



JOHANNA LATVALA

Obligations, loyalties, conflicts

Highly Educated Women and Family Life in Nairobi, Kenya



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This study examines family and kin relations of highly educated people in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. The themes covered are marital relations and relations between the spouses and their extended family members, the main focus being on the obligations, loyalties and expectations in kin networks. The study is based on anthropological data, mainly in-depth interviews and participant observation.

The aim of the research is to discuss various aspects of kin relations in the urban middle class context in contemporary Kenya, and to seek understanding of these by reflecting them to the changes in the Kenyan society, particularly as it comes to changes in gender relations. Analytically, the ideas of African feminist thinking, which emphasises communality, networking and negotiation, have been a fruitful point of departure to interpret family relations. Consequently, Kenyan families are looked as networks, where different obligations, responsibilities and loyalties are negotiated between the family members. To analyse these negotiated relationships further, concepts of 'kinscripts' and 'gender contracts' have been used.

The postmodern and feminist understandings of fragmented, situational knowledges have been guiding the research analytically and methodologically; the aim has been to present some possible interpretations based on the data. The contradictions are present, both in the participants' lives and in the researcher's interpretations. To show this, lots of interview quotations are included in the text, and the encounters between the researcher and the participants are analysed.

Some of the conclusions drawn from the data are the following: Family life seems to be based on different negotiations and contracts. Highly educated women try to negotiate ways to focus more on their nuclear or conjugal families, and to restrict their contacts and responsibilities with kin. Kin responsibilities are burdensome in financial terms, but even more, for the participants, in terms of restricting their privacy at home and in their marital relationships. These negotiations often lead to clashes with husbands and with other extended family members.

Another issue to cause conflicts between the spouses is the fact that polygyny is a socially and legally accepted form of marriage in Kenya. Once a carefully defined institution between two family groupings sealed with customary procedures, mainly the bridewealth, has become an informal - and often a secret - arrangement between two individuals, lacking a defined structure. For women, this often means that their positions are more vulnerable. However, for some highly educated women, a position as a second wife may provide considerable amount of freedom and still a socially and financially secure status. For a highly educated first wife, the fact that the husband has another wife may be embarrassing, but otherwise, as long as the husband takes care of his responsibilities towards the children and the first wife, she is often able and willing to continue the marriage.

In this research, it is pointed out that in the jungle of many overlapping and competing interests, loyalties and expectations, one has to make choices. Highly educated women are often placing their own interests, i.e. the interests of their own nuclear families ahead of those of the extended families, and this is causing transformations in contemporary Kenya, particularly as it comes to gender and family relations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	11
1.1. Research Settings: Nairobi and Kenya	11
Historical events.....	11
Nairobi and Kenya today	15
1.2. Kenyan society vis-à-vis gender and family	18
Patriarchal culture	18
Marriage laws and customary practices in Kenya.....	19
Bridewealth as a seal of a marriage.....	20
Polygyny: rural experiences.....	23
Reasons for declining polygyny.....	28
Sexual relations in the era of HIV/AIDS.....	29
Household and family.....	31
Changing family	34
Middle class, highly educated people, professionals	35
1.3. Middle class family life in Kenya and Africa – a literature review	36
CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS.....	41
2.1. Research methods and fieldwork	41
2.2. Research data	46
2.3. Participants’ backgrounds and marriages	49
2.4. The relevance and the focus of the research	53
2.5. The outline of the research.....	57
CHAPTER 3. ANALYTICAL APPROACHES	59
3.1. Ways of approaching the issues and the data.....	60
Postcolonial feminisms’ framework.....	60
African feminism / womanism: Naming and substance.....	64
Gendered kinscripts - expectations, obligations and conflicts.....	68
3.2. Choices of writing and representation	72
Multiple and fragmentary voices	72
Ethnographic ‘truths’ and positioning	73
”It’s like tea without milk and sugar”. Surviving different interpretations	74
Writing	76
CHAPTER 4. CONTEXTUALISING HIGHLY EDUCATED WOMEN’S LIVES	78
4.1. Women’s lives in Kenya.....	78
Limited chances	79
Women as servants.....	80
4.2. The impact of education	81
Privileged positions	81
Elite feminists and grass root women: Is there a connection?.....	83
4.3. Trying to promote one’s own life.....	86
Obstacles in family and society	86
For better or worse? Education and marriage	88
Overcoming obstacles	92
4.4. Conclusion	96
CHAPTER 5. NEGOTIATING MARITAL RELATIONS.....	97
5.1. Middle class attitudes and practices	98

An ideal marriage and a good (enough) marriage.....	98
To fall in love or just become ready for a marriage	102
Negotiating bridewealth: For the parents' sake?.....	104
Preparing for a church wedding	110
5.2. Crossing the ethnic boundaries: characteristics of mixed marriages	113
Choosing a spouse - does ethnic background matter?.....	113
Problems in inter-ethnic marriages	116
Otieno's case: Risks in inter-ethnic marriages.....	121
5.3. Conclusions.....	123
CHAPTER 6. WIVES, SECOND WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS: RECONSIDERING POLYGyny	125
6.1. Polygyny in an urban middle class context	126
Humiliating polygyny.....	126
A lost privilege of highly educated men?.....	128
Highly educated women's views on polygyny	129
Born-again Christians' positions.....	132
6.2 Facing polygyny one way or another	134
The wife and her husband's girlfriends	135
Unofficial second wives	137
To leave or to stay? When the husband wants to marry again	141
6.3. Different positions of women in today's polygynous unions	143
Official and unofficial wives	143
Polygyny or extra-marital relationships?.....	144
6.4. "What would you do if your husband took a second wife?"	148
Learning to see	148
Feminist as a second wife?	150
6.5. Conclusions: From family matters to private liaisons.....	152
CHAPTER 7. HELPING KIN, BUT WITHIN CERTAIN LIMITS.....	155
7.1. Practicalities and moralities of helping	156
Offering money and accommodation	156
Acting out of family solidarity.....	157
... or calculating for the future?	161
7.2. Different families, different arrangements. Negotiating responsibilities	162
A household of women: Together we survive	162
Three separate households, one family	166
A large extended family - Being the responsible one	169
Negotiating 'kinscripts' – Susan, Lucy and Charles	175
7.3. Conclusion	180
CHAPTER 8. KIN LOYALTIES AND MARRIAGE. STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH DIFFICULTIES.....	183
8.1. "I've made a decision to be submissive to a certain degree". Jane's story.....	184
8.2. Separating and coming back together. Helen's story	187
8.3. Challenging gendered kinscripts	190
Family loyalties in Jane's life	190
Breaking the contracts?	191
Balancing	193
Backlash.....	194
8.4. Conclusions.....	195
CHAPTER 9. TO DISTANCE ONESELF FROM KIN	197
9.1. To avoid problems, stay on your own	197

Relatives bringing problems	198
9.2. Living nuclear	201
9.3. Running away from responsibilities	203
Implications of distancing.....	203
Another side of the story?.....	205
9.4. Conclusions.....	206
CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION: TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONTRACTS.....	208
Contents: A Brief Summary	208
Fragments of possible worlds	210
Family as a web of reciprocal obligations	211
Marriage as a contract	214
Balancing, stretching, and breaking	215
REFERENCES	217

PART I: CONTEXTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This is an anthropological study on highly educated women and their family lives in Nairobi, Kenya. I discuss family life from different perspectives, with my main focus being on women and their relations to their husbands and kin. In these relationships, I am particularly interested in loyalties, expectations and responsibilities between family members, and different ways these aspects are negotiated in family networks. I aim to highlight how highly educated women in the contemporary urban middle class context negotiate between those values and worldviews that they are socialised to as children, and the new kinds of values they are exposed to through education, among other things, particularly as it comes to their lives as women, wives and members of the extended family. My considerations are based on anthropological research of over nine months in Nairobi, Kenya, consisting of 60 in-depth interviews of highly educated women and their family members.

In the Introduction, I will contextualise the research by discussing specific settings of the research, as well as some aspects of contemporary Kenyan society, particularly when it comes to gender and family issues. I will also discuss some contextual problems related to terms 'household', 'family', 'nuclear family', 'conjugal family' and 'extended family'. I will define the group of people whose lives are in focus here and contextualise this research vis-à-vis earlier research done on middle class in Africa.

1.1. Research Settings: Nairobi and Kenya

Historical events

Kenya is a country in East Africa with 31,5 million inhabitants (UNDP 2004, 154). Nairobi, its capital, is situated in Central Kenya, South of Equator with a mean altitude of 1700 meters above sea level (Kilbride et al. 2000, 48). I start with some historical facts concerning Nairobi and Kenya since the beginning of the colonial era, when Nairobi was founded.¹ In my account

¹ Later in the chapters I will also discuss shortly some pre-colonial practices when it comes to the specific themes of the chapters.

of the history of Nairobi and the early stages of colonialism in Kenya, I lean mainly on three recent studies: Claire Robertson's *Trouble Showed the Way* (1997), Carolyn Martin Shaw's *Colonial Inscriptions* (1997 [1995]), and Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna's *Interpreting Nairobi* (1996).² While the two first focus on analysis of colonialism and gender issues in Kenya, the latter provides a thorough historical account of the growth of Nairobi, focusing on building and planning the town for its inhabitants between 1895 and 1983. Because these studies' presentation of the early stages of Nairobi and Kenya are to a large extent overlapping, I do not refer to them separately unless using a strict citation or referring to information found specifically in a given study.

The British declared the East Africa Protectorate in 1895. Nairobi was founded when the Uganda Railway Committee decided to build a railway to connect the Indian Ocean (port of Mombasa) and Lake Victoria. In the midway located a place which the Maasai people used for watering their cattle and which they called "*Enkare Nairobi*" (the place of cold water). The same area was also used by Kikuyu, Kamba and Maasai women for trading.³ The British regarded the site as beneficial to build a town because of its location; also the climate was good and there was enough water. Nairobi was officially founded in 1899, when it was still "a piece of land with just a few shacks and an old caravan track" (Nevanlinna 1996, 96). In the beginning of the colonial enterprise people who first moved to Nairobi were in one way or another attached to the construction work of the railway and the town itself.

Different ethnic groups that resided especially in Central Kenya during the pre-colonial era, were brought into contact with each other by the colonialists in a new way. Colonialists' actions changed the customary thinking and living forms of different ethnic groups by drawing strict lines between them. This was done by establishing tribal headmen and territories where members of certain ethnic groups should live. Before the British settled in, boundaries between different groups had been more flexible, and individuals had more multiple and varying identities as group members. Shaw, who has studied the colonisation process of the Kikuyu in Kenya, describes the situation in the following way:

"The colonial system established a system of chiefs and subchiefs, regulari(s)ed all male judiciary councils, codified Kikuyu customary law, and through many commissions and much testimony mapped the extent of the Kikuyu tribal reserve. What was once a fluid

² The year of the first edition is in the square brackets when the book is mentioned for the first time. Afterwards I only refer to the edition used for the reference.

³ I will use the English form when talking about respective ethnic groups, thus for instance the Kikuyu, instead of the Gikuyu (see e.g. Kenyatta 1995 [1938], xv), or the Kisii, instead of the Gusii (see e.g. Silberschmidt 1999, 9).

system of community relations became – though never totally and never successfully – an official tribe.” (Shaw 1997, 6.)

Colonial Kenya consisted of many different communities, which were based either on African ethnic groups or Indian and European immigrants’ groups. Nairobi was considered as a European town by the colonialists, where European standards should be applied, although Europeans were always only a small minority of the population. Still they occupied most land, had better living conditions than Asians and Africans and decided mainly on the construction and maintenance of public facilities important for them. Their interests dominated, and the system of ethnic segregation was followed. Other (i.e. African or Asian) customs and practices could be tolerated only in restricted conditions and spaces. African people even needed passes to walk around in certain areas. There were different ways of avoiding this control, however. For instance, a prostitute may have asked her European ‘boyfriend’ to write a letter in which he stated that she belonged to his domestic staff, and could therefore cross the areas otherwise forbidden (White 1990, e.g. 168).

During the World War II Kenya played a central role in world politics as the headquarters of the East African command were located there. Immediately after World War II, investors – and immigrants from an impoverished post-war Britain - became increasingly interested in Kenya (see Nevanlinna 1996, 187). Because investments brought employment, also African labourers came increasingly to Nairobi. Migrants were mostly men, who left their wives in the countryside. However, a significant number of women also came to Nairobi in order to trade, practice prostitution or both. Particularly during the early years in Nairobi prostitutes offered extended care for their clients - not just sex - like providing food and a place to stay overnight. (Robertson 1997, 77; White 1990.)

The years between the Second World War and independence in 1963 were times of fundamental changes in Kenya, as well as Nairobi. Although Africans’ positions in Kenya were better than ever before in the colonial period, dissatisfaction among them was increasing steadily. Although possibilities for employment grew, the infrastructure of Nairobi was still poor, and particularly the lack of housing caused problems. Shantytowns without a formal structure or planning started to grow in the 1940’s and early 1950’s to accommodate the ever growing number of Africans. Similarly, the colonial government did not allocate enough land for the Africans in the countryside.

From these circumstances arose the anti-colonial Mau Mau movement in the 1950’s among the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru in Central Kenya. Thus, the Mau Mau was initiated by the people most directly affected and dominated by the colonial enterprise. The movement

grew fast and got a lot of supporters in its battle to make Kenya independent from the colonial rule. From the 1950's onwards, Kenya was in an alert state. Officials considered shantytowns as the centres of different anti-British political movements, and tried to destroy them killing African inhabitants there for instance in 1952, when the State of Emergency was declared. In addition to unofficial residential areas, city market places became the centres of political movements.

During the Emergency Nairobi was still a city dominated by Europeans, who imposed their own practices by force on Africans. Missionaries tried to change for instance those marriage practices they did not approve, like polygyny, bridewealth, leviratic marriages, clitoridectomy and arranged marriages. However, before the World War II, Christianity had little actual impact on marriage practices. By the 1950's however, it had affected thinking e.g. among the Kikuyu to such a degree, that a monogamous marriage had become an ideal one and church marriages started to become more common. (Robertson 1997, 192; 209-210.)

The peak years of Mau Mau guerrilla war were 1953-56. Kenya got *Uhuru* (independence) in 1963. Ten years later, most people interviewed by Shaw (1997, 154) thought that Kikuyu, Embu and Meru were the groups that had most impact on achieving independence and these groups should be rewarded. This did not happen, though. However, the new political decision-makers were mainly Kikuyu. The power was strictly in the hands of one party, KANU (Kenyan African National Union), during the first decades of independence. The first president, Jomo Kenyatta was in power until his death in 1978, after which Daniel arap Moi led the country until the end of 2002. The era of KANU leadership ended then, and Mwai Kibaki of the opposition coalition NARC was elected to be a president.

Population in Nairobi grew rapidly throughout its existence. In 1906, there were 11 512 people in Nairobi, and in 1936, 49 600. In 1948 the number was already 120 000, and in 1970, over half a million. The proportion of Africans among the inhabitants rose all the time. (Nevanlinna 1996, 162, 188, 205-206, 226-227.) According to the latest population census made in 1999, the Nairobi population was over 2 million, but it is usually estimated that the current number is over three million.⁴ Also otherwise urbanisation is increasing in Kenya. Whereas in 2002, less than 40 percent of the population lived in urban areas, by 2015 over half are estimated to be urban dwellers (UNDP 2004, 154).

⁴ The census is available on www.cbs.go.ke/census1999.html

Nairobi and Kenya today

Nairobi has always been cosmopolitan, in terms of its inhabitants, who have come there from different parts of the world, as stated above. Early inhabitants were Europeans (mainly British colonial, administrative or army officers), Indians (mainly coolies and shopkeepers), as well as Africans (mainly railway workers or domestic servants). Still today, Nairobi is an ethnically and nationally diverse town. Over half of the population are migrants from other parts of Kenya (Githinji 2000, 67-68), and in addition, there still are Asian, Arab and European minorities in Nairobi (Kilbride et al. 2000, 45; Nevanlinna 1996, 68; The World Factbook 2004, 3). Nairobi is the only town in Kenya which is represented with all modern sector industries, as well as a regional and international centre with many international organisations (Githinji 2000, 66).

Nairobi has continued to grow fast; presently the annual growth rate is four percent (Kilbride et al. 2000, 45). Mainly because of the high population growth rate in Kenya (3,1 % during 1975-2002, and 1,2 % currently [UNDP 2004, 154]), land has become scarce. Small pieces of land people may have in the countryside cannot provide for them and their families any more. Consequently, people, especially men, go to urban centres to look for a job, not an easy task in a country where unemployment rate is 40 percent (The World Factbook 2004, 6). Nairobi offers most possibilities for both educated and uneducated employees and is thus the most popular aim of migration in Kenya. In Nairobi, the main areas where salaried employees work are services - including government employment - (46.6 %), transport (13.8 %) and manufacturing (12.3 %), the two last mentioned being the most highly paid sectors, wages being about twice as much as those of the service sector (Githinji 2000, 72, 74-75). In Nairobi, many individuals are involved in the informal sector, *jua kali* (hot sun) employment, which is characterised by self employed individuals selling used clothes in the street stalls, repairing bicycles by the road or manufacturing arts and crafts to sell mainly to tourists at market places. *Jua kali* sector does not provide for a stable employment or benefits like the formal sector (Githinji 2000, 131).

However, unemployment is a big problem in Nairobi. I witnessed many occasions where highly educated people looked for a job after graduation, and it seemed to be a real struggle. In addition, living expenses in Nairobi are higher than in the rural areas or small towns. Because of the insufficient social security system, it is practically impossible to provide for oneself in Nairobi without being employed in one way or another. Often the only way towards a

better life is through the help from relatives. In addition to possible job or education opportunities, cities attract young people because there are less restrictions and prohibitions and more independence than in the countryside (Shauro 1992, 278).

In Nairobi, as well as in Kenya in general, there are extremes of both wealth and poverty. The distribution of income is one of the most unequal in the world, making Kenya a country of "ten millionaires and ten million beggars", and the gap is expected to rise in the future. (Githinji 2000; UNDP 2004, 190; Daily Nation 27.10.2004). About every fourth person lives under the daily sum of US\$1, and more than half of the people with less than US\$2 in Kenya (UNDP 2004, 148). The figures are little lower in Nairobi, but regional differences are huge there (Daily Nation 27.10.2004). Nairobi is a city of contradictions; homeless beggars lying on rags in the streets and just a few meters away huge Mercedes Benzes with their private chauffeurs transporting wealthy and well dressed people to luxury restaurants. I have never in my life seen people living in such absolute poverty before, but on the other hand, I have never before had a chance to visit such luxurious palaces in which some wealthy people resided, either.

Certain areas of Nairobi are characteristically upmarket or 'middle class', such as Lavington, Kilimani or Karen. People have beautiful, spacious gardens, nice houses behind tall fences and guarded gates, and expensive cars. Many more neighbourhoods are ever-growing areas of slums, where people have built their own small shacks from corrugated iron, cardboard and whatever one can imagine. The biggest slum is called Kibera, others are for instance Mathare Valley and Kawangware; slums accommodate perhaps 50 percent of Nairobi people (IRIN 4.6.2004). Those who do not belong to either the richest or the poorest live in rather modest houses or flats, sometimes with electricity and piped water, sometimes without them. Different areas are segregated not only in terms of wealth, but also to some extent in terms of cultural background of the inhabitants (see e.g. Nevanlinna 1996, 76; Nelson 1990 [1988], 184).

Kenya is ethnically very diverse, there are 42 ethnic groups listed in the Census. Biggest groups are Kikuyu (about 22 %), Luhya (14 %), Luo (13 %), Kalenjin (12%), Kamba (11%), Kisii (6%) and Meru (6%) (The World Factbook 2004, 3). Different ethnic groups have different vernaculars, and (notwithstanding Nairobi or other big towns) they reside in certain areas in Kenya. For instance, the traditional area of the Kikuyu has been the Central Highlands of Kenya (where also Nairobi is situated) whereas the areas around the Lake Victoria in the Western Kenya has been populated by groups like the Luo and the Luhya. Some of these groups are fairly absorbed to other neighbouring communities, while others are still utterly distinctive in their respective cultures.

The legacy of the colonial time is present in many ways in contemporary Kenya. For instance, English is an official language together with Kiswahili and the legal system is based on the British law that is practiced together with respective customary laws. The Mau Mau war increased certain tensions between the different ethnic communities in Kenya. For instance, the Luo had been employed by the colonialists during the Mau Mau, while the Kikuyu were fighting against them. The Luo and the Kikuyu still have prejudices against each other. Similarly, for instance the Samburu were on the British side during the fighting, and tensions between them and the Kikuyu still exist (Holtzman 2004, 66-67). Colonialism also offered new possibilities for some, particularly Kikuyu, who were in the most immediate contact with the colonialists. Particularly some early converted Christians had early access to Western-style education, and it elevated their social status. Some women I have interviewed come from the families where parents or particularly the father has been educated and employed by the colonial administration.

Since independence Kenya has been unstable in many ways. While some periods have been very successful economically, there have also been periods of decline. Politically, the ruling party KANU has had tough politics vis-à-vis those who have criticised lack of democracy and human rights. Shocking aspects of Kenyan past were revealed after the change of power, for instance torture chambers were opened up and victims' experiences reported in the newspapers. During the power of KANU, students often rioted and different ethnic groups clashed. Political instability and particularly the corruption problem and lack of fulfilled human rights have also financial effects. For instance IMF (International Monetary Fund) has suspended its loans for Kenya at least in 1997 and again in 2001 because of the government's inability - or unwillingness - to fight corruption (The World Factbook 2004, 5-6).

In recent years the threat of international terrorism has been present in Kenya as well. In 1998, the American Embassy in Nairobi was bombed, and in the end of 2002 an Israeli tourist aeroplane was attacked when departing from Mombasa. Also a tourist hotel popular among the Israeli was bombed in the coastal area. These events have caused a decline in tourism, which has been an important source of income for many Kenyans. For instance in October 2004 the United States government had a long-time recommendation for Americans to avoid travelling to Kenya on its web-site (http://travel.state.gov/travel/warnings_current.html).

In the end of 2002, when Mwai Kibaki was elected a president, I was in Nairobi. It looked to me that Kenyans seemed extremely relieved and happy, but also expectant. They expected the new government to end corruption and violence, to increase employment, to improve social security and to organise free primary education, among other things. Many

things have improved in Kenya, but the lasting effects are difficult to estimate at this point, only two years later.

1.2. Kenyan society vis-à-vis gender and family

Patriarchal culture

“After independence, controlling women became a core issue in nationmaking for male authorities.” -Claire Robertson (1997, 4)

“The need to control women has always been an important part of male success in African societies.” -Christine Obbo (1980, 4)

Kenya is a country with a male dominant (patriarchal) culture and society. This is grounded in different ethnic groups' customary laws, and reflected in contemporary statements and attitudes. I will give more thorough consideration on how this affects women's lives later, but here, I will draw some general lines with a few examples. The patriarchal thinking is reflected in a Kikuyu myth, according to which the primordial couple's Gikuyu's and Mumbi's daughters lost their power to men (who had a conspiracy against women), and that is when patriarchy won among the Kikuyu (Kenyatta 1995, 5-7). Among the Kikuyu, as well as in other ethnic groups, women are expected to obey their husbands, although these cultural expectations do not of course mean that women actually always do obey their husbands (see e.g. Shaw 1997, 46). More recently, in 1975, a Kenyan male minister spoke, while closing an International Women's Year seminar, to an all-female audience in the following way: “I am forced to believe that the woman is lazy in her mind --- You women think and believe that you are inferior to men --- It is a psychological problem and 99, 9 % of women suffer from it” (quoted in Nzomo 1997, 236). In 1985, when the UN Women's Conference was held in Nairobi, many urban and rural women called for more women in the decision making process in Kenya. President Daniel arap Moi responded to these requirements: “God has not made a mistake in making man the head of a household. Moreover, even if women were appointed to high positions, they are still expected to be subordinate to their husbands at home” (Ahlberg 1991, 150).

These rather surprising comments on women and their roles are illustrative of the mental environment concerning gender issues in Kenya. Still today, the message offered to women is the one of patriarchal attitude. Grace Ogot, perhaps the most famous woman writer in

Kenya and East Africa, explained women's situations in marriages in a recent newspaper article, where she was asked which one of her own books is her personal favourite. She said:

"The other woman [a short story] is also a favourite because of its simplicity and straightforwardness. It simply states that if a woman does not want her husband, the other woman will. It makes me feel that even as I get older, I should make sure that (my husband) is happy, because if I do not, the 'other woman' will." (Daily Nation, 17.9.2004.)

I was surprised to read her interpretation of the message of the short story 'The Other Woman' (1992 [1976]), which I had understood in a different way. I had thought that the story, in addition to pointing to the importance of keeping the marital relationship alive, criticised the existing social order, where most responsibility on marital relationships seems to fall on the wife's shoulders, and in case the marriage falls apart, or the husband finds another woman, the wife is to blame. It is in this gendered context of male dominance that I will look at the family and kin relations in this thesis.

Marriage laws and customary practices in Kenya

In Kenya, as elsewhere in East Africa, marriage has traditionally been regarded as a family or a lineage affair rather than as a conjugal tie between a husband and a wife. In marriage, two families have created a relationship, and a husband and a wife have become members of existing families and communities. (e.g. Kenyatta 1995, 163-185.) Consequently, considerations governing marriage have involved more than just a husband and a wife (Potash 1995 [1984], 82). What has been regarded as a 'good marriage' has not been so much a matter of the individuals in question than that of their family backgrounds, and social and economic circumstances involved in a marriage (Haram 1999, 197). Thus, even among the Kikuyu, women have not been able to choose their spouses entirely freely, although they may have had influence through consultation with the parents (Robertson 1997, 197). However, Kikuyu women have had more freedom than women in most other groups; the mutual attraction of the spouses-to-be has been the basis of the Kikuyu marriage already in pre-colonial times, and at least the consent of the woman has been required before the marriage could have taken place (Kenyatta 1995, 163; Schäfer 1997, 203).

In Kenya, there is a practice of legal pluralism, where "state law is the ultimate authority and it dominates other plural legal orders" (Kameri-Mbote 2001). When it comes to

marriage, one can marry either through statute law or one of the customary laws in Kenya. While statute law includes either a church or a civil wedding, customary marriage is sealed with negotiations between the spouses' families and paying, or agreement, of bridewealth. In addition to these, one can marry through Islamic and Hindu family laws in Kenya, but in this study, Hindu and Muslim families are not included. (Kameri-Mbote 2001; Kuria 1987, 289; 294.) Practices connected to marrying customarily vary in different communities, i.e. there is a Luo customary law, Kikuyu customary law etc., but even inside them there are individual, class, regional and temporal variations (Robertson 1997, 199).

Traditions concerning marriage practiced in pre-colonial Kenya have changed to some extent as a result of growing economic pressure, which makes it difficult to get the required bridewealth (LeVine 1979, 28; Seppälä 1995, 114), but also because of Christianisation and urbanisation. Specifically bridewealth and polygyny have been among those issues that missionaries have attacked (Robertson 1997, 191). Still, customary practices are followed and appreciated when marrying, even if they are “only a shadow of the past complexity of marriage rituals” (Seppälä 1995, 113).

Bridewealth as a seal of a marriage

The concept of bridewealth

Bridewealth can be regarded as one of the key concepts in African marriages (Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987a, 11), and it has been a central part of customary marriage procedures in Kenya.⁵ Bridewealth refers to the payment by the husband's grouping to the wife's relatives, whereas dowry means the property brought to the union by the bride's family (Spiro 1975, 89-90). Kenyans use words bridewealth and dowry, as well as bride price, synonymously in their everyday talk, and also I often talked about dowry when actually meaning bridewealth when talking with them. That is why, in the citations of our discussions, all those words may be used.

The meaning of bridewealth has basically been to transfer property and gifts from the groom's family to the bride's family in order to confer the rights to the wife's sexual and domestic labour, and also to the children born in a marriage (e.g. Davison 1996, 34; LeVine 1979, 28; Potash 1995, 83; Stichter 1988, 187). For the bride's parents, bridewealth has been a

⁵ However, all African societies do not have the practice of paying bridewealth. Brideservice, where the new husband is supposed to do work for his in-laws, is practiced at least in parts of Tanzania (see Vuorela 1987, 98-99).

compensation of the resources they have invested for their daughter (e.g. LeVine 1979, 11), and even today, the more educated the bride is, the more her parents may demand for bridewealth (Davison 1996, 236). This is not, however, always the case, as I will discuss later.

Because bridewealth has been a very important aspect in marriage, it has often been difficult for young men to get enough wealth to marry if they have not come from wealthy families. Family circumstances have influenced the timing of their marriage. There have, however, been traditionally accepted ways to avoid marriage payments. For instance, among the Kikuyu, if a man was unable to provide the bridewealth, he could enter into a patron-client relationship with a wealthier man. If he then married his patron's daughter, no bridewealth was demanded. (Schäfer 1997, 204.)

Bridewealth and divorce

When a woman gets married, she can expect to be taken care of by her husband. For a bride herself, the importance of whether or not bridewealth has been paid becomes essential in the case the marriage ends. Thus, in case of a divorce, bridewealth often needs to be paid back, at least part of it (Håkansson 1988, 159; Stichter 1988, 187). However, this varies in practise. For instance among the Luo, deductions are made from every child born in the marriage, and with four or five children, the wife would virtually have no bridewealth to return (Parkin 1980, 208-209). The requirement to return the bridewealth in divorce makes divorce cases somewhat problematic.

For instance, women in Luo families may not be encouraged to have a divorce, because bridewealth payments play an important role in Luo marriages. In addition, the woman may not be willing to have a divorce, because according to Luo customary law she loses her children to the father or father's family. (Parkin 1980, 200; Stichter 1988, 187; Potash 1995, 80.) The father gets the children, because the children are considered to belong to the one who has paid the bridewealth. As the bridewealth has customarily been paid in cattle, children's positions in a divorce are highlighted in a proverb: *mtoto ni mtoto wa ng'ombe* (a child is a child of a cow) (Ulla Vuorela, personal communication, winter 2004).

If the bridewealth which has been paid to the wife's extended family members is already used for living, investments, or perhaps for paying the bridewealth for one of her brothers, her family members may rather hope that she remains married, whatever her wishes are. However, this is not always the case, and sometimes the wife's family members may be more than willing to return the bridewealth, if they do not see a possibility to sort things out in a difficult marriage.

Current situation

In contemporary Kenya - after independence (in 1963) or at least since 1970's - (Robertson 1997, 207; LeVine 1979, 28), bridewealth is often not paid, and even marriage negotiations may not take place at all.⁶ In those cases, a man and a woman establish a union of cohabitation without the payment or agreement of bridewealth payments (Håkansson 1988, 179; Silberschmidt 1999, 75). These kinds of marriages, elopements, are the most common form of getting married today among those Kisii and Luhya communities Sarah LeVine (1979, 28) and Pekka Seppälä (1995, 112) have studied respectively. Elopements usually take place because of lack of resources to pay the bridewealth, which may be a considerable amount of cattle and money. In elopements, bridewealth can be paid later, although that happens rarely, and if so, usually only after the woman has proven that she is fertile, i.e. after the first child is born (Seppälä 1995, 114; Silberschmidt 1999, 78).

Regardless of the fact that paying the bridewealth has become less common generally in Kenya, paying is still a socially appreciated practice. When the bridewealth is not paid, women in the rural area are seen to be in a marginal position with an insecure status (Seppälä 1995, 114; LeVine, 1979, 365), as they belong properly to neither their natal nor their current family (Silberschmidt 1999, 84). The situation may also be uncomfortable for men, as for instance among the Kisii, according to cultural definition of fatherhood, bridewealth needs to be paid before the children can be considered to belong to their biological father (Håkansson 1988, 141). Thus, bridewealth should not be regarded simply as a form of exchange, because "bridewealth systems have subtly varying and often concealed implications for notions of legitimacy and personhood" (Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987a, 9).

⁶ According to Sarah LeVine (1979, 27-28), in the mid-60's, it was still common to marry according to traditional practices in the Kisii community she studied. Ten years later, it had become extremely rare. Claire Robertson (1997, 207) argues in her historical research on Kikuyu and Kamba women traders in Nairobi area during 1890-1990, that after independence, the role of the marriage ceremonies and bridewealth became less important. One can also read from Kikuyu women's life histories, that in the 1950's marriage negotiations still seemed to take place among the Kikuyu, but in the 1980's particularly the role of bridewealth had become a matter of choice rather than a requirement (Davison 1996, 181; 205). However, already in the 1930's elopement and abduction together were more common than traditional marriage in one Luhya community, regardless of the ideals (Wagner [1949] cited in Seppälä 1995, 113).

Polygyny: rural experiences

Traditionally, polygyny has been practiced widely in Kenya. Statute law marriages and customary law marriages have different perceptions of polygyny; while both civil marriage and church marriage are monogamous by definition, customary marriages may also be polygynous, and the number of wives is not limited.⁷ However, in practice, things are more complex, because even a monogamous statute law marriage may become polygynous later, by customary procedures. Thus, a couple may marry through statute law, for instance having a church wedding. If the husband sometimes later would like to take another wife, he could not do it through statute law again, without breaking the law. If he wanted to have another wife through a civil or church wedding, he should first divorce the first wife. However, even if the first wife had been wed through statute law, the husband can take more wives through customary law.⁸ (See Stichter 1988, 186; Potash 1995, 91.) This often causes problems in the families, as I will discuss later in the chapter on polygyny.

Although polygyny is probably becoming less common nowadays (e.g. Khasiani 1995, 42-43), it is still an option for many people. Particularly the Luo residing around Lake Victoria Basin (Ssenyonga 1997, 269), as well as ethnic groups such as the Samburu and Turkana, residing in the North-Western part of Kenya, and the Maasai, residing in the Southern Kenya, on the border of Tanzania, still practice polygyny.⁹ There are different estimations and small-scale surveys made on the prevalence of polygyny in different parts of Kenya.¹⁰ According to one estimation, approximately 20 percent of all marriages in Kenya are polygynous nowadays (Khasiani 1995, 39), but the figures vary a lot according to the age, education, location and ethnic background of the people involved. In Western Kenya, according to some studies, about one third of married men (Seppälä 1995, 85; Ssenyonga 1997, 269) and over half of the married women (Ssenyonga 1997, 269) live in polygynous unions. About half of the households are polygynous (Nyberg 2004, 143). On the other hand, for instance among the Kikuyu, the amount is much smaller (see Abbott 1997, 91; Davison 1996, 255, table 2).

⁷ Hindu marriages are monogamous, Muslim marriages may be polygynous (Kameri-Mbote 2001).

⁸ A Marriage Bill, which among other things would have made polygyny possible only with the agreement of the first wife, has been voted down twice in the Kenyan parliament (Nzomo 1997, 241; Stichter 1988, 186).

⁹ Reasons for the high polygyny rates among The Samburu, Turkana and Maasai derive from the fact that they still follow the indigenous belief systems to a considerable extent, and in many areas have the pastoral nomadic lifestyle, in which polygyny makes very good economic sense in terms of access to labour for optimal resource management (Celia Nyamweru, pers. comm., winter 2004).

¹⁰ Here, one should remember, that I did not include Muslim or Hindu families in this research.

Polygyny in urban areas, and particularly in Nairobi, is not as common, but as far as I know, proper, up-to-date statistics on the subject are lacking. According to a survey made by Khasiani (1995, 42) in Nairobi, less than seven percent of migrant women (i.e. women who had moved to Nairobi from other parts of Kenya), and less than two percent of non-migrant women lived in polygynous unions, regardless of their education. However, statistics about polygyny rates in Nairobi should not be taken at a face value, since polygyny in urban areas, particularly in a city like Nairobi, may not be as open and similarly organised as in the countryside, as I hope to show later in this research.

Research literature about polygyny in Kenya is almost exclusively limited to rural experiences. In order to give background for current situation in urban setting discussed later, I will have a quick look at the literature on polygynous arrangements in rural settings: the roles of the wives in polygyny, as well as the pros and cons of polygyny for women and men.

Regina Smith Oboler describes the everyday practices of a polygynous Nandi family in the end of 1970's in the following way:

“All wives in a polygynous family cook for the husband at every meal and set his portion aside – the husband, without prearrangement, may decide to eat at the house of any of his wives. If the wives are on good terms they may, with the husband's agreement, make an arrangement whereby one cooks for the entire compound on a given day if the other is busy with some other work. A husband may decide to spend the night in the house of any wife. There is no strict rotational schedule, but it is considered wrong for a husband to neglect a wife entirely, particularly sexually. It is a woman's intrinsic right to be impregnated and bear children. If her husband doesn't impregnate her, she is justified in seeking this service elsewhere.” (Oboler 1985, 127.)

Another quote from another ethnic community comes from Sarah LeVine, who describes the ‘traditional’ way of organising polygyny in the Kisii community:¹¹

“Polygyny was a cardinal feature of the homestead. The patriarch had several wives – at least two, ideally four, occasionally eight or more. Each wife had her own house with its own yard, surrounded by the fields allocated to her by the patriarch --- When each of his sons married, he built another house, nearer to the mother's than to those of her cowives, for himself and his wife. There were also children's or bachelors' huts (*chisaiga*, singular *esaiga*), for older boys to live in before marriage; and the patriarch himself – who ideally rotated among his wives but often stayed longer with the youngest – sometimes slept in *esaiga* as a retreat from domestic strife.” (LeVine 1979, 6.)

¹¹ By 'traditional', she refers to pre-colonial practises, which have gradually changed but still offering prototypes which have remained “salient in the social thought of most Gusii people” (LeVine 1979, 6).

Both examples show some aspects of the role of wives in polygynous families, and point to the rotation system in sleeping arrangements. They also hint at potential conflicts in polygynous families.

Sharing the burdens...

Although the extents to which the wives work together varies according to different ethnic groups and individual polygynous families, there is a possibility to share the workload between the wives. This has often been referred as one of the main advantages of polygynous unions for women. As Patricia Stamp puts it: “the polygamous household may offer women a basis for solidarity and task-sharing. At the household level, cowives cooperate to organi(s)e production, consumption and child care. --- [M]any studies stress the economic and political advantages of polygamy, including the autonomy made possible by shared responsibility” (quoted in Nasimiyu 1997, 285). Traditionally in rural environment, polygyny was often supported by women and men. Because land was plentiful, there was enough to be shared, and often too much work for one wife. For example, the Luhya used to share the land between the wives, who then used to cultivate their own plots (Nasimiyu 1997, 284-285). Among the Kikuyu, if the wives had good relationships, they might do cultivation and cooking together (Davison 1996, 35). Also for a woman trader it is a great benefit to have a co-wife who can take care of the domestic issues when she concentrates on business and travel (Robertson 1997, 66; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 74). In sharing the workload, the benefit is not so much for the second wife, as it is for the first one, because the second wife, who is usually younger, will eventually do most of the work.

Another frequently mentioned advantage for a woman of having a co-wife is a possibility to have rest after delivery and when sick (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1991 [1984], 25; Oboler, 1985, 73; Davison 1996, 98; Ocholla-Ayayo 1997, 113). The chance to rest when in need is a benefit for both wives. Polygynous arrangements have also been considered as a rescue for those women who might not get a husband of her own (Ssenyonga 1997, 278). However, for those infertile women who are married already, this may cause insecurity, because the husband may consider taking a second wife to deliver children.

...as well as everything else

One obvious disadvantage for women in polygynous marriages comes from sharing, however. Although the workload is shared, so are the finances. This is particularly hard for the first wife, who has tried to accumulate wealth for years with her husband, and when they have gained some wealth, the husband may decide to use it for taking a second wife (see Kayongo-Male &

Onyango 1991, 67). Sharing also means sharing husband's attention and material resources. When there are many wives in the family, the most important thing seems to be equality between them (see also Fainzang & Journet 1988, 62-70). If all wives feel they are treated in a fair way, there are better chances that relations in the family are harmonious. However, this may be an impossible requirement. For instance, according to Oboler, her Nandi informants of all age and sex categories were convinced that a husband always loves one wife more than the other (Oboler 1985, 126). Generally relations between the co-wives are not described as particularly harmonious (e.g. Oboler 1985, 126; Seppälä 1995, 124).

Anthropologist Pekka Seppälä gives an example of a Luhya family of three wives where the husband showed considerable preference for the third wife, and the other wives showed bitterness. To avoid that, the man tried to divide everything (i.e. every piece of food, soap etc.) equally between the wives (Seppälä 1995, 124). It is illuminating that the words for a co-wife and jealousy may be synonymous, as is the case in Baganda, where a word *kujaa* stands for both (Kilbride & Kilbride 1993 [1990], 205). This is also the case among the Kikuyu, where the word for a cowife, *muiru*, derives from the word for jealousy (Robertson 1997, 204). Whenever polygyny is discussed in the literature, the jealousy and concern over material goods, rather than over the husband's emotional attachment, is brought up (Madhava 2002, 69; Robertson 1997, 214; Seppälä 1995, 124; Silberschmidt 1999, 80; but see also Fainzang & Journet 1988 for other disputes). However, not only the co-wives have conflicts in polygynous marriages - also the spouses do, particularly in a situation where the husband is marrying a new wife (Whyte & Kariuki 1997, 139).

Prestigious polygynist

For a man, being polygynous has been widely considered as a sign of prestige (e.g. Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 261; Nasimiya 1997, 285; Oboler 1985, 124). In many cases, polygyny and political power have been linked together (see Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 262), and indeed, as Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997, 213) suggests, for politicians, polygyny may be a good option tactically: One of the wives, or some of them, if many, stay in the countryside ensuring the husband "the legitimacy and support essential to him in the local voting district at election time", while one of the wives, preferably the most educated one, stays in town. Many wives can be beneficial for politicians also in other ways. A Kenyan newspaper reported about an elder politician with eight wives, who wanted two of them to become his "inheritors" after his retirement, "keeping it all in the big family", as the newspaper entitled the article. His seventh wife said in the article that "We respect our husband. He does not entertain petty jealousies and

rivalry among his wives. ---We regard ourselves as more of co-workers than co-wives”, and the husband himself emphasised that he has paid bridewealth for all of his wives and educated many of them. (Sunday Nation 17.11.2002, 1; 4.)

In polygyny, resources are needed, because taking another wife means paying yet another bridewealth. Often older, wealthy men with a lot of land have preferred taking many wives (Seppälä 1995, 85; Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 263; Ssenyonga 1997, 269; 278). Some men, of course, have neither money nor prestige, but by marrying many wives they are hoping to achieve them, most often in vain (Kilbride & Kilbride 1993, 205; see also Nyberg 2004, 89). For those who already have some resources, having many wives may be a prosperous choice (see Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997, 212).

In addition to wealth and prestige, marrying more than one wife has also given old-age security for a man; this way, he has had someone to take care of him, even if one of the wives died, and children had moved far away from the homestead (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 263). For the first wife, this kind of a situation can cause tremendous bitterness as the first wife may feel seriously marginalised and indeed impoverished if the resources she helped to build up are now used on a new family (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004). One consequence that decline in official polygyny has in the context of the whole family is particularly interesting regarding the topic of this thesis. It concerns the relations of dependency between the family members. When the old father used to be taken care of by his young wife or wives, who will take care of him when there is no young wife, or a wife at all (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 265)? The responsibility for this would fall on his children.

For a man, there have not been great disadvantages in polygyny, as long as he has afforded feeding and educating the family members, and managed to treat his wives equally. A rural polygynist with four wives described his life as a husband to many wives in the following way:

“When one wife has her ‘monthly’ I go to another one. When one is angry with me I can go to another and get good food and good treatment. When visitors come they get served faster. There is a good division of labo(u)r around the house. On the negative side, I could mention the problem of getting land since each wife needs land for her children. There are multiple demands, one wants food, another clothes. Really difficult is the demand for school fees and uniforms. Overall, I think the man with several wives is happier than the man with one. He can go to several fathers-in-law for help.” (He, however, admits that his wives may not be satisfied:) “I think a woman married to a monogamist is happier than the one married to a polygynist.” (Kilbride & Kilbride 1993, 211.)

Reasons for declining polygyny

In the urban environment old arrangements and motives for polygyny do not work anymore: there is no land to be shared or cultivated and consequently, there is no need for sharing the workload for a more efficient farming. In towns, also space is a major issue.¹² Thus, surely urbanisation itself has affected the declining rates of polygyny, but there are also other factors. One of them, in the rural setting, is the shortage of land (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 262). For instance in Kisii District, the rapid population growth makes farms smaller for each generation (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 263). There is not enough land to be shared among the wives, and not so much farm work to be done, either. Another reason is the impact of Christianity, Western education, and the ideas of development (Davison 1996, 37). Although polygyny was one of the issues that missionaries have attacked most forcefully in Kenya, the impact of Christianity has not wiped polygyny away (Robertson 1997, 191; Oboler 1985, 124-5). However, Christianity and 'modernity' often attached to it, has had an impact. For instance among the Gusii, the 'big men' do not marry many wives any more, because it is not considered as modern, and on the other hand, political power is not linked to someone who has many wives as much as it used to (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 262). Hand in hand with the ideas of development goes education. Educating children is a major struggle for most families, and with less children chances to give education for all of them are better (Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 262; Parkin 1978, 83).

However, polygyny has not disappeared altogether. In East Africa, men still often have *nyumba ndogo* (small house) (See Haram 2004, 223; Silberschmidt 2004, 239), and in Francophone Africa *une deuxième bureau* (second office) (Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987a, 12), as the second wives' households are called. All in all, women's positions in polygynous marriages have been, and still are, ambiguous; on the one hand, polygyny may offer independence of a certain degree for women, but on the other hand, it also causes insecurity and competition. (See also Nyberg 2004, 142-143.)

¹² If a man takes another official wife in a town, it may even lead to a situation where the co-wives are forced to share the house and the kitchen (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004). In unofficial polygyny this is usually not the problem, because the 'second wife' does not live with the 'first wife', regardless of where the husband lives.

Sexual relations in the era of HIV/AIDS

I think that at this point it is important to have a look at the overlapping issues of sexuality, marital (in)fidelity, HIV/AIDS and polygyny in contemporary Kenya. In the era of HIV/AIDS, sexual behaviour has become one of the most important attributes of survival.¹³ I believe all Kenyans know someone who has died of AIDS, most know many. People have lost their family members, neighbours, school mates or colleagues. I once talked about the issue of AIDS with a graduate woman who was working at an international NGO (non-governmental-organisation) involved in HIV/AIDS research. She told me that she had recently lost a close friend because of AIDS. The friend was married to a very prominent businessman, and they had a child. She told me that she did not know if the husband had the virus as well, probably, but so far he looked healthy. She was worried about the child, but did not know if she was transmitted: *"I don't know, but she's fine, she looks very okay, she goes to school, yeah. I don't know if they've ever tested her for AIDS, I don't know, I've never asked, because it's still a bit sensitive. So I've never asked. But the husband is very fine, okay, he looks fine."*¹⁴

Her words are revealing, and tell a lot about the general atmosphere on HIV/AIDS in Kenya. It is still regarded as a taboo, at least to a certain extent, and the private as well as public views concerning AIDS pandemic are contradictory and sometimes quite surprising (see e.g. Daily Nation 25.10.2004). Although at least highly educated urban people speak about it seemingly openly on a general level, when it comes to personal experiences, it is not always discussed easily. Even this highly educated Luo woman, who was dealing with AIDS counselling regularly at work, had not talked about it openly with her childhood friend who had known about the virus for years. Infected people are sometimes abandoned by kin, and this makes many people hide their disease, and continue to spread it further. Although many told me openly that their siblings had died of AIDS, some expressed the reason for death in an indirect way, but so that I understood they meant AIDS. Some clearly did not want to talk about the reasons why they had lost siblings, and just commented that they did not know why they had died.

¹³ In 2001, the estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Kenya was 2 500 000, which makes about 8 percent of total population (UNAIDS 2002, 190), but according to the National Aids Control Council, in the worst infected areas, such as the Busia District, even 30 percent of the population is HIV-positive (Daily Nation 12.2.2003, section 2, p. 2).

¹⁴ Interview 9.11.2002

Another friend of mine told me about her neighbours, a professional couple with one child. The wife had some time ago died of AIDS, and my friend said the child was not looking well either. However, the husband had married another woman very soon after the loss of his first wife, and the new wife had just given birth to a child. My friend said that she could not understand why people do not take care of themselves, and what caused her most amazement in the situation, was the fact that the man was a doctor himself. Although this account may or may not be exactly accurate, these kinds of stories are told all the time.

I got the impression when talking with people, that highly educated people are aware of the facts concerning HIV/AIDS nowadays. When in Kenya in 1997-1998, I noticed that even some educated people still had quite ambiguous perception of it, but in 2002-2003 the information seemed to have reached them better. Factual information, experiences among the family and friends and stories like the ones I presented above have made many people carefully consider their own sexual behaviour.

For the unmarried people this means that they may not engage in casual sexual relations very easily. They may rather commit themselves to one permanent sexual relationship although it has not been legitimised by marriage, to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, than stay uncommitted and have casual sexual relationships. For instance one unmarried male student of medicine I spoke with said that in this situation, it was wiser, if one met the right person, to start living with her and then try to save money together than first wait for several years to save for the bridewealth. (See also Hasu 1999, 300.) For the married ones the situation is a bit more complicated. Some of those who become widows still face a situation where her in-laws insist that she would enter into a leviratic marriage, i.e. marry one of her late husband's brothers. Leviratic marriage may have very dramatic conclusions in the era of HIV/AIDS. If a man who dies from AIDS leaves a widow, who is most likely HIV-positive as well, and his brother marries her, he will probably be infected, too. He will then transmit the virus further to his other wives etc. Similarly, if the new husband is transmitted, he will probably pass the virus to his new wife as well. An AIDS counsellor explained to me the problems she has faced concerning AIDS, levirate and traditional beliefs in her own Luo community:

“And to them, it's not AIDS, to them, he's bewitched, you know, so it's... cause I asked the wife what do you think is making him so sick, you know, she told me, you know we took him to hospital, they told us he's okay, there's nothing wrong, they can't find anything wrong with him. You know because it's a very remote part, no one wants to tell you you have AIDS, they are telling they can't find anything wrong. So it's another problem. Cause if this man dies, among my people, his wife will be inherited, then the cycle continues. They will tell them now he died because he was bewitched. Instead of telling them he died of

*AIDS, please don't inherit her. I mean if she believes the husband was bewitched, she won't refuse being inherited."*¹⁵

Far more often than through leviratic marriages, however, highly educated women are exposed to HIV/AIDS without their own knowledge, because of husband's other sexual relationships. In fact, a statistical study by Luke & Munshi (2003, e.g. 3) made among the male Luo in Kisumu, Kenya, shows that marriage does not have a significant influence on men's (extra-marital) sexual relations.

Household and family

Household and family are central concepts in this research (see Moore 1988, 54-64 for discussion). In the Kenyan context, these two have clearly different meanings. For instance in Western Kenya, household is defined on the basis of shared consumption; household consists of "those who share a cooking pot" (Bradley and Weisner 1997, xxv; Nyberg 2004, 88). An urban household can consist for instance of different extended family members, but also include maids from the countryside, as well as other people coming from the same village and looking for a job in Nairobi. Although many of those who live in the same households are related to each other, households do not usually constitute whole families. Throughout this research, when talking about family, I generally mean family as it is understood in Kenya, including many family members from different households, that is, the *extended family*. When I mean exclusively the husband, the wife and their children, I will talk about *nuclear family*. In addition, I use the term *conjugal family*, to refer to a family which consists of a married couple and their children plus one or more relatives.

Ralph Linton suggested in the 1930's a model according to which families consist of relationships based on both *conjugal* (i.e. marriage) and *consanguineal* (i.e. blood) ties. Thus, in a family there would be a conjugal tie between the parents and consanguineal ties between the parents and their children. According to him, some families were conjugal and emphasised the role of the conjugal tie, i.e. marriage, whereas other families were consanguineal, and emphasised the importance of 'blood' ties. Families thus differ from other kin groups, such as lineages or clans, which are based exclusively on consanguineal (blood) ties. In his view, nuclear families were rather insignificant in many societies. (Linton 1936, 159-172.) In the late 1940's, George P. Murdock presented an opposite opinion. He argued that all family forms

¹⁵ Interview 9.11.2002

derive from a basic family form, *nuclear family*, which comprised of a husband and a wife and their children. Consequently, he defined *extended families* as consisting of two or more nuclear families related to each other either by the parent-child or the sibling tie. (Murdock 1965 [1949], 1-2.)

As Niara Sudarkasa (2004) has pointed out in a recent article, relations between the terms are not simple, particularly when it comes to the use of conjugal or nuclear families in the African contexts. According to her, the term 'nuclear family' refers to Euro-American family type, and is more restricted in its meaning than Linton's term conjugal family. This Euro-American concept of nuclear family can be applicable to modern Africa, but only to some extent. Sudarkasa prefers the term conjugal family when speaking of indigenous African families built around a marital tie. There is indeed an important difference between the nuclear and the conjugal family, although they may look structurally similar, both consisting of the husband and the wife and their children. When it comes to a 'traditional' polygynous African context, such as the one in Kenya, a monogamous conjugal family has often been just a phase, either in the beginning or in the end of a marriage, where the husband has been living with one wife only. In a nuclear family context, there is no such *expectation* (Sudarkasa 2004, 3-4, italics added), although in practise monogamy is not always guaranteed in monogamous nuclear family contexts, either. In addition, divorce may change the structures of both conjugal families and nuclear families, indeed breaking them.

Sudarkasa suggests than instead of Murdock's definition of an extended family as consisting of nuclear families, extended family (in African contexts) refers to the "*large family grouping built around the descent group known as a lineage, and also divisible into smaller conjugal families built around monogamous and/or polygamous marriages*" (Sudarkasa 2004, 5). Similarly, she suggests that Murdock's (1965, 23) understanding of polygynous conjugal families consisting of distinct nuclear families with a common husband/father, is erroneous (Sudarkasa 2004, 11-12). I can easily agree with Sudarkasa when it comes to a 'traditional' African, or Kenyan in this case, society. Even in contemporary urban Kenya, the extended family consists of several extended family members, instead of nuclear families, although conjugal families often are part of it. However, highly educated people in urban Kenya are in a somewhat different position when it comes to polygynous families. Sudarkasa claims that polygynous conjugal families have certain specific characteristics that bind them together, and they cannot thus be considered as nuclear families that share a common husband/father. I think that this is problematic. It is true that there are complex dynamics in polygynous conjugal

families, but I would still suggest that in the urban middle class Kenyan context, the new polygynous conjugal families in many aspects work like distinct nuclear families.

I will not specifically study affinal and consanguineal kin separately in this research. However, as the focus of this research is on women, and customarily, women become members of their husbands' families through marriage, the relatives that nuclear or conjugal families are mainly involved with, are those of the husband. From the perspective of the women, their relationships to their affinal relatives, i.e. in-laws are more under discussion than their relationships to their consanguineal relatives. Of course, when referring to relatives, I will make clear which ones are talked about.

In the early stages of research I had thought that I would study highly educated women's and men's relationships in marriages. When I asked highly educated women about their relationships with their husbands, I soon realised that it was not only the relationship between the two of them that mattered, but also the extended family was highly involved in their lives. Thus, I did not find it meaningful to study marital relationships in Kenya without including these extended family members and their influence in the research. Similarly, I decided not to focus on households, even if they contained relatives, but on kin networks. (See Moore 1988, 59.) It is important, however, not to talk of nuclear or extended families as oppositional to each other, because many families may be nuclear in a certain situation, and extended in another situation (Beall, Kanji and Tacoli 1999, 162). More precisely, families are most often regarded as extended, but household compositions are flexible, making households sometimes nuclear and sometimes conjugal, when relatives live there as well. Similarly, families are flexible, and the boundaries are negotiable, as I will point out later.

I do not use the concepts female or male headed households in this thesis. I dislike the terms, and think that they do not point to real dynamics and situations in highly educated Kenyan women's families. Among them, there are households where adult siblings live together, but only one of the siblings, a daughter, is working, while others are either unemployed or studying, including the brother. However, the woman takes care of everything. In terms of financial contribution, this would clearly be a female headed household. Again there are households where the wife earns more money than the husband and they even share decision-making. Would these be male-headed households because there is a man in the house? Not in my view. I try to make clear the dynamics of financial contribution and decision-making in those families I discuss, without using terms female or male-headed households.

Changing family

Many researchers have noted recently that contemporary African societies are in a state of flux with many controversial views concerning values, practices and opinions. These controversies have had significant effects on family life. The meaning of family, family life dynamics, the role of women and men as members in extended families are all changing rapidly in Kenya, and these issues are discussed widely as well in research (e.g. Suda 1996, 77; Weisner et al. 1997; McAdoo and Were 1989 [1987]; Kilbride and Kilbride 1993; Silberschmidt 1999), in media (e.g. Daily Nation 2.1.1998; Daily Nation 7.1.1998; Sunday Nation 15.2.1998.) and in fiction (Ogot 1992 [1976]). According to Kenyan anthropologist Collette Suda (1996, 77), the reasons for social change in Kenya can be found for instance in urbanisation, Christian teaching, formal education, male labour migration, feminism and other modern social forces. In this situation, examining the changing meaning of the family, the basic institution in African societies, is vitally important.

Traditionally, family has been a safety network in Kenya. In times of crises, like illness, death or food shortage, relatives have tried to make sure that all family members are taken care of. In addition, extended family systems have taught social, ethical and traditional values, which according to some (e.g. Suda 1996, 74), are now being mixed and swept away because of urbanisation and development. (Kilbride and Kilbride 1993, 62; 76.) However, instead of vanishing, traditional values and practices are combined with the new ones in contemporary life (Björkman 1993, 109). Like traditional and new values and practices, also rural and urban elements in African families live side by side (Beall, Kanji and Tacoli 1999, 160). Life in the urban environment in Kenya is closely connected to the life in the rural areas. Although for instance educated urban women live in many ways 'modern' life, they have many ties to the countryside and to the more 'traditional' lifestyle. In fact, as Beall, Kanji and Tacoli (1999, 160) state, "the interactions and linkages between city and countryside are increasingly recogni[s]ed as central factors in processes of social and economic change in Africa". These interactions and linkages are maintained mainly by kinship ties that still remain relatively strong in Kenya, as well as elsewhere in contemporary Africa (see Smith 2004). Kin ties are kept alive by various kinds of helping and mutual assistance, as I will show later in this thesis.

In relationships with kin, there are some aspects of continuity, things that strongly tie people to the larger communities. One of the most important, in my opinion, is the mutual help and assistance people provide to each other, and particularly their extended family members. Partly they do so because they feel that it is their duty, partly it is willingness to help

kin, at least to a certain amount. Many of the highly educated people have received help from their relatives at some stage of their studies, and they want to do something for those who need help now that they are able to do that. That creates a circle of help and reciprocity.

Another thing to maintain close links between the rural and urban family members is the way many Kenyans regard 'home'. Although some of the women to whom I talked had lived all their life in Nairobi, most still did not regard the city as their home (see also Oucho 1996, 54; Pietilä 1999, 34; Kilbride et al. 2000, 50), in a sense that they made explicit that their real home was somewhere else, although they lived in Nairobi. For participants, home was first and foremost the place where they came from originally, or in the case of those born in Nairobi, the place where their parents came from or the place where most extended family members lived. They also talked about home when referring to their husbands' 'homes'. The importance of the contacts between the urban home and rural home is shown for instance in the fact that most people I interviewed in Nairobi either had built a house at home or were planning to do so after they would have enough money, thus strengthening the ties to the extended family. Some women were ashamed of not having a house at home already, although they felt that it was long overdue. In their cases, women told me that the husbands are spending all the money on supporting relatives, so that they cannot even afford to build a house at home. When it comes to house building, all women said they would build a house on their husbands' homes, instead of their own.

Middle class, highly educated people, professionals

Changing aspects of family life touch particularly the lives of urban, highly educated people. In earlier literature concerning those Kenyan or other African women who are either educated and/or professional or who are married to those kinds of men are called variably elite women, middle class women or professional women. There do not seem to be strict lines between these concepts. However, regardless of the ambiguous practice of using these concepts in an inter-related manner, I try to be more specific here.

Education is usually regarded as a main defining attribute of African middle class (for instance Lloyd 1967, 125; Stichter 1988, 179). Also I thought in the beginning of the research that university education leads to a certain kind of 'middle class life'. In a Kenyan context middle class life refers to living in the upmarket residential areas, holding a professional job, driving an expensive car, educating the children in private schools, and using English as an

everyday language. It goes without saying that ‘middle class’ people are supposed to live in a house with amenities, like a water toilet, running water, shower, electricity etc. Modern dwellings are an important way to differentiate middle class people from the less affluent (see Nevanlinna 1996, 307). However, the lifestyle described above is only possible for the affluent ones, not all highly educated.

When I talk about middle class, I refer to participants’ educational background instead of occupation or level of income. Most of the people who participated in my research have a university degree, and are thus exceptionally well educated by Kenyan standards. Although some of them can be regarded as belonging to the elite of society, mainly due to the husband’s high position, or coming from a prominent family, most of them cannot. Although some participants earned well, lived in the upmarket areas of Nairobi, owned property and led the kind of life which is usually attached to *wabenzi* people in Kenya, many of them did not.¹⁶ Even more importantly, some highly educated people barely even belong to a middle class, certainly not in terms of standards and ways of living. Those whom I became most acquainted with, lived quite modestly, had small salaries that hardly covered their expenses, did not travel abroad and more or less spent money only on necessities. However, all of them had mobile phones during my last visit in 2002-2003. In 1997-1998 none of my acquaintances had one. Surely somebody may become part of the elite by having a high position which presupposes education, but education itself hardly even automatically guarantees one any job in today’s Kenya. A significant issue to remember when considering the people whose life this research is about is that most of them have educational and intellectual capital, but not necessarily financial capital. This holds specifically for those people who work at the universities, or elsewhere in the public sector, with poor wages (see Daily Nation 11.11.2003).

Thus, when talking about the people who participated in this research, I talk about highly educated women / men / families. But when referring more commonly to the kind of urban life that is possible for many of them, I talk about middle class life, context etc.

1.3. Middle class family life in Kenya and Africa – a literature review

Most ethnographies concerning Kenya focus on a certain ethnic group in the rural or semi-rural area, and their aim is to understand life, traditions, and rituals of the people belonging to that

¹⁶ Those people who can afford to buy a Mercedes Benz (i.e. affluent middle class) are called *wabenzi*.

group (to mention but a few, Kenyatta 1995; LeVine 1979; Langley 1979; Oboler 1985; Håkansson 1988; Moore 1986; Spencer 1988). Quite a number of these studies deal with the family life or gender problematic in one way or another. These studies have helped me to understand the traditional practices of different ethnic groups related to marriage and family, and thus given me perspective on today's attitudes and practices. They have offered me important insight when it comes to bridewealth negotiations and the whole process of marrying customarily, as well as to traditional roles of women and men and the role of the extended family. They have not, however, helped me very much to understand the specific problems in the urban middle class environment. Also most of the more recent ethnographies on Kenya (and Tanzania) tend to focus on a particular ethnic group, and still on the countryside or small-town environment, but I have found some of them (especially Davison 1996; Haram 1999, Hasu 1999, Pietilä 1999, Silberschmidt 1999) very interesting also from the point of view of this research, as they deal with gender issues, together with the questions of modernisation and rural-urban linkages, although often implicitly or vaguely.

Most classic ethnographies are written from a male perspective, emphasising certain issues and making certain issues non-visible (Moore 1988, 1-11). For instance, the male bias of Kenyan ethnographers like Louis Leakey and Jomo Kenyatta is well illustrated and discussed in Carolyn Martin Shaw's book *Colonial Inscriptions. Race, Sex and Class in Kenya* (1997). Because I aim at being conscious of gender dimension throughout the research, I rather use newer interpretations and critical discussions, like that of Shaw, on early ethnographies on Kenya when I need some background information.

Not all research done in Kenya has its focus on the rural life, however. Studies made in Nairobi or other big towns, tend to focus either on poor urban people, like inhabitants of the slums (Nelson 1978; 1990) or street children (Kilbride and al. 2000) or urban people of certain ethnic groups or communities, like the Luo (see e.g. Parkin 1978), or Muslim women (Fuglesang 1994).

Thus, highly educated people's lives in Kenya or other parts in Africa have received little attention in research. Still, there are a few exceptions; studies where highly educated or middle class people are in focus. The most important in connection to this research are the articles of Christine Obbo called "*The New and the Old in East African Elite Marriages*" (1987), and Sharon B. Stichter called "*The Middle-Class Family in Kenya: Changes in Gender Relations*" (1988), as well as that of Harriet McAdoo and Miriam Were called "*Extended Family Involvement and Roles of Urban Kenyan Women*" (1989 [1987]). Also an early monograph of Christine Oppong called "*Marriage Among the Matrilineal Elite. A Family Study of Ghanaian*

Senior Civil Servants” (1974) has been useful for me, although discussing middle class in Ghana. Other studies related to middle class family life are from other African countries (Omari 1960; Gould 1978; Karanja 1987; Ncube 1995) and they are short articles where university or other post-secondary students have been asked about their conceptions and expectations on marriage, family, or everyday life.¹⁷

I will have a short look at the above mentioned studies. Christine Obbo (1987), a Ugandan anthropologist, has East African elite marriages in focus. Although most of the husbands in her research are highly educated, only some wives have university education. She gives qualitative data, and presents cases, which point to such issues as relations to kin, nuclear family, decision-making and domestic chores. The cases she presents resemble parts of data I have quite much.

Sharon Stichter (1988) is an American sociologist, whose research is based on a survey of 317 middle class families in two housing estates in Nairobi in 1979. In her article she explores the changes in women’s positions as a result of creation of a middle class in Kenya, seeking whether a transition to the ‘Western-type’ of nuclear family with more egalitarian and joint relationships between husband and wife is taking place in urban Kenya. In her survey, most women are not highly educated. Her article gives statistical information about for instance who decides on different investments in the family, or on children’s education, as well as how spouses share the different costs, like paying school fees or buying food.

In their article, American Harriet McAdoo and Kenyan Miriam Were study the impact of urbanisation and upward mobility of Kenyan urban professional women and their families in three generations. Their informants were career women in high positions. Thus their point of departure is on women’s occupational status, not their education (McAdoo & Were 1989, 141). Their research is also based on a survey, and they report their ‘findings’ in statistics, and from their research it is possible to get information on how much professional women meet and help relatives etc., but they do not aim at discussing their material in a wider cultural context.

An early monograph on family life among the matrilineal elite in Accra (Ghana) was written by a British anthropologist Christine Oppong in 1974. In this study, she focuses on highly educated *male* civil servants and their families. She uses categorisation of the concepts *open/close* to analyse different relationships spouses have towards extended family members and concepts *joint/segregated* to analyse relationships between the spouses, particularly as it comes to pooling of financial resources and sharing the domestic chores. I am glad that I only

¹⁷ Another PhD thesis on highly educated Nairobi women, concerning their sexualities, is about to be completed by Rachel Spronk (see e.g. Spronk 2004; forthcoming) at the University of Amsterdam.

read this research in the final stage of my own writing. She points at many issues that I focus in my research and her analysis of marital and kin relationships have sharpened my own thinking to a considerable extent in the last phases of writing. However, her research has not steered mine, although it is surprising how similar some concerns seem to be in the end of 1960's in Accra and in the 1990's in Nairobi. The thematic difference between our works is mainly on how we look at relationships; when Oppong pays attention to concrete flows of money or help, for instance, I tend to look at feelings of obligations and morals behind these actions. My point of departure is women, whereas Oppong focused on middle class men and their wives.

Although I found all the studies mentioned above useful to some degree, I also want to distance myself from them. The data in the above mentioned studies is mainly from the 1970's and it is highly likely that values and attitudes have changed a lot since then. Their perspectives are on a concrete level, and they do not look for cultural values behind the everyday customs and practices. Only Obbo and Oppong, who present in-depth stories of some families, give qualitative data, where feelings are involved. Others point to the facts rather than attitudes or feelings, which are important in understanding (also) African family life (Potash 1995, 70), as I intend to do. Furthermore, none of them look exclusively at the family life of the most educated women. Instead, they may have as a starting point woman's high position in the labour market (McAdoo & Were 1989), or the family's social status (which often depends on husband's position) (Obbo 1987; Oppong 1974). Those that focus on students' views on family life represent more expectations than experiences, because most of the students were either unmarried, or recently married. One more significant difference needs to be explained in connection to the previous literature. When elite women, such as those in McAdoo and Were (1989) and Obbo (1987), are studied, they are usually not lacking financial resources, whereas some of the participants in this study were not wealthy, but rather striving to make ends meet. This is important to remember when kinship relations are under discussion.

According to these and other existing studies, the impact of education and social status on kinship contacts in urban Africa is controversial. Margaret Peil has suggested in her research on women in urban Gambia and Nigeria that when it comes to receiving help, education does not have much impact on the amount that women turn into their relatives for help, but, interestingly, the higher their level of income was, the more easily they seek help outside the kin (Peil 1983, 279-280). More generally, McAdoo and Were have suggested that kinship ties increase when social status increases (McAdoo & Were 1989, 135), and that kinship ties are severed or lowered only in cases of economic need, rather than out of social choice (Ross & Weisner 1977, cited in McAdoo & Were, 1989, 135). Christine Obbo (1986, 193), on the other

hand, argues for a more individual attitude. According to her, many elite women in East Africa manage to limit the number of the relatives to be helped to immediate family and close relatives, thus increasing the prosperity in their own nuclear families. She also states that some women avoid their families, even the close relatives, if they feel that the demands from the relatives are too high (Obbo 1980, 116).

Although in the beginning of my research project I was interested in things like sharing the housework etc. when trying to understand marital relations and equality issues, I soon realised that that approach would not lead me to those issues I was actually interested in. I asked women about those, and they answered; sometimes the husband helped in the housework, sometimes he did not. However, it was not so important, as the maids actually do the work. Conflicts do not rise over that issue generally (see also Aina 1998, 77). I felt that to focus on household work would be to impose my own North European views - where sharing the domestic duties equally between the spouses seems to be very important - to interpret Kenyan women's lives. Furthermore, some of the research mentioned earlier, such as Oppong (1974) and McAdoo & Were (1989) has emphasised this approach.

In addition to the studies directly connected to the theme of the research, I have read literature concerning contemporary African family life and marriage in one way or another. Here, volumes like *Transformations of African Marriages* (1987), edited by David Parkin and David Nyamwaya, and *African families and the Crisis of Social Change* (1997), edited by Thomas S. Weisner, Candice Bradley and Philip L. Kilbride (in collaboration with A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo, Joshua Akong'a, and Simiyu Wandibba) and a monograph of Philip and Janet Kilbride called *Changing Family Life in East Africa. Women and Children at Risk* (1993) have been most beneficial for me. Although none of these studies focus on professional people, they have some examples considering elite or middle class as well.

In addition, I have read a lot of recent anthropological and sociological research on kinship and family. Many of those books pay attention to the new rise of kinship studies in their introductions (e.g. Carsten 2000a, 1; Franklin and McKinnon 2001a, 1; Schweitzer 2000a, 1; Stone 2001a, 2). This recent revival of kinship studies in anthropology is not only shown in the number of books and articles on the subject. It is also shown in many new ways kinship and family are understood and discussed (e.g. Franklin and McKinnon 2001b; Stone 2001b; Carsten 2000b; Schweitzer 2000b; Collier 1997; Hoodfar 1997; Stacey 1991a; 1996; Strathern 1992a; Weston 1997 [1991]). I do not often cite these works directly in this thesis, however. Their impact on my thinking has mainly been the overall understanding of the complexities and flexibilities when it comes to families.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS

In this section, I will first set out my fieldwork experiences and the process of the research, as well as the methods that I have used in this research. I will also discuss the kind of data I have used, and give some background about the informants in this research. In the end, I will present the aims and the focus of the research, as well as the outline of it.

2.1. Research methods and fieldwork

Empirical considerations of this research are based on the material which I have acquired through anthropological fieldwork in the capital of Kenya, Nairobi. I have done my fieldwork in Nairobi in two longer and two shorter periods. My first visit there took place in January 1997, and second between December 1997 and March 1998. The next time I spent some time in Nairobi in August 2002 and then again from October 2002 to February 2003. Altogether I have lived there over nine months.

During my first short visit my main purpose was to find a more focused topic for my research. The only thing I knew in the beginning of my stay was that I wanted to concentrate on highly educated women in Nairobi. As I had some contacts at the University of Nairobi, I went there right after I had arrived, and I was introduced to a woman student there. She was very keen on ‘women’s issues’, and became very valuable to me during those first weeks in Nairobi. She explained to me many aspects in the lives of highly educated women, and women’s relationships with men, meaning of kin etc. She took me to places, and acted as my guide during the first days. Most importantly, she introduced me to her friends, other university students, who further introduced me to their friends. This is how I got contact to my first informants. During the later fieldwork periods, I was involved with those of them who still lived in Nairobi. My research assistant and Kiswahili teacher also introduced me to their friends, through whom I got further contacts. Before the last fieldwork period I had also met some Kenyans abroad who helped me to get acquainted with people.

When I met new people, I explained to them my wish to understand the complexities in highly educated women’s lives in the contemporary Kenyan society. To my

surprise, they reacted in a positive way. They said that they in fact talked about these issues every day with their friends, and that the subject is good. Most women seemed to be glad to participate. During all phases of the research, I felt that women reacted positively about participating in the research, and with a few exceptions, seemed to talk freely.

I carried out my interviews in participants' homes, work places, my flat, student dormitories as well as out in the cafes or parks. All the interviews that I conducted were unstructured thematic interviews. Both the contents and the form of the interviews were thus composed by the interviewee and me. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I had some kind of a rough list of the themes that I wanted to cover in our discussions, including for instance career expectations, relationships with men and dreams for the future. However, I soon found out that it was best to let the women raise the questions and issues they thought were important in their lives. Thus, in order not to steer the conversations too much, I said to my interviewees something like: "*What do you think that are the most important challenges in highly educated women's lives in contemporary Kenya?*" Although in some other research context, this kind of a question might have been incomprehensible, I think it was perfectly suitable for highly educated, intelligent women. The further the research went, the more unofficial the interviews came.

When I returned home and transcribed the interviews I had made, as well as read through my notes, I realised that the theme that came up in those discussions over and over again was family life and relations with kin, together with considerations on how women's education caused constraints in a marriage. That was the theme that also I had found most interesting in our discussions, and had a personal ambition in the subject as well. I had recently become a mother myself, and thus I had also started to think about different 'contracts' in family life; different ways of negotiating everyday life, and had found that extremely interesting also in our Finnish context. I knew very soon that I wanted to concentrate on family life in my dissertation.¹⁸

During my next trip in 1998 I thus focused on married women, who already had experiences of family life as wives and daughters-in-law. I think that one of the most stressful things for me was to try to find informants: the highly educated, married women are somewhere out there, but how to reach them? A friend of mine who had done her thesis on the conceptions of AIDS among the women of her own ethnic group in Western Kenya told me that she had had big difficulties in finding informants as women were so reluctant to speak about the issues

¹⁸ At the same time, I was somehow disappointed in myself. I had always been a little irritated because women anthropologists seemed to focus so much on family life and marriage. Why could I not come up with something different?

concerning AIDS. She told me very vividly how people were running away when they saw her approaching. This happened when I was complaining about some difficulties in getting to know new people because everybody seemed so busy. Her experiences comforted me a lot, and I started to think that maybe this is just one of the things that are part of research, and not necessarily due to my own incapability or bad luck. Many times I have envied those anthropologists who lived in small communities, where one is more or less inevitably in the centre of the events. In the city, the contacts with people are not there automatically, and I regularly needed to go to such places as the university where I knew that I would at least find educated people.

As many of the women I socialised with during my first two fieldwork periods were still studying at the university for their Master's, I found myself sitting somewhere around the university on a daily basis. As I visited the main library of the University of Nairobi looking for literature, I was able to have continuing contacts with some of the women I knew more closely. With them, I also had lunch, went for shopping, sat in a cafe et cetera, and some of them visited me and my family at our place every now and then. I would say that among my informants, I met a few of them many times a week. Most of the others I met every now and then, and a few of them I only met once, when conducting an interview. Those women were without exception introduced to me by someone I knew better, in most cases my research assistant, whom I hired at the middle stage of my first longer stay, when I felt that I should get to know more people outside the university. Her only task was to introduce me to the highly educated women that she knew, and she was never present when I talked to my informants. With her help I found my way out of the university. I conducted some interviews in offices at the centre, as well as in one school and one hospital further from the central Nairobi area.

During this second trip the interviews were of course different from the previous ones, because I knew that I wanted to focus on family life. Apart from the background questions (such as age, ethnic background, religion, family background, living arrangements, the number of the children, education, parents' education), and general themes like gender roles in Kenya or meaning of education for women, we talked mainly about family life. More specifically, issues concerning marriage (for instance perceptions of an ideal husband; how, why, when got married; roles in the family; decision making; child raising; financial issues; polygamy; arguments), and kin (relations with kin; how often meet; how they help; what kind of help receive; accommodating kin; arguments) were discussed. Only after analysing these interviews as well, I realised that my perspective on marriage and family was still too Finnish, focusing on nuclear family. I had not taken into consideration the role of the extended family adequately. Namely, in

the Kenyan context, it is almost impossible to talk about marriage without talking about extended family as well.

In 2002-2003 I was in Nairobi again, and then I wanted to get a wider perspective on family relations. I concentrated on a few families' kin networks, and interviewed many family members from certain families, including those relatives who did not live in the same household. I encouraged discussions on family and kin responsibilities as well as kin relations in general. Also this theme proved to be a fruitful one. People generally eagerly discussed their family relations and explained to me their opinions and experiences. I was introduced to many family members. This time, I spent more time with some people and their families by just hanging around with them. I visited their homes, they visited ours. We also made a trip to Western Kenya to pay a visit at a friend's family members.

My husband and our two children were with me during the longer periods. Having small children in a city like Nairobi caused a lot of problems and extra burden, particularly for someone who cannot afford to rent or buy a car with a meagre research scholarship. I lived with my family in a rented apartment, not in a local family. That is, perhaps, the thing that I regret, because sharing everyday life is bound to bring the researcher a lot of knowledge and the kind of information that is not brought up in the discussions. However, the presence of my children always had positive effects on my relations with the women to whom I talked. It was easy to start talking about children, and when people heard that I had boy twins, they were usually excited. Most women of my age (around their thirties) that I met in Nairobi, had children. Some researchers (for instance Davison 1996, 47) have reported that motherhood has been beneficial for them during their research, giving access to certain information that would not have been possible otherwise. I do not know how things would have been had I been childless (see e.g. Sudarkasa 2004, 2), but as I was studying family life and marital relations in Kenya, my impression was that my own position made it easier.

For me, doing my fieldwork in many periods has been the right way. Between the periods I have been able to let my thinking progress, I have been able to take perspective on the subject and to read more. During the process, I have also broadened my focus from women to wider kin networks. The thing that was perhaps the most important for me in the possibility of returning to Nairobi many times, was to be able to include the changes in people's lives. Of course, travelling back and forth can be stressful and demands some organising, and furthermore, when fieldwork is done in shorter periods, the researcher is not 'part of the picture' and does not become as familiar with people as if staying for an extended period of time.

Afterwards, when I analysed my encounters with participants by listening to the taped interviews and reading the transcriptions, I noticed that I had more or less naturally acted in a dialogical and reflexive way while discussing with Kenyan women. I had not consciously tried to follow the principles of dialogical anthropology in my encounters with the participants. However, I was familiar and impressed by the principles of feminist anthropology, and aware of the aspects of subordination that are always present in cross-cultural fieldwork encounters (see e.g. Wolf 1996a, 25). That probably influenced my acting already in the beginning, although the further the research went, the more important it became to me to follow the principles of reflexive research.

I would, however, argue that more importantly, it felt natural for me to approach the highly educated Kenyan women by discussion, and mutual change of opinions, rather than playing the role of an interviewer, or a researcher, who always knows what to ask. Furthermore, and this may be the crucial issue, I felt that most of the women I met did not want to be treated as interviewees, either. Rather, they would ask me questions, present opposing arguments and so on. That is the reason why I found our encounters so rewarding - cheerful, interesting and spontaneous - throughout my stays in Nairobi. Although sometimes the topics of our discussions were sad, like miscarriage, rape, or marital infidelity, women mostly had a hilarious way of speaking, and I really enjoyed our sessions. I also got the impression that most of them found our discussions interesting, or at least not distressing. I found their way of talking highly interesting and articulate, and that was the reason why I enjoyed even otherwise so stunning transcription of the interviews. Therefore I want to include a lot of citations from our discussions in this thesis. Another reason for that is due to the theoretical and methodological choices in this research, discussed a little later.

Different parts of the dissertation emphasise material required in different periods of fieldworks. For instance, while discussions on women's roles in Kenya are based mainly on fieldwork done in 1997-1998, family loyalties and kin networks base on fieldwork in 2002-2003. This is due to the research process and how my thinking has developed during it, as explained above.

2.2. Research data

The data on which I base my considerations consists mainly of unstructured, thematic interviews of 60 persons, most of whom are highly educated women. I will use the interviews of 50 highly educated women, either married, unmarried with children, or single women without children as the main source of information. Other interviews and discussions with men, for instance, I will use mainly to contextualise certain women's lives.

The interviews, as well as other discussions with the participants, took place mainly in English (which is not my mother tongue). The main reason for choosing English at the time of my fieldwork was my own lack of ability to communicate in Kiswahili, particularly in the beginning. Furthermore, even Kiswahili would not have been the obvious choice, because people whom I socialised with came from different ethnic groups and thus had many different mother tongues. As higher education in Kenya takes place in English, all of them spoke English fluently. Those, whom I asked about it, said that they speak English and Kiswahili as fluently, whereas the fluency in their respective vernaculars differed a lot (see also Obondo 1996, 47). Also, English is the language in which highly educated middle class people mainly communicate with each other in Nairobi. When I listened to people talking, for instance at the University of Nairobi (without me being involved with them), they almost always used English, or some kind of a mixture of English and Swahili, in the way that they for example greeted each other in Swahili and then turned to English.

It is, of course, possible that had I done the interviews in Kiswahili, Dholuo or Kikuyu, for instance, there might have been different kinds of tones in the way participants spoke. Maybe English affected their thinking, making it more 'Western'. For instance, when one woman told me about her (polygamous) father's other wives' children, she said to me: “[Y]ou know, in English you use to say that they are step sisters, you know, but in my mother tongue, in Luo, they're just your sisters and brothers.”¹⁹ Another thing connected to this is that most

¹⁹ Interview 22.1.1998. A reading instruction for transcriptions: In italics, the actual words of the speaker. When in parenthesis, e.g. (Mary), I have changed a particular name of a person or town to hide the identity of the speaker. If in square brackets and not in italics, e.g. [he], I have added a word to make the text more understandable. A cut-line (--) in the middle of the text points to a deleted word or section, whereas when finishing a sentence it points to an interrupted sentence, if the next sentence (the interrupting one) starts with the same symbol, (e.g. --but did you). Three points (...) in the end of a sentence shows that the speaker has not actually finished the sentence, and in the middle of a sentence that he or she is looking for the right words. I have also added in the parenthesis verbs to describe

people had both an African and an English name. Most of the women gave me the latter when they introduced themselves, sometimes stating that it would be easier for me to pronounce and remember it, thus reminding me of my cultural 'otherness'.²⁰

In addition to the taped interviews, my interpretations have been affected by informal discussion with many highly educated women and some men, and participant observation, which in my case mainly means hanging around with people I knew. In some cases, these unofficial conversations or short, spontaneous comments, gave as much, or even more information than the ones which were being recorded. As the alleged decline in morals and family values was one of the liveliest topics in media during my fieldwork periods, I eagerly read many articles in local newspapers and magazines, and the views presented in press have probably also directed my interests to some extent.

Also, my diary from the fieldwork period is important for me, mostly in making me, hopefully, understand better how I have come to certain conclusions, and how I have made rapport with people or how I have felt in certain situations (see Okely 1995 [1992], 6). Although some fieldwork manuals advice researchers to have two diaries, one for notes concerning the research as such, and one for 'personal' matters, I have never been able to quite understand how the two of them can be separated. When, in the beginning, I tried to have two separate diaries, I noticed that it only confused me: "Now, in which diary should I write this one?" Furthermore, the aim of reflexive research is not to keep one's personal life, that is feelings, emotions etc. away from the research, but rather to compare and reflect one's own experiences and feelings in the research questions, as well as to share them with those who participate in the research (see e.g. Duelli Klein 1983, 94). Hence, it only felt natural to put my 'personal feelings' and strictly research-related matters in the same diary.

I started analysing the data by reading through the transcriptions of the taped interviews many times, as well as reading through my fieldwork notes and diaries. Although I already had quite a good impression on the themes that came up most often, eventually I ended up coding the interviews to find out what was really talked about. By that method I found out

laughter or other sentiments, e.g. (laughs). When the speaker emphasises something, I have written the word in CAPITALS.

²⁰ I do not know what the impact of me coming from one of the Nordic countries, which are often regarded as some kind of model countries in issues concerning equality, is on the data I have received. Many women with whom I spoke with were aware of the Nordic ideal of gender and other equality, and the fact that I also told them that I have studied women's studies in addition to anthropology probably had some influence, too. Maybe some of them were more eager to talk about the issues of equality or talked about women's and men's relationships in a critical way because of this.

the themes in the lives of the informants that I discuss in this research. However, coding was not enough, since it only brings out the most obvious. As my research went on and my thoughts concerning the context of highly educated women's lives in Kenya, as well as the analytical context of my interpretations issues became clearer, I read through the transcriptions again. This time I pointed special attention to the issues of gendered family obligations and negotiations, even there where they were not explicitly outspoken. I also paid attention to how participants expressed certain things and to the relationships between what is said and what is actually done.

Although the data acquired during my fieldwork periods is extensive and many-sided, and it is not possible to mention everything here, it consists mainly of the following issues: women's lives, marriages, their relationships with men, family relations and kin obligations, but also of ethnic tensions, tensions between different generations, combining career and family, women's positions in work and society.

Furthermore, this research is based on highly educated women's views on their marriages and family lives. It reflects the attitudes, opinions and ideals as much as actual practices, because it is based on interviews and discussions, and not so much on extensive participant observations through living with in a family for an extended period. As I will discuss in the later chapters, it looks like women's attitudes and principles affect family life practices and gender dynamics in the family.

This is not to say that men are absent from this research, by any means. However, much of what concerns men, is actually about how women see men and their relationship to men. I have interviewed some men who belong to participants' families. I have also interviewed both husbands and wives from a few families, and in those cases I am able to reflect both spouses' opinions on marriage and kin. As my intention is to explore those relations from the women's points of view, I do not find it disturbing that I have not systematically interviewed men. On casual discussions, many highly educated men showed interest in my research and asked me: "Why don't you interview men? You would get interesting information!" At the time of the first fieldwork periods I thought that it would be quite enough to concentrate on women because of the relatively short time that I was to spend in Kenya. I also felt more comfortable with women. I am still content that I excluded men from my research at that time. Later, as I wanted to have a wider perspective on family life, I wanted to include some men in my study, because they (quite naturally) belong to the families. In addition, I had become quite curious on men's points of view on family matters after listening to women's stories.

One strength of the data is, hopefully, that it brings to the discussion of African family life some viewpoints that have seldom been in focus: the highly educated urban women's

views, attitudes and feelings related to family life; extended family obligations they face; and kin relations between the urban middle class people and their rural family members. In addition, it points to a certain period in Kenya when values and worldviews are in transformation and shows some possible tensions and concerns connected to that.

Although many sidedness and plurality are strengths of my data, there are still many things that are missing here. Due to limitations of dissertation work and personal preferences, I have had to omit many important aspects of family and gender relations. For instance domestic violence and rape are issues allegedly present but well hidden in Kenyan society. They rarely came up in the discussions I had with women. When they did, women mostly talked about violence *other* women face in their marriages. It is very much possible that some women participants have faced violence in their relationships or outside. According to a recent newspaper article, rape reports have increased alarmingly during the last years, but still, many rapes are never reported (Daily Nation 19.8.2004). Perhaps because of these things are not openly discussed in Kenya, perhaps because I did not know all women well enough, and certainly because they are not easy things to discuss in the first place, they are missing here. Another issue that I have not focused on is women's sexual behaviour (for this, see Spronk 2004; forthcoming). The impact or processes of divorce are other issues which I have not studied here, although it undoubtedly would have given an important contribution to this study. Also financial issues are given relatively little emphasis here.

2.3. Participants' backgrounds and marriages

Here, I will have a quick look at the social and ethnic backgrounds of the participants, their educational levels, ages, occupations, length of the marriages, household compositions etc.²¹

The backgrounds of the women who participated in my research are ethnically and socially very heterogeneous. I have interviewed and talked to people from many different ethnic

²¹ I feel awkward with the word 'informant', because it gives the impression that my only purpose when talking with people was to get information from them, and leaves out the whole range of other aspects in our encounters. 'Interviewee' sounds too technical, and can perhaps be used only when one is referring strictly to an interview. 'Participant', which is sometimes used "in order to avoid the objectification of the Other" (Kincheloe & McLaren 1998, 289), gives an exaggerated impression of co-operation and mutual agency of the people involved. In this thesis, however, lacking for better alternatives, I use all the above mentioned words to point to those women and men who have participated in this research knowing that I will use their words to make my analysis of the lives of Kenyan middle class people. When I talk of other incidents with people I have met, I will point it out clearly.

groups. The following were most represented: Kikuyu²² (40 % of participants), Luhya (23 %), Luo (13 %) and Kisii (12 %). There were also a few persons from other ethnic communities, like Kalenjin, Kamba and Maasai. Thus, the proportion of respective ethnic groups represented in this research is roughly in line with their proportions in reality, although the Kikuyu and the Luo are overrepresented, and the Kamba are underrepresented here. The distribution by ethnic groups is particularly biased if we think of the marital statuses of the participants. For instance, half of the Kikuyu who participated in this study are unmarried, whereas almost all Luo are married. This may partly be a coincidence, as I did not aim to have a statistically balanced number of people from specific groups, but it may also point at young educated Kikuyu women's independent lifestyles.

By social backgrounds of the participants I mean their parents' socio-economic positions, on the one hand, and their current socio-economic positions, on the other hand. Their parents' education varied from the very basic to a few fathers and even less mothers who had studied at the university. Most came from the countryside or from a small rural town; a few had lived in Nairobi or some other bigger town, like Kisumu all her life. Many would describe their family background poor; some would define it as middle class, sometimes meaning elite, while most were from modest, but somewhat educated rural families. What is common with their backgrounds is that their parents have encouraged them to get education. Thus, it is noteworthy that all female participants come from families where girls' education has been valued.²³

Most participants had higher socio-economic positions than their parents, due to university education or marriage. As my point of departure has been highly educated women's lives, nearly all my main informants either had academic education, either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree, or were studying at the university. Those who did not, had other professional training at a college level. A few of them had studied abroad (Britain, India, Philippines, USA, Tanzania), while most of them had completed their studies either at the University of Nairobi, or somewhere else in Kenya.²⁴ Many women, who participated in the research, were doing a Master's degree or a postgraduate diploma at the university of Nairobi. Those who worked had various occupations; there were a couple of teachers and doctors, as well as different kinds of civil servants and other professionals in the academic or business world.

²² Including the Embu.

²³ There are many deterrents to schooling for girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the most important being ambivalent attitudes of parents to girls' education (Odaga and Heneveld 1995, 50).

²⁴ There are five public universities and several private universities and degree-giving institutions in Kenya (UNESCO 1999, 158; Rosenberg 1997, 173).

When it comes to education, number of siblings in natal families does not seem to make much difference concerning the number of those who are educated. In many families with nine or ten children, almost all of the children were graduates. It does not seem to matter whether women were first or last born in their families, either. Some of them were the only graduates in the family, while many others had sisters and brothers who had degrees as well. It is noteworthy, however, that those women who had a Master's degree (instead of a Bachelor's), or were doing it, often were the most educated in their own family. Even more clearly they were the most educated women in their husbands' families, that is, among their in-laws.

Household compositions of the participants' families were various: nuclear families, conjugal families with spouses and their children plus relatives and maids who stay regularly with them; nuclear families and temporary, although sometimes long-term 'visitors'; families where spouses live separately because of the work, with or without the relatives; families consisting of adult sisters living with their mother etc. Household compositions varied so much that it is impossible to talk about the most common type except from stating that almost half of the families studied here were nuclear, and almost another half conjugal with varying number of relatives and non-kin members.²⁵ The rest were single persons, or lived in different compositions, such as consanguineal families.

Married participants had been married from a few months to over 30 years, and most of them were in the first marriage. A few couples were preparing to marry in the near future.²⁶ Most of the women were in their late twenties or early thirties, although I got some sort of a perspective of women of various ages as the youngest informant was 20 and the eldest was 53. Most women were married to a few years older men, and came from the same ethnic and religious background. Of the marriages, one third were inter-ethnic. Spouses most often belonged to the same church. Only one marriage was childless, probably because the couple had recently married. Educational level of the spouses was most often the same. Most of the couples had Bachelor's degree, but as many of my informants were doing their Master's degree, they would eventually become more educated than their husbands. There were some couples where the wife was more educated, and usually the husband was then not educated to the university level at all. In those cases, wives had started their studies after they got married. Although none of the women I interviewed for this research had PhDs, one was doing it, and some planned to start later. A few women had a husband with a PhD degree, though.

²⁵ According to Githinji (2000, 137), 82.3 % of urban households in Kenya are nuclear, 16.3 % are conjugal families with grandparents or other relatives living in, and the remaining 1.5 % are households with non-relative members. The average household size in Nairobi is 3.73 persons (Githinji 2000, 70).

²⁶ In addition, I interviewed single persons, of whom two had been widowed.

Common factors in their backgrounds are that they all are Kenyan Africans and Christians (except for one who converted from a Catholic to a Muslim when marrying).²⁷ Some of them were born-again Christians, belonging to charismatic Christian movements. During my fieldwork I did not make a difference between those who are Christians and those who are born-again Christians, although that might have been an important issue to pay attention to. I did not see the importance of religion in the first place, probably due to my own background; coming from a highly secular country with 'all middle class' population, where religion - or helping the poor - is not part of everyday concerns to most people. I became to see the importance of this only after reading Päivi Hasu's (2004) short article on charismatic Christian movements in East Africa, particularly Tanzania. According to her, a movement called neo-Pentecostalism has gained a lot of foothold in East Africa, also among the affluent middle class. I also know many people who belong to that movement, and there are some of them among the participants of this research. Undoubtedly, being a born-again Christian has an influence on somebody's values and opinions, particularly as one message of the Pentecostal movement is that "Christians should be healthy, wealthy and successful" (Hasu 2004, 12) and in fact, if you have faith, God will make you rich and successful (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004). According to my understanding this does not mean, however, that Christians should collect the material good only for themselves, but also to others who need it, like the relatives. Perhaps my interpretations would look different had I focused on the aspects related to religion more. For many people in this research, religion is an important thing, even when it comes to marrying someone. People who participated in this research were more often in inter-ethnic marriages than in marriages where spouses belonged to different churches.

I have chosen participants who are highly educated and live in Nairobi. Thus, ethnicity has not been a criterion. Before my fieldwork, I was not sure if I should focus on a particular ethnic group or put the ethnicity on the background and only focus on highly educated women in general. I decided to first discuss with women from different ethnic backgrounds, and see if ethnicity makes a difference. When in Nairobi, I did not systematically look for the differences or similarities between the opinions and attitudes of women belonging to different ethnic groups. My interviewees did not highlight ethnicity as an important factor in their family lives, either. When analysing my data, I consciously compared families from different ethnic

²⁷ Along with Muslim women, the Kenyan Asian women are not included in this research. I met Muslim women students at the university, and became acquainted with some, but I do not remember seeing Kenyan Asian woman students around the university. Those rare Kenyan Asian men I talked with had been educated abroad. (See Fuglesang (1994) for discussion on young Muslim women's lives in Lamu, Kenya.)

backgrounds, but did not find any significant differences in their marital or kin relations. In an urban setting like Nairobi, which is a melting pot of various different ethnic groups and nationalities, the middle class family life does not seem to be directed so much on the basis of ethnicity, as on the basis of educational level, social status, and urban environment. Although tribalism is quite strong in Kenya (see e.g. Stamp 1991), and also my informants were proud of their ethnic backgrounds, it did not seem to steer their lives very much. When I learned to know some women and families better, I found out that their non-kin networks were not tied to ethnic background. One of my friends was a Kikuyu, and her best friends were all Luhya. In another family, whenever we visited them, they had other visitors as well, and they were from different ethnic groups. Many people told me that children do not learn how to speak vernaculars in Nairobi, because neighbours come from different parts of Kenya. More important than ethnicity in forming networks are things like taking the same courses at the university, working in the same office, being neighbours or going to the same church.

Although I will not analyse the impact of ethnicity explicitly, I will recognise its significance whenever I think it is important, or in the cases where the participants themselves bring the issue up. The main topic where ethnic background is mentioned is differences in inter-ethnic marriages - whether the informants talk about their own marriages or inter-ethnic marriages in general. Hence, differences and special problems in respective ethnic groups are left generally unnoticed here, but, on the other hand, the central issues which are connected to highly educated people's family lives are explored.

2.4. The relevance and the focus of the research

Why is it important to study highly educated people's family lives in contemporary Kenya? Bringing little studied issues of middle class family life in modern African communities into discussion can make an important contribution to African studies (see also Creighton 2000; Odak 1997, 191). Educated urban people face different situations in their lives compared to people in the countryside, or poorer, uneducated people in towns. When they get married, they live more independent lives, away from the control of their larger kin networks. (See also Oppong 1974.) Thus, they have more freedom to make their own life choices. However, this position also increases the pressure they feel from the side of the poorer relatives. What do they

do with this freedom? How do they combine new ways of living and behaving with the ones they have been brought up with, particularly when it comes to family life?

Highly educated people have an important role as those who have means to provide for others. As inequality is still increasing in Kenya (see Githinji 2000), there will be more and more of those people who cannot take care of themselves. As long as social welfare systems does not offer them livelihood, they are dependent on their relatives. However, currently the sense of family loyalty has been debated actively in the Kenyan press and in people's everyday discussions. Although anthropological research has paid much attention to kinship studies, and especially to the "static classificatory aspects of kinship", surprisingly little has been written about "the politics of kinship or its processes of change" (Stichter 1988, 177). Thus, in my view, it is important to study what is happening in family relationships in contemporary Kenya, focusing on dynamics, processes and contracts. In this way it is possible to understand if the notion of "familyhood" in Kenya is changing and if so, in what direction (see Vuorela 1998, 6).

In addition, earlier research on kinship has largely been written from a male perspective, thus making questions of gender almost non-existent (Howell and Melhuus 1993, 38-39; Stichter 1988, 177). In this research, women, and specifically highly educated women are the focus of attention. There are good reasons for that. Highly educated women can be considered as a crucial force for cultural change in Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa (Lloyd 1967, 152; Di Domenico, de Cola and Leishman 1987, 118). According to Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987a, 15),

"such women are indeed developing a coherent ideological critique of gender relations but have yet to follow this up with significant change in practice. --- In acting as a reference group for other women and requiring men to adapt to their choices, it will not be strange if it is such women who will bring about the greatest transformations in ideas and practices relating to marriage in Africa."

Related to family life, the most highly educated women in Africa are frequently shown to differ from the less educated ones in that they strongly oppose polygyny in all its forms (Kilbride and Kilbride 1993, 71; Karanja 1987, 258), generally want fewer children in order to be able to support and educate them well (Obbo 1987, 265; Jejeebhoy 1995, 18; 39), and desire joint conjugal decision-making and more egalitarian marital relationships (Karanja 1983, 237-238, Oppong 1974; Lloyd 1967, 179).

Highly educated women are also likely to have broader economic independence, since they have better chances to provide for themselves, and are less dependent on their

husbands. Because of this independence, they have more possibilities in life than women with less education. That is crucial when the changing values concerning family life are under consideration. One could ask, for instance: What kind of a marriage do women value, or accept, if they can choose? What kinds of relations with kin are desirable? It seems that economic independence as such does not make it unproblematic to get a divorce, stay unmarried, or remain childless, because regardless of changed attitudes, the social pressure against single mothers (Suda 1996, 74; 78-9), divorced or the childless women (Gijssels, Mgalla & Wambura 2001; Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1991, 6; Obbo 1987, 265) are still strong.

Thus, changing values of contemporary Kenyan society are to a large extent reflected in highly educated women's lives. When it comes to 'traditional' notions of African families as extended networks that provide security for an individual, or patriarchal understandings of gender roles of women and men in families and society, highly educated women are in the forefront of change.

If highly educated women are an important target for research in contemporary Kenya, how about family? How about dropping family - or at least if it is understood as an affinal or consanguineal family - out altogether? Why would I not just study relationships and networks of highly educated women in the urban context, such as those with friends, neighbours and colleagues? Is the family concept based on affinal or consanguineal ties not already outdated even in anthropological kinship and family studies, as many recent studies have focused on other ways of creating and maintaining close relationships (see e.g. Howell 2001, Weston 1997)?

The most important reason for focusing on family in this thesis is the fact that to begin with, I was interested in highly educated women and their marital relations. As I have explained earlier, extended family members have a lot of influence on the marital relationship, and they often are closely involved in the life of a couple. The conflicts and the issues that need to be negotiated between the spouses, most often have to do with kin, instead of other people, like friends or neighbours. Furthermore, in Kenya kin networks have very practical consequences on poorer relatives, who may not have contacts to other affluent people outside their extended family networks. Expectations are steered to more affluent and educated relatives. In addition, to look at obligations and expectations in relationships that exist regardless of individual's wishes, reveals the role of negotiations, emotions and conflicts in an interesting way. Perhaps specifically non-kin networks need to be created and maintained, and they therefore "heavily dependen[d] on individual choice and agency", as well as emotional ties (Yan 2001, 230; 236; see also Nelson 1978, 86). However, in my view, kin networks also need to be maintained and discussed; they are not automatic, as I will hopefully be able to show later.

The main focus in this research is on family, kin and marital relationships of highly educated women in urban context in Kenya. In particular, I aim to study how women deal with these relationships in their everyday lives as well as in specific occasions, like when getting married. As stated earlier, in contemporary urban Kenya many processes of change are going on. These could be dichotomised as changes between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' lifestyles and thinking. Traditional gender and family values are being challenged particularly in those urban middle class families where the wife is highly educated. My aim in this research is to discuss some challenges of highly educated women, and look at their consequences, as well as the ways they are being solved. Changes that I am interested in here have to do with family and kin relations, on the one hand, and gender relations, on the other hand. Changing situations create certain tensions. My main focus is on tensions that are caused in highly educated women's lives when they try to navigate in the triangle extended family / conjugal family / marital relationship.

In family and kin relationships, I focus on obligations and expectations between the extended family members. There, my main interest lies in different moral frameworks that steer individuals' behaviour as members in extended family networks. More concretely, questions that are central, include: What kinds of expectations are there towards highly educated people from their less affluent relatives' sides? How are these expectations negotiated? How do highly educated people deal with often overwhelming extended family expectations and loyalties and where do they draw the lines of helping? How are family members helped, and what kind of help is received? What happens if someone declines to accept her/his responsibilities? Thus, I am not interested in kinship as such, but rather in the practical aspects of kin networks, dynamics of kin relationships and emotions embedded in them (see Bourdieu 2002, 33-38; Yan 2001, 227; 237-238).

Another focus in this research is closely connected to the extended family obligations. It has to do with gender dynamics in those marriages where the wife is highly educated. What kind of impacts do heavy kin obligations have to a marriage? What kind of an impact does education have to a woman's marriage? How are these two connected? How are 'conjugal' family and 'extended' family intertwined in highly educated Kenyan women's lives? I believe that what women think about themselves, their roles in marriage and in society in general, are reflected in their marriages, family lives and their relations with their kin. These many sided relationships between women's education, their roles and attitudes and their marital and kin relations are under discussion in this thesis.

2.5. The outline of the research

In the first two chapters, my aim has been to give background information which is important in understanding the context in which this research has been carried out. I have presented some aspects of the 'traditional' Kenyan society, particularly addressing matters relevant to the subject of the study - the family - like customary marriage laws and practices in Kenya, also pointing to the important role of bridewealth negotiations in customary marriages. I have also discussed the changing aspects of family in contemporary Kenya. In this chapter I have also presented my research methods and data, as well as outlined the main objectives of the study.

In the next chapter, I will present concepts of postcolonial and African feminisms, 'kinscripts' and 'gender contracts' and try to open up their impact on my thinking and on the ways this research has been written.

In chapter 4, I aim to highlight the complexities in highly educated women's lives in today's urban Kenya by focusing on issues concerning the impact of education on their positions, the challenges they face when trying to promote their lives and ways to overcome these challenges.

Part II, "*Marriages. Family Matters or Personal Choices?*" (chapters 5-6) will focus on the issues of marriage in contemporary Kenya based on my ethnographical material. To begin with, I will look at highly educated women's opinions and views concerning the meaning of marriage, the ideals and hopes attached to marriages, and the reasons for marrying. Then I will turn to bridewealth and discuss its contemporary situation by focusing on the participants' experiences and views on bridewealth. After that, I will elaborate the arrangements and negotiations that are often involved in a contemporary church marriage. I will also discuss one particular kind of a marriage, namely the inter-ethnic union and point to some specific concerns in those marriages. In this chapter, the overall idea is to study how marriage negotiations and arrangements are made today, and what is the role of kin when middle class people marry.

In chapter 6 I will be focusing on polygynous arrangements in contemporary Nairobi, and particularly highly educated women's different positions in polygynous relationships. There, I will point out the ambiguous role of polygyny in highly educated women's lives in Nairobi.

In Part III "*Kin Relations. Expectations, Loyalties, Conflicts*" (chapters 7-9) I will extend the focus from marital relations to family and kin relations. I will begin by discussing kin loyalties, obligations and expectations on a general level, presenting women's views and

feelings. Then I will present three different households and their arrangements concerning helping their family members. From these examples, I will draw some lines when it comes to negotiating kin obligations, i.e. 'kinscripts'. In chapter 8, I will look at the 'kinscripts' from the gendered perspective; focusing on tensions they may cause between the spouses as well as possible ways to solve those tensions. In chapter 9, I will discuss a phenomenon currently practiced by many middle class people: taking distance from kin.

In the conclusion, I summarise briefly the discussions presented here and point to different issues raised by these discussions, when it comes to the changing roles of families, kin and gender relations in contemporary middle class Kenya.

CHAPTER 3. ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

“Ethnographic truths must be understood as a creation growing out of the ethnographer’s personal attitudes and orientations, his or her experience of the people and the culture, the social and political conditions at the time of the fieldwork, the conventions of ethnographic writing, the institutional constraints of the academy, and the nature and specificity of the theoretical focus.”
–Carolyn Martin Shaw (1997, 72)

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the analytical tools that I have used in this thesis.²⁸ Rather than presenting a ‘grand theory’ on which to base my interpretations, I shall make use of parts of many analytical discussions that I have found helpful during the course of this project. My overall approach is based on the data I have acquired through interviews, discussions and participant observation. Theoretical considerations are the tools with which I have tried to understand situations that women, with whom I have discussed, face in their family lives in contemporary Kenya. Thus, all theoretical aspects have come across at various points of this research, rather than being there in the beginning and steering the research. I present analytical points of view in a somewhat chronological order, as they have come into my life, because often one insight has led to another. Surely some of them are overlapping. I do not refer to these analytical discussions explicitly in the chapters very often, but my overall approaches and interpretations are based on them.

I begin by discussing the approaches that have guided my thinking. In the second section I discuss how the chosen analytical perspectives have affected issues of conducting the research and representing my points of view. When it comes to the kind of interpretations or ‘ethnographic truths’ (see the citation above) that I am presenting in this thesis, my own background has importance. My perspective is that of a 30 something year-old Finnish female anthropologist, who has adopted most important theoretical and methodological insights from feminist anthropology, and women’s studies generally. This has a huge impact on the issues that I raise here, the interpretations I make, and the data I have in the first place. In addition, I have given birth to twins and got married during the process of this research, and lived in a nuclear family in the capitals of Finland (Helsinki) and Kenya (Nairobi). Although my experiences from living in Kenya have affected my thinking on many levels, my identity has been shaped first and

²⁸ In chapter 1.2. I already discussed the conceptual differences between 'nuclear family', 'conjugal family', 'extended family', and 'household', which also are important analytical tools for me on a more narrow level.

foremost on the basis of living and growing up in a highly secular Nordic welfare state, where equality of the citizens in social, economic and gender issues has been the ideal.

This study could have been conducted in several ways. Other persons would have done it differently; I would have done it differently in another stage of my life and anthropological ‘career’.²⁹ I try to make visible the choices I have made during the research process as well as reasons for them. Some of the approaches I have chosen consciously, due to my education and personal interests. These include showing women’s subjectivity and emphasising the gendered nature of family obligations. Other approaches have rather chosen themselves, or have become useful along the way, like focusing on extended family relations.

3.1. Ways of approaching the issues and the data

The most important general framework steering my interests from the beginning of this research project is the one concerning postcolonial feminist thinking. From the beginning it has inspired me to a great deal, but it has also raised some awkward thoughts. When planning my PhD research, I was not at all sure if I wanted to go to Kenya to study women’s lives there, because I had read how terribly wrongly many Western researchers interpreted African women’s lives. In order to avoid the most obvious misunderstandings, I wanted to become familiar with postcolonial and African feminist thinking. In what follows, I discuss some aspects of postcolonial and African feminisms that have become important to me and steered my orientation in this research. Later, I also discuss other analytical concepts of importance, that of ‘kinscripts’ and ‘gender contracts’.

Postcolonial feminisms’ framework

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s ironical and already classic definition of a Third World woman, as she is usually described, and produced, by Western researchers, is as follows:

“This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented,

²⁹ See e.g. Hale 1991; Bell 1993; Caplan 1993; Stack 1996a, for reflexion on one’s own positionalities during different periods of anthropological ‘career’.

victim[is]ed, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of the Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.” (Mohanty 1991a, 56.)

There are some reasons for choosing Mohanty’s words as a starting point in my discussion on the themes of postcolonial and African feminisms in this thesis. Mohanty points to the fact that the Third World women have been presented as uneducated, illiterate victims who are not, and cannot be, responsible for their own lives. Being utterly uncomfortable with these kinds of representations, I have tried to find ways to ‘write against them’.

Writing against misery discourses

Anthropological research is still often done outside the researcher’s own country and community. Consequently, the social backgrounds and the level of education of the researcher and the researched are often different, making the relationship unequal. In this research, highly educated women are the focus. This makes the perspective different from many studies done on women living outside Euro-American cultures. This may also make the relationship between me and the participants a more equal one. It has been suggested that some power dilemmas could be subverted by “studying up”, i.e. studying people with more power than the researcher, or at least the risk for exploitation could be diminished in that way (Patai 1991, 137; Schrijvers 1991, 177; Wolf 1996a, 2; 37).³⁰ Interestingly enough, women who are doing research on men are also sometimes seen as “studying up” (Newton & Stacey 1995, 296).

Furthermore, women in this research do not regard themselves as inferior. They would not identify themselves as ignorant, uneducated, oppressed or subaltern. If ‘oppressed’ means a person who has no choices (hooks 1984, 5), or ‘subaltern’ somebody who cannot speak (Spivak 1988) or become heard (Ahmed 2001, 61), then oppressed or subaltern people can be regarded as lacking proper agency in their lives (Schutte 2000, 61). Women whose lives are in focus in this research are not lacking agency, on the contrary, they seem to be active agents in their own lives. Surely they have difficulties, but they have resources, too, and they use many different strategies to survive. I hope to be able to show this strength in this thesis.

³⁰ It is possible, however, that when differences in class or educational background diminish, vanish or even turn upside down, differences in cultural background become more visible (Vuorela 2003a). For instance Pat Caplan (1994, 114), who has studied elite women in Madras, states that informants sometimes put her in a position of ‘Other’ during the fieldwork.

Concepts

Another reason to cite the popular words of Mohanty in the beginning of this chapter derives from the fact that they are part of a wider postcolonial critique called *postcolonial feminisms*, and many, if not all postcolonial feminist writers refer to Mohanty's thoughts. According to one insightful definition, postcolonial feminisms refer to "those feminisms that take the experience of Western colonialism and its contemporary effects as a high priority in the process of setting up a speaking position from which to articulate a standpoint of cultural, national, regional, or social identity" (Schutte 2000, 59). According to postcolonial feminist critique, Western researchers' way of conducting research in and on the Third World is eurocentric, and the premises of Western feminist anthropology, for instance, do not necessarily fit into studying other cultures. It has been claimed that this is due to the profoundly different points of departure, different ways of perceiving feminism, and in fact, incommensurable social categories (e.g. Steady 1989, 4; Mohanty 1991b, 3; Mikell 1995, 405; 1997, 4; Oyewumi 2002, 8).

I approach these wide discussions of postcolonial and African feminisms mainly through the following extraordinary volumes of collected articles: *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power. From Africa to the Diaspora* (1998) edited by Obioma Nnaemeka, and *Decentering the Center. Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World* (2000), edited by Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding. In addition, volumes like *Women in Africa and the Diaspora* (1989) edited by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley and Andrea Benton-Rushing and *African Feminism. The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1997) edited by Gwendolyn Mikell, have been most beneficial for me. I mainly focus on African feminist thinkers' views here, as I think that taking African feminist scholars seriously as contributors to knowledge is a fruitful perspective when studying the lives of Kenyan women (see Moore 1996, 6).

When different feminisms outside the Western cultural context - or feminisms of the originally Nonwestern people or minorities inside Western cultures - are discussed, terminology is not clear. Even *postcolonial feminisms*, which I have used above, is not a clear concept, and some writers use synonymously or in a closely related manner with it terms like *Third World feminisms*, *nonwestern feminisms* (e.g. Narayan 1997; 2000; Jaggar 2000, 22, note 5) or *global feminisms* (Miles 1998, esp. p. 176, note 1; Jaggar 2000, 15). All these terms point to differences across cultures, and emphasise the need to avoid generalisations. Apart from the criticism towards Western feminisms, global feminisms address a possibility of a dialogue between different feminist discourses by "re-examin[ing] our own commitments in light of the perspectives produced by feminists in others, so that we may recogni[s]e some of the limits and biases of our own beliefs and assumptions" (Jaggar 2000, 15) or simply by taking global issues

and concerns seriously (Miles 1998, esp. p. 176, note 1). One distinction between the terms has to do with the agency of those involved; not anyone can be a Nonwestern or a Third World feminist, for instance (see Narayan 1997, 3-5) regardless of one's research approach, although according to my understanding, anyone can do research from the framework of global or postcolonial feminisms, if committed to these ideas.

It is noteworthy that to conduct research or write as a Nonwestern feminist, for instance, does not mean that the outcome could not be culturally essentialist (see Narayan 2000, 93). The criticism of Western researchers' ethnocentrism has been justified and hopefully beneficial. However, I cannot help but wondering if the same tendency for cultural essentialist generalisations is used by some African feminists themselves when they talk about 'West'. I personally often do not recognise the 'West' or 'Western women' they talk about, although I can be counted to belong to that group. An innocent example is from Nigerian Olabisi Aina, who states that "Unlike Western women, African women cannot afford the leisure of being full-time housewives because they face both marital and extramarital social responsibilities" (Aina 1998, 78). Can all (married?) Western women really afford to be full-time housewives? In which countries, in which decades? To me, this looks like a sweeping generalisation.³¹ My intention is not to criticise Aina or others for their views, but to draw attention to the fact that it is sometimes very easy to give essentialist or generalising statements when writing about 'foreign' cultures without even noticing it. I am aware of my own tendency to fall into that every now and then.

Am I really an outsider? Personal encounters with postcolonial

In the process of this research I have become personally familiar with postcolonial tensions. Already before I had been to Kenya, a female Kenyan professor suggested to me that I should focus my research on highly educated women, because "At least you have some chance to understand the lives of highly educated women, because you have something in common". I know that I was not only imagining a slight irony in her voice. In fact she went on: "How could you ever understand the lives of, for instance, poor women living in the slums?" That was the first time I was in the situation where I felt I had to defend myself for doing research outside my own culture, although I did not know exactly why. So, there it was, the attitude I had been waiting for, and to which I had developed very well-argued answers ever since reading the

³¹ Even more systematically controversial is the way that another Nigerian-born sociologist, Oyeronke Oyewumi puts her words, when criticising Western researchers for generalising and essentialising African cultures (see Vuorela [2003b] for discussion).

arguments of Ifi Amadiume (1987, 7) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991a). I almost had a bad conscience, and I felt embarrassed about the whole project. Who was I to go to Kenya and study women's lives there in the first place? (see Latvala 2001, 2.)

Particularly hot debates concerning different understandings and interpretations have taken place when it comes to the issues of polygyny and female genital mutilation (FGM), both practiced in Kenya. For instance Obioma Nnaemeka has stated that Susan Moller Okin's (1999) views concerning the African immigrants in urban France are biased. According to Nnaemeka, Okin emphasises too much polygyny as a source of family conflicts in immigrant families, when in reality, racism and unemployment are much bigger problems and more important reasons for family conflicts than polygyny. (Nnaemeka 2004, 371-372.) Also FGM is an issue that has been differently approached by those women in whose cultures FGM is practiced, on the one hand, and by Euro-American women, on the other hand. Thus, when for instance Kikuyu women in Kenya are mainly concerned about the health aspects linked to FGM practices, European women's discourses point to female oppression or declining sexual pleasure of circumcised women. These discourses may not meet, and some African women do not want 'help' from abroad when it comes to FGM discussions. (Shaw 1997, 76-78; but see also Nelson 1987, 221-223.) One way or another, foreign researchers and activists may be accused of their opinions. Carolyn Martin Shaw argues that for instance those foreign anthropologists who have tried to look at FGM practices in its cultural contexts, have been accused of belittling women's sufferings, and those who have opposed it, have been accused of judging other cultures with their own cultural criteria (Shaw 1997, 76).

In this situation, I could have quit the whole project, but I did not. Another solution was to find ways to do more equal and more sensitive research. One way to do that was to get familiar with the main concerns in African feminist thinking, instead of imposing my own ideas of what is important and what is not.

African feminism / womanism: Naming and substance

Feminism

In this chapter, I look closer at some discussions concerning women's positions in African cultures, and point to the diversity in these discussions, particularly when it comes to concepts. Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo has stated that

“When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives, and the burden of African development. -- For some of us, this is the crucial element in our feminism.” (Aidoo 1998, 47.)

Aidoo thus talks about *feminism*, like some other African female thinkers (e.g. Mikell 1995; 1997; Aina 1998; Iweriebor 1998; Nnaemeka 1998a), but there are actually many different words used when feminist issues concerning African women are discussed.³² Many African women reject the term feminism, even in the concepts like *black feminisms* or *African feminisms*, because the word feminism as such too clearly aligns them with Western feminism or white feminist movements (Hudson-Weems 1998, 149-153). In similar vein, the use of the term sisterhood to describe the solidarity between all women worldwide, has been criticised as being Eurocentric and actually deriving from the idea of European nuclear family (see Oyewumi 2001).

Womanism

If not feminism, then what? Some African and African-American scholars have used the term *womanism* when referring to African women’s feminist aspirations and activities. Probably one of the earliest and most known definitions of womanism comes from African-American Alice Walker, according to whom a womanist means “a black feminist or a feminist of colo[u]r – who appreciates and prefers women’s culture – [and who is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Walker 1983, xi). Her definition has been criticised for its closeness to Western feminism (Hudson-Weems 1998, 154), on the one hand, and for its inclusiveness of homosexuality, on the other hand (Ogunyemi 1996, cited in Arndt 2000, 712). About the same time with Alice Walker, Nigerian literary critic Chikwenye Ogunyemi came up with the term womanism, independently from Walker, and although in her early works she talks about womanism generally, nowadays she uses the term *African womanism* (Ogunyemi 1985, 72; Arndt 2000, 711). Womanism, for her, includes equal sharing of power and wealth “among the races and between the sexes” (Ogunyemi 1985, 68). Also many other African women scholars and writers, such as Mary Kolawole and Buchi Emecheta use womanism instead of feminism, which they reject for its biasness (Kolawole 2004, 259; 264).

African-American scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998, 155) has tried to produce a more exact definition of African feminist thinking by launching the term *Africana*

³² See Allan (1993) for discussion on Ama Ata Aidoo’s feminism as a writer and a thinker.

womanism. She admits that her understanding of Africana womanism does not differ from African feminism apart from its name, which is more accurate, and includes also women of African descent. The latter is the difference between the views of Ogunyemi and Hudson-Weems; Ogunyemi excludes other than African women from African womanisms, “since feminism and African-American womanism overlook African peculiarities” (Ogunyemi 1996, cited in Arndt 2000, 711), but Hudson-Weems embraces all women of African descent in her Africana womanist thinking.³³

Although African feminism shares the same ground with Black feminism in the sense that both see the need to include also other aspects of women’s identity than gender, like race and class, in their agenda (see Lugones & Spelman 1999 [1983], 19), there are still many differences. As discussed above, the fact that African feminism is closely connected to African women’s everyday experiences gives it some special characteristics that are unnoticed in the work of African American feminists. Questions concerning property rights, bridewealth, polygyny or female genital mutilation (FGM), which are important in the lives of many African and Kenyan women, do not affect the lives of most African American feminists. Furthermore, questions of AIDS or famine are not as remarkable problems in the lives of African American women as they are in the lives of women living in Sub-Saharan Africa. Surely some questions, like issues of domestic violence or economic support from partners, are high on the agenda of both African and African American feminists.

Kenyan highly educated women generally use the term feminism, although they also criticise Western feminism for many things. However, I find the word womanism in many cases more suitable than feminism to describe the context of their thinking or actions, and thus, will use both of them in the following considerations.

Contextual and practical

But even if we agreed on which term to use, the meaning of the terms still need clarification. Diverse discourses concerning the substance are present also in African feminisms or womanisms. There are no clear definitions but rather many different, even contradictory voices and understandings of feminisms. (Nnaemeka 1998a, 5; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 222-223.) There are, however, some issues which most thinkers agree on when it comes to African feminism. I will now bring these aspects together, combining different discussion and points of view.

³³ In addition to the above mentioned terms, Nigerian Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie has suggested that African feminists could call themselves *stiwani*sts, like she does. *Stiwanism* comes from words Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 229-230.)

Obioma Nnaemeka (1998a, 5, italics in original) has stated that “for African women, to *be or think feminist is to act feminist*”. By this she means that feminist consciousness arises from the issues important in African women’s own lives and their immediate surroundings, and is pragmatic rather than theoretical. (Nnaemeka 1998a, 5-9; also Mikell 1995, 405.) The basis that all African feminist thinkers seem to agree on has to do with the fact that African feminisms stem from African history, environment and circumstances. Thus, African feminist thinking is necessarily a broad ideology bound up with many questions of oppression like race, sex, social class, culture and neocolonial structures. (e.g. Steady 1989, 4; Mikell 1997, 4; Aina 1998, 84; Chukukere 1998, 137; Kolawole 2004, 253.) Focusing on one aspect, gender, would be possible for only those who are middle class, white, heterosexual etc., in other words, those who do not “feel highly vulnerable with respect to other parts of [their] identity” (Lugones & Spelman 1999, 19). Hence, race, gender and class “come into existence *in and through* relation to each other - if in contradictory and conflictual ways” (McClintock 1995, 5, italics in original).

Extended, heterosexual family context

Closely connected to this, African feminism appreciates values important in many African societies, such as communality and (extended) family values. Thus, African feminist discourses emphasise interdependence, sharing, and negotiation, instead of individualism (Nnaemeka 1998a, 11; Mikell 1995, 405). Nnaemeka states that African feminism is actually “negofeminism”, i.e. “feminism of negotiation, accommodation, and compromise; no ego feminism” (Nnaemeka 1998b, 371). More recently she has stated that “African feminism --- knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts” (Nnaemeka 2004, 378).

In this context, traditions are not regarded as negative (Aina 1998, 72) and even those traditions, which may not be wholly beneficial for women, should be regarded from many sides. For instance, according to Chukukere (1998, 138) Nigerian feminism does not accept the idea of monogamy as given; instead it is equally aware of the positive sides of polygyny for women. However, it is a challenge to make a difference between oppressive and empowering traditions and maintain the latter, such as social networks (Aina 1998, 71-72).

Family networks are among the most important social ties. According to Olabisi Aina, African feminism is pro-family, which Western feminism in her view is not, and this has created extra pressure for African feminists in their efforts to convince men - and others potentially sceptical - that family values are high on the African feminist agenda, and that

feminist aspirations will never threaten family life (Aina 1998, 76). Perhaps partly for this reason, one important aspect in African feminist thinking is that it does not exclude men. Rather, African feminists want to fight oppression together with those men who take gender issues seriously, as many men do, according to them. (Steady 1989, 8; Aina 1998, 76; Chukukere 1998, 138; Hudson-Weems 1998, 155; Nnaemeka 1998a, 7-8; 1998b, 370-371; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 221.) In its family-centred approach, African feminism sees family as an extended family, and in addition, motherhood is greatly respected (Sudarkasa 2004; Oyewumi 2001, 6; Arndt 2000, 712).

One thing should be noted here. Although in African feminist discourses communality, social relationships and family values are highlighted, these are considered strictly within a heterosexual context (Aina 1998, 72). Debates concerning homosexuality are not, at least not yet, part of African feminist (or other) discourses (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 214; 219; Machera 2004, 163). For instance, some African researchers (e.g. Oyewumi, 2001, 7-8) have strongly attacked any homosexual interpretations applied to woman to woman marriages practiced in many African societies (see also discussion in Carrier and Murray 1998). Also my own discussions with highly educated people and readings of local magazines have made me think that homosexuality really ‘does not exist’ in the minds of many Kenyans.³⁴

Gendered kinscripts - expectations, obligations and conflicts

A somewhat more precise analytical perspective in this thesis comes from previous ideas of African feminism. By discussing and interviewing Kenyan highly educated women and getting familiar with African feminist thinking, I realised that family and kin relations are essential in highly educated women’s lives. Furthermore, family relations do not mean nuclear family relations, but extended family relations. It felt quite natural to choose extended family relationships as the main focus in my research. Furthermore, in my discussions with highly educated Kenyan women, they often brought up family obligations and different negotiations concerning them. To study extended family obligations, it felt right to look at the families as networks, which they *de facto* are. Although my perspective is clearly that of women in this study, it does not mean that I would look at women as detached from their social networks. Instead, I try to look at women’s life events as situational and contextual. When it comes to

³⁴ Also my perspective on families excludes homosexuality. It was not talked about, but it was not something that I particularly looked for, either.

family, I try to understand how different events interlink with others, and look at the logic behind the actions.

The kinscripts

One way to do this is to try to open up negotiations on different contracts concerning welfare of the extended family members. These negotiations can be seen to be based on certain 'scripts' in family life, scripts understood as moral frameworks that steer – if not determine – family members' behaviours. Carol Stack and Linda Burton (1994) call these 'kinscripts'.³⁵ Kinscripts consist of certain moral principles, moral obligations, which are negotiated between family members, either explicitly or implicitly (see also Finch and Mason 1993, 60-61). Although negotiations concerning responsibilities and expectations may be explicit or implicit, according to Stack and Burton, family members share the knowledge of kinscripts in their own families. They state that "people do not necessarily do for kin what they are supposed to do, but they understand *what* they are supposed to do, and *when* they are supposed to do it; and they know their kin *will* summon them some day" (Stack and Burton 1994, 33; see also Stack 1996b). I find the ideas Stack and Burton present very useful in highlighting the kinds of situations that highly educated women face in their relations with kin.

In their considerations, Stack and Burton (1994, 41) focus on how an individual family member's acts affect kinscripts. They state that unexpected happenings, like a divorce in a family, may mix up kinscripts, after which they will need to be reconsidered. Thus, individual choices affect the life-courses of other family members in kin networks and this way they have an impact on kinscripts in a given family. However, kinscripts are more than the sum of individual expectations and actions. They are also shaped by issues like family history and families' special situations and needs, as well as expectations and moral codes inside the community. Dynamics of kinscripts work both ways: individuals' acts affect kinscripts, which consequently have an impact on individual family members. In this research, I will approach kinscripts from a slightly different angle than Stack and Burton. Namely, I am particularly interested in the impact that kinscripts have on an individual family member's life and marital relationship. I also pay specific attention to the situations where kinscripts need reconsidering, in

³⁵ Stack and Burton (1994, 33) see kinscripts as consisting of "kin-work, which is the labour and the tasks that families need to accomplish to survive from generation to generation; kin-time, which is the temporal and sequential ordering of family transitions; kin-scription, which is the process of assigning kin-work to family members." Their considerations are based on research on low-income African-American families.

other words, different conflicts and arguments that take place because different family members have different opinions on their obligations.

I am aware of the criticism some 'Third World feminists' have addressed to the Western 'obsession' of focusing on the aspects of individuality when studying women's lives outside Western cultures (e.g. Mikell 1995, 405). As discussed earlier, African feminist thinking is communal and emphasises networks rather than individuals. However, kinship networks consist of individuals, and according to my understanding, it is important to study individuals to understand the logic of kinscripts (see Stichter 1988, 178). Furthermore, individuals do also have other interests than those of the community, as will be discussed later. Particularly does this hold for women, who often have more individual interests than men in Kenya (see Moore 1986, 110). Here I will set out the attitudes and values of those representatives of kinship networks, who are in relatively high social positions, and thus in an important role in the mutual exchange. Although the perspective in this research is mainly that of highly educated women in Nairobi, it will explore the meaning of kin also more broadly in contemporary Kenya, as the kinship networks are large and active, and function between the family members regardless of their location or education. Moreover, I do not want to leave emotions out (see Yan 2001, 237-238), and emotions cannot be discussed unless I focus on individuals.

The practical flows of help can be further illustrated by using the categories open / close and joint / segregated. Christine Oppong has applied these concepts in her early study of 'elite' marriages in Ghana. I will use the open / close division in the same way Oppong did, that is to study the relationships between the conjugal family and other (extended) family members. The more open a conjugal family is, the more contacts and flows of help take place between the spouses and their extended family members. My use of concepts joint / segregated is a little different from that of Oppong; whereas she used the concepts to clarify spouses' relations to each other in practical issues, e.g. if they share the household tasks, if they make financial decisions together etc., I will point to the roles of individuals inside the kin network. Thus, roles in extended families are highly segregated, if one person is mostly responsible for helping the whole extended kin. If the roles in the extended family are highly joint, responsibilities are evenly divided. (Oppong 1974, 21-25.)

Partly because 'kinscripts' have been highly gendered in those families I have studied, and partly because of my own background in women's studies, I will consider the kin contracts together with 'gender contracts'.

The gender contracts

The concept gender contract comes from a Swedish historian and gender critic Yvonne Hirdman. She has developed the concept for the study of the Swedish society during the past two centuries, but as Anita Larsson (1999) has shown, it can be used to study other cultures as well. Furthermore, I think that her concept can also highlight the dynamics of a specific contemporary situation, even without considering it historically. Different gender contracts define women's and men's spaces in relation to each other and presuppose or create different rationales of action for women and men respectively (Hirdman 1991, 191). This kind of a gender contract system

“(C)reates a number of ‘irrefutabilities’, i.e. a number of ‘obvious statements’ about how things ‘are’; it soothes the worried brow by declaring that ‘things are just as they should be’, but it also threatens those who challenge it, because the ‘irrefutable’ system of the sexes easily assumes the nature of a taboo” (Hirdman 1991, 191).

Thus, both kinscripts and gender contracts actually lay out certain (perhaps unarticulated) principles which are considered obvious in a given culture or community. When I became familiar with Hirdman's thoughts, I could see the gender dynamics (also) in Kenyan families more clearly. I think that her concept enables an analysis which sharply illustrates and points to crucial dynamics prevalent in Kenyan middle class gender relations. According to my understanding, gender contracts are embedded in kinscripts, in a sense that different things are expected from women and men respectively, and they also have different views concerning kin loyalties. Their roles as family members are highly gendered.

The analytical aspects I have presented in this chapter, i.e. postcolonial and African feminist thinking and the gendered moral frameworks steering family members' actions and thinking, are the ideas that have guided my thinking and my gaze in this research. This context has felt right for me intuitively, and I also hope it makes it possible to avoid some utterly Eurocentric interpretations and consequently, to end up in more equal research. In my opinion, a fruitful way to do justice to highly educated women's lives in Kenya is to interpret them in the context of African feminism and communal networks. Although I may not bring it explicitly forth everywhere, these ideas are present practically throughout this thesis. They also affect and guide the choices of representation.

3.2. Choices of writing and representation

Multiple and fragmentary voices

As discussed earlier, postcolonial feminisms pay attention to plurality when it comes to questions of class, race and gender. So do the ideas of feminist and dialogical anthropology. They can be regarded as forms of reflexive, new anthropology that challenges traditional ethnography's aim to create a timeless and whole picture of a studied culture (Crapanzano 1992, 207-208; Marcia-Lees & al. 1989, 7-8; Abu-Lughod 1995; Wolf 1996a, 4). I try to avoid generalisations in this research. Although I often talk about highly educated women in Nairobi, I do not want to suggest that the ideas presented here are those of all educated women in Nairobi. Even the group of women I have worked with is heterogeneous, and their opinions and worldviews are not similar in everything.

When I was talking with Kenyan women, and afterwards when I started to analyse our discussions, I sometimes felt frustrated because so many contradictory things came up. For instance, I was wondering why a woman who calls herself a feminist and appears to have high self-esteem, is ready to become a second wife for a man who has lied to her and has not taken responsibility for their common child. I have come to think about my feelings only later. Why was I frustrated, actually? Maybe I wanted to have a clear and neat package, a narrative without inconsistencies. Maybe I wanted to show that I have understood something about Kenyan women's lives and that I was also able to make clear and analytical representations. After all, I was writing a PhD dissertation. However, life is not coherent and different cultures are not internally consistent and monolithic, disagreeing only with "other cultures", as Uma Narayan (2000, 96), puts it, but there are controversies and discontinuities inside cultures, and also in the lives of every one of us. Barbara Tedlock (1995, 276) has stated that narratives of women's lives are often neither chronological nor progressive, but instead disconnected and fragmentary. Maybe that reflects the way women talk about things, but it also reflects the way things often are.

When looking for ways towards more equal research and writing, I lean on the ideas of feminist ethnography and dialogical anthropology. More generally, post-modern understanding of fragmented and situational knowledge is my point of departure in doing research. Instead of aiming at 'whole pictures', I tell about some parts and some situations in people's lives (see Abu-Lughod 1990, 22; 1993, 14). Consequently, I consider the controversies

and ambiguities present in my accounts and interpretations as strengths, rather than weaknesses of this dissertation.

Ethnographic ‘truths’ and positioning

The principles of dialogical and feminist anthropology affect my readings of my encounters with the participants, both before, during and after the actual fieldwork. I intend to be reflexive, critical, and analytical about the research process (Fonow & Cook 1991, 2), without taking the transformation of ‘data’ into interpretations for granted (Fine 1998, esp. 135; Olesen 1998, 317; Atkinson 1992, 4). That is, I try to look at my ‘data’ as constructed through our encounters, including explicitly the idea of the researcher as a person who composes the research using her interpretations instead of collecting the data that exists with or without her presence.

As the encounter between the participants of the research is regarded as the point of departure in dialogical anthropology, issues concerning the nature of the encounter become essential. It is important to ask, for instance: How can these encounters be analysed? What kinds of things affect and shape the encounters? What kinds of power dimensions are there in the encounters? Thus, different positions of the participants come into focus. Also in feminist anthropology, the question of positioning oneself is one of the central points of departure. It is acknowledged that ethnographic representations are always incomplete (Visweswaran 1994, 1), partial (Clifford 1986, 6), situated (Haraway 1991 [1988], 188) and positioned (Abu-Lughod 1995, 141-142) truths. Basically, positioning means that we, as researchers, need to study our relationships with those who participate in our research by wondering: “Who are we for them? Who are they for us?” (Caplan 1993, 178), thus exploring for instance how participants are located in the context of gendered and colonial histories (Ahmed 1998, 137). It is noteworthy that feminist understanding of partiality is positive, “feminist partial perspectives are *more* rather than less objective --- because such ‘situated knowledges’ *can* be held to account”, as Mary E. John (1996, 36) puts it.

Dialogical anthropology is not a clearly defined methodology, but rather a way of approaching issues while doing research, and it has been shaped by the writings of many researchers (Vasenkari 1999, 57). Anthropologist Dennis Tedlock, who belongs to the first to discuss dialogical anthropology, sees anthropological dialogue as follows: “It creates a world or an understanding of the differences between two worlds” (Tedlock 1979, 388). Following Tedlock, Kristen Hastrup states that when we study different cultures, we do not study “the real

life of the others - but the world that is created in the encounter by ourselves and the others” (Hastrup 1995a, 117; 1995b, 19). Hence, ethnography is a product: it consists of meanings - produced through dialogue and intersubjectivity between the participants - that eventually become ‘data’ for the researcher to make interpretations from (Hastrup 1995b, 47; Mannheim and Tedlock 1995, 2; Olesen 1998, 317).

Dialogical point of view is aiming at a more equal relationship between the researcher and the informant by revealing the dialogue between them during and after the fieldwork process. The intention is to show the process of interpretation, to make it open (Tedlock 1979, 388-389; Crapanzano 1992, 189). However, ethnographic dialogue can never be equal (Hastrup 1995a, 122-123; Wolf 1996a, 19), because the research product will ultimately be that of the researcher (Stacey 1991b [1988], 114). Differently oriented researchers with different backgrounds see different things (see e.g. Jaschok and Jingjun 2000; Wolf 1996a, 15). By using the methods of dialogical anthropology the researcher can make her interpretations more transparent. This way the readers can understand how changing everyday experiences and relationships between the people have affected the entity of the research (Okely 1995, 14).

”It’s like tea without milk and sugar”. Surviving different interpretations

I cannot recall the subject of our discussion any more, but a taxi driver who told me that “it’s like tea without milk and sugar” was referring to something useless or bad. I remember thinking that I prefer my tea without milk and sugar, unlike most Kenyans. This anecdote is meant to point to different meanings we give to different things and the difficulty of making the right interpretation of somebody’s words. For me, black tea is delicious, but most Kenyans like their *chai* with a lot of milk and sugar. Knowing that, I could interpret these words in the way he meant them. But things are not always as easy as making the difference between black and white tea.

I have come to realise this during the process of my research, and become aware how easily wrong interpretations are made. I want to give this issue some consideration throughout this thesis. I want to consider the situatedness of the fieldwork encounters, and show the multiple voices that are present in the encounters. Aiming at reflexivity, I feel like revealing not only my own positions, but also my opinions and prejudices. As Kevin Dwyer (1982, 255-256) puts it, in order to understand the things that I am doing research on, I must also look at myself and reveal whatever I find. If interviews resemble discussions, like mine did, the only

possible way for the researcher is to be oneself, and react like one reacts spontaneously. Since the interpretations that researchers make will always stem from their own cultural backgrounds, I think that it is only natural that misinterpretations and disagreements take place when we try to understand other people's lives. I want to problematise the fact that I sometimes disagree with a participant, and even try to 'make her see' something that she misses from my point of view (see also Silberschmidt 1999, 56; Haram 1999, 110). Inevitably, this affects how the discussion goes on, as well as what it contains.

However, it is not possible to keep a careful level of analysis concerning that in focus all the time in a dissertation. Or, it would be possible had I decided to focus on methodological issues and study problems concerning interpretations in anthropological enquiry. Although the idea is tempting, I feel that in my dissertation I cannot concentrate on my work as a researcher, but rather want to put the lives of highly educated women into focus. It would be awkward to show my dissertation to the people I owe so much and hear them saying: "So where are we actually? This is all about you and your feelings..." Anyway, as I regard self reflection of a researcher as extremely important in making honest research, I do not shut this aspect out altogether. Rather, I will comment or explain shortly my interpretations in various places, and discuss it more closely where I find it specifically important.³⁶

Combining views from dialogical and feminist anthropology, many issues in the research context should be taken into account. At least, it is important to reveal and study participants' positions, like gender (e.g. Bell et al. (eds.) 1993; Whitehead & Conaway (eds.) 1986) and personality (e.g. Joseph 1996, 118); as well as the interpretations, attitudes, emotions and feelings of the participants (e.g. Dwyer 1977, 144; Crapanzano 1992, 211, Matsumoto 1996, 162; Patai 1991, 141; Josselson 1996, 62; Borland 1991). Also socio-cultural background of the people involved and power relations inside the studied community and between participants need to be taken into account (e.g. Maranhao 1986, 308; Patai 1991, 137; Stacey 1991b, 113; Abu-Lughod 1993, 5; Wolf 1996a).

I have tried to be aware of my interpretations and things that might affect them while doing this research, particularly in the process of analysing the interview transcriptions but also other discussions. All aspects mentioned above can hardly be taken into account profoundly in this research, but I try to grasp some of them in my readings of the data.

³⁶ Emphasis on reflexivity, fieldwork encounters and interpretations are given for instance in many articles in the following edited volumes: Wolf 1996b; Kulick & Willson 1995; Bell, Caplan & Karim 1993; Okely & Callaway 1995 [1992]; Behar & Gordon 1995. See also e.g. Lawless 1992; Anderson & Jack 1991; Stacey 1991b; Borland 1991.

Writing

My aim at dialogical and reflexive methodology will also be shown in the fact that I quote our discussions quite a lot, and often in length.³⁷ I hope that this will show how I have come to certain conclusions, how the discussion has proceeded and how we (or I) have tried to understand the issues that are under consideration. I also want to bring out the rich way of speaking most of the participants had, because I think that their words express the ideas that I want to present more clearly than mine ever could (see hooks 1990, 151-152).

When thinking about practical issues of quoting, I have not found it very complicated, because my interviews were done in English. Consequently, I have not had the problems of translating, and thus, reconstructing the informants' actual words. Researchers who quote their informants point to the process of translating surprisingly rarely, as if it did not contain a lot of ethical questions. One aspect of the problem can be solved by including the original transcriptions in the footnotes (see Kupiainen 2000, 246-256). It is another question, whether anthropologists understand their informants correctly at all in the cases where the researcher is not fluent in the language (Jones 1998, 55). Furthermore, even when transcriptions are made of interviews committed by oneself in one's own mother tongue, it may sometimes be difficult to hear the words correctly (see Poland 2001, e.g. 631). For me, in addition to language, which only caused minor problems, like occasionally not understanding the accent in the beginning of my stay, quoting seems pretty easy because my informants spoke in a very clear and logical manner. Even direct transcriptions seldom contain discontinuities. Of course, choosing the citations has been in my power, and surely I have chosen the kind of parts of the discussions - in order to represent the informants' words - which, in addition to pointing out something that *I* regard as important, also are relatively clearly articulated, and thus readable (Atkinson 1992, 6; 23; 26).

When writing about things based on my interpretations of the data, I mainly tell narratives about individual people's lives in order to point to different situations and negotiations highly educated women face in their lives in contemporary urban Kenya. Particularly to highlight controversies and dilemmas in some women's lives, I quote our discussions and their words, and also analyse these encounters to a restricted level. Some chapters include rather detailed ethnographical description. Although some readers may find it unnecessary and even tiring, I hope that others will find it interesting and informative. I include such paragraphs for the sake of documentation; such information is scarcely accessible in earlier

³⁷ Analysing the interviews in a detailed manner is not, however, my intention.

research. Although this is not a long-time historical research, which reveals the changes in people's lives and opinions, like the study on Kikuyu women in Kenya of Jean Davison (1996), for instance, I make use of the fact that I have done fieldwork in many periods when possible.

I admire those researchers who are also talented writers, being able to play with different styles and forms of writing. Researchers and texts I have enjoyed particularly much, include for instance Lila Abu-Lughod (1993), Ruth Behar (1996), Jane F. Collier (1997), Jean Davison (1996), Janet Mason Ellerby (2001), Nancy Folbre (2001), Judith Stacey (1991a, 1996), Carol Stack (1996b), Kath Weston (1997) and Kamala Visweswaran (1994). Some day I would like to put more effort in writing and expressing what I really want (I have already made some efforts in that direction earlier [see Latvala 2004; 2001]). In this thesis I write in a more or less conventional manner. Experimental research writing, such as poetic, personal, autobiographical or prosaic style (see e.g. Behar 1996, Ellis 2002; Richardson 2001; Stack 1996b; Foster 2001) is always a risk, particularly so when it comes to a PhD dissertation. Naturally it also takes a lot of practice and experience to find the right way to express oneself.

Before continuing the discussions of women's lives in Kenya, let me summarise the purposes of the analytical choices in this research. As discussed above, my main aim in looking for right the analytical tools has been to reach a level of equality (non-depressing) and subjectivity (non-detaching) (see Fontana 2001, 165) when it comes to how I look at the issues and write about them. All chosen analytical tools, such as postcolonial and African feminist thinking, 'kinscripts' and dialogical and feminist methodologies make, according to my understanding, this approach possible. More concretely, I hope that this thesis makes a small contribution to writing against 'misery discourse' attached to many African studies by showing highly educated people's agencies and subjectivities. My research started with and developed in the terms of the participants, to a high degree. Our discussions steered the direction of my interests, and I have tried to focus on those things that women themselves have highlighted. In similar ways, the context of strong women and their subjectivities was what I found; it was not what I consciously looked for in the beginning, despite my feminist orientation. Everything in this study has been shaped in the process of it; I have only followed the route, although making conscious decisions all the time.

In the next chapter I turn to discuss those mental environments and life circumstances that highly educated women occupy in contemporary Kenya. There, I will come back to many aspects discussed in the first two chapters, but now I will draw considerations more directly from my ethnographical data. With the following considerations I wish to show the mental environment highly educated women live in their roles as women, wives and mothers.

CHAPTER 4. CONTEXTUALISING HIGHLY EDUCATED WOMEN'S LIVES

“Once again, wherever we turn, women, young as well as old, are the losers”

-Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997, 211)

“*Women are liberating themselves.*”³⁸ -Stella, a 23-year-old university student.

In what follows, I will show how women participants themselves perceive their situations in contemporary Kenyan families and society, and how they see the impact of education on their lives. By clearly pointing to highly educated women's positions and their worldviews concerning gender issues, I wish to highlight the context of their lives, both generally in society, and particularly when it comes to family life. I hope to bring to light the controversies embedded in many highly educated women's lives in contemporary Kenya. I also wish to connect their experiences to a wider context of feminist discourses, and highlight the special characteristics of some issues present in their lives. Instead of looking for a definition of Kenyan feminism, not to talk about African feminism, I bring forward those issues that women themselves have emphasised to me, also making some interpretations from their acts and less explicit expressions.

In this chapter, I am seeking to understand the following problems: How do the participants in this research regard women's lives, and highly educated women's lives in particular, in contemporary Kenya? What are the main concerns of highly educated Kenyan women when gender issues are involved, be they feminists or not? How are feminist aspirations shown in their lives? What kinds of ways do they look for to promote their lives? What kinds of obstacles do they face in this task?

4.1. Women's lives in Kenya

Practically all highly educated women who participated in this research were consciously and actively in favour of women's empowerment. This is shown in the way they talk about women's positions. I was often deeply impressed by the articulation of gender (and other) issues many women had in Kenya. I think that Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's statement about women as losers in Africa (cited in the beginning of the chapter) is too pessimistic. For highly educated

³⁸ Interview 16.1.1997

women, things do not seem to be quite as hopeless as she claims, but there is some truth in it, and Kenyan highly educated women themselves do regard women's positions quite pessimistically. However, as the other citation from a university student above shows, things are changing.

Limited chances

Generally highly educated women with whom I discussed, strongly felt that their possibilities to act on a political or other decision making level in Kenya were limited (see also Nzomo 1997). Helen, for instance, is a married civil servant in her thirties and a mother of three children. She is Kalenjin by ethnic background. At the time when we met, she was at the university doing a course in political science. Her description on how women are regarded in Kenya gives a good idea of many highly educated women's opinions:

*“Well I think they are seen as lesser companions in terms of development. And not only are we regarded that way, but I think women themselves regard themselves as the weaker sex. And in most cases we take it for granted that it's the man who has the leading role. We take it for granted that it's for them and not for us. We don't work so hard about changing that and when somebody comes up with a new idea of wanting, you know, to be in that line together with the men, they're not taken seriously by both men and women. They're actually dismissed cause it's a general feeling that we're okay, that the man should take the leading role and the women should remain where the men want them to be.”*³⁹

Many women, with whom I talked, like Helen above, expressed the general feeling of women being subordinated if compared to men. Although in their view, things have become better for women in Kenya, they are still far behind men when it comes to their positions in society. Helen told me also that she thinks it would be important to have women leaders in Kenya. Interestingly, less than two months before that particular discussion, at the end of 1997, there had been presidential elections in Kenya, where they also had two women, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai among the candidates. When Helen mentioned that Ngilu was one of the candidates, I asked her if she had voted for her. She explained:

*“No, I didn't, but not because she's a woman, neither it's because she's not from my ethnic group, but I felt that I supported somebody else. (Silence) And somehow I knew that she wouldn't make it. This is not a right time. We still have a long long way.”*⁴⁰

³⁹ Interview 10.2.1998

⁴⁰ Interview 10.2.1998

She said that Kenya was not ready for a woman president. Daniel arap Moi won the elections once again, but during the 2002 elections when I was back in Kenya, the opposition coalition NARC (National Rainbow Coalition) won and (Mr.) Mwai Kibaki became the president. This time, Charity Ngilu was nominated as the Minister of Health, and Wangari Maathai as the assistant Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife.⁴¹ The number of women in the parliament was the highest ever in Kenya, being 17 out of a total 222 members, while earlier it had been 9, at most (*Sunday Nation* 26.1.2003, 'Lifestyle', 9). The change was not only important when it comes to gender equality, but also otherwise; for instance Maathai had not been a popular person during the preceding KANU governance (see e.g. Nzomo 1997, 240-241).

Above, Helen talked on a general level about women's awkward situation when it comes to leading positions. Florence, a postgraduate student as well, and a married Kisii mother of one child, was more specific in her words while talking about discrimination against women:

*"Aah, women are actually treated as inferior, they have an inferior status, there are laws that discriminate women, like inheritance and something like that. Like we don't have laws that protect women --- Kenyan laws don't recognise that there can be a marital rape or something like that. So if you bring up such a case, you know, there's no law to protect you against this. And then women actually, when it comes to jobs and all these job opportunities, it's men who actually are considered first and for promotion, it's those people who are considered first. Even if you get a person who's in the same position --- the same qualifications and everything, --- the woman will not be doing the same as the man. So actually I find that there is a lot of discrimination against the women, women are not treated as equals I would say."*⁴²

Women as servants

Most women I spoke with agreed that women in Kenya have been regarded more or less like servants in the house. Perhaps highly educated women's understanding about how women are perceived in Kenya could be put as bluntly as Lina did, who commented that "*women are almost nonentities, you know.*"⁴³ According to many of them, the life of Kenyan women has been loaded with restrictions; what to eat, where to go, whom to talk. In their views, women have had too much work, and their work has been considered less valuable than that of men. The general opinion among the educated women was that the traditional role of women is a subordinate one, and that conception is still dominant at least in the countryside and among the non-educated. Many women referred to the lives of rural women in their own communities when they talked

⁴¹ Wangari Maathai received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 as the first African woman.

⁴² Interview 6.2.1998

⁴³ Interview 24.1.1997

about women's positions. For instance Jemosbei, who was a university student and married with one child, told how she regarded women's lives in her own Nandi community:

"I could say that in the African culture, somehow women are unfortunate in the sense that there is no liberation. Women are regarded to be the lesser sex. ---Let me give an example of Nandi. We do farming, we plant crops, maize, we have wheat, and then apart from this we keep cattle, cows. You see what happens with a role of women. They do the major part in the economy. They work in the farm, they milk the cows, sometimes there is no single worker at home apart from her and maybe a small child. ---And at the end of the day, all the money, all the output of the farm goes to a pocket of her husband. She lacks things like good clothing, she may not be living under good roof, she really lacks the basics of a human being and she's the one who works." ⁴⁴

Women participants explained women's inferior position within the patriarchal culture of Kenya (see also Nzomo 1997, 234; 236). According to customary ideas of the Kisii, for instance, women have been "ordered about, first by their parents, then by husbands and mothers-in-law" (LeVine 1979, 8). In addition to patriarchal traditions, many women referred to not only Kenyan men's, but also women's persistent attitudes to continue the same line of thinking, even in changing circumstances. Lina, a married childless Kikuyu woman in her mid-twenties spoke about gender roles in the following way: *"I really don't know what's wrong with African women, we have this tendency of distribution of roles, and we really keep up to them"*. ⁴⁵

4.2. The impact of education

Privileged positions

Education seems to have a tremendous impact on highly educated women's lives, shaping their values and opinions a lot. University educated women are in an exceptional position in Kenya, and the contrast between them and non-educated women is in many ways sharp, as in many African countries (see Aina 1998, 74). The proportion of girls who attend schools decreases the higher one goes: while 49 percent of all pupils at primary level were girls in 1995, the percentage at secondary level was 41 percent and at tertiary level only 31 percent (Blackden & Bhanu 1999, 94). According to the latest statistics, the proportion of women to men in tertiary level has increased to 35 percent (UNDP 2004; 227). However, only a small proportion of

⁴⁴ Interview 24.1.1997

⁴⁵ Interview 24.1.1997

tertiary students are at the universities. University of Nairobi, which is the biggest university in Kenya, had 13018 students during the year 1997-1998, of whom 3165 (24 %) were women. In Moi University, there were 5594 students in 1997, of whom 1504 (27 %) were women. (UNESCO 1999, 161-162.)⁴⁶ These figures give an understanding of the number of women compared to that of men. However, in Kenya, post-secondary education is rare for both women and men: While 85 percent of all primary school age girls and boys were in primary school, and 22 percent of all secondary school age girls and 26 percent of boys in secondary school in 1996, only 0.9 percent of females and 2.4 percent of males of a certain age group had access to any tertiary education, including universities, in Kenya in 1990 (World Education Report 2000, 140; 148; 156).⁴⁷ Thus, while as many girls as boys attend primary schools, after that the percentage of girls is always lower, and furthermore, only a very small proportion of the population receives university education.

Highly educated women themselves are conscious of the privileges they have, in contrast to the majority of women and men in Kenya, because of their education. Florence, 27, who is a teacher, Kisii, and currently a Master's student and married with one child, explains the meaning of her career:

*"Aah, it's very important, it gives you a lot of independence, you can stand on your own, you can support, you know, even if there's no man, in Kenya, if there's no man in your life, they believe you're outcast, something, especially if you're divorced or something, they will look at you as an outcast and actually there's no one to support you, you're left on your own. So actually even if I was left alone, I think my career would support me, support my kids, so I have, actually my career is like my backbone or something like that, it sort of makes me stand."*⁴⁸

Participants in this research considered economic independency as the most important thing that education brings to a woman, and consequently, a possibility to live one's life without depending on anybody, like a husband. Most women also pointed out that education has made them more conscious of women's poor positions in Kenya. All women with whom I talked agreed that education makes women's lives generally better; it gives them more opportunities and makes them more independent than uneducated women in the rural or urban areas (see also Nyberg 2004, 137-138). On the other hand, according to Claire Robertson (1986, 92), western-

⁴⁶ Presently Kenyan public universities practice positive discrimination in order to increase the amount of women at the universities, admitting women with lower points than men (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004).

⁴⁷ Adult literacy rate in Kenya in 2002 was 78,5 percent for females, 90,0 percent for males and 84,3 percent for all (UNDP 2004, 178; 219).

⁴⁸ Interview 6.2.1998

type schooling may be disadvantageous for girls, because education “encourages their removal from the labour force both as children and adults and promotes their dependence on men”. This may be the case with those women who have some education, but not with those who are university graduates, as they normally make use of their education and get jobs, becoming thus less dependent on men.

Elite feminists and grass root women: Is there a connection?

Working for the 'common good'

Highly educated Kenyan women seem to be very much group-oriented as women when it comes to women's status in society (cf. Mizracki 1999, 163-164). Thus, although highly educated women can in many cases act in an autonomous way, it does not mean that they would like to act alone or promote only their own interests. As one unmarried young woman who had recently started studies at the university thought: “*You can't be independent, and you have to interact.*”⁴⁹ The same applies to less educated women, perhaps to an even more considerable extent (see e.g. Nelson 1978; Stamp 1986). Anthropologists Susan Reynolds Whyte and Priscilla Wanjiru Kariuki express the same thought followingly, when discussing the importance of social networks for women in Western Kenya:

“If autonomy is defined as individualism and lack of mutual obligation, even educated women cannot be, and may not want to be, autonomous. Social support networks are --- important --- . The difficulty is in distinguishing what is supportive from what is oppressive. -- This brings us to the point that female autonomy is valuable if it is defined as the ability to mobilise relevant resources, both social and economic --- if it means the capacity to take initiatives and the knowledge to decide when they are necessary. It is irrelevant if it means independence in the sense of the ability to manage without the help of the others.” (Whyte & Kariuki 1997; 149-150.)

Thus, women want to work together for the ‘common good’. They are trying to change the way of thinking, when it comes to gender issues, at least in their own surroundings through networking with other women - and men.⁵⁰ Here again, communal aspect highlighted in African feminist thinking is present. Many women I spoke with had been involved in ‘women's issues’, either in their studies, professional lives or through organisational or political activism. Highly educated women in Kenya are very conscious of their role as protagonists for social change.

⁴⁹ Interview 17.1.1997

⁵⁰ In this thesis I do not discuss different women's organisations, which are popular forums for many women to act in Kenya.

Most felt that it was their responsibility as educated and enlightened Kenyan women to act for women's empowerment by advising and counselling those women who have not had chances to educate themselves.

Different feminisms?

However, we need to think about the concept of 'the common good'. Many highly educated urban women in their discourses often talk about promoting all Kenyan women's lives, but is it possible? Although many African thinkers link feminism or "feminist spirit" (Nnaemeka 1998a, 10) to indigenous African social orders (e.g. Aidoo 1998; Sofola 1998; Steady 1989, 21; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 223; 230), many also point to the fact that feminist thinking in any organised or conscious form is only at its beginning in Africa (Aina 1998, 66-67; Mikell 1995, 405). Even so, this is acknowledged mostly among the urban academic elite. Similarly as postcolonial feminisms point to the problematics of representing women in other cultures, one can wonder whether most Kenyan feminists, being middle class, educated and thus privileged women, can actually speak even on behalf of the women of their own cultures, taking into account cultural and class differences (see John 1996, 127-128; Dossa 1999, 160; see also Bell 1996, cited in Ahmed 2001, 66)? These elite women may identify more with international feminists than with non-feminist women in their own countries. Furthermore, there may be lacking trust between the uneducated rural women and educated urban women, and mutual lack of knowledge concerning each other's interests and aims. (Aina 1998, 66; 79; 81-82.)

Even if highly educated women understood correctly the needs and interests of rural or urban uneducated women, would they be the best persons to lead the campaign? I do not know how rural - or urban uneducated - Kenyan women feel about highly educated women's attempts to speak for them. Possibly they feel that their problems are very different from those of the highly educated women's. One of my friends, who was a highly educated woman herself, and identified as feminist, criticised those middle class feminists who have their conferences in fancy hotels and who have no clue about the needs of rural uneducated women. She said that nobody takes them seriously if they go to rural areas sitting in a car while other women carry water pots over their heads for kilometres. Even worse it is for those feminists who are not married. According to her, they cannot be role models for anybody, and rural women think that they cannot tell them anything concerning marriage or relations with men. She was painfully aware of this, being an unmarried mother herself.

Middle class women may not want to be too outspoken on feminist issues, because they may be afraid of losing their status in marriage and becoming socially disrespected as

divorced women. In this sense, some middle class women may be ready to keep up the facade even longer than other women. (Aina 1998, 75; Nwapa 1998, 96.) After all, they have more to lose in a divorce than most women, not only a nice house in an upmarket area and financial security, but also a high social status, which they may have acquired through the husband in the first place. For instance *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (Progress of Women), a well-known women's organisation in Kenya, has been criticised for being elitist, too male-minded, and of flattering government and leaders (Moore 1988, 169-170; also Davison 1996, 8-9).

Another reason why middle class women do not always act in a feminist way, may be the fact that feminism is perceived somewhat ambiguously (also) in many Third World contexts. For instance Uma Narayan, a philosopher born in India, states that feminists in the Third World are often accused of being "Westerni(s)ed", and of not respecting their own cultures if they criticise their own cultures (Narayan 1997, 3-6). Mary E. John, in turn, has argued that it is usually thought that feminists live in the West, while other women live somewhere else and are not regarded as feminists (John 1996, 116-117). In this sense, positions of feminists may become awkward.

Although all women whose lives I look at in this research are not feminists or womanists, many of them said they are. Even those who explicitly said they are not, thought that women and men should have equal chances, and they are committed to make these changes happen (see also Arndt 2000, 710). Not only in Kenya, but elsewhere, some women want to distance themselves from the word 'feminist' or 'womanist', for the above mentioned reasons. Particularly during my fieldwork in 1998 many people, women and men, talked about UN World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing. While women talked about it in the positive ways, men were often either amused, irritated or even frightened of the whole fuzz about 'women's issues'. Beijing had become one synonym for feminism, women's issues, equality etc., and there were even *matatus* in the streets of Nairobi, named Beijing.⁵¹

From the general considerations concerning some of the issues that are special in African feminisms discussed above, I would like to raise some aspects which are of particular importance in this study: first and foremost, women's commitment to different roles as a woman in family and kin - for example mother, sister, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law etc. - and responsibilities and expectations connected to these roles. In addition to these, negotiations concerning practices and problematics of marriage, particularly bridewealth and polygyny, are

⁵¹ *Matatus* are small, colourfully painted buses, which compete for customers by using clever and appealing names as well as playing music aloud. Furthermore, naming *matatus* is a way of social commentary, reflecting particularly current youth culture (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004).

subjects of this thesis. Thus, aspects of communality and presence of traditions will be highlighted. The urban middle class environment, where ‘traditions’ and ‘new values’ are living side by side, competing and sometimes clashing, offers a fruitful environment to study these practices. An illuminating point of departure to follow these many-sided discussions is a citation from one married university student in Kenya: *“What are we liberating women from? And what are we liberating them to? What is equality? If we could understand the meaning of liberation and equality, then we could be true feminists.”*⁵²

4.3. Trying to promote one’s own life

Obstacles in family and society

Whatever their ultimate motives or interests are, highly educated women often seem to face obstacles when they try to empower other women. Their worldviews may differ in a radical way from those of less educated or elder women, not to mention men. For example, many women explained to me that it is sometimes frustrating to try to speak for women’s rights or their empowerment because of the established attitudes against women. Jayne, a Kikuyu woman, felt in the following way: *“So that even though you think that you are fighting all your time to make them see that you know they [women] also are people with abilities and capabilities, you get very disappointed.”*⁵³ Similarly, highly educated women may confront disagreements with their parents or other extended family members because of the different values and worldviews. Sometimes they try to avoid possible conflicts by deciding not to deal with extended family problems. For instance Gladys, who works as a counsellor in a family clinic, and is trained to solve family problems and give advice in difficult situations, prefers not to get too closely involved with her (affinal) relatives’ problems. She does not want to, because she feels that her in-laws consider her as an intruder if she tries to give her opinions. This is regardless of the fact that she has belonged to her affinal family already for ten years. She has learned from the past experiences, that *“one should help, but from the distance”*.⁵⁴

When it comes to their own lives, however, many of them are not giving up their dreams easily, despite the different opinions of their mothers, for example. Today, many

⁵² Interview 24.1.1997

⁵³ Interview 10.2.1998

⁵⁴ Interview 13.2.1998

educated women are not waiting to get married in order to plan their lives, but instead want to gain economic independence and also prepare themselves for the possibility of living unmarried. Some unmarried women told me about their efforts to plan their lives and pursue economic independence. Unfortunately, these efforts have not always been supported by their mothers.

For instance, Irene, who is studying international relations to enter a diplomatic career, had to demand that she would be given some inheritance, like her brothers, after her father passed away. Her mother had eventually agreed, and had given her a plot in the town, but it had remained unrecorded, as the mother is waiting for her to get married first. Irene, still unmarried in her thirties, has doubts about getting married at all, because she is not sure what kind of a man would adjust to a diplomatic career that she wanted to have. She is strongly against the idea of quitting her career for the sake of any man. Augusta, unmarried as well, told her mother that she wanted to save some money from her incomes in order to make some investments. Her mother thought it was in vain, because her husband is supposed to take care of these kinds of things, once she gets married. Still another woman, Linda, did not want to wait until she finds the right man to marry, but rather tries to save some money to be able to buy a plot in the outskirts of Nairobi in order to build a house at some point. Her mother, unlike Irene's and Augusta's, encouraged her to become independent. What is common in Irene's, Augusta's and Linda's backgrounds, is that they are all unmarried, Kikuyu, and from Nairobi families. Irene and Augusta come from wealthy families with educated parents, while Linda's family is not as affluent, her mother being a single parent and a hairdresser. Linda's mother perhaps saw the importance of economic independence for women in a different way from the mothers of Irene and Augusta, because she became a widow early in her life and was left with five children. She has since then taken care of her children alone and managed to educate most of them.

Highly educated women's independence perhaps worries their mothers, who may think that a wife should be obedient to a husband, or at least let him make the decisions concerning finances for example. Thus, mothers may worry that being too independent makes it more difficult for their daughters to get a husband and stay (happily) in a marriage. Unlike their daughters, many mothers may still look at women's positions in life from the point of view of being wives, rather than individual agents with own aspirations, which are not linked to a marriage. Besides, many educated women themselves thought that just as in other issues, their education and independence makes it easier for them to solve problems in marriage. Jayne, an unmarried Kikuyu mother of two put this thought in the following way: "*Many educated women*

*actually make the best of wives, because they have a better capacity to understand the problems even those of their husbands and so on. But it takes time for both to come to that realisation.”*⁵⁵

For better or worse? Education and marriage

As Jayne said above, educated women might make very good wives. But, although education is generally regarded as an important way towards empowerment, when it comes to education and marital relations, things seem to be more controversial. In practice, even those women who strongly advocate women's rights, easily put their wishes in the background, and constantly reminded me that Kenyan men generally do not understand equality. In a similar vein, earlier in this chapter Helen explained her reasons for not voting for a woman candidate in the elections: the atmosphere was not yet ripe for women's leadership in Kenya.

Don't get too educated, please

A review of the earlier research concerning East African women's education and marriage reveals unanimously highly educated women's controversial positions: although education is generally highly respected in East African societies (Kitching 1982 [1980], 410; Obbo 1986, 178; Ncube 1995, 146), women can also be considered too educated when it comes to marriage (Potash 1995, 90; Obbo 1986, 187). Most East African women marry men who are socially and economically in higher positions than themselves (Obbo 1986, 179). A Ugandan anthropologist Christine Obbo argues that if the wife has a better education than the husband, men are not proud of it in East Africa and even the highest educated men characteristically do not like too educated wives, who want to be treated equally. Thus many men do not want their wives to get too high in their careers, or pursue further studies. (Obbo 1987, 272; 278.) Where highly educated women are concerned, this may cause problems if they want to marry. Where to find a husband who is even more educated? According to Pekka Seppälä (1995, 125), “[a]n educated woman is a problematic creature” for Luhya men he studied in Western Kenya.

The discussions I had in Nairobi are in line with these arguments. Many women told me that men usually do not want to marry a woman who has a higher education than themselves, and even the same level of education often causes problems between the spouses.

⁵⁵ Interview 10.2.1998

One unmarried woman put this thought in the following way: “*So I think that when somebody is educated they [men] look at it as a threat*“. ⁵⁶

This is in contrast to the fact that highly educated men in high positions may actually need an educated wife; someone who can contribute to the ‘middle class’ living style and is able to raise the children to succeed in life. They may also need a presentable wife who can socialise with elite people. (Obbo 1986, 187; McAdoo and Were 1989, 158.) However, it must be said that for many women, things are not so black and white, and it looks like many husbands genuinely encourage their wives to get education and have careers. In what follows, I will look more closely at how women themselves feel about this.

Supportive husbands

Those women whose husbands support them in their careers talked very positively about the impact of education both generally and specifically, regarding their own family lives. They gave credit to their husbands for encouraging them in their careers. They also stated that they are very lucky because their husbands approved their efforts to gain a good education. Florence, a Kisii woman, told earlier how having education or a career makes it possible for a woman to take care of herself even without a husband. When I asked her how men perceive educated women, she said:

“Yeah, they tend to respect them, they tend to give them chances, like they have an opinion, they can listen to them, their decisions and all that. They tend to respect that, but with an uneducated woman they will ask, what are you telling me, you’re not learned, you don’t know anything, there’s nothing you can tell me. So actually, with education, they tend to respect women more, they tend to realise that they’ve got potential.” ⁵⁷

Her husband has a Bachelor’s degree, and is planning to pursue a Master’s degree after Florence has finished hers. Her husband seems to respect her and values her education. Although she, after having a child, had felt like staying at home, her husband had actually convinced her that she should continue her studies. He, together with her father, also pays her fees at the university.

⁵⁸ Obviously, for Florence, education is a positive aspect both as a woman and a wife. Similarly, Mercy, a 37 years old Luo woman, who was also pursuing her Master’s degree after working as

⁵⁶ Interview 10.2.1998

⁵⁷ Interview 6.2.1998

⁵⁸ Annual fee at the university of Nairobi in 1998 was approximately 100 000 Kenyan shillings (= 1600 US\$, see footnote no. 88 for detailed currency rates) for a Master’s degree, according to two students. Although most women received the money from their parents, husbands or other relatives, many had a scholarship from the government for their studies. Thus, women from less wealthy backgrounds were also able to get university education.

a teacher for years, told me that *“I married after 6th form. When I went to my diploma, I was already married. When I went to university, my husband paid for it. He encouraged me to take my Master’s; I came here, he’s paid for it.”*⁵⁹ Her husband has even suggested that she should continue and pursue for a doctorate. According to her, her friends *“keep feeling I’m lucky”* and praise her husband all the time.⁶⁰

Walking on a thin rope

Many others are, however, in positions where their levels of education cause disagreements in their respective families. Jennifer, for instance, is in that situation. She is a 38 years old Kikuyu woman, and married with three children. She is doing a postgraduate diploma in social sciences, after working for years in a government office after receiving her Bachelor’s degree. Here is an illuminating part of our discussion, after I asked her if education improves the position of women:

Jennifer: *“It depends, it improves it if the husband is educated, then the education for women improves their situation. But in the cases where the husband is not in the same level as the wife, it can only turn it into worse.”*

Johanna: *“So men don’t want to have a more educated wife?”*

Jennifer: *“Yeah.”*

Johanna: *“How about your husband?”*

Jennifer: (gives a laugh)

Johanna: *“Is he educated?”*

Jennifer: *“No, not to my level. ‘Cause you know at one time we were at the same level, but he’s not interested, he’s interested in making money in business. I’m more interested in education.”*

Johanna: *“Is he encouraging you?”*

Jennifer: *“We are still together. About the encouragement ... well, he does not refuse, you know he can refuse, he can say no, but he hasn’t said no, so it’s positive.”*

Johanna: *“If he said no, what would you do?”*

Jennifer: *“If he said no, I would leave him.”*

Johanna: (smiles) *“Maybe he knows that.”*

Jennifer: (smiles) *“Maybe.”*⁶¹

Jennifer’s husband is less educated, and it is causing some troubles in her family life. Although the husband is not actually encouraging her, he has not refused her to go on with her studies, either, which he could have done in her opinion. It is interesting that Jennifer points to the husband’s authority to refuse the wife’s education, but on the other hand puts it quite clearly that if he refused, she would leave him. Thus, it looks like both spouses need to balance in the

⁵⁹ Interview 22.1.1998

⁶⁰ Interview 22.1.1998

⁶¹ Interview 26.1.1998

marriage to some extent. Jennifer expresses quite explicitly that she would not stop her studies even if he wanted her to. Furthermore, she has a scholarship from the government for her course. She believes that her husband would not pay her fees if she did not have sponsoring. Jennifer's situation points to a central problem in many highly educated women's lives in Kenya: education may have a negative effect on their family lives.

And even if husbands themselves do not mind having a wife with a better education, their peers or relatives may find that kind of a situation strange. For instance Margaret, a Kamba woman, who had got a Master's degree from a British university two years earlier, said that by the time she was graduating, her husband, who did not have any degree yet, was mocked by his friends. She explained:

*"Once I remember when we were there with all our friends, their wives were not going to school, they didn't even have the first degree. And then they used to tell him, ee, your wife has a Master's, she's going to have a Master's very soon. Then some of them would tell him [she'll get it] even before you get one."*⁶²

At the time of our discussion, Margaret's Kamba husband had been in Britain to obtain a Master's degree as well already almost two years. She thought that other people's comments may have had an impact on her husband.

Aware of the above discussed dynamics, women have to find strategies to cope with the situations. Their opinion seems to be that as long as they do not try to challenge their husbands by being too independent, things are okay between them and their husbands. But, as Sarah, a 38-year-old married woman working in international relations put it:

*"If you want to have problems, sure attempt to be independent, not just independent financially, but being independent in the way you do your things, that's what brings problems. So but we take careers, we don't give up. We know how to do it. If they [men] don't like it, too bad."*⁶³

Particularly problematic for women and men's relationships may be women's outspoken interests in women's issues or feminism. This is highlighted in an incident told by Kenyan philosopher Pamela Abuya: she was teaching a course on feminist philosophy at one of the Kenyan universities, when many women students suddenly stopped coming to the course. When she enquired the reasons for their absence, women explained that their husbands or boyfriends

⁶² Interview 18.2.1998

⁶³ Interview 26.2.1998

had refused them to participate in such a dangerous course.⁶⁴ Little seems to have changed in twenty years. Also anthropologist Ulla Vuorela tells about a women's study group that was organised at the university of Dar-Es-Salaam in the beginning of the 1980's. According to her, many men had told their wives not to participate in that "notorious divorce group". (Vuorela 2003a, 215.)

I will discuss the effects of women's education and independence on marriages, considering also kin relations, more thoroughly in later chapters.

Overcoming obstacles

As already made clear, women have faced obstacles in their efforts to speak for women's empowerment in Kenya. Many are also aware that they may not become too independent in their relations with men without causing troubles in the marriage. Thus, it is not surprising that they do not believe in a quick change in gender relations, but rather think that "*cultural structures cannot be changed in a day*".⁶⁵ However, explicitly or implicitly, women brought out the idea that *it is* possible to achieve equality between men and women. The best (if not the only) way to change attitudes is through child raising (see also Arndt 2000, 715).

Towards equality? Raising the children

Raising children can actually be interpreted as a part of their feminist, or womanist, agenda, as a means to achieve their goal: an equal or at least more equal society. They hope that both men and women in the next generation would have more equal attitudes and that the society would be more gender sensitive, and work towards that as mothers.

The attitudes of highly educated women towards raising children seem to be quite clearly in favour of equality when it comes to raising boys and girls. Thus, the traditional way of raising boys and girls differently, of teaching for instance girls to do women's tasks and to behave the way women are expected to behave in the community, is not regarded as an ideal among highly educated women. Rather, they emphasise that they want to raise boys and girls similarly. In practice, this means that they try to make sure that boys learn to take responsibility on household chores, like taking their plates and utensils to the kitchen after dinner, or preparing

⁶⁴ A paper titled "The Institution of 'Mikayi': Gain or Challenge" presented by Pamela Abuya on July 26th at the Women's Worlds 2002 conference held in Kampala, Uganda.

⁶⁵ Interview 23.1.1997

food. When it comes to girls, women want to encourage their daughters to realise their potential in other spheres of life outside the home, and to gain education. This is strikingly different from what Harriet McAdoo and Miriam Were (1989, 155) found in their research on professional women in Nairobi in 1970's. Then, 89 percent of women in their research said that they would raise their children in the same way they were raised, and they valued traditions when it came to child-raising. McAdoo and Were used structured interviews in their research, which may give different information than qualitative non-formal interviews and discussions. They, furthermore, did not concentrate on highly educated, but rather on professional women, and all women in their research did not have university education. Another explanation for the differences is that attitudes may indeed have changed in 20-25 years.⁶⁶

Socialising children not to be submissive

When I asked about the way participants raise their children, most emphasised to me that they *do not* want to do it in a traditional way. Instead, they want to raise their children to be equal. Tina, 27, a mother of one daughter, explained her views on how to raise the children, after I ask her whether she would like to raise her daughter like girls have traditionally been raised in her Kisii community:

*“Traditional? No, no no no. I want my child grow up at least knowing every kind of work, not that traditional kind of work whereby a lady is just supposed to do ... no, I want her to grow up so that she is able to do anything that comes her way. You know like this tradition that has been going on, that women are not supposed to do this kind of jobs like engineering, no no no, I don't want that. If she can do it, let her. But with good morals and whatever.”*⁶⁷

In Tina's words one can find rather subtle feminist criticism about women's limited alternatives. Grace, a single Luo mother in her mid-twenties speaks even more consciously about the importance of equal child-raising, connecting it to women's subordination and her own feminist aspirations.

“I don't want to raise my child in a traditional way because it's the traditional socialisation that brings, to me has brought all these problems. Cause if I'm socialised to be submissive, when I've reached a level where I can't be submissive, then there's a conflict between traditional and these other values. If I teach my son and daughter [that] there is nothing like this is only for men and this is only for women, and they do the same

⁶⁶ One reason for the change may be the school curriculum '8-4-4' which was introduced in the 1980's and which had some elements which were deliberately 'gender neutral'. For instance boys were required to do some craft projects like knitting at school. (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004.)

⁶⁷ Interview 16.2.1998

*work, I value them the same way --- You know, you don't create those dialectics for the children. They grow up knowing that you appreciate a woman as she is, you appreciate a man as he is. As you bring in the aspect of companionship, right from the start, you don't categorise. Then I would really try to socialise them like that, not traditionally."*⁶⁸

Grace clearly brings forth the conflict in the situation where girls are socialised to be submissive, but when they "reach a level" where they cannot be submissive any more. I think that by this level she does not only mean an educational level, but maybe rather a level of consciousness, or a level of independence, which, of course, may be connected to a certain level of education.

Clashing and confusing ideas of upbringing

The aim of women to raise children in a more equal way is not always welcomed by their husbands. However, women bear the main responsibility for upbringing of children, which is often practically done by maids in professional women's families (see also Stichter 1988, 196-197). Thus, mothers have more influence than fathers on the way that children are raised and on the values and practices that they will adopt. Many women said that husbands have problems with their wives' 'new' ways to raise children. These disagreements are not so much connected to girls' upbringing, as they are to that of boys. For instance, many women told me that in their respective communities, men have not been expected to even enter the kitchen, not to mention to cook or wash the dishes. When the husbands who have been raised this way see their son for instance set the table, or wipe it after dinner, they may feel very uncomfortable, and give comments like "*What are you doing here?*".⁶⁹ In these situations, single mothers are in an advantaged position: they do not need to take other parent's opinions into consideration when raising their children.

However, new roles and ideas concerning gender equality cause embarrassment also for some women, who may be confused about what to think of gender roles. Even if they want equality, they may be unsure about what it means in practice. Although they feel like raising the children in a more equal way, it may be difficult because their own upbringing has made them think that some tasks are for women. Fiona, 26, a mother of two boys, explained how she felt about it:

"Now my husband and I even agreed that we want our children to assist our housegirl, so even my small boy, normally when we have eaten, I tell him to, now take your plate to the kitchen, he takes it, to wipe the table, he does it, sometimes I even tell him to sweep his shoes. He's very young but he tries to do it. Actually we don't want him to grow like that (traditional way). In fact sometimes, I was telling him to sit in the sitting room because he's

⁶⁸ Interview 23.1.1997

⁶⁹ Interview 22.1.1998

*a boy. Then the father said no, you don't tell the boy like that, the day he'll have a sister, they should just work together, all of them. ---Because of modernisation, the way the things are, that is what they should do, but for us now, it's like how we're going to make it? --- It's hard because we are used to think that the boys don't do so much, but the girls do, but we want to bring them up together, knowing that they can do everything together, that is our pray, that's what we want to do. But it's very difficult because of our background, but we want to try. We want to bring them up together just knowing that work is supposed to be shared."*⁷⁰

Above, Fiona makes the point that actually her husband took the initiative for a more equal way of bringing up their children. Although Fiona, too, thinks that boys and girls should be raised in the same way, she finds it very difficult because she has been raised traditionally, according to which there are different roles for boys and girls. It is interesting, that although Fiona herself thought quite traditionally on women's and men's roles, she still felt that it is important not to pass those attitudes to the children. Just as her husband had taken the initiative to raise the children equally, he had persuaded Fiona to continue studies, when she had thought about concentrating on child-raising after having children. Again here, very controversial values and attitudes are highlighted.

Another feature which came up in our discussions concerning child raising, was women's desire to raise their children in a nuclear or conjugal family, and to have a close relationship with their children, although long working hours outside home often makes this ideal difficult to achieve (see also Stichter 1988, 196-197). Emphasising closeness in the conjugal family does not mean, however, that extended family members would be completely excluded from children's lives. Urban children often spend at least part of their holidays with the relatives in the countryside, and highly educated women often emphasised the importance of knowing 'one's roots', particularly when coming from the countryside themselves. In practice, however, many urban children may not become very familiar with their extended families and customary cultures. Some families I know let their children have extra tuition in the vacation to ensure their success at school, rather than let them have a long holiday or send them to the countryside.

⁷⁰ Interview 9.2.1998

4.4. Conclusion

Many highly educated women think that women's positions in Kenya have been, and still are in many ways poor. However, they often feel that their responsibility as educated and enlightened women is to work for women's empowerment. In their view, education has affected their opinions and attitudes a lot, and although educated women's positions are better in the society than non-educated women's, they still face many obstacles, particularly when it comes to marriage. One way to make women's lives better in the future is to raise children to be more equal.

Above, I have tried to outline mental spaces concerning equality and women's positions in society and family. This context of strong, intelligent and wise women should be kept in mind when reading this dissertation. However, as I will show later, feminisms as spoken and lived may not be similar, and sometimes the actual life choices may be in conflict with one's ideals. In the next chapter I will turn to discuss issues concerning marriage.

PART II: MARRIAGES. FAMILY MATTERS OR PERSONAL CHOICES?

CHAPTER 5. NEGOTIATING MARITAL RELATIONS

In this chapter I deal with different aspects of marriage that women in this research have faced in their lives. As discussed in the Introduction, marriage has become more individual than in earlier times in Kenya. However, marriage is by no means entirely an individual contract in contemporary Kenya. In what follows, I will look at marriage practices among some highly educated women living in Nairobi, paying particular attention to the marital relations, on the one hand, and kin relations, on the other. I will consider ideas of an ideal and a good enough marriage, issues concerning meeting one's spouse and getting married, paying specific attention to the different implications and relations of both customary marriage practices and 'modern' marriage practices. In the last subsection, I turn my attention to some concerns in marriages where spouses have different cultural backgrounds, discussing specific situations and conflicts that arise, particularly with extended families.

The conception of marriage as an alliance between families can still be seen in the way participants in this research talked about their family lives. However, there were also very different views than the traditional notion of marriage described earlier. According to many researchers, choosing a spouse is becoming more and more an individual choice in contemporary Kenya (see Hetherington 2001, 169-170; Håkansson 1988, 138-139; Seppälä 1995, 112; Nagashima 1987, 183). Based on my discussions with educated women, I agree with this view. Conjugal tie seems to be important to them, and many women clearly expressed both in their speech and their acts that they want to make it stronger, even if it caused constraints between the spouses and the extended family members. Although some women mentioned to me that parents might have had some impact on the decision as to when or whom to marry, the parents' opinions or wishes do not direct much when it comes to highly educated urban people's marriage practices. Only one woman told me that her mother was actively involved in finding her a husband. Some acknowledged some influence from her, or the boyfriend's, parents. Others explicitly stated that they decided themselves whom and when to marry, and most would have married their husbands anyway, even against their parents' consent. Some of them did that, indeed, as I will discuss later.

5.1. Middle class attitudes and practices

An ideal marriage and a good (enough) marriage

Get married before it's too late!

Most highly educated women seem to think that if one wants to marry, one should not postpone it for too long. There is a common belief among them, to which many women referred, stating that if a woman does not marry before her second year in the college is over, she will not get married at all. After that she would be too educated, and it would be much more difficult to get a husband. Indeed, most married women I know have found their future husbands in a college.⁷¹ It is noteworthy, that many unmarried women around their late twenties or older, were already a little worried about their possibilities to find a husband. According to them, their family members were even more worried. For instance Susan, who is an unmarried language instructor and a Kikuyu in her mid-thirties, regularly hears from her relatives enquiries about her possible boyfriends. She says:

*“Like during my birthdays, people will comment and say that now you’re celebrating your thirty-fifth birthday, maybe you should think of calling us for tea. Or: Are you seeing someone? And my aunties can call me and ask me what I’m planning, what I’m up to, is there a man in the city?”*⁷²

However, in her case, there do not seem to be proper men around and she already finished one relationship with a professional, foreign man because he was not a Christian, although otherwise decent, meaning he did not drink or smoke, for instance. She used to make jokes half-seriously about getting married before the end of the year. The only problem was to meet the right man before that. One year after I had come home from Kenya, she wrote in an e-mail: “I haven’t met that tall handsome man yet, I believe soon”.

When I talked with her mother about the fact that none of her three daughters all in their thirties were married, she saw Susan’s and her sisters’ points of view. The mother said: *“If they get a good husband, they can get married. (Silence) But of late, the Kenyan men are not responsible.”*⁷³ This Kikuyu lady in her mid-fifties expressed the feeling that many younger

⁷¹ Some women also told me that they wanted to get married in order to get rid of ‘sugar daddies’ harassing young women in the student dormitories.

⁷² Interview 2.12.2002

⁷³ Interview 2.2.2003

Kenyan women shared. They just put it more directly, stating that most Kenyan men are useless (see also Silberschmidt 2004, 236).

Regardless of that, all of the unmarried women whom I talked with wanted to get married eventually, although it did not seem to be the number one priority in their lives. Rather, for many unmarried women education and a possibility to have one's own life and independence seem to be more important than getting married, particularly if getting married would mean that they should change their behaviour in some way. Jayne, who was a single mother of two children and currently studying for a Master's degree after working for years in a government office, explained her reasons to be single: *"Anybody who can't have me because I'm enlightened, like I think it's what the education is going to do for me, they don't deserve me"*, hence showing her sense of dignity and self-confidence.⁷⁴

Mr. Right?

Thus, the biggest problem for unmarried women who want to marry is the difficulty of finding a proper husband. The qualities unmarried women listed in their requirements concerning an ideal husband were as follows. He should be, first and foremost, responsible. For instance Susan explained that she wanted to marry *"a person with a character, and a born-again Christian, I wouldn't want anyone else but Christian, and also someone who is responsible, and financially secure"*, and did not want to make compromises on that.⁷⁵ Her sister Linda wanted similar things from a man, and hoped that she would find a man who is *"a very responsible person, person of good heart, and somebody who has self-respect and self-control. Somebody who is very understanding, that's the kind of person I would like."*⁷⁶ Cynthia, a Luo woman in her thirties as well, stated that she wanted a man

*"who is romantic, the flowers and candles and chocolate guy, and of course he has to be faithful, and he has to be someone open, someone who will tell you (Cynthia), I don't like this because of this and this and this, or (Cynthia) I like this because of this and that. --- Someone open who can speak to my family members -- like a brother. And he has to have at least a career, a job, yeah. That's it, I guess."*⁷⁷

Although a few highly educated women have very 'Westernised' soap opera kind of ideas of romantic love, like Cynthia above, other qualities than being romantic prevail. Generalising from what participants in this research told me, the ideal husband should have two qualities

⁷⁴ Interview 10.2.1998

⁷⁵ Interview 2.12.2002

⁷⁶ Interview 18.1.2003

⁷⁷ Interview 9.11.2002

above others: responsibility and financial security. It goes without saying that highly educated women want to have likewise, or better, educated husbands, and would not consider other alternatives. None of the women I met could think of marrying someone with much less education. They often thought like an unmarried student, Augusta, who wondered: “*Would we be able to communicate at the same level if he was less educated?*”⁷⁸ These requirements are also emphasised in advertisements where marriage partners are sought in the local newspaper (e.g. Saturday Nation 25-31.1.2003, p. 12).

Ideal: Intimacy and love

In addition to those qualities, many unmarried women, like Cynthia above, stressed that they would like to have an open relationship with their husbands, meaning that they could discuss all problems and anything together. Also Rachel Spronk (2004, 17) who has studied young professional women’s sexualities in Nairobi, argues that new values based on love emphasise companionship, equality and sexual satisfaction of women in marriage. Earlier interpretations of African women’s thoughts concerning marriage suggest that they place less emphasis on sexual and marital intimacy (e.g. Shaw 1997, 78). Similar trends moving towards companionship and intimacy in marriage seems to be happening elsewhere in Africa, for instance in Ghana (see Dinan 1983, 350; Aidoo 1993). Thus, being educated, professional and urban seems to have an impact on women’s conceptions of an ideal marriage and an ideal husband. However, educated women indeed do have doubts about the possibility of such a marriage or husband in Kenya, as they do in other African countries (Robertson 1997, 219; Dinan 1983, 350; Haram 2004, 215.)⁷⁹

Perceptions of an ideal marriage and an ideal husband reflect highly educated women’s current ideas of a marriage as a choice that should make one happy and provide a means for a fulfilling relationship. Marriage is not primarily thought of as an obligation or a family contract, but rather as something a woman can choose, if she finds a good enough man. Of course, ideals and hopes do not always go hand in hand with the real chances in life.

Reality: A good enough marriage

If an ideal marriage, or an ideal husband, is difficult or impossible to find, how are things in reality? How do married women perceive their marriages? What is important in a good (enough) marriage? Although an ideal marriage would be based on affection and intimacy, in practice,

⁷⁸ Interview 14.1.1998

⁷⁹ Interestingly, conceptions of an ideal husband of rural Kenyan women may be very different. For instance those rural Luo women that Betty Potash has studied hoped for “hard-working men from good families who would provide economic help, did not drink, and would not beat them” (Potash 1995, 85).

other things than love seem to be important in a marriage. Instead, when I asked women how they perceived a good marriage or a good relationship, they mainly emphasised that a husband needs to provide for the family, so that it will not need to suffer, and that he will have to take care of his responsibilities. Mercy, a 37-year-old Luo woman who is a language teacher and a mother of three children, described her husband in the following way:

*“He’s good, very good, until you almost feel that you can’t do anything to offend him, cause he really tries, most of his money is spent on us, he’s very generous. He gives us almost everything, this and that, and sometimes I say surely you need to buy a suit or something. He does everything for us, I think sometimes he even forgets himself.”*⁸⁰

In a similar vein, a 36-year-old Kikuyu woman, Wambui, who works as an accountant told me about her husband: *“He has no objections if I want to buy something, if I want to spend money -- other husbands complain if you want to buy a nice dress. --- He tries to make life comfortable to me and the kids”*.⁸¹ In addition to taking care of material needs, women seem to appreciate their husbands for being an attentive father for the children. Wambui also appreciated her husband for that: *“He’s very fond of the kids --- he has time for us, he would do anything for the kids.”*⁸²

Very rarely did women talk about the companionship between themselves and the husbands, or expressed their satisfaction about the fact that they could discuss with their husbands and share their thoughts and emotions. Apart from the reason to marry, women hardly ever referred to love when they talked about their marriages (see also Silberschmidt 1999, 96). In this sense, the ideal marriages unmarried women wished to have did not seem to come true in practice.

However, although many women stated that the husband is supposed to be the head of the family, they wanted to participate in the decision-making in the family, and would not tolerate a husband who would “dictate on things”. Thus, as long as women felt that they were not oppressed in the marriage and the husband took care of his responsibilities towards the wife and their children, wives were satisfied. Many thought like Sara, a 38-year-old Luo woman, who had been married for 10 years: *“I think so far so good. I cannot complain about anything, there are the normal ups and downs which I think are necessary initially just to get intimate. But*

⁸⁰ Interview 22.1.1998

⁸¹ Interview 25.2.1998

⁸² Interview 25.2.1998

I think fairly satisfying, I think”.⁸³ Of course, like anywhere, there were also women who lived in unhappy relationships.

To fall in love or just become ready for a marriage

Most women said that they married for love. However, some just stated that they felt it was time to get married before it would be too late. When they met someone with the right characteristics, as described earlier, they decided to marry. Or, when they got pregnant, they wanted to marry. In the next chapters, I will take examples from some women's lives to highlight the many ways people meet each other, negotiate about the bridewealth and get married in contemporary urban setting by discussing the situations of many women and couples.

Sara, a 38-year-old scientist and a mother of two children had been married for ten years to her husband who was an engineer. They both had Bachelor's degrees, the husband studied in Europe for his degree and she has done several diploma courses in European countries, meanwhile the husband has taken care of the home and the children. She described meeting her future husband and marrying him in the following way:

*”I met him through a friend, actually, through a former classmate, we were doing (biology), and he was his classmate in high school. And I met them together one day in the street, I think, and he introduced me to the former classmate of his and then the following two weeks or so this colleague of mine --- invited us out for a drink, and there was this man again and then it developed for an affair.”*⁸⁴

She said they were courting each other for six months before marrying, although the man had already proposed to her when they had known each other for two months. They are both Luo, and the marriage was customary: *“We went through all the usual meetings and discussions that take place in the traditional Luo wedding, that all we went through”*. The husband had also paid bridewealth, although she wanted to distance herself from that institution by saying that *“I don't know if that was dowry, but there was some token, some sign of goodwill. I don't think that it was something, like, specifically dowry or something.”*⁸⁵ It was important for Sara that her husband was from the same ethnic group. Luckily she did not have to face a situation where the parents would not have accepted her boyfriend, because she cannot say what she would have done in that case.

⁸³ Interview 19.2.1998

⁸⁴ Interview 19.2.1998

⁸⁵ Interview 19.2.1998

Patricia, on the other hand, had only recently married when we met and was radiant as a newly wed happy woman in her mid-twenties, although perhaps still a little insecure in her role. She told me that she met her husband through work when she was still studying English at the university. Gradually they became friends, and she learned to know that his wife was seriously ill. After his wife passed away, Patricia supported him through his difficult times. Soon after that she went to Britain to study. Before she left, the man had confessed that he wanted to marry her in the future. She had not thought about him in this sense, and wanted to have some space, that is why she did not communicate with him while abroad. However, he was a big part of her life again from the day she returned to Kenya, starting from the moment she arrived: he had found out when she was arriving, and came to meet her at the airport. During the next months, she actually took care of him on a daily basis; she invited him regularly to have dinner at her place etc. He was involved in her life to such an extent, that her friends started wondering about the nature of their relationship. She says that in her view, she was just doing some charity work, and did not consider the man as anything else but a friend who needed somebody to look after him in order to survive from the loss of his wife. In that time she was thinking that it was time for her to find a husband and get married, and when she mentioned this to the man, he

“got so shocked, he was telling me I’m not getting married to any man apart from him. If I do, he’ll just give up, because who else would do him the favours I was doing as like how long would he live. But I found it very difficult to stand, because I hadn’t thought of loving this man as a husband, I wasn’t seeing that in him. I was just seeing somebody I was helping out of [misery]. But [he said] you know, if you don’t want, I will go and tell your parents, I will tell them that you’re not marrying any man if you’re not to marry me. And if you feel like you haven’t decided, take some time and decide.”⁸⁶

After this, she had thoroughly thought about his suggestion and they had discussed it for five months, during which time she “grew to like him”, and was eventually ready to marry him. She says that things they needed to talk about were for instance the position of his children from the previous marriage, as well as their opinions. Where would they live, how would they react? When I met her, she had been married for a few months, and thought that she had not had any problems with his children, who had accepted her as his new wife. One of the children lived with them; two others were studying abroad.

The way Patricia found her husband may not be ‘a fairy tale of a love at first sight’ kind of an encounter. Rather, a persistent attitude and refusal to give in from the side of the man, and no doubt his social and economic position eventually made her reconsider her relationship

⁸⁶ Interview 9.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview, until noted otherwise.

to a man who was considerably older than she was. Once they were married, “*properly*”, as she says, meaning that all traditional requirements concerning Luo marriage were met and bridewealth paid, she was able to live a comfortable life. They lived in a four-bedroomed house, she and her husband, and husband’s son and his niece. Husband’s prominent position guaranteed that nothing was lacking in her life. Her individual (mental) space had perhaps diminished, and her husband did not allow her to go for further studies abroad as she had planned, and did not like her going out with her friends any more, but she did not seem to mind, “*because marriage is to give and take, I decided to give into this*”.

I never talked with Patricia’s husband, and my view of their situation is from Patricia. Before this interview, Patricia had told me that she had been dealing a lot with women’s issues in her studies, and actually, she was forced to interrupt one course on women’s studies because she did not have time for it because of the wedding arrangements. She seemed like a woman who had a lot of ambition for the future. However, she had now married a man, whom she did not consider as ‘Mr. Right’ in the beginning. Interpreting her behaviour in the context of feminist thinking, one could say that this is an example of women’s current situations in urban middle class Kenya. She thought about her choices, and decided that to marry was the best choice, even if it limited her life to a considerable extent.

Negotiating bridewealth: For the parents’ sake?

Stories presented above are cases of women who married through customary procedures, without a church or a civil ceremony. There, I already pointed to the role of the marriage payments. I continue by focusing more clearly on bridewealth negotiations, which is the most important part of a customary marriage. At the same time, I broaden the focus so that I will include marriages where customary negotiations and other forms of marriage, like a church or a civil wedding are combined, by giving examples of different couples’ situations.

When marriage payments are discussed here, I want to remind my readers that my intention is fragmented and limited. Instead of marriage payments, I actually focus on bridewealth negotiations. For instance, I have not systematically recorded what has been negotiated to be paid, how much has actually been paid and when, etc. I did, however, ask women whether bridewealth was paid when they got married and how much was agreed on. While some gave exact figures, some said they did not remember or know. Thus, rather than providing exact figures of statistical value, I will mention some sums to give a picture on the

variability of requirements. Rather than looking at bridewealth as a form of exchange, I will try to unveil some of its implications as they are embedded in the urban middle class setting according to my understanding. I am interested in the attitudes and feelings connected to this practice. I want to think about how women see the meaning of bridewealth and how they participate in the negotiations. What is women's agency in middle class marriage negotiations, and why? How is kin involved? Other questions of bridewealth and marriage negotiations have been discussed elsewhere more thoroughly (e.g. Håkansson 1988; Comaroff 1980), and they fall outside the scope and possibilities of this thesis.

Bargaining and the process of paying

In the past, bridewealth was seen as an important confirmation of the woman's value; today, it is often criticised as having become commercialised (Potash 1995, 83). Many women told me about their extended family members' unrealistic expectations concerning bridewealth. Family members often asked far too much in their opinion. Janet, who is a 28-year-old doctor, married a fellow doctor of her own Kisii community in a customary way without a church or civil wedding. She explained her views on bridewealth negotiations that took place when they married as follows:

Janet: *"It's not very fixed, it's like, he has to do so much, yeah? It's like maybe, if we talk about money, we talk maybe a 100 000 shillings, which initially was a problem, but of course, we had to explain to them, we have just started to work, we don't have that kind of money. But they understood, they welcomed the idea, so it wasn't a problem then, yeah."*

Johanna: *"Was it important to you that he pays dowry?"*

Janet: *"Not for me, but for my parents, cause they would feel like, my parents still regarded that it's a sign that a man is able to take care of their daughter, he's able to pay that and he's able to respect her. And for them, it's important that he pays, we pay, actually this thing we pay, not he pays. It's like you chip in, at the end of the day. But then, I explained to my parents that it's not possible to give as much dowry as they had expected. So they agreed we could give what was possible. Yeah, that's what happened."*⁸⁷

According to Janet, her parents asked her husband-to-be to pay about 100 000 shillings (= 1600 US dollars).⁸⁸ As Janet and her groom thought that it was too much considering the fact that they had recently finished their studies and did not have enough savings, they negotiated a

⁸⁷ Interview 13.2.1998

⁸⁸ An average exchange rate (during my stay) in 1997 was 1 US\$ = 55 KSh or 100 KSh = 1,8 US\$, in 1997-98 1 US\$ = 62 KSh or 100 KSh = 1,6 US\$, and in 2002-2003, 1 US\$ = 79 KSh, or 100 KSh = 1,3 US\$ (currency rates from: www.oanda.com/convert/fxhistory). I use dollars instead of euros, since euro was not in use before the year 2002.

smaller amount. Janet went on and told me that bridewealth is not paid at once, but rather in instalments, and that after the first payment, “*nobody really counts*”.⁸⁹

Janet’s marriage was customary without a church or a civil wedding. In most cases highly educated people have a combination of customary and church marriage. That was also the case of Cecilia and her husband. They had been married about ten years. She is a Luhya and so is her husband, and both have university degrees. They had their main wedding in Nairobi in a church, but they also went through customary negotiations between the elders from both sides. Cecilia said that after a certain amount of the bridewealth is paid, the remainder is very flexible, but however,

*“when he’s actually officially coming home to do some [payment] it’s actually recorded in that book. But basically once you’ve reached a certain amount it doesn’t really become a bother to anybody, whether you go back to do something more or not. Because you’re constantly helping them.”*⁹⁰

She said that she did not even remember when her husband last paid something ‘officially’. They give money to her parents and her brother’s family who live in the rural areas on a more or less regular basis, because the brother (who has a university degree as well) has not found work, and is depending on their parents’ pensions with his wife and their children. However, as Cecilia had recently lost her well paying job in an international company, they did not have as much resources to help as they used to have. Still, small amounts of money were distributed every now and then, but if the husband wanted to pay part of the bridewealth officially, it should be a substantial amount of money:

“If you bring something so small it looks like you’re really despising that other family. So it’s always good if you take something good, something substantial. --- It’s actually a big function for the family. You know, if he feels he’s ready, he’d like to go and give them something towards dowry, he’d actually go and send them a message on his proposed dates, and they would actually get back to you and tell, okay --- this is the date we are waiting for you. --- During the first negotiations I have to be there, but during the ones that follow, I don’t have to be there. Unless I would personally like to go and help my parents --- with the preparations. But otherwise it’s not mandatory that I’ll be there, no.”

She said that she did not remember what kind of a bridewealth was agreed on in their case, but “*my father kept consulting me, he kept on consulting me and I told him no.*” She discussed with her fiancé and came up with an appropriate amount and then told her father who further informed other people involved. Cecilia thus wanted to influence the amount of bridewealth, probably because she knew her fiancé did not have very much money, coming from a fairly non-

⁸⁹ Interview 13.2.1998

⁹⁰ Interview 3.2.2003. All following citations are from the same interview, until stated otherwise.

educated family and having many responsibilities towards extended family members. In addition, her parents are well educated and were not in an acute need of bridewealth money.

When money is not an obstacle

Those who come from a wealthy family and marry someone from a similar background do not have to care so much about money. Carol, a manager in her thirties, and her husband went through everything possible, including the pre-wedding party for the friends. She described her wedding and marriage negotiations in the following way: *“It was a church wedding, but before that lots of traditional ceremonies took place, traditional Kikuyu [ceremonies], the ones that had to take place before you could have a church wedding”*.⁹¹ Their wedding had been a big function with many guests, but now, some seven years later she would do it differently, in a more modest way. Her husband is due to pay a bridewealth of over one million Kenyan shillings (13 000 US\$). When I expressed my surprise over such a big bridewealth, she explained:

*“[It] was decided not only by my family, but the whole clan. But what traditions say is that you’re not supposed to pay the dowry at one go. Dowry is supposed to be paid over generations, so that the friendship between the two families does not die. So that my husband’s family would get a chance, even after I died, to come and visit members of my family as they pay, it’s supposed to be continued after generations. He only paid I think 50 000 [650 US\$]--- [a]nd the rest is supposed to be paid during time.”*⁹²

Both Carol and her husband come from wealthy Kikuyu families, have Master’s degrees and good jobs. This probably explains the big bridewealth they agreed on. However, one million shillings was not considerably more for this man in proportion to his incomes than smaller sums for someone else. The husband’s salary was about 80 000 shillings (=1040 US\$) a month, so if he saved all his salary during one year, he would come up with the bridewealth. Still, it was a high requirement. Carol tells that her husband is solely responsible for paying the bridewealth, because in his family, everybody is responsible for his or her own finances. As Carol says, bridewealth is not paid as a single payment, but rather in instalments over time. In most cases it is practically impossible to pay the required and agreed amount at once, because the amounts are often very large. Furthermore, that would not even be the ideal way of paying the bridewealth, because one important aspect in bridewealth traditionally has been to create and maintain good relations between two families, which also comes up in what Carol says.

⁹¹ Interview 22.11.2002

⁹² Interview 22.11.2002

“Give us what you’ve got”

After these examples which point to the importance of bridewealth negotiations, I will talk about two marriages where the role of the bridewealth negotiations, as well as other customary elements, has been minimal. Naomi, who is working in the public health care, was in her fifties, and got married in the early 1970’s. Theirs was a church wedding, perhaps because her father is a priest, who obtained his degree in theology in the United States. They did not have much traditional Kikuyu customs related to their marriage. According to her:

*“My father does not believe in those negotiations, so he did not see the need of having negotiations, and in fact what he did, that even after we had agreed the date and the wedding was to be, he invited his sisters and brothers and informed them that I was getting married, and he told them that they should not make any fuss on the wedding day, asking for, you know sometimes on the wedding day the relatives of the girl are asking for funny things.”*⁹³

When it comes to the bridewealth, her father had just said that the groom can give whatever he wants, without any demands. Even less formal was the marriage of Florence and her husband. Although coming from a wealthy, educated Nairobi family, Florence, a 28-year-old teacher and a postgraduate student, chose to keep a low profile when marrying. She met her husband in the college, where they were both involved in an arts group. After a couple of years, they decided to get married. Although her parents wanted them to have a church wedding, she preferred to have a modest civil wedding with a party, *“something small, for just the immediate family”*.⁹⁴ They are both from the same community, Kisii, but they did not have much customary elements in their marriage, although the husband’s parents had come to meet hers in Nairobi, and they had agreed on the bridewealth. Even if the wedding was very ‘modern’ in all ways and the extended kin was not involved practically at all, there was still the agreement on bridewealth, although she says that her parents were not very interested in the whole issue: *“My parents told them that you give us what you’ve got, it’s fine.”*⁹⁵

Florence’s and her husband’s parents accepted their marriage, and they did not avoid profound marriage negotiations or church wedding for that reason. They just wanted an intimate wedding. Usually the reason for having a civil wedding without family negotiations has to do with the fact that the parents of the bride - or less commonly the groom - have not accepted the marriage. In every case I know of, the reason for the parents’ disapproval was a different ethnic and/or religious background, sometimes combined with the fact that the man had (a little)

⁹³ Interview 19.2.1998

⁹⁴ Interview 6.2.1998

⁹⁵ Interview 6.2.1998

less education than the woman and her parents did not think that she should marry that kind of a man.

Ambiguous attitudes

Highly educated women tend to explain bridewealth as a tradition they have gone through out of respect for their parents and parents-in-law. This attitude differs to some extent from the attitudes of the Kisii women in rural Kenya, the majority of who were in favour of paying bridewealth, as it was important for them personally (Håkansson 1988, 150). However, women usually thought that paying the bridewealth makes the husband more responsible and more committed to the marriage and also controls him to some extent, “*so that he doesn’t play around too much in a marriage*”.⁹⁶

Although highly educated women often talked about bridewealth in a nonchalant way, things may not be so simple. Attitudes towards bridewealth were somewhat ambivalent. Some were clearly proud and satisfied if the bridewealth was a substantial sum of money. Similarly, some of those whose husband had not managed to pay any bridewealth yet, were a little embarrassed. So, although in their speech many did disparage bridewealth, it may be more important than they are ready to admit. Nigerian feminist Molarra Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, 211) has stated that

“There are African married women, African middle class and Westerni(s)ed women, who will argue that they want to have their bridewealth no matter how corrupted and commerciali(s)ed it is; if they do not, their husbands will not respect them and treat them with the appropriate recognition that their family had officially and ceremonially handed them over.”

Although highly educated women with whom I have discussed have not been as outspoken as Ogundipe-Leslie when it comes to the bridewealth’s importance, some may think so. There certainly sometimes are strong tensions included in bridewealth issues (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004). In any case, attitudes towards bridewealth in today’s Kenya are controversial. Paying a large bridewealth may bring recognition to a woman, but in whose eyes? Her own, her extended family members’, her in-laws’, her husband’s or her friends’? This would be an interesting issue to think about, but unfortunately I cannot answer this with the data I have. I can only point to the symbolic role of the bridewealth, which is followed out of the respect for the parents and parents-in-law. Thinking about the future, many

⁹⁶ Interview 22.1.1998

women said that they did not care if their daughters received bridewealth or not when they get married. These women did not see their future wealth, or well-being, was depending on the bridewealth they would receive for their daughters.

Preparing for a church wedding

Combining different practices

As already stated, most Kenyans regard marriage as a contract between the extended families sealed with an agreement of bridewealth. Nowadays, because of the lack of resources, marriage often takes place in the form of the elopement of the spouses without any ceremonies.⁹⁷ Against this background, it is pretty understandable that church weddings are often regarded as elitist and connected to a high status in Kenya as well as wider in East Africa (Seppälä 1995, 113; Hasu 1999, 249). People whose life is studied in this research are exactly those who have church weddings, partly because of their Christianity, but also because most of them have the resources for expensive church wedding. Maybe it is also a matter of giving signals of being successful and having a certain position. Although a church wedding gives a certain prestige, many feel that it is not enough as such, without negotiations between the families.

Even if other customary elements are minimal, bridewealth is usually agreed on. Although an unofficial marriage, i.e. getting married through elopement, has become common in Kenya, among those highly educated people I know it was not common. The husbands were also almost always highly educated and were able to pay the bridewealth, or at least were willing to agree on it. Only those cross-ethnic marriages, which were not accepted by the parents, started without marriage negotiations and paying the bridewealth, as I will discuss later.

Certainly there is no one way of meeting one's spouse and getting married in today's urban middle class setting. I know people who had married according to all requirements customarily without a church or a civil wedding, some others who had only informed their parents that they were getting married, and the husband had perhaps paid something small "*as a sign of an appreciation*".⁹⁸ There were also those who only had a church or civil wedding with a minimal amount of customary elements, like an agreement of a bridewealth, or without any, and those who had it all: full customary procedure and a church (or

⁹⁷ Although also less or non-educated rural people may arrange a church wedding years after their customary marriage if the couple has managed to get sufficient wealth (see e.g. Davison 1996, 209).

⁹⁸ Interview 16.2.1998

a civil) wedding, plus a lavish party for relatives and friends.⁹⁹ Often, when highly educated people marry in contemporary Kenya, they combine different elements. Those who had had a customary marriage, often looked forward to having a church or a civil wedding in the future. Also those who had a civil or church wedding, included more or less elements from customary marriage, at least some sort of an agreement on bridewealth. As church weddings are popular and prevalent especially in a middle class setting, I want to have a close look at the preparations involved in marrying in one Luhya family, where three daughters were planning to have a church wedding in the near future.

Ruth's process of marrying

The youngest of these three sisters, 26-year-old Ruth, wanted to marry her boyfriend of four years. Getting married would be a major expense for them. Ruth and her fiancé had been saving for the wedding and the bridewealth for some time, as church weddings with a reception were expensive: The clothing for the bride and the groom, the rings, little fee for the church, not to mention transportation and feeding of the guests which was a big expense, as “*you know here in Kenya we always invite so many, it's the tradition, you know, so many people, like the minimum you can have is maybe 150 people in your wedding.*”¹⁰⁰ On top of that, the bridewealth. I asked her whether they had started the negotiations already:

“Yeah, we have, we have started, I was back at home in December, okay I went to tell them that I was getting married, then they told me to wait... you know (Alice) is not married yet, she's my elder sister, so they expected her to ... okay, (Alice) had told them that she was planning also to get married this year, so it was like they wanted her to, at least I give her a chance to go ahead. But again, they also told me after some consultations, they told me to go ahead with my plans. So we are planning, my boyfriend is planning to visit them in the course of March.”

The boyfriend has not yet met the parents or other relatives except her sisters who live in Nairobi as well, and I can sense that Ruth is a little anxious about the meeting. Not that her parents would not accept him and their marriage: he is decent, educated and employed, not from the same ethnic community, but quite close, and besides, even Ruth's mother is not a Luhya. She rather worries about their demands to do with the bridewealth, which according to her are often overwhelming:

⁹⁹ Almost 2/3 of the marriages were exclusively customary, almost 1/3 of the couples had a church wedding with customary negotiations, and only a few couples had a civil wedding either with or without customary negotiations.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 22.1.2003. All following citations are from the same interview until stated otherwise.

“They’ll ask for, okay they will definitely ask for cows, between, okay it could be 12 or 14 cows, and you know, here in Kenya, a cow maybe is going for between, okay, if it’s a big cow, 15 000 and maybe 20 000 [shillings]. And that is maybe somebody’s whole month’s salary --- and on top of that, they want money. I’ve heard of situations where the parents ask for maybe a matatu [a small bus], a whole matatu, that is a lot of money, a new one. Yeah, and that’s not all they want. There’s other small small things, like the aunties will say we need this and that, your aunties, and then the uncles, they also want, the old men, they also want their own part. In addition, on top of the paid dowry, so it’s not easy. Yeah, especially, okay, when you’re doing it officially, like me I want to do it officially -- there are those cases where they just move in and continue with their life, but I want to do it officially.”

She said that she had discussed bridewealth with her boyfriend, and had agreed that they try to negotiate a reasonable amount with her father. In practice, however, Ruth is not supposed to be present in negotiations, so they pretend she is not involved or even aware of the details, although she is very much involved. As she says, in her community, the elders often ask between 12 and 14 cows, and if they cost what she estimated, from 15 000 to 20 000 shillings (195 US\$ to 260 US\$) each, the value of the cattle alone turned into money would be somewhere between 180 000 and 280 000 shillings (2340 US\$ to 3640 US \$). In addition to cattle, there would be cash requirements. Ruth has a college diploma in natural sciences, and so does her boyfriend, and although he has found a job, she has not so far, and so their financial situation is not very good. Even if they saved all his salary, which of course is not possible, it would take over one year to come up with the whole bridewealth. She believes that they are able to find a solution that satisfies both parties concerning the bridewealth. Although she says that some parents may even prevent the marriage if they do not agree on the bridewealth, she is convinced that it is not going to happen in this case: *“he [fiancé] can always go and talk to my dad, my dad is --- at least he’s a little bit learned, he has a degree, he did (economics) long time ago. So --- they can at least come to terms, to sit down and talk.”*

After I had already come home from Kenya, a year later, I heard from the eldest sister that Ruth had gotten married. Almost at the same time, her elder sister, Alice had had her wedding. Alice did her Master’s degree in a foreign university a few years ago, where she met a man from another African country, who had now become her husband. Both of them were working, and thus had a little bit more money to spend than Ruth and her fiancé. Alice and her husband had a wedding reception in a five-star hotel, and the couple left for a honeymoon to South Africa. Ruth’s wedding was a bit more modest, because of the expenses. Some months after the wedding, Alice moved to the other side of the globe for her doctoral studies in urban planning. Her husband did not have a chance to follow her, and for the next few years, they will be living in a long-distance marriage.

Even the eldest sister in this family, 28-year-old Lucy, wanted to have a church wedding, although she had been customarily married for some time and gave birth to her first-born child when I was in Kenya. When I visited her a few days before she gave birth to her baby, she told me that they were saving money to have a church wedding, which “*are very expensive, but we can afford 100 000 [shillings] for the wedding*”.¹⁰¹ She also says that she is not going to organise any kind of a fund raising, i.e. a ‘pre-wedding party’ arranged for one’s friends towards the wedding costs. She thinks that everybody should pay their own weddings themselves. Lucy and her husband are both educated and employed, but still, 100 000 shillings (1300 US\$) is a relatively big sum to be saved from their salaries, which total about 45 000 shillings (585 US\$) a month. When they married customarily, they did it in low profile. Parents had met and they had agreed on the bridewealth. She says she does not know how much he is supposed to pay, but at least the value of 12 cows. However, he has not paid any of it yet. In this family, things were in good order: All three eldest daughters were educated, two of them were working. When I was still in Kenya, one of the daughters was married, two more were getting married, all to educated and employed men.

Now I will turn to look at the special problems that I came across in those families where the spouses came from different ethnic backgrounds.

5.2. Crossing the ethnic boundaries: characteristics of mixed marriages

Choosing a spouse - does ethnic background matter?

Because marriage has earlier been strongly regarded as an alliance between the families, and many people still see the implications of a marriage in that way, it is not surprising that ethnic background of the spouses is often regarded as important. If spouses come from very different backgrounds, the relations between the families may not become as close as they may if the parents of both spouses have the same cultural background and speak the same vernacular.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Interview 21.1.2003

¹⁰² Of the married interviewees’ marriages, 10 were inter-ethnic, and 26 were not.

“I didn’t want from any other tribe”

In an urban setting different ethnic groups socialise more with each other, and children learn from the early childhood to play with their neighbours, who are of different background, also speaking many different languages. For instance urban Luo children switch fluently between Dholuo, Kiswahili and English, depending on the context (Obondo 1996). Even if originally from a rural environment, those who have come to Nairobi to study or work mix with other groups. In an urban middle class setting, women’s opinions regarding the meaning of the ethnic background vary; there are those who absolutely think that it is best to marry someone from the same community, and there are those who think that ethnic background makes no difference at all when choosing a spouse.

The following citation shows quite a typical attitude among those who give preference to the same ethnic background. Tina is a 27-year-old woman working in a travel agency. She is married to a man from her own Kisii community, and when I asked her if she would have married someone from another ethnic group, she answered:

*“Well, I didn’t want from any other tribe, although, sometimes you fall in love. Sometimes a tribe doesn’t put a limit to you love. But I’d really prefer a man from my tribe, for the reasons that there are so many things that other tribes, okay, maybe customs that are difficult when you marry a person from another tribe. But it’s so easy when you have the same customs and values when you marry a man from your own tribe. So, that could have been my preference, to marry a man from the same tribe. And that’s what I got.”*¹⁰³

In Tina’s opinion, it is easier for women to relate to men from the same cultural background, and vice versa. She has a point; in everyday life it is often easier if the spouses are from the same community and speak the same vernacular. For example Paul, who is a Luo man having a Kamba girlfriend, whom he hopes to marry, explains that in practice it is sometimes difficult with different backgrounds: *“At times we are together, with my family or friends, then they start talking the local dialect, then I have to tell them, hey, there’s someone who doesn’t understand, so we have to speak Kiswahili or English, so she understands.”*¹⁰⁴ He thinks that in the future, they will have to mix their backgrounds and find together the kind of a life which they both are satisfied with. However, he admits that Luo culture is very strong, and *“You cannot throw away the matter of culture, [but you can] pull it a bit. There’s a certain amount you don’t follow, like ‘this is too much’”*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Interview 16.2.1998

¹⁰⁴ Interview 9.11.2002

¹⁰⁵ Interview 9.11.2002

Thinking of other family members, too

In addition to one's own preferences, many women pointed out that marrying into one's own community is a better choice regarding other family members. For instance Gladys, a 34-year-old social worker, thought that especially from the point of view of the children, it's good to have the same ethnic background, in their case Luhya, because "*intermarriages are cultureless*".¹⁰⁶ An important aspect in learning cultural traditions is language. In inter-ethnic marriages the spouses usually speak Kiswahili or English with each other, and the children do not necessarily learn to speak their parents' respective mother tongues. In addition, many Nairobi born children have a poor command of their parents' vernacular even if it is the same for both parents. Particularly in middle class families, parents often speak English to their children in order to prepare them better for education (Obondo 1996, 47). Some women who had grown up in middle class Nairobi families told me that they were sent to the rural areas as teenagers to learn vernaculars, and some had even taken courses in language schools as adults to be able to communicate more fluently with their rural kin.

Also for the parents' sake, many thought that it would be more convenient to marry someone from the same community, like Eunice for instance. She is an unmarried Kikuyu woman in her thirties from the Eastern Province. She explains that she would not like to marry anyone else but a Kikuyu, because families would then be more able to communicate with each other. Furthermore, she says that among the Kikuyu, male circumcision is an important rite of passage, a mark of manhood. The Luo, on the other hand, do not practise circumcision. She explains that if she married a Luo, her family would think that her husband is not really a man, but only a boy who is not ready for marriage (see e.g. Kenyatta 1995, 130-154; Robertson 1997, 241 about male circumcision among the Kikuyu).

In addition to the importance of male circumcision for Kikuyu, different views and practices concerning the position of children in cases of divorce among the Kikuyu and the Luo is an issue which women often pointed out when highlighting that the most difficult inter-ethnic marriage would be between a Kikuyu woman and a Luo man.¹⁰⁷ There are no such couples among the participants of my research. One Luo woman, married to a Luo man herself, described the attitudes of the men of her own community towards the Kikuyu women in the following way:

"The biggest worry among the Luos is to marry a Kikuyu. If you marry a Kikuyu, the Luos are resented. And I think it's worst in the traditional set-up of inheritance, you know. Because

¹⁰⁶ Interview 13.2.1998

¹⁰⁷ This may be linked to general prejudiced attitudes many Kikuyu and Luo have towards each other.

*the Kikuyu are originally matrilineal, so if you are separating or divorcing a Kikuyu, she'll take the children, whatever you'll do, she'll go with the children. To a Luo, children belong to a man, so if I was to leave my husband, I wouldn't take the children. --- When a Luo marries a Kikuyu, and she's going to take the children, the Luos feel such a blow, you know. So they are very particular, cause they really fear, for not to marry a Kikuyu, they almost fear. But of these other tribes they would say, no, it's all right."*¹⁰⁸

Love matters, not ethnicity

As seen above, many highly educated women acknowledged that different cultural backgrounds bring difficulties and they rather marry someone from the same ethnic background. However, more than one third of participants were in inter-ethnic marriages, although I did not try to look for that kinds of marriages specifically. There were thus many participants who did not think in terms of ethnic categories when it comes to marriage.

For instance, Linda, an unmarried Kikuyu woman in her thirties said that *"I'm not a tribalist. I would marry any tribe"*, and Sarah, who had married a fellow Luhya, emphasised that ethnic background *"wasn't important at all"* as a criterion.¹⁰⁹ Surely most unmarried women thought that if they found someone they fell in love with, ethnicity should not come between them.

Although some people may want to distance themselves from tribalism and ethnic prejudices by emphasising the meaningless of ethnicity, my understanding is that ethnic background *does* matter in a marriage. There are certain problems in marital and kin relations which are common in inter-ethnic marriages, and those I will discuss next.

Problems in inter-ethnic marriages

Even if ethnic background does not matter to the spouses themselves, it often matters to the extended family. In the rural areas, women often move to the husband's homestead after marrying. Thus, different ethnic backgrounds may make it difficult for a woman to adjust to a new culture, language and habits. In a city like Nairobi, ethnic background has less meaning in the everyday life, as the wife does not move to live with her in-laws. However, as kin relations are often active and close, crossing the ethnic boundaries in marriage may cause extra pressure for both women and men, even in an urban setting. In what follows, I will discuss some problematic situations women may face in their inter-ethnic marriages.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 22.1.1998

¹⁰⁹ Interviews 18.1.2003 & 26.2.1998

Most women living in inter-ethnic marriages acknowledged that they had had some kinds of difficulties with family members because of different backgrounds.¹¹⁰ Ethnic background as such does not seem to be very significant in family and kinship practices, meaning that many issues, problems, practices and attitudes are basically often the same, say, in Luo families and Kikuyu families. However, in these respective communities, customary practices differ in some crucial ways, concerning for instance children's custody in divorce, highlighted in the previous citation, which may become a very important issue in certain situations.¹¹¹

Parents' prejudices and resistance

When spouses have different ethnic backgrounds, problems often come up. Those women, whose parents were originally against the idea of them marrying a particular man, were involved with a man from a different ethnic and/or religious background. Many of them had married without the consent of the families, and often lived many years in an unhappy situation, where they have not had many contacts with those parents who did not approve. Reasons for not approving the marriage do not seem to be actually linked to a person as such, but more to his or her ethnic background. Some parents, particularly if uneducated, old people living in remote rural areas may have prejudices towards other ethnic groups, as explained by a Luo woman who married a Luhya. Her mother had told her that she cannot marry a Luhya, because "*Luhyas eat people*".¹¹² She said that they had waited over two years to get the acceptance, during which time they lived together and had their first-born child. Finally her parents accepted, after which they went through customary procedures and then had a civil wedding. Her parents-in-law did not have problems with their marriage, and even her mother-in-law was a Luo, like herself.

Sometimes it can take even longer than a few years before the parents accept. Leyla, originally a Catholic Kamba woman in her late thirties who married a man from another ethnic and religious background at the age of 18, did not get approval from her father until they had been married for ten years. Her father could not accept that she had married a man from that particular ethnic group, and also the fact that she wanted to convert to Islam did not please him. Also her father-in-law resisted their marriage in the beginning, because of the religion, but after

¹¹⁰ It may sometimes be difficult to know what difficulties are due to different cultural backgrounds, and what to some other causes. Here, I focus on those issues that women themselves interpreted as being related to ethnicity.

¹¹¹ Questions concerning ethnicity are many sided and complex, and profound analysis on that falls outside the focus of this thesis, as I discussed in the Introduction.

¹¹² Interview 11.2.1998

he found out that she was willing to convert, he finally accepted. Leyla explained their situation in the following way:

*“We were madly in love. (laughs) It was like if we can’t be together... we had to. So, initially -- he was a Muslim and I was not. Then his parents were against it, then it was like if it’s not this one, then I’m not marrying anybody. Then my father also had problems with his tribe, he thought I should marry someone from home.”*¹¹³

Their marriage is, according to her, a happy one. After marrying, she had obtained a Master’s degree in economics and given birth to three children. She had been working in a professional position for years. The husband is a designer. Her own parents are fairly well educated according to the standards of that time by going to school for eight years. Her father appreciates education a lot, and had emphasised to his children that they should go as high as possible. Perhaps for that reason he was disappointed when Leyla declared that she was getting married, being only 18 years old. If her father was afraid that the daughter would choose marriage instead of education, he was wrong; indeed, instead of limiting Leyla’s choices in life, her husband had paid her fees at the university.

Also Jemosbei, a 27-year-old lecturer, had problems with relatives when she wanted to marry her boyfriend. Jemosbei is a Kalenjin, and she met her Kisii husband-to-be in college. They fell in love, and after a while she became pregnant, when she was still a student. Her parents were against their relationship, because the man came from another ethnic group. Like Jemosbei and her boyfriend, Jemosbei’s parents were active members of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church. Actually Jemosbei had met her boyfriend in the students’ religious group. So religion was not the problem. Neither was his educational level a problem, although after college he worked as a civil servant in a quite modest position. According to Jemosbei, the only problem was his ethnic background. Her parents even suggested that she should leave him. In spite of that, she and her boyfriend decided to stay together, and furthermore wanted their parents to be involved in the process of marrying. When they informed her parents that his parents were to come to visit them and discuss the marriage, her parents had told her that “*we are not going to sit with them*”.¹¹⁴ They had refused to meet their daughter’s boyfriend or his parents. Jemosbei and her husband then had a simple civil wedding, where her cousin participated as the only one from her family.

When I met her last time, their child was two and a half years old, and they had practically no contacts with her parents. She visited them occasionally, but her husband did not.

¹¹³ Interview 11.2.1998

¹¹⁴ Interview 2.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview, until stated otherwise.

She said to me that they are giving her parents some time to “cool down”, and she thinks that they will probably soon be ready to meet her parents-in-law, because, “after all, their girl is gone”. She was happy in her marriage, regarding her husband as a “modern African man”, who even took care of the four-months-old baby for two weeks alone without a domestic servant when she was reading for the final exams to obtain a Bachelor’s degree.

Jemosbei and her husband have been forced to distance themselves from their relatives, but she also likes it that way. She explained her feelings towards the relatives:

“Sometimes they can be an overnuisance, they can bring a lot of mix-up in the family. So I would never really encourage being too close to them, and I wouldn’t also encourage them to come and stay with me. I would really discourage it as much as possible.”

While Leyla and Jemosbei come from rural areas and from the families where parents have little education, Lina comes from an affluent Nairobi family, and the father has a doctorate in engineering. He has studied and worked in many countries, being in the United States for an extended period when I got to know Lina. Lina herself has lived in Nairobi all her life. She is a Kikuyu married to a man from Western Kenya. They met when she was still in college, and the boyfriend was about to finish his studies in the school of medicine. For her, the main thing was that they were in love, and she did not care about his background. In Lina’s opinion Kikuyu people generally despise Western people, and nobody in her extended family liked the fact that she married her boyfriend because of his ethnic background. Her parents had even threatened to disown her. They had a civil wedding with very little customary things involved, although some kind of a bridewealth was paid. Later the parents had fully accepted their marriage, even before they had any children. Lina gave birth to her first-born baby during one of my stays in Kenya, after hoping to get pregnant for years.

“Sometimes I really have a problem” – adjusting to a new community

Thus, getting married and getting the consent of the parents may be difficult in the inter-ethnic marriages. Afterwards, when living a family life with a man who has a different cultural background, women also face problems. These problems are not so much related to their relationship with their husbands as they are related to contacts with kin.¹¹⁵

Although none of the women I knew actually lived with their parents-in-law, they said that difficulties arose when they visited their in-laws, and tried to adjust to the cultural practices which often were strange to women coming from different communities. For instance

¹¹⁵ In this chapter, I only point to those problems that have to do with different ethnic backgrounds. Later, I will discuss other issues connected to kin relations.

Jemosbei, a Nandi woman, whose parents still had not accepted her marriage to a Kisii man, as explained above, described in the following way her problems in their inter-ethnic marriage:

*“Okay, this happens when I go back, when I go to their home. I find life quite very different. --
- The way they do their things could be quite different, the way they bury, their funeral, you
know, they are quite different from ours. Generally the way... let’s talk about witchcraft,
which is so rampant among the Kisii. --- I’m brought up in a society where we don’t even
believe that there are witches. You know, I wouldn’t want my child, I wouldn’t tie anything, or
I wouldn’t put anything in his clothes, or I wouldn’t cover him when I’m in a group of people.
But when you go back to their home, they have those things of witchcraft when maybe a child
needs to be done this and this and this. You know, a child needs to wear a certain cloth, a
child has to be covered, and I really find it disgusting.”*¹¹⁶

In a similar way Mary, 28, who is a Kalenjin married to a Luo, explains: *“Like now, I was
telling you about the funerals, sometimes they expect me to do like they expect me to stay at
home and take part in celebrations and funny mourning they do and, you know you find it hard.
And sometimes you feel that you’re not adapting well on that society.”*¹¹⁷

In the previous examples, women do not regard their husband’s communities’ practices and traditions as important or even do not believe in the same things. Even the words they use like “disgusting” or “funny” are revealing. Sometimes one can feel uncomfortable if values and practices to which one has been socialised since childhood differ very much in the community where one is married. Colette, who is a 40-year-old doctor, told me about the complex rules of avoidance between different age-groups which she grew up with as a Maasai (see e.g. Spencer 1988, esp. 190-193), and which do not exist in her husband’s Kisii community, and about her difficulties to adjust to that:

*“And then, then I had a lot of problem you know with culture. Because in my, where I
grew up, elders are to stay separately from children, or specially women, young women.
So I, well my father’s age group, I was never to be there or we were never to be found
near there. So when I cross now [i.e. go to the husband’s homestead], you are found to
mix with elderly people, my father’s age group, and I found that very uncomfortable, and
I would be tongue-tied --- then I would say, you are not allowed to talking to these people,
cause I never grew up talking to people like that. So sometimes I really have a problem.”*

A general feeling among the women in mixed marriages was that they are kept an eye on very closely whenever they visit their husband’s home. However, husband’s parents have mostly accepted mixed marriages without big problems. For men, it may be more important to get acceptance from kin, and perhaps they would not marry against their parents’ will. After all, the future wife will be more closely tied to the husband’s family - although women in the urban

¹¹⁶ Interview 2.2.1998

¹¹⁷ Interview 9.2.1998

environment do not usually live with their parents-in-law - and thus husband's parents may be worried about how she will adjust to the community and how they will get along with a wife who has a different cultural background. Also, because highly educated professional men pay their own bridewealths instead of asking the money from their families, parents' influence may not be crucial. Women's parents, on the other hand, might feel that they would lose their daughter and her children even more completely if she married into another ethnic group.

Otieno's case: Risks in inter-ethnic marriages

"Every woman in Kenya should look at this case keenly. There is no need of getting married if this is the way women will be treated when their husbands die." (Wambui Otieno, in a press conference in Nairobi in 1987, cited in Stamp 1991, 808.)

Problems and suspicions towards other groups may culminate in inter-ethnic marriages in Kenya if the husband dies. A well documented case of this kind is the dispute over a distinguished lawyer S. M. Otieno's burial between his (educated) widow Wambui Otieno and his extended family members (see e.g. Stamp 1991; Cohen & Odhiambo 1992; Ojwang & Mugambi 1989; see also Nzomo 1997, 241-242). This example shows the ambiguous way two legal systems (statute law and customary law, as explained earlier) may be used. It also points to many questions of gender, ethnicity and kin loyalties in Kenya; such as the rights of widows, risks in inter-ethnic marriages and the meaning (or meaningless) of intimacy between the spouses. (Cohen & Odhiambo 1992, 11-12; Stamp 1991). S. M. Otieno was a Luo, and his wife was a Kikuyu. They had been married over 20 years, and chosen to live a life that concentrated on their nuclear family instead of close kin relations. He had lived all his adult life in Nairobi, raised all his fifteen children there, and had only visited his homestead a few times during that time. He did not establish a second 'home' there, like most urban Kenyan Luo do, but instead established a small farm outside of Nairobi as his second 'home'. He himself had asked to be buried in Nairobi. After his death in 1986, his wife wanted to do that, but his extended family members insisted that he should be buried in his birthplace in Western Kenya, which was a custom of Luo people. Wambui Otieno's lawyers argued that S. M. Otieno had made a deliberate choice to live somewhat unattached of the traditions of his ethnic group, and instead chosen to live a 'modern life'. This was highlighted in his marriage with a Kikuyu woman, his Christianity, lifestyle, and residence in Nairobi. Hence, Luo customary law concerning the burial of Luo should not be applied to him. His *clansmen*, however, argued that the fact that Otieno

was born and raised as a Luo was paramount.¹¹⁸ The court decided that the customary law should be applied in this case, and Otieno was buried in his birthplace. (Cohen & Odhiambo 1992; Stamp 1991; Ojwang & Mugambi 1989.)

Although the clansmen got to bury him, they did not gain possession of his property, which was left to the widow, and actually had been registered jointly for both spouses. After the clan failed to get the property in court, they tried another way: they wanted Wambui Otieno to be wed in a leviratic marriage, i.e. they wanted her to marry one of the brothers of her deceased husband, who would set up a home for her in Western Kenya. Wambui Otieno answered in the following way: “In what capacity would he do that? Are you trying to suggest that he would take me over? In that case I would tell him to forget it.” (Stamp 1991, 837-838.)

According to Patricia Stamp (1991), ‘the Otieno case’ was in fact a dispute over control of gender relations. In addition, it was a question of Kikuyu-Luo rivalries and also of the customary and ‘new’ values. Wambui Otieno “initiated a stream of legal actions, protests, commentaries, and press conferences throughout the five-month saga; her refusal to be silent outraged the male protagonists, authorities, and public more than almost any aspect of the affair” (ibid. 1991, 821). This may be one reason why she actually did not get much support from the members of her own ethnic group, either; they probably felt uncomfortable in the way she challenged patriarchal values and practices. Also political reasons may have prevented many from giving their support to her openly. (ibid. 822-823.) Interestingly, the widow did not use strong feminist rhetoric when she pleaded her case, although she was familiar with it, having held leadership positions in women’s groups. Instead of being overtly feminist in her argumentation, she “used the same discourse of wifely responsibility and prerogatives employed by the clan and the courts, but she chose those aspects of the discourse that countered their patriarchal, constraining interpretation of tradition. In doing so, *she exemplified the particular form feminist discourse takes in Africa today* and charted the political and ideological terrain on which it is carried out.” (ibid, 841, italics added.)

¹¹⁸ By using the term ‘clansmen’, Patricia Stamp wants to emphasise the fact that “the clan actions were from beginning to end a male initiative, conducted on behalf of a patrilineal structure as part of a patriarchal discourse” (Stamp 1991, 809 note 2).

5.3. Conclusions

In this chapter I have shown how ‘traditions’ and ‘modern’ customs concerning marriage live side by side. Some aspects concerning marriage are perhaps particularly pervasive in urban middle class culture, such as the process of choosing one’s spouse, getting married, going through marriage negotiations and discussing bridewealth. To start with, the questions of whom and when to marry are mainly *individual decisions*. The husband is chosen according to one’s own preferences, mostly out of being in love, but also by considering if the person has the right kind of character to make a good husband. Also timing matters; the older and more educated women are, the more difficult it seems to find a spouse.

Secondly, when urban middle class people marry, they often *combine different elements*. Although church weddings are the most wanted form of marrying among Christian urban middle class people, church weddings have not taken the place of customary marriage procedures. Instead, church weddings take place in addition to customary negotiations, or rather; customary elements are included also in cases where the main wedding takes place in the church. In cases of civil weddings things vary more. Some have preferred a modest civil wedding regardless of the fact that they could have afforded the costs of a lavish church wedding. For most, the reason for a civil wedding has been either the lack of finances, or predominantly, some conflicts with the extended families concerning the marriage, which in these cases would be an inter-ethnic one.

Third, although traditional customary practices are applied to various extents in different families, agreement on bridewealth is the most important part of negotiations. Bridewealth negotiations take place, and bridewealth is paid. Actually, paying or at least agreeing on bridewealth, as well as the amount of it, is what differs most if middle class and other marriages are compared in contemporary Kenya. Non-educated people nowadays often may not have resources to pay the bridewealth, at least not for a long time. However, I would point to an *ambiguous role of bridewealth* in today’s urban middle class marriages. Various, interlinked aspects of bridewealth are prevalent in the middle class setting. Obviously bridewealth is regarded as important, as in almost every marriage it had been agreed upon even though women themselves had an ambivalent attitude towards it. They explained that bridewealth negotiations were a tradition and the practice was followed for the sake of the parents, in order to respect and please them. Although they were critical about

commercialisation of the custom, most women were satisfied if their family had received a high bridewealth. It would require more thorough focusing on the issue to estimate what receiving or not receiving bridewealth, as well as the amount of it, actually means for highly educated women.

Fourth, another thing which is noteworthy in contemporary middle class marriages, is the fact that men pay the bridewealth themselves. As far as I know, all men had paid their bridewealth themselves, instead of receiving the money from their parents or relatives. Because bridewealth is paid in instalments, it affects the finances in the marriage. In reality, *husband and wife pay the bridewealth together*, after being married. What they give as a bridewealth to wife's parents and kin is away from their own finances. Perhaps that is why middle class women often take an active role in negotiating an appropriate amount for bridewealth, trying to prevent the parents for demanding too much, although they are traditionally not supposed to do that.

Fifth, the trend to choose one's own spouse makes *inter-ethnic marriages* more common. Although the spouse is chosen individually, the presence of kin cannot be avoided. Specifically in inter-ethnic marriages, the role of kin is still important. If they do not accept the marriage, the couple gets quite isolated from other family members. Even if they do accept, meaning of ethnicity becomes visible in these marriages. This is highlighted during visits to the husband's 'home', when adjusting to a different culture may be difficult. It is visible also in everyday life, when explicitly or implicitly negotiating the meaning of different cultural backgrounds and upbringing of children. And as discussed in the case of S. M. Otieno, tensions in inter-ethnic marriages may culminate in the situations where the husband dies.

CHAPTER 6. WIVES, SECOND WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS: RECONSIDERING POLYGyny

- *“He promised to marry me, but he had another wife”* ¹¹⁹ (Njeri, 30 years)-

Polygyny, often cited as being one of the defining attributes of African marriages (e.g. Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987a, 11) is an issue which deserves consideration when family life is under discussion. ¹²⁰ The reason why I see the need for including a relatively long chapter on polygyny in this thesis is not, however, only the fact that it has been an important part of marital institution in Kenya, but rather its illuminating and interesting role in contemporary urban Kenya. Looking closely at some issues related to contemporary practice of polygyny tells a great deal about relationships between women and men, both women’s and men’s roles and positions in the society and in the extended family, as well as about the urban way of life and its consequences on family and marriage.

In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects of polygyny, mainly from the point of view of women’s agency when they deal with polygyny in their own lives. ¹²¹ What kind of possibilities and choices does a woman have in a situation where she suddenly discovers that the man she has been dating for a long time and who is the father of her child, is already married? How about when her husband is considering about having a second wife? How will she react? What will she do? I also reveal opinions of women and, to a lesser extent, men on polygyny. In addition, I will raise some ideas concerning polygyny as a tempting choice for some highly educated women. With all these issues, I aim to reveal different dynamics, interests, and conflicts that are related to polygyny in the contemporary urban middle class environment. In particular, I will focus on the ambiguous relationship between highly educated urban women and polygyny. Here, as in other chapters, I aim to look at the phenomena from the Kenyan context, and specifically from the context of Kenyan feminist thinking, taking some distance from Western interpretations of polygyny. As I have already given a background on polygynous marriages in

¹¹⁹ Interview 18.1.2003

¹²⁰ Although polygyny (a man having many wives) is the exact word in the context of this research, people in Kenya generally talk about polygamy (which can refer to either husband or wife having many spouses), when they in fact mean polygyny. That is why both terms may come up in citations from the discussions.

¹²¹ I am aware that polygyny is a multidimensional, complex and contradictory phenomenon, which should be looked at from many different perspectives, such as socio-cultural, economic, demographic and environmental (Bretschneider 1995, 183; Håkansson & LeVine 1997, 261) in order to understand it properly. Here, I unfortunately can only cover some small fragments of that.

Kenya in the Introduction, I will here, turn the discussion directly to the urban middle class context.

6.1. Polygyny in an urban middle class context

My understanding of polygyny in a contemporary urban middle class setting derives mainly from what those women, who have faced polygyny in their own relationships with men in one way or another, have told me. I have also talked with many women and men who come from polygynous families, and have heard many stories on what they think about living in a family where the father has many wives. I have also participated in many formal and spontaneous discussions on polygyny, as well as read about it in the newspapers as well as in fiction by Kenyan (and other African) writers.¹²² Unfortunately I have not had a chance to follow how things are practically arranged in a polygynous family by participating in such a family's everyday life. This is mainly because *officially* polygynous middle class families are few in Nairobi, I did not actually know of any. This is the case particularly in Christian families, with whom I mainly socialised.

Humiliating polygyny

Having said that, I would still claim that polygyny is something that even middle class women need to take into consideration at some stage of their lives. For instance, they can face this kind of a situation in the role of a second wife, who marries a man who already has a wife (most likely in the countryside) with, or more likely, without her knowledge. If she however met a situation where the husband considered taking another wife, it would not be likely that she would leave her professional job and move to the countryside, to the husband's home, where she most likely has never lived in the first place. She would not do it. She would either stay in the house when the husband moved to his new wife, or she would continue living with the husband, who would visit and support his other wife as well. In the worst case, she might be forced to share her house with another wife.

¹²² Among my favourites are *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Ba (1979), *The Other Woman* by Grace Ogot (1992 [1976]), *Changes, A Love Story* by Ama Ata Aidoo (1993 [1991]) and *Unmarried Wife* by Sitwala Imenda (2001 [1994]).

According to those married women and men whom I interviewed, all lived in a monogamous marriage.¹²³ However, as my interpretations are mainly based on what these people and their family members and friends told me, and, to a lesser extent, on frequent participation in their lives, it is difficult to say whether some husbands had another, either official or, more likely, an unofficial wife. It is probable, however, that it would not be easy to admit that the husband has another woman or another wife. This would probably be particularly difficult for highly educated women, who are often said to strongly oppose polygyny (e.g. Omari, 1960, 202; Karanja 1987, 258; Kilbride & Kilbride 1993, 71; Silberschmidt 1999, 80). As educated women have been exposed to Western and Christian concepts of fidelity in marriage, women may find having a second wife in the family humiliating. Interestingly, Kenyan sociologists Diane Kayongo-Male and Philista Onyango state that if the husband has another wife, women seem to blame themselves for not being good enough wives. (Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1991, 66-67.) This attitude links to the patriarchal order of Kenyan society. Even if society is changing, and relationships between women and men are too, women still blame themselves if they face polygyny in their lives. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, this message is often still transmitted to Kenyan women.

Thus, Harriet McAdoo and Miriam Were (1989, 148) argue in their article on Kenyan career women that “while none of the women admitted to being in a polygynous union, it was found from other sources that at least one woman was in a polygynous union as the first wife, and another made allusions of the possibility of another wife”. In similar veins, Margrethe Silberschmidt (1999, 79) found out in her research on the Kisii, that many women living in a polygynous marriage claimed to be the first wives although they were not (instead they were, for instance, second or third wives). Also A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo (1997, 113) states that Christians may not admit to being polygamists when asked. It is also possible, of course, that men had one or more ‘outside wives’ without the knowledge of the wives (see Haram 2004, 217; Stichter 1988, 186). When it comes to unmarried women, none of them admitted being girlfriends of a married man at that moment, but some of them had been in that kind of relationships earlier, and had also children by them.

¹²³ Altogether 36 married persons, of whom 3 women and 3 men were married to each other. The rest were married to people I did not interview, although spoke with many.

A lost privilege of highly educated men?

Like women, all men whom I interviewed told me they were monogamists. Their perceptions on polygyny differed from that of women's, however. Practically all men, whom I asked about polygyny, said that they know many men with more than one wife, whereas women generally said that they do not know any and that the whole institution is dying. I sometimes noticed that highly educated women were somewhat surprised and amused when I asked them about polygyny.¹²⁴ Some women acted as if the whole issue was outdated and not a part of their lives in any way. Perhaps this area is men's territory, which wives do not know, or pretend not to know, anything about.

Men, on the other hand, did not show this kind of an attitude, and sometimes eagerly discussed the issue. However, women were very much aware that men often do have 'outside girlfriends'. Similarly, while women generally opposed the idea of polygyny, men were not as strict. It is often argued that highly educated men's attitudes towards polygyny do not differ from the less educated men's attitudes (Stichter 1988, 186; Kilbride & Kilbride 1993, 71; Kayango-Male and Onyango 1991, 65; Silberschmidt 1999, 80), and in fact, that highly educated men secretly admire a man with an 'outside wife' (Karanja 1987, 253). Most men I spoke with told me they do not want to have many wives, because of the problems polygyny brings into one's life or because they cannot afford to, and even if they did, their wives would not accept it. Also, many mentioned that as Christians, they are not supposed to have many wives. I did not, however, sense any strong feelings against polygyny in principle in men's opinions. Perhaps one could say that men considered polygyny as a lost privilege, which unfortunately did not work in today's world. Born-again Christians rejected the idea more forcefully than other men, though (see also Nelson 1987, 219).

However, polygyny is practiced and in any case, it is discussed, although often in a humorous way by those who want to take distance from it. Let me give an example. One Sunday I was visiting friends in the outskirts of Nairobi with my family. Kids were playing in the backyard, while the adults were sitting inside and talking. Many people came for a visit, mainly friends and neighbours. We talked about various topics. For instance, somebody asked about men's relations with their mothers-in-law in our country, Finland. I and my husband told about the straightforward relationship my husband has with my mother. When we said that in Finland,

¹²⁴ Maybe this had to do with the fear, or dislike, of being 'exotised' or 'essentialised' by yet another 'voyeuristic' European researcher (see e.g. Mohanty 1991a; Arndt 2000, 724).

a man can dance with his mother-in-law, one of the men was terrified. He said that if he was to dance with his mother-in-law, he would surely faint and eventually die. He continued that even if he had that kind of a dream, he would not dare to tell anyone. Instead he would spend a long time thinking about the meaning of the dream.

Having heard this, the host of the house started teasing the man that people are incredibly traditional, even regressive, where he comes from. He continued that they even support polygyny. He said something like this: "When you go to a bar, a man with only one wife has to sit in the back of the room, just in case somebody comes and announces that his only wife has died. This is because other men do not want to spoil their evening by listening to the widower mourning the loss of his only wife." (In fact, the way he presented his argument was far more dramatic and theatrical.) Here, the host probably wanted to provoke his guest, and exaggerated, maybe because my husband and I were present. He knew that we would find it very interesting. However, his words revealed, in my opinion, that in these born-again Christian men's discourse, polygyny was *the* regressive thing.

Highly educated women's views on polygyny

There is one particularly interesting aspect when the relationship between middle class people and polygyny is considered, namely the different ways highly educated women and men are positioned when it comes to polygyny. Although not all highly educated men have educated wives, most highly educated women have wealthy, well educated husbands in high profile professional positions. In other words, they are married to those very men who are most likely to acquire other wives. Thus, highly educated married women are the ones who are in a vulnerable position to become the first wives for a man who later may marry other wives. Also, highly educated young women are often those women who may become a second wife for a prominent man whose first wife is perhaps uneducated. But, highly educated women are also those women who are against polygyny more than other women (not only) in Kenya. This is an important dilemma when relationships and marriages between highly educated women and men are considered. In this situation, one should remember that although many old motives considering polygyny from the men's points of view have disappeared or become less important in urban setting, one is still there: wealth and prestige attached to a man with many wives.

Next I will have a closer look at the women's opinions and their behaviour in different circumstances related to polygyny. The general attitude against polygyny became clear

in the discussions I had with highly educated women: Women were against the idea of living in a polygynous family in principle. All preferred monogamy. However, in practice things may not always be as simple.

Not black and white

Interestingly, women's attitudes on polygyny do not seem to be very much affected by their own background; whether or not they come from polygynous homes. Practically all women who have spent their childhood in a monogamous family opposed polygyny. It did not seem to be a real option, although many women were aware that they might face the situation where the husband had someone else in the future. Reactions to the possibility of polygyny differed, but it was not generally regarded as the end of the world. For instance Elizabeth, aged 44 and a Kikuyu, had recently come back to the University for a Master's degree, after working in a professional job for years. Her husband is a doctor. She talked about the possibility of polygyny in the following way, after I asked her what she would do if her husband took a second wife in the future:

“If he wants to go to another direction? Well, theoretically, I can only say theoretically, I don't think I would stand it. Well, suddenly it's not easy. Maybe it's not such a yes no, black and white thing but I really don't think I would stand it.” (She imagines how the situation could be arranged:) *“What you have, you make an arrangement that he takes his responsibility on children but if he has a mistress, he just stays with his mistress and you live your own life. After all, as long as he's not having any other children, he can take his responsibility, you can make an arrangement how you deal with the children. I mean essentially how you pay their school fees and what... feed the children and that kind of things you can organise, but otherwise I really don't encourage somebody to, I find it quite misuse or mistreatment for someone to stay with him yet he's got another wife or mistress.”*

¹²⁵

Although she has grown up in a monogamous home, lived in a monogamous marriage for a long time and has received university education in Europe, she does not oppose polygyny forcefully. She rather brings forth that she probably would not stand it, but on the other hand, it is a many sided issue and deserves thorough consideration, in case it would become actual in her life. Very much in the same way, Sarah, who was working in a professional job concerning international relations and was married to a doctor as well, told me that at the age of 38 she had reached “*a mature age*” where she did not see any point in fighting over men.¹²⁶ She came from a monogamous family as well. Both women had been married about 20 years already and had three children.

¹²⁵ Interview 16.2.1998

¹²⁶ Interview 26.2.1998

Those who come from monogamous homes perhaps do not even think about polygyny as an option, and consequently are not very rigid in their opinions. In addition to family background, ethnic background does not seem to be very important in the attitudes of those people whose lives I studied. For example, Elizabeth is a Kikuyu and Sarah is a Luhya. What matters more, is the age of a woman. For example Elizabeth and Sarah probably already considered their position in the marital relationship as a safe one, and did not consider polygyny as a real threat to that. It is also possible that they already had so much experience of marital relationships that they chose not to be too rigid. In a case the husband decided to take another wife, they would probably find some kind of an arrangement concerning the children, as Elizabeth said in the quote. Certainly some married women who came from monogamous homes resisted polygyny forcefully, stating that they would not stand it at all.

Those married women who have lived in polygynous homes, of course regard polygynous arrangements as one way of normal family life, although they also bring forth the tension it brings to the family. Although they most often disapprove of polygyny, their attitudes depend to some extent on their own experiences; how things were organised in the family they grew up in.

As long as the husband provides

Mabel, 33, works in the public health care. Her Luo father had three wives when he was still alive, Mabel's mother being the second one. She told about her views on polygyny, after I asked her if her husband, who is a civil servant as well, was polygynous:

Mabel: *"No, he's not polygamous (with a laughing voice), he's not yet, but I can't tell, maybe he will think of being polygamous much later, because most of men think about polygamy when they get some wealth, that's when they start it."*

Johanna: *"Uhuh, do you think it would be possible?"*

Mabel: *"For him to be a polygamist? I can't really know, can't really know for sure."*

Johanna: *"What would you think about it?"*

Mabel: *"Hmm?"*

Johanna: *"What would you think about it if he started to follow---"*

Mabel: *"---if he started to (starts to laugh), I can't really know how I would react at that time. But coming from a polygamous family, I wouldn't really have a big problem with it, so long as my interests are taken care of, my kids are going to school, he provides, he doesn't neglect me. Of course I have my job, but he also contributes a lot in the family. So if that doesn't change... I don't think I'll have a big problem with it. But if it changes, then that is a different occasion."* ¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Interview 11.2.1998

Mabel explained that in her childhood family, all wives and all children were treated equally, and they had no quarrels. For her, the most important issue in polygyny is equality between the co-wives, and equality concerning financial resources in particular. Hence, Mabel explained quite objectively that her husband is not polygynous yet, but he might be later. Because it is expensive to provide for two wives, most polygynous men take other wives only after they have gained some wealth, as she said. I was somehow surprised that Mabel told me about the possibility of living in a polygynous union in the future so calmly, and without any great display of sentiment. However, when we talked about the issue she was frequently laughing, in ways I interpret as signs of embarrassment, on the one hand, and amusement, on the other. Thus, she might not have been so neutral about the idea of having co-wives after all. I think so also because later the same day she said that they used to have big quarrels with her husband on other women. She said that earlier her husband used to have many girlfriends, who also disturbed her by calling at their house late in the evening. She was not sure if he still had some.

Born-again Christians' positions

Some women find polygyny completely impossible for them. Fiona, a 26-year-old teacher, said:

*“We have discussed [polygyny], and you know the fact that we are born again Christians, that is already a sin. We have discussed and we feel that there’s nothing which can even make him feel like having another woman. And as we are born again Christians that is already a sin. You know the fact that we come from polygamous families, what we’ve experienced in those families is something that you’d never want to go through again. So in fact when you’ll look at it, you’ll find that people who have gone through those families will never experience what they have experienced because there are so many quarrels, there are so many things that are happening in those families.--- People always fight.”*¹²⁸

Both Fiona and her husband come from polygynous Luhya homes. When she speaks, she often refers to the fact that they are born-again Christians, and that guides their life. She thinks that it is impossible for her husband to take another wife. However, most of those women who had lived in polygynous homes were against polygyny whether or not they were religious. They would agree with Fiona’s opinion that there were a lot of disagreements and a lot of suffering in polygynous families.

Born-again Christians refer to the practice as a sin, and consider themselves safe from it, if their spouses are born-again Christians as well. Being a devoted Christian is -

¹²⁸ Interview 9.2.1998

according to those women with whom I discussed the issue - regarded as a legitimate reason to refuse from polygyny. Those born-again Christians I knew usually were married to born-again Christians as well, and agreed with their spouses that they should stay monogamous. Sometimes the relatives of the husband, however, would have liked him to take more wives, but women said to me that relatives usually understood if someone was a born-again Christian that they should not try to persuade them. Fiona had actually faced a situation where her in-laws had suggested to her husband about taking another wife. She explains:

*“You know, when you are a born-again Christian, there are some things which you cannot do. So they cannot come up with such a thing. Like there was a time he was staying alone in the house, when I was in Kericho, then one of his sisters was telling him, now that your wife is away, why can’t you get somebody at least? No no no [he said], the fact that she’s away, I cannot do anything, because spiritually we are together.”*¹²⁹

Being a Christian helps also if the husband dies, and one of the late husband’s brothers wants to marry the widow. This practice of levirate has been particularly prevalent among the Luo. According to a survey covering 170 households among the Luo in the Lake Victoria Basin, 63 percent of widows had been remarried to the brothers of their late husbands (Ssenyonga 1997, 271). Thus, although non-existent, or almost so, in many communities it is not a marginal phenomenon in all, and remembering the tight connections between the urban and the rural family members, even a highly educated urban woman may face a situation where she is expected to marry the brother of their deceased husband.¹³⁰ Even if she is educated and her late husband was educated, her in-laws may try to pressure her to a leviratic marriage, as was discussed earlier in case of Wambui Otieno and her deceased husband. 37-year-old Mercy, who is a teacher, thinks that it would be perfectly possible that her mother-in-law would like Mercy to be married by her brother-in-law, if her husband died.

*“Yeah, she’d like me to be inherited, she would, of course, so that I don’t affect my children, you see, but in my opinion that’s nonsense --- but in her opinion it’s a very important aspect of her life. --- And it’s a requirement for the sake of your children. So that something doesn’t go wrong, that they don’t die or something, I don’t know. So they carry it out as an obligation, that’s all.”*¹³¹

They are both Luo. She tells that her mother-in-law is a very traditional woman. When Mercy’s father-in-law died, the mother-in-law accepted to be inherited, although she was a devoted

¹²⁹ Interview 9.2.1998

¹³⁰ For instance, according to Oboler (1985, 129-130), among the Nandi in the end of the 1970’s, it was rare, and only applied to young widows who did not yet have enough children.

¹³¹ Interview 22.1.1998

Catholic. To make up her 'unchristian' behaviour, she went to mass every morning for the next six months.

One of the Luhya women whom I interviewed was a widow. Her husband had died already some 15 years ago. After his death, his relatives had wanted her to marry one of the brothers. She had declined, however, perhaps because of being a Christian, perhaps for some other reason. Her brother explained to me that he did not want her to marry one of the late husband's brothers either, because:

*"They just wanted to take her and make her a wife, they didn't want to support her. And she said no to it, she said she couldn't accept it, because she knew what they actually wanted was to make a wife of her, to have sex with her, not to take a responsibility of her family. So she refused, and I thought it was right. She was right to do that."*¹³²

Thus, the brother had felt that his sister's ex-in laws would not have treated her and her children well, and the sister had since that lived alone, with the material help from her siblings, particularly from this brother. Situations when a young widow returns to her father's place rather than gets married in a leviratic marriage or otherwise stays in her late-husband's homestead is nowadays increasingly taking place in those Luo and Luhya communities in Western Kenya that Helen Nyberg has recently studied. This practice may imply a big change in thinking when it comes to gender, kin and child custody, for instance. (Nyberg 2004, 144-145.)

6.2 Facing polygyny one way or another

When I once discussed family life with a young male student of medicine, he commented that he is against polygyny, and would never seek a polygynous relationship. He said: *"I think if I found myself in such a scenario, it would be just a pure accident"*.¹³³ I have not interviewed polygynous men, and do not know their exact motives or the processes that has led them to become polygynists; maybe it has been an accident, maybe something more conscious.¹³⁴ But for those women who have found themselves in a position of a second wife or a permanent

¹³² Interview 8.2.2003

¹³³ Interview 25.1.2003

¹³⁴ Polygynous men Philip Kilbride (Kilbride & Kilbride 1993, e.g. 210-2; 218-22) has studied in Kenya and Uganda often seem to have ended up in polygynous unions if not accidentally, then at least not quite intentionally, either. However, as his examples show, situations, circumstances and reasons related to polygyny are many.

girlfriend of a married man, the way things have turned out has often been a surprise.¹³⁵ They say they did not know, when entering into the relationship, that the man was already married. Sometimes I felt that it would have been very easy to figure it out, had they really wanted to. I am pretty sure that one woman who had a relationship to a man and had a child with him, was actually his second wife. The way the man avoided meeting her family members and kept distance from her, as well as only met her very seldom, made me think of it. Also another woman had a steady relationship with a man who received mysterious phone calls when they were together, and she suspected that he might be involved with someone else as well.

In what follows I will discuss situations of women, who have faced polygyny in one way or another in their lives. As I hoped to make clear in the previous chapter, highly educated women would like to have a monogamous marriage, but are aware that sometimes during the marriage, they may have to face the fact that the husband is seeing other women. Here, it is important to look at the women's experiences of marital infidelity, polygyny and sexual relations in the right context, that of HIV/AIDS, as discussed in the Introduction.

The wife and her husband's girlfriends

Wives

All women in permanent relationships with whom I talked about sex or marital fidelity emphasised being faithful. They hoped their husbands are faithful as well, but many said something like Sarah, 38, who was married to a doctor: "*I should think so, but you see, I always say that of an African man, you can never be a hundred percent sure on something, but I think he should.*"¹³⁶ In many women's opinions, all African men are more or less polygynous, and monogamy or marital fidelity may be an impossible requirement (see also Nelson 1987, 219). Earlier, Kenyan women might not have cared about their husband's infidelity very much (see e.g. Jankowiak & al. 2002, 88; LeVine 1979, 92), but in the era of HIV/AIDS they are in a difficult situation.

Jennifer, who is a Kikuyu woman in her early thirties and a post-graduate diploma student, is married with three children, and was suspecting that her husband might have affairs. When I asked her what she would do if she found out that was the case, she said:

¹³⁵ However, I am aware, that some young women may look for wealthy married men, so called 'sugar daddies' to provide for them.

¹³⁶ Interview 26.2.1998

Jennifer: *"If I found out, I would just leave him. You know nowadays, there is this problem with AIDS and it's not fun, it is death."* (J: *"Yeah."*) *"And he knows that if I ever had concrete evidence, I would not stick".*

Johanna: *"You wouldn't forgive?"*

Jennifer: *"No. Because it means it's something you've forgiven and then it happens again. So this time I would be lucky to escape. And so many of my friends and relatives have died from AIDS."* ¹³⁷

As is illustrated in her words, a husband who has extra-marital relationships causes a serious threat to a wife, too. In addition, wives may not even dare to suggest that their husbands would use a condom with their wives, as it would be taken as a confession that the woman herself is unfaithful (Silberschmidt 1999, 146). ¹³⁸ In this connection, my question *"You wouldn't forgive?"* seems rather naïve. When it comes to marital infidelity in Kenya, it is not a question of just forgiving and forgetting, but about a real threat of becoming infected with HIV.

Girlfriends

If the positions of the married wives are insecure in today's Kenya, so are the positions of 'other women'. This is highlighted if we look at sexual relationships from girlfriends' viewpoints. One of many women I know who had been involved with married men was 38-year-old Jayne, a Kikuyu woman. She had been seeing a man for six months, and got pregnant. Right after Jayne had let him know that, he admitted being married. Jayne took a lot of time to talk about men, who *"only want to have fun with women, and forget to mention that they are married"*. ¹³⁹ When the man wanted her to have an abortion, she had enough: *"I told him I am not a school child. If you think you're the one to meet the needs of the baby, you can go to hell. That was that."* ¹⁴⁰ According to her, he only seemed glad to walk out of her life and particularly, away from his obligations.

Jayne talked very sarcastically and bitterly about Kenyan men. She has always lived alone, and was finishing her Master's degree when we met. She was not worried about the future in a sense of material well-being, but she said that being unmarried was a problem for a woman of her age. She explained that although she had always worked, and had only recently come back to the university for a second degree, people like neighbours thought that someone was providing for her. She said she had bought a car two years ago, and had taken out a loan for

¹³⁷ Interview 26.1.1998

¹³⁸ This is particularly worrying, since the statistics show that less than half of the men in many Sub-Saharan African countries use condoms with non-regular partners (UNAIDS 2002, 27).

¹³⁹ Interview 10.2.1998

¹⁴⁰ Interview 10.2.1998

it, which she is still paying back, but neighbours are rumouring that an American man has bought it for her. She admits that she has an American friend, who is working in the church she attends, but she emphasises that they are not having an affair, and he certainly does not buy her cars.

Jayne comes from an uneducated family. Thus, she cannot expect much help from her family, and the fathers are not providing for the children. Still, she was so disappointed with the attitude of avoiding responsibilities that the first father showed, that she did not want to have anything to do with him. As a single mother of two, she was determined to take care of her children alone. Often these kinds of relationships are not as temporary as hers. Next I will have a look at two women in longer-lasting polygynous arrangements.

Unofficial second wives

I wouldn't have to live with him

During one of my visits to Kenya I was introduced to a 26-year-old Luo woman, Grace, with whom I spent quite a lot of time while in Kenya.¹⁴¹ She was a Master's degree student, and defined herself as a feminist. She was clever and open, and I really enjoyed her company. When we got to know each other, she told me that she was a single mother, and had been involved with a man who turned out to be married. Their relationship lasted for several years, and according to Grace, during the whole time the man told her he was divorced. She had accidentally heard from some of their mutual acquaintances that the wife had come back from abroad, where she was studying. At that stage, when we first met, she let me understand that their relationship was more or less over, but they were still friends. One year later, when I was back in Kenya, she did not talk much about the man, and I did not bother about him very much either. Then, once when I was interviewing her 'officially' with a tape recorder, she told me things that really made me think about the dynamics of polygyny. In what follows, I will discuss our taped conversation and point to some issues that I find particularly interesting in it, concerning the events of her life as well as our encounter.

In the beginning of our conversation I asked her to tell me some more details about her relationship with the father of her child. She began by talking about the beginning of their relationship:

¹⁴¹ For earlier versions of this discussion, see Latvala (2001; 2004).

*“You see, initially when I met him he told me a very... You know that girl was still so young, at heart and mind, you know, he was my first boyfriend, and when I met him, he told me stories that, even today I wonder how I believed it, but somehow he was able to convince me that there's nobody. You see, I love children so much. Then he had a son, so I felt so sorry for him that he takes care of the son alone. But that the wife was just away, I didn't know. I knew it later”.*¹⁴²

She thus started by almost saying how he had lied, but then changed her mind and defended her own behaviour in the situation by appealing to her age and naiveté. She continued and explained how she had found out that the man was already married:

“Ah, some of these things you can't hide forever. So she came back from study. How did I know she came back? One of his friends, we were just talking, then one of his friends, I think he thought I knew, then he just said that this person, the wife has come back. So I was so shocked.”

When she told me this, we both burst into laughter, the situation felt so absurd. Grace came from a polygynous family. She had told me many times earlier that she did not support polygyny, and that women should be empowered in all spheres of life, including the relationships between men and women. She wanted to be independent and take care of herself and her child. By being independent she meant not only financial independence from the father of the child, but also independence from the relatives. She had for instance saved some money to be able to move in her own place from her aunt's house, and commented that *“I can't stay with my auntie forever”*.

From all I had heard her saying during the time I had known her, I had got the impression that she really considered the whole relationship as a mistake, and did not appreciate the man very much, although she admitted that she still had strong feelings for him. The fact that the man had not treated her very well by constantly lying to her combined to her feminist, or womanist, worldview, I became really surprised in the course on our interview. Our discussion went like this, after I asked her if she was seeing someone else:

Grace: *“I'm not interested. I'm more interested in my books, my work. It is very difficult. I think I got so much from this relationship. It's very difficult as it were if this man asked me to get married with him, I would. I would love a lot.”*

Johanna: *“You would?”* (Surprised)

Grace: *“Yeah.”*

Johanna: *“Although he has another---“*

Grace: *“---I won't mind. After all, I wouldn't stay with them. I have my work and I have my children.”*

Johanna: *“Are you sure that you would like to have that kind of a relationship?”*

Grace: *“Sometimes, you don't have a choice.”*

¹⁴² Interview 16.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview until stated otherwise.

This citation is a good example of Grace's mixed feelings. In her first sentence she stated that she was more interested in her studies than other men. The way she told it implied, in my view, that at that moment, she rather thought of her career than men in the first place, including the father of her child. Surprisingly, she continued by saying that she would, however, marry him if he proposed her. I was really puzzled, because I did not expect to hear something like that. I tried to ask, if she did not mind him being married already, but she interrupted me by saying that she would not mind. Instead she would continue to live her own life as the second wife. My attitude became quite evident when I asked her if she really wanted that kind of a relationship. My words in the previous as well as the next citation reveal that I really thought she should not marry him. In a perspective, I think I wanted to make her think twice about marrying him, and pointed to the fact that he had not been very reliable so far:

Johanna: *"But now, if you for instance married him, so how could you trust him if you know that he has done these kinds of things, he has lied to you and..."*

Grace: *"I DON'T"* (emphasises).

Johanna: *"You don't?"*

Grace: *"I don't know, Johanna, I told you I live every day, I don't know. You see, sometimes I don't like talking about this because I really feel like I've messed up myself. You know. Yeah."*

Her situation shows how contradictory her feelings were at the time of our discussion. She still loved him, but did not trust him. In principle, she was against polygyny, but still, would consider the option of becoming a second wife, if he asked her to. I will discuss this complexity more in depth later in this chapter.

Two years after our discussion Grace told me that she had had another child with the same man, but he still had not proposed for a marriage. According to her she was no more interested in marrying him either, and the relationship was actually over. She said that her social life was quite mixed up. All in all, she was not happy about the situation. Grace had by that time graduated and had a job, although the salary was not enough. Another year or so later I met her again. She had gone up the career ladder and had a good position in business life. She was dating a widowed man, and the man wanted them to marry. She had her doubts, for a number of reasons. She was by now accustomed to living by herself, with her children. Life was running smoothly, and she could provide for herself and her children all they needed. Would she lose her independence if she married him? She said that particularly his relatives were pressing them to make a decision, either to get married or finish the relationship altogether, so the man would be ready to marry someone else. Although she said she loved the man, she was not sure. What

would happen to her freedom? Would she be ready to start raising two children from the man's previous marriage in addition to her own two, although she never wanted to become a mother of a big family? Also money mattered: she got along well, but the man had infrequent incomes. She indirectly expressed her concern about ending up providing for all of them.

Love died, but my children need his money

Another story of being involved with a married man has some similar aspects but also different ones. It is about 30-year-old Njeri, who was also in a long-term relationship with a man, and had a child with him. All that time the man had promised to marry her, but when she was pregnant with their second child, she heard from his relatives that he was actually married already, and a father of two children. She had become so mad at him that she did not want to have anything to do with him, although he still kept on coming to see her. In the beginning he used to provide for the children, but then he stopped. According to Njeri, the reason might have been that his wife had forbidden him to help Njeri's children. She said that after he finished helping, she had once gone to meet him. She told me:

*"I've been there. Last year I went there, because I had a problem, I needed some money to pay the school fees. But, hmm, I found the wife there. She was very mad at me. Then he came and we talked, he said he'll be helping. But the wife wanted me to take the kids there. She said they cannot --- be supported when I have them but I refused."*¹⁴³

When I asked her if she meant that the wife would have preferred to raise the children herself than just help them financially, she answered in the affirmative: "*She said it's okay, but I didn't find it okay*". I asked why she thought the wife was mad at her; should she not have been mad at her husband instead? She said that the wife was probably worried that Njeri would come and stay as a second wife. However, she could not even think about that possibility, because "*my love for him died because of what he did*". She said that the man was a Luhya, and according to their customs, children belong to the father (see e.g. Seppälä 1995, 126-127), whereas Njeri is a Kikuyu, who consider children belonging to the mother.¹⁴⁴ That probably was an additional reason why she did not want to think about giving them to the father. She had not stayed in touch with a man, although he had given her his mobile phone number, and told her that he still loved her.

¹⁴³ Interview 18.1.2003. All following citations are from the same interview until stated otherwise.

¹⁴⁴ Although children belong to their father also according to Kikuyu customary law, if the bridewealth has been paid (Kenyatta 1995, 185; Davison 1996, 234), in practice children are usually left with their mothers (Robertson 1997, 227).

Some of these extra-marital relationships last for considerable times. Sometimes the ‘other woman’ will be an unofficial second wife, with or without the knowledge of the wife, like both Grace and Njeri have to some extent been. Sometimes, however, a man may want to make an extra-marital relationship official; to marry a second wife.

To leave or to stay? When the husband wants to marry again

Give me your money, and I will marry a second wife

Another perspective to women’s experiences on polygyny comes from a Luo woman, whose husband (also Luo) had told her that he wanted to take a second wife. The woman, Jane, was a qualified teacher, and her husband was a relatively successful businessman. They had been married only for four years, but had a lot of problems in their marriage both in their marital relationship and the roles in the family, as well as in their opinions when it comes to relations with kin (see chapter 8 where I discuss the situation in this family as it comes to their marital and kin relationships more in detail). Both had children from previous marriages, but they did not have one together. Their marriage was based on a practical arrangement: the man wanted someone to take care of the children, and the woman felt lonely after living years as a single mother. In the situation where things became really tense, he told her that he wants to take a second wife. What follows is an excerpt from our discussion, from the part where she told me about her husband’s intentions:

Jane: *“He wanted us to open a joint account and I refused. Because by then he was telling me that he wants to marry a second wife, coming from a polygamous home. He tells me that he wants to marry a second wife and he tells me to open a joint account, I said no.”*

Johanna: *“What about this second wife, what do you think about it?”*

Jane: *“I refused, but he said he’s going to marry again.”*

Johanna: *“Is this problem still unsolved?”*

Jane: *“It’s unsolved and he keeps telling me that he’s marrying, he’s marrying. It’s that song in the house.”*

Johanna: *“Why does he want to marry another wife?”*

Jane: *“He thinks that my children are going to leave him, and when my children have left, I’ll follow my son. That’s how he’s reasoning. That when we’re not able to work any more, I’ll go to my son. So with that he’s arguing that he’s living with no wife. And I have no say to that, it’s crazy.”*¹⁴⁵

Her husband had let Jane know that he has a girlfriend whom he wants to marry, and that he wanted them to open a joint account, so he could use their savings to pay the bridewealth for a

¹⁴⁵ Interview 18.2.1998

new wife. She had refused, and both her own relatives and her in-laws had supported her decision. Things between Jane and her husband got so tense, that she started to consider a divorce. Although she got support from her family, she was still hesitating.

More burdens

However, she thought that her husband might take a second wife anyway, and when I asked what she would do, if he did, she explained:

*“It's going to be difficult. In fact I'm not ready for another broken marriage, but deep in my mind, I'm reasoning that I can live better without him. Because he has so much burden. Most of his money is going to take care of the burdens. And he wants another burden. A woman who will start giving birth. So deep in my mind I feel that eventually I'm going to do away with him. That's what is in my mind, but I've not decided. It's going to be difficult.”*¹⁴⁶

Although this quote is only one short comment, it shows the way she spoke about the issue. If the husband took another wife, she thought she would have to divorce him, although she would not have liked to get another divorce. She did not really talk about the possibility of staying in the marriage as the first wife. Although I did not ask it directly, and Jane did not talk about it directly either, it becomes quite evident that living in a polygynous family was not an option for Jane. When I asked her what she would do if he took another wife, she started talking about being divorced again, instead of talking about living in a polygynous marriage as a first wife. Also when she stated that she had thought that he was a good man, a good Christian, she implies that good Christians do not look out for other wives. One reason for divorcing, rather than staying as a first wife was financial, as she was worried about how her husband could take care of all of them, as he already had too many obligations towards his kin. Another reason was that their relationship was not working on any level. She was not afraid of leaving her husband. She knew she can take care of herself, she had done so for a long time before remarrying. She had an option.

The practice of joining the financial resources to get another wife might have been acceptable in the rural areas in the past, if there was a lot of land, and one wife could not do all the work alone. The first wife would possibly have been willing to have someone to share the work. But in middle class urban context the request of the husband seemed quite unreasonable and paradoxical; Jane's husband asked her to contribute financially towards having a co-wife, whom she did not want to have in the first place. A second wife would not be of any benefit to

¹⁴⁶ Interview 18.2.1998

her, she would only increase the financial burden she and her husband already had, and most likely deteriorate even more the relationship between Jane and her husband.

Jane told me that although she was not happy, she still wanted to try to make the marriage work. They are Luo and acknowledge the father's right to his children in the case of a divorce (see Parkin 1980, 200), which make divorce cases difficult for Luo women. They did not have a common child, so that didn't make her stay. Jane herself thought that the husband might have sought for another woman precisely because they didn't have children together. It is difficult to say what the situation would have been if the husband had not had difficulties in providing for her and a new wife? Would she be more willing to stay in that case? I don't think so. I got an impression that she was really tired of her marriage and lacking communication in it, and unless that improved, she would not stay. I will now go on to discuss women's different positions in polygynous unions more analytically with the help of the cases presented above.

6.3. Different positions of women in today's polygynous unions

Official and unofficial wives

There are certain important differences in the roles of the wives in official polygynous marriages and unofficial polygynous arrangements discussed above. First, one should make the difference between the legally wedded wife and an unofficial second wife. I borrow definitions of these two types of wives from Wambui Wa Karanja, who has studied "inside wives" and "outside wives" in urban Nigeria. Although her data is from another side of the African continent, I find her words accurate also in urban Kenyan context. According to her (Karanja 1987, 251), the term "inside wife" usually means "an elite woman who has been married in a church wedding or through statutory law (usually both) and usually subscribes to the Christian ideology of a monogamous marriage, at least as an ideal". Furthermore, according to her definition, "she usually lives with her husband and their children in an 'official' residence. She adheres tenaciously to the Western concept of love, affection, companionship and fidelity". An inside wife will also expect her husband to provide financially for herself and their children.

An "outside wife", on the other hand, can be defined in the following way: She has a regular sexual relationship with the man, she is financially regularly provided by the man, and she usually has children, whose paternity is acknowledged by the man. According to Karanja, a very important feature in the definition is the fact, that an 'outside wife' has a limited social

status, because her husband refuses to declare her as his wife publicly, and consequently, she has considerably less social and politico-jural recognition because no bridewealth has been paid and no marriage rituals have taken place. (Karanja 1987, 252-253.) Thus, an 'outside wife' is not an official second wife, who has been married through customary law, but rather like a steady girlfriend. Although Nigerian practices cannot be equalled with Kenyan ones unproblematically, it looks like the same kind of practice of having an official wife and a steady girlfriend is not strange in Kenya, either (see Obbo 1987, 264; also Arndt 2000, 717). This practice is nowadays more common than the 'old' one, where many wives were married through customary practices.

Polygyny or extra-marital relationships?

But can we talk about polygyny when referring to this kind of an arrangement where a married man has another woman, whom he has not married customarily, i.e. who has not been introduced to his family and for whom the man has not paid bridewealth, and who thus does not have a defined and accepted role as his second wife? Should we just rather talk about married men who have extra-marital affairs? And unmarried women who have sexual relationships with married men who also provide for their living? I think that there are grounds for talking about a new way of polygyny, which is particularly pervasive in urban setting. In a cultural context where polygyny has been, as still is, an established institution, customary expectations concerning the rights and expectations of the spouses in polygynous unions are present also in these unofficial unions. Many women who become involved with married men consider themselves more like second wives than 'just' girlfriends, and act in these situations to some extent as is customarily expected, and also expect from the man what can be customarily expected from him.

This is a complex issue, but I hope I will be able to highlight the current situation with some further considerations on the cases presented earlier. When women find themselves in a relationship with a married man, what will they do, and why? I will have a look at how Grace and Njeri have negotiated their situations, what alternatives they have had and what reasons might explain their behaviour.

In both cases, the men are not acting according to the traditional requirements concerning polygyny. They have another woman, a girlfriend, and have children together. They have not, however, formally introduced these women to their respective families, although both women knew some of the men's relatives. The bridewealth has not been paid. Wives most

definitely have not been consulted about taking a second wife. The men are avoiding their responsibilities: at best they give vague financial support. Thus, their relationships do not look like established, official polygynous unions at all. In fact, the relationships of Grace and Njeri are examples of new kinds of polygynous arrangements, particularly common in urban settings.

Involvement of family members

Although the role of the relatives is minimal in these new kinds of polygamous marriages, it is still there. When problems arise, for instance when the man is not ready to take responsibility of his second wife or her children, the woman may seek for help from his extended family, as happened in Grace's case. Grace went to meet the man's relatives and parents before the first born child had had his first two teeth, which, according to her, is a customary practice in the man's community. She explained that she wanted to meet his parents because of the traditions, i.e. to get recognition for her child. She had informed the man about her intentions, who had tried to prevent her from going, but she said she had been determined to go. The man's relatives had welcomed her, and had later actually tried to convince the man that Grace is a good lady, and he should take care of his responsibilities, either by taking her as a second wife, or at least providing for their common child. His family members had, according to Grace, thought that he is a coward, and Grace's brother had a same perception of the man. He had gone to meet him at his workplace and tried to discuss the situation with him. Her brother told me, however, that the man had behaved in a very arrogant way, and had hardly even admitted that he was the father.

On the other hand, the women's family members may try to defend the woman's and children's financial rights, like children's rights to alimony, as I talked about in Njeri's situation. She had gone to meet the father of her children when she needed money for the school fees. As I explained earlier, the man's wife, in particular, did not want to give the children any support unless they moved with their father. Njeri tells that her family members, sisters and mother, had tried to talk to the man as well. After unsuccessful efforts, they finally tried to sue him through a child welfare officer to pay some allowance to his children. Njeri's mother told me about their efforts to handle the matter:

*"We tried, like last year we tried to inquire him whether he could help his children, even we went to children's officer, yeah, we were sent to the children's officer, and the children's officer wrote a letter through a chief, he was called then he told he needs to be given some time, so that he will think about it. The date they were given to meet, then he never turned up. --- We even went to another advocate, he wrote a letter to him, he called him, then he went. He said the same thing, he was given a date, he never turned up."*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Interview 2.2.2003

Her sister, on the other hand, pointed to the fact that they cannot take the issue to the court, because private lawyers are too expensive, and the government officer had probably already been bribed, as he seemed to have forgotten the whole case. Finally, even when a man wants to marry a second wife in a way traditional customs require, his relatives may oppose, particularly if the first wife is not willing, as was the situation in Jane's case.

Educated women have chances

At this point, I would like to draw attention to the fact that while Grace was a university student when her affair started and a Master's degree holder when it eventually finished, Njeri is not educated. She has only gone to school for six years. Thus, although Njeri does not actually belong to the groups of women I study in this research, I wanted to involve her story in order to highlight the differences between highly educated women and women with less education. The stories of Grace and Njeri begin in a very similar way: They fall in love and have children, and only learn later that the man is married already. Stories continue differently, however. Whereas Grace has managed in her life in an excellent way without the help from the father of the children, and is getting on well, Njeri's situation is not as good. She later had a third child, with a different man, whom she is seeing occasionally. He has not shown any intention to marry her, although she would like that. She lives with her three children, three sisters and mother. She has no income apart from an occasional second hand clothes selling business. For a short while she worked as a housemaid for a Kenyan family, but she had to quit as they expected her to live in the house, and she could only go and see her children once in a month. In addition, her salary was only 2000 shillings a month, although she had to work from 5.30 in the morning until late in the evening.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, she is relying on her sisters and mother, who take care of her and the children.

Grace didn't sue the man in court to get alimony for the children, although she could have well done that, particularly as one of his close relatives is a judge, who had actually suggested that she should. She didn't do that, because she was confident that she could make it without him. Njeri, or rather her family members, had tried legal means but had not succeeded in taking it far enough, mostly because lack of finances. She was not too proud to ask for money,

¹⁴⁸ 2000 shillings (US\$26) is a poor salary even compared to other maids whose salary I know about. In a house where we lived for some time, basic household tasks were done by maids, who went from one apartment to another. They earned KSh 6000 a month, and worked about 8 hours a day, 6 and half days a week. According to the secretary of that estate, the wages and the working terms for the maids there were very good.

she could not afford to be. Grace on the other hand, was too proud to even think of it. But she could afford it, although she was still unemployed when the relationship finished. She had gone to meet the man's family to get recognition for her child and perhaps for herself as well. But she didn't want to force him to pay alimony. She told me:

*"And I think now that [alimony] is one of (Patricia's) [the baby] rights. But you see I don't want, I don't want to force someone to do what they don't want to, when they know they should do. I don't want to do that, cause I know, at the end of the day, I'm going to work hard, and I'm so sure I'll get a job and I'm so sure I'll be successful, cause I'm very hard working. So you see, I'll rather struggle now knowing that ultimately I'll take care. Then I'd rather learn to take care of myself now than depend on somebody's money, when I don't know when he can decide to cut that, you see. And also the courts are so corrupted today, somebody could even pay someone money and stop it. So, I have plans depending on myself."*¹⁴⁹

What I want to stress here, is the fact that although highly educated women may and indeed do easily find themselves in the same kinds of situations in their relationships with men as women with little or no education, they often are, however, in a better position. They have alternatives; they are not completely dependent on men. They may act according to what they think is the best solution, without being too much worried about being left to rely on relatives. With Grace's education, she believed in the future. Njeri, on the other hand, didn't have much reason to believe in a bright future on her own. However, she didn't want to become a second wife, because for her, it would probably have meant a worse position. Besides, as she said, her feelings for him had died. If their different backgrounds are considered further (Grace was from a polygynous Luo family, Njeri from a monogamous Kikuyu family), one might find additional understanding. Although being highly educated and a supporter of 'feminist' ideas, Grace considered the option of becoming a second wife. Not in a customary way, but rather in a more contemporary urban way of living on her own, 'independently'. Njeri, although not being educated or even able to take care of her and her children's daily needs on her own, did not consider the option of polygyny. Perhaps their diverse cultural backgrounds and childhood circumstances had an effect on their choices.

Jayne, who was in a more short-term relationship with a married man than Grace and Njeri, never tried to meet the fathers' families. She didn't want any support from them. Her situation is different from that of Grace and Njeri, whose relationships resemble more (unofficial) polygynous union than hers, which was perhaps more like a casual extra-marital relationship. Jayne probably considered herself as a girlfriend who got cheated, not a potential second wife.

¹⁴⁹ Interview 16.2.1998

Let us still consider these alternatives from the first wives' points of view. There we must keep in mind highly educated women's perceptions of African men who have difficulties in being faithful, and the real threat of HIV/AIDS in any sexual relations. For a married woman, a husband who has a permanent sexual relationship with a permanent second wife, be it unofficial or official, is often a better and a safer alternative than various casual girlfriends. This may however, be a more humiliating situation, although some middle class women seem to ignore these unofficial second wives and perhaps even pretend they are not there. If the husband takes another official wife, as Jane's husband was planning to, it may appear to a highly educated wife, who has hoped that her marriage is a Christian, monogamous union, as a 'full catastrophe' (Celia Nyamweru, personal communication, winter 2004). There, she may feel that she is to blame for not being able to keep her husband to herself, the message which patriarchal culture in Kenya supports, as stated earlier.

6.4. "What would you do if your husband took a second wife?"¹⁵⁰

Learning to see

Once I was interviewing a prominent Kikuyu businessman, who was a friend of someone I knew. He came from a successful family, whose members held high positions both in business and in politics. He had, however, grown up in a polygamous family in the countryside. We had discussed in depth his family life: his relations to his wife and kin and feelings of obligations towards family members. He had also told me that although he had grown up in a Christian environment, he was not actually against polygyny. However, knowing his wife strongly opposes the idea, he would not even dare to suggest it to her. Then he suddenly asked me what I would do if my husband took a second wife. I answered, a little amused for some reason, that first of all it is illegal in my native Finland. Then I continued that I cannot imagine that my husband would like to have a second wife. Instead, if he fell in love with another woman, whom he would like to marry, he would surely first seek a divorce from me.

My spontaneous reaction revealed my point of departure, love. I tend to think about polygyny – particularly if I think of living in a polygynous union myself – on an emotional level. Of course, my reactions tell more about my own cultural background than

¹⁵⁰ Interview 26.11.2002

polygyny itself (see Levine 1988, 4; see also Jaggar 2000, 17). A Finnish sociologist Riitta Jallinoja (2000) argues that problems in Finnish marriages based on romantic love begin when the 'third' enters the marriage. The third can be anything that breaks the union between the two lovers. Although I do not completely agree with her view of a couple which excludes everything else outside as a basis of Finnish family life, I think that the idea of romantic love can explain my first, and also second, reactions to polygyny. From the perspective of romantic love polygyny is problematic, because according to this idea, love is directed to one person (at a time), and no other partners are tolerated. For a long time I looked at the marriage from the point of view of romantic love, instead of seeing it as a practical arrangement (where love can surely be involved), where certain contracts inside a family are discussed and negotiated. Connected to this, I looked at family from the point of view of marriage, as if it was the centre of family life. However, as Nigerian-American sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi has argued, to focus on conjugal relationship may not be the right way to approach family in Africa, and consequently, the position of a 'wife' is perhaps not what we should be looking at in the life of a woman, but instead, that of a 'mother' (Oyewumi 2000; 2001). However, instead of juxtaposing women's roles as either wives or mothers, we could perhaps look at the dialogue of different aspects and roles of women's lives (see Vuorela 2002, 274).

Highly educated women I talked with approached the issue from another angle. They told me that polygynous marriages can work, as far as the husband treats all wives and their children in a similar way, when it comes to education of the children, for instance. When talking about possible co-wives, women often did not show any sign of being jealous of the man's feelings, instead they were jealous of the idea that the husband might use more financial and material resources on someone else. Thus, the threat in polygyny did not seem to be so much about losing the husband's affection as it was about having to share the finances. I tried to ask about other aspects many times, but often I found that women misinterpreted my questions, such as "How about in principle, apart from finances?", and explained that of course, "because of Christianity" they would not even think of it.

Let us think for instance about what Jane thought about the possibility of her husband taking a second wife. She did not bring the emotional side forth in our discussion. She did not talk about being sad or insulted when the husband wanted another wife. Instead, she talked about the additional burden the new wife would bring in the family, when she started to have children. As I told, accommodating and feeding the relatives already cause a lot of financial pressure, in addition to lacking privacy. Jane stated that her husband already had too many responsibilities and a new wife would only bring more. On the other hand, love was not

the reason for their marriage. Those who explicitly stated that they had fallen in love with the man who became their husband, or those who were still waiting for 'Mr. Right' expressed also problems on emotional level in polygynous unions, but not very forcefully. Rather, they might say, like Susan, who was still unmarried in her mid-thirties and came from a monogamous Kikuyu home herself:

*"I don't think it's right (gives a laugh). Especially as a Christian, I think polygamy is wrong, and secondly because of financial security, I wouldn't like my children to struggle with other families, other wives for finances. And also for emotional security. I think I need emotional security. Yes."*¹⁵¹

Feminist as a second wife?

I want to consider one aspect of becoming a second wife which usually is not brought into discussion by looking even more closely at Grace's situation. Why did she, a highly educated feminist, think about marrying a married man? Although, at the time of our discussion, I could not help thinking that Grace should not become a second wife, from her point of view, her thoughts were understandable. Her life as a single mother was socially uncomfortable, although attitudes towards single mothers seem to be becoming less prejudiced. If she married her ex-boyfriend, she would have at least been married, and even to her child's father. Her position would have been safer both economically and socially. The fact that she would have been a second wife, would not be something extraordinary in Kenya. Besides, Grace said that she still loved the man. If she had kept on waiting and hoping to meet someone else, it would have been possible that she had been left alone. In that case, and also if she had decided to stay unmarried, she would be in a marginal position in her society. It is also possible, as I understand now, that Grace thought about marrying him exactly because he was already married. During our conversation, I did not pay any attention to Grace's sentence: *"After all, I wouldn't stay with them"*.¹⁵² Afterwards, I have come to think that Grace's expression is quite important in understanding her situation. As I have already told, she was a woman with high self-esteem, and one way to keep her independence without being in a marginal position, was to become a second wife and have her own household: to live with her children, but without a husband and particularly without in-laws. Thus by becoming a second wife she would actually get a social

¹⁵¹ Interview 2.12.2002

¹⁵² Interview 16.2.1998

status of a wife, instead of an ambiguous status of a single mother, probably financial support from the man and her independence to live her own life.

The idea of becoming somebody's second wife can be interpreted, as Nigerian Chikwenye Ogunyemi argues (Arndt 2000, 716-717), as an act of independence. She tells that some university graduates in Nigeria rather marry into polygamous homes, in order to avoid the oppression in marriage. They are free to come and go as they like. Kenyan writer and activist Wanjira Muthoni agrees that the same phenomenon is common in Kenya, as well. She talks about those African women who have been exposed to the new ideas in the following way:

"I find it very fascinating that they pick up the best of the two worlds. They can have children who have an official father and everything, but at the same time they have their freedom and all that. --- Sometimes, when they cannot change the circumstances – like when they cannot have the new man, the ideal man, the way they would want him – then they reorgani(s)e their lives in such a way that at least they are getting as close to the ideal as possible." (Arndt 2000, 717.)

The position of the first wife is often regarded as favourable in research, when it comes to economic status (e.g. Stichter 1988, 186). But the first wives also have the most to lose, if the husband starts to favour the newest wife. In urban setting, a position of the second wife is not necessarily bad, either. Some researchers who have studied African urban middle class, refer to the comfortable financial life of the 'outside wives' or second wives. It is argued that men may be much more generous towards them than the first wives, and buy them a better house and a more expensive car, travel abroad with them, put the children to better schools etc. (Karanja 1987, 253-356). Furthermore, some women have many 'sugar daddies' to take care of them, to ensure that nothing is lacking in a material way (Silberschmidt 2004, 240).

Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo has dealt with urban middle class polygyny in Ghana in her novel *'Changes. A love story'*, where she tells about a highly educated second wife, whose husband frequently rushes to bring her the most exclusive gifts on his way home to his first wife (Aidoo 1993, e.g. 145-7). I want to stress that in my focus here are educated urban women, who are most often working in professional jobs and have steady incomes (although not necessarily big), that is, they are economically independent as it is. They don't need a husband to take care of their basic living expenses. However, a husband may fill some emotional and sexual needs in a socially acceptable way, as well as share the responsibilities of parenthood. The husband also provides economic security. Of course finances are better with the support from him. One incident which made me look at Grace's situation from another angle was my discussion with a female East African researcher in a conference concerning ethics and gender.

She said to me that an African feminist can marry a man who is already married, that is not a problem. Even though she would oppose polygyny in principle, it is not such a big deal to her. Often she thinks practically, and chooses the best alternative. Hence, in her cultural reasoning, polygyny is one of the choices. As Parkin & Nyamwaya (1987a, 11) put it, “the financial advantages in becoming the second wife or mistress of a wealthy man may outweigh such ideological factors and become regarded as compatible”.

Also, if we think about the way highly educated women talked about a good marriage, or the factors which make a good marriage, it becomes even more understandable why polygyny may not always be contradictory to women’s aims. For them, in a good marriage, it was first and foremost the question of the spouses who can negotiate their positions in relation to each other and their kin in a satisfactory way. Thus, if a husband fulfils his duties towards the first wife and the children, whether or not he has a second wife as well may not be a big issue.

Grace’s situation implies that ‘traditional’ practices have a strong influence even in the lives of educated and ‘Westernised’ women. Especially in regard to sexuality, traditional customs and values remain strong (Kamaara 1995, 67). However, ‘traditions’ and ‘modern’ values are intertwined in an interesting way in Grace’s life because, when considering the possibility to become a second wife, she can be interpreted to take the best parts of both spheres: A legitimate status as a second wife and her own aim at independence.

6.5. Conclusions: From family matters to private liaisons

Situations I have discussed in this chapter have pointed out some crucial aspects on how polygyny is practised and arranged in contemporary urban Kenya. Although official polygyny may be diminishing, particularly in urban middle class context, the unofficial one seems to be flourishing. According to my understanding, it looks like the whole institution of polygyny has changed of what used to be a carefully regulated family issue to an *unofficial and secret arrangement*, which lacks a defined structure. If compared to earlier times, and if compared between the rural and the urban areas, the change is clear. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997, 213) calls the nature of today’s polygynous marriages as “an alliance of individual interests”, where each person involved has his or her own individual interests and reasons to marry. The practice is still there, but the institution around the practice is not. Instead of customarily married cowives there

are secret mistresses (Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1991, 106). Thus, there is a new recognition of polygyny in an officially monogamous setting (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997, 215).

Who benefits from this situation, if anyone? Both women's and men's positions in polygynous marriages have changed, and in many ways complicated. Thus, unofficial polygynous practices put people in a situation where they usually do not have a clear understanding or agreement either on their responsibilities or their rights.¹⁵³ One striking difference is that while the first wife's position in today's unofficial urban polygyny has become more vulnerable and less privileged, the second wife hardly has any security in her relationship with a married man. If the first wife is married through statute law, and the second wife through the customary law, in practice, if they end up in court to settle their rights, the wife with an official certificate is in a more advantageous position (Kameri-Mbote 2001). In some cases, however, the second wife's life, if she happens to be a highly educated woman, may be very fulfilling. Thus, from women's viewpoints, the contemporary practice of being an unofficial second wife offers *independency* in some cases, but in most cases, it only offers *uncertainty and lack of responsibility* from the man's side. It does not offer a full status of a legitimate wife, socially or legally. For a first wife, as long as the husband does not neglect or abandon her and her children, she can '*pretend*' to be the only wife. Also, the fact that the husband has a second permanent wife instead of changing girlfriends is a better option regarding the AIDS pandemic, although those two are not mutually exclusive.

For a man, polygyny may still offer prestige among his peers. Otherwise, it only *adds to his responsibilities and expenses*, if he acts according to the expectations and takes care of both his families. If he does not, he is a free agent to some extent, but is he enjoying his position either way? If any hint on that can be found in the fiction by Kenyan and other African writers, the answer is clear. A man with many wives, particularly if the arrangement is not accepted by all parties, may be in a difficult situation, feeling guilty for both wives and both families and trying to adjust his comings and goings so that all wives are satisfied. Ama Ata Aidoo (1993, 119-120) describes this situation from a polygynist's point of view in her novel *Changes*:

"How did our fathers manage? He wondered to himself. He knew the answer. They, our fathers, lived in a world which was ordered to make such arrangements work. For instance, no man in the old days would be caught in his present predicament: that is, wondering which woman he would be making love to on a New Year's Eve."

¹⁵³ According to Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo, the problem with polygyny in the 'modern' urban context is exactly that traditional rules and regulations related to polygyny are not followed, and hardly even known about any more (lecture at the University of Helsinki, Spring 2001).

I hope that in this chapter I have been able to show how many ways polygyny is still part of people's lives in urban middle class settings in contemporary Kenya. In particular, I wanted to bring forth some controversies and inconsistencies that urban middle class women in Kenya confront in their lives, especially when it comes to their relationships with men. With these issues, I also wanted to discuss questions of feminisms: by looking at women's agency we can reveal how contextual and flexible understanding of feminisms may be.

PART III: KIN RELATIONS. EXPECTATIONS, LOYALTIES, CONFLICTS.

CHAPTER 7. HELPING KIN, BUT WITHIN CERTAIN LIMITS

In this chapter, as well as the following ones, I will extend my perspective further from marriage and gender relations to kin relations. Although already earlier, I have in some contexts (like bridewealth negotiations, inter-ethnic marriages and conflicts in polygyny) pointed to the role of kin, I will now turn to look at kin relations more closely. I will bring forth issues of family dynamics as they are connected to marital relations between the spouses, on the one hand, and relations between the spouses and extended family members, on the other hand. In practice, those relations are interlinked. On the general level, women usually told me about their relatives with appreciation and described their relationships with the relatives as ‘cordial’. Relatives are an important part of their lives. For instance most of them have gone through at least some sort of traditional marriage negotiations between the families, as discussed earlier, mainly to show their respect to their relatives. There is, however, a clear tendency for a more conjugal or nuclear type of family life. Increasing individualism, and increasing emphasis on nuclear family over extended family, is a contemporary phenomenon also elsewhere in East Africa (see e.g. Haram 1999, 104; Pietilä 1999, 33). This may cause problems in extended families and between the spouses (see also Oppong 1974, 82). Many women told me, before I could even see the connection properly, that kinship relations and other aspects of extended family life, were the “hottest issues in any marriage”. In what follows, I will try to open up some of these ‘hot issues’ embedded in middle class family life.

I will point to different dimensions of helping kin: who helps whom, in what ways, and when. I consider how women express their sense of obligations towards their family members and kin, and their ways of drawing the lines between helping and not helping too much. I will also look at how family responsibilities and helping kin are negotiated and organised in three different kinds of families, and discuss some analytical issues concerning kin obligations basing on these examples.

7.1. Practicalities and moralities of helping

Offering money and accommodation

There are many ways in which highly educated Kenyans help their relatives. Two ways, in particular, according to my understanding, are financial help and accommodating the relatives. Financial help includes things like paying school fees, medical costs, or basic living expenses for relatives; and helping them in special occasions like arranging weddings or funerals. The biggest financial burden for Nairobi middle class families considering kin obligations is paying school for the extended family members (see also McAdoo and Were 1989, 155), which most participants in this research did. The amounts varied a lot: some gave 1000 shillings or less a month, while others frequently paid 20 000 shillings a month.¹⁵⁴ School fees for primary and secondary schools tend not to be charged monthly – the biggest fees usually come at the beginning of the year (i.e. January) and then in the beginning of second term (i.e. April) and again in the beginning of third term (i.e. late August). Those who did not pay any school fees for relatives, either had no one to support in the immediate family - that is among the brothers or sisters or their children - any more because everybody already was independent, or they felt they simply had no resources to pay. In addition to permanent or long time costs like school fees, most middle class families give varying amounts of money to the relatives when need be, especially in cases of sickness, weddings or funerals.

Accommodating the relatives is another form of helping which is very much present in the middle class people's lives. They offer a place to stay for their rural relatives who come to Nairobi either for an extended visit, to look for employment or to have education. This may be a short period, after which the person finds a job and is able to move out on her/his own. Often the fact is that even those people who have lived in Nairobi already for a long time, may not have succeeded in getting employment, and are thus continuously dependent on their relatives for a place to stay, sometimes moving from one relative to another (see Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1991, 67). Also those who study in Nairobi often stay with the relatives throughout their studies. This may work out to be a long stay. When it comes to providing accommodation for relatives, most families in this research were either doing it at the time of my stays in Kenya or had done so earlier. Although some relatives stay for years, situations change quite often, as

¹⁵⁴ = from 156 US\$ to 312 US\$, according to average currency rates during my fieldworks in 1997, 1998 and 2002-2003.

relatives come and go. Most women I interviewed provided accommodation for relatives, some young women were themselves accommodated by relatives, while only a few families were strictly nuclear in the sense that not even a housemaid was staying with the family. Others were nuclear families with a live-in maid who might or might not be a relative. Maids either slept in partly detached 'servant's quarters' or in the main house depending on the situation.

In the office I'm not your relative

When the positions of educated middle class urban people in the kin networks regarding the flows of helping and receiving help are considered, it can be seen that most of these people give more than they receive. It looks like although in some difficult family problems educated women turn to their relatives for help, usually they express willingness to solve their problems either alone or by discussing with friends. However, women are often asked for help by the relatives when conflicts arise in the extended family. Thus, highly educated people easily have tight contacts to the relatives, because so many less wealthy or less educated relatives turn to them for help. Relatives seeking assistance may even cause problems at their family members' workplaces like offices or hospitals, and some workplaces have posters on the wall stating something like 'In the office I'm not your relative', pointing to the fact that relatives should not expect special treatment in official issues on grounds of their relationship with the employee, and also that employees should first and foremost focus on their professional duties instead of family duties while in office (see also Smith 2001; Obbo 1986, 182-184). In the moral order of the Kenyan family, those family members who are in high positions, and thus financially more able to help than others, are expected to help the relatives; if they do not, their position in the family may become somewhat uncomfortable (see also Obbo 1987, 268). I will now turn to look at these issues with the help of my empirical data.

Acting out of family solidarity...

Many educated women in this research express a strong sense of solidarity and obligation towards family members. For instance 27-year-old Florence, a postgraduate Kisii student with one child, talked in the following way about her feelings for her family members, referring to school fees:

"You'd feel guilty if you'd see your brother hanging at home cause lack of fees, or something like that, you know, you'd feel bad. You'd like them to have a chance at least. So like I and my

*other sisters-in-law ---, what we have told them is that please, support them, as far as you can go, you know, so that they don't feel neglected or something like that. Such that it's a chance for education, and if you think that you can help them, just go ahead."*¹⁵⁵

Florence and her husband pay fees for her husband's three brothers and two sisters. She said that the amounts vary, because they share the costs with her husband's other brothers, but they usually pay between 5000 and 10 000 shillings (80 - 160 US\$) a month. Florence comes from a reasonably well-off Nairobi family, and nobody in her natal family needs support. She has only one brother, who is a solicitor and still unmarried, and would be able to help their parents, if there was need. When Florence speaks of her family, she mainly refers either to her natal nuclear family or her marital nuclear family, excluding other relatives.

Often, like in Florence's case, spouses support husband's siblings, but there was not a great difference in supporting the relatives of the wife among those women who participated in this research. In those families, where sisters and brothers need financial help in both sides, also woman's relatives are supported, especially in those cases where the woman is the most highly educated in her natal family. Customarily it is usually regarded that primarily male members of the family are responsible for helping financially other family members. Thus, when a woman marries, she is regarded to become part of her husband's family, and is not so much expected to pay school fees for her own sisters, brothers or cousins. Because helping the wife's family is not customary, it sometimes creates tensions in the families. According to some women, the husband's relatives do not feel good about the fact that they support the wife's relatives. Mercy, who is the second eldest child in a polygynous Luo family of three wives and 20 children, has paid school fees for most of her sisters and brothers, being the most educated. She tells about her in-laws' attitudes: *"At times they resent, yeah, like when my husband does things for my family, they don't like it. They can't show it openly, but you can almost feel it from their comments."*¹⁵⁶ According to my understanding, this attitude links partly back to bridewealth payments. The general idea in bridewealth payments is that when the husband pays the bridewealth to his wife's extended family members, they can use the money for instance to support other children's, that is wife's sisters' and brothers', education. Thus, apart from the bridewealth, which goes to the woman's relatives, the couple should use their resources on the husband's side.

One way to avoid conflicts between the families in these kinds of situations is to agree that bridewealth is not to be paid, but the spouses will instead pay school fees for wife's

¹⁵⁵ Interview 6.2.1998

¹⁵⁶ Interview 22.1.1998

sisters and brothers, like in Colette's case. Her father had said to her husband during the marriage negotiations: "*I will still need my daughter to help me in educating her sisters and brothers, so I don't want bad blood between the families.*" ¹⁵⁷ Colette, who is a doctor, comes from a big Maasai family - she has 10 younger sisters and brothers - and she explains that in a way she and her husband have indeed paid the bridewealth, although in the form of school fees for her younger siblings. Cases like that of Colette's are interesting, as customarily among the Maasai the bride is very much incorporated into her husband's family and also economically she becomes a producer and reproducer in her husband's family. In this case, however, Colette is providing considerable economic assistance to her natal family.

When helping kin is considered, one has to make a distinction between those who have and those who do not have wealth. Florence and her husband, as stated above, are able and willing to help her husband's siblings. For her and many others, helping kin considerably may not be a burden and may not limit their own lives financially very much. Many others, however, have to make considerable sacrifices in order to come up with the requirements from kin. Again, there are even those highly educated people who can barely take care of themselves and their own children, and are not able to help relatives in any ways. One thing which is important has to do with whether someone is a firstborn in a family or the last born. Often the last born children have it easier concerning kin obligations: older sisters and brothers have already educated younger ones, and they have become independent. Even if they still need help, older siblings are usually more stable financially, and in a better position to help. However, if a younger family member gets much more education or money, she may find herself obliged to support the children of the less affluent siblings. For a woman, to marry the firstborn son in the family is usually more burdensome than marrying someone younger among the siblings. The latter option may be easier for women for other reasons, too, because other brothers' wives have already 'fought the battles'. That means that younger sons' wives may not be as closely kept an eye on as those who have come to the family earlier.

Although those women who felt that husbands were giving too much money to the relatives are less satisfied with the situation, also those women who agreed to help the relatives and regarded it as their obligation, expressed that "*it has been a burden*". ¹⁵⁸ Thus, women with whom I discussed were not against helping the relatives financially, as long as it happened within certain limits. Where those limits are, depend on many issues: family's finances, their values and preferences, family's composition etc. In wealthy families, women do not usually

¹⁵⁷ Interview 17.2.1998

¹⁵⁸ Interview 22.1.1998

have anything against helping the relatives financially, even in considerable amounts. Usually they want to be involved in the decisions of whom and how to help. Some of them, however, leave the issue for the husband to decide, like Patricia, who had recently married a significantly older, wealthy Luo man:

Johanna: *“Do you have any idea how much he for instance gives money to his relatives?”*

Patricia: *“No, I don’t have an idea, because I don’t want to be involved. Because I feel as long as he doesn’t deny me anything I want, as long as he takes care that I’m comfortable, I don’t have to ask him about money he gives to anybody else.”*¹⁵⁹

On the other hand, in those families, where money is not enough even for the nuclear family itself, helping the relatives causes serious constraints. For instance Angelina and her family have big difficulties because they do not have enough money. Angelina herself has recently finished her Master’s studies, but she does not have a job. Her husband is a civil servant with a low salary. They have two children. She told me that they do not help anyone, unless someone is sick. Her opinion is that the relatives *“can help themselves without disturbing us”*.¹⁶⁰ However, she suspected that her husband was secretly giving money to his brothers, because she had noticed that some money was often missing on pay day. This caused arguments in her family.

Although possibilities for helping in a given family have an effect on the amount of helping, also circumstances do. Sometimes it is practically impossible to say no to the relatives, regardless of one’s own finances, particularly because AIDS is killing many young adults in Kenya, leaving orphans. Sara, who is 38 years, and married with two children, occasionally pays school fees up to 100 000 shillings (1600 US\$) a month. She told me about the situation in her family:

*“Life is that difficult, and the sort of situation we have, his, we have a lot of responsibility, especially on his side. He’s lost two members, his brother and his wife, both died and left three children. So that means we take care of those three, so in fact we have five children already, three on top of my two. The same happened to his sister, also with three children. So that means, other than my children, there are those others.”*¹⁶¹

Sara and her husband both have university degrees from abroad, and they are both Luo. They live in a three-bedroom house with their children, maid and one of her husband’s nephews, and his younger sister. Other children of the deceased in-laws are in boarding schools, which Sara and her husband pay for. They have always accommodated relatives, because her husband has many responsibilities due to his position in the family: *“I have to accept the fact that I have to*

¹⁵⁹ Interview 9.2.1998

¹⁶⁰ Interview 26.1.1998

¹⁶¹ Interview 19.2.1998

*live with some of his younger relatives, that's part of it. Because being the only, he has two other brothers, but being the most educated, he has most responsibilities.”*¹⁶²

... or calculating for the future?

Although helping the relatives is often explained as a sign of obligation or family solidarity, like in the discussions above, more selfish reasons are also expressed, either implicitly or explicitly. Many women who participated in this research had a practical explanation for paying school fees: To make relatives independent, so that they no longer come to ask for help. At the same time the helpers themselves eventually become free when kin responsibilities are concerned. Tina, a Kisii woman of 27 years, is working in business, and is married with one child. Her husband's cousin lives with them, and according to her, they “*give her endless support*”, like buying clothes, books for her studies etc.¹⁶³ In addition, they pay university fees for two of his brothers and two of hers, around 15 000 to 20 000 shillings (240-320 US\$) a month. She said that it is not easy to find money for all this. However, she explained:

“We have no other ways, but we have to send [money] because they have to come and learn and be independent, because if we leave them, then they will just be on your knee every day. So it's better to educate them, so when they finish they'll get their jobs and be independent.”

Johanna: *“Okay, so that's the reason. You help them a couple of years and then they---“*

Tina: *“---they'll be on their own. Other than helping them all through. Cause if you leave them and they don't get employed, eventually they will come after you for any help, for any assistance, they'll come after you.”*¹⁶⁴

The same thought, although more implicitly, is expressed in Mercy's (Luo) words. She explained that they have helped many of her sisters and brothers out of school, because “*if I don't pay their fees, they'll drop out of school, and they'll just, you know, suffer. Maybe they'll come back to me and they need a dress or something. I say that we'll pay your fees, work hard, so that one day you'll get a job*”.¹⁶⁵

Hence, the ultimate aim or motive for helping is not only to help relatives to survive, but often to make them independent, and thus to make oneself free of obligations. In order to achieve such a state, it is necessary to limit those who are helped. Most of those highly educated women whom I talked with seem to put the limit on the immediate family, by which is meant

¹⁶² Interview 19.2.1998

¹⁶³ Interview 16.2.1998

¹⁶⁴ Interview 16.2.1998

¹⁶⁵ Interview 22.1.1998

sisters and brothers and their children. Other extended family members are helped only in exceptional cases.

7.2. Different families, different arrangements. Negotiating responsibilities

I will now turn to look at the flow of help in family networks more concretely by focusing on three different families' arrangements. By bringing into the discussion different family and household forms, I wish to point to heterogeneity of families and households, and give some concrete examples on how family obligations are fulfilled and negotiated.

A household of women: Together we survive

Four daughters and a mother

The household on which I will focus first consists of a Kikuyu lady in her late fifties and her four unmarried daughters in their early thirties. One of the daughters has three young children who also live there. They live in a terrace house not too far from the centre of Nairobi. Their neighbourhood is quite peaceful, although it is very near to one of Nairobi's slums. The road is tarmacked just until their house by an American denomination, which has its main church, a huge and wealthy-looking building on the other side of the street, facing their house. After the church, the road continues as an earth road. They have two small bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. The house is self-contained. They have electricity, and the stone walls are covered by some posters and wall calendars. Their living room has a dining table, a sofa and a couple of chairs, and a bookshelf, which contains mainly some religious literature and a small black and white TV. Their place is tidy, clean and comfortable.

The mother is working as a hairdresser, but can hardly make 10 000 shillings (130 US\$) a month nowadays. The eldest daughter, Susan, who is the most educated in the family, is a language instructor, and is working continuously. The number of her students and consequently the amount of her salary varies, but she estimates that she makes some 15 000 shillings (195 US\$) a month. Second daughter is working as a hairdresser, like her mother, in a salon in the city centre, and gets approximately the same salary as her mother. Third daughter

works in a computer firm as an assistant, and gets only 4000 shillings (52 US\$), which according to her is barely enough for transportation and food. The youngest daughter, who has three children, does not have a job. Occasionally she sells second-hand clothes, or works as a domestic servant, but mostly she stays at home and takes care of household errands. She has never been married, and is receiving very little help from the respective fathers of the children.

Sharing the costs

The main providers in this family are the mother and the eldest daughter. They share the costs so that the mother pays the food, the eldest daughter the rent (4500 shillings = 58,5 US\$), and electricity together with the assistance from the second daughter, and they all try to contribute to children's school fees, which add up to about 84 000 shillings (1092 US\$) a year, and occasional medical bills. The second youngest daughter can barely take care of her personal expenses, but manages to give her mother 1000 shillings (13 US\$) or so every now and then. Although they usually manage to get along, they are not wealthy. According to the mother, *"it's very difficult to maintain a family now. Even if these daughters were not working even for a small money, I could not afford even the rent."*¹⁶⁶

Because the youngest daughter is not working, and has three children to provide for, she is depending on her elder sisters and mother. She does not seem happy about this, and told me that *"I feel like it's a burden to them"*.¹⁶⁷ Her mother and sisters do not, however, show any frustration for having to provide for the youngest sister and her three children. They take it as a fact of life, although they do think that the children's respective fathers should take more responsibility. The elderly mother feels responsible for her adult daughters. She would like to retire already and move to the countryside, where they still have their late grandparents' *shamba* (farm), which they have rented out. Susan is responsible for the maintenance of the farm, and she visits it regularly to see that the tenants are taking good care of it. The farm is not as flourishing as it used to be in her grandparents' time, and the harvest has become much smaller. The mother feels that in spite of her wish to move to the countryside, she has to stay in Nairobi, until her daughters have become financially independent.

*"So I now pray that if they get a better job, they can at least help me to prepare that house [in the countryside]. And also when I leave Nairobi, I find that everyone has income. That would be better. But when there are people not working in good job ... I am afraid to leave them, they might even sleep hungry."*¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Interview 2.2.2003

¹⁶⁷ Interview 18.1.2003

¹⁶⁸ Interview 2.2.2003

At least Susan could be independent, if she lived on her own, as well as two of her sisters who are working. But the fourth sister would be in trouble, because she could hardly survive with occasional incomes and take care of her children at the same time.

Grandparents' role

Although they presently live together, this has not always been the case. Because their (monogamous) father died when the children were young, and the mother never remarried, the mother was not able to take care of all children. Thus, they lived separately in their childhood; the mother lived with the first-born son and two youngest daughters in Nairobi, and Susan and her follower lived with their paternal grandparents in the countryside in the Rift Valley Province. Their biological grandmother had died, and they were raised by their grandfather and his two other wives, but all siblings just talked about grandparents, without making a distinction between the biological grandmother and grandfather's other wives. According to Susan's account of her grandparents, they had a 'big' farm producing vegetables and fruits for sale, and were 'fairly well-off'.

When Susan and her sister lived with their grandparents, the grandparents took care of them also in the form of paying their school fees until the end of secondary school. The mother, on the other hand, paid school fees for those three children who lived with her. After secondary school both daughters moved to Nairobi to attend a college, and started living with the mother and other siblings. However, Susan has worked and lived outside Nairobi for some periods during the years. The mother also paid college fees for two of the children, and Susan helped to pay for one of them, while two of them had been working and saving the money for fees themselves.

Extended family relations

This household of an elderly mother and her four daughters cannot accommodate outsiders, apart from short occasional visits. They are short of space already as it is, sharing two bedrooms between eight persons. They help extended family members financially, however, if they can. The second eldest daughter tells:

"Yeah, if we are able to, we can organise and save some money and give it to them. Like for example those of our relatives who live in the rural areas, they are not well off. And you see, maybe one of them gets sick, they don't save money, they use all their money, so we help

*them, financial help if we can. They can bring the sick person here in Nairobi then we take them to hospital.”*¹⁶⁹

The maternal grandfather is still alive, and lives in the countryside. According to the mother, it is practically impossible for her to help her father. Her two brothers are not working, and have even less chances to help. *“If I had some income I could take care of him, but now I can’t keep him”*.¹⁷⁰ However, in emergency, they have to find the money somewhere. For instance, they had taken the grandfather to the hospital in Nairobi, when he was sick, and paid all the expenses.

Their dead father’s sister lives in a more upmarket area in Nairobi, and is married to a well-off man. According to Susan, her relatives from the father’s side live a very ‘European’ life with an emphasis on a nuclear family, and thus do not regard Susan and her family as belonging to their lives very closely. Susan thinks that their family is a modern one, too, as most Kikuyu families are in her opinion. According to her, the reason for their separate lives is that her relatives’ financial and social position is much higher, and they are older, her cousins belonging to an almost different generation than Susan and her sisters. They mainly meet each other at funerals or weddings, although there have not been many in their extended family lately. Susan says that her cousins had tried to give Susan and her siblings advice when they were starting their college education, but the cousins were not willing to help in other ways than advising. They had not offered financial help, and Susan and her family members had not asked for it.

Giving or receiving help

When it comes to asking for help, members in this family do not seem to prefer it unless it is an emergency. In one occasion, when Susan was visiting our place and I told her that the guard at the gate of our compound had just asked me for ‘some assistance’, she reacted in a strong way and commented that it is very impolite to do such a thing. In an interview, her sister tells about how she feels about asking for help from their more wealthy relatives, who also live in Nairobi:

*“They have their own family and their own problems, so we don’t like to ... (Johanna: ... to ask them?) Yeah, we don’t like to unless it’s very very urgent like health, if one of us is sick, that one we can ask for help, then they can organise something. --- We don’t like to disturb them ‘cause they have their own problems, so we rarely ask for help, unless it’s very important.”*¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Interview 18.1.2003

¹⁷⁰ Interview 2.2.2003

¹⁷¹ Interview 18.1.2003

When one of the youngest daughter's children became sick, they had to ask for help from their friends and the mother's friends for the hospital fees, which were about 8000 shillings (104 US\$). When I asked Susan's sister if they were expected to pay the money back, she said that it was not a loan, and laughed, "*we were not expected to pay the money back*".¹⁷² Thus, rather than turning to their well off relatives for help, they had turned to their friends. According to them, their friends did not expect them to pay the money back.

In this all female family, adult siblings help each other and basically share everything they have. The siblings also have a brother, the first-born in the family, but he has distanced himself from the rest of the family, and is not contributing to any costs. I will discuss more closely feelings of obligations and expectations in this family later, after presenting two other family forms.

Three separate households, one family

Siblings living close to each other

In the Luhya family that I will discuss next, the main character is the eldest daughter called Lucy. The composition of this family is very different compared to that of Susan's. Four of the daughters and one of the brothers live in Nairobi, and the parents in Western Kenya with the youngest daughter. Lucy is married, and lives with her husband and a new-born baby in a one-bedroom house. The area is very similar to Susan's neighbourhood, and so is their house outside. Entering their yard, surrounded by similar cement houses next to each other, and finding my way through the countless cotton diapers hanging on a clothesline, I got a very comfortable and cosy feeling. The yard is red mud, as is Susan's, and every now and then a chicken runs around. However, when I first time entered their house, I was a little surprised to see a computer and stereos in the living room. In the small kitchen, there was a microwave oven. From outside, I had not expected such equipment in the house. It became obvious that this household had some disposable income at times.

At the time of my fieldwork, the husband's sister was living there too, as she was preparing for a language test in Nairobi. Just a few minute's walk away from Lucy's house lived her three sisters and brother. They shared a house together. Although siblings thus had two households, in practice they lived very close to each other and were involved daily. Two of the sisters, who were not working, went to eat to Lucy's place almost daily. Another sister was

¹⁷² Interview 18.1.2003

working as a researcher at the university, and the brother and one of the sisters were beginning their studies in a college. One of the sisters had already graduated, but did not have a job. Lucy herself worked at a government organisation dealing with information issues. Her husband was working as an accountant in an international NGO.

Educating family members

Lucy and her two sisters had all been educated to college level, and even the father himself had a university degree. The youngest one was about to finish Form 4 (high school), and the other ones were either studying or had just graduated. Their parents had managed to pay school fees for all of them until the end of secondary education, after which the siblings have had different ways of funding their studies. Lucy had received a scholarship for a college. At the same time as she received her degree, started working and got married, their father became chronically ill and had to retire on medical grounds. Furthermore he became permanently dependent on costly medication. As he in this situation was not able to pay all fees for younger children any more, Lucy started to take responsibility for some of the costs. *“Then it became a little difficult, I had to step in now that I was working, to help the other siblings.”*¹⁷³ Thus, the responsibility was now on Lucy, since she was at that time the only one who worked. She used to share the costs for the younger siblings studies with her father, although one of the sisters had an international scholarship for her studies in a foreign university. Since Lucy graduated and started working, she has been the main provider in the family.

Lucy and her husband help her two siblings who are studying, and the last born in her family, who is still at school. Lucy estimated that after her two other siblings started their college studies, they would spend approximately 100 000 shillings (1300 US\$) a year for school fees. As their salaries total about 540 000 shillings (7020 US\$) a year, they would pay a little less than one fifth of their incomes in school fees for their sisters and brothers. They also helped kin on the other side, paying school fees for her husband's siblings. The husband is the first-born in the family, like Lucy, and his siblings are still younger. Since Lucy's father-in-law has many wives, he does not have means to help all of his children. Lucy says that they regularly help her two of the five immediate siblings of her husband, who are still at school. One of the husband's siblings is working, but other two of them are unemployed. According to Lucy, they mainly help only her husband's five full sisters and brothers, not the numerous children of his father's other wives, although in an emergency they would assist them, too. Lucy is willing to help the

¹⁷³ Interview 21.1.2003

relatives financially, and she would even accommodate them for a while in case they need it. She however, explains that two months would be a maximum time, and within that time, they would be expected to find a place to stay for themselves.

The second born, Alice who lived in another house, near Lucy, with her two sisters and a brother, did her studies in a university abroad. She had a scholarship for both her Bachelor's and Master's, and did not need anybody's help. As the foreign scholarship was rather generous, it enabled her to participate in paying the school fees for her sisters, and also to assist her parents. After her graduation she got a good job in an international organisation and as she got an excellent salary, more than KShs 100 000 (1300 US\$) a month, she was able to assist even more. She had recently started a new job at the university, and was planning to pursue a doctorate, which she indeed started in another foreign university some time later. While still in Kenya, she was actually pretty much responsible for that household. The third sister, Ruth, was seeking a job after graduating, but had not succeeded yet. She had lived with Lucy for two years, until Lucy got married. Their father had paid her diploma fees.

Reciprocal helping

Ruth's approach to their situation reveals her sense of reciprocity as someone who has received help and is hoping to be able to give it herself some day:

"I have to help, because if it wasn't somebody helping me, I wouldn't be what I am now. Although currently I'm not earning anything, but at least I have my certificates, if there were not these problems with employment and so many other issues of tribalism, corruption, at least I think I would be employed. I would, because at least (Lucy) helped me to go through with education, professional education." ¹⁷⁴

Her follower Alice, on the other hand, expressed the same kind of feelings from the perspective of the one who helps already. She thought that it is too hard for her to take care of everything in her household now that she earns about 35 000 shillings (455 US\$) a month, but as she said: *"It's too much for me, but you know, I don't have choices, I just have to live the hard way. --- I have to support them. Even if it's one shilling, I have to divide it. There's no other way out."* ¹⁷⁵

By the end of my fieldwork, Alice started to work at the university, and Lucy expected her to start helping as well. Ruth, who had a degree but had not found a job, as well as the younger siblings who were still studying, did not have means to help at that time. Lucy was hoping that things would get easier for her in the future, since her two sisters had graduated,

¹⁷⁴ Interview 22.1.2003

¹⁷⁵ Interview 2.2.2003

partly with her financial help, and both of them were planning to get married, and indeed did so later the same year. However, from her husband's side, Lucy expected to continue helping for a long time. When she ponders about her role as a helper, she says that nobody would actually blame her for not helping, *"because it's not your responsibility, but then you would not be happy seeing your brother being just there, and you're enjoying your life when they are suffering. So you just have to help. ---[Other family members] would be okay. Only that you would feel the guilt yourself."*¹⁷⁶

In this family's situation again, different needs are actual in different times, and negotiations on who can help whom, are taking place when something in the situation changes. When the father fell ill, the main responsibility was transferred to the eldest, Lucy, as she happened to graduate at the same time. Again, she has carried out her responsibilities when it comes to educating her sisters and brothers, and even her husband's siblings, and now it was time for other two sisters to take on more responsibility. Since the two unmarried daughters got married shortly after I had returned from Kenya, the relationships in the family have probably changed once again. Probably Alice has increased helping, and Ruth will too, at least after she gets a job. Responsibility is becoming a little less for Lucy.

The third kind of an arrangement I will look at in this context is the situation where one family member is practically responsible for the whole extended family. Although in this thesis my perspective is mainly that of women, in what follows I need to make a small exception. Before going to discuss how extended family commitments may cause problems between the spouses, I need to elaborate how an individual, in this case a man, may end up in deep kin loyalties. At the same time, I want to point to many positive aspects of a close-knit family, a family where members can trust each other to be taken care of.

A large extended family - Being the responsible one

Next, I will discuss loyalties and responsibilities in one particular extended Luhya family. It consists of eight siblings, their children and spouses, living mainly in Nairobi and Western Kenya. Also children of the deceased family members are there to be taken care of. There are little less than 40 persons in this family. One of the brothers, whom I will here call Charles, is the main character in this story as well as in his extended family in reality. In addition to him, five of the siblings or their spouses are working. Most are unemployed, and some have not yet

¹⁷⁶ Interview 21.1.2003

started or finished their professional education. The parents passed away about 15 years ago, and according to Charles, the father passed the responsibility of the family to him before his death. Before going to discuss his present position the family, I tell a shortened version of his life story, based on our discussions. I will concentrate on the aspects of family commitments in it.

How I became the one who helps

Charles was born about 40 years ago to uneducated parents in Western Kenya. When he was a young boy, his three elder brothers were already living away from home, being at school. He says that he already started helping his parents financially when he was about seven years old, picking up guavas and selling them, as well as earning money by taking care of a neighbour's goats. He started school later than usual, at the age of nine or ten, "*because I couldn't start earlier than that, because of these duties and so on*".¹⁷⁷ At school he took afternoon classes to be able to work in the mornings. He used to cut sisal and catch fish from the lake nearby and sell it. He handed over all the money he earned to his parents. With this money, his father "*would actually be able to give some school fees to my elder three brothers, and then he would actually give some of this to help feed the family. So we actually had a very special relationship between me and my father and my mother.*" By that time one of his elder brothers already had a steady job. When Charles went to boarding secondary school, his elder brother used to pay his fees, and in addition was able to support the parents. As money was still not enough, Charles started to earn money by digging land for people. He also had a small plot of land, where he used to plant cabbage and other vegetables, and sell them. He tells that by the end of the term, he always had some money to give to his parents. Because his mother had become sick, and could not work properly anymore, Charles decided to open a small stall for them by the road, where she could sell soap, sugar, matches and so on. His elder brother was so impressed by his efforts that he decided to give money to the parents to open a real shop in the village. He says that they were making good business for a while, but then, just as Charles was about to start high school, his elder brother lost his job, and things became more difficult.

Charles moved to another part of Kenya to attend a high school, and could not get a job anymore, because he did not have any social contacts in that area. He was also very busy with his studies. At the same time, the father had become sick. "*So the situation was very bad, my school fees was difficult to come by, my brother got no job, I didn't even have a proper uniform.*" They managed to struggle through that time, however, and after finishing high school,

¹⁷⁷ Interview 8.2.2003. All following citations are from the same interview until stated otherwise.

Charles got a position as an untrained teacher. With his salary, he was able to pay the school fees for his two younger sisters. In the mid-80's he got a scholarship to a university, and the situation became better for all of them. He used to earn about 2000 shillings (26 US\$) a month, out of which he gave money to his parents as well as continued to pay for his sisters' school fees. One year later his father died, and *"then the worst happened, because 1987 my mother also died, so when my mother died, the family was now actually left on me."* His younger brothers were still in primary school, and his younger sisters in high school. He tells that somehow he managed to send them all enough money to get by. Things improved when he got a job as a graduate teacher at the university with the salary of 7000 shillings (91 US\$) per month. He also got a chance to take a short course in England, and *"after that, I actually got a job in (London), but then I looked back home, and I declined to take a job. I came back."* Soon after that, he was promoted at the university, and gained a better salary. Things improved even more when he got married to a woman who was working in a multinational company earning a good salary. Charles earned his doctorate from a British university some time ago, and continues his work as a university teacher and scholar.

Taking care of the whole extended family

Charles is a central person in his extended family network. He is the one who holds all strings together, and no major decisions are made without consulting him first. His responsibilities are many. First of all, he accommodates some relatives. At the time of my fieldwork, their household consisted of himself, his wife, their two children, his niece, his brother and two young women from the wife's village. One of the girls had come to live with them to do the domestic chores, but after she went to get a professional training and started her own small business, they took her sister to live with them as a domestic servant. They paid her education, and the wife told me they will also pay for another sister's training after she decides what she wants to study. Thus, there were eight persons permanently living in their rather small three-bedroom house, and every time I visited their place, they had other visitors, too. They built the house some years ago because they felt that the rent they were paying at that moment was too expensive. Their house is built of cement, with small rooms and a small yard, where they rear chickens. Their lavatory is outside and their house does not have electricity. They do have a lot of books, though, piles of them (mainly Charles' professional literature) are shread all over the living room.

In addition to accommodating relatives, Charles is the main provider for the extended family members. He pays school fees, he gives money for food, and is mainly responsible for wedding and funeral costs in the family. Although he did not remember all the

exact sums he had paid last year, from what he told me, and what I learned from discussion with his wife, his two sisters and two brothers as well as his niece, I calculated the following: he spent at least 85 000 shillings (1105 US\$) for school fees, in addition about 40 000 shillings (520 US\$) per year for his sisters' and brothers' living expenses. In addition, he had hired an *askari* (guard) for his late parents' house, as nobody was living there at the moment, and paid him 2300 shillings (30 US\$) per month. Thus, basic 'fixed' expenses for the extended family were around 150-160 000 shillings (1950 - 2080 US\$) per year.

If expenses are compared to his incomes (his wife lost her job some time ago, and was now finishing her Bachelor's degree without an income), which is about 360 000 shillings (4680 US\$) a year, it looks clearly more than one third of his incomes goes towards taking care of the so called fixed extended family responsibilities. In addition, he had given money for his younger brother to start up a business a couple of times, approximately 10 000 shillings (130 US\$), and shortly after I had left Kenya, there were two funerals in the family. He estimated that on average, funerals in their Luhya community cost about 100 000 shillings (1300 US\$). In reality, almost everything he gets goes towards these responsibilities. Of course he also needs to pay school fees (approximately 70 000 shillings [910 US\$] a year) for his own two children, who are in a private primary school. In addition, he and his family are active members in their denomination, and have donated money for a new church building.¹⁷⁸ According to him, if someone counted their incomes and expenses, he is sure they would not have enough money, but he believes that "*there are miracles*".

Although financial issues place a great strain on him, his responsibilities do not end there. According to himself, as well as other family members I spoke with, he is also the one who is morally and intellectually advising the others. For instance, when I was in Kenya, one of his younger brothers was trying to find a place in a college. When I first met him, he told me that he would really like to become a chef, he would like to learn how to prepare different kinds of meals and he would like to work in an international hotel, maybe in Mombasa. His big brother did not agree. Charles told me that thinking about the future it was much safer to pursue a teaching career. Some months later when I talked with his younger brother about his possibilities again, he said: "*I don't know which one I will take, but my brother was in favour of this teaching*".¹⁷⁹ When I asked him what he thought about it, he said that he liked the idea as

¹⁷⁸ See Hasu (2004) on middle class people's relations to Christianity and donations, particularly in the context of Pentecostal church in East Africa, in which also Charles, his wife and the children belong.

¹⁷⁹ Interview 8.2.2003

well. Thus Charles seems to have convinced his younger brother about the possibilities of a teacher's career. Later I heard that younger brother had indeed started at teacher training college.

Charles is very respected by his relatives, who trust his capability and willingness to choose the best alternatives of the possible ones. His large network of friends gives him a possibility to arrange jobs and education for his family members. His niece explained:

"Because since he interacts with many friends, he's able to inquire about certain chances to most of us who quit form four examinations, or even class eight examinations. So he's able to communicate at least with friends who are in various places to acquire chances to some of us." ¹⁸⁰

His relatives may have become used to the idea that they can always rely on his help, but they did not take his help for granted. They were simply grateful for his help, and did not have anyone else to turn to. The younger relatives expressed the hope that they could play their own part later, if they got jobs.

When problems come up, Charles is the one who solves them, although his sister and sister-in-law can also give advice. When he was out of the country for his PhD studies, many things went wrong at home. Without his supervision, his younger brothers started having problems, and other family members were not able to sort them out. He explains that in that sense being abroad was stressing for him, and receiving phone calls or e-mails from home often meant getting bad news. However, Charles said he wanted to start giving his younger brothers more responsibility of their own lives.

"My main strategy at the moment is actually create, make these people realise that they are actually now adults, and should now start looking for ways to raise money and to begin to take care of themselves". (He explained further that one of the brothers has behaved in an irresponsible way more than once, but still:) *"I can't leave him starve. No, I cannot, but I don't want to, because he's an adult, I don't want him to feel that everything else is ready, like I've done in the past, in the past I've made many mistakes."* ¹⁸¹

In many situations when Charles' extended family members need help, they do not ask directly for money, but instead they explain him the situation and ask him for advice. For instance, once when he was visiting our place and we were sitting and talking, his mobile phone rang. It was one of the relatives, who asked what should be done to his son who had been drifted into a bad company. Maybe he should be separated from those people for some time? Charles suggested that he should come to Nairobi to live with them for a school vacation to get away from the bad company. After the phone call he explained to me that the conversation he just had was typical:

¹⁸⁰ Interview 8.2.2003

¹⁸¹ Interview 8.2.2003. All following citations are from the same interview until stated otherwise.

“They don’t have to say everything black and white. I know, when they call me, I know what they are saying. You know so I’ve got to start thinking about how we can help this situation”.

Although Charles is the most educated in the family at the moment, it is not the (only) reason for his position. For many years, one of his older brothers was more educated, and had a good job. Charles told me that actually his father decided before his death that Charles was going to follow him as the one who leads the family. According to their traditions in their community, it should have been the oldest brother, but Charles suspected that the fact that he was helping so much already as a child made his father realise that Charles is responsible enough, and as a matter of fact, the most responsible among the brothers.

Although he seems to enjoy his role as the one who is responsible for everything and who arranges money, accommodation, education and jobs for extended family members, it is also hard for him, particularly when solving more serious problems. He tells that *“there has been a lot of you know strain, yeah. Certainly in those cases I’ve developed a very high blood pressure”*. That is why he has also tried to move part of his responsibilities to others. As I mentioned earlier, he tries to make his younger brothers see that they should now begin to take care of themselves. In addition, when we talked about his niece’s education, he said to me that at least he tries to get the money from her parents, he tries *“to discourage, I say no no no, please take care of your responsibilities”*, but eventually he does not refuse to help if others cannot provide for the school fees for instance. He understands that in the long run it is better to educate as many family members as possible. However, he is not very confident about the future. When I asked him if he thinks things will become easier during the years to come, he was suspicious. He explained that the employment situation is so bad in Kenya that not even those who finish their studies and graduate from the university can expect to get a job. So instead of expecting that by educating some family members they will be able to help the others in turn, he thinks that they will eventually be his responsibility in the future as well. In addition, there are many small children in the extended family who need to be taken care of in the future.

When I followed the way Charles arranged family issues and calculated money transfers, it really became clear that their family is a network, which is dynamic and changing. Family members’ actions had impact on others. During the end of my latest stay in Kenya, one of the brothers was just finishing his studies, while another one was about to begin his. Actually the fact that one of them was about to graduate made it possible for another one to start studying.

Negotiating 'kinscripts' – Susan, Lucy and Charles

After focusing on Charles' situation as the main provider in the large extended family, and Lucy's and Susan's families' arrangements, I will now turn to discuss some themes that can be found from what I have told above. In all these three families, there are certain negotiations going on concerning helping kin. These negotiations are based on kinscripts, the moral framework that steers family members' actions and loyalties, as I discussed earlier. Situations change, and when they do, new agreements need to be made. In this way, negotiations concerning new commitments and agreements construct new kinscripts in the families. Actions of each individual family member have an impact on other people in the family. Family responsibilities have had a strong impact on the way Susan, Lucy and Charles have lived their lives. They all have made many decisions and choices from the perspective of the whole family, not just themselves or their conjugal - or nuclear - families. According to my interpretations they have also given up some of their own aspirations in order to provide for their family members.

For instance Susan had remained in the household of her mother and sisters, although she had been planning to move out, being 35 years old. She was, however, aware that her mother and her sisters would be in trouble without her input. Even if she provided for them financially after moving on her own, it would cause some other problems. For instance, so far, whenever the youngest sister, who has the children, has had a temporary job as a housemaid or second hand clothes dealer, Susan is the one who has mainly taken care of the children, particularly the youngest one. As a language teacher, Susan has most of her lessons in the evening, and is often free during the daytime. If she moved out, it would become even more difficult for the youngest sister to try to get even temporary income, as long as the youngest child is not at school. Of course, living on her own would also mean extra costs in form of rent etc. Susan, like her mother, has a strong sense of obligation for other family members, and she would not make decisions without considering their effects on the whole family.

When it comes to Lucy, one can also see clearly how family commitments have made her postpone her own plans. So far, she has put the extended family needs in the first place, and for instance has not got married in a church, because the money was needed elsewhere, although she would have liked to. She, however, was also planning to have a church wedding in the near future, and was saving money for it. She had her first-born child during my stay in Kenya, and was planning to move to a bigger house further from the centre. They had already found an appropriate house to live in, and were only waiting for Lucy to get back her strength after delivery. The new place would be more conveniently located regarding Lucy's work place,

where she would return after her three-month maternity leave. In a way, their child was born in a good moment, as Lucy's sister Alice now had an income, and would probably assist a lot more than before. Thus, Lucy could afford to invest on her own nuclear family for a change.

On the other hand, Charles and his conjugal family could - although he never brought it up to me explicitly - live comfortably in an upmarket area with their incomes, if they decided to. Instead, they have a modest, although cosy, house in the outskirts of town. They have been saving a long time to install electricity to their house, but the money is always needed somewhere else in the extended family. In addition, he might get a possibility to go and work abroad. But, as he says, although this way he would earn more money to take care of the family, he is reluctant to leave because of his strong role as a 'moral mentor' in the family. He would, however, welcome a short-term stay abroad. As came up in his life story, his commitments have also caused him stress and health problems. I often witnessed this. For instance one Sunday when we met for a lunch, he looked exhausted. He told me that he had stayed up past midnight trying to solve his younger brother's problems with his sister and sister-in-law.

Maybe the way that responsibilities are shared in the families of Susan, Lucy and Charles in a different way can be further highlighted by looking at their family and household forms. In an earlier chapter I discussed the differences of the terms 'family', 'nuclear family', 'conjugal family' and 'extended family', as well as families based on either conjugal or consanguineal ties. I will now look at the three households and families discussed in this chapter from these perspectives.

The household of Susan consists of a mother, her five daughters and the three children of one of the daughter. However, in her family, Susan includes the brother who does not live with them and who does not take part in the expenses of his mother and siblings. Her extended family includes her grandfather, as well as her both parent's siblings and their children, i.e. her cousins, and furthermore their spouses and children. Hers is not a nuclear family, neither is it a conjugal family, because there is not a single marital tie in the household or immediate family. Perhaps her household and immediate family can be counted as extended, because there are the children of her sister. In terms of conjugality and consanguineality, this household and family is consanguineal, where members are related to each other by 'blood' ties.

The household of Lucy is a conjugal family, but not purely nuclear nor extended. The two young women related to her husband who were living at their place where not there permanently, although for extended periods. In practice, it was more extended than nuclear. Lucy's family, on the other hand, included her parents and one sister, who lived in one household, and her other siblings, who lived in another household together. In her extended

family were involved also her husband's parents and his immediate siblings, as the father-in-law was polygynous. As I have focused here on Lucy's family networks, and not specifically those of her husband, ties to her side are emphasised here, as they were in Lucy's accounts. The three households that make the core of Lucy's family are very different. There is a nuclear conjugal household of her parents, an extended conjugal household of herself and her husband, and the consanguineal extended household of her siblings.

The household of Charles consists of a married couple, i.e. Charles and his wife, their children, a varying amount of relatives in different times, and two non-relative members, who were according to my understanding counted as family members as well. They were taken care of and educated like relatives, but they were also expected to behave like other family members. In other words, these non-relatives from the wife's village had become family members by the process of some sort of "kinning" (Howell 2001, 207). Thus, their household consists of a conjugal extended family. Their family includes all Charles' siblings and their spouses and children, as well as the wife's parents and a brother with his wife and the children. His (extended) family consists of many conjugal and nuclear families. The unmarried persons were accommodated by the conjugal families, although some students resided in dormitories.

Furthermore, thinking about the members of the households / families and their responsibilities concerning the relatives, these households / families are also different. The household and family of Susan is closed and joint, they don't help relatives much, and they all try to contribute to the costs of the household. The conjugal family of Charles is very open; Charles helps almost in a limitless way his relatives. Charles' family is very segregated when it comes to helping, it is mainly Charles who has possibilities and willingness to help. The household and family of Lucy resembles that of Charles, it is open, but the roles are not as clearly segregated. The sisters of Lucy help each other and other siblings, as well as the parents. The dynamics in this family has probably changed a lot since my last visit to Kenya, because two of Lucy's sisters have married and moved abroad.

Below, differences between the households and the families are shown.

HOUSEHOLDS

	<i>nuclear</i>	<i>conjugal</i>	<i>consanguineal</i>
<i>Susan</i> (Kikuyu)			X
<i>Lucy</i> (Luhya)	X	X	
<i>Charles</i> (Luhya)		X	

FAMILIES

	<i>nuclear</i>	<i>conjugal</i>	<i>extended</i>	<i>consanguineal</i>
<i>Susan</i>				X
<i>Lucy</i>			X	
<i>Charles</i>			X	

HOUSEHOLDS VIS-A-VIS RELATIVES

	<i>open</i>	<i>close</i>
<i>Susan</i>		X
<i>Lucy</i>	X	
<i>Charles</i>	X	

SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES INSIDE HOUSEHOLDS OR FAMILIES

	<i>segregated</i>	<i>joint</i>
<i>Susan</i>		X
<i>Lucy</i>	X	X
<i>Charles</i>	X	

It may be easier to show the differences in diagrams, which address the above discussed issues.
The main characters (Charles, Susan, Lucy) are marked in yellow in each diagram.

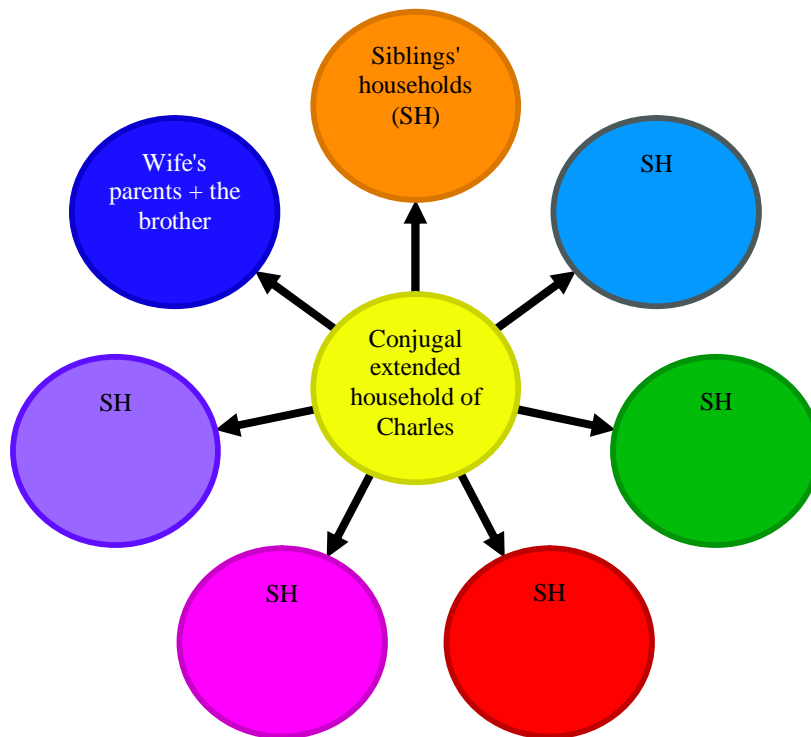


DIAGRAM 1. **Family of Charles.** In the middle his own conjugal extended household, and around it, many households of different compositions (not marked in detail here) of his siblings. The position of Charles in the middle shows his central place in the family responsibilities, and the arrows show the direction of helping.

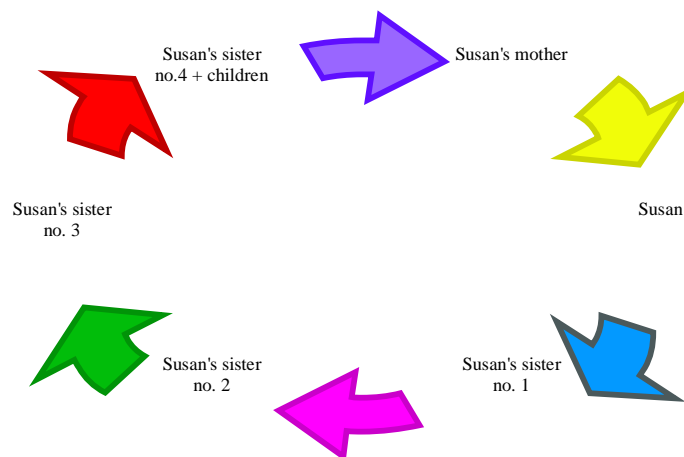


DIAGRAM 2. **The household / family of Susan.** All adult persons in the household help each other, some financially, some in other ways. The brother, who lives elsewhere by himself, is also included in the family. Thus, apart from the brother, household and family is the same thing for them at this point in their lives. Extended family members are not closely involved in Susan's and her siblings' lives.

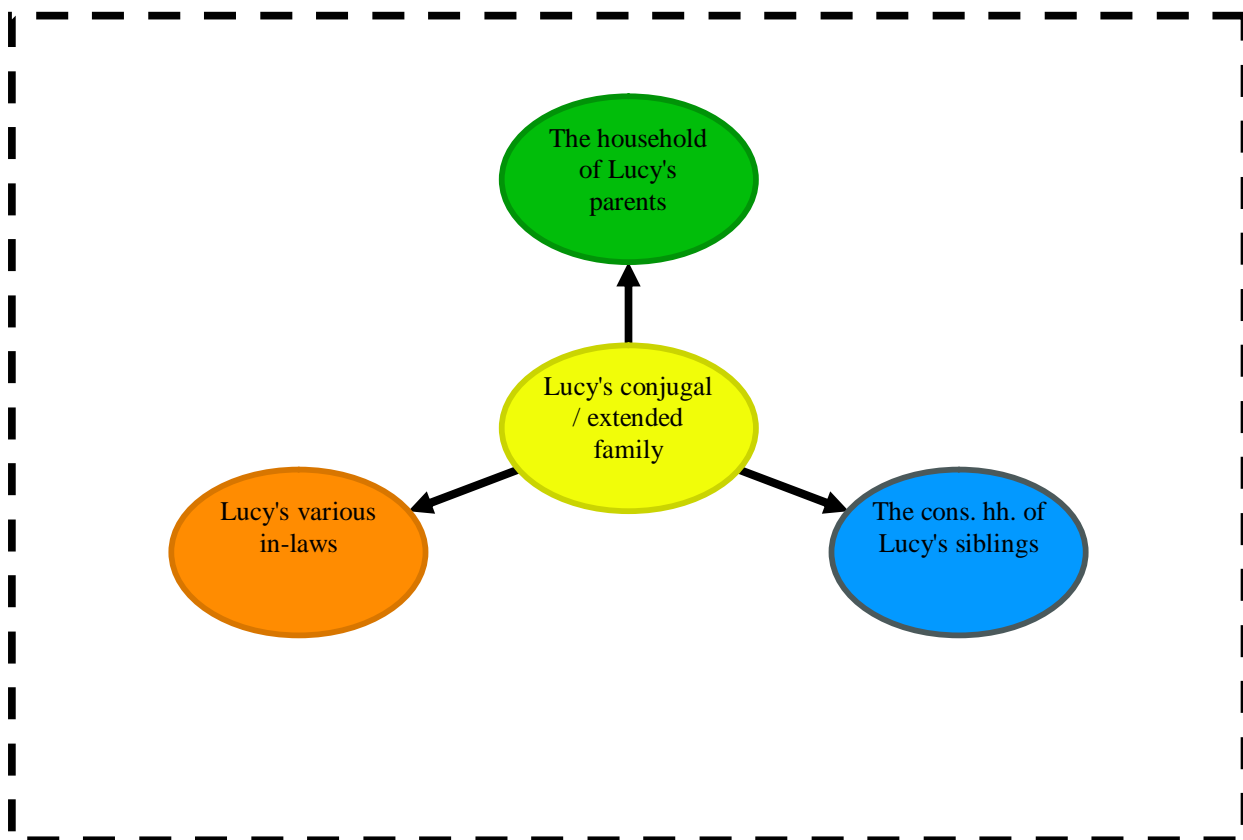


DIAGRAM 3. **The family of Lucy.** In the middle the conjugal family of Lucy. The form of their household varies from nuclear to extended depending on situations. The arrows show the direction of helping in the time of the fieldwork. Earlier, Lucy's parents have helped their children, and in the future, her siblings will probably participate more.

7.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at opinions, arrangements and negotiations concerning kin loyalties and obligations. With these considerations I have aimed at showing that *family networks are dynamic and changing*, and they are under constant negotiation due to changing circumstances. I have also wanted to bring into light that loyalties to kin are many, and to take care of those really demands a lot, both financially, socially and emotionally. It is possible that the more people do for their relatives, the more obliged they feel to continue. Nancy Folbre (2001, 86-87), who discusses family obligations in North America, asks:

“Would you love your parents more if you knew that they were going to move in with you in their old age? Would you feel closer to your brother if you had to support him when his wife ran out on him and his children? Maybe. But you would probably also feel resentful and frustrated.”

Her words point to the fact that although giving hard times, helping kin is also rewarding, and strengthens relationships inside families. The time dimension of kinscripts, “kin-time” as Stack and Burton (1994, 33) call it, becomes evident; each person has different responsibilities during different stages of life, depending on the person’s own financial and other life situations, but also on the needs that arise in specific situations. These examples also point at the fact that expectations are not always outspoken, but still, people are more or less aware of the expectations of their extended family members, and they feel that they need to take their responsibility. In the beginning of this chapter I presented women’s views concerning kin responsibilities on a general level. In the stories of Susan, Lucy and Charles, these feelings of obligations and loyalties are shown in their actions and choices. People help family members, because they feel they have to. Partly this goes back to the reciprocal thinking according to which the fact that they have received help when they have needed it (particularly when it comes to education), leads to the fact that it is their turn to help now.

These examples also point to the underlying patriarchal order of family life. For instance, Charles’ role is that of a patriarch, he has power and he uses it, but he is also benevolent when it comes to the family members. His wife did not complain about the situation to me. Instead, she said that she is used to living close to the relatives and helping them, because her parents always used to help relatives as well. Her parents are well educated, and they have a spacious house in the countryside. The wife says that when she was still working, she was also supporting her parents, who are retired already, but at the moment she did not have proper means for helping. In their family, the patriarchal order seems to work, and it is notable that Charles did not neglect his nuclear family at the cost of the extended family.

I want to emphasise the fact that the role of the one taking care of the whole extended family, like Charles, falls most often, if not always, to a man. I would have included a story of a woman acting in the same role had I known of such a case. As became clear in the case of Lucy, women may be active supporters in their family networks, but I did not come to know any women with such a strong mental and financial command of the entire family as Charles had. It would be difficult to imagine that a woman could be in such a strong position in the extended family as Charles was, due to Kenya’s patriarchal cultural milieu. Although ethnic differences are not my main interests here, one should mention that these examples point to a tendency which, according to the data I have in use, is in my view predominant: Kikuyu families are more closed when it comes to helping relatives than Luhya or, say, Luo families.

Here, I have also addressed the heterogeneity of family and household forms. There are a variety of family and household forms in contemporary urban Kenya, and it is impossible to place them in the classification nuclear / extended family. Even if the relationships between the members on which the households are built around are added, like I have done, using the terms conjugal and consanguineal, picture isn't clear. It is also important to examine responsibilities and expectations, and how they are divided and directed. To address this, I have used the concept segregated / joint to point to the responsible individuals in the households / families, and open / close to point to the amount of help given outside the household.

Particularly when the households are open in their relationships with relatives, and the roles of different family members are highly segregated, the one who has most of the responsibilities may end up in a situation where the interests of the nuclear/conjugal family and extended family are clashing. In the conjugal relationships of Charles and Lucy, their kin commitments have not caused big disagreements between them and their spouses. In many relationships, these kinds of heavy duties cause constraints, and I will next turn to discuss those.

CHAPTER 8. KIN LOYALTIES AND MARRIAGE. STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH DIFFICULTIES

“We try not to be too aggressive, or to break that myth [of men’s power as head of the home] right away – it must be gradual. If you want to change it abruptly, you encounter a stronger resistance.” (A prominent women’s leader in Kenya, cited in Stamp 1991, 843.)

Now, I want to look more closely at the inner dynamics in those conjugal and nuclear families where spouses are completely tied up with responsibilities with kin. In what follows, I will discuss what happens if the spouses do not agree on the amount that the relatives should be helped, or if the wife is excluded from the process of deciding altogether. Here, the perspectives are those of the wives. This chapter brings back many issues discussed earlier, such as the impact of education to women’s opinions and attitudes, marrying, bridewealth and polygyny, and links these to relationships between the extended family members.

When planning my study, or even during the early fieldwork periods, I did not look for conflicts in marriages consciously. However, they steadily came up in my discussions with highly educated women. When I studied the conflicts between the spouses more closely, I realised that they were practically always at least somehow connected to wider kin relations. For this reason, I decided to deal with the relations between the spouses and their relations with kin together. I think in that way I can better discuss many aspects in these situations, and their inter-relatedness. I also think that bringing some potential issues causing conflicts into discussion helps me to point to some crucial dilemmas in middle class family lives.

With the following considerations I try to point to these issues, discussing different strategies that two women, whom I will call Jane and Helen, have developed in order to cope with their lives, when it comes to their marriages and kin relations. I will consider their situations from the analytical perspective of kinship obligations and gender contracts.

Why have I chosen these two women’s stories to highlight kin-related conflicts in Kenyan middle class marriages? Their cases are not exceptional, the information they revealed to me is not unique. However, their stories point exceptionally clearly at so many issues which came up in my discussions with many women that I felt these issues need to be brought into discussion here. In addition, Jane and Helen were more open about their marriages than many other women. I did not know them as well as many other women; actually I only met Jane once, when interviewing her. Helen I met more frequently. The fact that we did not know each other very well, and I did not know their families, may actually have been the reason for their

openness. Had I been a regular visitor in their homes and had I known their husbands, they might have been more careful about revealing their negative feelings, as I sometimes sensed in other women's cases. As it is, they had nothing against their stories to be written and analysed. Another reason for choosing their stories for a closer reading is that I admire these women's articulate way of expressing themselves, and their courage to deal with difficulties in their lives.

First I will tell address the situations they have faced in their marriages, and then discuss these on a more analytical level binding together some issues in highly educated women's lives that reveal gender dynamics particularly poignantly in Kenya.

8.1. "I've made a decision to be submissive to a certain degree". Jane's story.

Jane is a Luo woman in her forties, and works as a secondary school teacher. She has children from her previous marriage, which ended when her husband left abroad years ago, and never came back. At the time of the interview, she had been married to her second husband for four years. Her husband is a Luo widower with two children. They do not have children together. Jane is more educated than her husband, who is a successful businessman. When her first husband left, Jane waited for him to come back for many years, after which she went to court to dissolve the marriage.

After the divorce, she stayed alone for some time, and then married her present husband. Her mother was actively involved in arranging the new marriage, as she wanted her daughter to marry again. Jane had already refused to marry some other men that her mother had introduced to her, saying that she was not ready to marry yet. Finally she accepted to marry her husband-to-be, because she was feeling lonely, and "*he APPEARED (emphasises) to be a good Christian*".¹⁸² At the time when I met her, she was very disappointed in her marriage, and was thinking about getting a divorce. After Jane's first husband left, her in-laws helped her in many ways. She tells that they regarded her as their daughter until they died. But this became problematic at the time when she was marrying her second husband. She tells:

Jane: "*I wanted to be wed through the church, we organised everything for the church wedding. But in the day of my wedding, my previous family intervened with it. They didn't*

¹⁸² Interview 18.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview, until noted otherwise.

want me to go public about my marriage". (She turns her head and looks like she is about to cry.)

Johanna: "So your previous in-laws?"

Jane: "Yes."

Johanna: "Can they do that?"

Jane: "They threatened me with a court interaction, and coming from the background of very respected people, the family felt that I should not go to church. I should leave the whole idea, they would pray for me and..."

Johanna: "I'm sorry."

Jane: (gives a brief, sad laugh)

Johanna: "And although it was their son who disappeared---"

Jane: "---He disappeared, I was not to blame and they know that. After that they tried to apologise and to behave well, but they had already spoiled it".

Because of her previous in-laws' resistance, Jane and her new fiancé had to cancel the church wedding, and marry through customary law, although a church wedding was what she had wanted. When I asked her whether her ex-in-laws could prevent the church wedding, I meant if they have some kind of legal means to do that. Although Jane did not answer my question directly, she referred to a possibility of them taking her to court, and talked about the respectability of her ex-in-laws. More than being afraid of the legal interventions, I believe that she had decided to give up the idea of a church wedding because of the loyalty she felt for her them. Regardless of how they had behaved, Jane still wanted to remain in contact with her ex-in-laws, not least for the sake of her children. However, her present husband did not like her close relationship with them.

Her present in-laws, on the other hand, are around more than she would like to. They have lived with Jane all through her present marriage. She said that the relatives were always there. When I met her, her two-bedroom house was crowded: In addition to four children, they accommodated her brother-in-law's child, plus two to five different people all the time. She and her husband had different views about this. According to her, he saw no problem:

"Like he comes from a very extended family, the father is quite a polygamous man. And now again my house is full of relatives. Not at first it used to irritate me so much, and when I would talk to him he wouldn't see the sense, but I learned to cope with the situation."

Although Jane does not like her in-laws to stay with her, she does not show it to them. According to her, they generally like her, and do not consider her as a problem, but rather as "a wonderful lady", because she never complains about them. Jane said that the relatives may not even know the conflict that they are causing between Jane and her husband.

Johanna: "How about extended family members, what kind of a relationship you have with them?"

Jane: *"Many of them are very close to me, many of them. Because I learned that I can't say no, I've been zipping my mouth about them. So they really don't see me as a problem, they think I'm a wonderful lady, cause I won't complain whenever they come. And they like me generally."---*

Johanna: *"How often do you see those relatives?"*

Jane: *"They do come to my home, my house. There is no single time when just family is alone, right now there are three of them in the house."*

Johanna: *"Do you have, when they are staying too long, do you have conflicts with them?"*

Jane: *"No. They must just assume that I like. Like I've said, this co-wife was there over a year, the baby, when she was there for one month, I asked my husband what kind of plans does he have. Then he responded funny, he asked me what do I want him to do? To chase his relatives away? And I kept quiet (whispering)."*

Many women told me about the same kinds of problems with their husbands, concerning the in-laws and other kin. Sometimes they were able to discuss these issues with their husbands and find some kind of a solution or agreement on the matter - often they were not. In Jane's case, things are worsened because, according to her, the husband is not willing to discuss issues. For instance, she had tried to inquire her husband about his plans regarding his brother's second wife, who used to stay with them. Instead of being willing to think about different possibilities, he had asked Jane if she wanted him to chase his relatives away.

Jane has been careful with her husband. According to her, she has understood that the man is a dictator, and she has to speak very softly in order to make him listen. She said that she has learned to be submissive to a certain degree to make the marriage work. She told me also that she tries to save the marriage, even if she had to make compromises. Her words were: *"I've made a decision to be submissive to a certain degree"*. When I asked her how she felt about that, she said that she felt like betraying herself, but *"that's the way he wants it"*. Thus, she had a strategy to cope with her husband and kin: to be submissive, but only to a certain degree. In some situations, she kept quiet, while in others she talked, but softly. This is highlighted even in the way she whispered when saying *"And I kept quiet"* above. Her strategy seems to have a goal: to balance in her situation so that she can make certain compromises to make her marriage work, but, she will not compromise in anything.

When wondering reasons for her husband's behaviour, Jane referred to the differences in their educational level. She had a Bachelor's degree, and used to teach in a teachers' training college before her second marriage, whereas her husband has not gone to university. She argued that her husband felt inferior because her education was better than his:

"But I think that the main problem is not me as not recognising him as the head of the house, the problem is his education. 'Cause when I reason out with him I can see him feeling very bad. Then he starts telling me that he is a very respected person in his work place, he's able to advice so many people in his work place. Here I am not recognising that. So then I realised where his problem is."

She was able to analyse her situation in a wise way, and she kept on analysing it to understand his husband's opinions. When I think about Jane's situation, it feels clear that she was not only analysing it because we were talking about it. On the opposite, her ways of approaching their problems signify, in my view, that she had been thinking about them profoundly, and had been seeking ways to influence her husband without causing more difficulties.

Jane's husband was generous to his own relatives also in other ways than accommodating. According to her, he gave more money to them than to her children, which was not fair in her opinion. She also felt that they were not living in the way that could be expected at the level of his husband's salary, because all money was going to his relatives. In their household, Jane was paying for the kitchen, and the husband paid most other things, except her children's school fees. Finances were causing arguments, and the problem was once again the lack of communication; the husband was not willing to talk about how they should share the costs in the family. Here again, Jane's conciliatory attitude towards her husband becomes clear:

"There was a time he felt that I'm not spending my money the way he wants me to. Then I asked him: How do you want me to spend my money? --- He told me that I don't want to dictate you on how to spend your money, but I'm telling you that you're not spending your money in the right way. I told him that is not a solution to our problem. Tell me what you want me to do with my money, and he kept quiet."

Jane had tried to balance in her marriage by taking a submissive attitude, more so than she would have liked to. As she was not happy with the situation, it is possible that she ended up having another divorce. Due to limitations of anthropological research far from the researcher's home, I have not been able to follow Jane's life after our encounter, and can only wonder which direction she chose for her life.

8.2. Separating and coming back together. Helen's story

Another family with very similar problems is that of Helen's. Helen is in her thirties. She is doing a postgraduate diploma in social sciences at the university after working many years in a government office as a middle-level civil servant. She is married and has three children with her husband. They are both Kalenjin by ethnic background. She has been married for five years, but only lived together with her husband for about two years, because earlier they were working in different towns. Some months after they had moved in together, they had a bad crisis in their

marriage, which almost led to a divorce, and they separated for some time. At the time of the interview, they lived together again, but she was not happy with the situation. The major problem in their marriage, like in Jane's, seems to be related to kin. This becomes quite evident in the following, which is a part of our discussion. Before that, we had discussed some background issues concerning her and her marriage, and when we were talking about living arrangements, she had told me that they have always provided accommodation for relatives. When I asked her how she felt about living with them, she said:

*"Mmm, I'm not comfortable about it, to speak the truth. It feels better now. That's where we are very different, where we differ most. When he used to live alone, he used to have very many young men living with him. Some are job seekers, some are just idling, just staying with him, have come from the rural area to stay with him. And he likes that. He has no problem with that at all -- -So back on relatives, they moved in and they stay with us and that means that the house is so crowded. I can't handle it."*¹⁸³

She further told me that they had three bedrooms. Luckily they only had daughters so that they could all be put in one bedroom, which they shared with the maids, who were relatives. As one bedroom was reserved for Helen and her husband, the third one was left for the visitors. She told me that at the time when she was expecting her youngest child, her husband used to bring even ten visitors every day and the situation got really bad:

"Things got out of hands. There was a time when I would have literally a new set of people every day, every evening, you know, he would come with new people, they would leave the following day and that evening he would come with another group. ---It almost became serious, you know, he said if I can't stand his own people, I can't stand his relatives, then I might as well confess that I can't stand him also. We quarrelled over that and I said yeah, if that is what it takes...---Because he said he's a man of the people, he has always stayed with those people, and I should not be a reason to separate them. Yes, that was the most challenging time. We got over it and right now there's less people, but he's not happy about it. He's not happy. There are some people, he reminds me 'you remember the last time so and so came to visit me, he has never come back again and it's because you are too cold towards them'."

Helen told me further that the only problem was not the number of visitors per se, but particularly the fact that her husband made the decisions concerning the visitors alone and hardly informed Helen about them beforehand. Another thing that caused constraints was money. Helen said that she was providing for the household alone. According to her, her husband bought clothes to the children or food to the house only occasionally. Recently he had paid school fees for one term to their youngest daughter, but usually Helen was responsible for them also. Instead, the husband was helping his relatives financially to a considerable extent. Helen

¹⁸³ Interview 10.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview, until noted otherwise.

estimated that her husband was “*dishing out sixty percent of his salary*” to his relatives. She was not satisfied with this, as is shown in the following citation:

Johanna: “*Would you like your husband to help more, to give less money to his--*”

Helen: “*---Yeah, and more to the family (gives a brief laugh). Not only that. We also have a long long way to go in terms of our settling, we don’t have a house, at home we don’t have a house, we still stay in our parents’ house, which is very old and small, so whenever we go home [to the countryside] we put up with one of his brothers. And that’s what I find it to be very inconvenient. And I feel it’s long overdue, we are supposed to be having an own house. At the rate which he’s doing that, giving out, we’re not able to settle down. For us to be able to do that, he has to cut up.*”

To solve their problems, Helen had tried to talk to her husband. According to her, he was not willing to discuss them with her. When Helen noticed that she could not solve the problems with her husband alone, she turned to her in-laws and talked to her husband’s elder brother’s wife (her parents-in-law had passed away). Helen had told her about the situation, about the fact that she had to provide for everything alone. Helen explained to her that she could not afford having all those relatives with them, because living expenses in Nairobi were so high. According to Helen, her brother-in-law’s wife seemed to have understood, and seemed shocked to hear that Helen’s husband was not supporting her and their children. However, when she went back home, she had told other relatives that she did not like Helen’s attitude of not welcoming relatives to live with them. Helen had tried to solve the problem together with her in-laws, but unfortunately it had not worked out. The impact was opposite from the desired one: now her in-laws knew about her feelings, but did not appreciate them.

Eventually, she had become so tired of taking care of all those extra people that she had separated from her husband for a while. She had, however, felt that it was not a right decision after all, and they had moved back together. Although, as she said, things had become better, neither the husband nor Helen was satisfied in their marriage. According to Helen, her husband was feeling that she was putting too much limits on his social life, and blamed Helen for worsening his relations with kin.

Helen told me that she could have not anticipated these things to happen before they moved in together, although they never discussed before they got married how they would organise things. She told that “*I was surprised, I was shocked, I was depressed, but all the same I felt that no, it was not a normal thing that should happen and I thought it as because we are not able to communicate, to discuss such issues.*” When trying to explain the way things had turned out, Helen provided a very similar explanation as Jane did earlier. She had come to a conclusion that the real problem behind their difficulties was the fact that she was too

independent, too educated. She felt that her independence was also causing problems, since her behaviour blurred the roles in the family. She told me further:

“And I think this might be because I started working first, before I got married, so I guess I used to being independent. It didn’t occur to me that I should stop. Now I think that I should let him do some of his duties, because it has some side effects that I have not liked --- But it seemed to me that I was to blame for all this. Even the fact that he does not provide for household, it was all due to my fault, cause I never stopped, I was too efficient. I never stopped to let him chip in.”

Now, I will turn to discuss the situations of Jane and Helen from the point of view of kin loyalties and gendered contracts inside families.

8.3. Challenging gendered kinscripts

There are lots of similar elements in Jane’s and Helen’s marriages. They both have problems with a husband, who brings too many visitors in their homes, without consulting the wife. Both women’s husbands rather use their money for the relatives than for their nuclear families. Both women have problems in communicating with the husbands. Both think that the main reason for conflicts is their independence and education.

Their situations have many features which indicate the kinds of issues that highly educated women confront in their lives in contemporary urban Kenya. First, they point to the fact that ‘new’ attitudes and actions of professional women are causing special kinds of problems in family life, both between the spouses and especially with the extended family members. It seems that husbands are more willing to have wider and tighter social contacts with kin than wives, and that is one of the main issues to cause arguments in the middle class urban families. Second, they point out that women’s individuality is causing troubles, because the traditional patriarchal order in the family changes. Consequently, confusing situations may rise up, if the spouses are not willing or able to discuss new possibilities and gender roles.

Family loyalties in Jane’s life

I already used the concept of kinscripts to point to the moral framework in which family members’ acts and obligations are considered when discussing family loyalties of Charles, Susan and Lucy earlier. Thinking about Jane’s and Helen’s situations with the concept of

kinscripts, there seem to be many things that highlight the role of kinscripts in their lives. Jane's behaviour has strongly been affected by different kinscripts. For instance, in both of her marriages different feelings of loyalty have affected her behaviour and decisions to a great extent. After her first husband had left her, she remained loyal to him for a long time. She did not get a divorce until after her husband had been abroad without contacting her at all for years. Later, she showed loyalty to her mother, who wanted her to marry again, although she was not really excited about it in the beginning. She was also loyal to her ex-in-laws, when they insisted that her new marriage should not take place in a church, but instead, through customary procedures. She has also stayed in good relations with her present in-laws, despite her irritation by their prolonged visits.

There was one aspect in Jane's marriage, which was making things even more complicated. Her husband had recently informed her that he wants to marry his girlfriend, making her a second wife. I talked about this situation in chapter concerning polygyny. What comes to her husband's plans to marry a second wife, the relatives had been actively involved in finding a solution to the situation, which they considered as problematic. Both her own and her husband's relatives were against the husband's new marriage. Since the husband did not seem to be willing to give up his plans, Jane's brother had suggested that she should get a divorce. He had told her to organise a meeting between her relatives and her in-laws, where her relatives would return their cows, i.e. the bridewealth the husband had paid. Although she has tried to solve the situation with her relatives, at the time when we met, she was still trying to save her marriage, and in this way, she was acting against her relatives. She was, however, loyal to her parents, who, according to her, wanted her to stay married.

Breaking the contracts?

I now turn to look at the marital relations of Jane and Helen and their respective husbands more closely. Here I need to go deeper into contracts, and add another central dimension, gender, to the considerations. As already stated, kinscripts are expectations towards family members, expectations that they are - at least to a certain amount - aware of. Kinscripts define, to some extent, people's behaviour as family members. So do gender contracts. Similarly, kinscripts always contain aspects of struggle over power (Stack and Burton 1994, 37-38), as do attempts to change the gender contracts (Hirdman 1991, 191). In Kenya, the patriarchal order, embedded in customary laws and practices, favours men. Thus, men are probably more comfortable with the

present situation than women. Whenever one wants to break the gender contract, or act against the “irrefutable”, it is likely that conflicts emerge, and these conflicts need to be negotiated and solved, in order to come up with a new contract.

The family members often form a “plural subject” when acting in the family. This means that in many situations, they are jointly committed to achieve a certain goal, be it for instance educating a family member. But in addition, individual family members do have their own personal goals, which may be in contradiction to those of a plural subject. (See Gilbert 1996, 2.) People sometimes act against what is expected, against their obligations, breaking the family and gender contracts. For instance, it might look like Jane and her husband were working towards a common goal as a plural subject in showing hospitality to the relatives. But closer attention shows that Jane is only pretending to be a part of a plural subject and to enjoy the visits of the extended family members. She acts in line with these expectations, but in reality, her loyalties are directed towards her conjugal family, and especially her children.

In my opinion, Jane has tried to change the unarticulated contracts in her conjugal family. She has tried to discuss kin relations with her husband, but after realising that it was useless, she has developed strategies to talk to her husband so that he would not feel threatened. She has also decided to send her daughter abroad to study because she could not cope with her stepfather. Another important decision she has made against her husband’s will was to refuse to open a joint account with him, so that he could use their money for taking a new wife.

It looks obvious to me that Jane did not want to break or stretch the limits - the “irrefutabilities” in Hirdman’s (1991, 191) words - too much in her marriage. She has not fought openly, but has rather tried to keep a soft tone when trying to make her way (see also Haram 2004, 223). It is as if she thought that her education and individuality already were too risky for her marriage, and she did not want to make it any worse. Still, being submissive was not what she would like to be, and she tried to affect her husband in a soft way.

Although kin-related problems have an important role in their disagreements, there is another level as well. Namely, the relationship between the spouses is problematic to some extent. Their marriage was a joint decision based on rational reasons and loyalty to kin. Because of that, in my opinion, the role of expectations, commitments and contracts is highly important in their relationship. Still, Jane and her husband have not talked about what exactly they committed themselves to when marrying. Jane thought that she would be in a better position socially and also emotionally with a husband. However, things did not turn out to be that way. Although I have not talked to her husband, I can imagine he wanted to have a wife to take care

of the children and the home. Jane's role in the family is to be the one who takes care of the visitors, who feeds them etc. Her husband welcomes everybody, but does not do much else; he seems to be the one who helps, who hands out money, but in the end, it is Jane who takes care of the most responsibilities. Emotionally Jane has not been happy with the husband, and their relationship lacks conversations and mutual agreements. The role that the husband had reserved to Jane was not the one she wanted to live in.

Thinking about Helen, she has made a lot of important decisions during their marriage, challenging gender contracts and kinscripts more openly. She decided to take a postgraduate diploma in social sciences, which she was doing at the time of the interview. The husband has been quiet about it, and while he is not really encouraging her in her career, she thinks that he is not actually against it, either. When she got married she decided to remain a Catholic (the husband is a Protestant), and bring up the children as Catholics as well. As a Catholic, she will not use any birth control methods, and the husband has not opposed her on that. She also made the decision that they should move to the same town in order to be able to live together. She was also the one who decided about the separation, "*I kind of kicked him out of the house, yeah, I told him to leave us alone*".¹⁸⁴ When she realised that she was wrong about the separation, she asked him to come back. Although they have fewer visitors now, and situation has become better in that sense, their different views have created tensions between Helen and her husband, as well as Helen and her in-laws. But even Helen has not turned away from the relatives completely: she did seek for help from her in-laws, but without success. When I think of Helen's story, I get an impression that she is actually the active agent in the family. In a similar vein, Jane is the active agent in her family, although in a more hidden way.

Balancing

There are some aspects in Jane's background that can explain her current situation. She lived independently with her children from the previous marriage before moving in with her present husband. She was working, she took care of the children and the household, and she made all the decisions independently concerning her everyday life. She is well educated, but when she got married, she gave up a better job in another town in order to live with her new husband. Her husband does not seem to appreciate the relatively independent lifestyle she has got used to. Although the husband knew that she was used to providing for herself and making her own

¹⁸⁴ Interview 10.2.1998

decisions, Jane could see that her husband was irritated because she continued to do so even though she was now married to him. Thus, Jane started to break, or stretch, gender contracts because she had to; she was left alone and had to take care of her children. Pretty much in a similar way, Helen started to make independent decisions because she was the one who was living with the children when she and her husband were working in different towns. These women had become used to making independent decisions and taking care of errands at home. From their accounts one can see that they had not even realised that they should have changed their behaviour because of moving in with a man.

However, both understand their husbands' situations, whose family histories and past experiences have created certain loyalties towards extended kin. They also recognise their husbands' unselfish personalities, and even respect them for those qualities. Their husbands' life histories resemble that of Charles, of which I told earlier. Both husbands have received a considerable amount of financial and other help from their extended family members, and also other community members, and, according to the wives' interpretations, feel like they have to pay back their debts by helping any community or extended family members when needed (see also Oppong 1974, 57). According to Helen, her husband *"thinks he's some kind of a charity work organisation (laughs), he's out to dish, whenever someone comes and he's in trouble, he feels that he's under obligation to assist."*¹⁸⁵ Helen and Jane understand that their husbands are in the web of loyalties and expectations from which it is very difficult to step aside. However, there is only so much one can bear, and in their families, the husbands have crossed the limits. Despite of that, Jane and Helen are understanding. They are looking for reasons to their conflicts from their own behaviour. They seem to blame themselves for being too independent. They know that they have not acted according to patriarchal family order, although their husbands would like them to, and they know their difficulties derive from there.

Backlash

The husbands of Jane and Helen act as patriarchs when it comes to decision making concerning kin in their nuclear families. They do not have the same power or authority when it comes to their relations with their wives. Here, the conflict between the patriarchal order and highly educated women's different views comes clear.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 10.2.1998

Perhaps the husbands were feeling that they were left aside by educated and independent wives like Jane and Helen. Interestingly, the husbands' territories seemed to be the relatives, on whose movements they did not much bother to inform their wives much. They were probably more associated with their relatives than their conjugal / nuclear families, and things they COULD actually control had to do with kin. Both husbands had articulated their identification with kin quite clearly. As earlier came up in the interview citations, Jane's husband had asked her, "*what do [you] want [me] to do? To chase [my] relatives away?*" when she had tried to discuss whether his brother's second wife and her child might find another place to stay after they had lived with Jane for one year. Helen's husband, on the other hand, had responded to Helen's uneasiness to live with the relatives in the following way: "*[If] [you] can't stand [my] own people, [you] can't stand [my] relatives, then [you] might as well confess that [you] can't stand [me] also.*"

8.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have focused on situations that may arise in conjugal families if one of the spouses, normally the husband, has lots of obligations and loyalties to kin. This becomes particularly problematic if the wife does not share the husband's views on obligations, and worse still, if the husband excludes the wife from decisions concerning kin relations. I have also looked at marital relations, pointing specifically at women and men's different understandings of their roles. This mainly has to do with the fact that many highly educated women want to distance themselves from the patriarchal family order, and this is not accepted by all men. Women usually act according to the feminist rhetoric in Kenya, which implies subtle criticism and balancing, rather than overtly expressed demands.

As I have shown above, spouses may not have many possibilities to solve their problems if their relations with kin are very close, because they do not have privacy in their home. There is no space where they could discuss without others hearing them. And even if there was an opportunity, husbands may not be willing to discuss their problems. According to Potash (1995, 69), kinship ties are so important in East Africa, that loyalty to the relatives can often be more important than loyalty to the spouse. In Jane's and Helen's families, the husbands' loyalties clearly seem to be directed towards kin at the wives' expense.

I think that in Jane's and Helen's opinions, the gender contracts were mainly the ones to be changed in their families. Kin contracts or kinscripts should also be changed in order to be able to solve the problems, but this is a question of negotiation, which would actually come from changing patriarchal gender roles, i.e. gender contracts. Perhaps the wives' aims to change the gender contracts in these families have caused strong resistance in the husbands, which has consequently led them ally more keenly with their relatives.

CHAPTER 9. TO DISTANCE ONESELF FROM KIN

As already became evident in cases of Jane and Helen, kin loyalties may have tremendous effects on the marital relationships. Sometimes the arguments between the spouses lead to a divorce or separation; sometimes the situation goes on but the relations between the spouses or between them and the relatives may not be very good. The latter situation demands balancing and compromising from both parties, but particularly from the wife.

However, to avoid such a problematic situation where the spouses' views concerning the relatives are conflicting, many middle class people choose another way. They withdraw from close contacts with the relatives, so that spouses can have more privacy and less kin-related conflicts. I will now look at some families' arrangements to live as a nuclear family, or at least to consciously limit kin contacts and focus on the conjugal family. I discuss reasons for these decisions, as well as the impact of 'withdrawing' on their marital and kin relations. I will also look at the situation from those relatives' points of view, who feel that their family members are not acting according to expectations.

9.1. To avoid problems, stay on your own

Living close to the relatives may cause problems, both between the spouses and between the *wife* and the relatives. It was very rarely, if ever, that I heard of problems between the *husband* and the relatives, in spite of close contacts. Partly this may be explained by the fact that women are more often responsible for the household, and they are the ones who are supposed to feed the visitors and take care of them. Another reason is that relatives are more often those of the husband than of the wife, and the wife may feel uncomfortable and insecure in the company of her in-laws, particularly in the beginning of the marriage. However, the fact that I have focused on women in this research may also have an impact on this interpretation.

Although some, usually quite young, recently married women did not express their frustration towards living close to the relatives, most women with whom I discussed did. In practice, they try to cope with the situation often in similar ways as Jane and Helen earlier. Sarah described African families, and at the same time, her own family, in the following way:

*“I, you know, like African families, we are so extended. That there’s no single time that you’ll find that you’re staying alone. You get to stay alone maybe for one month, two months, but those relatives will always be there. So we always accommodate them as much as we can, we can’t chase them away, although you might find that there are some relatives who are annoyance. But we tolerate that annoyance.”*¹⁸⁶

Sarah is married with three children, and works in a relatively high position in a public sphere. Her husband has a PhD and he is successful in his career. She lives alone with her children most of the time, because her husband is working abroad quite a lot. However, there often are relatives living with her. When we met, she did not have anybody staying with her permanently. Although, above, she says that they cannot chase the relatives away, she later told me that she has once chased a distant cousin of her husband away, because he was bringing visitors to the house late in the evening, and she could not stand that. She also said that she has refused to take her husband’s niece to live with them, because she had a closer relative in Nairobi, who also was well-off, and who, according to Sarah, should take care of her.

Relatives bringing problems

The relatives whom my informants provided accommodation for were mainly from the husband’s side, but not exclusively (see also Githinji 2000, 137). I am aware that relatives should not be considered as one homogenous group, but one should rather pay attention to things like who are accepted, who are not etc.¹⁸⁷ As I did not focus on this systematically during my first two fieldwork periods, my considerations lack a detailed analysis on this matter. It does not, however, seem to make much of a difference from whose side they are. Rather, women often express less patience with male relatives, who do not help in the house. Women are more welcome, as they usually take part in the household chores, whereas male relatives do not, and thus increase women’s work in families. (See also Githinji 2000, 138-139.) However, some women had problems also with their sisters-in-law, who borrowed their clothes without asking and acted very arrogantly in the house.

Generally, many women knew of their friends’ or relatives’ accounts or of their personal experience that relatives brought problems. For instance, Fiona, a 26-year-old mother of two, who lives with her husband, children and a maid, explained:

¹⁸⁶ Interview 26.2.1998

¹⁸⁷ Nigerian-American sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi emphasised this to me (personal communication, Autumn 2000).

*“You know, since we got married, we’ve tried as much as we can to distance ourselves, you know? We visit them, we like them to visit us, but we’re not really staying together with our other relatives. In fact my husband used to stay with his nephew and niece, but when I came in, he told them to maybe look for another place to stay, because we know that such people as those they bring in other problems. In fact that distancing ourselves has really helped us. Because we haven’t had any problems --- Because if they come to stay, obviously there’s so many problems.”*¹⁸⁸

Fiona and her husband have never lived with the relatives, and they decided to live in a nuclear family form when they got married. Fiona’s husband was living with relatives before moving in with her, and had some problems with them, because they used to come home late at night. They have also heard from many friends about the problems that living with relatives can bring. Based on these experiences, they had decided to live by themselves.

What kinds of problems do relatives then bring into a nuclear family? Women participants often referred to the general arguments that relatives can cause in the family because the more people there are, the more different opinions there are as well. More specifically, there are some interesting issues that came up in our discussions; namely the relatives’ impact on privacy and closeness, on the one hand, and freedom of acting and behaviour, on the other hand. Aim at privacy and closeness has to do with one’s own space – a demand not easily connected to an idea of a Kenyan family - and with the emotional relations between nuclear family members. Freedom to act in a way sometimes customarily not expected from women or particularly men, has to do with the fact that relatives may control and steer spouses’ behaviour, encouraging them in different directions than they would like themselves. I will first focus on the issues of privacy and closeness, and then on the aspects of behaviour.

Lack of privacy and closeness

Colette, who is a Maasai doctor in her forties, lived without relatives. After accommodating them for years, she had decided that she had had enough. She tells that she had realised that *“I’ve nowhere to put my feet down [in their house]”*, because they accommodated three or four grown-up men all the time.¹⁸⁹ Although they had a spacious house, with four bedrooms, in her opinion it got too crowded there. At that time she lived in the house with their four children, her husband and a maid, in addition to these relatives. In this situation, she had told her husband that if the relatives are not going, she will find a job in another town where she can live in peace. Her husband had seen her point, and when I met her, they had lived five years without relatives. In

¹⁸⁸ Interview 9.2.1998

¹⁸⁹ Interview 17.2.1998. All following citations are from the same interview, until stated otherwise.

her view, “*unless it’s extremely important, we don’t take anyone*”. However, she said that their relatives did not understand their aim at privacy, and they kept on saying to Colette and her husband that “*you have a big home, what are you complaining?*”. They did not withdraw from their responsibilities altogether, but continued to pay considerable amounts of school fees for the members in her large natal family. Collette did not specify what she means with privacy, except for having some physical and mental space in her own house.

Many women, however, brought more explicitly up the meaning of privacy. When the relatives are around, women feel that their relationships with their husbands and even with their children cannot be very close. Particularly, lacking privacy will damage relationships between the spouses, and prevent them to get to know each other properly, as well as solve possible arguments when they pop up. Elizabeth, 44, a Kikuyu librarian married to a doctor, wants to limit the number of visitors to a minimum. At the time of one of my stays in Nairobi, she lived with her husband, three children, a nephew and a maid. According to her,

*“There’s interference, you don’t have that kind of freedom you would like to have with your children and your husband. You want to talk together, there are some things you want to talk to the children about, even without their father to be there, so kind of discussion and whatever. When there’s an outsider you can’t do those things.”*¹⁹⁰

In a similar vein, Florence, who is a 27-year-old Master’s student and lives with her middle class Kisii parents and her child, because her husband is working in another town, says she has noticed that her in-laws do not interfere each other’s lives very much. She is happy with that, because “*I think that when you don’t have interference from the people, you actually, you tend to be yourself, tend to live your life so that at least I know what my husband wants and he knows what I want, yeah.*”¹⁹¹ Because of that distance, she had not had problems with her in-laws.

Control of the relatives

In addition to the lack of privacy between the nuclear family members, the relatives who stay, and especially the in-laws, bring another kind of a dimension to the marriages that many women are not satisfied with. They often feel like Zipporah, 42, who usually does not accommodate relatives in her large house: “*When my mother-in-law is here, my husband does nothing*”.¹⁹² She means that when they live as a (Kikuyu) nuclear family, her husband can do some tasks which are customarily not considered to belong to men, like helping in the kitchen or taking care

¹⁹⁰ Interview 16.2.1998

¹⁹¹ Interview 6.2.1998

¹⁹² Interview 19.2.1998

of the children, but when the relatives are there, husband acts in the way he was raised to act. In many ethnic groups men have been discouraged to enter the kitchen. For instance, customary Kikuyu practices did not allow men to cook or wash utensils without putting both themselves and the women in an awkward position (Kenyatta 1995, 54). Men seem to be quite sensitive on their reputations as 'real men'. Many women told me that their husbands may change the diapers for a baby, for instance, but if the wives even mention it to somebody, husbands get really upset. Similarly, they may prepare food, but first they make sure that nobody sees them from outside by closing the curtains in the kitchen windows.

And even if the husband himself would be willing to break the boundaries, his relatives might consider it inappropriate. This is highlighted for instance in an account told by Christine Oppong (1974, 128) of a Ghanaian couple who had studied and lived abroad. After returning back home, the couple had found it very difficult to maintain the customs they had developed abroad, including more equal sharing of housework etc., because of the pressures from the extended family. In similar veins, women may feel forced to act in a more 'traditional' way than they would feel comfortable with when relatives, particularly in-laws are around. As I have pointed out earlier, highly educated women would like to have a husband with whom they could share intimacy and discuss anything, and who would also be flexible when it comes to the gender roles. This kind of a family life is not quite possible when living with relatives, and often the wives feel they are blamed by the in-laws for being too radical or modern.

9.2. *Living nuclear*

Carol has been married for about seven years. Her natal Kikuyu family is very modern in many ways: Both parents have studied abroad, the father used to take care of the children when the mother was out of country for her degree, and he is accustomed to do all sorts of household chores. Her husband comes from a much more traditional family when it comes to gender roles. They had some difficulties because of this in the beginning of their marriage, before they could adjust to each other's habits. Presently they are, according to Carol, quite comfortable. However, clashes still take place, particularly when (husband's) relatives come for a visit. For instance, Carol told me about her mother-in-law's reaction towards unfamiliar gender roles in Carol's family. The following incident took place when the mother-in-law was invited to celebrate Carol's birthday together with other relatives.

*"I remember once, it was last year, it was my birthday, she was visiting town, and I had a six-week-old, so we couldn't go out for a dinner, cause the baby was too small, so we invited my dad home for dinner together with my brothers, and guess who was in the kitchen? My husband. She [mother-in-law] was so offended, you know, we were sitting down, then my brothers were taking beer with my father, they were taking alcohol with my dad and they were talking very freely, and I joined them in the chat, and then my husband was in the kitchen cooking, so she finally asked him, 'Hey, what's up? WHAT IS GOING ON [emphasises]?'"*¹⁹³

According to Carol's interpretation, her mother-in-law was so offended about the fact that her son was preparing dinner on his wife's birthday while she was chatting freely with the visitors, that she withdrew from the company and went to bed.

Luckily they do not need to worry about the relatives too much, because both of them come from prominent Kikuyu families. Nearly all of their immediate relatives, meaning their sisters and brothers, are well educated and financially independent. Furthermore, her husband is the last born in a (polygynous) family, and does not have many responsibilities towards family members. The wife's parents are well educated, and her brother is financially independent as well. In this sense, they do not face many expectations, be they related to finances or accommodating, from other family members. Their household consists of their nuclear family, and a maid (who is not a relative) who lives with them. They have decided not to take any relatives to live with them, because of the past experiences. Here is a part of our conversation:

Johanna: *"You don't have any relatives living [here]?"*

Carol: *"No, I said no."*

Johanna: *"Have you ever had?"*

Carol: *"Yes, it was a disaster."*

Johanna: (giggles) *"In what way?"*

Carol: *"In all the ways, but I think when people learn to depend on you too much, basically it was my husband's niece first, then his nephew and then my own cousin. And what happened, these people are all working, but they didn't contribute towards the house expenses, so you're feeding them, you're providing them, you're housing them, they're using the services of your maid to wash their clothes, and finally someone can't even clean their own room, you know, if you tell them to do something... you know they start to feel like they're part of the decision making process in the house, so then the clashes start coming in, they don't contribute towards anything, so I said no, I rather live on my own. And if I was to help these people settle, what I will do next time, I'll rather pay their rent somewhere for about three months, until they're settled, and after that let them take care of themselves. But living with people can be extremely tricky, yeah."*

Johanna: *"Did you only have one at the time?"*

Carol: *"Yes, it was one at the time, and each of those times it ended as a disaster. You know."*

Johanna: *"Mmm, how long were they [here]?"*

¹⁹³ Interview 22.11.2002. All following citations are from the same interview, until stated otherwise.

Carol: *"(Julie) was nine months, (Jack) was six months, and my cousin was six months also."*

Johanna: *"So what kind of a disaster was it?"*

Carol: *"They get too used to the place, you know, and for instance -- with the nephew to tell him to buy anything, they had good salaries you know, so with his nephew we told him to buy something, he gets annoyed, he feels like YOU (emphasises) have the obligation to take care of everything. So no more of that."*

She further states that they were not wise enough to understand that they should have been more strict with the rules of the house right from the beginning, because *"you try to be nice"*, and then problems slowly started popping up. In those three cases where they eventually told their relatives to move out, their relationships deteriorated for some time, but not permanently. According to Carol, their relatives must have understood eventually that they had actually helped enough. Although Carol and her husband had decided not to accommodate relatives, they did not categorically refuse from helping other ways. As she said above, she would even be ready to pay a rent for a relative for a few months to help him or her to settle down. Considering their financial situation, that would cause no problems.

9.3. Running away from responsibilities

Implications of distancing

When some members of the extended family decide to distance themselves, it may cause some turbulence in the family. How do the rest feel about these relatives who have turned their backs on them? What consequences does this distancing have? The effects, and consequently other family members' reactions, may be small or almost non-existent, or they may be considerable and pass responsibilities forward to those who have not distanced themselves. According to Christine Obbo (1987, 268), it makes one's position in the family uncomfortable. It is not, however, as simple as that. Rather, the consequences depend on the circumstances of the families. If all immediate family members are financially independent, one can more easily say that one *would* help sisters and brothers and their children, but they do not need help. Other relatives should find other resources. But if one of the siblings for instance is wealthy, and others are not, his or her position is difficult: to decline has many practical effects, like lacking possibilities for education, medical treatment, or even food sometimes.

Carol's and her husband's decision to make some distance by refusing to accommodate relatives in their spacious house in one of Nairobi's most upmarket areas is not likely to cause huge problems to their relatives. As already stated before, their relatives are well-off, and in case somebody would need help, there are plenty of those who can help. However, on Carol's husband's side, they seem to include only his immediate sisters and brothers, and not the children of his father's other wives. They have not succeeded in life as well as Carol's immediate in-laws, but both Carol and her husband seem to give little thought on those people. They do not seem to consider them as being on their responsibility. Carol is, however, conscious about the fact that her husband's other siblings might expect something from them, and might see their responsibilities differently.

Apart from a few very wealthy families like that of Carol's, in most Kenyan middle class families the decision to withdraw from family responsibilities causes reactions. In one Luhya family, one of the brothers did not want to take any responsibility of his siblings and their children, although he had a good job and a Master's degree from an American university. He did not even welcome some of his brothers to his house for a visit. One of the brothers explained his older brother's behaviour followingly: *"He has always tried to run away from his responsibilities. He has always, actually all the time that I have known him, he has never been very serious about his duties."* This man clearly pointed out that in his view, his big brother would have responsibilities, but he is not acting according to expectations. Furthermore, he explained that *"his situation is not bad, but I think he's just selfish. That kind of a person he is."* He thought that many of those responsibilities he is forced to take care of, could be shared with his older brother, which would make things much easier for all of them. In spite of his disappointment on his brother's behaviour, he has not turned away from his big brother's children. For instance previous year he had paid the school fees for his niece, when the brother had had problems with money. According to him, the children should not suffer from their father's choices.

Similarly, in another (Kikuyu) family, there was also a brother who did not take care of his responsibilities, and other family members were left in an awkward position trying to cover all the expenses and needs with their small salaries. He had earlier lived with the rest of the family, but had moved out some years ago. One of his siblings told me that he was causing a lot of trouble while still living with them, drinking and bringing girlfriends to the house. He was also neglecting his duties. Although they kept contact with the brother, he visited seldom, and other family members did not visit him. He had regular incomes, and was making enough

money to take care of himself. In addition, in his family members' views, he could have helped them as well, but he did not. The mother said that he did not help them in any way:

“He always tells me... you know he agrees with anything, but he doesn't do anything. He tells me I'll help if I get money, but ... never does.” (Another family member agreed with her and said:) *“he knows we need, but that is his personality, he doesn't give --- we've asked many times, but he says he has some projects he's undertaking so he cannot support us.--- I think he's just selfish.”*

Another side of the story?

I became aware of the sensitiveness of the family obligations during my latest stay in Nairobi, when I had decided to focus on family networks. During my earlier fieldwork periods, when I wanted to talk with women only, I did not have problems to find 'informants', except for the time tables which were sometimes tricky. But during the last fieldwork, when I said I wanted to study family networks and consequently talk to other family members as well, some of them were not willing to participate any more. I sensed that they were reluctant, although they may not have articulated it so clearly. Particularly much this was so with women in prominent families. Why were they willing to talk to me individually, but not knowing that their husbands or other family members would talk to me too? Although I had even during the earlier stays talked with people who had distanced themselves, I did not get a very clear picture about how it affected the rest of the family. On the latest trip, when I wanted to interview many family members from the same family, I faced another side of the story. Many people told me about their wealthy relatives, who had distanced themselves from the rest of the family. As I realised that these things are often sensitive family issues, I do not bring reveal here which families I refer to when giving following examples. For the same reason, I did not include references for the citations in the chapter above.

I would have liked to talk with these persons who had withdrawn from family obligations, but I never had a chance to discuss with them. I only met some of them briefly in family occasions. It is noteworthy that I never had a chance to talk to any of these 'distanced ones' in their family contexts. I often asked if I could sometimes talk with them, but as it was never arranged, I did not insist it either. As has already become evident, I met individual persons who had more or less cut their relations to relatives, withdrew from the responsibilities, or at least clearly limited their help. And I met other people who had these kinds of people in their family. But I did not meet both of them from the same family. So, in any particular family, my perspective is either the one's who had withdrawn or the ones' who are left behind.

This may have to do with the fact that distancing often places a person in an uncomfortable position in a family and s/he is not as close to other family members as s/he was before, and not only out of her/his own will. Contacts become less, and these people are not a part of their family members' everyday life, and perhaps I did not meet them for that sake. However, I think the situation is more complicated. Perhaps it has something to do with my feeling that some of those who had withdrawn did not want me to hear another version of their family situations. Partly this may have to do with difficulties in studying elite people in general, the tendency to 'close the doors' and open themselves to only those who belonged to the same group (see for instance Odendahl & Shaw 2001, 299), partly because they were perhaps concerned about what other family members might say. Maybe husband would tell about their marriage in a different way, maybe the relatives would not speak in a nice way about their well-off relative who had withdrawn from her responsibilities? I wonder if I was given a too homogenous picture of the families I studied? This reminds me of Pierre Bourdieu's words about ethnographers who often offered 'an official version' of things - instead of how kin relationships really are practised, we are told how they should be in an ideal situation (Bourdieu 2002, 37).

In addition, I wonder what impact might the fact that often it was the person with the most responsibilities in the family who introduced me to their other family members, have on people's accounts? Did this fact make the rest talk in a certain way? I think that those who spoke about their kin relations were talking sincerely most of the time, although certainly there were also things that were silenced about, some sorts of 'family secrets' (see Rosenblatt 2001, 896; Ellerby 2001). In addition to kin obligations and avoiding them, the secrets may have to do with polygyny (see Latvala 2004). But still: What would I have heard from those I did not have a chance to talk to at all? How would these commitments and arrangements look like from their points of view? In any case, I am aware of my partial view to kin loyalties.

9.4. Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed some people's choices to distance themselves from family obligations. In other words, they have reduced openness towards relatives, and become relatively closed, particularly when it comes to providing accommodation. It looks to me that women more often than men want to *limit kinship contacts* because they want to focus more on the conjugal relationship. Reasons for this are partly *financial*. Many middle class women are

tired of relatives who ask for money, because many of the educated themselves were not affluent in economical terms. Many were civil servants with low salary, or had not found a proper job after graduation. In spite of that, paying school fees for younger relatives was often regarded as an obligation. Very often the financial help causes distress between the spouses as well as to some extent between the couple and other relatives.

According to my understanding, however, the biggest problems in middle class families, at least from the women's points of view, are caused by accommodating the relatives. Although that, too, means financial burden, it is interesting that those who declare that they want to have distance with the relatives, do not explain their decision in terms of money. Rather, they explain that they want to have more *privacy in their nuclear families* than living very close to the relatives allows. Avoiding the relatives would thus lead to an improved relationship with their husbands, and indirectly also with the relatives. When relatives are around, problems appear, both between spouses and between the wife and the relatives.

Thus, by taking distance from kin, women are actually trying to make their marriages better. They are preventing and avoiding problems as much as possible, and this way try to make their conjugal family relationships closer and stronger. Whether or not this is possible depends on much more than both spouses' willingness to do so. What needs to be thought about is the kinscripts in the whole extended family, i.e. how responsibilities and obligations are divided, and other family members' financial positions as well as attitudes.

CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION: TRANSFORMATIONS AND CONTRACTS

In this research, I have studied highly educated women's family relationships in Nairobi. My approach to the family comes from Kenyans; the family includes the extended family members. This understanding of the family as a network of relatives is in line with the ideas of African feminist thinking, which emphasises communality; women's lives are looked at in the context of their social networks, of which family is one of the most important. More precisely, I have focused on the highly educated women's marital relations, on the one hand, and on other family relations, on the other hand, and shown how they are interlinked and how they affect each other.

Contents: A Brief Summary

Part I: "Contexts"

In part I, I presented the factual and analytical contexts of this study. In addition to a short description of the early stages and recent events in Nairobi and Kenya, I discussed family and gender in the 'traditional' and contemporary Kenyan society. I presented the customary idea of a marriage in Kenya as an alliance between two extended families, and stated that in Kenya, one can marry through customary ways or through a statute law, or combine both ways. I pointed to the important role of bridewealth and polygyny in Kenyan marriages, and stated that today's sexual relations need to be thought in the context of HIV/AIDS. I defined middle class in this research as consisting of those women (and men) who are educated up to a university level. I pointed to the fact that this group is heterogeneous, and their actual social and financial positions vary to a considerable degree. I also discussed the research methods, the data and the participants of this research.

I also presented the analytical tools which I have used in order to make my thoughts clearer. The general framework, which has steered my thinking, is the postcolonial feminist thinking, and particularly the ideas of African feminism. This has opened my ideas to see families as extended family networks, as networks with practical concerns and contracts. From here, I found the idea of 'kinscripts' of Carol Stack and Linda Burton, which helped me in making an analysis of the family obligations and networks in the studied families. To look at the kinscripts as gendered understandings, I presented Yvonne Hirdman's concept 'gender contract'. Later I showed that many women feel that their chances to act in the society, or even in their

own surroundings is limited, although education made women's positions generally better in all women's views.

Part II: "Marital Relations. Family Matters or Personal Choices?"

Part II dealt with marital relations. Most participants in this research wanted to include bridewealth negotiations in their marriages, although the wedding took place in the church. I showed the ambiguity related to bridewealth in today's middle class marriages; on the one hand women seem to ignore the issue, but on the other hand it seems to be of high importance. Also, women's roles in these negotiations were highlighted; as in the middle class families, wives pay the bridewealth together with their husbands, they often are active parties in negotiations and try to make a good bargain. The attitudes and practices connected to the bridewealth show interestingly, how highly educated women's aims for a more individual kind of a marriage are concretised. They want to be active agents in marriage when it concerns choosing the spouses, going through bridewealth negotiations or arranging weddings. At the same time, however, in line with the African feminist thinking, they try to balance with the traditions by taking into account the opinions of their extended family members and respecting them. From their discourses and actions, one can conclude that highly educated women in contemporary Nairobi marry individual men, not their extended families. This is indicated specifically in inter-ethnic marriages which often take place in middle class context. Still, the interrelatedness of one's own life and one's extended family life comes forth in the fact that most women, particularly when living in inter-ethnic marriages, had problems with their extended family members and in-laws.

I also discussed new polygynous practices and women's different positions in them. I showed that polygyny has changed from a family matter to individual, secret relations between the persons involved. This has generally made women's positions worse, but some highly educated women may also find polygynous unions providing more autonomy and independence than monogamous marriages.

Part III: "Kin Relations: Expectations, Loyalties, Conflicts"

In the last part, I expanded my focus from the marital relations to the relationship between marital and kin relations. First I showed that women participants shared a sense of obligation towards their family members. However, because of the tensions close relations to kin often cause, many women seem to be willing to put limits to these relationships. Particularly this had to do with providing accommodation for relatives. My interpretation is that women appreciate their conjugal relationships to the extent that they do not want them to be spoiled because of the

relatives, whose presence inhibits intimacy between the spouses and also makes them behave in the way they are expected instead of the way they would wish. In addition to the relationship between kin and marriage, I also discussed kin obligations and loyalties in length. I presented different families and their arrangements and negotiations to help family members. It turned out that in many cases obligations are more than one could possibly survive. Often this causes arguments between the spouses. One way to help the situation is to take distance from kin, and concentrate more on a nuclear family.

Fragments of possible worlds

In this thesis, I have discussed specific tensions that may arise in the highly educated women's lives when their worldviews differ from the underlying patriarchal understanding of women's places and spaces common in Kenya. I wanted to point out that the highly educated women are an important group in social change, and that they try to change the society, but as it is, they often find themselves balancing between two worlds, 'the old one' and 'the new one'. This balancing is present in their lives in many ways; in this research I have concentrated on its implications to highly educated women's lives as wives and members of the extended family networks.

I hope that the interview citations and my interpretations of them have showed the controversial feelings, attitudes and actions of many highly educated women in contemporary Nairobi. My intention has not been to build a coherent and seamless entity. Furthermore, the controversy between what is said and what is actually done come up in many women's situations. One can wonder why women may speak in a certain way, and act in another. On the one hand, this may have to do with the ideals and realities; we all may speak for instance about equality or kin loyalties in the way we would like things to be or the way we would like to think, but in reality we live life as it comes, sometimes against our wishes. This is well illustrated for instance in considerations concerning polygyny; in principle women are against it, but in practice, it may sometimes be a better alternative than something else. On the other hand, I am aware that women perhaps talked to me in a different way than they would have talked to a Kenyan researcher.

I have earlier explained my choice of not basing this study on people belonging to a certain ethnic group, or even taking ethnic differences into a detailed analysis on a regular basis. Some suggestive remarks on the meaning of ethnicity, as it comes into live according to

the data I have, needs to be made, however. It is possible that ethnic backgrounds are more meaningful in the lives of highly educated women than I have been able to discuss here. Even urban dwellers' kin relations extend to the countryside, where customary ways of thinking one's roles and obligations as a family member may be more important than in the city. Extended family members' opinions and expectations are part of highly educated people's lives, and may add many dimensions to the relations which I have not been able to grasp here. It looks to me that for instance in Luhya and Luo families, kin expectations and loyalties are stronger than say, in Kikuyu families. One reason may be the fact that polygyny is more common in Luhya and Luo families, and the families are thus bigger. There are more people to take care of. When it comes to marital relations, and particularly opinions to polygyny, this also probably has an effect. From the women I have interviewed and talked with for this research, Kikuyu women were less ready to have a polygynous relationship (especially a formal one) than Luo or Luhya women. More Kikuyu women were living on their own, unmarried. However, referring only to their ethnic backgrounds to explain these differences would be too simplifying. Here, I just want to stress the fact that my main purpose has been to examine the lives of highly educated women, and to leave the ethnic differences aside. A comparative research to focus on the impacts of ethnicity in these women's lives would be needed to shed more light on the issue.

My intention has not been to show if the directions many women I have talked with have taken are common or not. But I know they exist. These are phenomena which are present in the transformation of Kenyan society, and of which I have constructed certain views and certain interpretations when it comes to the reasons and dynamics of these transformations. In this way, my considerations discuss concrete cases with their own specific his/herstories, on the one hand, and show possible worlds, i.e. possible futures of the family or gender relations, on the other. Along the lines of the postmodern research agenda, I have pointed to some fragments of lived experiences, which show certain tensions and knots in people's lives. The main tensions that have been studied here, are the transformations concerning marriage, family, and gender relations. I will now discuss some issues that I consider central in these transformations, based on my ethnographic material.

Family as a web of reciprocal obligations

In this research I have shown that one important aspect of those Kenyan highly educated families studied here is that they consist of networks, in which kin and gender contracts are

negotiated and re-negotiated. According to my understanding of the ethnographic data this study is based on, negotiations on these contracts, particularly kin contracts, seem to form the core of family life. Families are not something fixed, but under constant negotiation, and these negotiations over responsibilities actually make families (see also Harkness & Super 2001, 365). Kinship ties can, for instance, either be kept alive or ignored as I have discussed throughout this thesis (see also Cattell 1997, 159). Although kin relations are not built entirely on moral responsibilities, but surely on emotional ties as well, they are often activated and tested in the situations which contain expectations or demands. In a society which lacks sufficient social welfare system, family is held responsible for its members' - children's and adults' - wellbeing in everyday life. In the data of this study, almost half of the families were extended conjugal families. According to Githinji (2000, 70), less than 18 percent of all urban families (from all social categories) in Kenya are extended. This further points, in my view, to the fact that highly educated people face many expectations by kin, and of course, are able to provide accommodation for the non-immediate family members. Although kinscripts differ from one family to another in a given culture, in some societies kinscripts contain more obligations and demands than in others.

For instance, Janet Finch and Jennifer Mason (1993, 180, italics in original) state in their research on family responsibilities in England that people in their research did not think they had a right to *expect* help from relatives, "let alone to *demand* it". Similarly, according to Marilyn Strathern (1992b, 26), in the Western world, people define their personhood according to what they are individually, not according to what their relationships to other people are. Thus, she argues that the individuality of persons is "*the first fact of English kinship*", where relations exist *between* individuals (Strathern 1992a, 14, 50, italics in original; see also Segalen 2001, 269). Surely relations exist between individuals in Kenya as well, but they are very closely tied to a more complex web of relations. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Celia Nyamweru, who explained to me (in personal communication) her understanding of these helping and loyalty networks in Kenya, which she calls "*triangles of patronage*". According to this idea, most Kenyans have people 'below' them in the socio-economic hierarchy; those who rely on them for financial or material support, advice, contacts and 'networking' links. In turn, most Kenyans have people above them to whom they can go in case of needing such assistance. There are also those on more or less the same level, but who may have particular areas of specialisation which one may not have oneself, like an access to a helpful lawyer or to a co-operative doctor and so on. A lot of assistance may not be strictly material, but consists of help by giving access to one's own network of 'people above' or 'people on the same level' to the 'people below' oneself. In

the same way, one may use one's own knowledge of the world and abilities that education has brought in assisting people 'below' oneself to get a visa, to apply for college, to get a job etc. Here, the financial costs may not be so great for the more educated, but it takes time and demands organising to do these favours.

Furthermore, as Nyamweru pointed out, if somebody turns to a more powerful person too often, one can use up one's 'credit'. Thus, one has to think thoroughly what to do in each case when assistance is needed or asked. One must point out that these 'triangles of patronage' do not include only relatives, but other people as well. Therefore, in these triangles, what are actually negotiated are not only kinscripts or kin contracts, but *welfare contracts* inside the networks. For instance, many middle class women I know in Nairobi have 'welfare contracts' not only with relatives, but also with their friends or neighbours. When one is part of this kind of a welfare contract network, one can be confident that she is taken care of in cases of troubles, if only possible. Here, the concept of reciprocity is central. Helping is not solely a one-way relationship: when the more affluent members of the family for instance give accommodation to a relative, or pay his/her school fees, they will receive a domestic servant from the countryside or are able to send their children there for school vacations (see also Obbo 1980, 116). In addition to more or less material support, family networks work as a moral and emotional basis on which to rely for all its members.

When it comes to highly educated women and men, they are often in positions where their relatives are socio-economically 'below' them. If that is the case, the expectations these people face may be overwhelming, and need to be limited. If they are more or less on the same level, then the relationship is a more reciprocal one, where people on the same level help each other in their own areas of expertise.

According to my understanding, reciprocity in kinscripts, triangles of patronage or networks of welfare contracts, does not – at least not only - mean that if you do something for someone you can expect the same person to do something for you in the future. Rather, you do something for someone because someone else has sometimes earlier done something for you, or for someone else in your immediate network, or because you can expect that to happen in the future. According to my interpretations of the data, reciprocity cannot be understood as a direct give-and-take relationship, where benefits are counted, but rather as a context of "co-operation and gratitude" (see Harkness & Super 2001, 369). I have not studied other than kin networks in this research. It is, however, possible that loyalty towards family members is more altruistic than towards non-relatives in these networks. Anyway, these are complex relationships with many different motives and agents, and it is based on, and creates, many "relations of dependency"

(Vuorela 1998, 6), be they social, emotional or financial.

On the one hand, kin relations and obligations cause tensions in the families, as I have discussed. But on the other hand, exactly these commitments make family members feel closer to each other and nourish the relationships between them. Taking care and taking responsibility is what family is mainly about. Certainly there are conflicts, and people at times feel frustrated, but in some ways the level of practically doing something for someone, is what keeps up the networks.

Marriage as a contract

Like family, marriage can be considered as a contract. However, those women's marriages I have studied here are not the kinds of contracts between the respective extended families as they used to be customarily. Rather, they have become contracts between the individuals, the husband and the wife, where different obligations and responsibilities are negotiated and agreed upon. Highly educated women studied here are moving towards what Claude Lévi-Strauss has called modern marriages. According to him, the basic characteristics of a modern marriage are "freedom to choose the spouse within the limit of the prohibited degrees; equality of the sexes in the matter of marriage vows; and finally, emancipation from relatives and the individual(s)ation of the contract" (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949], 477). In many ways, the marriages of those women I have studied here are 'modern' already; in other ways, like in emancipating from the relatives, they are going more and more in that direction. However, as I hope to have made clear, it is not a question of a simple transformation from 'traditional' into 'modern' marriage, or from 'nuclear' into 'extended' family.

In the families studied here, a happy marital relationship is not first and foremost about love or companionship between the spouses (although that was the ideal picture of marriage), as it is about the fact that the spouses agree on their responsibilities. This implies that they think similarly when it comes to their mutual relationship and their roles as a wife and a husband, as well as to how much and in what ways relatives are involved in their lives. This becomes quite obvious in the way women talked about their families as well as in the way things were - or were not - working out in them. Women did not bring issues concerning kin explicitly forth when describing a good marriage. Instead, the presence of kin very often became an issue in a problematic marriage. Thus, although more individual, the marriage contract does not exclude the extended family completely. It looks to me that in the families with many problems,

the husband's loyalties and commitments were directed towards his own extended family members, more than towards his nuclear family, wife or children (see Potash 1995, 69). According to my understanding, among the middle class people, the main reason for a husband to neglect his wife and their children is the preference he gives to his extended family at the cost of his nuclear family. The situation may be different for instance in very poor urban families, where the husband / father may fail to take care of his wife and children simply because he lacks even the basic resources to do that. Another important reason for a middle class husband to ignore his nuclear family may be another, most often unofficial, wife.

The role of polygyny in a contemporary middle class environment highlights the nature of the marital relations as contracts. As I discussed lengthily earlier, even a highly educated woman who is against polygyny in principle, can consider that option if she is sure that her husband continues to take care of his responsibilities also after taking another wife, mainly such as providing for her and their children and offering their children good education. One way to avoid a strict marriage contract and have more individual space is to become a second wife for a married man.

Balancing, stretching, and breaking

From the individual events and women's accounts discussed in this thesis, one can see that there are many kinds of transformations going on in the family and kin relationships in contemporary Kenya. Family contracts are not stable, they are negotiated and re-negotiated. Transformations in kin and gender contracts always cause some turbulence and resistance, as I have discussed with analytical tools of kinscripts and gender contracts.

Two culturally prevalent understandings, or "irrefutabilities" (see Hirdman 1991, 191), in Kenya that have been central in this research are the notion of kinship solidarity and the patriarchal order of the society. It looks like Kenyan men regard their well-being mainly in terms of their relations to kin, "what is good for me, is what is good for the extended family", whereas women have more individual aspirations, emphasising the well-being of the nuclear family, as Henrietta Moore (1986, 110) has pointed out. Also my ethnographical material shows that women seem more willing to take distance from the traditional understandings of kinship solidarity, whereas men are more prone to stick with it. The same applies to gender relations. Thus, both in gender and family relations, women are trying to stretch the borders of patriarchal gender and family understandings.

Whenever one wants to make deviations from the gender contracts or kinscripts, it is likely that conflicts emerge, and these conflicts need to be solved in order to end up with a new contract. In the present situation, the highly educated women try to balance between the old and the new, being cautious of not breaking the traditional gender roles too much. On the one hand, they want to make decisions in the family, be equal partners with their husbands, but on the other hand, most of them still recognise the main authority in the family to belong to the husband. Accordingly, some women may be independent, but at the same time they feel insecure in the role where they do not have clear understanding how to act in different situations. However, they are very conscious of their roles as protagonists for a change in gender equality. Many women whose lives I have discussed in this thesis have tried to find alternative ways to improve their lives, particularly marital and kin relations, thus trying to avoid too rigid conflicts.

In spite of that, many conflicts that arose in those middle class Kenyan families studied here were due to women's high education and their views on more individual life (regarding the relatives) that is generally regarded suitable for women, according to the gender contract. I have paid attention to the situations where kinscripts need reconsidering, where personal and communal goals are in clash, or where gender contract is not working. In other words, I have discussed different conflicts and arguments that take place because the spouses have different opinions on their obligations as spouses and as members in the extended family.

In this research, I wanted to point out that in the jungle of many overlapping and competing interests and loyalties, as well as many overwhelming demands, one has to make choices. Choosing, almost inevitably, harms someone. The highly educated women studied in this research are often placing their own interests, i.e. the interests of their own nuclear family, marriage or their personal ones, ahead of those of the extended family, and this is causing transformations in contemporary Kenya, particularly when it comes to gender and family relationships. More generally, I wanted to problematise some aspects of the general notion of an 'African family' as a network of relatives by examining family solidarity as consisting of different, competing and often opposite expectations and demands.

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