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RURAL KENYAN LUO WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES:
AN INTERPRETATION

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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The purpose of this research was to provide insight into the roles of rural Kenyan Luo women as farmers, homemakers, and members of women's groups. More specifically, this research explored nine rural women's multiple roles regarding their work/family expectations and responsibilities, especially in relation to family traditions, household tasks, food production, and income-generating activities.

Five women in their twenties and four women in their forties were selected from Kendu Bay in western Kenya. Interpretive inquiry based on phenomenology and hermeneutics was used because it fostered exploration of the meaning of daily life experiences from the perspective of those living it. The major method of data collection was in-depth individual interviews using a series of open-ended questions. Each woman was interviewed three times for one to two hours each time. The transcribed texts were shared with the women for clarification and change. A feminist approach was used because it provided for an open, egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the participants which facilitated conversational dialogue.

Through the analysis, themes emerged which created a sense of those threads that flowed through rural Kenyan Luo women's roles as homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups, informing their attitudes and behaviors. Patriarchy was an over-arching theme which influenced all aspects of the women's lives--marriage, work, and children--and seemed to form the base for the other major themes: conformity and struggle. Conformity was necessary to acquire a good name through

respect and reciprocity, and to maintain connection to the community by observation of rituals and taboos. Struggle was exhibited in hard work, conflict between old and new values/practices, and their reflections about life. All themes were intertwined and overlapping and were evident throughout the women's lives. Together they formed a picture which depicted the interdependence and multiplicity in rural Luo Kenyan women's lives and explained how their lives work for them as they maintain their traditions in a changing world. The voices of the women reiterated the existence of these themes and through a shared perception of their significance and meaning, greater understanding of their lives was created.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Women in developing countries play a major role in food production. They participate in virtually all activities involved in the food production cycle including planting, harvesting, transporting, processing, storing, preparing, and consumption. This predominant role of women in food production is well documented. Literature indicates that about half of the women in the world live and work in rural areas in developing countries and are responsible for 40 to 80 percent of the agricultural production (Abdullah, 1980; Amuge, 1986; Annabel, 1991; Bryson, 1981; Buvinic & Yudelman, 1989; Charlton, 1984; Lindsay, Milner & Harries, 1977; Midamba-House, 1990; Savane, 1980; Slayter-Thomas, 1992; Tadesse, 1984). According to Savane (1980), 80 percent of the world's population lives in the rural areas and is dependent for the most part on agricultural pursuits. In Kenya, women manage at least two-fifths of Kenya's small holdings and provide three-fourths of the labor used in them (Hertz, 1989; World Bank, 1989). In carrying out their productive and reproductive roles, Kenyan women struggle to provide for their families. Women's poverty and subordination to men is manifested by lack of access to land ownership, education, and technology; and labor discrimination, much of which was brought about by colonization.

As a result women spend long hours in laborious tasks both in the household

and in the farms using traditional tools. Modernization has not improved the status of women in most cases, but has worsened their position. Redistribution of tasks due to improved agricultural techniques has marginalized the role of women because, unlike men, they have been denied the opportunity to acquire skills in the use of new machinery (Annabel, 1991). The introduction of cash cropping and new farming methods has not been of benefit to women due to the fact that the women have continued to use manual farming tools. Women are therefore confined to unskilled labor with low wages.

The rural woman in Kenya has a role as producer as well as homemaker. The woman's food production activities are important at both the macro level within the society and at a micro level within the household. Rural Kenyan women typically work between 10 to 12 hours a day. This is mainly due to lack of labor saving technology for food production, processing, preservation, and preparation.

In spite of the importance of the productive and reproductive roles that Kenyan women play in the economy of the country, their "domestic tasks are "invisible" because they are not considered as formal work; therefore, their efforts have not been quantified. Although women work hard in both the household and agricultural activities, they are also expected to nurse the sick children and adults, not only in their homes but also in the community. In patriarchal countries like Kenya, men have control over women and often make decisions in various matters such as family planning and family income. There are cases in Africa where women have no control

of their reproduction, therefore, they continue to have many children. This factor has an impact on women's health, and increases their already heavy work loads.

Although considerable progress has been made in educating males and females, in Kenya, the illiteracy rate for women is higher than that for males. Socio-economic factors have great influence in determining women's education. Parental attitudes, expectations, and economic status influence children's enrollment at all levels of education, especially primary. Girls' access to higher levels of education is more limited than that for boys because of various problems they encounter at home or at school. For example, girls have more responsibilities in the home which prevent them from studying. Because of this factor, their entrance into professional careers is restricted and they end up in unskilled labor and subordinate positions. In cases where women have the same qualifications as men, they do receive lower remuneration for equal services (Lindsay, 1980; Parpart & Staudt, 1989).

Women's groups have formed in Kenya for the purpose of working together to improve their lives using a community-based approach. Women's groups are involved in various developmental activities that include income-generating projects related to agriculture which extends to the village level (Fong 1991; Parpart and Staudt, 1989). Since women make major contributions in agricultural production, they are assisted by the Kenyan government through the extension program in the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGO's). With the help of the extension worker, the women are introduced to appropriate farming and household

technologies that simplify their work and increase their efficiency.

Justification

The economy in all parts of rural Kenya depends exclusively on agriculture. One of the main objectives of Kenya's agricultural and food policy is to ensure food security at both national and household levels (Republic of Kenya, 1993). To accomplish this objective, the Kenyan government has created initiatives to assist farmers and to provide incentives in order to improve food production and to raise the standard of living in the rural community. Farmers depend on subsistence farming to meet the food requirements for their families and also for income. Women in developing countries make a significant contribution to agricultural food production and much quantitative research has reflected that. Yet no one has studied the lives of the women using the interpretive approach. This research was needed to enlighten scholars as to the experiences of rural Kenyan women and the meaning these women attach to their lives.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to provide insight into what it is like to be a rural Kenyan Luo woman as a homemaker, a farmer, and a member of a women's group. More specifically, this research explored nine rural Luo women's multiple roles regarding their work/family expectations and responsibilities, especially in relation to family traditions, household tasks, food production, rural developmental projects, and income-generating activities.

Reflections

Interpretive research involves subjective judgment of the data. The researcher's experiences are built into these subjective inferences and provide context in which the reader can interpret the findings of the study (Thompson, 1992). Therefore, before I was able to understand other people's lived experiences, it was necessary to reflect upon my own life. Ricoeur (1981) asserts that "the first function of understanding is to orientate us in a situation" (p. 56), and it "involves particular memories of items and events in one's own history" (p.17).

To share my lived experience with others, I focused on particular memories and events of my life. I am a third daughter of six children; I was born, raised, and attended both primary and secondary school in Nairobi, Kenya. Both my parents worked in a government hospital in Nairobi. My father is now retired and has moved to his rural home in South Nyanza, Kenya.

Since we all lived together, work was shared among all the family members. Household chores included preparing food, cleaning household utensils, sweeping, and washing dishes and clothes. Food purchasing and preparation was done mainly by my mother. My sisters and I assisted her with cleaning the house, washing clothes, and sweeping the floor. My father assisted in some basic work such as warming food for us when my mother was away from home or taking us shopping, out to eat, or to the hospital when we were sick. He polished his shoes each morning before he went to work and read the newspaper when he came home from work. He made sure the

locks were secure when everybody had gone to sleep. My brothers ran small errands around the house or played outside with their friends.

In our leisure time, especially on the weekends, the family sat together and generally talked about the day's events that were of interest, or a family matter that was of concern. At times my parents talked about their lives as they were growing up and would even talk about when they dated. My father often spent his time with his friends when my mother was away from home. In her spare time, mother crocheted.

Both my parents have always been very supportive and encouraging in all aspects of our lives. They valued education and as we were growing up they ensured that we all attended school. Whenever we had personal problems or pressing issues, they took their time to discuss the issues until they were resolved. I grew up in a very protected environment. My social life centered around church and school.

I have always had a close relationship with my mother. My mother taught me Luo (my ethnic group) cultural beliefs and values through stories or folklore. Some of these teachings came from my aunt and my maternal grandmother. My mother also taught me social etiquette that would help me meet societal expectations; such as, how to sit like a lady and to respect older people. There are some things that I learned through observations such as how to welcome and treat guests. She always said, "It is rude to ask whether one wants to eat or not--you offer them and if they don't want it, they will let you know." She taught me how to share; sharing is encouraged in most African societies. She would say, "You will always receive double of whatever you

share in one way or another, and if you give up your last item to a needy individual, God would provide you with more." According to her, anything good does not come easy--you have to work for it and perseverance is the key. All these teachings are what have helped me to become who I am. All those values that my mother instilled in me were very meaningful and helpful, especially when I left home for school here in the United States. Reflecting upon my mother's teaching, I had a sense of direction and was able to overcome various obstacles in my life. There were times when I was influenced by my friends to do things that were against my upbringing, such as using profanity. On such occasions, I would recall what my mother had said, "Ease off from your friends and leave them alone whenever you find out that they are not the right type of friends."

I also have had a good relationship with my father. Three years ago, I briefly visited my parents and he had to walk us up to the bus stop at dawn. I can vividly remember how cold and dark it was when my sister and I followed very closely behind my father who was carrying our suitcase. I had dropped one of my earrings on the way and did not realize it until we arrived at the bus stop. I informed my father and my sister about what had just happened. I removed the other earring and did not think about it again. Three months later, when I was briefly visiting with my parents again, my father came to my bedroom and handed me a piece of a broken earring that looked familiar. He explained that he had retraced his footsteps to and from the bus stop that morning, and on his way home found the earring although it had been

trampled on. I was touched by this incidence and realized how much he really cared for his children. I decided to keep the earring as a souvenir.

The combination of personal and societal teachings from both of my parents has enabled me to overcome various obstacles in life and has enabled me to comfortably adapt to different environments and to interact with people from different cultures. When I came to the U.S. I was away from home, alone for the first time, and had mixed feelings. Life was very challenging and for the first time I did not have anybody constantly giving me guidance. I felt that I could do anything that I wanted to do, but at the same time was afraid because there was nobody to guide me or to turn to in case I was faced with a problem unlike home where I had family, friends, and relatives. Their guidance enabled me to be flexible enough to fit within the contemporary society.

Definition of Kenyan Luos

I belong to a Luo community. My understanding and expression as a Luo provided a context for understanding other Kenyan women. The Luo people of Kenya are one of approximately 46 ethnic groups. About 98 percent of Kenya's population falls under three major cultural and linguistic groups, which are the Bantu, the Nilotics, and the Cushitic (Hubbard, et al., 1993; World Factbook, 1995; Worldmark, 1995). There are various ethnic groups in Kenya: the largest is Kikuyu (22 percent), Luhya (14 percent), Luo (13 percent), Kalenjin (12 percent), Kamba (11 percent), Kisii (6 percent), Meru, 6 (percent), Asian and Arab, (1 percent); other groups constitute 15

percent (World Factbook, 1995).

The Luo are from Nilotic group and live within the Nyanza Province near Lake Victoria in Kenya. (See Appendix A for maps of Kenya) They are the second largest group in Kenya, approximately two million people (Buzzard, 1982). They originally came from Sudan over the past 500 years (Hubbard, et al., 1993; Middleton, et al., 1995). In the pre-colonial era, Luo's were pastoralists. People moved from one area to another. Land was gained by males fighting for their territory. Women gained land access through their husbands. In the twentieth century the Luo settled in the Lake Victoria area where they adopted horticultural practices. Women were primarily involved in planting and harvesting (Buzzard, 1982). As a result of a sustained high reproductive rates, the land available to individual families dwindled (Buzzard, 1982).

A common characteristic amongst Luo of Kenya is that they stay connected with each other both in the urban and in the rural areas. This connectedness provides channels through which customary practices are maintained between the urban and the rural. The Luo share a uniform pattern of cultural beliefs and values in which age and wealth are highly respected (Middleton, et.al, 1995).

In Luo culture, men are viewed as dominant over women. This begins at birth. A newly born female infant remains with the mother in the house for four days; a male remains three days. After these specific days, the infant is brought out in the sun for the first time. The first contact with the sun indicates a man's seniority over a woman in terms of protection (Mboya, 1938).

Luo children are usually named according to the time of the day they are born or named after a well-known individual. For example, a child may be named after a deceased paternal or maternal grandparent. This practice is to perpetuate the name of the individual.

The Luo believe in telling their children rules of conduct. They also tell them folklores, mythologies, and stories, although not as common as in the previous years. The idea behind these myths, folklores, or stories is to teach values, such as to be kind, honest, humble, or to avoid pride or greed.

Luo people, like other ethnic groups in Kenya, are very hospitable and generous. Luo women often serve the best foods to visitors. They believe that guests are special and should be served foods reserved for special occasions, such as meat or chicken, which are raised to meet the obligations of their hospitality. Some Luo cultural foods include ugali (similar to mush) porridge, sour milk, sweet potatoes, groundnut soup (peanut soup), cassava, beef, chicken, aluru (non-scavenger small birds), green grams soup (dengu), maize mixed with beans or mixed with peanuts or a combination of both (nyoyo), various green vegetables, such as "osuga", "dek," and "omboga," and a variety of fish. Since Luos are from the Lake, they eat a lot of fish although it is becoming less affordable. They have a special pot for cooking fish. This particular pot is different from other pots because it has "ears", a short but wide neck, and is convenient for cooking the whole fish without breaking it.

The Luos have many food restrictions, mostly because of religious or cultural

taboos. Food preparation is laborious and done by hand using special tools such as grinding stones (pong gi nyapong). Cooking well is only one among several attributes of a good wife.

Previously, all family members were expected to be home at meal time and they ate in two groups. All males (father, husband, sons) ate together and all females (mother-in-law, wife, daughters) ate together. Certain foods were eaten only occasionally because they were reserved for ceremonial occasions. Domestic animals, such as cows, were slaughtered for specific occasions such as marriage, celebration, welcoming of a guest or a traditional medicine man, or a ritual.

The Luo rules of conduct also influence housing for husbands and wives. For example, the relationship among the individuals and marriage seniority determines in what position a house should be built. A polygamous Luo man does not build one single household for all his wives; each wife has her own house and manages her own household independently (Middleton, et al., 1995). The husband builds his house in the center known as "Duol". The wives' houses are placed along the husband's house according to seniority.

Luo women do not inherit land from their fathers, but have rights to use the family land and share in the control of production. Men use cattle as a means of "dowry" or "bride-price." This payment is made to the woman's father and in addition to the dowry; the bride price "is an attempt to recover the lost services of an industrious daughter" (Dolphyne, 1991, p. 2). The husband will send some cows to

the woman's parents at a later date as a fulfillment of one of the marriage obligations. Dowry depends on various factors such as the educational level of his wife-to-be, parent's socio-economic status, and their influence in that particular community. In case of divorce the man may claim some of his cattle and custody of the children. This depends on the decision made by the elders based on the problems between the couple. If the marriage was customary or traditional, the elders make decisions on whether to return the cattle or not. They may decide whether to return only a few or none at all.

Previously, in traditional religion, Luo worshiped their ancestors. They believe that ancestral spirits were active forces in their world; these beliefs are still found among many Luo (Middleton, et al., 1995). Following the colonialization of Kenya, many Catholic and Protestant churches tried to convert the Luo resulting in religious beliefs that combined traditional and Christian practices (Middleton, et al., 1995).

An understanding of the Luo culture was necessary to provide the context for the study. My experiences as a Luo woman provided me with a certain understanding of the Luo culture. This included ideas about family relations and traditions, cultural beliefs, marriage traditions, gender roles, and work responsibilities. A recognition of one's own assumptions or preunderstandings is also necessary for this kind of research because it serves as a preliminary orientation to what we are trying to understand. Listed below were my assumptions prior to conducting the research.

Assumptions

1. The respondents may feel oppressed and not be able to articulate it. They may not perceive gender inequality in their lives.
2. They assume their way of life is the way it should be because that's all they've ever known and that is the way other women's lives are. They, therefore, accept their way of life because they don't see any other alternatives.
3. The respondents will be open and provide information freely and honestly.
4. The respondents' lifestyle is automatically structured due to circumstances beyond their control, therefore they are caught up in the system and may appear passive.
5. Male children are valued more than female children due to traditional beliefs and practices.
6. Religion and cultural beliefs are still actively practiced by the Luo ethnic group; therefore, change is slow.
7. Traditional norms and values are maintained.
8. Belonging to a women's group is empowering.
9. Meeting basic needs is the women's primary goal.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Context

Gender Roles in Pre-Colonial Africa

In pre-colonial Africa, women were farmers, traders, and craft producers. They worked both in the house and on the farm. Women's activities were complementary to those of men; as producers and traders they were less subordinate to men (Midamba-House, 1990; Terborg-Penn et al. 1987), and were economically independent (Sharma & Young, 1994).

Women were responsible for daily domestic tasks of fetching water, collecting firewood, grinding grains, picking vegetables, preparing food, cleaning the house, looking after the children, and trading. They were assisted by their young daughters. Men were responsible for hunting, tending cattle, clearing land, and building houses, including leather work. Young boys assisted their fathers in herding. In cases where both men and women were involved in trading, men dominated long distance trade whereas the women were active in short distance trade. Long distance trading involved an exchange of livestock, food crops, salt, pottery, iron goods, pots, basketry, and wood carvings (Savane, 1980; Barman, 1990). Short distance trading involved an exchange of local goods, grains, vegetable products, and craft items in a more limited geographical range (Presley, 1992).

In some parts of Kenya workloads were unevenly distributed within gender

with respect to age. Young men were involved in warfare, cattle raiding, and pursuing cattle raiders, whereas older males were responsible for judicial, political, and ritual functions and were consulted on corporate political decisions. Elderly women were responsible for domestic tasks but they were assisted by their daughters-in-law and their children. They were also consulted in the disposal of family food production and family resources including property.

Both genders were involved in agricultural tasks. Women were responsible for preparing ground for hoeing, sowing, planting, weeding, and harvesting food crops. Male agricultural activities involved cultivating and assisting the women in some heavy tasks such as clearing fallow land, cutting trees, and tilling new fields (Kitching, 1980). In cases where men and women were involved in the same productive activity (such as farming or weaving), they produced different items.

Land use in pre-colonial Africa was communal and was under the control of the male elders. Oboler (1985) reported that some specific ethnic groups such as the Luo women owned livestock in their own right in the pre-colonial period. Although women did not have the rights to designate or sell land, the enforcement of land ownership reinforced the security of their land use. Although men had rights to land by virtue of being a member of patrilineage, they could not designate land individually, but could designate land rights to the women with other males in their patrilineage.

Soja (1968) states that the pattern of settlement and population density was flexible and was associated with environment and cultural restrictions among the

pastoralists who moved from one place to another clearing land. The natives cleared land, moved as freely as they wished looking for grazing land, and generally stayed within clan or family units. Due to the fact that the natives migrated from one area to another, they were not confined permanently in a particular area. This non-permanent situation resulted in a distribution of "unused" or "unoccupied" land which was used as neutral ground, buffer zones, and reservoirs for expansion by the neighboring people (Soja, 1968).

Changes Created by Colonization

Colonization brought about many changes in families' economic and social systems. It altered family roles, particularly the economic and complementary activities that existed between men and women in the pre-colonial period. Since the colonists were interested in exploiting trade, they decided to appropriate lands that were not used or that were not physically occupied at the time. In 1902, the British administration implemented a policy of land appropriation under the Crown Lands Ordinance Grant to enable the British to assume lands that were not "physically occupied." The aim of this policy was to stabilize and monopolize trade for their own markets and also make land available to Europeans for settlement and ownership (Trenchard, 1987; Soja, 1968). As a result of this policy, most of the Kenyan Highlands were appropriated by white settlers and were known as "White Highlands;" the rest of the land occupied by the native population was known as "African Reserves." Between 1902 and 1959, the British who came to live in Kenya lived as they would have back in their own country. They supported themselves through

farming in the White Highlands using modern farming methods assisted by the colonial government which provided them with bank loans, using Africans as a source of cheap labor (Soja, 1968).

A tax law was introduced that required male heads of household to pay taxes. The imposition of this tax on males was a means of coercing men to work for cash (Soja, 1968). Because of the colonial settler policy, land available to the Africans was limited. The Africans were confined in their own boundaries and were not allowed to expand their territories. They were also restricted from growing any commercial cash crop such as coffee and tea (Ominde, 1971). Due to land shortage and overpopulation in the reserves, there was greater pressure on natural resources which resulted in soil deterioration. Because of the tax policy and the need for wages, men were forced to move to the urban areas and work as casual laborers and in the "White Highlands." The women, on the other hand, were left in the reserves, mainly to produce food and nurture the male laborers (Etienne & Leacock, 1980).

The White Highlands practiced large scale farming and mainly produced cash crops such as coffee, tea, pyrethrum, cereals, and sisal. The natives practiced small-scale farming and produced food crops such as cassava, potatoes, bananas, and sorghum. As a result of the restriction on cash crop production on the small-scale farms, Kenyan society was pushed from subsistence to commercial farming (Trenchard, 1987).

Women's Work

The tax policy had a great impact on women because they were left with the

double burden of family and farm as men migrated to the urban cities for work to support their families (Annabel, 1991). In some cases, the women themselves left in search of employment in the urban areas or rural towns. The loss of men from the community and the farm disrupted the normal social structure of the family as well. The women were forced not only to raise their children with little or no economic support but also to meet colonial demands for sustaining cash crop production. In addition, although the women were now heads of households, they did not assume the actual status of household head which would have given them access to credit and other resources. This meant that the women were automatically put in decision-making positions for which they were not culturally prepared nor legally authorized.

Kitching (1980) cites further evidence of the widening division of labor among the rural men and women of colonized Africa. Apart from their domestic, child-rearing, and regular cultivating tasks, women were now responsible for agricultural tasks that men used to do, such as clearing land for planting crops and looking after domestic animals. To reduce the burden of increased agricultural labor, the women introduced labor saving crops, such as cassava, maize, and groundnuts; adopted new implements; and made trade and marketing a regular part of their lives (Hafkin & Bay 1982).

As a result of the prohibition of land expansion by the British colonial system, the natural resources in the native reserves were deteriorated due to overpopulation. After evaluating the political implications of increased population in the reserves, the colonial administration implemented land tenure reform system.

Presley (1992) traces women's progressive loss of status in Kenya to land tenure and employment patterns established under colonial rule. The objective of land tenure was to secure the boundaries and facilitate the use of land as collateral. Land tenure had a negative impact on the status of women because the fertile land on which food crops could be cultivated for consumption was reduced. When land was individualized, title deeds were given to individual males so that the systems of use-right, which previously included women, were now suddenly controlled by males (Midamba-House, 1990; Okeyo, 1980; Treore, 1984). The land tenure reform system was still in progress when Kenya became independent in 1963. In addition, since land inheritance in Kenya was from father to son, women for most part were now economically dependent on their husband's goodwill for available land to grow food. Women, however, had rights to use the family land and share in the control of production until they were married.

Contemporary African Women's Roles

Women's Productive Roles (Work)

It is estimated that approximately 18-30 percent of the world's families are supported by women (Public Health Association, 1986). In fact most responsibilities for world food production are carried out by women--in the family and on the farm. A number of researchers have indicated that in Africa 60-80 percent of agricultural labor is carried out by women (Annabel, 1991; Bryson, 1981; Buvinic & Yudelman, 1989; Public Health Association, 1986; Savane, 1980; Slayter-Thomas; Tadesse, 1984). The degree of participation varies from country to country and depends on the type of

farming and the natural environment. In Kenya, over 80 percent of women live and work in the rural areas (Terborg-Penn, et al., 1987). These important contributions are overlooked because statistics often miss family and informal sector activities and because data, even when collected, are not desegregated by sex. Women in those households are left to provide daily necessities for themselves and also to provide for their children with limited resources and facilities.

Rural women have much work to do in the farms, homes, and in the community. They are responsible for cultivating crops, as well as processing, preserving, storing, and preparing foods, all of which entail a series of time-consuming and laborious tasks performed mostly with traditional tools and techniques.

Cultivation of crops involves planting, weeding, harvesting, and carrying produce from the farms. After harvest, the raw produce is processed until it is ready for preparation. This involves tedious and labor intensive tasks such as threshing, drying, winnowing, pounding, grinding, sifting, and sieving. Therefore, food preparation for a meal can take from 2-4 hours. Related to food processing is food preservation. Women are responsible for preserving food for later use for their families. These processes include drying, shelling, smoking, and fermenting techniques.

The task of collecting water for household chores and agricultural purposes is very tiring, time consuming, and demanding. In rural parts of Kenya, there are some areas where there is no piped water nor transportation; therefore, women walk several miles to fetch water, especially during the dry season when most sources of water are dry. Since women use water for various household and agricultural activities, they are

forced to make several trips per day in order to meet these needs. A daily average consumption of water, including drinking, per person is approximately 30 or more gallons (Institute of Medicine, 1992). The larger the family size, the more trips they have to make, perhaps five or more trips per day. The task is odious and is overwhelming, especially when they have small children. In some parts of Africa, women spend between 3-8 hours per day collecting water (Annabel, 1991; Institute of Medicine, 1992).

In addition to collecting water, women are also responsible for providing fuel for food preparation or preservation. Various types of fuel are used in the rural areas, including firewood, charcoal, kerosene, plant residues, corn husks, and twigs. Firewood is commonly used in many parts of Kenya. The amount of fuel used varies, but generally, traditional methods of cooking use large amounts of fuel. Most foods, such as meats, are cooked for hours before they are tender. This means that the women have to carry sufficient fuel to enable them to cook effectively. Apart from the weight of the fuel, the gathering process involves, bending, stooping, and walking over rough valleys or steep slopes (Annabel, 1991). Women are expected to fulfill certain family or community obligations such as taking care of their sick families, relatives, or neighbors. In some ethnic groups such as the Luo and the Luhya of Kenya, when death occurs in a family or community, women are expected to cook and serve guests who have come to pay their last tribute. This may take from a few days to several weeks because the people who cannot come immediately come whenever possible. Therefore, the women are supposed to serve for as long as they come.

Women are also involved in birthing and tending the sick primarily through the use of herbs. In rural Kenya, women known as "Traditional Birth Attendants" or "midwives" are trained to assist other women in birthing due to the experience and expertise that they have acquired over the years in attending to the needs of pregnant women (AMREF, 1993; Population Report, 1988). These women, who are mostly over 50 years of age, are also knowledgeable of traditional herbs for treating certain diseases when people are unable to go to the hospital.

Women are expected to maintain certain social relations through entertaining with small gifts of food, crafts, or domestic animals. For example, if there is a community function women often get together and decide what to provide for special guests to the community. Such gifts usually include pots, millet, fruits, sheep, or goats.

Because of family and community expectations, women fulfill a variety of social obligations. Yet the work involved in these activities is overlooked. Nor is it documented, since in today's world, work is only defined as that for which wages are received. Many of the activities of women are invisible and are not included in statistics because they are not considered as "formal work."

Farm Technology. Despite the fact that most women were involved in subsistence food production, the introduction of improved agricultural techniques worked to their disadvantage because men monopolized modern technology. When the colonists came to Kenya, they came with their own agricultural machinery and men were taught how to operate it. Women were left out and continued to use traditional

tools and techniques for land preparation, weeding, and harvesting in subsistence farming. Lack of modern techniques and tools reduced the quality and quantity of the women's farm products. Even with the introduction of new technology, most agricultural policies were focused on modernization and improved technologies for cash crop production which was done by men in the fields rather than in post-harvest activities which were done by women (Abdullah, 1980).

Access to Capital. Men have economic control over women due to the fact that they own land (Buzzard, 1982). As a result of providing only men with title deeds Kenyan women have been disadvantaged in obtaining credit. Formal credit, available from banks, finance institutions, and cooperatives, requires collateral and the payment of interest rates which makes credit inaccessible to women because they often do not have assets or title deeds that could serve as collateral. In most cases, they have to depend on their husbands to get credit, putting them in a dependent situation, which was not the case before the intrusion of the colonists.

Women have occasionally obtained informal credit from friends, relatives, or from private business with no interest charges for basic needs such as school fees, uniforms, and paraffin. In some instances, the rural shopkeepers provide credit on mutual agreement for basic household commodities such as sugar, soap, milk, or a match box for a specific period of time.

Women have no control over the family income in some cases. Even though they may labor longer hours in both commercial and subsistence crops than their husbands, the marketing agencies channel the farm income through the male heads of

household as the selling agents of the farm produce. Cash income earned from these farms is usually controlled by men and they often spend the money on their own needs (Trenchard, 1987; Murray & Emecheta, 1981). This means that the women have less influence in household decisions regarding money and less access to the rewards, such as the benefits of new technology. When there is a shortage of land and labor, husbands may increase the acreage of the commercial crops at the expense of traditional subsistence crops. This often results in inadequate food to feed the family creating a constant need for cash among Kenyan women to supplement food supplies for the family.

Women's Reproductive Roles

In Africa, women are tied to their reproductive roles. According to Murray and Emecheta (1981),

In many ways, nature seems to be on the side of the ruling class, the man.

African women crave and want children. Some say that this is a natural yearning, but this is doubtful. What happens is that a girl child is conditioned right from birth into seeing her main role as that of wife and mother. She is brought up to think that without children she is not a full woman. (p. 8)

This is one reason why Kenya has experienced a population explosion, resulting in an estimated 27 million people in 1995 (Worldmark, 1995).

Family Planning. Population not only exerts pressure on scarce employment and housing but also affects health. Family planning is important for women both in developed and developing countries because it provides women with the opportunity to

choose the size of their family. According to Sadik (1990), childbirth risks in developing countries are higher than developed countries; one out of every 21 African women will die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth.

Major emphasis on family planning began in Kenya in 1967 (Ministry of Agriculture, 1992; World Bank, 1989). The purpose of family planning was to reduce the rate of population increase, provide basic health care within reasonable reach of people, and reduce the infant mortality and maternal morbidity rate. Family planning services are currently provided by Kenyan government health facilities and non-governmental organizations (World Bank, 1989). Reduction of population growth is dependent upon the success of the National Family Planning Programme which is intergrated with Maternal and Child health Services (Republic of Kenya, 1993). In Kenya the promotion of family planning education in both the urban and rural areas of Kenya has increased the level of women's awareness in family planning. Some women have recognized the need for smaller families and as a result have reduced the number of children in their families. This number is reflected in a drop in the fertility rate from 7.9 in 1979 to 5.4 live births per mother in 1992 (Republic of Kenya, 1993). Because of the increased awareness of family planning, about 27 percent of women of reproductive age in Kenya currently use modern methods of family planning compared to 7 percent in 1978 (Republic of Kenya, 1993).

Although the data indicate an increase in family planning methods, the rate of increase is slow considering the number of years the program has been in existence. The slow change in family planning is due to barriers that influence its effectiveness

including lack of education, transportation, resources, and time, plus religious and cultural beliefs and practices. The more educated the women, the less children they are likely to have since they are more likely to use family planning services.

Religious beliefs often contribute to the ineffectiveness of family planning. For example, in areas where Catholicism is practiced, the use of contraceptives is low. In addition, people in Kenya tend to have more children to counterbalance the high infant mortality rate. In other words, they tend to have more children to avoid the chances of being childless in case of disease or epidemic. Despite the effort of the government and non-governmental organizations in promoting family planning, the overall change is slow.

Some cultural beliefs make family planning ineffective. For example, in certain ethnic groups in Kenya, boys are more valued than girls because it is believed that they will take care of their parents in their old age. Another reason for this preference is the cultural practices of land inheritance. In an effort to bear a son, several children are usually born. Because Kenya is a highly male dominant society, some women have no ability to control their own reproductive behavior and will often agree to have more children whenever their husbands wants. Sometimes their husbands do not allow them to use contraceptives. In some cases, the desire to have more children is mutual because parents believe that the children will bring home more wealth and economic stability in the future, especially if they are well educated.

Another reason for wanting large numbers of children by some couples in Kenya is the laborious agricultural tasks performed by women. Since women are

overworked most of the time, they want more children who can help them in their family tasks. Work burdens, as well as isolation from clinics, contribute to the ineffectiveness of family planning. Even in cases where mobile units offer family planning services, some women do not use these services because they are too busy or lack transportation to take advantage of them.

Women in general are disadvantaged in that most birth control methods are directed to them. As a result, they often suffer from side effects caused by the use of certain contraceptives such as birth control pills, IUD (coil) and Depo Provera injection (Mungai, 1993). According to Brydon and Chant (1989), birth control methods that are provided to third world countries are often inferior compared to those in developed countries, and "sterilization is often promoted as a cheap-once-for-all solution to the 'problems' of high fertility" (p. 196). In addition, the drugs which have expired or been rejected in developed countries due to the dangerous side effects are used by women in the third world countries. Although men are encouraged to participate in family planning, the acceptance rate is low.

Health. Health services in Kenya are provided mainly by the government combined with nongovernmental organizations, church missions, and the private institutions. In 1992 the number of hospitals increased from 132 to 301; the number of health centers also increased from 735 to 2,2637 (Republic of Kenya, 1993). Rural areas in Kenya are mainly served by the health centers, sub-centers, and dispensaries. As a result of this increase, there has also been an increase in medical personnel. The number of registered and licensed doctors increased from 892 in 1973 to 3,554 in 1992

(Republic of Kenya, 1993). The population/doctor ratio also increased to 15.0 for every 100,000 people in the same year (Republic of Kenya, 1993).

Despite the increase of the health services and personnel in Kenya, health provisions do not sufficiently meet the population needs due to the steady increase in population. Poor sanitation due to lack of piped water and poor hygiene in various parts of developing countries are additional factors that affect health. Diseases such as malaria, anemia, and malnutrition are still common. According to the AMREF Annual Report (1992), malaria accounted for 30 percent of outpatient visits and 20 percent of inpatient visits in East Africa in 1992 and accounted for over one million deaths among children. The group that was at the greatest risk from this disease included children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women.

In most parts of the coastal and western part of Kenya, the infant mortality rate is high. Malnutrition in children between 1 and 5 years is one of the main health problems experienced in Homa Bay district. For example, in 1993 in Homa Bay district in the western part of Kenya, a study revealed that approximately 23 percent of the children suffer from chronic malnutrition while 24 percent exhibit stunted growth (Republic of Kenya, 1993). In the same area, the infant mortality rate in 1989 was 143 per 1,000 live births (Republic of Kenya, 1993). According to the World FactBook (1995), infant mortality rate was 73.5 deaths/1000 live births per year at the national level. Poor nutrition may result in iron deficiency anemia especially in pregnant women. According to Sadik (1990), nutritional anemia is associated with poor nutrition which affects as many as half of all women in Africa. Infant mortality is

also often related to poor diet and malnutrition. The risk of having low-birth-weight babies is greater for malnourished mothers. Other factors include poor water resources, low income, lack of education, and successive pregnancies. Education reduces the infant mortality and maternal morbidity rates by helping women avoid complications and make childbearing safer through prenatal care and better nutrition.

Early marriage and childbearing are commonly practiced in most developing countries, including Kenya. In Kenya, Luo women marry shortly after puberty (Buzzard, 1982) and childbearing begins at an average age of 15 in the rural areas (AMREF, 1993). In Kenya, most deaths are among women of reproductive age, and are usually related to child-bearing. Deaths are most associated with women having more than four children, giving birth less than 2 years apart, poor diet, and being younger than 18 or older than 35 years (Hertz, 1989; Sadik, 1990; UNICEF, 1991; UNICEF, 1993; Wilson-Ercoli, 1980). "Maternal mortality rate in various African countries may be as high as 550 times that in European countries" (Institute of Medicine, 1992 p. 81). In addition to the negative effect of large families on the women's health, large numbers of children increases the domestic workload to meet economic needs of the family, especially when women are the heads of household.

Health care through mobile units is available in various rural communities in Kenya and includes immunization of children and prenatal services for pregnant women. Despite the fact that these services are offered, some women do not use the services due to lack of time (to attend or take their children to clinics) or lack of money to purchase the medicine.

Since rural women are involved in household, agricultural, and developmental activities in their community, they are often overburdened with work. Overwork in addition to poor nutrition often leads to poor health and the situation is worse in pregnant women because of increased nutritional requirements. As a result, their health status is affected and they often suffer from nutrition-related diseases such as iron deficiency anemia (Wardlaw & Insel, 1990). Nutritional anemia affects approximately two-thirds of the pregnant and fifty per cent of nonpregnant women in developing countries (Institute of Medicine, 1992). If the condition is not improved, it often results in childbirth complications which may lead to infant or maternal death.

Reduced crop production results in poor nutrition which also increases susceptibility to nutrient deficiencies. As more sons inherit their father's land, the land which their mothers cultivate is reduced and often results in low food production (Okeyo, 1980). Since most rural women depend on their farm products as their main source of income, the land available to them may not provide enough food crops nor enough money to purchase more land. There may not be money to purchase enough food to feed the entire family. Therefore, the food is rationed or "stretched" to feed all family members. Insufficient amounts of food in the long run affect health.

Women's health, as well as that of their families, is determined by the types of foods that they consume. Availability of the foods in the environment depends on the type of soil and the weather in a particular area. Some foods are seasonal, which means that if women do not preserve or store the available foods for future use, the diet is likely to be affected. Repeated unbalanced diets eventually result in

malnutrition.

Although women produce most foods eaten by the family, they often do not eat adequately. Food restrictions due to taboos or cultural practices by some ethnic groups may also lead to insufficient food intake. There are some ethnic groups where men receive preference in the allocation of foods within the household; they are served first at the expense of the children and women (Oxfam America, 1988).

Women's health is also affected by the work they do. Due to the fact that women are the major household and agricultural workers, they are often exposed to hazardous environment (Maendeleo ya Wanawake, 1992). For example, as women prepare food for their families, they are exposed to carbon monoxide emissions from cooking fuel (Annabel, 1991; Maendeleo ya Wanawake, 1992).

Since women are the main water and firewood carriers, the heavy loads they carry on their backs supported by their head straps makes childbirth difficult, and causes skull deformity, especially among the Kikuyu women (Wiper, 1971). Luo women carry water or firewood on their head may cause headache. Women are also exposed to polluted water and are therefore vulnerable to waterborne diseases such as cholera or dysentery. Normally, household utensils and clothes are cleaned where water is obtained for drinking or cooking; therefore, it may not only be hazardous to the women, but also to their families.

In summary, women's health status depends on their educational background, availability of time and personal income, child bearing, work load, food production, and cultural patterns.

Women's Groups

In Kenya today women's groups are small, local community groups organized for the purpose of improving their lives, as well as those of their families. Women's groups are involved in many developmental projects and act as "entry level points" into the community for various government programs such as health sanitation and income-generating activities (Republic of Kenya, 1993). The groups are self-help by their orientation. The size of the group varies and depends on its objective or the area of location. In 1991, the Women's Bureau census reported there were 23,614 women's groups with a total membership of 968,941 of whom 11 percent were men (Republic of Kenya, 1993).

Women's groups in Kenya have specific rules that govern the use of their resources. Once a group is formed it must be registered with the government (World Bank, 1989). An organized group becomes a viable means by which women can get assistance and obtain credit and resources. Services may be channeled to them through the Kenyan government and other non-governmental organizations.

The women's organizations are supported by the Ministry of Agriculture through the Home Economics Extension program (Republic of Kenya, 1993). The front-line extension workers, under the supervision of Home Economics Extension Agents, work closely with the women's groups in various activities or projects. The projects often include building improved stoves, dish racks, fireless cookers, and water tanks.

Most group members meet at least once a month and discuss the group

activities or projects. Each member makes a monthly payment which is contributed toward a project or an item of priority expressed by a specific member. For instance, if a member needs a water tank or household items, the money given by the group members will be used toward the water tank or whatever the member needs.

Women's groups have made significant contributions to development projects and have spent considerable time, money, and energy to make them successful. Most of these projects have made their work a little easier, although more needs to be done. Women have to walk long distances to collect water, therefore, they have taken upon themselves to construct water tanks for each of their member's homes. In Kenya, firewood is the energy source for over 90 percent of the rural households (Maendeleo ya wanawake, 1992). Firewood is becoming more and more scarce due to deforestation and the weather conditions; thus, energy-saving stoves have been introduced which use approximately half the energy of a non-enclosed cooking fire. This not only saves the women time and energy, but also reduces depletion of natural resources thus promoting a cleaner environment.

In some communities lacking nursery schools, the women's groups have managed to build the schools using their own building resources, such as bricks for building and roofing tiles.

Women's Income Generating Activities. Women's groups also engage in income-generating activities. These activities include crafts, pottery, jiko or stove liners, basketry, food and livestock production, embroidery, tie and dye fabric, simple clothing construction, tree nursery, bee keeping, raising poultry and rabbits, fish ponds,

and posho-mills. The products obtained from these activities are used at home and the excess is sold for extra cash. For example in livestock projects, the milk is used by the group members and the rest is sold. Income-generating activities are long-term investments and often receive assistance from the government and non-governmental organizations.

Cultural Influences

Education

Education in Kenya can be divided into three distinctive categories: primary education, secondary education, and specialized training institutions, including the universities. These categories in turn fall into three types according to the source of aid received. The first type are the government schools. These schools are fully funded by the Kenyan government, have better qualified teachers, and have students who score better on the national exams (Odaga and Ward, 1995). These schools are limited in number, particularly at the secondary level, and they are very competitive. The second type of schools is referred to as "Harambee" schools. These schools are developed as a result of community cooperation; "Harambee" means pulling together for a common goal. The parents and the community are responsible for providing resources for these schools. The government, however, provides trained teachers. The third type are the private schools. These schools do not receive government assistance; the facilities are strictly provided by individuals.

The schooling system in Kenya has changed since independence. Until 1985 formal schooling was based on the British model of seven years of primary education,

four years of secondary, two years of advanced secondary education, and three years of university (World Bank, 1989). In 1985, the system was changed to one referred to as 8-4-4 education system (Midamba-House, 1990) which resembles the U.S. model of eight years of primary education, four years of secondary, and four years of university education (World Bank, 1989). At each level, students are required to take National qualifying examinations that determine whether the student will proceed or not. The Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) is a major national exam that is taken in standard eight which is equivalent to grade 8. The performance on the KCPE determines the type of secondary school the student will attend. Students who do not do well enough to be admitted to government aided schools attend Harambee schools.

Since the 8-4-4 system was introduced, there has been a remarkable change in the Kenyan educational system. One such change has been in the enrollment rate of students. For example, in primary level the female/male sex ratio increased from 45:100 in 1972 to 97:100 in 1992 (Republic of Kenya, 1993). In secondary schools, the level increased from 75:100 in 1972 to 97:100 in 1992. At the university level, female/male ratio in 1972 was 42:100 but declined to 37:100 in 1992. In teacher education it increased from 60:100 in 1972 to 75:100 in 1992. In polytechnic institutions, the ratio was 6:100 in 1972 and increased to 40:100 in 1992 (Republic of Kenya, 1993).

Despite the total increase in the country's enrollment rates, the enrollment growth rate for boys is higher than that for girls at all levels. According to Dolphyne (1991), the percentage of females 13-16 years of age attending secondary schools was

half the percentage of boys attending the same age cohorts. She further states that according to a 1979 census, 55 percent of the entire female population over 14 years of age had no formal education compared to 32 percent of males of the same age group.

A number of researchers have indicated that girls do not receive the same education as boys in Kenya (Brettel & Sargent, 1993; Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980; Maendeleo ya Wanawake, 1992; Midamba-House 1990; Presley, 1992; & Terborg-Penn, 1987). The Kenyan education system prepares boys for technical and scientific fields, whereas girls are trained in the arts and education. As a result, girls are unable to achieve at higher levels of learning since more emphasis is placed on science and math. In primary classes, girls are taught home science so that they can learn to be better homemakers while boys are taught crafts (Midamba-House, 1990). The number of girls who take mathematics, biology, chemistry, physical sciences, and physics at the secondary school level and qualify for access to higher education and training institutes is less than a third the number of boys (Kinyanjui, 1993). In addition, there are more government funded schools for boys than girls (Odaga & Heneveld, 1995).

One reason girls do not achieve or qualify for higher learning is that boys are given more opportunity to study than girls. In Kenya, as in many parts of Africa, children of both sexes are expected to assist their parents with household and agricultural tasks. The situation is worse for girls because they are expected to help with domestic tasks including child care after school hours and it interferes with their homework (Karani, 1989). As a result, they have no time to spend on their homework.

Another reason is that when a choice must be made to educate a girl or a boy in a family due to financial limitations, in most cases preference will be given to the boy (Dolphyne, 1991). Parents believe that girls will be married and belong to another family whereas the boy will remain at home and support them in their old age (Buzzard, 1982). The boy will also be able to carry on the family name. However, according to Parkins (1978), Luos tend to educate all children; they do not choose based on gender.

For girls who attend school, the chances of dropping out of school are higher than for boys because of such factors as poor test performance often caused by frequent absences from school. Some girls may drop out due to teenage pregnancy. A study of female adolescence and sexuality in Kenya secondary schools, carried out by African Medical Educational Research (1993), revealed that 89 percent of the girls in Kenya had engaged in sexual intercourse by age 15 and were not using contraception. Approximately two-fifth of boys compared to approximately one-third of girls complete primary school, just under half of those boys and girls go on to secondary school (Herz, 1989; World Bank, 1989). In some cases women have no opportunity to attend school. Some who have gone to school when they were young become illiterate later because their lifestyles cannot sustain their reading and writing skills, especially after a long period of time.

Despite the problems facing women in obtaining an education, some women have managed to overcome the problems. The women who have managed to overcome educational barriers experience discrimination at their work place. For

example. women who have the same qualifications as men do not receive the same salary or positions because the employers, through legal regulations, have managed to use different job titles for similar tasks (Lindsay, 1980).

Marriage

Marriage duties and obligations in Kenyan rural society are governed by customs and vary from one ethnic group to another. Marriage is legalized by fulfilling the customary rites and obligations. There are various types of marriages in different parts of Kenya: monogamous, polygamous, and woman-to-woman marriage. The type of marriage depends upon the financial or social status of an individual. For example, a rich and powerful man may decide to marry more than one wife, or a woman may decide to "marry" another woman to procure a son. Woman-to-woman marriage is practiced among the Kikuyu and the Nandi ethnic groups in Kenya. This type of marriage occurs in cases where a woman is a widow or cannot have a child; therefore, she "marries" another woman in the hope of having a son to inherit land. The children that her "wife" bears belongs to her as she stands as a "father". There is no sexual involvement between the two women but the female wife is allowed to be sexually involved with a man of her choice, whereas the "female" husband ceases to have sex with any man (Midamba-House, 1990). Although this type of marriage has been practiced among other groups as well, it is relatively insignificant today.

If a woman does not have a son, in most parts of Kenya she will not have anybody to take care of her in her old age, and will probably have to rely on her relatives for support. Polygamy is more widespread because of this. This situation

has become more difficult as people have become more individualized and tended to support their immediate families only, unlike in the past when everybody was concerned with one another and supported each other.

In Kenyan society, ethnic groups tend to observe a dual system of marriage known as statutory and customary. The Kenyan government policy seems to honor the two types of marriages which are both valid. Since customary marriage is primarily polygamous, a man can legally marry as many wives as he wishes. In a customary polygamous marriage, the first wife or an older woman is often more privileged, as compared to her co-wives, in terms of decision-making power regarding household and farming matters, including resources. They are often called upon to fulfill some of the family rites and/or obligations (Parkin, 1978). Seniority is determined by age or a woman's position based on the length of time she has been married (Guyer, 1984). In most cases, customary law does not alter the woman's right of land inheritance. In fact, in case of divorce, the property and the children's custody will automatically go to the husband because it is generally assumed that the husband has a right to own the property and keep custody of the children. However Butegwa (1989) states that "custody of minors may be determined according to African customary law, the guardianship of infants act" (p.57). In a polygamous marriage, work is shared among the co-wives. The first wife of the man is likely to take on all the work in her mother-in-law's household. The second wife will then share the work with the first wife work excluding child-care because it is believed to be an individual responsibility (Mackintosh, 1982). Murray & Echemeta (1981) and Terborg-Penn et al. (1987) argue,

however, that child care responsibility is shared in polygamous marriage and the mothers take care of each other's children.

One advantage of polygamy is that it often serves as a method of birth control by reducing close births in women. Some groups have customs which prohibit sexual intercourse during menstruation, lactation, and pregnancy thereby lengthening the space between children (Cummings, 1991). In polygamous marriages the husband can have the child with one of his other wives. This practice was advantageous to women in that it provided ample time for their bodies to regain full recovery before becoming pregnant again. Another advantage was that complete household and agricultural work is shared. According to Cummings (1991), polygamy, as an economic system, promotes communal and cooperative values, mutual obligations, and also ensures the economic security of the members of the household.

Statutory or Christian marriage is monogamous and is legalized through registration procedures required by the law as stated in the marriage agreement. The woman's parents do not necessarily give consent before marriage. The advantage of statutory marriage is that it provides an opportunity for mutual decisions on issues that may affect the couple, such as the number of children and birth spacing (Dinan, 1989). In addition, according to Butegwa (1989), "A married woman can acquire, hold and dispose of any property" (p. 55). In statutory marriage, household or farm work is not shared and the women have to do all the work by themselves.

In both customary and statutory marriages the husband is required to fulfill his marriage obligations of paying dowry or a bride price to the parents of the prospective

bride (Dolphyne, 1991). In addition to the bride price or dowry, in some cases, he will send some cows or goats to the woman's parents at a later date as a fulfillment of one of the marriage obligations. Bride price is not mandatory in statutory marriage but is currently practiced. The ritual is important to the women because they think they will be ridiculed in their community if their husbands do not pay the bride price for them (Butegwa, 1989). The type of animals for marriage varies from one ethnic group to another. Some ethnic groups such as the Kambas of Kenya will send goats instead of cows to the woman's parents (Hobley, 1971). In recent years the amount of cash or the number of animals has been reduced. Dowry depends on various factors such as the educational level of his wife-to-be and her parent's socio-economic status and their influence in the community.

Religion

Religion is found in most cultures in one form or another. According to Olupona (1991) there are over seven thousand new religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa. Religious movements arose as a result of the strong contact between Christian missionaries and the African leaders. In Kenya, "Roman Catholics constitute 28 percent of the religious beliefs, Protestants (including Anglican) 38 percent, indigenous beliefs (18 percent), and Muslim (6 percent)" (World FactBook, 1994, p. 212).

When the missionaries went to Africa in the 19th century, they went with their own religions and established their own churches, schools, and hospitals. The missionaries had an impact on the people's lives both socially and economically, especially women. The main objective of the missionaries, other than converting

natives to Christianity, was to train the girls for Christian marriage and motherhood and not for jobs (Brettel & Sargent, 1993). The girls were taught European skills, domestic science, child care, hygiene, and the Bible often in their own language. One of the conditions to attend missionary schools was to become Christian; therefore, the majority of Kenyan women became Christians during that period. Training girls in domestic science deteriorated women's positions in the job market because it didn't provide them with the necessary skills required to do the jobs. It also brought about many changes in their personal relationship within their family and community. Some of their cultural practices, such as circumcision practiced by certain ethnic groups, e.g., the Kikuyu, was discouraged. Christianity introduced beliefs and values which varied according to different religious sects. For example, the Seventh Day Adventists restrict use of pork, certain types of fish, tea, or any caffeinated beverage. The African Inland Church and the Seventh Day Adventist church both regard alcohol as sinful (Oboler, 1985). Roman Catholics allow dancing and use of alcohol but forbid use of contraceptives.

Role of Extension Program in Kenya

Agricultural production is a major economic activity in Kenya. One of the objectives of Kenya's agricultural policy and food policy is to ensure food security at both household and national level (Republic of Kenya, 1993). The purpose of the extension program is to improve and to maximize agricultural food production to meet the demand for Kenya's increasing population.

Agricultural services are controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture through

extension staff who are positioned at the ministry headquarters, provincial, district, location, and sub-location levels. Agricultural extension staff play an important role in the dissemination of updated farming practices and technologies to farmers by facilitating their adoption and use. Because of the important role of the extension staff, formal and informal training are offered in primary and secondary schools as well as agricultural training colleges throughout the country. Agricultural training is achieved through local universities such as Egerton University, Nairobi University, Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology, and the University of Eastern Africa at Baraton. Agriculture is also offered in specialized agricultural training Institutes such as Bukura and Embu Training centers. Budgeting and administrative control of the universities are controlled by the Ministry of Education. Home Economics was incorporated into the National Extension Program by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1984. Previously the extension workers focused on male farmers and as a result, women farmers were not reached.

According to Onyango (1987), the Training and Visit system (T & V) was introduced in Kenya in 1982. "The basic goal of the T & V system is to build a professional extension service that is capable of assisting farmers in raising agricultural production and/or income and providing appropriate support to agricultural development" (Benor, 1987 p. 138). The purpose of the T & V system is to reduce the staff to farmer ratio to enable one staff to cover a manageable number of farmers for effective extension services (World Bank, 1989). Another purpose is to increase the number of farmers and technical staff and therefore increase production. The farmers

in a sub-location are visited by a front-line extension staff member. T & V is sponsored by the World Bank and involves training front-line extension agents who teach farmers through selected contact farmers. According to the World Bank (1989), "3,500 front-line extension agents cover 1.7 million farm families, or an average of one to every 500 families. The groups of 500 are subdivided into 8 smaller groups of 50-100, and from those 5-10 contact farmers are selected (World Bank, 1989).

A contact farmer is a farmer who is willing to adopt updated farming practices and who also allows the extension agents to use their farms for demonstration plots. The farmers are taught new ideas and farming practices that have been released by the researchers. The home economics front-line agent is supposed to visit four farmers and one women's group per day. This means that within a month she is supposed to visit a minimum of 18 groups and make 54 home visits (Rodah Morogo, personal communication, September, 1994). The purpose of the home visits is to identify the existing problems, create awareness, and form new women's groups in a specific area. The front-line extension agents are supervised by a home economics extension agent. A fortnightly training schedule and monthly workshops are scheduled which involve the subject matter specialists, front-line workers, and the researchers. The district home economics extension agent supervises the extension agent and visits each division at least once a month.

Home Economics Extension Program

Home economics extension workers are trained in delivering home economics messages. The task of home economists is clearly seen as promoting self-sufficiency

in food production at a national level. Home economics agents are also responsible for improving the standard of living of the people by helping them develop better nutritional habits, therefore, making Kenya a healthy nation. Home economists are involved in training and working with women farmers since they are the major participants in agricultural food production. Specific home economics areas that are covered include appropriate technology, population education, nutrition and food production/preservation/storage, and home management. According to Kuria (1990), money management, simple book-keeping, and project identification including income-generating activities are some of the new areas that have been included in the current programs to address the demands of the development process.

Appropriate Technology

Appropriate technology refers to household tools made with local resources to ease women's work and also save time. Appropriate technology currently being advocated includes the Maendeleo improved stove, fireless cooker, tea cosy, dish racks, and water tanks.

Maendeleo improved stove. A Maendeleo improved stove is a clay stove that is built around a pottery liner called a "jiko liner" (Morgan & Spalding, 1994). The liner automatically provides the proper door size and firebox and pot rest which assures top efficiency. The tongue at the bottom supports the wood allowing the air to flow below the wood into the fire so that long pieces of wood will not fall out (Morgan & Spalding, 1994). The advantage of Maendeleo jiko is that it is economical, efficient, and saves about 75 percent of energy compared to a three-stone

firewood stove and can accommodate up to two or three pots (Maendeleo ya Wanawake, 1992). The liner is approximately 70.00 Kenyan shillings, which is equivalent to \$1.50 or the price of about 3.0 pounds of sugar (Macharia, J. personal communication, September 27, 1994). The advantage of a Maendeleo jiko is that it is economical, efficient, and saves about 30-50 percent of energy compared to a three-stone firewood stove (Maendeleo ya wanawake, 1992). In rural areas of Kenya, most women use firewood as the main source of cooking. It is becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming to find firewood because of deforestation and occasional dry seasons. For these reasons, women are encouraged to use this energy-saving cooking stove.

Fireless cooker. A fireless cooker is a basket or a cardboard box which is insulated with wool, old pieces of clothes, or blankets. A black piece of cotton material is used to cover the insulated basket or carton box. The lid to the basket or carton is made similarly. The food is parboiled and placed in the insulated cooker and allowed to cook slowly (Morgan & Spalding, 1994). The advantage of a fireless cooker is that it is portable and can be taken to the farm. It enables the family to eat hot food whenever the mother is away from home (Grace Ogore, personal communication, September 29, 1994). The fireless cooker is advantageous because it is smokeless and therefore safe for the environment, and it saves energy.

Tea cosy. A tea cosy is an insulated bag made with any type of cotton fabric using the same principles of making the fireless cooker (J. Macharia, personal communication, September 27, 1994). A tea cosy is mainly used to keep tea or food

hot. The advantage of a tea-cosy is that food does not have to be reheated once it is prepared. It can keep food hot for approximately 4 hours.

Dish racks. Dish racks are a piece of corrugated iron raised by four pieces of wood (Grace Ogore, personal communication, September 29, 1994). The purpose of a dish rack is to keep the dishes clean and dry away from dust or animals in order to improve sanitation.

Water tanks. A water tank is made of either cement and clay or corrugated iron sheets (Morgan & Spalding, 1994). The purpose of a water tank is to catch rainwater for household purposes. In some parts of rural Kenya, women are forced to walk long distances to collect water. To avoid this problem, the women are taught how to build their own tanks (J. Macharia, personal communication, September, 1994). This is mostly done in groups because it is too expensive to construct individually.

Nutrition Education

The purpose of promoting good nutrition to farmers is to enable their families to eat a well balanced diet. The women are taught how to raise chickens, rabbits, and even how to maintain fish ponds. Kitchen gardens are encouraged and the women are taught how to grow fruits and local vegetables in order to obtain maximum production. The crops produced are consumed at home and the surplus is sold for cash (Morgan & Spalding, 1994).

Women are encouraged to raise chickens for home consumption and the excess products are sold for extra cash. According to Chale and Carloni (1982), chicken meat is convenient because it can be stored longer than any other meat. Rabbits are also

encouraged because they are easy to care for and serve as a good a source of protein.

Population Education

Population education is another important area of concern in Kenya. In 1995, Kenya's population was estimated to be 28,817,227 million with a growth rate population of .99 percent per year (World FactBook, 1995). Factors such as education, employment, health services, infrastructure, and even land are affected by additional population; therefore, the Kenyan government and non-governmental organizations are working together to promote family planning in order to control growth rate in all parts of the country.

Home Management

The main emphasis in home management is resource management and home improvement. In resource management, the major topics taught include income management with emphasis on budgetary control measures, and time management, especially planning the use of time on a daily basis and over a period, such as a month (Kuria, 1990). Home improvement covers pest control, principles of hygiene and sanitation, food storage, house decoration, and handling and use of household equipment and tools.

This area is important to the farmers because it helps them maximize the available resources at minimized cost. It also helps them gain experience in budgeting to enable them to live more comfortably and at a reasonable cost.

Summary

Historically, men's and women's work were complementary. Women were

involved in domestic tasks while men were involved in herding; both genders were involved in trading. As a result of colonization, women's work was increased. They were not only responsible for household tasks; they also assumed agricultural work that was previously done by men, and they had sole responsibility for care of children. Women were also placed in decision-making roles for which the culture did not provide training or resources.

Contemporary African women's roles include production and reproduction. In their productive role, they continue to use rudimentary tools because they were excluded from the modern agricultural technological training given to men. In addition, they have no access to capital which would allow them to obtain credit.

Traditionally, rural African woman's reproductive role was to bear several children, particularly male children. Family planning methods have been encouraged in Kenya to reduce the population explosion. Family planning is important for a woman because it provides her with an opportunity to economically and emotionally take care of her children and protect her health. Women's health is also affected by manual work and inadequate nutrition.

Women in Kenya are actively involved in women's groups where they are taught skills that improve their daily lives and where they engage in various income-generating projects.

Cultural influences on education, marriage, and religion have a great impact on African women. Gender inequality in the provision of resources exists at all levels. Female children are less likely to be educated than male children because many African

societies are patriarchal. Marriage defines African women. Marriage and children provide status and security in their communities. Religious beliefs control what women eat through food restrictions and taboos.

The agricultural extension program in Kenya plays an important role in improving rural women's lives. Home economics extension promotes various educational projects, including appropriate technology, nutrition education, population education, and home management.

CHAPTER III

COMPOSITION OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the lived experiences of nine rural Kenyan women. The women were selected from the Luo ethnic group based on their status as farmers, homemakers, and members of women's groups. A feminist interpretive methodology was used to enhance what was concealed behind the women's cultural beliefs and activities in their daily lives. The inquiry began with the women's experiences as related to the researcher who sought to understand and interpret those experiences from the women's perspectives.

Feminist Research Methodology

For this research project, the interpretive mode of inquiry was used because it provides insight into lived experiences. A feminist approach to this research methodology was used because it is designed to illuminate and understand the lived experiences of Kenyan rural women and to utilize new knowledge obtained from their experiences to improve their lives through increased awareness of alternatives. My effort was to create a non-hierarchical relationship with the women which would allow them to engage in a conversational dialogue. Creating an egalitarian relation allowed the participants to express their feelings and voice their concerns. The elicited information about their lived experiences was explored for themes. The themes which emerged offer an interpretation which makes sense of or provides meaning for the hidden aspects of the women's experience. The researcher used the interpretive

approach to understand what it means to be a homemaker, a farmer, and a participant in women's groups.

Hultgren (1989) and others (Edwards, 1990; Oakley, 1981; Reinhartz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Suransky, 1980; Weber, 1986; & Weiler, 1988) have discussed how interpretive methodology is a more appropriate research approach for exploring lived experiences than non-lived experiences. This research is not only interested in reporting what the subjects tell from their own perspective, but also in searching for deeper understandings of their lives through questions such as "What is it like to be a Kenyan woman? a farmer? and a mother?". This research does not claim that it develops a concrete picture but rather that it increases the awareness of the experiences of the rural Kenyan women.

Two components that contribute to understanding this method are phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology is a study of lived experience (Manen, 1990). The term phenomenology is derived from two Greek words "phenomenon" and "logos." Phenomenon means "one which shows itself" or "come to light" or "appearance." Logos means letting something be seen. Therefore phenomenology is defined as "letting that which shows itself by its own self, be seen from its own self" (Heidegger, 1962). "To let which shows itself be seen from itself" in the very way in which it shows itself from itself." The aim of phenomenology is to bring into light or to uncover that which is hidden and to make explicit (Thavanez, 1962). It also aims to help us to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of our everyday experiences and asks questions such as what is this or that kind of

experience like. According to Hultgren (1989), phenomenological research tries to describe the experience from the point of view of the experiencer and in the process it hopes to achieve an awareness of different ways of thinking and acting for new possibilities.

Hermeneutics is a word from Greek origin which means interpretation. Hermeneutics is defined as theory and practice of understanding in relation to the interpretation of the texts (Manen, 1990). In this study the "texts" are stories of rural Kenyan women. Klein (1983) and Thompson (1992) have stated that feminist research is an appropriate method to use because it does not exploit women as research objects nor compare them against the normative (male) standards. This research methodology is particularly appropriate because it is research "for" and not "of" women. This methodology tries to take women's needs, interests, and experiences into consideration and aims to provide explanations of women's lives which can be used to improve their situations.

Research Procedures

Participants

Nine participants were selected from the Kendu Bay area in the western part of Kenya. The criteria used in the selection of the participants included: They belonged to the Luo ethnic group; they were farmers, homemakers, and members of a women's group; they were married and had children; they represented a range of educational background; and they were in their twenties or forties.

Luo ethnicity was selected because the researcher spoke the same language, and

therefore did not need an interpreter. In this type of research, understanding the language is extremely important as meaning is changed in the translation. The participant's educational level was between standard 1 (grade 1) and form 4 (grade 12). Five women were in their twenties and four were in their forties. The participants were initially contacted through the community health care worker and through the extension worker in the Kendu Bay area with further communication through letters and face-to-face dialogue. The participants and the researcher were from the same ethnic background which provided a connection between the researcher and the participants (Thompson, 1992). This kind of study requires that the researcher establish a good rapport and an atmosphere of trust with the participants in order to engage the participants in conversations where they would freely express their feelings and voice their concerns.

Data Collection

The method of data collection was in-depth individual interviews using a series of prepared open-ended questions and a tape recorder. The interview focused the women's roles as homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups. The questions focused on four major aspects of the lived experiences of the Luo rural women:

1. What is it like to be a rural Kenyan Luo woman?
2. What is it like to be a farmer?
3. What is it like to be a homemaker?
4. What is it like to be a member of the women's group?

(See Appendix B for specific questions.)

A pilot study of four Luo women was undertaken in 1994 before data for this research were collected. The study enhanced the interviewing techniques and also provided an opportunity for me to become familiarized with the women as well as health and extension professionals in the area. The taped interviews from the pilot study were transcribed into a hard copy and hand-delivered to each participant. I made an appointment and discussed the information to verify contents. I made charts of all the major categories based on the questions. For example, I listed the responsibilities of all the family members. By looking at the charts, I could clearly see the relevant information without going back into the scripts. By doing this, I noticed that there were some gaps in the questionnaire. I reevaluated and constructed more questions which was used with the women in this research.

After a period of 6 months I went back to the same area where I had collected data for the pilot study. Nine women were located with the help of the extension worker. The study was conducted in informal environments which included their homes and kiosks where they were working. Before the interviews began, the purpose of the study and its relevance to the rural Kenyan women and the research community were explained. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours each with a total number of three interviews for each woman. The interviews focused on the participants; I listened more than I talked and tried to avoid being judgmental at all times.

I transcribed all the interviews and used the chart I had developed to help me

identify gaps in the information that was being gathered. Since the information was elicited from the participants by engaging in a conversational dialogue, every interview was different. Yet I wanted to cover all the aspects of the questionnaire at some point. I transcribed their interviews mostly at night, and during the day I made observations and interacted informally with the women. We engaged in many conversations that were not taped. This was intentional because I wanted to familiarize myself with them and at the same time I wanted them to be comfortable with me so that when I came back and asked more questions, they would be comfortable and feel free to share the information that I needed.

After two to three weeks, I shared the information from the transcripts with them in order to discuss, clarify, and make changes in the previous conversations. This procedure was done three times to reaffirm content and interpretations relative to interview questions. Any distortion in meaning was cleared through discussion in subsequent interviews.

At the final interview the themes were shared with the women. By working together with the women on the themes, some of my biases were removed. This procedure was important in creating a mutual understanding between the researcher and the participants about the meaning of their lives to them.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with "immersion in the data" (Tesch, 1987). van Manen (1984) compares this to reading a book: "We enter it...we begin to care about the people in it...we experience action without having to act" (p. 59). I began by reading

each transcript over and over until I was familiar with the women, until I could recognize who was speaking without her name. The more I read, the more I cared about these women and was connected to their experiences.

Data were analyzed by uncovering the themes from each of the respondents. According to Tesch (1987) and Manen (1984), a theme is a brief statement that describes the content of the individual data unit. In other words, it is "what the data segment is all about." Tesch (1987) further explains that a theme can also mean a major dimension, major aspect or constituent, or simply a partial descriptor of a phenomenon studied. According to van Manen (1984), "Themes are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus experienced as meaningful wholes" (p. 59).

I followed the highlighting or "line-by-line" approach for identifying themes described by Tesch (1987) and van Manen (1984). This involved looking for statements in the text that revealed the experience that was described. I began the process by noting the words and phrases that kept occurring throughout the women's interviews. I read the text over and over, looking for statements that illuminated the experience that was described. This method ensured that nothing was left out. Each sentence in each line was considered as I tried to think what the recurring words meant to them and how they were related to the women's lives. I asked, "What does this mean?" and "Why does she do this?" Brown (1987) states, "Because people often have reasons for what they say and do, the researcher's interpretation is one of understanding intentions, meaning, goals, and values within the set of reasons (p.281).

The reasons I came up with helped me identify the themes.

As the themes began to emerge, I searched through the narratives of all the women and pulled out each segment that related to each theme. Again, I engaged in active listening to the women's voices to be sure the themes reflected their lives. With some assurance that the emerging themes expressed the voices of all the women, I organized them into parts and tried to fit them into a text in a way that it made sense. This time I asked: Do these reflect the women's lives? All the women? Which aspects of their lives? Are the themes related to each other? How? The themes made sense when they reflected all the women and the various aspects of their lives.

The interpretation was guided by the participant's narratives. I read the narratives again and revised the themes many times. Following Brown (1989), I made every effort not to distort the meaning of the interpretation. The meaning of the themes should be uncovered by being conscious of one's own assumptions to avoid biasing the analysis.

Finally, I asked, "What explains and connects all the themes?" According to Brown (1989), "The meaning of the parts of the text is determined by the meaning of the whole text" (p. 80). The researcher's interpretation should help others understand the meaning that is hidden behind people's actions (Brown, 1989). I tried to go beyond their conversations to interpret and find the meanings of their responses regarding their lived experiences.

Criteria for Validity

The following standards for judging interpretive research were used as the

criteria for validity in this study. The criteria and application to this study follows:

1. The research focus is relevant to life today (Brown, 1989). This research was important for improving rural Kenyan women's lives.
2. The explanation of meaning (or researcher's interpretation) must reflect both the cultural tradition and the historical-social context (Brown, 1989). The meaning of the themes that emerged were interpreted based on the participants' cultural traditions; the fact that the researcher was also a member of the participants' culture facilitated the safeguarding of the social-cultural-historical context. In addition, the participants were interviewed several times over a period of time; this process of multiple interviews helped clarify the women's roles.
3. The interpretation reflects the participants' narratives (Brown, 1989). The researcher shared the information from the interviews with the participants to reaffirm the content and create a mutual understanding of the meaning. This helped to avoid the researcher's biases.
4. The interpretation is made by interrelating the parts and the whole of text (Brown, 1989). Throughout the analysis and the discussion, the researcher attempted to show how the themes were interrelated.
5. The interpretation is reasonable within the context of social practices and the underlying assumptions shared by the social groups being studied (Brown, 1989). The feminist approach to data collection allowed the participants to guide the interview process with the researcher serving in a facilitator role

which enabled the participants to focus on aspects of their lives which were important to them. Also, the interpretations corresponded with previous quantitative research in the literature regarding African women.

6. The research shows the researcher's familiarity with the topic and the cultural traditions and historical-social context which shaped meaning in the text (Brown, 1989). Since the researcher belonged to the same ethnic group, she was knowledgeable of the cultural traditions and values of the participants. This knowledge assisted in making the interpretations faithful to the participant's narratives.

CHAPTER IV
RURAL KENYAN WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES:
AN INTERPRETATION

Process of Analysis

The purpose of this research was to provide insight into the life experiences of rural Kenyan Luo women whose multiple roles include homemaking, farming, and participation in women's groups. Excerpts from interviews with nine women were analyzed according to aspects of their lives--marriage, work, children--from which themes emerged. The framework for this chapter includes profiles for each of these women's roles using a particular woman's voice for each plus identification of themes, which includes a description and interpretation with quotes from the dialogues with the women.

Profiles of Rural Luo Women's Roles

Rural Luo women have many roles. They are homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups. All of the women interviewed functioned in all of these roles. The following section explains each of these roles separately using their own voices.

Being a Homemaker (Ada's Voice)

I am 20 years old and live with my husband and my two-year-old son Otieno in my father-in-law's farm in Kendu Bay. My dream was to get married, have children, and live in peace and it all came true. I went to school up to 5th grade but

had to drop out of school because I was pregnant.

I have many responsibilities in this house. I wake up in the morning at 5:00 a.m., prepare breakfast for my family, then help my mother-in-law at the farm between 7:00-7:30 a.m. From the farm, I take a bath and collect water. I collect water from the river which is several miles from here since we don't have running water. I have a neighbor here who has spring water in his compound, but it dries up sometimes when the weather is too hot. After I collect water, I bathe my little boy and prepare lunch. Lunch consists of one or two of the following foods: collard greens, sweet potatoes, stewed fish, chapati (similar to a thick soft tortilla), ugali (cornmeal mixed with water and cooked to a hard paste), "osuga" (a local green vegetable), sour milk, or hot tea. After lunch, I wash dishes, then wash clothes. We have to carry our clothes to the river when we want to wash because we cannot carry water and clothes at the same time. This means that I have to make two or more trips per day because I not only collect water for household tasks, I also collect water for my kitchen garden which is watered twice a day when there is no rain. I have to carry enough water for all household tasks and bathing. Anyway, after I collect water, I prepare porridge or tea which is around 4:00 p.m. After that I wash the dishes and go to the market to purchase food which is a distance from here.

Preparing a meal takes about 3-4 hours because everything is done manually. For example, in order to prepare something like peanut butter soup--which is one of the common dishes in this area--the peanuts have to be shelled, roasted, ground before it is cooked. The sweet potatoes that are served with the soup have to be peeled and

cooked. The utensils I use for cooking include clay pots, frying pan, and different-sized sufurias (iron pots). After dinner, I prepare hot tea and wash the dishes before I retire to bed. It is then about 10:00 or 11:00 p.m.

Being a Farmer (Florence's Voice)

I am 45 years old. I am married and live with my husband on a two-acre farm. My mother taught me farm work as a child and that is why I am able to work on the farm by myself. I am grateful that she was able to teach me farm work because it provided me with useful skills which I would be lacking otherwise. Now I am able to work without assistance in almost all the farm activities and can harvest just like anybody else. My family and I do not have to go hungry. When I have a good yield from my crops, I sell the food products in the market and I am able to buy some of the basic needs for my family. I have always done farm work in my life and I enjoy doing it, and it is unfortunate that my family members do not like farming. I spend between two and a half and three hours per day on my farm. I spend more hours on the weekend because I get some assistance from my children.

Crops planted in my farm include cotton, finger millet, maize, beans, groundnuts (peanuts), sweet potatoes, and cassava. Cassava is available all year round but the rest of the crops are seasonal. I also have a kitchen garden where I plant collard greens, onions, and tomatoes. The tools that I use at the farm include a hoe for digging and a little one for planting, weeding, and for harvesting. Food preservation is time-consuming. For example, cassava is peeled, dried, and cut into small pieces before it is stored in the granary. It must be ground into flour before it is

cooked. Maize and millet are dried and stored. Some people remove the husks from millet and store it in sacks. Since it can be attacked by the weevils, they sometimes add protective chemicals, but old women use ash to prevent pests such as weevils. The ash from burnt firewood is good and may be used to preserve grains before they are stored. Though I haven't used it myself, I see my woman neighbor use it. Alternatively, you can use food preservation chemicals from the shop. With vegetables I chop, blanch them, and put them in the sun to dry.

I work alone in the farm most of the time and perform all the tasks except for breaking the ground which is done by my husband. When I go with my children, the older child helps with the digging and weeding, and the young ones help by collecting the weeds and other unnecessary vegetation and putting them on one pile which I use to make compost. It is unfortunate that my family members do not like farm work though I go with the children on Sundays. They go to school during weekdays. My husband definitely does not like farming; therefore, I do the drainage, planting, and all other farm activities by myself.

A problem experienced with the crops is the exhaustion of land. I use manure to improve the its condition. Now what I do is I take a little bit of manure and put it in the hole with the seeds. It does well sometimes. We have poor soil in this area and the weather is too hot. I have a problem with the weather. You see I may prepare my farm and plant the crops but they all withered due to drought. Without rain there is no food. After the rainy season, mostly in March to May, there is usually a shortage of water. All the available wells dry up, and we are forced to go

for water all the way to Awach river. This is quite a distance and it becomes difficult to carry enough water for watering the farm and for household use. For example, in the dry season, one can go to the river several times to collect some water for all the household use. Can you imagine watering the farm twice a day? I water the first thing before the sun comes up and after the sun goes down. If I don't have enough food products due to lack of water, it means that I have to buy food and with limited resources, it can be very difficult.

Being a Member of a Women's Group (Miriam's Voice)

My name is Miriam and I am 40 years old. I am a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and I live with my six children in Kendu Bay. My husband lives in Nairobi. I was married when I was 18 years old. Although I had hoped to complete high school, I could only attend school up to standard 2 (which is equivalent to the second grade) because my parents could not afford to pay for my school fees. I am the last born in my family and both my parents love me especially when I was growing up. Since I am the last born in the family, (Miriam smiled as she recalled her childhood days) I was spoiled as a child and was not even when I did something wrong.

Apart from my endless household tasks, I belong to Oriang women's group. We are 52 members in total. According to what I was told the group started in the early 1960's and I joined it when it was already started. Since the group was able to obtain a loan, they bought a plot of land. After they paid off the initial loan they took another loan and built their own center where they are currently carrying out their

group activities. The group is involved in making projects such as wepesi or maendeleo jiko, jiko liners, macrame beads and necklaces, and flower and cooking pots. The group meets everyday from 10:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. Membership fee is 20.00 shillings. The group is governed by strict rules. For example, if you report late, you are charged 2.00 shillings. It is like going to work. If you are unable to come due to personal reasons, you must inform the group leader ahead of time. The first thing that we do when we meet is say a word of prayer. We discuss any matter of concern, then we work on our individual projects. We get paid according to the number of products we have made and sold.

I have gained some benefits since I joined the group because I find that I have daily income. I have also gained a lot of skills in the group's projects including the ability to detect problems with the hand water-pump tank. I would not have learned if I was at home. I was never trained in this area but it is God's plan and also a gift from God. There was a problem one day with the water pump and we couldn't figure out the problem. I was one of the three group members who were asked to come forward, push the pump, and see how it felt. I told her that it felt lose. The other two group members were asked to unbolt some parts. When we opened it, I noticed that there were three washers laying lose on top of each other. I looked and fixed it. I felt encouraged by the fact that I was able to do it. Since then I have been asked several times to fix it.

We have a home economics extension officer who comes here sometimes and teaches us various projects. She has taught us how to make a fireless cooker,

mandazis (fried sweet dough) using sweet potatoes, and how to bake a cake using local grain flour such as sorghum and millet in an improvised oven using sand heated on a charcoal jiko (stove). (Miriam smiled). I have only tried baking the cake once due to my busy schedule. She is supposed to come next week to teach us jam-making. I have not tried anything else that she has taught us because I spend most of my time here. My activities in the women's group include making pots, macrame, and painting various designs on some products before they are ready for sale. At the women's group, I am also involved in transporting clay from a farm purchased by the same women's group to their place of work for a fee. I also sell firewood to group members where it is used to fire clay pots whenever they need them. Since I am busy during the day everyday, I make at least four clay pots at night for extra income before I retire to bed. I also make macrame on some nights. You know, you can't be tired when there is a need for money, unless you have enough money.

A common problem experienced by this group is lack of transport. Marketing the finished products is also a big problem. Currently, the group members have hired some people from an advertising organization to come and train us on promoting our finished products. This is something new and we hope that it will succeed.

Themes

In conversation with these rural Luo Kenyan women, themes emerged which cut across all their roles as homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups. One overarching theme emerged from the interviews which ran as a thread throughout these women's lives: patriarchy. This theme influenced all aspects of the women's

lives--marriage, work, children--and seemed to form the base for the other major themes. Themes ensuing from patriarchy were conformity and struggle. These two major themes were both contrasting and converging. Sub-themes underlying conformity seemed to portray (1) a "good name" which included respect and reciprocity and (2) connection to "home" which included rituals and taboos. Struggle, the second major theme, was exhibited in hard work, conflict between old and new, and their reflections about life. All themes were overlapping and difficult to separate and yet maintain the complexity of the culture. Each of the following sections describes the meaning of the themes and their influence on the lives of these rural Luo Kenyan women using their own words.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a form of social organization in which males are dominant in the family, community, and across the culture. According to Mies (1986), "Historically, patriarchal systems were developed at a particular time by particular peoples in particular geographical regions. They are not universal, timeless systems which have always existed," in spite of "the fact that patriarchy is today an almost universal system" (p.37-38). Patriarchy is reflected in almost every aspect of Luo women's lives in Kenya as in other developing countries. This is reflected throughout childhood, adolescent, adulthood, and death. As in other parts of Kenya, their lives are governed by cultural laws and practices which favor men because Kenyan society assumes that men are superior to women

In Kenya, men dominate most aspects of life and are more privileged than

women. In Kendu Bay, male control is reflected in everyday realities. Luo women's rights are determined by the men's status. Although individuals acquire more power with age, men generally have power over women. Descent is recognized on the male side of the family. Therefore, children and property such as land belong to the father's side.

Marriage

In Africa a woman must be married to fit into the culture (Dolphyne, 1991). For example in Luo society, being married is looked upon more favorably than being single. In rural areas marriage provides economic security for most women. Women in the rural areas marry shortly after puberty mainly due to lack of funds, pregnancy, and labor needs (African Medical Research, 1993). Sophie is an example of a woman who married young due to difficult circumstances. She recounted,

When my mother died, my father married another woman. Sometimes he visited us and picked me up from my sister's house. He also died when I was still young. When he died, my two brothers, my sister, and I were left alone. When my older brother was married, his wife was very mean to me. When I lived with him, she brought some water and asked me to wash her feet and lotion them for her. My sister felt bad when she noticed what was happening so she asked me to live with her. My brother also wanted me to live with him. It was a struggle because my sister would come and get me from my brother and he would do the same. My sister was unhappy with the situation but it continued until I was fifteen years old when I got married.

As a result of early marriage, most of them have low educational status which makes them dependent on their husbands for economic support. Men have control over their wives because of this dependence. For example, Esther said,

Marriage provides an opportunity for someone to take care of me... It also helps me raise my children... Maybe the assistance. You see he assists me

financially so by all means I have to abide by what he tells me because if I don't, I am going to miss some of his assistance. (laughs) So I have to do what he wants.

Not only does he control money used in their household, but also any funds available for her family of origin. He generally controls her life because she has no other place to turn as her parents can't support her. In fact, they often need provisions from her. This factor is expressed by some of the women. Cathrina told,

The advantage of marriage is that when you are married, you live well and have your own place. When you are working or have your own business, you don't burden your parents with financial problems.

Because Esther earned income she was able to provide financial support to her in-laws jointly with her husband's income. Her in-laws, however, did not recognize her efforts. She said,

Whenever I visit my mother-in-law, like the last time I went, my husband gave me some money to take to her...The money was definitely collectively earned from the two of us, but they only praised their son and (laughs) they forgot that I also earned the money.

Marriage is considered an exchange of wealth. The exchange of gifts in marriage in patriarchal societies symbolizes the power men assume over women. Since a man pays the bride price for his wife to compensate her family for her services, he feels that she should cook, wash clothes, and other household tasks (Dolphyne, 1991). Therefore, the function of marriage for a Luo woman in the rural area is mostly to take care of her husband and children and be responsible for household tasks. When a man marries, he acquires the labor power of the woman and her reproductive potential to create more labor as well as continue the lineage. She is

expected to work and to produce children. Her ability to produce children is important because more children increases labor and more labor increases food production.

Marriage in Luo society is not thought of in terms of buying; it implies an investment in social relations between the two families. It involves the transfer of wealth to the woman's family and provision of labor and reproduction to the man's family.

Customary marriage in Luo land follows certain rituals. Traditionally, marriage transactions are discussed between the man's and the woman's families. The marriage is legalized when the girl's parents have given consent and the bride price in form of money or cattle has been paid. The number of cattle depends upon the man's economic status and the woman's educational level, and whether or not she comes from a royal, wealthy, influential family (Dolphyne, 1991). Previously men were assisted by their fathers in dowry payment. Nowadays men, with the exception of a few cases, are responsible for their own dowry payment. Because of Luo traditional law concerning the bride price and children, a Luo woman finds it difficult to leave her husband in most cases. Having paid the bride price grants men custody of the children. Also, a husband may claim a return of the bride price if his wife returns to her parent's house. Thus her parents and her kinsmen will encourage her to go back to her husband. The amount of bride price has decreased over the years. If the girl's parent's want a large amount of money for their female children, the many may not take marry her.

Under customary marriage practices a woman is not recognized as being married before her husband pays the bride price even though the couple may live

together (Dolphyne, 1991). Before the couple marry, their character background including that of their families is investigated by relatives from both families to ensure that the people who are marrying are not related, come from a good family background, have no chronic or hereditary illness or criminals in the family, and are known to be respectful or hardworking (Dolphyne, 1991). When a couple have been married under statutory law which does not require payment of bride price, under Luo custom such a marriage is considered illegitimate.

Previously, a woman's permission to marry was not a must. Abduction was a ritualized behavior; that is, the woman did not walk to her husband's home, she was forced or dragged to her new home (Hay, 1976). She cried, resisted and did anything under her power to avoid going to her husband's home. This symbolized the women's loss of her natal home and the man's gain (Murray & Emecheta, 1981; Dolphyne, 1991). Some marriages were not too far from her home, therefore her brothers and other relatives would come for her rescue. If she was not rescued, she maintained her position by refusing to eat and would even try to escape to her parent's home. All this time the husband and his family would induce her to stay. Anything she asks for was provided. Miriam's marriage was by abduction. She narrated her own experience.

I was married from around this place which is close to my parent's place of residence. I had set off for the market when I was abducted from the market where I had gone to purchase some food. My husband never took the initiative to inform my family that I was at his home. My parents, in-laws, relatives, and the elderly people from my clan searched for my whereabouts because they were never informed. When they finally discovered my whereabouts, the two families met, discussed, and negotiated the marriage requirements. I decided that it was good for me. How would you know a person that you have just met?

This ritual has, for the most part, been abandoned in favor of couples being introduced by families or friends resulting in dating and marriage. Yet connection to a woman's family of origin is restricted because of obligations to the husband's family.

Esther told,

You see, since I got married I can even count the number of times I have gone home. (laughs) I rarely go home. So most of my time I stay here. I usually take 2 days when I go home. I can stay for 6 months without going anywhere.

Polygamy in this ethnic group has persisted and remains high compared to other groups in Kenya. In Luo society, many men have managed to preserve their cultural tradition of marrying extra wives. Luo men are interested in biologically reproducing themselves and thus expanding their lineage by strongly adhering to the tradition of polygamy. Due to economic factors, the numbers of wives has decreased over the years. Currently marriages with two or more wives is less common. In polygamous marriage the older wife (first wife) normally stays in the rural area and the second wife lives in the urban area with the husband (Parkin, 1978). Esther's situation was a case in point. She described her feelings about polygamy:

I wouldn't refuse my husband if he wanted to get a second wife, but the way I have seen it, polygamy has actually brought a lot of problems to several families. Our family is one of them. My father had a second wife. Now immediately he married this second wife that was the time when he left us under the care of our mother. The disadvantage of polygamy is that they bring problems to the first family...There will be the problem of resources...It might end up that some children are educated while others are not.

One advantage of polygamy is that it provides security of the children in that wives care for each other's children (Murray & Emecheta, 1981; Terborg-Penn, Harley, & Rushing, 1987). Esther pointed this out,

The advantages (laughs) you might...anyway is such homes, in polygamist's home, you will find the co-wives working together; if one is sick she can help her in tilling the farm and even looking after the children (pause) so they help one another, and even in educating one of the children. If one is ill, not able to raise enough funds, the wives can help each other to educate the child belonging to one of them. Like the other time when we went to Harambee (getting together and raising money for a good cause) the man has three wives. Now I saw them walking hand-in-hand making the visitors comfortable [work close together]. And even one is barren, when one has no child in a polygamous home the children will make her comfortable because she will have the children help her in her household duties. She should not feel lonely as if she was alone in her own home where she was only with her husband and they had no children.

Martha also had negative feelings about polygamy but pointed out the advantages for men.

I don't think polygamy is good because it brings a lot of jealousy...It has an advantage because if there is work to be done--let's say at a farm--then they can all go at one time and work together and complete it faster than a farm with only one wife. Secondly, in a polygamous home, the man has food coming from all directions. (laughs) The man feels good? Yes, he feels good because he eats a variety of food here and there. Thirdly, he has a lot of helpers. If he needs anything, he cannot force himself to do it because he has a lot of people he can send. He will be well rested and will feel good. If there is war, he will have people that will help him fight the war. There will be many children in the home that can run errands. Farming is made easier.

In recent years, polygamy in Kenya has decreased but is slightly more common in rural than in urban areas (World Bank 1989 p. 65).

Work

Because of the gender-based division of labor in Kenya, culturally women are responsible for household tasks while men are responsible for outside tasks such as building houses or clearing land (Dolphyne, 1991). According to Susanna,

A woman's job is collecting water, grinding flour, fetching firewood, preparing food, taking care of the children, washing clothes, and sweeping the floor.

Like Susanna, Veronica told,

My role as a mother includes household duties such as sweeping the floor, washing the utensils, cleaning the house, and cooking.

Florence and Esther clearly distinguished men and women's roles. Florence explained,

Women's work includes cooking, washing clothes, collecting water...Men's work includes looking after cattle, thatching roof, building houses, and clearing ground for planting.

Esther concurred,

I don't know whether all other ethnic groups do it that way or it is only the Luo's. You see in a home it is not only cooking that is there to be done, we have many other tasks. Therefore, I would not feel bad if my husband doesn't cook because apart from cooking there are other tasks such as building a house and providing shelter for us. That is his task and there is no way you will expect him not to provide shelter. So there is this division of roles, of labor. You just have to do yours.

Because of the gender-based division of labor, Luo women, especially in the rural areas constantly live under pressure to abide with the cultural norm because of fear of what the people will say if they see their husbands performing women's tasks. They are obligated to perform these tasks (Dolphyne, 1991). They are reluctant to let their husbands cook or help them with other household tasks for fear people will say "dhako oronye", which means that the wife has stripped him of his manly powers and he abides with anything she asks him to do. This fear is reflected in some of their conversations.

According to Veronica,

Men are not supposed to sit by the stove and cook because it would not look right if they did. The women will not even let them do that because it is a

woman's job and people will talk about it. I will not feel comfortable with him in the kitchen because he is not supposed to cook...Men do not cook, it is women's duty to do that...My husband is not involved in any household task.

She continued,

If you assign him more tasks, his relatives will have a feeling or may say that you have overpowered him. His name will be the talk of the community and they will say that so and so is overpowered by his wife. Why is the woman controlling him?

There are some things that a man may want to do to help out in the house but Ada felt that the work is not only unsuitable but also that it would be embarrassing if the people from the community saw him perform these tasks. She gave an example from her own experience in her house.

This work is not suitable for a man to do (laughs)...Suppose I was here; he cannot cook or wash dishes, pick some vegetables from the farm, and I am not sick, and I am sitting here just looking at him...There is embarrassment when people will say so and so's wife is making her husband do her work and she is just sitting down. She does not respect her husband.

Esther also felt that it was her job to cook. She said,

I would not feel comfortable. I just have a feeling that it is my duty to cook. It is a tradition and looks bad. He would not accept it anyway. If he cooks and I am around, the people will see him and talk about it to other people. I just have a feeling that it is my duty to cook so I can't see why he should cook. Men do not cook because if they do, you really feel uncomfortable. If I am here and I am not feeling well, he cannot agree to cook. (laughs) No he cannot. I don't know what circumstances can make him do it. I only remember him doing it that other week when I was sick. He prepared ugali (cornmeal cooked to a hard dough) one day but it was quite a task...I think it is the tradition. It looks so bad (Both the researcher and the participant laugh.) when he offers to do it, I would still feel bad.

With Florence it was like a taboo for a man to do women's work. She said,

If people (her relatives and friends) see a man doing women's work, they may say "You know so and so's wife has just turned him into a servant!" if

husbands wash clothes when their wives are home probably working on other household activities. As his wife, you will not be comfortable when you are with the other women and he is doing household tasks because they will talk to you about it...If husbands wash clothes, that is what will cause embarrassment, therefore I will take it upon myself to do the job myself. (laughs)

She continued,

You should tell him not to wash dishes because you will be embarrassed should a visitor find him accomplishing those tasks. Someone will eventually find him doing those kind of tasks. Can you imagine if his friend comes along and finds him stooping with utensils and soap in front of the house, washing dishes?...For Luos it is shameful.

Because of the social expectations of the Luo women, women are expected to be knowledgeable in all homemaking and farm skills by the time they get married. A female child is taught both the household and farm tasks by her mother to prepare her to cope with the marriage expectations from her husband, her in-laws, and her kinsmen from her husband's side of the family. Florence was no exception. She said,

[My mother] taught me household tasks such as collecting water, firewood, cooking, and that is why I am able to do them without complaining about the husband not doing them...In my life, I do farm work by myself.

Children

Because children are a source of identity for Kenyan women, children provide esteem and security to Luo women (World Bank, 1989). When a woman is married and does not have a child, it is automatically assumed that the problem lies with her and not her husband. Failure to have children can result in her being sent back to her parents, and as a result the man is justified under customary law to marry another wife. Therefore, having children gives the women more status. According to Florence,

A woman with children is more respected and her husband is less likely to marry another wife.

Children also create a bond between women and their husbands. When women encounter problems in their marriage, they often stay in the marriage and endure considerable hardships because of the children. Another factor that encourages women to stay in marriage is the disadvantage women have in remarriage. Generally men do not like to marry divorced women or women with children (Parkin, 1978). In her relationship with her husband, Esther said,

I know that he loves me because I equally love him but several times we have to disagree. Sometimes we have to disagree with one another and then we come back together and we continue living together waiting for a day when divorce or separation may come. I am not anticipating for any of those but they are there.

Women with children are respected in the Luo community. Without the children in their lives the women would be unhappy. Florence stated,

It is obvious, I would be unhappy because it is children who give happiness though it's God's wish to provide children. A husband would marry a second wife if the first wife does not bear children. I have what I expected from marriage: children and self-reliance.

Esther concurred,

Yes, my life would be different without a child. I would be unhappy. People would probably be talking about me. I would not have anybody to keep me company or anybody who can help me with work...If I was married and didn't have children, my marriage would entirely depend on the relationship with my husband and my mother-in-law. Though most of the mother-in-laws are actually very harsh when it comes to such circumstances, the husband might persevere but the mother-in-law might not be. So if I didn't have children and my husband loves me then I will just stay, but if he did quarrel with me, talk ill about it, then definitely I will not stay with him.

Although Luos love children generally, they value male children more than

females because only males can inherit their father's land. Therefore, not only do men feel that their wives should bear children, but they have preference for males. Male children are also important because they carry on the family name. Luo men feel that they have not fulfilled the cultural expectations if they don't have a male child and may marry another wife with a hope of procuring a male child in the next marriage.

Gender inequality of females in Luo society is detected right from infancy. When a baby is born, Luos do not take a male child out of the house as quickly as a female child (Mboya, 1938). This symbolic gesture indicates that a man does not leave his home. It is also believed that a man is "wuon pacho" meaning the head of the homestead. Sophie told,

It is a Luo custom that boys spend four days in the house before they are taken out and three days for girls. A boy cannot spend three days as a girl because he is a boy. He will remain in his parents home whereas if you are a girl, you will be married and will leave home. The man is the cornerstone of the home. He cannot be compared with the woman.

Children are treated differently in the family based on gender. Martha told how her relationship with her parents was different from that of her brothers. She began with her relationship with her mother,

It was not very bad. She would beat me up sometimes especially when she asked us to do some household tasks and we never got around to do them. For example, she may ask us to wash some dishes, but we would go swimming until very late. When she came back and found those dishes still sitting there, she would get mad and beat us. My father would beat us if we went to play and came back home very late. You know us females are not like males, who can go anywhere and not get into trouble. When we went out to play and came home late in the evening for example, at 7:00 p.m., he could ask, "Where are you coming from?" and he must beat you. We used to think he was mean, but he was trying to straighten us. My father's teaching was that he taught me to follow examples of those who were working hard in school. He

encouraged me to work hard in school like my classmates to enable me to be independent in future and also help him. (pause) I did not follow his teaching; therefore, it did not help me.

Florence explained the universal problem for girls; they are ultimately the ones at risk. She explained,

Girls should take care of themselves from becoming pregnant. If a mother allows her daughter to go anywhere she pleases, including parties, then the mother will not be able to know the origin of her pregnancy if she becomes pregnant.

Most women in rural areas of western Kenya depend mainly on their farm products and some trade for income. The income obtained from their farms alone may not be sufficient to take care of their family's basic needs including children's education. As a result some parents are forced to make decisions as to which child to send to school because they cannot afford to educate all their children (Buzzard, 1982). Such decisions tend to favor male children. Veronica said,

If I didn't have enough money to educate both my son and my daughter and had to pick one I would choose a boy because he will be employed one day, and he will be able to help me. With a girl, she will be married and will live with her husband and only visit once in a while.

Summary

The influence of patriarchy was found in most aspects of Luo women's lives. Kenya is a patriarchal society in which gender inequality exists at all levels. It starts from infancy, persists in childhood, and is continued in adulthood. The man is considered the head of the household, therefore, he controls major aspects of family life. Luo women are economically dependent because men control the resources and make the decisions. Marriage for Luo women means productive and reproductive

roles. Because of the higher status of males, male children are preferred, and different rules and expectations apply to male and female children. Division of labor is well defined. Although men's and women's work roles are complementary, women are over-burdened as they have total responsibility for homemaking, farming, and child-rearing.

Conformity

Conformity was the key to having a good name and being connected to one's home. both highly valued among Kenyan Luo women. Having a "good name" (nying maber) required the conformity necessary to gain respect and reciprocity. Being connected to one's home required conformity to practices regarding cultural rituals and taboos.

Good Name "Nying Maber"

Having a good name in the community was found to be of paramount importance to the Luo society. It gives one respect and requires reciprocity. Veronica described it beautifully,

To respect and also talk nicely with the people in the community is important because it gives you a good name in the community. Let's say for example you need a favor in the community, you may have a child who has passed an exam but does not have sufficient money to proceed to secondary school. The community will be more willing to come together and raise money to take him/her to school if the parents and the child have a good name or have established a good rapport with the people.

Respect. One of the themes that was common to these women's experiences was respect. To them, respect meant conformity and obedience. Conformity meant following traditions and obeying one's elders as in most African societies. In a patrilineal society such as Luo, most women are brought up to be obedient. Culturally,

it is instilled in Luo women from childhood that they must obey, respect, work hard, and that they should also be responsible. Some are afraid to ask questions and may not be comfortable when challenged. The attitude is simply ingrained that a Luo women must do certain things or behave in a certain acceptable manner in order to fit into the culture. Respect is valued in the Luo culture and is practiced throughout life.

The women interviewed narrated how their mothers taught them. Susanna told,

My mother taught me to respect the old members of the society such that there should be no argument with the father and mother-in-law. She taught me how to live respectfully with my father.

Veronica concurred,

My mother's teachings were helpful. She taught me to respect my parents and after marriage to respect my husband.

Florence affirmed what her mother taught her and the consequences of not showing respect.

The main thing that she taught me as a child was respect especially the elderly people. How to address older members of the society and how to address my age mates. She taught me to respect people the same way I would respect my parents because if I was disrespectful to people, I would be disliked and despised. People would say, "The daughter of so and so is so disrespectful, whoever will marry her will get a rude wife." Other people would probably say, "That woman is ill-mannered." Then the whole village will get to know and nobody will respect her.

Respect is accorded to all age groups within all areas of social relations, e.g., parents, husbands, wives, in-laws, adolescents, and children. Esther told,

There was respect for my father which I have brought to my family. That is I also respect my husband, the way my mother respected my father.

Martha concurred,

She taught me that if I live with my husband I should respect him and if I have a mother-in-law, I should respect her. I was taught not to disrespect my mother-in-law and my in-laws. I was also encouraged to have a good relationship with them.

According to Martha, "Respect to one's husband means doing what he asks."

Miriam agreed,

You should respect the people whom you live with. When your husband asks you to do something, go ahead and do it.

This means serving his needs as Cathrina added,

The respect I give to my husband and working hard have assisted me in my marriage. By doing the things she taught me has helped me to live in peace. Respect includes the way you live. For example, you know that if your husband is supposed to take a bath, you prepare the water for him and take to the bathroom before he reminds you to do it for him. That is respect. If you prepare the things that he needs, for example, iron his clothes before he tells you to do it for him. He needs to find those things ready. Doing the things for him is respect. Doing them well is also respect...My mother taught me to respect my husband and she also taught me how to cook. The respect to my husband and hard work has assisted me in my marriage.

Sophie provided an example of how to create peace in the family to enable you to live with a cruel person. She explained,

For example, if I live with a cruel person and he even comes home and talks to you in a harsh tone, you can answer him in a polite manner to avoid argument with him. Therefore, when he comes home, he should be welcomed with respect, talk politely with the individual.

Marriage is what gives women respect in Luo culture. These were Cathrina's words,

Marriage gives you respect. People will not ill-talk about you if you live with respect

According to Susanna,

Once a woman is married, she is respected. Men will address her with some respect....A husband is like a shield or a cornerstone to a Luo woman.

She continued,

Marriage is good because you have your own family, you are more responsible because you are taking care of a family. You know what? You will be accorded respect. For example, if you are married, men will respect you and will not flirt with you. If you are unmarried, you will hear all sorts of things from men, some of which are disrespectful.

Wives within polygamous marriage should also be treated with respect.

Florence described how a polygamous husband may create peace with his wives. She said,

Some husbands have peace in the family by the way they treat their wives. They treat them in such a way that they love each other and treat each other as sisters. In other words, the husband treats them with respect and ensures that their desirable needs are equally met or equally provided for. For instance, if the husband buys one pound of meat for the first wife, he should also buy another pound for the second wife. If it is a dress, then each gets one.

Luo children are socially brought up to be seen and not heard. They are taught obedience and respect for all age-groups especially for the elderly. They are expected not to engage in adult conversations. When the parents have some visitors, the children are asked to play outside when they are finished with the chores. When they are needed, they are called upon. When they disobey or do not listen, they are disciplined. It is embedded in children at a very early age; therefore, the child learns the cultural values and laws and the consequences of not following them. To Martha, respect should be accorded to all people. She said,

I will teach my children to respect their parents and all the people who are older than them regardless of their relationship. I would encourage them to work hard in school and also teach them light household duties. I will also

allow them to observe and help their father with his manly tasks.

Since Esther's mother taught her to respect her father, she is doing the same thing with her children. She explained,

I also make my children respect their father now because we were also made to respect our father. I discipline the children whenever they do anything wrong. I talk to them and if there is no change, I use the cane. I have always seen a change.

Children are used to run errands around the house. Miriam was teaching her children how to respond when asked to do something. She explained,

Children should accept being sent without arguing back. They should obey when asked to do something. To respect all those in their age group because should a problem come up, they are the ones who will assist and will not hesitate or wait for their biological father to come. My children should respect their aunts and uncles the same way they respect me. This will enable them to grow up with respect.

According to Martha, children are not being taught as in the past. She reported,

The child should be discouraged from abusing people, throwing objects at other people and from misbehaving. Nowadays we don't quite teach them traditional beliefs. The children should be taught to be respectful.

A loosening of the norm of respect is a threat to an important factor holding these communities together.

Reciprocity. Luo people value a good reputation within the community because they want to attract support from the clan. This means that they have to act in certain ways so as to sustain the social values of the community and for fear of being ostracized in time of need or even during celebrations. The rewards may be in terms of a need such as paying school fees for their children or may not be monetary

as when one is building a house.

Having a good reputation or having a good name means others will be willing to assist although rewards may not be immediate. The invitation to participate in activities such as house plastering, meetings, marriages, funeral attendance, and cultural celebrations are informal. Information is usually transmitted verbally. Women are obligated to do work and are usually available to participate in community activities. If there is a crisis, such as death, women will congregate in the home and prepare food for the guests and well-wishers. In case of death more people are likely to show up. Women prepare the body for burial if it is a woman; if it is a man, the men perform the burial rites. In case of sickness they visit the sick in their homes and in the hospitals. Lack of participation results in lack of respect. According to Sophie,

If there is a new house to be constructed, the men will build the house and the women will collect water and plaster the walls. If one of the women die at home, the women will volunteer to wash and prepare the body for burial. In case of death of a man, the men will do the same thing. Some people are afraid of the dead body but the way people look at the situation is that something like that can happen to anybody and your turn may come one day. Therefore, if you are afraid to attend a funeral, nobody will attend yours. People may say "Did he/she attend anybody's funeral when he/she was living?" Very few people will attend their funeral apart from their immediate family or close friends.

Tasks are delegated according to seniority. Miriam told,

Women are always called upon to go and assist in entertaining visitors and are assigned tasks according to their seniority. For example, an elderly woman will not be asked to cook if her daughter-in-law is there. Tasks are also assigned according to what someone is good at. If an individual loves to talk, she maybe asked to sit and talk with the visitors. If one is good in serving food, she will be asked to do so. Some women are shy and may bring food to the visitors and leave it on the table without saying a word.

Participation in the ritual ceremonies is expected. Esther explained, "If there is any ceremony, we have to participate in some of the rituals." Or if there is a need for extra hands in the community, people help each other. Cathrina explained,

If we need someone's help, we ask them to come and help and if they need help, we will reciprocate.

Veronica concurred,

When there is something to be done in the community--let's say there is a new house to be plastered--we are informed ahead of time and we often get together and help each other. Some of us will cook, serve guests, bring some water, plaster walls, and entertain.

Ada, like Susanna and Veronica, told,

When there is a new house to be built, the women usually help with some parts of construction. Let's say before the new house is built, the women can collect some grass even if some men are not around...You can get assistance when you inform the people what you want to do because none will come to assist if you don't ask them to do so. They will not just come out and say, "So and so is building a house, let me go and help out." No they cannot do that.

Other than working together and helping each other, women provide love and support to those who are sick. Miriam said,

I participate in activities such as plastering walls, farm work; for instance, weeding as requested by the community or even when one is sick. I also assist in washing the patient's things or even visiting the sick at the hospital whether one is a relative or not.

Florence concurred,

The women in my community helped by collecting water, cooking and serving guests. Some women had to plaster walls while the men fixed the roofs. Women also participate in the construction of new latrines in particular schools or a new house in a particular village. You know sometimes we get together when somebody is sick in the house and we pray for them in their house.

Respect and reciprocity were two sides of a coin which give Luo women a

good name in their communities. A good name was important for quality of life through connection to the community.

Connection to "Home"

Luos have a strong connection to their lineage and a community spirit. Most families in Kenya have two households--urban and rural. Due to job commitments or schooling for children, a family may live in an urban area, but they will maintain social relations with the rural community. These people have a strong tie to their land: therefore, regardless of their residence in any part of Kenya, they often return to their ancestral home or "dala" because they belong to the community there. Ancestral homes are a source of identity to Kenyan people. (Cohen & Odhiambo, 1992).

In addition, in order to maintain rituals and customs, resources such as foods or medicines are often transferred between the urban and rural areas. Luos have a home or "dala" in the rural area which has a special meaning to them. A home or "dala" in Luo sense is an ultimate place to live after retirement and for burial after death.

Dala is established in the rural areas through a ritual involving family members. "It cannot be a personal affair" (Cohen & Odhiambo, 1992). At the very minimum it includes the eldest son, his father, and his mother. Initially the eldest Luo male builds his house (simba) on the right side of his father's compound close to his father's gate. He establishes his home when he moves out of his father's compound with his wife into a new house. Thus no matter how much one "feels at home" in a given house (ot) one cannot just declare it a home (dala) without the appropriate ritual (Cohen & Adhiambo, 1992).

Rituals and Taboos ("chira")

The Luo ethnic group in Kenya have strong cultural beliefs and superstitions which influence their lives. These beliefs have been handed down from generation to generation to account for things in life which cannot be explained. These beliefs have been set into rules that guide them in what they should do and what they should not do to keep them safe from the unknown. Many of the rituals and superstitions are based on their connection to the earth because the land is so important to Luo people.

Previously people in the community interacted with each other with a close-knit family-type relationship. Children were reprimanded by anybody. There were some social rules that governed the traditional laws. People who lived in these communities had obligations to obey these laws in order to fit into the cultural norm. Prohibitions were sometimes intended to reinforce cultural rules and expectations. Luo people believe that if an individual avoids these rules, something bad will happen.

Luo people generally have a strict order of prioritizing and sequencing things. The three things are: birth of a child, marriage, and death. These three events are absolutely important and are surrounded by tremendous amounts of taboos and prohibitions. If you do not do certain things that you are supposed to do, you will be punished. Breaking the taboo may bring sickness and/or death. That is, violation of cultural laws may result in the affliction of "chira." Chira causes death and sterility as a result of engaging in illicit sex and breaking seniority rules (Parkin, 1978). The punishment may affect you directly or it may affect your children or your grandchildren unless an "herbal cleansing" remedy or "purification" is performed.

Violations of cultural laws (Parkin, 1978) include:

1. Sin of omission (Something that is not done that was supposed to be done).
2. Sin of commission (Something is done which should not have been done, such as violation of a cultural law).
3. Interference with the equilibrium of things (Any infringement of the cultural law, such as non-observance of rituals and taboos).

Many of these taboos regulate behavior due to age (seniority) and or position due to marriage. Several cultural taboos relating to relationships are found through marriage.

Naming Children. Luos have multiple names. A child can be named according to the time, weather conditions, circumstances, or after a dead person with gender differentiation. For example, a child born at night is named Atieno if it is a female or Otieno if it is male. A child born on a rainy season is named Akoth if it is a female, or Okoth if it is a male. In such circumstances of twins, one is named Apiyo and the other Adongo. A child can be named after his/her grandparents to carry on their names. There is continuity after death; the dead are not gone. Luos believe that after death, the spirit still lingers on.

Names have a purpose of protection. If the child is not named when the mother has a dream, the child may die. A dead person can manifest himself or herself in a dream to the parents at the time of birth. Sometimes the name in the dream overpowers the gender line; therefore, you find men named after women or Atieno instead of Otieno and vice versa. Rituals performed at the birth of a child symbolize

that the living is somewhat still connected with the dead and the dead are connected with the unborn. If you do not do what you have been asked, you will be punished.

The punishment may affect you directly or may affect your children or grandchildren.

Cathrina narrated her experience in relation to naming children. She stated,

One of my daughters is named after her maternal grandmother and the other one after her paternal grandmother's sister. The reason why I named the first one is because when I was pregnant, my older sister had a dream and in her dream she had come with my mother to take me home from the hospital. But you see I had not delivered at the time. When the baby was born I named her Beatrice Achieng. The baby cried continuously for a long period of time. When my family came to visit me at the hospital the baby was still crying. They looked at the baby and noticed that she resembled her maternal grandmother and called her "Joan." When this name was mentioned the baby stopped crying immediately. For this reason I named her after her grandmother whose name was Joan. My sister and mother were unaware of what had happened.

After a month when my second baby was born, something strange happened. The baby was fine and I had laid her down to go to sleep. I was getting ready to wash some clothes. Suddenly the baby started crying continuously from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. I tried everything to make her stop but was in vain. I finally decided to take her to a private doctor but he could not find anything wrong with her. The doctor asked if the baby was accidentally dropped by someone. She was given some medicine to help her go to sleep but it did not work. It was now some minutes to 1:00 p.m. and she was still crying. The mothers at the hospital looked at me and said "Lady, your child is not sick, the baby is crying for a name. Just call the name of some of your deceased relatives that you can think of. You know I could not think clearly at that time since the baby was crying. I started calling out names just for the sake of calling. One of the names that I had mentioned was my grandmother's sister's name who had died some time back. When her name was mentioned the baby immediately stopped crying. It seemed like she had taken a deep breath. I breast-fed her and she did not cry any more and finally fell asleep. The baby had cried till 4:00 p.m. before I could call the right name. She had cried so much that her eyes were swollen and seemed like they had bubbles.

Wife Initiation (Keto Kendo). In Luo custom a newly married woman does not cook. Her mother-in-law cooks for her and they all eat together. She is not involved

in any household tasks for a while. After a short period of time, the woman will share her mother-in-law's kitchen. Food is purchased together and they both cook and eat together. In the months to follow a fireplace is built by her mother-in-law for her. After she has given birth to one or two children, she will move to her own house as a wife (Hay, 1976 & Trenchard, 1987). keto kendo is the ritual for an installation of a separate household. In Luo tradition, a newly married woman is invested as a wife. Although she has the basic apprenticeship, she is helped by her mother-in-law to improve the homemaking skills learned from her mother and is put to a test. A ritual of marriage initiation is performed to symbolize that you are now a wife in that home (acceptance). Martha describes the procedure,

A fireplace "keto kendo" is built for her by her mother-in-law. She cooks for her father, mother, brother, and sister's-in-law. From then on she can cook and eat at her own house. In case of death of her husband, if the ritual is not carried out, she will be afflicted by "chira."

Ada explained,

A fireplace must be built for a newly married woman. If this is not done and her husband dies, she will get "chira."

After you are married, a fireplace is built up and a pot and some vegetables is given to the new bride on the first day. You cook and invite your in-laws. From then on, you are allowed to cook in your own house. You are not allowed to build your own fireplace before that ritual is done. If you do, you will get "chira". The person who will build the fireplace for you is either your co-wife or your aunt.

Esther has gone through the ritual. She stated,

I live in my own house but we share the same compound and prepare food together in her kitchen because traditions do not allow me to have my own... You know when you are married you will not be allowed to cook in your own house. After some time, when you have stayed with your mother-in-law

for a while, she will provide you with some food preparation items to enable you to prepare food when you move to your own kitchen. She will prepare the fireplace first; if not, one of your co-wives or your husband's brother's wives will. They will provide you with the necessary items. One might give you a cup, a plate, and then you will be expected to prepare something delicious like meat and invite the people in the home or community to come and feast. After that you can begin to prepare your own food in your own kitchen. If one of your husband's younger brothers decides to marry, his wife will now cook with his mother and the wife who used to cook with her mother-in-law can cook her food in her own kitchen.

Therefore, a mother-in-law is very important in orientating a newly married women into the home. Sophie did not have a mother-in-law when she got married, but she was unaware of this until after the fact. She told about her reaction when she found out.

When I was married, I didn't know that my mother-in-law was deceased. When I came [to her husband's house], I found a young woman who cooked for me for only 4 days. On her last day, this lady told me that she was traveling somewhere and I should fix my own food. When I realized that my mother-in-law was not available, I panicked. When I realized that my father-in-law was alone with no one to cook him food--I had only been in that home for four days--I was uncomfortable. He called and told me that he lived alone and the lady who had been helping him left. Therefore, I could go ahead and do whatever I could do.

I went back to my sister [since her mother was deceased] and explained the situation. I also told her that my husband was not a Catholic, and I did not want to go back. My sister encouraged me to go back. She told me not to neglect an orphan. She said, "Why are you running away from an orphan and you are one? If God has planned it that way, just go back and stay." It seemed like my sister was the go-between person [one who introduces the couple to each other and convinces the couple to marry]. When he came to visit my sister she noticed that he was a quiet young person. Therefore, she went ahead and made some meeting arrangements. My husband came and got me and this time he said that he was a Catholic. (laughs) My sister sent my brother to come and get me from my husband but when he came, he was told that my husband's family had planned to take some cows to my family the following day. Sure enough, the cows were sent to my home the following next two days.

Because her husband-to-be was not a Catholic and she would not have a mother-in-law, she had decided to go back to her sister's home. Yet when the husband took the cows to her sister, she decided to go back to him, illustrating the importance of this ritual in marriage.

Food Taboos (Kweche). These are certain beliefs about food that are traditionally practiced by people in the Luo society. In the previous years, men were mainly involved with livestock while women were involved in weeding and harvesting. Hay (1976) states,

The association of women with agriculture and men with livestock and wild game is mirrored in a series of food taboos that prevented Luo women from eating chicken, eggs, milk sheep, rabbit, hippo or elephant meat and other kinds of game as well. (p. 91)

According to Cathrina,

An older woman cannot eat chicken when she visits her daughter and son-in-law. We have seen some women eat chicken but nothing happens to them. They eat chicken in their homes but when they come to visit their daughter and son-in-law they do not eat it. If my children's father is around, I don't eat it. I give it to him but when he is not around, I eat it.

Sophie concurred,

Elderly women are restricted from eating chicken. Currently there are some places where women will not be served chicken when they visit. A cow, a sheep, or a goat will be slaughtered for her. A mother will not eat chicken in her married daughter's house...Men eat agoko (kidney). The tongue is for old men but I don't know why...The chicken gizzard is for males. The women can eat any other part.

There are some families whereby men are served particular pieces of meat before other family members. Susanna told,

If chicken is cooked different pieces are eaten by different family members.

When your husband is around you cannot eat the gizzard. I don't know why.

Sophie agreed,

When chicken is served, specific pieces are eaten by specific family members. When a husband is around, he eats the gizzard. I really don't know why...An older person sitting at a table will eat it when he/she sits with the younger people.

In addition, she told of certain beliefs concerning food given children,

I heard that according to the Luo beliefs, if children are fed eggs when they are young, their tongue will become heavy and may cause a delay in speech.

Household Establishment (Goyo Ligala). Who can build a house and where is also dictated by Luo culture. For instance, Luo custom requires that an elder brother should build his new house at a specific site that has been allocated to him. The ritual of installing the new house requires that the father show him where to build his new home (Parkin, 1978). The son cannot build his home in his father's compound. He must move out of his father's compound and establish his own home, "goyo ligala." The son is accompanied by his father and his eldest son who carries a cock, firewood, and dry grass. His father carries a walking stick and the second-born son carries an axe. When they reach the particular place where the house is supposed to be constructed, the father lights the fire and the cock is tied close to the fire (Mboya, 1938).

Florence gave an example of what happens if the rituals are not followed,

Building a house. Now for example, the house up here. When we build a house, the main door to our house should not face my father-in-law's main gate. If our door faces his main gate directly, this can create problems. (pause) It can even cause death. There is a man from Rae (small sub-location in Kendu Bay area) whose father had four wives. He built a house for one of

his wives in this area. The man went and built his house in his mother's compound. His mother's main door was facing the main gate. The man went ahead and built his house in such a way that it blocked his mother's main door. As a result of this, he lost his wife and child. Before his wife died, she was sick and her husband ran away and left her in the house; the wife went back to her parent's home where she died. Her child also died later on. It is believed that "chira" killed her. The mother and the child died from chira due to the fact that her husband's house had blocked his mother's main door.

Esther explained about a woman's role without the presence of her husband,

If a woman moves from the house that she lived in with her husband, to a new house without her husband, he cannot enter that house. They say he will die...If a woman builds a new house in his absence, if he comes and sees (pause) he never left the house there, now he will be surprised and he will begin asking "Whose house is that?" They say that shock in the first place will kill him. The question, "Whose house is that?": That shock is enough to kill him unless they take some "manyasi" (a particular Luo herb used for cleansing a particular law that has been broken) together before he gets into that house to prevent anything bad that might happen.

Planting Seeds (Golo Kodhi). The man initiates planting by digging the first hole and planting the first seeds, followed by the first wife. If the man is not there, they have to wait for him to come home. Regarding planting Cathrina told,

When seed crops are planted it must specifically be planted by specific individuals because if you don't something will happen.

Miriam maintained the tradition of keeping seeds in her mother-in-law's house. She explained,

I am not allowed to keep the seed crops in my house. My mother-in-law is deceased but I am still restricted to keep the seed crops in my house. I have maintained the tradition otherwise I would get "chira." A child must not roast and eat (pause) say maize. You must first taste it before he/she consumes it. If a child eats without their mother's knowledge, he/she will have done that due to their ignorance and nothing bad will happen to him/her. When harvesting period is approaching, you must teach your children not to harvest before the crops are ready.

Florence said,

A first wife plants the first seed crops in that particular home. The women married to the younger sons must wait until the woman married to the first son plants the first seed crops first...A daughter-in-law is not supposed to plant seed crops before her mother-in-law and likewise in harvesting the first crops.

Incest Taboos. Within Luo society there are a variety of rules designed to prevent incest. It is considered an absolute abomination for a father to sleep with his daughter. If this happened, the father is ostracized and driven out of the clan. Sexual intercourse with all family members is prohibited; this includes father, mother, sister, or brothers but extends beyond immediate family. In Luo traditions, there is no word for cousin. Therefore, your uncle's daughter is your sister and your uncle's son is your brother. The same thing with uncle. There is no word for uncle; therefore he is called father.

To avoid incest, Luos avoid any intimate proximity with family members, especially parents of opposite sex. It is against Luo cultural norms for children to see their parents or their parents-in-law naked. Sophie told,

A married woman is not allowed in her mother and father-in-law's bedroom.

The consequences of breaking this particular taboo are described by Martha,

[My mother] taught me that as long as my father and mother-in-law were alive, I should avoid their bedroom because if I see them naked I may suffer from "chira".

Parents and any relative should not sleep in their son's or daughter's houses (Parkin, 1978), nor can adult children sleep in their parent's houses.

Esther admonished,

Sleeping under the same roof with your mother-in-law's house. No you can't do that! How can you sleep in your mother-in-law's house? You can't. You will have to sleep in one of your brother-in-law's house or other relatives house. What will happen if I sleep at my mother and father-in-law's house? Eh! I don't know but then it is something that ...eh! eh! eh! That is a taboo of the taboos that if you break...Oh no you can't! In her house? (laughs) You will have to sleep...even in your grandmother's. Maybe a late grandmother or a grandmother who is living. That is the mother of the father of your husband. That one I think you can sleep in her house and not your mother-in-law's house. (laughs) Even me when I was married, my husband had not built a house and I didn't sleep in my mother-in-law's house. It is a well-known fact and it is obvious (pause) that is an obvious fact. I had to sleep in one of my in-law's house; it happened to be an empty one.

In Luo customs, when children reach puberty, they no longer sleep at their parent's house. Sophie confirmed this,

When a girl starts menstruation, she cannot enter her parent's bedroom because if her mother is still young and is able to give birth, she may stop having children.

Alternate generations are supposed to be close even in their relationships. For this reason grandchildren, both married and unmarried, can sleep in their grandparent's house. This closeness also allows opportunities for grandparents to teach the younger generation the traditions and values through folklore.

Burial. Unmarried women are either those who have never been married or those who have been divorced. In Luo culture, women were expected to be married. Being unmarried was considered abnormal. It was believed that unmarried women would haunt their homes if they were buried in the home; therefore, they were buried outside the fence of their father's compound to avoid it. This belief is currently not practiced in some homes due to religious influence. All of the women told of the advantages of marriage as opposed to being unmarried in terms of burial. Esther

explained,

There is security particularly for Luo married women. In case of death when a woman is single, there will be a problem. Where will we bury her?

Miriam concurred,

In case of death, you will have a secured burial place...But unmarried Luo woman cannot be buried in her father's compound because there is fear that something bad will happen to her family.

Ada said,

Marriage is not bad because if you are unmarried and you are faced with a problem in your home, it becomes a big problem. This kind of thing just happened. There is this girl who died not too long ago. She was buried outside her home.

Susanna observed,

One advantage of marriage is that if a lady is married, in case of her death, she will be buried at her husband's compound. But an unmarried Luo woman cannot be buried in her father's compound because there is fear that something bad will happen to her family.

Sophie narrated her unmarried daughter's current situation in relation to the taboo. She said,

Marriage is good. Even if you are married only for a week, it is good. Let me explain you something about myself. I have a daughter who is not married and she really wants to get married to enable her to live in her own house. If she is not married and she dies at home, she will be buried outside her father's compound.

She continued,

A girl cannot be buried her home. A man can. My door does not face my father and mother-in-law's house, therefore if I lose my daughter, I will not bury her outside the home, I will bury her at my mother-in-law's home because my gate is located behind my mother's land that she is not using. That is like a family cemetery. There is nothing wrong with that because you have buried her at your mother-in-law's or at her grandmother's compound. If, for

example, you bury your daughter in your compound and you happen to have four boys, and you don't have enough piece of land, when your sons are ready to build their houses, where will they build their house? He cannot build a house close to his sister's place of burial.

Seniority. In Luo tradition, a position of seniority in the family is determined by age and gender. Family rituals are performed according to seniority. Veronica told,

A younger girl should not be married before her older sister. If it happens, she cannot eat anything that her younger sister cooks. This tradition is not as common as it used to be.

Susanna and Ada concurred,

A younger man is not allowed to construct a house before his older brother. It is the elderly people who might know the reason...If an elder son has not built a house, a younger son cannot build one.

Veronica added,

If a man is ready to build a new house, the people in the community will be asked assist in prayers. The man (the eldest) will lead the way and will carry an ax followed by his younger brother who will carry a cock. Their parents and the rest of the people will be praying. The older boy will be the first one to dig the first hole where the pole will be placed to build the house. The cock and the ax are symbols that indicate that a new house is getting ready to be built.

If the order is broken, a misfortune or an ill-omen will befall whoever breaks it. For example, eucalyptus plant is normally used when fencing a homestead.

Traditionally, as explained by Martha,

A man cannot plant "Ojuok" in his father's compound before he moves out to his own. He will die if he defies the tradition.

Florence concurred,

A man cannot plant "ojuok" in his father's compound. He has to move from

his father's compound first. If he does not, he will die.

A man is considered the head of the family. A wife married to the first-born son of a particular home is accorded a senior position regardless of her age. She has priority to perform any rituals, beliefs, and practices in the home (Guyer, 1984). She must always lead (Parkin, 1978). There are a number of performances that she must officiate and which cannot be done without her. She is well-respected and consulted in most family issues. In case of a polygamous home, the first wife gets the senior position followed by the second wife and so on. For example, according to the seasons she must plant or harvest her farm first. The husband must also build her house before building the other wives' houses. Most rituals are initiated by the senior wife.

According to Luo custom, widows were considered unclean. In case of the death of their husbands, certain rituals were performed to cleanse them. Although this ritual is practiced by some individuals, it is dying in some areas. Martha lost her husband about a year ago. She reported,

Now that I have lost my husband, I cannot cook for my co-wives nor can I enter their houses or spend a night in any body's house unless I go home first. I must go home and spend a night at my parent's house. Currently, I am cooking at my own kitchen and not at my mother-in-law's kitchen. My co-wives can come to my house but cannot eat anything that I cook. It is a taboo. When I go to their house, I can eat because they are "clean."

Summary

A major theme among these rural Luo Kenyan women was conformity. To them conformity was critical to having a good name and being connected to the

community. To have a good name, Luo follow cultural rules in order to earn respect and acquire reciprocity. Following the cultural rules, including rituals and taboos, also enable a Luo to be connected to the community. All of the sub-themes associated with conformity--respect, reciprocity, rituals--were intertwined and overlapping and were evident throughout the women's lives.

Struggle

These Luo women struggled in a variety of ways: They struggled because of the hard work required to provide for their families, and they struggled with conflicts between the traditional ways of living and modernity created through colonization and Western religious influence. Their reflections illustrated some of their unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

Hard Work

Rural Luo women face hard work. Martha echoed the voices of all the women when she said simply, "After you get married, you seek ways that can enable you to survive. All these things require that you work hard."

Women's workloads were increased as a result of colonization (Annabel, 1991). When men migrated to the urban areas to look for employment, women became heads of household. They were not only responsible for the household and farm tasks, they were also responsible for taking care of their children alone. According to Esther,

The women, not necessarily in my case, have a problem of living by themselves. The husband stays 20 kilometers from her. She has to take care of the children when they are sick. She is all alone taking care of them, their schooling, and all that while the men are just staying alone. She is single in the real sense, but she is married.

Since men's salaries in the urban area were only enough for their survival, many were unable to financially support their wives. Women were left with the responsibility of taking care of their children with no financial support (Annabel, 1991). Western influence thus created economic hardship for Luo women. Martha explained what it meant to struggle with these hardships,

If you are the kind that does not like to work hard, you will encounter some problems. For example, you may not have a way of helping yourself and you have children, you will be forced to start some kind of business, work hard. If anybody gives you money, you can buy your child something to eat because if you don't feed the child, he/she will cry and you are responsible for the child anyway. (Long pause)

Miriam affirmed,

My mother taught me two things. She said, "Now that you have decided to get married even if some problems come up later on, you will see how to solve them." When I left home I realized what she was trying to tell me before I was married...I decided to rely on myself and use my head so that if I am experiencing some problems, I am able to overcome them. When God adds his blessings, it keeps me from thinking too much...God provided me with children but I have to look into ways of educating and clothing them all by myself. God guides me on how to take care of them. Sometime ago, I was engaged in casual labor in order to earn a living. I would weed people's farm for income. I left the casual contract when I joined Oriang women's group.

Esther articulated well the situation many of these women find themselves in and the role in the family they must play. She explained,

The first role is to provide for the family. You see I work mainly to provide for the family. So when I get money I can be able to buy food for the family, buy clothes and other family needs. (laughs) I have a maid to assist but sometimes I am forced to work even when I am sick because like now, I have a maid who is not residing here with us so she goes home in the evening. Then you see, I have to do the cooking by myself because I find it difficult to tell my husband to go and cook. (laughs) It looks quite awkward and then the children I have here. The last born is still young and cannot do the cooking then there is nobody else to do it.

Even when husbands are nearby, it seemed that these women shouldered the burden of providing for the family. Sophie describe this problem for women,

If you can get a loan and are able to start some kind of business and you happen to have a bad husband your business will go down. You may find that a woman who has no husband and is good in business, is doing much better than when she has a husband who takes from her. If the husband has realized that his wife makes a lot of money, even if he is hardworking, he will sit and just eat. The same thing is happening at this restaurant. I feel that he can work if he wanted to...If you don't do it [work], won't you go to bed hungry? You just work so that there will be food at the table.

Sophie's own circumstances left her with providing financially for her family. She continued,

I have experienced a lot of problems because my husband is unemployed. He teaches in Church. He teaches free of charge. Teaching in church is useless because there is no benefit or any salary. All the difficult tasks that an individual can accomplish to teach his children are ignored. (pause) The children that we have all passed their exams. One of my sons had to stop at 10th grade due insufficient school fees. I took him to carpentry training. My second son is trained in car mechanics. He is trained by one of my relatives but lacks his own tools. He is hardworking but cannot work without the required tools. If their father was hardworking, they could have completed their school or their training.

All of the women experienced difficulties having enough money to provide for their families. Florence explained,

As we have children in school I spend the family's income in paying anything that is required in school. I buy them clothing including school uniform, pens, books, and other items that may be needed. School uniform is nowadays expensive. It is over 100.00 shillings. Exercise books (notebooks) cost 40.00 shillings depending on the type of book needed and grade. The textbooks are obtained from the common community library established from funds raised through harambee. An 80 pages book would cost between 40.00 to 50.00 shillings. That is the type of book our son Ouko, a standard 5 pupil, would need. A pencil is still cheap, 3.00 shillings only.

Veronica concurred,

Women lack money that would enable them to trade in some business of their choice, to avoid depending on their parents. So that they do not have to ask for money if they want to buy house hold items such as soap...It would not be possible for me to get a loan from anywhere because I am not working anywhere. Problems that women experiences are related to money to buy the necessities. Sometimes you don't even have money to buy medicine for your children.

Even Miriam's ideas about what she would do with extra money illustrated how basic her needs were.

One thing that I would like is ... You know, now at home, if my husband would send me extra money, I would like to purchase a cow...If funds were available, I could employ somebody to help me with the household tasks while I work at the women's group...I would also like to have a new house because I have an old house and the wind keeps blowing a part of the roof off most of the time, especially when it rains.

At an earlier age, these rural women were encouraged to engage in small trade business in order to be independent. Martha admitted,

My mother encouraged me to have some kind of trade to enable me to be independent if possible and be serious about it.

The other women shared their strategies for supplementing their family incomes. Sophie told,

Before I started this kiosk business, I used to go to the lake and purchase some fish and sell in the market. I stopped that kind of business because I was not getting much. The money that I obtain from the kiosk is enough to cover most of my needs but sometimes I don't get enough therefore I have to borrow. One month may be good but the following month I may be operating at a loss.

Miriam continued,

When I don't have enough money...Let us say I can...I usually cut down a tree from my compound, split and sell it as firewood from which I may earn 50.00 shillings. My son helps me to cut the tree or split it into small pieces every evening after school. Didn't you see me carry some firewood the other day when we met? I even bring some to my colleagues here so that I can get some

extra money. I bring and sell them in bunches of 20-25 shilling each. They usually give me their orders when they are ready to fire their pots before they are sold. These days I have my older daughter who helps. I knead the clay while she takes charge in food preparation. After supper at about 8:00 p.m. I get down to business and by 1:00 a.m. I will have molded 4 pots--the type called "oigla" (a pot with a short and wide neck). If I fire them safely without breaking any of them, I am sure of getting 40.00 shillings from the sale at the market. This will enable me to buy whatever I need.

When I transport clay to the women, I am paid immediately and in cash. The sunshine cannot change the color of my clothes for nothing. (laughs) I have to charge them for the damage (wear and tear) caused by the sunshine. (laughs) The problem with me is that whenever I make some money it is all spent at the market before I get home. When I get home I have nothing.

Cathrina confirmed,

Apart from working in my kiosk, I also do embroidery for women. Gradually and with a good plan I am able to get whatever I need. For example, I may plan that this month I will embroidery and make enough money to buy three dishes. This goal is usually accomplished but if it does not happen according to my plan, I try to buy items gradually until my goal is accomplished.

Martha concurred,

I take some groundnuts from my farm and sell them at the market. I sold a sack full of groundnuts last year. I divided it into two and I sold it for only 1000.00 shillings. The other half was saved for planting for next year.

Sometime even their businesses do not provide enough for basic necessities.

Cathrina disclosed,

The problem experienced for instance is the lack of funds. If you rely entirely on your business for income and the basic necessities such as soap or other needs, sometimes the money needed to fulfil the basic needs will be more than the amount of profit made from the business. That will hurt business and it will go down. That is the problem that I am experiencing most.

Sophie experienced medical costs that her business alone could finance.

Remember when I told you that I was sick at the hospital, one of my friends who had witnessed my son's baptism came to the restaurant (kiosk) several

times but was unable to find me. Finally he came by one day and asked me why the restaurant was not opened. I told him that all the money that I had obtained from the kiosk was spent at the hospital. He offered to help and asked how much I would need to reopen it. He loaned me 500.00 shillings which was enough to get a health certification letter for the restaurant. I had to borrow some money and buy some food items to start off. I am still paying off the loan.

Sophie was fortunate to have someone lend her money in this case.

Obtaining loans or credit is extremely difficult for rural Luo women because in Luo tradition, property is passed to males. Since women do not own land, they have no access to credit (World Bank, 1989). Several women indicated that they could not get loans individually because of lack of title deeds which are either under their husband's or their father-in-law's name. However, women can obtain loans by belonging to the women's group. Miriam belongs to Oriang women's group and through the group, they have managed to obtain a loan which has helped them in their project. She said,

We have obtained loans through the women's group before for this land and this building and we are still paying it back. Members of this women's group can get loans as a group. As an individual I cannot.

Like Miriam, Florence expressed the difficulties of obtaining a loan. She said,

[I] would like to get a loan but getting it is a problem. Right now I do not have any activity that can help me obtain a loan. Our farms are not productive enough to put me in a better position to get a loan. Even if I was entitled to get a loan and invest in growing cotton, the drought may affect the cotton before it is ready. Therefore, I may experience total loss. I will not be able to repay the loan.

Florence admitted that women's groups were helpful with some support to begin projects.

We have little money in the women's group account. Although we have gained new skills of making baskets and macrame, the group is inactive right now...Due to financial problems within the group, we feel that we should find some guest of honor and a fund-raising drive so that the money obtained can boost the women group's account for later investment in some beneficial projects.

Ada told of families getting together to save money and provide loans for each other.

How can you get a loan? You can probably get it if you belong in a group. We have formed a family group of young people. There is a small amount of money that we contribute each month and save. This is the money that you can borrow if you want to start a small business or trade. It is comprised of young mothers and their husbands. My husband's brothers and their wives. We have not opened an account but we will open it soon.

This illustrates the value of working together to reach individual as well as common goals and the ways women meet the challenge of lack of funds.

These rural Luo women faced their struggles through hard work, support from women's groups, and for Mirian, her belief in God. She confessed,

Yes, I have problems of getting funds everyday to buy my children some food. And in that God blesses me by showing me the way out every morning so that at the end of the day, I go back home with something at least to feed my children. When I have a problem, I ask God for solution by way of prayers before retiring to bed and he gives me ideas by the time I wake up on how to solve the problems. God does not really use words to me on what to do, but I believe He is the one who leads me and gives me strength to carry on with the activities that help earn money. For example, working for somebody at a fee. That is the way God helps me.

Conflict between Old and New

The Luo people, like other ethnic groups in Kenya, have retained their cultural traditions even as they are experiencing processes of change. As a result conflicting forces arise regarding what people should or should not do. Culture dictates behavior

while other factors--religious, legal, economical, environmental--strain these beliefs and attitudes.

Marriage. Even though pre-colonial Luo society was patriarchal, Luo women had certain cultural rights which disappeared as a result of the introduction of the western judicial system. One of the changes brought about by the court system that affected women in Kenya was marriage. Marriage is not culturally recognized by the Luo people until money or cattle are transferred to the woman's parent as a bride-price. Therefore, under the traditional law, even when a Luo woman is legally married in church, her husband is supposed to transfer cattle to his wife's parents. Yet under Statutory marriage, if he decides not to pay the bride price, the law will favor him. This means that even though the woman is legally married by Statutory marriage, by customary law she is not. Thus, a man could decide to send her back to her parents since he never transferred any cattle to her parents.

Another example regarding marriage is the practice of polygamy. Culturally, polygamy is common. Yet these women voiced concerns about its benefit to them. Miriam recounted her feelings and the effect of polygamy on her,

My husband has already married a second wife though we have not lived with her. It is good in that in case of death to one of us, the one who has survived will bring up the children. A disadvantage of polygamy is obvious. When I was the only wife, my husband used to bring me some presents or some food, but now since there is a co-wife, he tends to lean more on her side...We need to share equally the little that is available. When food or anything is bought it should be distributed equally to both houses. If things are not done like that, that is when we become obstinate!

On the other hand, when her husband returned to her and was "trying to be a little

closer than he was before," Miriam wished he would "marry a second wife." In fact, Miriam revealed the ways in which women resist when they don't like something.

She continued,

Once (he has married two wives) he has tried two things and has to deal with only one, there is bound to be a problem. I am not going to complete the tasks that the other woman used to do as I am tough-headed. My children are grown. He may tell me, "Go and wash my clothes." As an adult I will respond, "Eh! My washing days are over. Give your clothes to your children to wash." He will force me to iron his clothes but I will be too busy to find time to do that...Me! to iron his clothes for him? If his clothes must be ironed, let him find a younger wife to do that. I am elderly now. He could give his clothes for his son to iron.

Susanna told about her relationship with her father as a child as a result of his polygamous marriage.

I loved my father halfway because he was living with another woman while married to my mother. Sometimes I would wish to talk to my father but he was far away and was with this other woman. Therefore, I discussed my problems with my mother because I could not go to the woman's house because the people in that household probably had their own problems. Sometimes my school fees were paid but I did not have pocket money. You see, my mother was always there for me.

There was evidence that these were strong women who had a sense of their worth and right to be respected within marriage. Esther told what caused quarrels with her husband:

I may probably to the market and stay longer than he expected. When I come back he begins to quarrel. To me that is unnecessary because I am also a grown up and I know that I shouldn't stay there because there is danger out there. When I get back he begins to quarrel.

Susanna added this twist,

First of all, it is men's decision that should be final because God first created a man, and then immediately created a woman. Currently in Kenya and the

world in general, a woman's education might place her higher than a man. A woman who is well-educated will supervise an office where men are less educated. All in all, we as women often boast. If my level of education is higher than that of my husband, then I will not respect him. Some women do that but others are good. Once she has accepted to live with the man, she will know how to handle him. Even if a woman is educated, she should not be disrespectful as it is the man who was created first.

It seems for Susanna the key is in knowing how to live with the contradictions.

A statement from Cathrina also revealed the strength and self-respect inherent in these women. She reported,

The wife should treat the husband with (pause) she should treat the husband with a lot of understanding letting the husband be the head of the household in most decision-making but she should not treat the husband as God. She should correct him when he is wrong so that the husband realizes that she is also a person in the home.

This may also be indicative of change in women's views about their relationships with their husbands, or perhaps a weakening in patriarchy.

Bearing Children. Another example of cultural change relates to child bearing. Traditionally, a male child has been preferred over a female child because inheritance is patrilineal (Dolphyne, 1991). Therefore, in the process of trying to procure a male child, a woman may end up with many children. On the same note, family planning is encouraged for uncontrolled population, and most women recognize the costs involved in caring for children. Yet Catholicism discourages the use of contraceptives. In this situation a woman is faced with the problem of fulfilling cultural demands, religious expectations, and at the same time her own desire and ability to nurture and economically provide for children.

Sophie described what women are traditionally taught about child bearing and

how that's supported by Catholicism.

According to people's wish, you can have as many children as you wish. At my wedding, it was written somewhere that a man should give birth and be able to see his/her third or fourth great grandchildren. In olden days, there was no end to giving birth. You know, the end of giving birth was when there was no more eggs in the woman's ovaries. It ceased on its own. If a woman had 8 eggs she would have only 8 children. There are people who have only one child and people would wait and wait to see another child but there would be nothing. It depended on God's wish...I had tried natural family planning method and did not have any more children [after 9 children]. The government was encouraging family planning methods. The Bishop felt that a Christian should not use artificial birth control methods because it was similar to being a killer.

Cathrina concurred,

The Catholic church does not support artificial methods of family planning but they support the natural method. When you are using artificial method--let's say the pills--you are killing the eggs and it is God who has created those eggs, therefore, you are killing.

Susanna also said she would not have liked it if family planning was

introduced,

I would not have liked it because God said, "Go ye into the world, multiply and fill the world" (both the participant and the researcher laugh). And He did me some good because He gave me 10 children before I finally reached the non-productive age. For this reason, there was no need to use any family planning method. I don't like family planning myself because it often causes stomach cancer. That is something I know, and if you use it all the time, you will give birth to an abnormal child. A certain woman swallowed the pills around here and she gave birth to a baby with two umbilical cords. One on the anterior and the other on the posterior sides. That was possible because she had used a lot of the oral contraceptives. Some people use quite a lot of pills around here. There should be a limit to the use of these pills. There was a woman buried yesterday at Kanyaluo (a name of a sub-location in western Kenya), she had used contraceptives for many years. Before she died, she said that she wished none of her children would ever use the family planning method. That is what caused her death. She gave birth to a baby that had caused a wound in her uterus. I don't quite agree with family planning.

On the other hand, Sophie agreed with the church's teachings on family planning.

The teachings that the woman taught us in church was good but when she taught us about family planning, some of us had already had ten children (laughs) and she could not tell us to reduce the number of children or kill the number of children that we already have. She found that we already had many children therefore we had to start from where we were in terms of the number of children we already had. It would be a mistake to have another child after the teachings.

Sophie explained why she agreed with family planning,

I think family planning is good because in today's world--and also based on how people use money in terms of food and work--if you have many children, you will find it very difficult. That is why when family planning was introduced, we were very happy and many Christians came. Those who came did not have any more children after that. For those who did not come are still having more children. (laughs)

One problem for some of the women with the church's stance on contraception was its contradictory message regarding children. Cathrina declared,

The Church encourages few children because life has become very difficult. It is better to have few children to enable an individual to take care of them...The Church opposes family planning. In fact right now I hear them encourage it in all churches. They say that people should have few children because life has become very difficult so that it is better to have a few children that an individual able to take care of.

Another problem for these women was being able to follow the family planning procedures advocated by the church. Esther shared her dilemma regarding this.

The family planning method "Billing's Method" (similar to Calendar method) requires a high rate of accuracy. Since I am very busy, I don't have time to check my body changes that indicates my fertility period. Not knowing my fertility period, it is easy for me to make a mistake and conceive without my knowledge. That happened to me a few weeks ago but lost it. I conceived without realizing because I didn't know that it was my unsafe period. You see, the other day I had a problem. I had already conceived when my baby is not

even one and a half year old.

This was because there is this very involving part, checking the accuracy of your body signs or the changes in your body. You have to observe the chart. I am thinking of using the artificial family planning method. I have no otherwise [meaning no alternative].

Cathrina was also torn about what to do and reiterated the problems with using the method accurately. She told,

I don't quite agree with my church (Catholic) on its position on family planning. I don't see some of their clients (followers) benefiting from any of the teaching. It does not help them very much. It can help them only for few months. I don't know if they follow the method correctly...I would like to have four children but it is not in accordance with Catholic teaching as they don't tell people the best number of children to have but only stress spacing the children to be born. Because that is the number that would be a little bit easier for me to take care of.

Martha, who was not Catholic, concurred with Esther and Cathrina regarding a desire for convenient family planning methods. She relayed,

I am in favor of family planning. I would go to the health center here; I started to practice their teachings but I was experiencing some side effects with birth control. When I forgot to take the pills even for a day, my periods would come. I would want to try the injection method of family planning. I had discussed with him [her husband] when he was still alive and he had said that we would start using it after we had two children.

Florence also was not Catholic, but she didn't use family planning. Yet she recognized the value of spacing children and felt that fewer children would have been easier. She reported,

My religion does not influence the number of children that I should have. I have never heard them state the number of children one should have. I do not use any family planning method...Nurses and doctors have spoken to me about family planning at a private clinic. The nurses and doctors have spoken about it several times. On many occasions, when I used to take my children to the clinic, the doctor would wonder and one day he said "Hey sister, how come

you keep on giving birth?" and I said "Oh brother, what do I do about God's work?" (laughs)

My husband does not care whether you give birth close together or not... God has helped me a lot because I do not become pregnant quickly after I have delivered. Sometimes I may become pregnant after 3 years without using any kind of birth control method. Most of the time I give birth when the last child has grown strong and could even go to school...Other women say that it is good for spacing children. Others say that it causes problems or complications with the uterus. Therefore, I really don't know what is right or wrong about family planning...Personally I would like as few as five children but I gave birth to nine. The five would have been better for me because that would have enabled me to take good care of them a little better.

Ability to care for their children was always of utmost importance to these women. In addition, Cathrina recognized the necessity of spacing children for the health of the mother. She declared,

If the mother does not make sufficient money, she will not have adequate food supply. If you give birth after three years the first child will be strong and ready to go to school by the time you are ready for another baby...I don't use any method of family planning. God has blessed me by the fact that I don't have children closely spaced. My last born is old enough and it will also be fine if I don't give birth at all. Poorly spaced children usually cause problems. A certain period of time needs to be given to allow the mother's body to be back to normal. Children who are closely spaced creates a lot of difficulties with baby care.

Husband's expectations about children influence child-bearing. Susanna told,

Most men don't quite support family planning. Two reasons for that is that they insist on having male children and also insist on having a large number of children so that if some die, they will still have some more left.

Cathrina admitted,

There is very little freedom. (laughs) For instance, on the number of children you want. Let me say that it is me now that is directly concerned. I do not have the freedom to choose the number of children. My husband will also interfere by refusing my proposal (pause) something like that. Then I cannot support my parents the way I would like to if I was alone.

Esther shared about her own husband,

To me I don't know how he [her husband] reasons anyway. Maybe it is because of his religion. He is a Catholic and he says that religious teachings say that "you can have as many children as you can." I have always told him we only have two children right now and we are unable to clothe them to the best as you would wish. We too have not been able to furnish our house and improve or living standards because the salary is not enough. Therefore the number of children you have should actually depend on how you can afford but he has refused to understand that. Life is very difficult, actually very difficult and then he is also having an influence from home. His home people (his family) have eight, nine, ten. You see you don't understand. You know what he now says whenever I tell him? He says, "You see the women you talk to, they tell you this and they tell you that."

Esther, however, wasn't willing to leave it at that; she added,

You know what I intend to do? I intend to use an artificial method for maybe five years not five but maybe four and then after that I will go back to Billings method and get a baby girl. Although the method is effective, it is quite involving.

On the other hand, it was through her husband that Sophie came to know about family planning methods, thus he shared her feelings about it, and supported her.

It must be remembered that children are very important. They provide security to Luo women because she can be sent back to her parents if she is barren causing them a financial burden. Many people still desire a great number of children because they hope that the children will provide them with financial security for old age.

According to Veronica,

It is important to Luo women to have children because they will help you financially when they complete school and will be working. I will encourage my daughter to have her own business when she grows up. The business will be one of her choice and which she can afford...I would like to have four children because it would be easier to educate them.

Martha also explained why children are important, which as a widow adds to

its significance.

I would like to have four children because you never know with this world. If God takes away two, I will be able to have two left. I think it would be different because a child (e ber ot) gives warmth to the house. Sometimes your husband may not be home and you are left with your child. You can find someone who you can talk to and who makes your house happy. The child will also be able to run errands for you.

There are a number of children who stay at home due to economical reasons.

Children may stay home because of lack of money to pay school fees or buy books, uniforms, or other required items to stay in school. There are a number of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy and stay home to help their mothers with the overwhelming household and farm tasks (African Medical Research Foundation, 1993). Male children often herd cattle, clean compounds, or help their fathers with his tasks. They also perform household tasks, such as collecting water often on a cart or a bicycle or help with some errands around the house. Children are often sent to carry messages from one household to another. Others simply work as house help for people either in the urban or rural areas for extra income. The money earned is often sent to their parents. Those who go to school help their parents with the household tasks after school, sometimes minding other children when their mothers are busy. Whatever the reason, children who stay at home are used as labor force by their parents. Veronica told,

The child helps me with the dishes while I clean the floor...Yes my children help after school hours. One could fetch firewood and another collect water...When you don't have children, there is nobody who helps you with work, you do everything.

These rural Luo women have to reconcile their own desire for children, their

husband's (and the culture's) expectation for male children with their ability to care for children. Esther articulated well the dilemma these women face and the consequence of not dealing with the issue.

Family planning is promoted everywhere in the country (pause). Some of these people are even educated men... They know the problem but it is just the refusal at the back of their head that it cannot work (pause) that has been shown to be this way..."You should have many children as possible" was based on the past and now we are in times that is actually very difficult therefore, should only have the number of children they can take care of. If that is not done, marriage problems will be continuous.

Raising Children. How children are raised is another conflict rural Luo women face. Traditionally, males were educated before females when finances were scarce (Parkin, 1978). For example, Cathrina told.

The highest level of education I attended was standard 8 (8th grade). The reason I did not continue further was because my older brother was also in secondary school. One of us had to stop because my parents could not afford to take both of us to school at the same time.

However, Cathrina no longer believes gender should be the determining factor. In her family, she said,

I would choose a brighter child regardless of their gender. If the resources are limited and I am to choose one, I would choose the bright one because if I choose one who is not bright enough he/she will waste my money. So it is useless to choose the girl if she is not bright enough or it is useless to choose a boy if he is not bright enough. So I just have to play my cards right by choosing the one who will pass the exams.

Susanna agreed,

The Luo would prefer that you educate the boy because it is the boy who will always live with the parents and the girl will eventually be married and will move away from home. Wise parents should select one who is smart and who would be helpful to them or to the community after they have attained their education. One may decide to educate the boy who may not be helpful and

one may choose to educate a girl who may be promiscuous and will be marrying and divorcing men left and right. After three men, she may not even assist her parents. On the other hand, a well-educated girl will be as helpful to her parents as to her mother-in-law. The boy can also be helpful to his mother-in-law. His mother may be sleeping in a leaking house and he may not care to fix it and may only help his mother-in-law. The girl may also decide to help her mother-in-law and not her own mother. It depends on the

individual, but it is good to educate whoever has the potential of doing better regardless of their gender.

In terms of what to teach children, values regarding division of labor for some women have remained gender specific. Cathrina told,

First of all I exercise discipline ...because I believe that when I don't teach them that, they will grow up to be undisciplined...One thing that I exercise is discipline so that they grow to be responsible citizen...We teach girls household duties which we cannot also teach boys because I don't think they need it much, given that the girls cook and take care of the house. I will teach the girls and not teach the boys.

On the other hand, Susanna believed children should be taught a variety of tasks, yet she was concerned about modeling the appropriate gender roles within her family. Thus, she was living out a contradiction. She stated,

As a matter of fact, these household duties should also be taught to boys to enable them to help their wives when they are sick.

Everyone makes his/her own decision on how they want to live. There are certain issues that a couple can discuss and carry them out without involving the children. For example, you may ask your husband to help you with certain household tasks, such as fetching water. You can do it discreetly. You don't want to tell your husband in the presence of your children to go and fetch you some water because a female child may tell her husband the same thing when she is married. That may be enough to cause some friction between her and her husband especially if the husband comes from a clan where men do not fetch water. There are only certain ways and tasks in which he can help his wife.

Luo people have somehow managed to persist in their cultural traditions. The

Luos cling to ideas about bringing up their children that have been handed down from one generation to another, even though some may not be applicable to today's world. A typical Luo parent will not discuss or exchange views on a variety of issues with their children. A child is supposed to listen and obey their parents and their elders and take their advice without any question. They are supposed to be seen and not heard. These values are deeply rooted in the culture. Miriam stated,

I teach my children to accept being sent without arguing back. They should obey when asked to do something. To respect all those in their father's age group because should a problem come up, they are the ones who will assist and will not hesitate or wait for their biological father to come. My children should respect their aunts and uncles the same way they respect me.

Ada explained,

Be strict with your children. If he/she is about to do something wrong, you discourage them from doing it. If he is about to do anything wrong, you stop him/her before he/she does it. When he does something wrong, you spank him so that he is aware that whatever he has done is bad.

Martha added,

I can teach a girl to listen to advice. What I would stress very much would be to study very hard so that they can be independent. I can teach a boy not to be in group. Boys like to walk in groups and then they get involved in bad things such as smoking cigarettes, drugs (nyasore), alcohol. I teach him not to be involved in such a group. Secondly, I would tell him to study and work hard in school so that he will be able to take care of himself.

It appeared that change was occurring as the women examined their own experiences and determined how their lives and their children's lives could be better. This then was reflected in what they taught their children.

Food. Religion has also influenced the foods people eat. Many people in South Nyanza, western part of Kenya are Seventh Day Adventists or Catholics.

Because of their religious beliefs, there are certain foods that are restricted (Oboler, 1985). Susanna, a Seventh Day Adventist, told,

Religion tells us of the restricted foods such as alcohol, cigarettes, fish without scales, and pork.

Ada concurred,

Seventh Day Adventist church restricts meat consumption but encourages vegetables, beans and fish. The Bible says that you should not eat pork or plants that do not bloom, such as the mushrooms, or fish without scales, such as the eel, or rabbits. Seventh Day Adventists are not supposed to eat those foods. I eat meat and not an eel.

Miriam's views on this issue illustrated the dilemma for women in abiding by religious teachings and yet fulfilling cultural norms or economic needs. She said,

Seventh Day Adventist people pray on the seventh day which is Saturday and they do not cook on that day. You see, all Seventh Day Adventists are supposed to follow the same rule. They are not even allowed to warm food on the Sabbath Day, but we humans, we have violated God's words because when we are hungry, we just cook. A true Seventh Day Adventist does not eat meat at all. They eat vegetables, beans, rice, and non-meat products. I have not read it in the Bible. Tea is prohibited, but it is more affordable than cocoa which is recommended. If cocoa is not available, they recommend soybean powder or "Chung" (roasted millet and ground). Alternatively, I drink herb tea (from my kitchen garden). I drink whatever is available because I don't have the money to buy cocoa. We eat available food and cook on the Sabbath Day.

Florence told the same story.

The religion restricts people from drinking tea. The religion encourages people to drink cocoa. I drink tea because cocoa is expensive. (laughs) I cannot afford cocoa. From what I have heard people say--but I have not tried it to see if it is true--is that if you are unable to buy cocoa, you can grind millet and use it as tea because it will give the color of tea. We (her grandmother and her) use it when we have guests from church because the Seventh Day Adventist church members do not drink tea...I only use it if a guest come unexpectedly and I don't have cocoa. (laughs) I know that people do not eat fish without scales, but I do not know exactly why.

Sophie's religious beliefs as a Catholic also prohibited the consumption of some foods. This time, religious beliefs were reinforced by economics, yet conflicts were again created due to environmental factors. Sophie told,

We don't eat meat because it is too expensive. We don't eat meat on Fridays because of our religious belief. We are Catholics. Nowadays, you can eat it. People are now allowed to eat it because there was a famine at one time and many people died; therefore, it was no longer restricted by the pope. Meat was restricted on Fridays because Jesus died on that day. That is why we did not eat meat. People were afraid to eat at their friends or their relative's houses because they were not sure whether the pots used for cooking were previously used for cooking meats other days other than Fridays.

Sophie had an idea why foods were sometimes restricted, which is perhaps a reason why some food restrictions no longer exist.

Men eat 'Agoko' (kidney). The tongue is for old people. I don't know why. Women do not eat kidney because it is for men. (laughs) You know nothing happens. You know people from the olden days tried to keep people from eating delicious food or from the foods that they liked. (laughs) These days people are smart and they eat any part that they like. That belief is practiced by everybody, even by religious individuals...Girls can eat kidney. The women who are still giving birth are not supposed to eat it. The young men are not supposed to eat it either. These restrictions still exist. There is something it does to men. That is why they like it. It is not good for men and I am not sure why. These days (laughs) when someone wants to buy any cut or any piece, all they have to do is go to the market and purchase any part or any piece of meat cut that you want depending on what you want to eat. I abide by some of the beliefs. It depends.

Values. Western values from the colonial rule and from the missionaries have eroded the traditional, cultural, and social values through migration to urban area and mass media. New religious beliefs have sometimes replaced traditional beliefs.

Florence told,

A belief that is keenly adhered to is the one that has an effect on a person. We have found out that people in the olden days had strong traditional beliefs

because there was no religion. When they woke up in the morning, they would say, "the sun has risen well." With the moon they would say, "the moon has risen well" and that was their prayer. For us Jesus performed the last sacrifice, therefore, that is how we dropped some of the ethnic or traditional beliefs. It means that before religion came, those beliefs were practiced as they would practice religion.

Sometimes, the Luo adhere to their cultural beliefs while trying to abide by religious beliefs which are in conflict with cultural practices, causing confusion and fear.

Florence continued,

It makes people uneasy and afraid of what might happen if they don't follow traditional beliefs. Traditional beliefs used to be so strong in their earlier days.

With the rural Luo women interviewed, there was the persistence of cultural traditions even as new cultural norms were created. One change described by two women concerned taboos regarding children's access to their parent's bedrooms.

According to Cathrina,

Once a girl is married, she cannot enter her mother's bedroom...I don't know what happens if she does because I enter my mother's bedroom and nothing happens. It used to be that daughters could sit in their mother's bedroom. If you are not married, nothing happens...I used to see some of my women relatives enter my mother-in-law's bedroom but when I came here, I was made aware that I cannot enter my mother-in-law's bedroom. I cannot say that I feel bad about it. It is the belief that varies from one family to another.

Florence concurred,

My grandmother taught us that after getting married, a daughter-in-law should not enter into her father and mother-in-law's bedroom. The same restriction applies to an adult daughter. She is not supposed to enter her parent's bedroom as soon as she enters into adulthood or she will get "chira." But we have abandoned that belief because you can even see my daughter-in-law cooking in my bedroom.

Florence worried about having time to teach her children values. She said,

Nowadays the children go to school and when they come back, they help with the household duties and there is no time to sit with the children and teach them. That is why you will find some disrespectful children in some cases...The advice that a child should be encouraged not to do anything wrong such as abuse, throwing objects at other people, or from misbehaving. Nowadays we don't quite teach them traditional beliefs. The children should be taught to be respectful.

Grandmothers are a also resource for teaching values. Sophie recited,

When a child has a grandmother, it is good because they usually love and teach them and also care for them. Secondly, if a child is old enough, they help by teaching them the cultural traditions. They can tell them what used to happen and what is currently happening so that the child can know the difference. There are some teachings that the children can learn and be brought up properly.

Yet as women become busier with farming and household tasks, resources become increasingly limited, and outside forces continue to undermine traditions, teaching values becomes more difficult.

The importance of continuing those values is reflected in a folklore Martha's mother taught her.

There was a hyena who went to look for sheep. On his way, he came to a fork in the road. The hyena has an ability to smell very far. Now on one side of the road he smelled some sheep, and on the other side he could smell some meat. He had a problem deciding what road to take. The hyena tried to go to both place at the same time. You now see how the hyena is greedy and it split into two pieces.

Martha continued with what the story taught her.

What I learned from these teachings was that she was trying to teach me not to be an individual who wants this and that. If I want to do some things, I need to focus on one thing because if I want this and I want that, I will miss them both. That is what she was trying to teach me.

Reflections

Because Luo women value marriage and children they invest their time and also endure hardships in most cases to preserve it and keep the family intact. Their conversations reflected that they were enduring numerous hardships but were staying in the marriage. The women interviewed were asked the question, "If you had to start over again what changes would make in your life?" Their responses follow:

Veronica

I expected to at least reach ordinary level (equivalent to grade 12) secure a job opportunity and then get married so that I would not have to totally rely on my husband. I would be having my own income. We would then jointly pool our money and buy good household items. Things have not worked according to my expectations...I would complete school, get a job, and lead a better life.

Florence

I would go back to school. I like studying. That is the main thing I would do. After school, I would choose to live a single life. I would not be married again because I have already experienced a married life. I am aware of the ups and downs of marriage. but that is for me. For you I still recommend marriage so that you can gain experience. (laughs) Education is good because it puts you in a position to gain employment opportunity from which to earn some money for a better life. Marriage is good.

Sophie

I would complete school, get a good job, and educate all my children...If God would give me more money, I would educate all my children. You know my son did well in standard 8 (8th grade), but I did not have enough money to allow him to go further.

Miriam

I would not like to marry. I would stay single and do some business for a living. I have realized that there are lots of problems in marriage. Once one is married, one becomes responsible to everything and to everybody. I would continue to stay at my father's house such that he would be tired of me. If I

was to start all over again, I would work hard with all my heart to enable me to support myself. I would not be married because I have to find ways of helping myself. (Long pause) Finding ways of taking care of children is a difficult task.

Ada

To go to school because going to school is very helpful. You can also teach the child some teachings that would help him/her in life.

Esther

I would wish that I get a better education that would assist me in leading a better life than I am doing now. The (pause) highest that money would allow me because you see money is the determining factor. How far one goes [attend school]. (Pause)...You see it is pointless wishing and yet you know that it is something that you cannot actually walk out of particularly the Christian bonding that once married you shouldn't leave that marriage. You have to create advantages. You have to make it work. But otherwise if I had a chance to do it over again where there was no religious ties and nothing tying me then I wouldn't live with it. I would have one daughter and with a man (pause) any man and then I forget about it.

Martha

The way I see it is different because what I thought did not happen. I thought I would have a good job but it did not happen. I thought I would be married when I am working...I got pregnant therefore I had to drop out. I went back to my parents and they wanted me to repeat standard 11 but I refused. It seemed like too many years. The highest level of school attended was Form III (11th grade)

Susanna

If I had a chance to do it over again, I would continue with education and go on to medical school and take care of people's health including mine. On the other hand, if I pursue a pastoral profession, I will be convert people because my faith will be stronger.

Cathrina

I would be educated first then I would complete school, secure a job and help as much as I can at my natal home. I will ensure that I develop my family's

home (natal) first, so that when I am married, I will have done something nice for my parents.

These were things these women wished they could have had in their lives.

Their words illustrate the ways rural Luo women are disadvantaged, the opportunities that did not exist for them. Their reflections show the values they have for their children and may indicate ways they will initiate change to make that possible.

Summary

Another major theme for these rural Luo women was struggle. Struggle was depicted by hard work and conflict between the old and new values. Hard work was essential for survival, theirs and their families. Conflict was experienced as they negotiated adherence to their traditional culture while adopting new beliefs and practices. Their everyday lives were characterized by struggle imposed by these two factors: hard work and the conflicts between the old and new. Their reflections revealed what was missing in their lives and how their struggles could have been alleviated.

At one point in the interviews Sophie was asked if she had ever wished she were born a man instead of a woman. She responded, "Yes. I have thought about that. You know when you are suffering you wish you were a man." This thought seems to encapsulate the power of the struggle in these women's lives. [As a footnote: A man nearby overhearing the conversation reported, "I have not wished to have been born a woman."]

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to shed light into what life is like for rural Luo Kenyan women. Through the analysis, themes emerged which give us a sense of those threads that flow through their roles as homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups, informing their attitudes and behaviors. Patriarchy was reflected throughout the women's lives and influenced the other major themes: (1) conformity to establish a good name and connection to the community through respect, reciprocity, and rituals and (2) struggle as exhibited in hard work and conflict between the old and new. The voices of the women reiterated the existence of these themes and through a shared understanding of their significance and meaning, a greater understanding of their lives was created.

The themes are understood as separate although the connection among their various components must be recognized. To understand the whole and how all these themes relate, one has to step back from the daily details of life to uncover what is under all of it. These questions helped to focus this process: Why these themes? Why do these beliefs and practices work for these women? What is it about rural Luo Kenyan women's lives that generated these themes? I have two suggestions: interdependence within the Luo community and the multiple roles of Luo women.

Rural Luo Kenyan women live in an extremely **interdependent** culture. Community members are interdependent socially, culturally, and economically. They have learned that everyone lives better when they work together. Therefore, they are accountable to one another. It is not like American or other Western cultures where

people can live somewhat independent of each other, and where individualism is highly valued, as when someone says, "This is my business and I will do what I wish." Luo people are accountable to one another in all things that they say and do because their lives are intertwined. Thus, they value what people say and think about them. This point is reflected in their accounts of their roles, who should do what, and what people will say or think if the gender norms are not followed. They expressed fear at what people would say if someone didn't do what he/she was supposed to do. This is important to Luo women because members of their community affect their lives directly. If these Luo women didn't follow the appropriate roles or rituals, they would be viewed negatively and perhaps ostracized. They do things that they are supposed to do or don't do things they are not supposed to do (conformity) to avoid having a negative reputation (respect) which would deny them support from the community (reciprocity).

People in this culture not only need each other for monetary support, but they also need each other for moral support. Investing in a good name and connection to the community provides that. This is what Luo women and the rest of the community invest in; this is the ultimate reward that they are all striving for. Therefore, Luo people, whether wealthy or poor, try to be accountable to each other. The struggles Luo women face also emerge from interdependence having been based on a patriarchal system. The Luo community depends on women's productive and reproductive activities; therefore, the women must endure the hard work and the conflicts they experience between their traditional beliefs and those emerging from the

outside.

Rural Luo Kenyan women live **multiple roles** which also help explain how the themes interrelate and what is concealed beneath them. These multiple roles are analogous to the meaning of multiple in the term "multiple jeopardy" coined by Deborah King (1989) to describe the multiple effects of race, class, and gender that Black American women experience. According to King (1989), "The modifier 'multiple' refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism" (p. 80). For rural Luo women, "multiple" also reflects not only the several, simultaneous roles they play but also the multiplicative relationships among them. They function as farmers multiplied by homemakers multiplied by members of women's groups multiplied by daughters and wives multiplied by mothers. This conception of their multiple roles helps illuminate their value for conformity (to acquire respect and achieve reciprocity) in order to survive the overwhelming nature of their roles. This conception of multiple roles also explains how struggle (in hard work and conflict between old and new) is a constant factor in their daily lives.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the rural Kenyan women in this research varied as individuals, as members of the Luo lineage and community, they shared a culture which produced common themes which cut across their roles as homemakers, farmers, and members of women's groups. Patriarchy emerged as a powerful theme, influencing most aspects of their lives and forming a base for the other major themes. Cultural laws and practices which favor men were repeatedly evidenced in work and relationship aspects of life within the family and community. For example, men have economic control because they own land. Men have family control because they are considered head of the household and are the decision-makers. Men have custody over children through brideprice and thus have control over marriage because women are connected to their children. Men have control over women's production because if a woman does not have children, her marriage is threatened and being single is not an option for women. Division of labor is gender-specific, and while it is labeled as complementary, women are overburdened with total responsibility for homemaking, farming, and child-rearing. Although men are assumed to be the family providers, it was through women efforts primarily that families managed. Cultural laws and practices also require women's active participation in the community as they have responsibility for overseeing rituals and transmitting the cultural norms to the next generation.

Themes ensuing from patriarchy were conformity and struggle. These two

major themes were both contrasting and converging. Conformity was the key to having a good name and being connected to one's home, both highly valued among Kenyan Luo women. Having a "good name" (nying maber) required the conformity necessary to gain respect and reciprocity. Being connected to one's home required conformity to practices regarding cultural rituals and taboos. All of the sub-theme associated with conformity--respect, reciprocity, and rituals--were intertwined and overlapping and were evident throughout the women's lives.

Struggle, the second major theme, was exhibited in hard work and conflict between old and new values. These Luo women struggled because of the hard work required to provide for their families, and they struggled with conflicts between the traditional ways of living and modernity created through colonization and Western religious influence. Their reflections illustrated some of their unfulfilled hopes and dreams and how these could have been met.

Separation of these themes is artificial because of their interconnection. Together they form a picture which depicts the interdependence and the multiplicity of rural Luo Kenyan women's lives and explains how their lives work for them as they maintain their traditions (respect, reciprocity, and rituals through conformity) in a changing world (struggle through hard work and conflict). Their strength and integrity was confirmed through their voices.

Research Implications

For the Researcher

I have learned about cultural traditions of which I was unaware even though I

am also Luo. I have new insight and new experience that will be useful to me in working with rural families through agricultural extension in Kenya. I have learned that these women, though they may be perceived as oppressed are strong. I have learned that despite the problems that they experience in their everyday life, they are able to fight oppressive situations in subtle ways through their connections with each other, and that they are rich inside themselves with self- pride. I have learned that they are determined and they are making a difference in their families, communities, and to my country of Kenya. I have learned a lot.

As an extension educator, this research experience has enhanced my cultural awareness in ways that will be useful when I am working with rural women or planning programs which are related to improving their lives. I am more sensitive to their needs because I had the opportunity to informally interact with them in their natural environment in their everyday lives.

For the Participants

The participants in this research, the rural Luo Kenyan women I interviewed, also profited from the experience. First, they benefitted through being able to tell their stories. Feminist researchers firmly believe that allowing someone's voice to be heard is incredibly affirming. Second, they gained knowledge that will assist them in providing for their families by connecting them with women's groups and agricultural/home economics extension agents in the area. Several of the women interviewed had not been visited by extension workers at the time of my first visit. Therefore, I helped identify extension workers who would provide education on topics

such as appropriate technology, nutrition and food production/preservation, and family planning as well as help them join a women's group and be involved in income-generating projects. This type of knowledge and opportunities for involvement can help improve their lives. Third, these women will benefit as the information that I obtained from the participants is shared with other professionals such as the extension workers.

An example of how people can come to recognize the value of this type of research in spite of initial suspicion involved the husband of one of my participants. As I was collecting data, one spouse was very suspicious as to what was going on and demanded to know what kind of information I was eliciting from his wife. I explained to him how understanding rural women's everyday lives was important, and that this information could be used by professionals to help improve women's lives through the various educational and income-generating projects. I gave him a copy of the questionnaire so that he would know the type of questions that I was asking his wife. He read it and calmed down a little bit. Later, this man became friendly with me when I came to visit his wife, and even asked me to stay for a meal at one point.

For Kenyan Educators, Administrators, Policy Makers

The information derived from this research is important in helping people understand the culture of this particular group. Understanding culture is critical to planning and implementing family policies. Understanding people's lives facilitates the acceptance of new recommended changes in areas such as food habits, health, family planning, and appropriate technology. To introduce any new ideas or

technology, one must understand culture. One must understand the culture from the people living it.

Changing cultural values is difficult and cannot be legislated, but people can be educated and attitudes can change with time when the process begins with people's daily lives and people have influence in decisions which affect them. Evidence from this research suggests that education may well be the most effective way to improve women's lives and promote family well being.

The Kenyan government must be aware of the importance of women's contributions to the economy. Changing the land tenure system and giving women access to credit would be beneficial because they would be able to contribute more. Improvement in the infrastructure would allow women greater ease in marketing their products. Availability of labor-saving devices, like corn shellers, would make work easier and save time for these women. The time saved could be utilized in further production, activities in women's groups, or community developmental projects, in addition to giving them time for themselves. The information provided by this research is needed by Kenyan officials who develop policy which affects rural women and, thus, the country.

For American Family Professionals and Educators

The research increases global awareness through its focus on a group of women in a developing country. It informs understanding and enhances knowledge about cultural practices which facilitates connection between people in the United States and people of Kenya.

This research contributes to our understanding of women and families in a developing country within a particular cultural context. And while these results are not generalizable across families and context, by providing insight into what works for a particular group, we add to our comprehension of families in general: the commonalities and the differences. The research reinforces our understanding of the economic, social, and cultural contributions of women to family, community, and country.

The research methodology, both feminist and qualitative, enhances our understanding of the appropriateness and advantage of such research to researchers, participants, readers. This research also contributes to the body of knowledge about women and families.

Future Research Needs

This qualitative research project provided in-depth information about the everyday lives of nine rural Luo Kenyan women. Other research is needed to expand our knowledge about other groups of African women: their lives, their family roles, and their roles in development. More data are needed in order to assess how quality of life for rural Kenyan families can be improved--what is needed and what is currently working that could be applied throughout the country.

Research Projects to Aid Rural Families

1. Kenya is a diverse country consisting of over 40 ethnic groups. Similar studies should be done on other ethnic groups in Kenya to provide more understanding of women from a cross-cultural perspective.

2. Research is needed to assess the influence of cultural and religious beliefs of various ethnic groups on their food habits and determine the most effective nutrition education methods.
3. Research is needed to assess the influence of cultural and religious beliefs of various ethnic groups on their family planning attitudes and behaviors and determine the most appropriate educational methods for each group.
4. Research is needed to assess the influence of cultural and religious beliefs of various ethnic groups on marriage practices and family structure, on agricultural production, mother's and children's health, and children's access to education.
5. Research is needed which investigates the factors associated with patriarchy within different rural ethnic groups and the consequences for women and children.
6. Research is needed which explores the impact of women's groups on rural women's lives: effectiveness of women's groups; ways of alleviating obstacles they face; why women's groups are prevalent in some areas and not existent in others; characteristics of successful women's groups.
7. Research in Kenya is needed on how to make household technological devices affordable and accessible to all rural women.
8. Since women play a major part in food production, research is needed to determine how credit can be made more readily available to women to increase their production.
9. Studies are needed in Kenya which include husbands and wives because of

men's roles in the decision-making process. Involving men more directly would reduce resistance to research processes and also increase the likelihood of research information being used.

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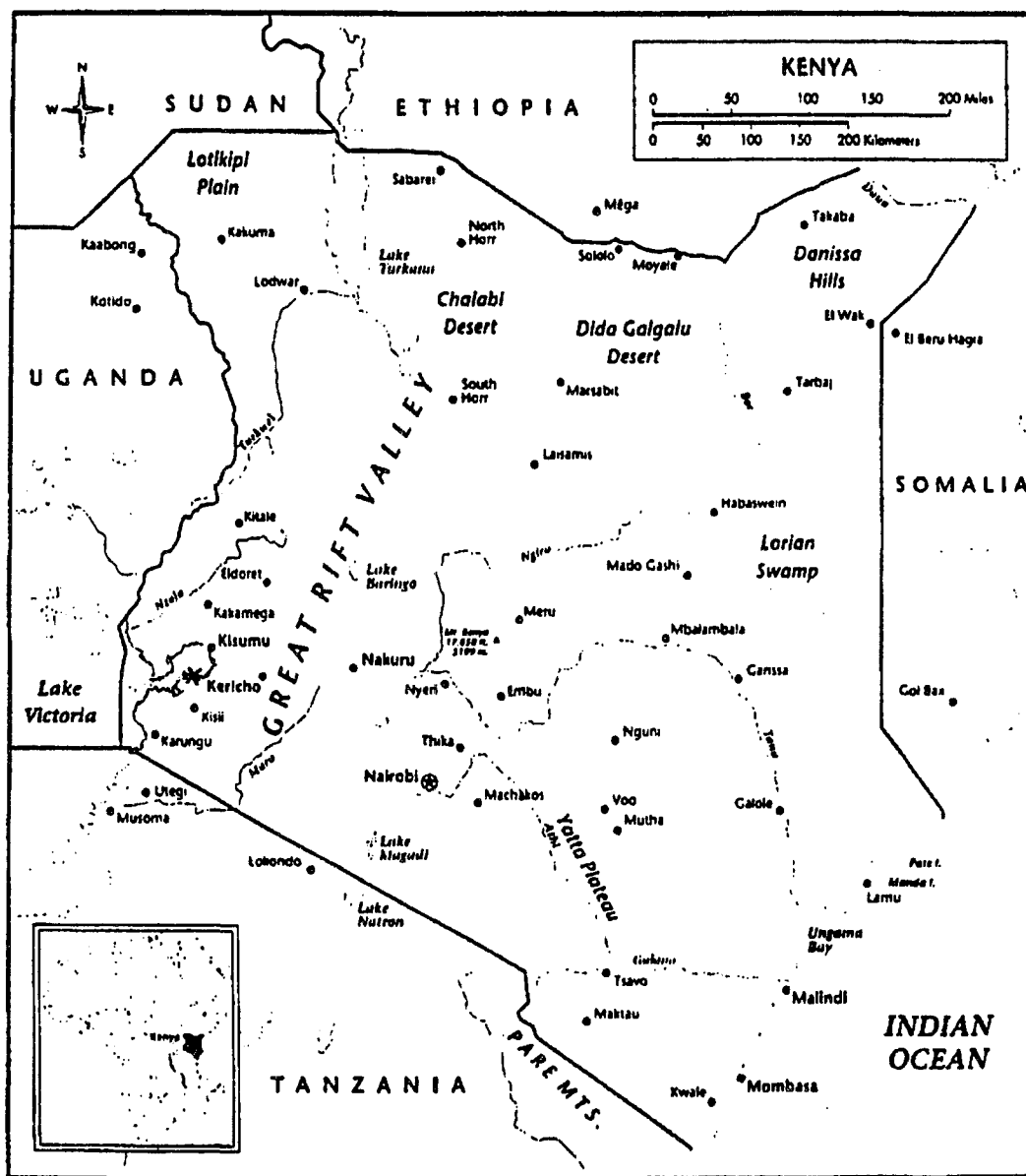
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Appendix A
Map of Kenya



* Kendu Bay

Source: Worldmark. (1995). Encyclopedia of the Nations (Vol. 2, p. 199).
Detroit, MI: Gale Research.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Overall Questions: What does it mean to be a rural Kenyan Luo woman who maintains her traditional roles within a changing world in her multiple roles as homemaker, farmer, and member of a women's group?

QI: What is it like to be a Kenyan Luo woman?

Ethnicity

1. How does it feel to be a Kenyan Luo woman? Describe?
2. What distinguishes a Luo from other ethnic groups?
3. What are some of the Luo ethnic beliefs that your mother taught you?
4. What did your mother teach you as a child that has made a difference in your life?
5. What did you learn from these teachings?
6. What role does the traditional mother play in the life of a contemporary Kenyan Luo child?
7. What are some of the ethnic beliefs that are practiced by your family members?

Religion

1. What is your religion?
2. Do you actively apply in your life religious teachings you learned in your family?
3. How does religion influence the types of foods that you eat?
4. Are there foods that are restricted?

Q2: What is it like to be a homemaker?Household Tasks

1. What are your daily activities from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed?
2. Do you have a helper?
3. How much time do you spend in each activity?
4. Who prepares the food in the household? How are they prepared?
5. What type of equipment is used in food preparation? Describe.
6. Describe how the household tasks are distributed among your family members.

Marriage and family

1. How old are you?
2. Have you had an opportunity to go to school?
3. Are you married? Do you live with your husband?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. Do you have any children? Describe their ages.
6. What is your role as a mother?
7. What are some specific things about social etiquette that your mother taught you as a child? Describe?
8. What did you learn from your mother that has helped you in your marriage and childrearing? Describe.
9. What are some of your mothers teachings that have not made any difference in your life since marriage and in child rearing? Describe.

10. What did you think marriage would be like before you got married? Is it what you expected?
11. Who is the most influential person in your life? Explain.
12. What are your needs that require a portion of your family's income? Describe the approximate cost for each of the items mentioned?
13. Do you make enough to support your needs?
14. What do you do when you do not have enough money?

Family planning

1. Has religion influenced you on the number of children that you would like to have? Describe.
2. What are your religious beliefs on family planning? Describe.
3. Where does your church stand on family planning issues?
4. Has anybody spoken to you on family planning? Describe.
5. What are your feelings about birth control?
6. How does your husband feel about family planning?
7. Do you practice any form of family planning?

Q3: What is like to be a farmer?

Work allocation

1. How much time do you spend working on your farm?
2. Describe how farm work is distributed among the family members.

Food Production

1. Do you own a farm or a plot?

2. What is your farm size?
3. What type of food crops do you grow?
4. Do you experience any problems with your crops? Describe.
5. What do you do with the farm products from your farm?
6. Do you have some crops that are available all year round? Describe.
7. Do you have some seasonal crops? Describe.
8. What do you do with the surplus farm products?
9. What benefits do you receive from your farm?
10. Do you own some livestock? Describe the type and the number of animals owned.
11. What type of farming tools do you use in farming? Describe.
12. What type of farming tools does your husband use in the farm? Describe.
13. Do you suffer from any injury or farm related health problem? Describe.
14. Do you have access to credit?
15. Do you have access to farm resources?

Food Preservation

1. Do you purchase extra foods from the shop or do you produce foods from your farm that are not for immediate consumption? Describe.
2. What do you do with the food surplus?
3. Has anybody spoken to you about methods of food preservation? If yes, who? Describe the methods that you have tried, if any.
4. How do you feel about the methods that you were taught?

Food consumption

1. Describe the types of foods that are eaten at each meal on a typical day.
 2. Do you eat any food between meals?
 3. Basically what foods does your family eat during the week?
 4. Are you allergic to any type of food?
 5. Basically what are the foods that you are not allergic to but would never eat?
Why?
 6. What are your favorite foods? Describe.
 7. Are there any foods that you dislike and would never eat or cook if available?
Describe.
 8. When food is served in the family, who is served first? Why?
 9. Who makes decisions on foods that are purchased for the household and how often and why?
 10. What types of foods do you purchase frequently? Describe.
 11. How much money do you spend on food per day?
 12. What source of energy do you use? How much do you spend per month?
What kind of equipment do you use?
- Q4: What is it like to be a member of a women's group?**
1. Are you a member of any women's group? Describe.
 2. How did the group start? Describe.
 3. Is the group involved in any type of project? Describe.
 4. Are you involved in the project? Describe.

5. What is your role as a member of the group?
6. Are you involved in any income generating-activity?
7. Describe the activities that you are involved in from the time that you meet to the time you go home on a typical day.
8. Has participation in the women's group affected how you take care of your family? Describe.
9. What are your feelings in regard to being a member of the women'group?
10. What are the benefits of being a member?
11. What are the drawbacks of being a member?