflict that cut through and across these divisions. For example, how is a visitor to know that a bucket of eggs for sale communicates a defiant split in allegiance between neighbours who had recently become 'kin' through marriage? How is a stranger to recognise what has rendered the bicycle inoperative is not so much its flat tire as the resentment of a father for an apathetic son? How should the uninitiated know not only to measure the time the cows are in the yard in terms of their probable thirst, but also in terms of family members' adherence to a division of labour according to gender and age hierarchies? While people sharing a pot of tea as well as time, space, and silence to drink it may seem to indicate tranquil amity, and thus a consensus of allegiance – arguably a criterion for relatedness – how should this interpretation be qualified if signs of dissent and division are also recognised? In the objects and acts I have already revealed – the boiling and selling of eggs, the neglect of the bicycle, and the watering of the cows – as well as so many others that variously appeared, there were strong signs of tension that infused the actual experience of relatedness with discomfort. Yet, these symbols can only communicate to those who have gained the social competence to decipher them. Once such signs are made meaningful it becomes apparent that the life-worlds of family and domesticity are complex and fragmented, with cooperation and contention calculatingly entwined.

Like any symbols, daily objects and acts gain their intelligibility from social histories (Appadurai 1986; Connerton 1989; Cole 1998; Das et al. 2008). My attention was often drawn to this methodological treasure – unseeing as I first was – by individuals who were most sensitive to their implications. I found David was especially sensitive to such signs, which seemed sensible given his own process of reacquainting himself with his relatives after

ten years of living in the orphanage. He often brought me his existential worries thinly or briefly disguised as material observations. For example, he asked me one day if I had seen Mikey's new school uniform. When I said that I had not, David told me that his aunt had travelled to Kisumu to buy it. His following pretence of an offhand remark was that he did not know where his aunt and uncle had found the money. (David was always extremely reserved and quiet and I judge that he never said anything without a purpose.) What David did not say was that his aunt and uncle had been unwilling to pay anything toward David's education and they knew that David's lunch fees had not been paid so that he was often going hungry from before 7 in the morning until after 7 at night. (The orphanage paid David's basic school fees after he petitioned them for several weeks.) But David knew that I knew this, and that I knew that his uncle and aunt knew. We also both knew that Mikey rarely went to his kindergarten class and that it was not necessary for his grandparents to buy Mikey a full uniform at that point. These correlations went unsaid, but David silently kept careful account, and I observed how he cautiously demonstrated his resentment of Mikey's favouritism by refusing to engage with Mikey in any small acts of play or sharing.

While it can be argued that all children (as well as adults) use material objects and physical acts as symbols to calculate their social status, or love and affection, in contrast with other siblings or peers, the comparative case of the purchase of Mikey's new school uniform with the disregard for David's school fees and lunches seems to hold more than the esteem of balance in its weight. This is because the case was reminiscent of a longer history of differentiation between the security of Mikey's claims upon his father's family with the insecurity of David's claims upon his father's same family. Whereas David had been given up by Augustina and Isaiah to the government orphanage when he was nine years old (in 1998) because they judged they could not pay for his care and education, when Mikey was six years old (in 2006) Augustina and Isaiah paid Mikey's maternal grandparents bridewealth for his deceased mother so that they could bring him back to live with them.⁸³ Understood in the light of this history and context, such transactions in the household economy seem less petty than they otherwise might. David's insecurity of tenure among his relatives may well be foretold in such material audits.

⁸³ Mikey's father – Augustina and Isaiah's son – was also dead by this time. The bridewealth paid was less than it would have been if the bride and groom had been alive, but enough to signify bridewealth, and constituted a considerable expenditure for Isaiah and Augustina.

The significance of material objects and acts to experiences of cooperation and conflict among David's family and other families in this study seemed in large part related to their context of livelihood scarcity. Particular objects and acts mattered objectively in their correlations with economic security and advantage in that difficult and highly competitive environment. The eggs that the neighbour boiled for Sam to sell provided him with economic independence from his uncle so that he could continue to live in Kanyathi, and through his presence he could sustain his claim to family land. David's resentment of not being provided fees for his schooling and lunches arose from a fear for his compromised capacity to perform well at school (e.g. through being sent home for lack of payment and missing classes and also being distracted with hunger during classes) and associated future employment opportunities. There are so few purchased objects in households in Kanyathi that they are easily understood to represent deliberate choices made by the purchasers of some priorities over others – including the prioritisation of some people and relationships over others. I think that the intensity of anxiety attached to material objects and acts in such a context of scarcity has implications for how studies account for 'cultures of relatedness'. When combined with the prevailing uncertainty regarding norms of who is responsible for whom and what, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, seemingly small or subtle signs of support or rejection can be highly telling of the prevalence of competition in families that may otherwise appear to be living in patterns of harmony. Therefore, attention to these signs of how material insecurity influences intimate relationships - and is also influenced through intimate relationships - is important in accounting for the dynamic potentiality of kinship.

At the same time, the significance of such material objects and acts as those already described was often derived from their latent and ambiguous forms, rather than their explicitness. As indirect forms of communication they left the possibilities for interpretation indeterminate, thereby providing alternative means to direct confrontation for people's navigation through conflicts. I saw that often these objects or acts served to suggest – as gentle signs to prod or warn, for example - rather than command, options for relationships between people. In their subtle manners, such signs were invitations for individuals to accept or refuse their responsibility to another. For instance, the bicycle propped against the wall served as an invitation to the son to patch it and thereby acknowledge and repair his breached relationship with his father. Conversely, the cows left tethered in the yard might be read as the resistance of a young man to the discipline of his elders. The deliberate indirectness of such tactical approaches underscored the qualified agency in relationships: a person was left to choose

how to acknowledge and respond to such prompts. In so doing, people were able to influence how experiences of conflict or cooperation were perpetuated or revised.

In drawing this focus to the details of daily objects and acts that were at once integral and subtle in everyday domestic lives I mean to draw attention to the balance of powers – and especially variability in agency – that configured relations among a household and family. I found that in considering these in terms of everyday forms of compliance as well as resistance (Scott 1976, 1985; Abu-Lughod 1990), I gained insights into not only what bargains were made, but also how and according to what conditions. I perceived that the potentiality and indeterminacy enacted through subtle objects and acts reflected a dynamic context of negotiation between people living together, which in sum and in parts could affect the existential comfort of being in the world together (Zigon 2010: 5). In this, children as well as adults had multiple tactics at their disposal for communicating what were the conditions and contingencies of their relationships. However, as I will discuss in the next half of this chapter, these possibilities for negotiation were at specific moments overwhelmed when what was at stake was rendered explicit. In such moments, inequalities in power were brought into sharp relief and such subtle forms of bargaining power were less effective.

So it was ordinary daily practice in Kanyathi homesteads for people to create and navigate through subtle invitations to potential cooperation or conflict. And rarely did the latency of potential conflicts break through to the surface in such a way that people were forced to explicitly account for their animosities or loyalties. But on occasion the ordinary did become so disturbed that extraordinary events of conflict erupted. This happened in my host family when a claim to family land was explicitly articulated and denied. In the next section I describe this critical event, and then how its legacy came to be reckoned through the ideas and practices of different family members.

Quarrel in the Family

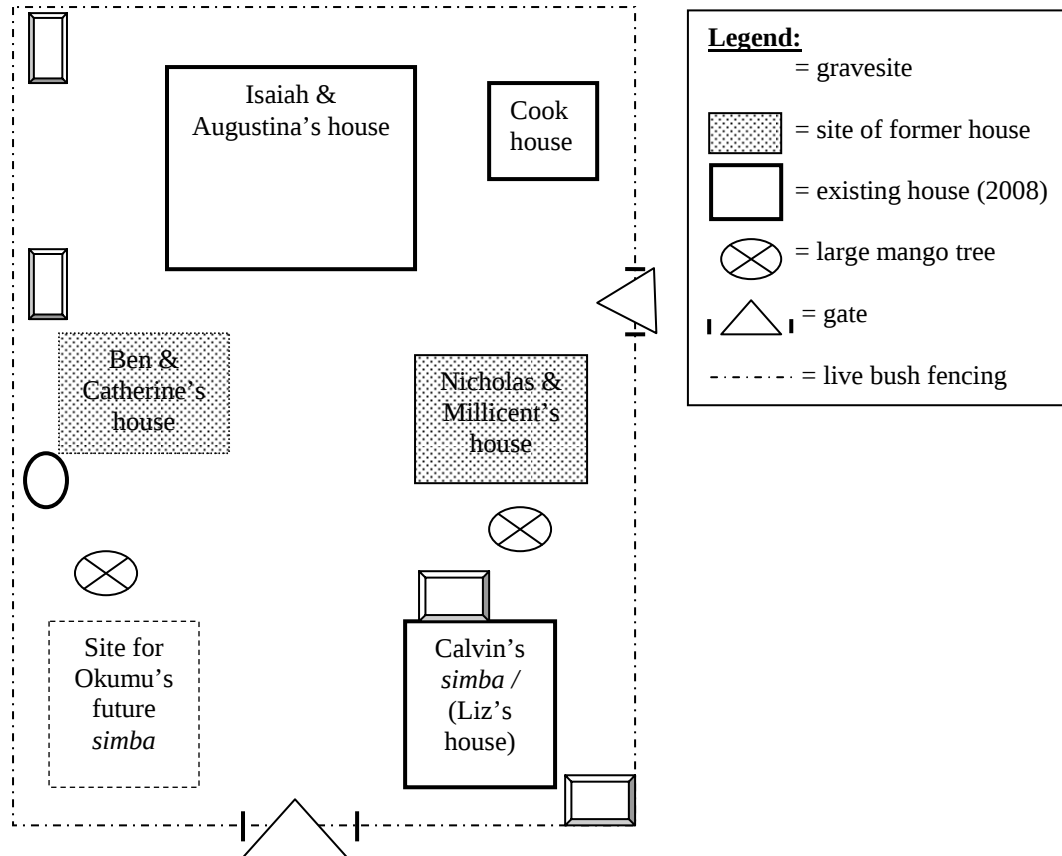
In September 2008 I returned to Kanyathi after six weeks away. The night I returned, all of the family members convened in Isaiah and Augustina's house for dinner and we looked at the photographs from my brother's wedding that I had just attended, and I gave the small gifts that I had brought from Canada for each family member. A young man entered the

house quietly. I noticed that he had not called out ‘*Odi ka*’ or ‘*Hodi*’ which are the Dholuo and Kiswahili inquiries a visiting guest offers upon approach, expecting confirmation from the homeowners that they are home and welcome the guest with their reply of ‘*Donj ot*’ (Dholuo: ‘Enter the house’) or ‘*Karibu*’ (Kiswahili: ‘Welcome’). This lack of greeting was extremely odd for a guest. The stout, rather slow-moving man, probably in his late twenties, who entered then approached me and silently shook my hand before taking a seat in one of the available chairs. That he did not shake anyone else’s hand and was not welcomed to ‘*bed piny*’ (‘sit down’) was also peculiar to me, indicating common familiarity with the family, or the social misdemeanour of a *janeke* (Dholuo: mad man or fool). Eventually, David addressed me: ‘This is our brother, Sam, who is now staying here’. Sam ate with us that evening but not again after that. When I later asked David about Sam’s whereabouts he would tell me that Sam was doing some small business in town or looking for work and returning at night to sleep in our neighbour Thomasina’s cookhouse with David and Thomasina’s grandson.

Over the next month the family and I discussed the plan for me to build a house in their homestead. We agreed that I would pay for the house and it would be where I would stay while I was in Kanyathi, but it would actually be the bachelor house (*simba*) of Calvin, the eldest son to Isaiah and Augustina. Everyone seemed pleased with this plan. There were no other financial prospects for the family to otherwise build this house. In accordance with Luo customs that order life transitions like building homes and marriage by brothers’ age seniority, the building of Calvin’s house meant that he would then be ready to marry, after which his younger brother, Okumu, could build his bachelor house. In related discussions, it came up that David’s eldest brother, Omondi, should also build his house, but that he had not planned to do this yet, as he was living away with his wife and three children. However, it was understood that it would be necessary for Omondi to build first, and then his younger brother Stephen could build, and eventually David, the youngest of Nicholas’s sons, could build his bachelor house. What was not entirely clear was on what land those three brothers would build since it is not allowed by Luo custom for a son to build on the land of his father after the death of his father. It was discussed in very hypothetical ways that Omondi would be able to build on the land of a widow in the clan first, and later establish his separate homestead on a new piece of land, where his younger brothers could then join him in building their houses. It seemed to me there was not great expectation that this would happen

any time soon, although Stephen and David were somewhat anxious to see Omondi take it forward so that their way would be cleared.

Fig. 6.2: Homestead layout in 2008 (author's design).



Everyone pitched in during the building of the house. While I paid for all of the materials, all of the young men in the family contributed some labour. Calvin did the ceremonial tasks, like setting the main pole, and Sam and David especially did most of the very unpleasant jobs. In fact, Sam alone did one of the messiest jobs which entailed smearing black tar on the wooden frame. These labour arrangements all seemed rather political in their demonstrations of support, and I am sure there were some disputes that I was left out of over who was contributing enough assistance and who was not. I know from being told that Isaiah's action to cut down the home's oldest trees to provide some timbers for the house frame was protested against by Stephen who asked what trees would be left for the rest of them to build in the future. Certainly, the building of the house raised questions as to who would build next, and when, and how. And by bringing such questions into open forum, the building of the house forced a confrontation over who had rights to family land and assistance and who did not, and why.

I was away when a major quarrel broke out among the family. I had chosen to spend the night of November 4, 2008 at a friend's house in Kisumu because over the course of that night the results of the United States Presidential election would gradually accumulate. This choice was a safety precaution in case 'Luo son' Barack Obama did not win and violence broke out,⁸⁴ as well as due to my interest in watching television coverage of the results. In the end, of course, Obama's win marked an incredibly uplifting moment for people across Luoland, Kenya, and Africa. Kenyan President Kibaki declared November 6 a national holiday in 2008 to celebrate Obama's election. The celebrations kept me in Kisumu until November 6. When I returned to Kanyathi I learned that the family had quarrelled. David and Julia, and their neighbours and recent relatives through marriage, Simon and Mama Simon, told me what had happened.

On the same night that one 'Luo son' was elected as the President of the United States a different Luo son was disowned from K'Omera. That evening, Isaiah called Sam to meet him in his house. Apparently, some time earlier Sam had asked Isaiah for permission to build his own home on one of the family's other two plots of land. Isaiah was now ready with his answer: he told Sam that he was not a son of the family, that he had stayed away too long, that he had not been honest with them, that he would not be allocated family land, and that he should leave the family and the clan's area. During this, Isaiah and Sam raised their voices and Isaiah could be heard shouting at Sam. Calvin and David were called up to the main house and Augustina was also there, arguing. Simon and Mama Simon could hear them from their home 40 metres uphill, and Julia could hear them from down in Calvin's *simba*. Isaiah shouted at Sam that he was unwelcome and told him to leave Kanyathi. saying he never wanted to see him again. Sam argued back that this was his home and he had nowhere else to go. Eventually Sam fled down to Calvin's house, and was joined there by Julia, David, Calvin, and Simon. Sam was crying, and Julia and David too. Calvin was silent. Sam said to Julia: 'Julia, do you see now? Even with us living here together, I am not wanted here'. But their neighbour, Simon, calmly counselled Sam: 'You are now a grown man. This is nothing to cry about. If it's food, my mother can feed you. If it's a place to sleep, you can sleep with David at Thomasina's. But you should not leave this place [Kanyathi] because it is where your father and mother died'.

⁸⁴ There had been rumours circulating around Kisumu that any foreigners could be in danger of targeted violence by frustrated Kenyans if Obama did not win. For more discussion, see Madiega, *et al.* 2008.

By the time I had returned to Kanyathi, things were calm, or at least superficially so. But Julia and David and Mama Simon sought me out to tell me what had happened. Eventually, Augustina did too. And after hearing all of their stories, I met Sam – away from Kanyathi – and I heard his side of the story. Under the disguise of ordinary patterns of domesticity, I learned that they were all living in conflict, uncertain about how to relate to one another, and navigating with sharper vigilance through their daily interactions. And these reactions, often subtly demonstrated, communicated who had what kinds of power in how their relationships were brokered.

In fact, the quarrel effectively split family and friends. David, and Julia supported Sam, and pitted themselves against their uncle and aunt, Isaiah and Augustina, who in turn drew to their side of the argument their sons Calvin and Okumu, and their nephews (David and Julia's half-brothers) Stephen and Omondi (who lived away from Kanyathi, but who was critical as he is supposed to be the first of Nicholas' sons to build a house). The neighbours Simon, Felicia, and Mama Simon acted to support Sam. For example, Sam ate his meals at Mama Simon's, and each day she boiled him eggs to carry to Kisumu to sell and let him keep the profits. As a result, the adult neighbours avoided each other for some time. In fact, Isaiah refused to speak to Mama Simon and Augustina directly criticised her niece Felicia's choice to align with Sam. (Felicia was married to Simon so that marriage had made the neighbours family.) Calvin only tacitly supported his father, and was very diplomatic in his positioning as he tried to retain his friendly relations with David and Julia as well as Simon and Felicia, although I did not see Calvin and Sam interact again. Sam stopped casually stopping in at K'Omera although he continued to sleep with David in a neighbour's cookhouse.

In what follows I describe some of these fissures more specifically by considering the reactions and outcomes experienced by the three family members who found themselves most personally affected and vulnerable: Julia, Sam, and David. This examination highlights how differently the same event affected family members' lives and relationships.

Julia

Julia (b.1992), the youngest of the siblings and cousins and only girl in the homestead, was the most empathetic to Sam's rejection. Soon after the family's quarrel, we had a conversation about how she was feeling. Julia told me:

The next day [after the quarrel] even my thinking had changed. I thought: 'This is my brother who is being sent away so how can I stay in this home that will not keep my brother?' ...

I am seeing the family is divided. I see that they do not want us here. Since this has happened my thinking has changed and I see that they don't want us here.

I asked her 'Who are 'they' and who are 'us'?' and she replied: "'They' are my parents and 'us' is David, Sam, and me'. I said to Julia that I could see that she is loved by her family. But she answered: 'It may seem that I am the most loved but there is some love that you can see on the outside and there is also the love on the inside. And they are hiding something inside'.

Julia also told me how she had overheard her half-brother Stephen and cousin Okumu say in reference to her and David's support of Sam's case: 'If they want to go, just let them go'. Julia had also been addressed by Augustina who told her to stop crying about the situation because she did not understand it. Julia had retorted: 'You say you love David and me but you don't love our brother. So how can that be?' Later, Julia said she heard Augustina say to Isaiah: 'You cannot change what you've already said. If they want to go, let them go'. That the children might have chosen to leave K'Omera was clearly a distinct possibility.

However, Julia and David did not choose to leave. Instead, they demonstrated other tactics of protest. Julia visibly demonstrated how upset she was by the family's quarrel. She cried much of the time, and she fulfilled her chores with a solemnity unlike her previous demeanour. Even some of the neighbours noticed the changes in her behaviour. Julia also chose not to return home from school during the mid-day break to help prepare and eat lunches. These acts were purposeful forms of protest, and they acutely communicated her feeling of estrangement from Augustina, since it was usually only the two of them and Mikey who were together at home to prepare and eat lunch. These acts of protest were not

lost on Augustina, who raised complaints about how bothered she felt by Julia's crying and absences from home.

Julia's reaction points to how she identified with Sam as potentially unwelcome in the family due to a lack of immediate 'blood relations' with their aunt and uncle. Yet her tactics also reflected how Julia's unique family history and role provided her with different forms of agency in negotiating her family relationships. On the former, Sam exploited Julia's lack of knowledge of their different fathers, and let her cast her lot in with him against the rest of their family based on the principle of 'blood'. Her uncle and aunt's rejection of Sam made Julia question her own security: she questioned what non-loving feelings they were hiding on the 'inside' about her.

Concerning the latter point, however, Julia was uniquely positioned to demonstrate some forms of agency in the negotiation of her relationships. As the only girl in the homestead, Julia was relied upon to fulfil a large portion of the domestic labour, and Augustina was the person who most benefited from this help. This role, which could be seen as a disadvantage based on Julia's gender, also constituted her opportunities to bargain her relationship. In communicating the withdrawal of her willingness to help her aunt and family in a voluntary way, Julia's protest was in some ways suffered by her aunt – both tangibly in the form of an added workload and emotionally from losing the camaraderie they had previously easily shared. However, as a student with no form of income of her own, Julia's protest in the form of absenting herself from lunches at home also hurt her as it meant she went hungry during her final primary education examinations which required hours of concentration. Julia's brother David realised this and scrounged some money to provide Julia with enough to buy small snacks during her exam breaks 'to give her strength'. This also strengthened their bond and Julia would tell me that David was always the person she felt closest to.

As history would have it, Julia and Augustina did not that year fully overcome their estrangement because Julia did very well on her primary education examinations and was invited to a provincial girls' boarding school for which I helped her to secure a bursary from a local charity and paid the remaining costs. While Julia's absence from K'Omera would most tangibly negatively impact Augustina since it was Augustina who would have to do all of the domestic chores without Julia's assistance and regular company, Augustina was in

favour of Julia going to the boarding school. As Augustina explained to me, she had seen how hard Julia had worked for her exam scores and she deserved to be rewarded with 'the chance to try'. This sacrifice, as well as Isaiah and Augustina's efforts to purchase for Julia many of the materials she would need for this new school, including shoes and school books, seemed caring to me.

Sam

Given all of the upset people at home, I was surprised to find that Sam had quite calmly accepted that he would not be allowed to build on the family land under Isaiah's control. He also quite readily admitted that he saw that his claims to that land were weak because he is not Nicholas' son and he had only ever lived among Nicholas' family for two years when he was a young child. However, he felt that the fact that his mother is buried with Nicholas at Kanyathi and that he has half-siblings in David and Julia gives him some legitimacy in making his claims on their family. Sam's only contradiction with Isaiah's account of history was that that Sam claimed he had travelled back to Kanyathi to attend Nicholas' burial. Sam explained that he would probably build on his mother's relatives' land, after all.

Sam's tactics of first asking Isaiah for permission to build on their family's land and not revealing to Julia and David that he is not Nicholas' son might be understood as arising from his understanding that genealogies (and their associated rights) can be amended according to people's will. This understanding about the adaptable construction of genealogies is also reflected in the emphasis that both sides in this debate invest in the proxy issue of whether or not Sam attended Nicholas' burial. By making this the crucial criterion to legitimating claims on the family, both sides are able to maintain the logic of why David is entitled as a family member whereas Sam is not. It is possible that Sam did not reveal the truth of his father to David and Julia because their ignorance provided Sam with a sort of blackmail with which to pressure Isaiah and Augustina to amend their rejection of him. However, it is also possible that he kept this secret with Isaiah and Augustina because he did not want to hurt David's chances by opening the debate about his genealogy. All Sam said about this to me was that it was not his secret to tell. However, even if the reason that everyone conspired to keep the secret from David and Julia was to protect David's security, the divisions this secret exacerbated managed to weaken David and Julia's sense of their security within the family.

David

Several days after the family quarrel when I was out for an early evening walk by myself I came across David digging gravel into a wheelbarrow as part of an effort to make the walls of my house stronger. He joined me for a walk up the hill. He asked me what I had heard about the family's quarrel over Sam and I just told him I had heard there was a quarrel between Isaiah and Sam. David, ever quiet, stayed quiet. He said to me that Sam had been away for a long time while David and Julia had always stayed with their father and that he, David, had been the last one remaining with his father when Nicholas died. He told me that he had been his father's favourite. For the rest of my time at Kanyathi, on the matter of Sam, David chose to stay silent and he increasingly distanced himself from Sam. For example, when Sam started living with a local widow and I asked David if he had been to visit them at her house, David expressed strong disapproval that echoed his other family members' reactions to that arrangement.

In his uses of memory and daily practices, I interpreted that David was trying to distinguish his genealogy from Sam's. I think that these efforts emanated from his fear to make any movements that might risk what he felt to be his own precarious claim on the family. David's responses demonstrated that he perceived his incorporation with his family as much less secure than Julia perceived hers. While Julia felt she was able to enact everyday forms of protest such as avoiding domestic work and camaraderie without putting herself at great risk, David acted with more constraint, and in effect, he purposefully shifted his tactics to be complicit with his uncle and aunt's position rather than to defend Sam's case. This points again to the importance of history and practice to genealogy: whereas Julia's sense of security emanated from her many years of growing up as a daughter of the home fulfilling her daughterly duties, David had not gained the same confidence as he had grown up apart from the family since he was sent by them to live in an orphanage for ten years of his childhood. When the quarrel over Sam's claims on the family broke out, David was still trying to cautiously building his own sense of security among his family members. And as I have described above, David had already perceived he was vulnerable in this with other children like Mikey favoured over him.

David's chosen strategy was deference, and I think this was motivated by a concern for his own preservation. It was no mystery to me why David might have felt insecure. In fact, I found similar kinds of reserved and deferent behaviour dominant among orphaned children

who were joining or re-joining their relatives' homes, and I also found that it contrasted quite starkly with the behaviour, and more easygoing relationships, between orphaned children who had lived for long periods with their relatives. The latter bred social familiarity as well as practical integration and reciprocity (e.g. through domestic work) which were both important to establishing the capacities of children to make claims on their families. Children like David, who had lived apart from their relatives for years, often acted with more reserve, and carefully veiled their judgments of their relatives. They seemed obedient. However, as I have also recounted above, this appearance of obedience was not necessarily matched with respect and trust.

At the same time as considering David as vulnerable in his situation, it is also important to take note that he had chosen to remain living among his relatives for seemingly very strategic and potentially fulfilling reasons. First, he wanted to remain a secondary school student, and while his fees were paid by the orphanage, he had breakfast and dinner provided at his aunt and uncle's home. As well, as a son of K'Omera, David was also welcomed in the village which had important practical benefits such as being allowed to sleep in a close neighbour's kitchen house and being able to raise a small income by selling paraffin among his neighbours. He also held expectations that - however distantly in the future - he would build his home in Kanyathi, and would have that home for the rest of his life, continuing to live in close contact with his brothers and cousins. Perhaps also crucially to David's sense of wellbeing, as a recognised son of the family at K'Omera - even with whatever questions or discomforts this entailed - David experienced important elements of self-identity. His home was not just nominal, but tangible to his existence, in a way that it had not been during his years in the orphanage. His father was remembered as a son of the village and clan and this memory enveloped David: sometimes he would be called '*Wuod Osir*' ('son of Osir') by neighbours who had been his father Nicholas Osir's agemates. His parents' graves were on the land where David had spent his first years of life, and when twice each year David and his cousins would plant that land with maize, they would plant around the unmarked graves, setting aside these small strips of land as markers of respectful memory. In these various ways, it is possible to see how the scarce resources of the past (Appadurai 1981) are brought to bear on 'the needs of the moment' (Bourdieu 2003 [1977]: 105) to legitimate through the mode of genealogy who can claim to belong.

My Family Role

When I asked Calvin one day why it was that no one in the family would tell David the truth that Sam and he were brought by their mother to her marriage with Nicholas, Calvin said he thought they should. I asked if he thought it was because then David would feel rejected, but Calvin said: 'He can't be refused now because this is his home'. Calvin tried to persuade me to tell David the truth, but I said I would not since I was not a family member. In this, I realise I too resorted to specific genealogical criteria to delineate my relationship to this family.

In conclusion to this tale of the family's quarrel, it is also worthwhile to reflect critically on the impact of my own presence and participation in this home and family. By following David through his steps from the orphanage toward reintegration with his family, paying for the construction of a house in the family homestead, and helping to send Julia to secondary school I clearly changed the immediate dynamics of this family's domestic economy and the course of their histories. Financing the building of the house that would become Calvin's *simba* may have triggered the dispute over who could build when and where, while helping to secure funds for Julia's enrolment at a boarding secondary school may have prolonged the experience of separation between her and Augustina and may in fact have promoted the permanent loosening of the bonds of familiar affection between the two of them. At the same time, these two acts contributed in valued ways to the home and family: none of the family's surviving sons had yet built a *simba* house nor had resources to do so in the coming years which blocked all of their sequential transitions into adult manhood; and Julia's education is of the best quality experienced among any of her relatives. Today the brothers and cousins sleep together in that *simba* house and it provides a separate space for the young family members to gather together. Julia is half-way through her secondary education. The closer I became to the people in K'Omera, the more potential there was for me to not only learn their stories but also to contribute to the making of their stories. This undeniably constituted for me an important opportunity and hazard; a privilege and a responsibility, and these were complicated relationships to navigate.

Finally, it is noteworthy and understandable that the family quarrel did not occur when I was present and that people's stories revealed, or in some cases concealed, more as I grew more familiar to them and their lives. In Augustina's and Julia's and David's cases, they shared more with me; I think this was a result of their growing trust in my purpose, judgment, ethics,

and care. In Isaiah's case, even as we grew friendlier and shared more of daily life, his discretion was maintained, especially about how the family finances worked; I think because he hoped to make me feel concerned about how family needs or dreams would be met. But that is how Isaiah is with everyone: his children and brother's children are left to wonder – and worry - about his plans for their futures.

Practices in Genealogy: Authorising Discourses of Kinship

The focus I have brought to this family's quarrel is meant to point to how the production and reproduction of families does not necessarily follow a smooth and stable teleological trajectory of incorporation through daily practices of sharing; at least, not in this context. The case of the quarrel – and especially its manifestation in multiple versions and implications among different family members – exposes how unevenly experiences of belonging to a family can be experienced. These experiences are uneven across time and event, as well as across different family members. And I argue that in this case and through the broader study context, much of this unevenness emanates from inequalities in access to livelihood resources. The inequalities between who controls resources and who relies on resources, and who is entrusted with investments and who is excluded, are important power imbalances that are factored into strategies of cooperation and conflict.

Yet, when access to livelihood resources, including land, or school fees - or other kinds of a 'chance to try' - was brokered through kin relations, the debate commonly turned to rest on the moral criterion and practice of kinship. Sam's rejection from the family and its land, for instance, was argued in terms of his growing up among his maternal relatives and his absence from the funeral of Nicholas, rather than the fact that Nicholas was not his biological father, nor the crude calculations that there was not enough land to share among seven young men, and Isaiah and Augustina had decided only to share it out among those 'sons' who had earned their sponsorship (and perhaps estimation of reciprocating material provision in the future). The importance of genealogy to legitimating the moral arguments of such kin-based arrangements was evident. And the importance of the flexibility in crafting genealogies was equally evident.

The content of this chapter also makes evident that there is not necessarily one commonly shared account of the family's constitution, but rather different partial accounts imbued with the subjectivities of each person who claims one. In his careful narrative *Tears of the Dead: A Social Biography of an African Family*, Richard Werbner (1991: 109) has reflected on how 'The history of a family, seen from within, can never be a single account. Family members invariably develop very different ways of knowing and telling about their lives'. Moreover, his exploration of different individuals' different ways of knowing and telling about shared time and place, events and relationships, left Werbner (1991: 3) to theorise on the analytical significance of efforts to acknowledge their interdependence:

The life histories were both cause and effect; they grew out of such a personal discourse, and they also carried it forward. Only through knowledge of the sensitive, sometimes petty, personal discourse among family members can we understand the moral argument resonating in each life history and between all the life histories.

That there was moral argument resonating in each, and between all, of the accounts of the constitution of David's family has been, I hope, rendered evident in this case study. In fact, I believe that it is especially at this scale of study – in the close-up study of everyday practices and analysis of how these practices are meaningful to specific actors in terms of the work of bridging their pasts with the futures – that different kinds of insights can be learned concerning why and how certain moral arguments do resonate. At this scale of ethnographic research, the work that is invested by different people to match their ideas and practices is valuable data.

I understand this work along the lines suggested by Das (1998) in her discussion of how events and the everyday are mutually constitutive in people's practices of ordering their lives. Das has suggested that on the one side critical events can serve as the extraordinary moments conducive to the establishment of consensus on the meaning of things, while on the other side of these events are transitions into everyday life, which she phrases as the 'descent into the ordinary'. While events provide moments for the meaning of certain ideas to be brokered, it is in the descent into the ordinary that work is done to adjust these ideas to realities. In this case study I have analysed the quarrel as an event because there was articulation of key ideas related to the constitution of the family. And while the resolution of that quarrel was not necessarily clear cut since some family members continued to show signs of dissent, the key

ideas for legitimating family members in terms of genealogy were made clear. But as I have traced the ‘descent into the ordinary’ in my descriptions of the family’s interactions on a typical morning following the family’s quarrel as well as the individual responses among Julia and Augustina, Sam, David, and the others, the terms of the debate adjusted to accommodate the practical elements of living together. Through daily, ordinary practices, people managed to bring into being particular ideas, adjusting those ideals that proved impractical within the contexts of their tangible realities. This involved both individual and collective exercises in the ‘situational pragmatics of remembering and forgetting’ (Whyte and Whyte 2004: 91) as well as tactics to communicate or obfuscate adherence or resistance within the family.

Conclusion

In sum, this case study of David’s family reflects that a moral argument is ever present (if sometimes latent) in how kin relations and reciprocities are practiced in daily interactions and accounted in genealogies. The most daily and domestic aspects of kinship are imbued with a deep regard for morality, as are the most critical moments when divisions in powers over livelihood resources are at stake.

Carsten (2004: 35) has theorised that ‘kinship is made in the homes, through the intimate sharing of space, food, and nurturance that goes on in domestic space’. The validity of this proposition seems to bear out in the material I have presented above. Kinship did seem to be rendered particularly cohesive as an idea and practice through the patterning of livelihood interactions around the house and home. And the use of genealogy to legitimate kin roles, relations, and rights also often used material related to domestic sharing.

However, this case study also provides clear indication that everyday practices of kinship can also incur critical events, and the forcing of choices, rather than just an enduringly smooth experience of sustaining the group. Questions of livelihood seem to be critical in this context to the potential for ruptures among families as sharing entities. This underscores the point that sharing can not be assumed to be unproblematic, even if it may at first seem to be practiced unproblematically. Questions of power imbalances and the variable possibilities

and constraints on the agency of family members to affect their interactions with others are critical.

Misreading domestic routines as harmonious is common, and perhaps difficult to avoid.

Tensions between family members who live together are often subtly concealed or disguised – until they erupt. While eruptions may be immediately insightful if they include the explicit articulation of grievances and tangibly reveal power dynamics, the daily practices of living with these same tensions are also significant as part of their longer experience. As demonstrated in this case study which involved both an eventful eruption and the everyday practices preceding and following it, paying attention to everyday life can illuminate what is at stake if tensions erupt. For example, observing the everyday cooperation that Augustina and Julia shared as the only women of the home, and the sociable intimacy this seemed to infuse in their relationship, provided my point of comparison for how damaging the quarrel over Sam was for their mother-daughter type of relationship. This example also proved the possibility that every relationship is potentially at stake when questions are raised concerning what actual claims can be accommodated within the moral economy of kinship.

Chapter 7 Questions of Community and the Care of Children

Introduction

The last three chapters have analysed how the care of children is addressed by families and practiced in homes. In the study context, families and homes are the primary social spaces in which the care of children is expected to be provided. In this last empirical chapter I seek to broaden the scale of this analysis to address whether and how care for children may be practiced beyond the limits of families and homes. This brings my focus to experiences of childhood in the everyday public spaces of the local community. In this, I am basically exploring whether children are in anyway considered a 'public good' in the sense of being considered of value to society in general, and consequently whether the care of children is considered a shared responsibility or virtue.

In this chapter I closely examine people's experiences of living with (as well as against) each other in the village area of Kanyathi. I describe how the phenomenological experiences of human contact in shared space compel strategies and attendant logics of social conduct among people living in the village area. Included in the immediate sensory experiences of witnessing other lives in the village is the witnessing of the lives of other children; that is, children other than of one's own family. With the use of examples, I discuss how being implicated as a witness can force individuals to strategise and rationalise a choice of conduct – and specifically a choice to practice care or not - toward children. This takes into account how 'ordinary' morality can be in that it may be tacitly practiced in daily life (Lambek 2010). However, it also acknowledges the suggestion that there can be particular moments when morality is called explicitly into question. As Zigon (2007: 133) has suggested, there may be moments in which existential discomfort arises from some kind of breakdown in the tacit agreement of what is to be done, and from such moments an 'ethical demand' is issued 'when one is forced to reflect on the kind of person one wants to be in her social world'.

As I outline below, I have approached the concepts of community and care, as well as children and childhood, as contextually contingent, and even situationally contingent. As well, I have tried to perceive moral ideas and practices 'in the conjunction or movement

between explicit local pronouncements and implicit local practices and circumstances’ (Lambek 2010: 7).

Qualities of Communities and Care

In a collection of key concepts for social and cultural anthropology, editors Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing (2000: 60) have noted: ‘The concept of community has been one of the widest and most frequently used in social science. At the same time a precise definition of the term has remained elusive’. In the history of anthropological research and theory, the conceptual and methodological approaches have shifted from regarding communities as ‘empirical things-in-themselves’ based on an understanding that a community has essential commonalities (e.g. of interest, locality, and/or social system) that give rise to an underlying logic, which in turn explains the community’s origination and continuation (Rapport and Overing 2000: 61). Instead, more recently, communities have been conceptualised as ‘worlds of meaning in the minds of their members’ (ibid.: 62). Anthony Cohen’s concentration on ‘the symbolic construction of community’ has been important to this shift, and his conceptualisation of community is consistent with how I found community to be experienced in the village of Kanyathi, and so it is helpful to cite his idea here so as to introduce the parameters of my following analysis:

Community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call ‘society’. It is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home. In it they learn the meaning of kinship through being able to perceive *its* boundaries – that is, by juxtaposing it to non-kinship; they learn ‘friendship’; they acquire the sentiments of close social association and the capacity to express or otherwise manage these in their social relationship. Community, therefore, is where one learns and continues to practice how to be ‘social’.

(Cohen 1985: 15 italics in original)

Cohen’s approach works well for my research questions of how care for children was both understood and practiced outside of families’ parameters. Combined with my specific evaluation of the parameters of a community in terms of how care for others might exist ideologically and practically, this approach allows me to sidestep from the outset an analytical tendency to assume a rigid demarcation between ‘the public domain’ from ‘the

domestic domain' (c.f. Strathern 1988: 94-95; for a review see Rapport and Overing 2000: 333-343). Actually, by focusing specifically on what ideas and practices of care for children were shared or not, and among whom, and under what conditions, my questions of community have been limited from the outset. What I mean by this is that my analysis of what and how a community exists might have turned out very different findings had I framed it in terms of another concern. In exploring ideas and practices of care for children I have set some of my own conditions on the constitution of community. Nevertheless, I have tried in this analysis to be inductive in contemplating what different ideas and practices might reflect about a common morality for care, and from this what different experiences of community might exist in the same place and time. As a result, this analysis considers how care was conceptualised and practiced by neighbours who were familiar or not with each other, as well as more official community representatives such as the government-employed assistant chief and school teachers, as well as representatives of NGOs that were present in Kanyathi. How the ideas and practices of community members converged or diverged indicated the extent of consensus or controversy regarding a public ethos of care for children, as well as the degree to which different actors and institutions were considered as of, and for, the community.

A specific concern with ideas and practices of care for children rests on a hypothesis that there are ideas of children and childhood that are distinct from ideas of adults and adulthood. Again, I have tried to be inductive in exploring what these ideas might contain. Throughout the study I puzzled over how adults and children thought of children in terms of competencies and vulnerabilities, individualities and universalities, children as 'human becomings' and/or human beings in their own right (Qvortrup 1994). Other studies have provided useful insights concerning Luo ethnotheories of child development (Ominde 1952; Blount 1972; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989: 92-95; Nyambetha and Aagaard-Hansen 2003; Geissler and Prince 2004; Grigorenko et al. 2005; Onyango-Ouma 2006; Tudge and Odera-Wanga 2009; Geissler and Prince 2010: 153-194). My focus on ideas and practices of care for children is not only concerned with what children might tangibly be and do, but also what they might symbolise. This interest holds potential to conjure what social values are associated with children and childhoods. Anthropologists and sociologists have long considered 'children's place in society' in terms of social reproduction, and specifically how children and child care are implicated in the organisation of the generational ordering of socio-cultural transmissions (Mead 1930, 1933; Benedict 1935; Fortes 1969; Goody 1976; Goody 1982; Fortes 1978; Whiting and Whiting 1975; Whiting

and Edwards 1988; LeVine 1989; Morrow 2003).⁸⁵ Anthropologists and sociologists have also analysed how children's relative status in societies can reflect 'adult moral values about a cherished past and a desirable future, clothed in commonsense notions about children's best interests' (Fog Olwig and Gullov 2003: 3; also see Gottlieb 1998, 2005; White 2007). By analysing encounters between adults and children in different social configurations within village life I hope to identify what moral values associated with social reproduction were being translated into practice, and how.

Everyday Village Life: Human Contact and Social Conduct

Daily lives in Kanyathi can in many ways be experienced as public and exposed. As physical neighbours, interactions can be immediate, if not always direct and explicit. Henri Lefebvre (1991: 405) has suggested that social space 'proceeds from the body'. This suggestion resonates with how I found the phenomenology of everyday life in Kanyathi implicated and influenced sociality.⁸⁶

Most daily activities in Kanyathi occur in the open, in the view and hearing of neighbours, making neighbours easily aware of each other's social and economic circumstances. A person might, for example, see from a quick glance into the neighbours' homestead that one of the

⁸⁵ For instance, Fortes' ethnographies describe that Tallensi and Ashanti adults not only greatly valued children and grandchildren as markers of 'individual fulfilment' or destiny, but the care of children (through parenting) was also 'a fulfilment of fundamental kinship, religious and political obligations, and represents a commitment by parents to transmit the cultural heritage of the community' (Fortes 1978: 125). He explained, 'the child whose birth confers parenthood is born not only to its parents and into its family but also into a lineage, a clan, a community, to all of which its survival at the limit to reproductive age, is of critical economic, juridical and religious interest' (ibid.: 126).

⁸⁶ However, in seeking to understand how people in Kanyathi witnessed the lives of others and chose to respond to this witnessing I recognise the necessity of tempering the suggestion that social space 'proceeds from the body' (Lefebvre 1991: 405) with the caution not to naturalise sensory experiences. As anthropologists working in different contexts have demonstrated, sensory phenomena should be evaluated as cultural and historical products, rather than as universal, 'natural' human experiences (Geurts 2002). That is, modalities of perception are learned; how I have learned to perceive and what this implicates for me in terms of being a witness to other people's lives might have been very different from the experiences of other people in Kanyathi. In this chapter's discussion I focus on a range of opportunities to witness the lives of others that I could perceive as embodied in the space between neighbours, which included some means of perception that I acquired while staying with people in that space. There were, of course, other modes of perception at work in Kanyathi, including how the landscape combined with memory and ideology (Ingold 1993; Bloch 1995), as well as the reading of particular physical manifestations as signs of misfortune or malediction (e.g. sticks across a path were perceived by some as potential signs of witchcraft practices and the ways in which some people looked at others could be interpreted as signalling evil intentions). A different but related sensory phenomena has been analysed by Geissler (2000) in his discussion of how geophagy (soil eating) is practiced in certain Luo communities of Nyanza as a means of incorporating place with selfhood. Eating soil from the local area was not something I found practiced or esteemed in Kanyathi, although pregnant women would eat soil that they bought from the market for its nutrients.

women has been left behind to wash laundry and cook the mid-day meal while her co-wives are leaving to walk up to the hills to collect firewood. A person familiar with this setting would be able to tell from seeing the direction the two women are walking, and the clothes they are wearing, and the tools in their hands, that they are going up the hill to cut wood. Several hours later that same person would be able to see how much wood the women had collected and could try to calculate whether the amount would be more than enough for the homestead's own consumption, thereby leaving how many bundles for sale at the market. A local person would know that a bundle of firewood was then selling for 70 shillings (GBP 0.57) at the nearest market, or 100 shillings (GBP 0.81) at the farther Kisumu market. Later in the week, such a person could notice if the children of that homestead were sitting at home for any days, or if they did not miss more than a day of school while other children in the neighbourhood sat at their homes for a week until their latest round of school fees were paid. And so that watchful person could be privately tallying in his or her head whether the women had used their earnings from the firewood sale to pay for their children's school fees or for something else. The neighbour would be able to notice if the women who had chopped the wood were washing their dishes in a new plastic basin, would recognise if one of those women was wearing new clothes, would certainly smell the unmistakable fermentation of homemade brew, and if a radio was heard to be making noise again after several weeks of silence, a neighbour would realise that some batteries had been recently purchased. *Jogueng'* (people of the village) almost cannot help but tune eyes and ears and noses and thoughts to the changes occurring on the other side of the hedges that symbolically separate the people of one homestead from others.

So much is noticeable and taken note of in the patterns of the village. Whether a mid-day meal is cooked or not is noticeable. Whether a mother is too sick to get out of bed to make lunch for her children is noticeable. Whether children stay at home from school for several days, and then for several weeks, is noticeable to the neighbours. A child coughing the cough of tuberculosis is noticeable, as is a child hobbling on one side of his foot. A neighbour may ask the grandmother of the coughing child if she has taken the child to the clinic, and another neighbour might call the hobbling child into her homestead to take a look at how a thorn is stuck in his foot and she might insist on trying to extract it. Neighbours are quick to be interested in whether a woman is smearing fresh *owoyo* (cow dung and mud mixture) on her house's walls because this can indicate her expectation of visitors; learning which visitors may be expected will be the not-so-thinly veiled purpose of calling out across a hedge to

acknowledge her work: '*Iloso odu*'? ('You are making your house?'). The height and breadth of neighbours' crops, as well as the weeds that grow among these crops, stimulate much reflection on how that family is working hard or not to produce their harvest. And certainly, hearing the shouts and cries from a couple's house produces concern and unease. The next morning, some neighbours may make furtive, careful inspections of a woman's face for cuts and bruises. Others deliberately will not.

Children are easily seen and heard in Kanyathi. Girls and boys weave up and down the village's many footpaths, sometimes silently, sometimes boisterously, often in small groups, and often on some mission to fetch or deliver something for their elders. Children are the village's designated fetchers: girls fetch water from the river; boys move cattle to and from the river; and all children are regularly sent on specific errands, more often than not serving as the go-betweens in adults' borrowing and lending with one another. But the practice of 'sending' (*oro*) children is not performed as if only designed to help adults; sending children also provides opportunities to 'apprentice' children in their broader sociality (Rogoff 1991). In carrying out errands, children often have to enter homesteads, and therefore engage in exchanges of greetings and information with the adult or adults there. Often adult neighbours seem to deliberately test children's abilities to interact with them by posing a series of questions, such as how certain family members are doing (e.g. 'How is your grandmother? Where is she today? Did she go to town this week? How is your sister's baby?' etc). Children who respond in such exchanges are visibly appreciated among adults – their replies are often responded to with smiles, laughter, patting and gentle squeezing of their hands and arms, and maybe small gifts of food, while children who refuse to perform such social exchanges may literally be frowned upon, and behind their backs such children may later be described to other neighbours as lacking respect (*luoro*), and developing bad character.

Nevertheless, between adults and children, and especially between just adults, the sharing of experiences is usually delicately handled. Living in such proximity, people must choose to ignore or address the content of other people's lives. Inevitable physical exposure makes it necessary for each person to continuously make decisions about where to draw their social boundaries with others. With so much apparently obvious – or rather noticeable - I became interested in how and when people practiced interest and disinterest, particularly in terms of children. I was intrigued to note not just thresholds of expressed interest in other people's lives, but also differences in these thresholds as applied to interest in particular people's lives.

I wondered about both: What were the thresholds of socially acceptable interest in a child's wellbeing? And what imbued the discriminations between interests among different people (adults and children) for different children's wellbeing?

I observed many adults and children actively cultivating a habit, or rather a tactic (deCerteau 1980), of not acknowledging what seemed rendered apparent for them to recognise. This is a tactic for refusing to allow oneself to be accountable for the lives of others. It serves to maintain distinctions of autonomy, even if phenomenological experiences coincide. This is not to pretend that people in Kanyathi are not constantly interpreting their neighbours' behaviours and characters and acting on these interpretations. The difference is the refusal to overtly assert these private interpretations. To do so risks implicating oneself in someone else's situation. Admitting knowledge of the intimacies of another person's life holds the potential of implicating the knower in these intimacies and their complicated and persistent negotiations. Alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, getting involved in someone else's life can have a fractious effect on otherwise harmonious relations. As my host father Isaiah viewed it, people can resent a neighbour's intervention, especially if it might seem judgmental: 'When you criticise others they can feel you are just feeling you are better than them and showing off'. Minding one's own business then is important to protect one's own autonomy as well as the autonomy of the other and a suitably respectful relationship.

Despite the potential social discomfort of intervening in a situation beyond the boundaries of one's own homestead, several people did intervene in cases where they witnessed what they considered the ill treatment of children or young people by their neighbours. In Chapter 6, I described how Mama Simon, Simon, and Felicia chose to take sides in the family dispute over Sam's claims to family land by offering encouragement and assistance to Sam. In the next part of this section, I discuss two more examples of neighbours' interventions that occurred during my study. I analyse these in terms of their moral judgements concerning children's care as well as the contingencies of social biographies for ethical practices.

Neighbourly Interventions: The Crafting of Social Morality

The following cases bring a variety of issues about village life to light. Each was an extraordinary incident in the practice of everyday life in the village. Each represented a clash

in attitudes and behaviours; moments of competing ideas translating into relatively confrontational action. In their extraordinariness they show where and how some boundaries concerning moral values were drawn in the village, and specifically how different neighbours perceived right and wrong, good and bad, agreement and transgression; in these cases, concerning the treatment of children. As I further scrutinise the details of these cases, however, they also illuminate how it was not just the phenomenological experience of witnessing in shared space that provoked individuals to intervene on behalf of particular children. Individuals' chosen responses were also highly influenced by their own social biographies.

By 'social biography' I mean the mix of personal and relational qualities that constitute an individual's social identity in terms of role and reputation in a particular context. I find through my analysis that individuals' attitudes and behaviours were not only produced at some subconscious and tacit level (i.e. through the internalisation of a cultural script), but rather that individuals were reflexive of their social biographies and sensitive to how these social biographies were known by other people and used in other people's appraisals of their actions and characters. Rather than use the term 'social identity' I use 'social biography' to accent dynamism and contingency in how social memories and relations can affect social position, perspective, and action in particular contexts. This is meant to approach the notion of 'identity' more carefully; as a more fluid and continuous process of configuring in specifics of time, space, and social relations. I find that this approach to social biography fits with Erving Goffman's (1974: 453) observation that 'The divination of moral character by adducing indicators from the past is one of the major preoccupations of everyday life' and Webb Keane's (2010: 75-76) ancillary note on how people become shaped as publicly known moral characters over the course of their interactions with others and this shaping can consolidate bodily habits, affective dispositions, and styles of reasoning. I will now spell out what I mean by social biography in terms of the details of these two case studies.

A Practice of Care against Violence

Peter (b. 1968) was one of the first men I met in the village and I visited him and his family several times. Peter was often addressed as '*Mwalimu*' (the Kiswahili word for 'teacher' is a deliberately used term of respect) by children and adults alike in the village because he was a volunteer Catechism teacher for children through the local Catholic Church. I found Peter to

be an unpretentious, solicitous, and well-liked man. He had grown up in Kanyathi and had always farmed in Kanyathi, and was therefore a veritable *wuon Kanyathi* (son of Kanyathi). Peter and his only wife at times struggled to raise the funds for their seven children's primary school fees as well as to pay for the increasing medical attention that Peter's wife needed for various ailments including recurring pneumonia.⁸⁷ During our second conversation I asked Peter if neighbours watch and talk about how children are being treated by the relatives with whom they are staying, and he described a dilemma he had experienced as a neighbour:

Yes, they [neighbours] do that. Such comments are common. You'll hear that 'So-and-so is mistreating or treating well those orphans'. Mostly people talk about it but they don't confront that person. For example, there's a neighbour here, I heard he was mistreating the child that was staying with him, and myself, I saw he was mistreating him, so I confronted that man. He didn't like it and that boy was forced out of the house and slept here. Now he's been taken back to his paternal family, away from that man.

This boy had been physically beaten several times by the uncle with whom he had been living in a small homestead next to the small homestead of Peter's family. The boy was a friend and classmate with Peter's children and had been welcomed to eat lunch with Peter's children on several occasions. Peter described him as a 'good boy' and a 'small boy'. These qualities were apparently sufficient for Peter to feel justified in intervening on behalf of the boy to protect him against his uncle's physical abuse. At the same time, Peter recognised the boy's uncle as a drunk who frequented local *pombe* (locally fermented beer) brewers. He could be loud and destructive when intoxicated, which was often. Peter explained to me that he had previously tried to counsel the man to treat his nephew well, and from my interactions with Peter I cannot imagine that he was in any way aggressive with the boy's uncle. When those efforts failed, Peter decided to take the boy into his own home and later coordinated the boy's transport to live with his other relatives.

Peter had encountered a 'moment of ethical demand', to use Zigon's (2007) phrase, and he had decided to act in a way that demonstrated an ethic of care for a child. Peter had judged that he could not tolerate his neighbour's violence and mistreatment of the boy, and he had intervened to make this clear to his neighbour and then to protect the boy by offering the boy an alternative place to live away from his uncle. I believe it is important to analyse the

⁸⁷ Peter's wife died in December 2009.

content of what spurred this moment of ethical demand (witnessing violence against a child) as well as the content of the created response (child's physical protection) for what they tell about the content of a moral idea of childhood and care for children. However, it is also important to critically consider the social relations of this interaction. I argue that the latter is important because the dynamics of the social biographies of Peter and the boy's uncle influenced the kind of response Peter chose to make.

In analysing this case, it is important to recall that Peter was addressed as '*Mwalimu*' throughout the village as he encountered adults and children along the roads and footpaths, due to his role as a volunteer Catechism teacher in the village Catholic Church. This position reflected and reproduced many local people's respect for Peter as a 'good' person. Being a son of the village and the Kogony clan also meant that Peter was very well-integrated among his neighbours through kinship and shared social histories. I think these two qualities of Peter's social biography influenced his decision to confront his neighbour and to act against his neighbour by taking the boy away. It is likely that as a man possessing considerably extensive and deep social relations in the village, as well as social esteem for his religiosity and righteousness, Peter felt confident that other community members would approve of his actions. Peter had told me that other neighbours had told him of the case, as had his own children. It is possible that Peter felt compelled to act to fulfil his neighbours' and children's expectations of him. Moreover, Peter's action was against a man with much weaker social esteem in the village. As I have mentioned, the boy's uncle was locally recognised as a drunkard which was a social category characterised by significant disapproval among the vocal majority in Kanyathi. I suggest it is very possible that the social distinctions between Peter and the boy's uncle made the 'ethical demand' on Peter an easier prospect to answer in favour of practicing care for the child.

In fact, Peter was cautious with how far he took responsibility for the child's care. This too seemed to be influenced by considerations of social reputation and sanctions on appropriate behaviour. Peter's response was to temporarily feed and provide a bed to an eighth child in his household. However, Peter expressed unease with the notion of the boy continuing to live with Peter's family. He explained this in terms of there being no kin relations between the boy and Peter's family. To be neighbours, and to be specifically concerned for the boy's welfare, were not sufficient justifications to keep the boy living with Peter's family. Villagers would be expected to be curious as to what had provoked Peter's interest in the boy. Peter's

own reputation as a good villager could have been tainted by the accusations of the boy's uncle for tampering in business that was not his own. Moreover, Peter did not just have the opinions of his fellow villagers to worry about, but also those of the boy's other relatives, living some miles from Kanyathi. As well, while Peter did not cite this concern, it seemed obvious to me that the question of how to pay for the boy's school fees would quickly arise since Peter and his wife had a hard enough time keeping their own seven children in school. In the end, Peter arranged for another elderly woman neighbour to take the boy to his paternal relatives living in another village. For Peter, that was an appropriate resolution of the dilemma.

A Practice of Care against Neglect

The neglect of two orphaned sisters by their paternal uncle and aunt also caused much gossip among neighbours. The neglect first became apparent when the girls, then aged fourteen and twelve, stopped attending primary school and later when the youngest girl was sent to Nakuru (200 kilometres from Kanyathi) to work as a nanny for a distant relative and the eldest girl became pregnant while living alone in her deceased parents' house. My host mother, Augustina, told me that she had heard many people talking about the girls and she felt sensitive to what people were saying because the girls' aunt called Augustina 'mother' due to a rather complicated intertwining of their lineages. As a result, Augustina decided to intervene.

Augustina described to me that she raised her concern about the girls directly to their aunt, Victoria, when it was known that the girls were no longer attending school. When Augustina asked Victoria why she was not taking better care of her nieces, Victoria told her she would send for the girls to come back and live with her. According to my observations and my later interview with the eldest girl, Victoria did not take this action. Later, when Victoria's married daughter returned to the village for a short visit some neighbours talked to her about the situation prompting Victoria's daughter to collect her pregnant 'sister-cousin' so that the girl could live, and later give birth and raise her child, at Victoria's house. This is what happened although the niece – and other neighbours – told me that she was often treated like a 'housegirl', rather than like a daughter, or even a niece, by Victoria.

This case struck villagers as a ‘bad one’ because Victoria and her husband were the obvious kin to care for their nieces, and moreover, they were financially much more secure than the majority of villagers. Gossip centred on Victoria and her ‘bad heart’. She had been living alone and was judged to be suspicious for keeping to herself, a particular form of selfishness.⁸⁸ In fact, it is possible that Victoria’s husband did not know that his nieces were not living with Victoria as he lived in another city for employment. People speculated on this, and I found that their speculations focused heavily on how quarrelsome Victoria was while her husband was rarely implicated except for mentions of how his full-time salaried job meant they could pay for the girls. However, Victoria seemed to have socially insulated herself from her neighbours. She went to church in Kisumu and strangely, she did not belong to any local savings-and-loans groups. Instead, it seemed the only regular interactions she had with her neighbours were in casual passing along paths and at occasional clan gatherings. It is possible – with the security of her husband’s salary and absence - Victoria felt able to avoid the harm associated with defying her neighbours’ judgments about her wilful neglect of her nieces.

This case therefore also clearly brings to light not just the content of an idea of care for children, but also the social dynamics that affect how this idea is practiced or not. In this case, the idea was comprised of a concern for children to be provided with a caring home among their relatives, to be enrolled in school, not to be sent out to work far from home, and not to be left to bear a teenage pregnancy alone. The social dynamics of how this transgression was confronted turned on kinship. Kinship was used in two ways. Instrumentally, it was used as a tactic to gain access and influence with Victoria by Augustina and Victoria’s daughter, and through them less directly by other concerned villagers. As well, it seems kinship served as the rationale or impetus that provoked both Augustina and Victoria’s daughter to intervene. Both recognised that their own social biographies were complicit with Victoria’s transgressions as a consequence of their kinship with Victoria. Gossip directed at Victoria could easily be sprayed more widely to encompass Victoria’s closest associates, her family and friends, including her daughter and her local ‘mother’. Therefore, there may have been

⁸⁸ Even to sit alone for a few hours could be regarded as strange, antisocial behaviour in Kanyathi. If I was found to be sitting alone – even if I was writing in my diary – it was more common than not for someone to come (or be sent) to sit with me. If I went for a walk on my own someone also would join me – on their own volition or by order of someone else worried about me or the possibility of me acquiring an antisocial – and therefore suspicious - reputation. The other person often did not engage purposefully in conversation or offer tangible assistance, but offered what seemed to me as more passive companionship. This was caring for me in the form of watching over and out for me (*rito*).

an element of self-interest in Augustina's and Victoria's daughter's concern for the two girls' care, in terms of the desire to preserve their own social reputations of being good people. Neighbours were aware of this rationale and used it.

Practices of Moral Community

I found a distinct ambivalence among children toward any suggestion that non-kin adults might be interested to help them, and this counted for well-known neighbours, as well as new neighbours. Much of this seemed derived from the tendency of children to privilege a different definition of 'care'. Children generally – and especially older children (i.e. over the age of approximately twelve) - seemed to distinguish pointedly between sentimentality and utility. While they could appreciate good hearts (*chuny*) and love (*hera*) among adult villagers – and could readily identify 'good' and 'bad' individuals or types of adults - they were, on the whole, more interested in differences between types of assistance (*konyruok*) that could be proffered. For instance, while appreciating a neighbour who would greet them in a friendly manner, ask about their education, or provide shelter in their house during a heavy rain, over a neighbour who would show them a 'bad face' or speak in a harsh manner, children regularly advised me that neighbours just look and talk, they do not *do* anything to help. For the most part, children did not seem to perceive that adults outside of their families felt any obligation to help them. They commonly attributed this to two reasons: first, everyone has their own families to take care of; and second, children's wellbeing is often subordinated to adults' other interests, including maintaining neighbourly harmony. In sum, children purposefully did not invest much trust in neighbouring adults as reliable sources of help and care.

Yet, it is possible that the story is more complicated than this. As the examples above describe, adults' acts to assist children facing specific risks might stand as evidence of the existence of certain moral standards for the care of children in the community. Children were aware of some of these cases, and I suggest this awareness might have generated their tacit acknowledgment and expectations of locally relevant standards of care. In fact, only very rarely were children able to provide examples of other children in Kanyathi that they judged were entirely neglected. Instead, children were commonly able to identify family members and neighbours that were helping other children. This was also true for the few

cases in the village of children living on their own in what might be classified as ‘child-headed households’.

On a different point, but one critical to children’s sense of community and care, girls and boys demonstrably enjoyed and appreciated different ways of feeling integrated with their surrounding community members, including performing in dance troupes and football matches for community audiences, witnessing and discussing local neighbours’ harvests, attending funerals, and living safely in the village during the weeks of post-election violence in Kisumu and other parts of Kenya in early 2008. The village was generally not regarded by the children living in it as a harmful or unpleasant place. This finding was confirmed in the written essays I received in response to an assignment I set in January 2009 for the pupils in the local primary school’s Standard 8 class (as part of my volunteering with after-school tutorials). I had asked the students to write essays starting with the sentence ‘2008 was a year of ...’. In response, most students wrote about the Kenyan national election and post-election violence that had occurred during the last week of 2007 and first weeks of 2008. Multiple different essays described how violence was perpetrated in Kisumu and other cities, often between Kikuyu and Luo people, and by the police against civilians. The essays also contained many personal examples of how the children and their relatives had experienced the village of Kanyathi as a place of safe refuge during that dangerous period.

In what follows, I pull back my analytical perspective from particular incidents and individuals’ social biographies to encompass a wider scope of village life, that is, more general patterns of social interactions which revealed particular affiliations and differentiations, or solidarities and segregations, among the people living in the space of the village. In my examination of patterns of social interactions, the existence of particular thresholds and barriers within the village become apparent. As I will explain, these thresholds and barriers – and the management of who can cross them and who cannot – are more intentionally designed features of this social space than those more immediately phenomenological encounters I have described above. Yet, the two experiences of space are intrinsically interlinked. How the physical space of the village has come to be divided has had implications for ideas and practices of public life, which in turn suggest repercussions for children’s care in Kanyathi. These aspects of village life are explored below.

Physical and Social Segregations

The neighbourhood is, almost by definition, a mastery of the social environment because, for the dweller, it is a known area of social space in which, to a greater or lesser degree, he or she knows himself or herself to be recognised. (Mayol 1998: 9)

Distinctions between public and private were tangibly changing across the physical and social landscape of Kanyathi, and these had implications for the potential ideas and practices of care for children in the community. As described in Chapter 2, the dramatic increases in the economic value of land ownership in the area have led to different pieces of the village being cut off from the rest. Through land expropriations by the government, and land purchases by private businesses or individuals, the space of the village has become increasingly fragmented, both physically and socially. The village as a familiar and coherent experience has eroded, as has the potential for ‘a mastery of the social environment’ and recognition among neighbours, as per Mayol’s (1998: 9) suggestion above.

When I asked long-time residents of Kanyathi - who referred to themselves as *jogueng*’ (people of the village) and *joKogony* (‘people of Kogony’; as described in Chapter 2) - who it was that was building in the newly fenced plots near their homesteads I was often met with rather worried expressions. ‘We don’t know,’ people would tell me, often in cautious and bewildered voices. Different individuals would volunteer small scraps of information: an older man and a younger man that nobody recognised came one day in a car; the man is a professor at Maseno University; the family is from Western Province; they are Luihya; no, they are Luo; the man bought the land for his son; no, the old man will build his house there but he is waiting until the road through the village to be paved. Little seemed known; much was speculative.

Such unfamiliarity with the identities and designs of new neighbours undermined efforts to imagine a shared community. It is well-established Luo practice to define a person’s social identity in terms of one’s background, both by kin and place of origin. The two are often entwined since place of origin can be further specified into clan which in turn breaks down into specific kin genealogies. For instance, several adults (usually men over the age of 40 and occasionally older women) would advise me from which of the nine wives of the son of the first man of the Kogony clan they (and others) descended. It is common for a stranger to be asked to help others understand who they are by describing their genealogy and to thereafter

be addressed in these terms (Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989: 26-28). This is particularly true for women since women are in some ways ‘strangers’ as they marry into the Kogony clan and move to Kanyathi from other clans and places. Isaiah, for example, only ever called his wife ‘*Nyar Gem*’ (‘daughter of Gem’; Gem is a village in Nyanza Province), while in introductions to new people Tufi often had to describe the place and family she had married into and so she became known among many in Kanyathi as ‘*Nyar Nyakech*’ (Nyakech is the village of her husband’s family). I noted that younger people were much less prone to such naming, preferring to use given first names, but they still inquired as to a newcomer’s place of origin, although not clan and parentage. For many adults, especially older adults, to not be able to identify a person in terms of their kinship origin was unsettling. It could mean, one elderly woman cautioned me, that relatives might marry because they were unaware of their shared descent. Nevertheless, while there were some new non-Luo landowners in Kanyathi, the vast majority were Luo and could - if they were willing to do so – therefore define their social identities in ways that fit within this genealogical framework.

It was not only the unfamiliar faces (with their unfamiliar histories) that signalled the potential for social distance across Kanyathi’s landscape. The fences that were commonly erected to safeguard purchasers’ claims – often before building any other structures - communicated not only possession but also exclusion. They served to ward against the usufruct claims villagers have commonly made on each other’s land, especially land that lays idle. (Villagers did not plant on other people’s idle land but some scavenged such land for wild plants.) The most common use of each other’s land among neighbours in Kanyathi was the treading of footpaths to provide shortcuts. These did not just represent practical innovations. They also served as social opportunities. To take a shortcut through someone’s yard often meant entering a social interaction, even if it was just the exchange of greetings. It also opened the potential to observe and to be observed. By restricting physical access, the fenced areas of newly purchased tracts of land closed off modes of interacting and witnessing among neighbours. The fences communicated the intention of enforcing social separations.



Fig. 7.1: The changing landscape of neighbours in Kanyathi⁸⁹ (author's photograph).

Such social and physical separations might be expected to have repercussions for how children are cared for across the different spaces that comprise the village of Kanyathi. How this might be the case can be inferred from the answers that one mother in her early forties offered to my question 'Do neighbours discuss who should care for children?' This is how she described how people in the village might consider the situations of children other than their own:

What I have heard is at the time of a funeral. I will hear people discussing who is fit or who is not fit to care for the children. For example, in the case of my 'co-wife' [husband's brother's wife], neighbours noticed she was dying so they would come and tell me that I would have to care for these children.

Neighbours are very good at looking at how children are being brought up, like how they are fed and clothed and if they are going to school. These neighbours will look at the bodies of the children and compare how the children's bodies were when their parents were alive. They even compare how children's attitudes change with new situations.

They [neighbours] just talk though; they don't help. Those that can be in contact with children's other relatives may report this poor treatment.

⁸⁹ The new neighbours occupying the house to the left in this photograph are not Kogony clan members. Upon purchasing their small plot and building their storied house, they privately arranged an electricity connection. The homestead to the right has been continuously occupied by a multi-generation family since they were displaced by industry expansion from their original home in the village area. This homestead is not connected to electricity.

Elizabeth: What are the things that people consider about who is good to care for children?

It is based on financial ability - maybe food. Sometimes you find a person who is not generous and helpful to others. They look into the help a person can give to children. For example, a neighbour can send a child to go and ask for something from that mama. And the kind of response is what they base judgments of character on: they make judgments of the generosity or meanness of the person. The ways someone can help to provide the necessary things in life matters a lot.

Or the neighbours will see how you have been living with other relatives and they will judge your character on that.

These kinds of insights about how neighbours monitor and judge the care of children alongside the character of adult guardians illustrate the central role of social relationships and reputations for the efficacy of community members to act as a safety net for the care of children. This efficacy is highly contingent upon the prevalence and relevance of social interactions in people's lives. In Kanyathi, as in many urbanising areas, the privatisation of spaces, including public resources, imposes physical barriers to social interactions. The infusion of strangers' claims on spaces within the community can also fragment and thereby undermine the existence of social consensus concerning social virtues, including an ethos of care among community members. The implications for children's care are uncertain. What will happen when new neighbours do not see children's bodies outside of their homesteads due to the physical obstruction of walled fences? Without opportunities to foster familiarity, will there be less willingness to even try to recognise children beyond the boundaries of one's own home? What are the knock-on effects for children if adults in the village do not attempt to borrow and loan with one another, and therefore are unable to judge one another's character? And what might be the consequences if neighbours do not know who a child's relatives are to make contact with in case of any concern for that child? These questions feed an understanding that the care of an area's children depends upon an ethos of community, which derives from shared experience and purpose.

Authorising Discourses for Children's Care

There were particular ideas of morality, and specifically moral conduct toward children, propagated through the discourses and practices of 'official' community representatives in

Kanyathi. The government-employed assistant chief and schoolteachers were especially prominent in articulating what standards of care were expected. As well, there were various NGO activities focused on children in Kanyathi. These different institutions often demonstrated remarkable consensus and thereby issued what might be regarded as authorising discourses (Asad 1986, 1993) for children's care in this context. The key concerns for children's care around which the multiple 'official' discourses in Kanyathi converged included children's primary school enrolment, as well as children's basic safety and health. The blame for children's poor care in Kanyathi was for the most part assigned to their parents or other immediate guardians.

As I have described in Chapter 4, a primary school aged child not in school was commonly regarded in Kanyathi as vulnerable. This judgment not only gained currency through neighbours' gossip about different families that 'chose' not to spend their money on children's primary school fees. It was also a norm that the assistant chief tried to enforce through occasional campaigns of visiting households that were not sending their children to primary school to tell the adults it was their duty to do so. In an exercise in 2008, for example, the chief identified 42 children in the local area that were not enrolled in school but whom he judged should have been. The chief, or his volunteer advisors, personally warned the guardians of these children that they were expected to send their children to school. If not, they were warned that the government would take action against them. The extent of this action during my period of research was that several households received further warnings in the form of letters printed on government stationery. As well, the assistant chief occasionally raised the concern at public meetings (*barazas*) in Kanyathi during which he scolded parents and other relatives that were not fulfilling their responsibility of sending their children to school.⁹⁰ Demonstrating the effect of these messages among the community, I found that some guardians sought the assistant chief's intervention to discipline the children in their care. For example, a woman caring for her orphaned nephew brought the 14 year old boy with her to the chief's office after she had caught him missing his primary school classes. She asked the chief to beat the boy to teach him a lesson, explaining that she was not strong

⁹⁰ The local assistant chief was prompted to take such action against parents by a directive from the Provincial Administration in 2009. Similar campaigns have been implemented in other parts of Kenya. In the same year, national newspapers ran a story of government prosecutions in Kilifi against parents who had not taken their children to primary school, and quoted the District Commissioner in Kilifi as warning: 'The prosecution of the parents is the beginning of a major crackdown that will see more parents arrested for abdicating their obligations. ... The Government has collected data of parents who do not take their children to school. They will be arrested and charged' (Masha 2009: 5).

enough to discipline the boy. While the chief did not physically beat the boy, he did sternly warn him that he would ask the school's headmaster to report directly to him if the boy was absent in the future so that the chief could then find the boy and discipline him further. Other adults and children also made appointments with the assistant chief and the local Member of Parliament to ask them to support their applications for the limited number of secondary school bursaries the MP allocated.

While there was much concern in Kanyathi about children's enrolment in school, there were also other concerns about the care of children that did attend school. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the teachers at the primary school in Kanyathi were asked in May 2009 to provide information to the Kisumu municipal education department concerning the school's orphans and 'most vulnerable children'. Of the entire student population of 679, the teachers listed in their report that 129 children were 'single orphans' (one parent deceased) while 60 were 'double orphans' (both parents deceased). Separately, the teachers listed 202 children (30 percent of the student population) under the category of 'most vulnerable children'. The children that the teachers listed as orphans and as the 'most vulnerable children' were often different, thereby indicating that the teachers recognised that orphanhood was not the only, or even primary, risk factor for children's wellbeing in Kanyathi. Commonly, individual teachers developed their own criteria to distinguish which children in their classes were 'most vulnerable'. Only four of the school's sixteen teachers lived in Kanyathi, and therefore many were not familiar with the families and home lives of their pupils. When I interviewed several teachers about their criteria for distinguishing the 'most vulnerable children', they mentioned their knowledge of children's experiences of physical and sexual abuse, children's mental or physical disabilities, as well as their estimations of poverty as noticed by the inability for children's guardians to provide school fees, adequate clothing and footwear, or children's demonstrated hunger.

Some teachers, as well as the school headmaster, occasionally chose to act on their judgments that specific children required their assistance in securing adequate care. For example, the school management committee occasionally practiced discretion in forgiving some students' late or lack of payment of school or exam fees. Adults and children in Kanyathi knew this, and some visited the school to make personal requests of the headmaster or a teacher to allow children to continue attending lessons even when their fees had not yet been paid. As one orphaned young man caring for his younger two siblings described to me:

One time [my brother and sister] were sent home for fees and that's when I went and talked to the teachers and told them I did not have the ability to pay. [The teacher] said it was okay and if I would get something I should take it there. [The teacher] told me he would not send them [home for fees] again. And they haven't been sent again for fees.

The school was also influential in disciplining other aspects of children's care. An aunt caring for three of her orphaned nieces recounted how a teacher had sent one of the little girls home with a note. In the note, the teacher told the aunt that the girl seemed persistently ill with different ailments and that the aunt should take the girl to the clinic. The aunt did so, and the girl was treated for an ear and throat infection before she was sent back to school. Some children complained to me that teachers were mean to them in repeatedly asking about their lack of shoes or complaining about their torn uniforms. Some teachers occasionally decided to refuse children's school attendance if they wanted to send a message to children's guardians to provide their children with footwear or improved clothing. Whether this helped or hurt children was difficult to judge since it worked to secure some children better uniforms while other children simply missed more classes. A very few children told me that their teachers had actually been the ones to provide them with a uniform when their families did not. In these various ways, it seemed to me that there were particular standards expected and enforced by the school, even if they were pursued through varying means.

A NGO that had 128 children registered for 'sponsorship' in the larger local area practiced a similar mix of standardised and individualised evaluations of children's vulnerabilities. When I asked the NGO's outreach worker how the organisation chose which children to include in their programme, he said:

We started with total orphans. Then OVCs [orphans and vulnerable children] – these ones have a parent but they are not able to pay for school fees, medical care and such. We advertise through the Assistant Chief and churches. Then so many people come to ask for their children to be registered. And it is for us to decide who is the most needy. ... But we don't sponsor children out of wedlock. We don't enrol children of unmarried mothers but we do consider those children of widows. This is because an unmarried woman can marry again and move, taking the child with her.

The outreach worker also explained that he gained information about children's situations from visiting their homes and talking to neighbours, as well as from sitting on the local primary school's management committee. He described how at some meetings the school's headmaster would read out a list of the names of children having problems with providing extra fees for books, exam fees, etc. The NGO outreach worker would then take note of these names and try to register these children for 'sponsorship'.

However, the assistance available through the NGO 'sponsorship' programmes in the local area was very limited. The larger of the two different NGOS' programmes had 128 local children registered as 'sponsored', but only about 30 children had 'active sponsors' which meant sponsors who occasionally sent money or other gifts to their partnered children. The majority of children have what the NGO calls 'dormant sponsors'. While 'dormant sponsors' are matched with individual 'sponsored' children and do, in fact, financially support the NGO, the NGO uses these donations for funding infrastructure projects, like the construction of wells and latrines. Unless a sponsor decides to directly send a gift to a child, a child registered in this 'sponsorship' scheme does not receive any individualised assistance. It is the same for the other 'sponsorship' programmes in the area. This is a change from the past when registered children received school uniforms and school fees, and other material contributions. These programme changes have raised suspicions among children and their families in Kanyathi that the Kenyan staff of the NGOs are 'eating' (i.e. keeping for themselves) the donations from foreign sponsors. There is therefore a palpable distrust of the NGO workers by the registered children and families. Nevertheless, both the local outreach workers and the children and their families explain that it is at least worth the chance for a child to be registered because that child might just prove to be the lucky one who receives a sponsor's gift.

If such individualised donations do come through, the sponsorship programme, the NGO outreach worker plays an influential role in determining how these are used. In one child's case, for example, her sponsor regularly sent money at Christmas (usually between Ksh5,000 [GBP 36] and Ksh7,000 [GBP 50]). One year the outreach worker had been informed by the headmaster that the girl's aunt and uncle had not paid her school fees. So the NGO worker arranged to confront the girl's aunt when the cheque arrived for her to cash at the Kisumu post office. He then told the aunt that he would travel with her to the girl's school to ensure the money was used to pay the outstanding balance. The girl's aunt

quarrelled with him saying that they should not try to take money from someone who needs it, but the NGO worker insisted. The girl's fees were paid that day and the family was allowed to take home the remaining money, but were warned that the money was supposed to be used to help the girl.

The convergences in the judgments of the chief, the schoolteachers, and the NGO workers clearly did not occur spontaneously. Rather, institutional links between their professional activities encouraged common norms to develop. The local NGO outreach workers described consulting on individual children's cases within the organisation of a primary school committee meeting. The locally elected municipal councillors and Member of Parliament for the area also occasionally consulted with the administration at the local schools as well as NGO outreach workers when they had to make choices of which young people in the area to award government bursaries for secondary education tuition. As well, the NGOs 'advertise' for children's registration for sponsorship through the assistant chief and local churches. Telling of the kind of influence such NGO activities have on local reputations, I learned that the assistant chief for Kanyathi had been promoted to his position after having spent seven years as the outreach worker for one of those same child sponsorship NGOs active in the area. This work had prepared him well, he said, to become familiar with so many different families as well as to understand the challenges faced by people living in his constituency. Given that he worked for the NGO during the period when sponsorship meant the direct distribution of school fees and other material forms of assistance to children and families, I suspect that this individual's popularity had been enhanced due to his association with such patronage. And to finally answer a question that kicked off this study, I learned that the seven children from Kanyathi that I had found living in Mama Ngina Children's Home in Kisumu in 2007 had been placed there as a result of the actions of their local municipal councillor. She explained that she had heard about their cases from the children's relatives who she was familiar with as a result of their participation in local community activities, including Catholic Church services, occasional NGO-sponsored activities, and burials. With this insight, it was not clear to me whether those seven children placed in the orphanage would have been among the village's most vulnerable children, or whether they were instead the beneficiaries of a shared community network of care since their individual situations had been identified and acted upon.

Other institutions located *in* the village area, however, were not recognised as part *of* the community. For example, the Norwegian-funded and run children's home and schools that were built in the local area were not only separated from the rest of the population by metal gates, fences, and watchmen. Local residents also complained the institution was socially isolationist, and uncaring toward the local population. Its primary school, which is equipped with computer labs and other special features, charges fees 40 times higher than the local government school. Of its approximately 230 enrolled children, half have their fees paid by their own families, while half are 'rehabilitated' street children and other children classified as vulnerable by the NGO and individually sponsored by donors in Norway and elsewhere. The NGO has not sponsored any children from Kanyathi. The locally elected councillor complained to me that she had once visited the NGO directors (a Luo woman from elsewhere in Nyanza and her Norwegian husband) and directly asked them to take in a few specific orphaned children from the local area that were suffering, but she was refused.⁹¹ When I later asked the Norwegian director about the NGO's interest in the people who live around where their institution is located, he described that in October 2008 they took 30 to 50 old and sick people from the area in their private bus to their office headquarters in Kisumu to feed them *ugali* and beans, and after the post-election violence in 2008 (during which two other NGO-run children's homes in the Kisumu area were attacked by local people), the NGO had, over the course of one day, fed 800 people *ugali* and beans. 'They were all very happy with that,' he said. On a regular basis, however, the NGO's activities were beyond the reach of local residents.

⁹¹ The councillor said she suspected the children sponsored by the NGO were all relatives of the woman director. This type of suspicion of patronage between orphanage directors (and staff) and sponsored children (who are often suspected of not being orphans or otherwise vulnerable), and embezzlement of donations to orphanages was rife among adults and children in Kanyathi as well as throughout Nyanza and Kenya, as I noted from everyday conversations with all kinds of different people, statements at official meetings (e.g. the Kisumu Area Advisory Council for Children and Youth meeting January 30, 2009), and stories reported in national media. For instance, at the public launch of an Adoption Survey Report the Government of Kenya's Director of Children's Services stated that their offices had found that in some children's homes '80 to 90 per cent of the children have parents who can be traced. While some homes are genuine, some are started under the guise of hosting vulnerable minors, to cash in on the project' (Anyangu 2009: 22). In a story under the headline 'Children homes put on notice' the newspaper the Weekly Citizen (March 30-April 5, 2009: 8) reported the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Development as saying he was concerned that dubious children homes were involved in child trafficking and siphoning money from donor agencies. In July 2009, a media story broke about the embezzlement of foreign donations of 'millions of dollars' by a 'smartly organized cartel' of police officers with Kisumu's Criminal Investigations Department, Kisumu municipal council staff and the local managers of the British-funded NGO for orphaned children in the area (Audi 2009).

Whether one of the most recently-arrived new neighbours in the area will achieve better integration with the existing local community remains to be seen. The SOS ‘children’s village’ has scheduled its first inhabitants to move in to its gated enclosure in late 2011. While the NGO has not committed to selecting children from the local area to live within their compound, representatives have stated in public meetings that they would try to hire local people for the ‘non-technical’ jobs. Most of the people I spoke to in Kanyathi have chosen to take a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude toward the project.

Fig. 7.2: The new SOS Children’s Village, situated above the existing village (author’s photograph).



Conclusion

Time and time again, people told me that ‘Neighbours just see [*nen*]; they do not do anything’. This suggests a passivity that is useless. However, I think the findings about how community members were seeing reveals that they were also watching and witnessing. I suggest that these were important practices in the development of people’s judgments of how to socially relate, both at individual and collective levels. Moreover, the overlay of these practices with a particular Luo concept of care as the protectiveness that arises through ‘watching over / out for’ and even ‘waiting’ (*rito*), as discussed in Chapter 3, seems to indicate a rather specialised caring role of those outside of children’s families who ‘just see’ children’s daily lives.

While in response to my questions children and adults in the village often tended to favour respect and willingness to help (*luoro*) – a Luo concept I have elaborated upon in Chapter 3 – as the epitome of generalised (i.e. community) care, I discerned that the most prevalent and impactful type of care for children was indeed community members’ acts of watching over and out for (*rito*) children’s safety and wellbeing. I suggest that ‘watching out for’ as a particular caring role can be attributed to two contextually specific social prerogatives, related to the socially valued roles assigned to children and families.

First, watching out for (*rito*) can be understood to reflect a shared social value of children as active beings in public spaces. As I have described, children are extremely visible throughout Kanyathi as they carry out work for their families, which includes both the work of materially provisioning households (with water, fuel, etc.) as well as the work of maintaining social reciprocities (sharing news, greetings, and borrowing and lending). By watching out for children as they were active in the space of the village, villagers helped to maintain the security of the village for children’s very public practices in it, and thereby they demonstrated care for the valorisation of children as active contributors to families’ wellbeing and community sociality. And I entertain that it is likely that through the practices of watching children and watching out for them, community members’ affinities with those children developed. This carefulness over children’s daily lives seems important to a collective experience of affinity among people in Kanyathi, potentially engendering an atmosphere and understanding of love (*hera*).

The second concern underscoring ‘watching out for’ as the community’s leitmotiv of an ethic of care for children is the understanding that children are ultimately the responsibility of families, and not of the wider community. Therefore, the extent of villagers’ interests in caring for children was through safeguarding children’s care within families. Community members’ watching and witnessing of children’s lives provided the empirical evidence they needed to distinguish whether or not a family was being appropriately responsible for the care of ‘their children’. This information could then be used to justify interventions with children’s families, either through communicating concerns directly to a child’s carer or by seeking alternative relatives to intervene to provide care. Even the seemingly passive and unproductive activities of gossip – fuelled often by what had been seen or otherwise witnessed – factored into neighbours’ practice of a sort of referral system to secure children in their families.

Care as merely seeing, and not doing, therefore, should be understood as a purposeful limit that was justified by – and reinforcing of - the broad social consensus that families are ultimately responsible for their children. In this case of Kanyathi, the wider community played a vital – as in *living* – role as a sort of ‘safety net’. Through the surveillance of everyday lives and the disciplining of families (tacitly and directly; through unspoken and spoken normative judgments), the community governed the rules that children belong to families and families must act with according responsibility. The efficacy of the community’s role was dependent on how entwined families were in localised webs of sociality. However, if families extracted themselves from these webbing, the community’s safety net might have only been experienced as loose ends.

This chapter has described how ideas and practices of care for children were not prevalent in Kanyathi as constant and universal standards, but rather manifested in ways that were as contingent and dynamic as any questions of community and belonging. This underscores how the constitution of a ‘public’ and a ‘public good’ – such as ‘community’ and a community’s children – are dependent on how social consensuses about norms and values are constructed, and among whom. At the same time, I suggest that it is the situational and perspectival character of everyday sociality in the village which infused vital potentiality into the ideas and practices of care among the people living there. While a general and overarching social consensus about the organisation of life may have been elusive, the formation of social consensus around particular questions – such as the security or wellbeing of children - comprised a continuous interest and project among many residents.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

I initiated this ethnographic case study into lived experiences of widespread orphaning in western Kenya because of my scepticism of the generalising tendencies in existing policy and research about contemporary orphanhood due to HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. I questioned whether the dominant problem definition attributed to an 'orphan crisis' has not been too definitive and consequently limited in scope. Primarily, I was apprehensive of the seemingly simplistic correlations assumed between the deaths of parents and the outcomes for children, and I was dissatisfied with the paucity of insights concerning what increasing numbers and proportions of orphaned children mean for the societies experiencing such demographic changes, both in the present and in anticipation of the future.

I judge that the latter gap in knowledge is the result of the inability of many of the research methods thus far used to answer certain kinds of research questions. In particular, I find the tendency to try to interpret demographic characteristics of households as proxy indicators of people's willingness to care for orphaned children highly problematic. My critique focuses on the influence of certain assumptions in the design of research hypotheses and methods. Specifically, I argue that the hypothesis that biological relatedness motivates propensities to care for others (Bishai et al. 2003: 262; Case et al. 2004: 484-5; Beegle et al. 2010: 1729), and the hypothesis that decisions to care for orphaned children are based on households' financial calculations (Williamson 2000: 5; UNICEF 2003: 11; Subbarao and Coary 2004: 13-14; Abebe and Aase 2007: 2062-5; UNICEF 2007:42; Mathambo and Gibbs 2008: 8 and 27; Beegle et al. 2010: 1728) are imprudently narrow. I also question the efficacy of research methods that favour the quantitative analysis of large survey data sets to answer questions about motivations and processes of caring relations because of their limited capacity to account for qualitative differences between groups. My overall argument is that research designed with such hypotheses and methods neglects the potential of human beings to be significantly influenced in their attitudes and behaviours by their social and cultural contexts. As such, I question how projects to prove or disprove such hypotheses can in fact offer any insights for understanding the reasons for people's decisions, much less the processes by which decisions are made to care, or not, for orphaned children.

Even much of the existing qualitative research is largely derivative of the dominant problem definition of the ‘orphan crisis’ as presented in leading policy frameworks. For instance, the evaluative question of whether families are coping or collapsing tends to determine from the outset what will be measured (Abebe and Aase 2007; Mathambo and Gibbs 2008). As well, I challenge some scholars’ interpretation of their qualitative findings that deviations from ‘traditional’ patterns of children’s care (e.g. patrilineal fosterage) indicate social disorder (Nyambetha et al. 2003a: 301). My point is that instead of assuming crisis, researchers might more productively probe what reasons might exist for changes in who cares for children, and the processes by which these changes become influential.

In sum, the popular characterisation of recent experiences in many Sub-Saharan African societies as an ‘orphan crisis’ is singularly problematic. It privileges preconceived ideas of what is important for people’s lives, and in using these as the rationale for further research and policy interventions it reproduces the power of these ideas. As a globalised authorising discourse that universalises experience, the orphan crisis paradigm crowds out the possibility that there are other ways of understanding and experiencing life. I believe this has resulted in a critical gap between people’s everyday experiences of orphanhood and how these are understood by others.

My starting point for this study therefore was that more open-ended questions should be explored and these would likely require different kinds of research approaches. I anticipated that there might be some promise in taking a more inductive research approach so as to try to learn what was at stake for different people living in a context experiencing high and increasing rates of adult mortalities due to HIV and AIDS. I hypothesised that ethnographic research conducted over an extended period among one population might be an efficacious method for such gaining a unique set of insights concerning what such demographic changes implied for different people. Deciding to pursue such a case study in the peri-urban village of Kanyathi in Nyanza Province, Kenya was meant to meet this challenge.

In exploring people’s experiences and perspectives in Kanyathi I came to focus on what ideas were granted legitimacy as important for the conduct of everyday life, and how. As a result, I purposely investigated ideas and practices pertaining to childhood and children’s care, the potential of caring relations to exist between adults and children, and, even more specifically, the assertion of kinship as the primary source of care for children in Kanyathi.

Yet, in these investigations I confronted the dilemma of uncertainty. That is, I found a high degree of questioning in people's efforts to forge responses to children's orphaned situations. Rarely was there unambiguous consensus among the people of Kanyathi concerning what *should* be done in response to children's orphanhood in light of families' diminished livelihood capacities. More broadly, there seemed a distinctive concern with how such situations might be appraised in moral terms.

These findings have been integral to what I have been able to contribute through this dissertation. They have meant that my analysis has focused on three main concerns. First, I have had to consider how to understand uncertainty as a condition of life, and the implications of this. Second, I have analysed how a shared perspective of uncertainty has spurred a concern with morality in the study context, and specifically galvanised a moral economy of kinship. And third, I have sought to account for how the concern with morality affected what was deemed at stake in people's lives. In what follows, I summarise my key points related to these three concerns.

Uncertainty as a Condition of Life

Older and younger, male and female people in Kanyathi described feeling a lack of confidence in how their lives would turn out. As my host mother, Augustina, summarised to me: 'In this world you can start in a good way and finish in a bad way, or start in a bad way and finish in a good way'. Moreover, in recent experiences in Kanyathi, it has not always been easy to know which way your life has turned. Augustina, for example, could not quite judge whether she should feel appreciation or despair. Instead, she left her own ability to judge aside, ceding that capacity to providence, with the statement: 'God has taken all of some people's children. For me, He has left two'.

What caused people to perceive their lives as insecure was rendered evident through the proliferation of individual and collective narratives of specific disappointments and losses. Years of economic fluctuations and increasingly widespread and lasting poverty in the region has diminished many people's hopes of gaining, or confidence in maintaining, lasting financial security. Many of the currently available opportunities for the potential economic advancement of people in Kanyathi are regarded as quite poor chances. For example, either

the bulk of opportunities available such as petty trading, participation in rotating savings and loans associations, or casual construction labour promise low and uneven returns, while the more prosperous chances such as permanent, formal employment (e.g. a government job) are few and far between, and more often than not their attainment is beyond the powers of those applying (e.g. the cost in bribes are too high). These kinds of uncertainties make salient the local philosophy that life is struggle. One has little choice but to try, and then see what will happen.

Similar lack of confidence has been experienced in reciprocity among kin. The rise in middle-aged adult illnesses and deaths since the 1990s has significantly diminished who is available to care for children family members. In Kanyathi, at least one of every five children under the age of 15 has lost a mother or father, while perhaps one of every ten children has lost both parents, and similar proportions of parental deaths have occurred across Nyanza Province's population (Juma et al. 2007: i, iv). My study has accounted for the kinds of challenges families in Kanyathi have experienced in their efforts to respond to these losses. While the ability to provide care for orphaned children has been challenged by the financial costs that have come to be popularly associated with children's care (especially school fees), as well as the scope, duration, and depth of poverty, many people have perceived that the core problem is in fact the result of ambiguity in kin-based morality. A critique that has gained significant traction among many people living in Kanyathi, and similar contexts in Nyanza, is that some individuals are acting immorally when they shirk their responsibilities to 'share the burden' (*kawo ting*) of their family's care of orphaned children. And a favoured strategy to guard against this problem – at least among those who find themselves feeling most uncertain or insecure – is to try to embed the economic challenges of children's care in a moral ideology of kinship.

Consolidating a Moral Economy for Care

Part of the effort of consolidating a moral economy of kinship has entailed the definition of who is responsible to whom. As I have described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the processes by which these definitions are brokered often complicate the assignment of rigid criteria. While there is a Luo cultural ideal of patrilineal fosterage, most people in this study described that their families' realities require more allowance for contingencies. Individual circumstances such as livelihood constraints, for example, as well as individual dispositions (of both adults

and children) have instead been considered carefully in families' reckoning of how they might fashion a response with the resources at hand. Genealogies legitimating individual claims also proved flexible as a result of the 'situational pragmatics in remembering and forgetting' (Whyte and Whyte 2004: 91). And ultimately, according to popular perception, it is what is in people's hearts that will determine their propensities to care for others, and thereby prove their moral character.

Nevertheless, even people's hearts are considered changeable. Thus, much practical effort has been invested by various families in influencing their members' hearts to secure commitments to a particular idea and practice of kin-based morality. Indeed, I have analysed that the local argument that sitting as one (*-bedo e achiel*) is the means to strengthen families has proven convincing because of the action's practical efficacies. The staging of face-to-face encounters through the conventions of burials and family meetings, as well as even greater formalisation through the keeping of written records detailing individuals' participation, can inculcate trust. Many people in Kanyathi described such experiences as producing a psychological and emotional shift in their sense of efficacy. The empirical evidence that has convinced people in Kanyathi that sitting together constitutes the essence of their unity can be analysed as consistent with some of the most influential sociological theories of how groups actualise their cohesion through face-to-face - and often ceremonially-distinctive - encounters (Durkheim 1912; Goffman 1955, 1967; Giddens 1990: 80-88).

The argument has already been made in some recent ethnographic accounts that the HIV/AIDS epidemic constitutes 'a distinct experience in the life worlds of populations in the wider sub-Saharan African region ... [with] the power to challenge the 'habitual' of everyday life and [to be] a disruptive and morally disturbing force in the productive and reproductive orders of kinship networks, community constellations and society at large' (Dilger 2010: 2-3; also see Bähre 2007: 52; Klaitz 2010: 51). My study findings endorse this perspective. Yet, my study findings have yielded different kinds of insights from those existing studies. For instance, some other researchers have focused on how AIDS has been interpreted by particular communities as a symptom of moral decline (Dilger 2008; Beckmann 2010: 120; Geissler and Prince 2010: 247-8). These researchers have also duly acknowledged how moral anxieties over the proliferation of HIV and AIDS are entwined with anxieties over economic resilience and cultural survival (*ibid.*). My empirical and theoretical interests in morality have been different because I have focused less on how people have problematised HIV and AIDS;

although I did perceive this as central to people's experiences of uncertainty. Yet, I chose instead to primarily focus on how people have problematised caring relations in light of the pressures of increased demands in a context of limited livelihood security.

My research findings also appear somewhat different from other studies' findings due to the strong correlations made by people between morality and kinship. I suggest that this finding is due to the fact that my study focused on the care of children, and specifically the care of orphaned children. Other researchers that have investigated how the HIV/AIDS epidemic has affected people's experiences of care in different communities have found ruptures in kin-based caring relationships and the forging of new caring relationships among participants in religious congregations and NGOs (Dilger 2006, 2008; Bähre 2007; Beckmann 2008; Klaitz 2010). These analyses attribute the broken and emergent patterns of contemporary caring relationships to the specific moral and practical challenges of the disease. For example, Hansjörg Dilger (2008) has accounted for how widowed women and their children in AIDS-affected Luo households in western Tanzania 'tend to fall out of family solidarity networks' and some have found social protection, safety, and care among Pentecostal churches and NGOs in urban centres. Dilger has analysed these changing relationships in terms of the characterisations of HIV/AIDS as a 'bad disease' because of its association with promiscuity and because the illness is experienced as 'particularly painful for individuals and their families' (Dilger 2008: 210). He has discerned anger, blame, fear, and fatigue as underscoring resistance to, and rejection of, infected kin (ibid.: 218).

Findings like these are important cautions against an idealised view of families as intrinsically caring. My study also documented cases in which the claims of individuals – and most commonly, the claims of widows with children – upon their families (patrilineal and matrilineal in different instances) were rejected. The experience of young Juma, his mother, and Juma's younger siblings, for example, was a case in point. As Juma described it, they were 'chased' from their home after his father's death, and after his mother's death his relatives said the children had to help themselves because their adult relatives already had too many children of their own for whom to care. Nevertheless, face-to-face encounters among kin did lead to some claims being acknowledged. For instance, when directly asked, a distant relative agreed to provide the children with a house to live in, and upon witnessing at a family burial the children's hardship another relative fostered Juma's sister into her household and paid her school fees. In fact, Juma perceived that the question of kinship remained

paramount. As he put it: ‘When the relations are distant, people can decide to help or not’, thereby implying that closer kin relations would have provided him and his mother and siblings with more security.

Similarly, the grandson whose grandfather had sold his deceased father’s land found himself fighting against his grandfather’s arguments that the young man’s claims upon his patrilineal family had been invalidated by his parents’ choices to live and die apart from the family, and furthermore because the young man’s father had not materially helped his relatives and his mother had refused to remain married in her deceased husband’s family through *tero* (widow inheritance). However, I find it noteworthy that this was considered a controversial case in Kanyathi, and consequently ended up in mediation at the assistant chief’s office, with a village elder scolding the grandfather on his moral duties as the head of a family to ensure the security of its members. Again, the moral ideas invested in kinship significantly influenced the terms in which claims to care were asserted and contested.

I suggest that what might account for the relatively wide acceptance of kinship as the moral rule for orphaned children’s care in my case study was the significance of local ideas of childhood and children’s care. Generally, children seemed more trusted as innocent than adults, and especially infected or ill adults. This is not to say that individual children were treated as innocent and trustworthy. There was certainly apprehension toward children’s changeable propensities, and even raising a child as ‘one’s own’ was not trusted as safe insurance that the child would reciprocate care in the future. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the care of children was more easily identified as a good deed, especially because raising a child could be used to signify an investment in the endurance of the family. The same righteousness was not always available for the care of ill adults, often because, as Dilger (2008) and Geissler and Prince (2010) found in their case studies, adults’ ailments were often tinged with suspicion of their moral transgression, and furthermore, caring for an ill person could be considered an unproductive drain on limited resources.

Stakes in Morality

Even when morality was widely approved as a framing discourse for how kin should care for orphaned children, however, this did not mean that people’s efforts to secure care were

straightforward and successful. What it did mean, I argue, is that new opportunities could be opened up in the struggle to negotiate how care would be practiced in everyday life.

I found the challenges that could be issued in the language (spoken and unspoken) of morality opened spaces for those with lesser obvious (i.e. economic) power to assert their claims upon others. Although certain positions of power and unequal relationships could be fortified through the determination of 'authorising discourses' for morality, this did not absolutely preclude contestation and even modification of outcomes according to the interests of those in weaker positions. This argument is similar to Scott's (1976) theory of how moral economies provide opportunities for resistance by economically weaker actors; a notion he came to further elaborate as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985). In my study, for example, I have described how the legitimacy of particular genealogies as charters for individuals' claims upon a family can be the product of delicately brokered (and often tacit) agreements. While those people with clearer control of resources, for example through title deeds to land ownership and culturally significant prestige such as that customarily invested in elder males among the Luo, can wield disproportionate influence over which discourses they will accept as authoritative, my examination in Chapter 6 of the intricate interpersonal politics and interplay of tactics among members of David's homestead demonstrates that supposedly weaker individuals – like 16 year old Julia – had recourse to acts of moral protest to assert their points of view. Similarly, the significance of social consensus for sanctioning social reputations in the village setting of Kanyathi made gossip a potentially powerful tactic in efforts to secure the care of vulnerable children.

My argument therefore is not just that the practices of everyday life can influence what is at stake, but also how the stakes might be won or lost. Certain practices, including the use of certain words as signs-in-use, raised the moral stakes of people's actions in Kanyathi. And as the meanings of certain actions became recognised as embedded in a specific moral framework, the rules of the game shifted. Or, at least, the potential was there for new rules to be asserted.

However, the extent to which the field of struggle over norms and practices of care changed in Kanyathi remained limited by the differences in power between the various actors. Simply put, some people could afford to ignore the claims that there were new norms to sanction or censure their behaviour. For example, those who perceived that they could afford to cut off

certain social ties, including kin relationships, did so. As I have noted, it seemed that every family in Kanyathi had at least one member that had become 'lost'; that is, had given up efforts to maintain material and symbolic connections with their relatives. In Bourdieu's (1993: 143) language, these were the people who had surrendered the social capital of their kin. Perhaps they had judged that they did not require the 'contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources' (ibid.). Perhaps they judged they could better ensure their own security through guarding their economic autonomy. As many people in Kanyathi recognised, the burdens of kinship's moral economy that were shared were only shared among those who chose to return (and who perhaps had little choice but to return) to sit together as one.

Regardless of these constraints – and indeed even in full appreciation of them - I think the findings and analysis in this dissertation support the suggestion that a focus on moral practice, judgment, reasoning, and questioning in everyday social life can 'force a rethinking of 'power'' (Lambek 2001: 1). From the examples I have explored, I find there is merit in Lambek's (2010: 7) proposition that a consideration of morality may contribute to thinking through how agency and structure interrelate. In my case study of experiences of wide-scale orphaning in Kanyathi, practices and ideas associated with morality introduced new sources of contingencies into everyday life.

Hanging Questions

Reflecting on what a deliberate study of uncertainty makes possible (and not) for understanding social life, Whyte has noted how it not only 'remind[s] us that the discourses and narratives we human actors use are partial, incommensurate with one another, and often incapable of convincing us fully' ... but also that it challenges the clear authority of anthropological analysis, thereby issuing a further 'reminder of the need for humility, humanity, and verisimilitude in ethnography' (Whyte 1997: 225-6). My ethnography has had to acknowledge both of these limitations.

Despite my efforts to identify clues and appreciate potential, important questions remain hanging both in real life in Kanyathi, and consequently in my analysis in this dissertation. For instance, is a family's 'sharing the burden' of their orphans' care to be understood as just and

virtuous cooperation among equals, or inequitable and desperate bargaining among those without access to a better option than to use their cooperation as insurance? Correlatively, is 'sharing the burden' to be understood as morally normative? These questions must be left hanging because what is at stake for different people implicate different, incommensurate kinds of concerns. For example, how does a young person weigh the comfort of feeling him or herself wanted in a household against his or her desire to complete school? As I have described, many older children seemed to choose the latter over the former, but only until the point when they recognised their chance to try (at education) had expired, and then they preferred to return to the homes where they felt themselves more appreciated, or less grudgingly accepted. Different grandmothers described how it was emotionally painful for them to acknowledge their inability to provide for an orphaned grandchild because they were struggling or suffering too much with the children already in their care. Of course, we would prefer to raise our brothers' children together with our own, fathers said, but that has simply not been feasible due to current livelihood constraints. 'What is one to do? We just struggle,' the refrain was often repeated. Is this idiom of struggle to be understood as a valiant rallying point – as a moral virtue and support, as I have suggested - or as an idiom that masks the risk of atrophy? Or, perhaps, does it function as both?

These questions remain hanging because this historic moment continues for both the people in Kanyathi who are not certain about how their efforts will work out and for me as the analyst trying to interpret the significance of a particular moment in history for changing expectations. In Kanyathi, I found that people's efforts to craft their ideas and practices were often provisional, and deliberately so. Ultimately, what I have ended up with is a set of insights that indicate how on-going struggles to determine what can and should be done to secure care for children have exposed the simultaneous fragility and tenacity of kinship, in particular, and sociality, in general. And this exposure has spurred different kinds of ideological and practical efforts among those who remain together to try to gain a more certain equilibrium among themselves. This has meant that my own analysis is also hinged on the crux of potential. This dissertation therefore has presented a set of findings that implicates potential, rather than only outcome, and ontology rather than merely survival.

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