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# UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

# INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED SOCIAL RESEARCH

## ADDITIONAL SEMINAR PAPER

TITLE: Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour: Gender Relations and Economic Change in Koguta, Western Kenya.

BY: FRANCIS, E.

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A F R I C A N  S T U D I E S  I N S T I T U T E

ADDITIONAL SEMINAR

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by: Elizabeth Francis

No. X5

# Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour: Gender Relations and Economic Change in Koguta, Western Kenya

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that changes in the regional political economy and household differentiation are registered, acted out and struggled over, it is where one can most profitably study economic change as social process.

I am going to argue that twentieth century transformations in the political economy of Western Kenya, together with processes of differentiation, have been closely bound up with profound changes in gender relations, and in the ideologies which justify them. These changes have been slow, piecemeal, non-uniform and non-linear. They have been the subject of intense conflicts within households which have centred around questions of access to and control over resources, and in which, as well as power relations, ideas about rights and responsibilities have been critically important.

## Description of the research

I conducted fieldwork from November 1987 to February 1988 and from May 1988 to March 1989. Throughout fieldwork, I was resident in the sub-location, in the home of a local family. I gained a reasonably good knowledge of the Luo language, although I always worked with an interpreter, whose help I found necessary for more complex discussions with informants.

I used a variety of research methods, of which the most important were a sample survey of 104 households, from whom I collected basic socio-economic data; a budget survey of 24 individuals in 19 households; and the collection of life histories from 67 informants. I also had many more general informal discussions.

## Background

### (i) The Political Economy of Western Kenya

Kenya was one of the African colonies with a substantial population of Europeans engaged in extensive farming, plantation agriculture and, later, in manufacturing. These activities for a long time required plentiful quantities of cheap labour.

In what is now Kisumu District, labour migration began in the first years of the colonial period and large-scale labour migration has been the norm since the 1930s. There is not space here to discuss in detail the processes which initially generated mass migrancy. Summarising, the historical experience of the region does not appear to fit the classic 'underdevelopment' model of the generation of a migrant-labour economy, in which the destruction of African agriculture led to mass labour- migration. (Arrighi 1970; Palmer and Parsons 1977; Bundy 1979) But it also differs from more recent studies which identify an extended period of considerable prosperity and 'peasant' cash-crop production in areas which later became migrant-labour economies. (Ranger 1978 and 1985; Beinart 1982)

Labour migrancy by unmarried men was initially stimulated by force and by new cash needs (for taxation, clothing and cash to purchase bridewealth cattle, for example). (See Clayton and

Savage 1974; Van Zwanenberg 1975; Stichter 1982) It became increasingly necessary for married men to remain on the labour market for long periods to meet growing cash needs, but agriculture appears to have been quite resilient in the 1930s, despite the loss of male labour-power. (Hay 1972) It is only more recently that food-production has deteriorated to the point where migrant incomes are needed to purchase basic foods. However, I found no evidence in Koguta of the 'peasant' cash-crop boom sometimes assumed to have occurred in most smallholder areas of Kenya in the 1920s and 30s. (Kitching 1980; Ranger 1985) Rather, there was an initial period in which mass migrancy coincided with viable food-crop production, probably due to an expansion of female labour-time.

But after the early 1930s, Kisumu was set on a trajectory that increasingly marginalised agriculture as a source of income. As more and more labour was withdrawn from agriculture, a downward spiral of agricultural decline and ever-increasing migration to maintain subsistence was initiated. Other factors contributed to the declining ability of agriculture to provide an adequate cash income. The fixed boundaries placed on the Reserves by the Government led to population pressure on the land and, hence, to shorter fallowing periods and declining soil fertility, lowering yields. The switch to maize accelerated soil exhaustion, because it depletes fertility more rapidly than the indigenous crops of sorghum and millet.

Thus, although the agricultural economy was probably able to withstand the loss of the labour power of young males up to the 1930s, from then onwards, the loss of the labour power of adult males undermined production. Coupled to this direct loss of labour power through migrancy was the slow process of a reduction of female labour-time expended in agriculture as diminishing food production forced women to spend increasing amounts of time in off-farm economic activities, particularly trading and handicraft production. In the households where remittances were adequate to cover shortfalls in food production, individuals were not forced to seek alternative income-sources to the same extent, but they also had a much greater incentive to invest resources in their children's education than in agricultural production. (Hay 1972; Kitching 1980)

The region became a net importer of food and later developments, such as the stabilisation of the labour force, the creation of high-wage sectors and the development of commercial agriculture following the Swynnerton Plan, did little to change this picture. Farmers in most parts of the region have not been offered a suitable cash crop and even those in areas suitable for higher-value cash crops are handicapped by poor infrastructure and their distance from the major markets.

Nowadays most households in Koguta do not grow enough food to feed themselves for the whole year and they experience an annual hungry season for several months before the Long Rains harvest in June-July. Those with particularly small plots are in this position for most of the year, and sometimes year-round if the harvest is poor. The food-supply is even more precarious in the Lake Shore areas, where the Short Rains frequently fail.

Today, the nearby market at Sondu, which is on the border of Kisumu, Kericho and Kisii Districts, is a nodal point for the import of food from Kericho and Kisii into Luoland.

Because so few households have a crop surplus with which to fulfil their cash needs, most are required to obtain cash from other sources. Remittances from migrants are an important source of cash for some households, but since the emergence of widespread, annual food deficits, there has also been a burgeoning of small-scale trading and handicraft production (especially palm-frond baskets). The bulk of it is carried out by women. Men tend to be involved in trading activities which require some initial capital - such as permanent shops and transportation. Informants recall that in the 1930s and 40s, much of the food-trade was seasonal, but now many households require cash for food purchases year-round, so trading and basket production take place throughout the year.

2. Migration and differentiation

Many of the key resources and strategies for improving one's economic position and for avoiding a fall into extreme poverty have altered considerably since the early years of the colonial period. For the generation born before 1930, it was possible to accumulate resources through trading and, to a lesser extent, through farming, provided one had a minimum endowment of land and cattle (though not necessarily large initial holdings) and the ability to discern profitable modes of adaptation to changes in the local economy. Such a strategy was a viable alternative to long-term labour migration.

The men who followed this strategy all made their children's education their major investment, however, as it became clear by the 1970s that education provided the key to upward mobility. An increasingly stagnant local economy removed farm and off-farm rural activities as a source of accumulation comparable to better-paid wage employment. Some of these children - particularly those who finished their education in the late 1950s and 1960s, when the upper reaches of the labour market opened up to Africans - were able to get better-paid professional employment, so that their fathers' comparative prosperity was translated into an advantaged position for their children. These people are now almost all employed in the urban areas and it is access to their remittances, together with state pensions, which is the chief factor determining the distribution of income in the rural community.

Fewer and fewer rural residents can be expected to benefit from such remittances in future, however. The transmission of economic advantage between generations has become increasingly difficult because of the massive increase in the numbers of young people with secondary-schooling, coupled with falling job opportunities in the 1970s and 80s. Few people resident in the rural areas are able to educate their children to the levels now required for them to get professional jobs.

Consequently, the rural elite can be expected to become less and less congruent with the dominant class at the national level.

There are now almost no rural households which could be considered wealthy by urban standards.

Land and cattle have also been replaced by access to off-farm income (through the labour market and rural off-farm activities) as the resources keeping poorer households out of great poverty, although land is still a highly important source of farm income. Rural-off farm income is becoming increasingly important as falling urban real-wages make it extremely difficult for migrants to send adequate remittances. The ability of members of a poorer household to obtain rural off-farm sources of income depends greatly on household structure, as women with many young children and the elderly may not be able to undertake time- and energy-consuming tasks like trading. Poverty is partly a function of a household's position in its development cycle.

Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour

In an analysis of changing gender relations, there are several major difficulties. The first, periodisation, is intrinsic to the project of reconstructing social relations from oral evidence. I do not attempt to give a spurious air of precision to the changes I am about to describe - my periodisation, pivoting around the 1930s, the 1950s, and the 1970s, reflects a perceived difference between generations with regard to patterns of economic behaviour and life chances.

The second problem is that, although the processes of accumulation and impoverishment that have been at work in the twentieth century are clearly closely bound up with changing gender relations, it is not possible to make simple connections between them. Precisely because they have been the object of struggle, these conflicts have had variable outcomes. I can only suggest some apparently important variables.

The third problem is that much of the evidence is shot through with gender ideologies. What people think and, what is not the same thing, what they say about as vital a topic as power relations within their own households reflects a multitude of factors - how things used to be; how they think things ought to be; and often more diffuse ideologies about the nature of women and men and the proper relations between them. The ideological nature of the evidence is not always just a problem to be got around. Where these ideologies can be pulled out and analysed, they provide an insight into one of the factors affecting people's behaviour. But the more general problem of assessing the status of evidence remains. It means that conclusions have to be relatively tentative.

I have found it useful to organise the analysis around the concept of divisions of labour.[3] I use the plural noun in order to cover the division of tasks (the sexual division of labour in the simplest sense); spheres of responsibility and authority; and contributions to the reproduction of the domestic unit.[4] Changes in one or another of these divisions of labour have tended to

3. Cf. Pahl (1984)
4. Cf. Guyer (1984)

produce conflicts over the others and, eventually, have led to pressure for change in the other elements.

Gender Relations Before Mass Labour-Migration

From what is known about pre-colonial Luo communities, it appears that they were in a state of considerable flux in the years immediately before the arrival of the British in the 1890s, with many communities shifting from a predominantly pastoral economy towards one more based on agriculture as they moved from the drier areas around Lake Victoria into higher, better-watered ground. There appears to have been a concomitant increase in male involvement in agriculture, but, on the whole, the bulk of agricultural and domestic work was still done by women.[5]

Settlement and kinship affiliation were largely based upon lineages of agnatically-related males. The primary domestic units were the first the compound, typically containing a polygynous senior male, his wives and the houses of younger brothers and married sons, and, within the compound, the house; one for each married woman and her children. Women married into lineages, usually from quite distant clans.

Each married woman appears to have been responsible for finding most of the food supply for her house. To this end she was allocated at least one field for her own use. Informants relate that a woman had the power to make planting decisions and had control over the crops coming from these fields, including any surplus, even though her husband was regarded as having ultimate authority over the land. (In Dholuo, the distinction was made between the person having authority over the field - wuon puodho - and the person with ultimate authority over the land - wuon lowo.) A husband had his own field, called mondo, largely worked by his wives, and he was expected to make good any shortfall in his wives' food supplies with crops coming from the mondo. Otherwise, these crops were his to dispose of as he saw fit, and it was through the exchange of surplus grain for cattle, which could be used as bridewealth, that men were able to accumulate power and prestige. The ability to accumulate resources therefore ultimately depended on control over female labour.

Transformations

i) The early decades of mass labour-migration: 1930s - 1950s

Labour migration does not seem to have made a significant impact on divisions of labour before the 1930s, when migration by married men became widespread. From then onwards, the basic division of responsibilities in most Kogutа households was increasingly between migrancy by men and a holding together of the rural household and farm by women. This arrangement gave

5. Sources: Butterman (1979), Evans-Pritchard (1949), Hay (1972), Pala (1977), Southall (1952), Whisson (1964), Wilson (1961) and oral evidence.

many women de facto responsibility for day-to-day management of the household and the farm, as well as the entire farm labour burden. Not all such responsibilities were novel: it has already been suggested that Luo women had a degree of autonomy in the management of their gardens and household food-supplies, but many wives of migrants increasingly became managers of a unified farm, protectors of the household property and guardians of their children.[6]

Although there was differentiation in the wages received by migrants from the earliest years, inequalities in income from employment did not bring about immediate differentiation in levels of farm production or striking differences between the roles of women in different migrant households. The wives of most migrants remained in Koguta, providing the household food-supply from farming and undertaking seasonal trading to fulfil some of their cash needs. Most wives of migrants took on this crucial holding-role because their husbands were too far away, for too long, to play much of a role in day-to-day household decision-making.[7] But I found no evidence that wives of better-off migrants were able to use remittances to expand farm production to any significant extent. The suggestion that some women were able to do so is central to Kitching's hypothesis of a dynamic link between off-farm and farm inequalities in the smallholder areas of Kenya.[8] It rests on a misperception of the uses of migrant remittances and the gender relations which played a large part in determining their use.

Few migrants invested in farming beyond the replacement of their own labour power. Instead, migrant remittances were initially spent on taxation and consumption goods, and invested in bridewealth, while migrants in better-paid employment also made other investments, primarily in cattle and school fees. Growing land shortage and low returns to farming discouraged much investment in additional wives and a large proportion of the cattle acquired appear to have been invested in school fees. Most migrants would not have been able to afford to use their wages to invest in expanded farm production, but better-paid migrants were also reluctant to do so. Low prices, poor infrastructure and distance from markets were clearly important factors limiting the returns to farm investment, but, as the existence of a small number of resident male farmers and traders indicates, they were not initially overwhelming. A key factor seems to have been that few migrants were willing to delegate financial responsibility and decision-making power to their wives. This reluctance stems from a deep-seated distrust of women's reliability that is explored in more detail later. It is a trend that has continued to the present, when better-off migrants prefer more easily managed investment in real estate to expanded farm production supervised by their wives.

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6. Hay (1982)
7. Cf. Hay (1972); Lovett (1989). For Southern African comparisons, see Bozzoli (1983), and Peters' critique of Bozzoli in Peters (1983).
8. Kitching (1980)

In the households of migrants farming was thus replaced as a possible source of accumulation by the acquisition of cash and cattle through the labour market. This switch replicated the older pattern whereby investment activity was carried out overwhelmingly by men, since they dominated access to the resources - education and money - which were required to undertake these activities.

So, despite the fact that there were considerable differences in the wages earned by migrants, divisions of labour between migrant husbands and their wives were fairly uniform. The nature of gender relations in Koguta households - the reluctance of men to delegate much financial responsibility to their wives, was one of the factors weakening dynamic links betwen employment and farm income and thus slowing down processes of differentiation.

In this period, changes in the division of tasks and spheres of authority and responsibility in households where the husband was not migrant were acute, however. For a few decades, a small number of locally-resident men were able to accumulate resources through farming and trading. The most significant aspect of this for the analysis is that such accumulation often involved bitter conflicts over the appropriation of female-labour power.

The distinction between different types of authority over land, between the wuon lowo and the wuon puodho, was undermined as land shortage dictated the amalgamation of fields. A man could argue that being wuon puodho over all the fields, he had a legitmate claim to make decisions and allocate surplus crops. Such a claim by a husband clashed with a woman's claim for the right to control over her household's food supplies.

Consequently, there was considerable conflict over these competing claims and a variety of outcomes. Some women retained substantial autonomy over their labour and access to crop income, others became little more than labourers for their husbands, while between these extremes lay a multiplicity of arrangements. These changes cannot be linked to processes of differentiation in any simple way. On the whole, wives of men who became involved in cash-cropping lost a large amount of control over the labour process and crop income, but some have been able successfully to make an appeal to a notion of entitlement to a share in the fruits of labour - so successfully in some cases that husbands and wives now cultivate separate cash crops, while in others the husband uses hired labour rather than call on his wife's labour and be under an obligation to give her a share of the crop.

Whether or not this happened partly depended on the man's role in financing household reproduction and in this respect conflicts in non-migrant households parallel later conflicts in the households of migrants.

Directly related to both differentiation and long-term agricultural decline is a slow series of changes in spheres of responsibility and control in rural households. These have changed in response to agricultural decline, while also partly causing it. Moreover, there has also been a marked divergence

between households with regard to patterns of responsibility and control. All these changes have been the subject of intense conflict.

ii) The impact of economic decline

The dominant historical trends since the Second World War have been an absolute decline in agricultural production, with a consequently increasing need for cash to buy food, and, alongside this, a dramatic rise in the number of essential household items and expenses which can be met only with cash, accelerating the process by which differences in access to remittances from the urban areas have become the most important determinant of economic inequality. Differences in the resource endowments and demographic structure of rural households also exert a powerful influence, however.

These processes of differentiation have given rise to both a fairly wide spread of incomes and striking contrasts between the ways in which rural households get cash incomes. There are households in which the bulk of cash income comes from remittances (mostly from husbands and children, or as pensions) and households with no access to remittance incomes, getting cash from their farms, a medley of off-farm activities and transfers from kin and friends. The majority of households lie between these extremes, their cash incomes coming from a number of sources. The material links between rural and urban households are coming under increasing strain, however, with remittance incomes frequently low and intermittent, reflecting falling real-incomes in the urban areas and the crisis in the urban labour-market. A household's endowment of land and the ability of its members to undertake more labour-intensive cash-cropping, or off-farm activities, therefore to a large degree determine the extent to which it can meet its cash needs.

In their efforts to get cash, not all individuals have followed similar strategies and the effectiveness and popularity of the various strategies available has altered in response to the changing political-economic context. Farming was never a source of large-scale accumulation in Koguta, although a small minority successfully followed strategies based around a combination of farming and rural off-farm activities, their children then moving into relatively well-paid urban employment. For the majority, farming has provided a security function which, in combination with labour migration, is becoming increasingly precarious as farm production and urban job-prospects fall. Poor returns to rural off-farm activities, and low remittances from their children, have prompted some retired migrants to attempt to get an adequate income from intensive cultivation of vegetables and they have recently been joined in this activity by some of the younger men who have given up trying to survive on the urban labour-market. In these households, farming is much more than a holding activity. But cash-cropping is a strategy requiring great efforts for low and risky returns which are exacerbated by the fact that prematurely-returned migrants usually have the smallest landholdings of all, because they belong to a generation which is inheriting a portion of the already small holdings of their fathers. Many younger men are therefore not prepared to

follow a cash-cropping strategy and they rely for money on odd-jobs and petty trading, while their wives grow a small amount of food on tiny plots and otherwise rely on petty trading and transfers from relatives and friends for food. The precariousness of this way of life hardly needs to be pointed out and, after experiencing it, many young men return to try their luck again on the urban labour-market. It remains to be seen whether return migration by younger men will eventually become permanent, as they decide that the search for urban employment is hopeless, or whether they will continue to move back and forth between the rural and urban informal sectors.

iii) Current patterns of responsibility and access to resources

The transformation of the basis of the household economy from the farm to cash income has changed expectations and exacerbated conflicts between men and women over spheres of domestic authority and responsibility and also provides the context to contemporary mechanisms of differentiation between rural households.

In a small minority of households, the growing need for cash has been met largely from remittances. Some of these households consist of the wives and children of migrant men doing clerical or supervisory work. Others contain men retired from similar work who now receive occupational pensions. In both types of household, the bulk of remittances tend to come from a single source and be received by one household member, the woman in the former case and the man in the latter. Either arrangement leaves the wife almost entirely financially dependent upon her husband and responsible for only the details of domestic management. There is less pressure on her than there is on other women to engage in independent economic activity and many such women play a very passive role in their household's financial affairs, simply receiving a regular allowance to cover food purchases. Household reproduction is fundamentally dependent on male earnings and women's role in reproduction is limited to providing domestic labour and a security function through their farm production.

Many informants, male and female, cited a pattern in which the man provides the cash income for the household as the ideal distribution of responsibilities and power. A 'good husband', dichwo maber, gives his wife enough money for her to feed the household, as well as providing clothing, household goods and school fees. Such an ideal stands in considerable contrast to the pre-colonial pattern of female responsibility for the bulk of household provisioning and reflects the fact that avoiding poverty depends so greatly on a resource - paid employment - to which men dominate access. Decades in which rural women became increasingly dependent on remittances in order to buy food seem, therefore, to have modified the ideal of a good husband and proper division of responsibilities within the household from a pre-colonial ideal of relative autonomy for the woman within well-defined spheres towards a more unified model that assumes ultimate male authority. Such a model also reflects the ideal of male 'breadwinner' and paterfamilias promoted by mission

Christianity. For many women, trading carries a stigma of poverty and women getting an adequate income pride themselves on not being obliged to 'sit in the market'.

There is often a discrepancy between this model of the household as an economic unit and the behaviour of individuals within households, even where the man is the main earner of cash income. Several better-off couples whose finances follow this model prided themselves on taking decisions together - "We sit and discuss"; "We decide together" , but realities were often rather different. For example, in one household where the husband and wife were self-consciously "modern", the husband, a retired professional, personally bought most of the food with his pension. On many occasions they stressed the fact that they decided everything together and contrasted the egalitarian and unified nature of their household with that of other people in the community. A more accurate picture of their relationship emerged when the wife fell quite seriously ill with malaria and her husband refused to give her money for hospital fees, or even to buy medicine. "I am just a body", she complained. "When I am sick, he doesn't care at all."

The question of the extent to which households are units and the strategies of members conform to common goals is an issue which lies just below the surface of discourse in Koguta. Women complain about husbands who do not support them and their children, while parents complain about uncaring children. In this respect, the ideal of an economically unified household can be used as a claim on men's, and children's, resources, by other household members.

But the ideal is also a justification of women's restricted access to cash incomes. Many men feel great ambivalence about independent economic activity by their wives and, although, as will be made clear below, many women are becoming increasingly involved in off-farm activities, men who are just able to sustain their households' expenditure needs prefer not to give their wives scope for gaining an independent income.

This reluctance reflects the fact that, although the wife of a migrant almost inevitably plays a greater managerial role in the household than the wives of most non-migrants, a greater decision-making role for women is considered to pose a threat to the authority of men and, hence, to the unity of the household and, ultimately, the whole social order.[9] It is a topic that men quickly warm to, using a discourse that combines a fear of the supposedly chaotic potential of women's sexuality with a stress on the divided loyalties of a woman who has always married in from another clan.

> Luo men do not like their wives to trade, because they think that they will walk around. (Judith Achieng)[10]

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9. Cf. Parkin (1978)
10. To protect informants' anonymity, all names have been changed.

> Women don t know how to look after money properly. They take the money, leave the house and wander around the country - to Mombasa, Nairobi - and they want to show off, for example, by buying clothes, but a man will want to use the money properly, for example, by paying school fees...
>
> Very few Luo women trade, because they are weak (compared with Kikuyu women). Their husbands are not willing for them to trade, because of what they might do when they are away from home, like going with other men. Some women are trusted and they do trade like this, but it is better for the woman to be older. (Philip Ojwang)

> Luo men take their wives' trading income...a Luo woman who travels around trading is called a prostitute. (Mary Anyango)

> There are not many ways for a woman to get money around here. So when a man sees his wife with money, he gets suspicious. (John Obala)

These comments convey a basic distrust of women - their loyalties and their sexuality. A woman is an outsider who has married in from another clan and who can rarely be completely trusted. She has a rampant sexuality that needs to be closely controlled and this is best done by restricting her movements. A mobile woman is suspect, because movement and sexual laxity are practically synonymous and both threaten the cohesiveness of her marital home. A woman with her own resources may leave her husband for another man.

The imagery both harmonises and clashes with the realities of gender relations. There is a continuity between what is known of pre-colonial Luo society and the present in the conflicting loyalties set up by virilocal marriage, but the supposition that Luo women are likely to take the first opportunity to leave their husbands is strikingly at variance with the low divorce rate. It is difficult for a Luo woman permanently to leave her husband and few do so.[11]

But as well as being based on fears of women's latent sexuality and unreliability, the wish to control the movement of women has origins in the reorganisation of the sexual division of labour on which labour migration has depended. For the rural household to be maintained, it is essential that someone remain to hold it together. Regular trading, with the continual travelling it requires, threatens this pivotal role.

The disquiet felt by many men at the thought of allowing women to get economic resources independently also arises from a fear of power struggles between a man and a 'strong woman' (dhako ratego). Relationships within households are sometimes described as a zero-sum game:

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11. Cf. Potash (1978)

> When the man is up, the woman is down and when the man is down, the woman is up.
> (Helen Awuor)

And the key to who is up or down is relative economic power.

> It is income which makes a woman strong. The thing that makes a man strong is that he does not want to be conquered in terms of getting income for the family.
> (John Obala)

Conflict over a woman's trading activity - Ann Auma

Ann Auma's husband is a station master for Kenya Railways, working in the Rift Valley. Each month, he sends her around KShs.400 and this is about 75% of her cash income.

She used to live with him in the Rift Valley and she started trading in maize between the Rift Valley and Kisumu.

> When I began trading, my husband said it was a waste of money, because profits would be made very small by the high price of maize and by the transport costs. He also said that I would run away from him. But on the first trip, I came back with KShs.600. He told me to give him the money and he said that he did this because the money could make me leave him.
>
> After taking the money, he did nothing with it for a long time, but then he used it to buy four sacks of maize for me to trade with. This time I made KShs.1700 and he took the money again. He used some of it to buy things for the house.
>
> Another woman trading in maize advised me to give the money to my husband and then he would see that I wasn't wasting it or walking around with it. So from then on I did it like that. Sometimes there would be extra maize in a sack, so I would keep the extra money from it and I still have it.
>
> [In 1988, Ann came to live in Koguta, to oversee the building of a mud and cement house and she is now permanently resident.]
>
> I'm going to start trading again, but I won't tell my husband. I'll use some of the money he sends me to start it. But if he knew I was trading, he wouldn't bring money. I will tell him about it eventually.

Ann's husband's objections to her trading centred around the suggestion that she would at the least waste her income and at worst be sexually unfaithful (the 'wandering' she mentions has sexual overtones in Dholuo), or even leave him. She was able to continue trading only by striking a bargain that lost her almost all control over her profits. An attempt to trade from her rural home would lose her his remittances.

Ann's husband's attitude to her activities is typical of the answers informants give to general questions about the attitude of Luo men to independent economic activity by their wives.

As one would expect in any collection of beliefs, Luo gender ideologies are not all congruent and people voice contrasting attitudes to domestic relationships in different contexts. When describing ideal domestic relationships, both sexes draw on the concept of winjruok, 'understanding'. In a home where there is winjruok, men and women co-operate according to their expected roles, which in the man's case amounts to the benign use of his ultimate authority. When describing this ideal in English, Luo people often use the word 'co-ordination'. It can be achieved only if women accept the authority of men and it can be undermined by an overly assertive woman.

Because of a combination of growing rural cash-needs and falling urban real-wages and employment prospects, for a growing majority of rural households, remittances received are wholly inadequate for reproduction and many households do not receive remittances to any significant extent. Reproduction of many households has therefore become increasingly dependent on members' ability to earn a cash income through off-farm activities, such as petty commodity production, trading and farm labouring, and, to a lesser extent, on transfers from beyond the household. Consequently, economic roles are in flux to an extent that in some cases amounts to a transformation of gender relations and household structures and which also challenges received gender-stereotypes. The ideal pattern of male 'breadwinner' and dependent wife is far from the necessities of survival in most households.

In many households where the husband maintains active contact, or is even resident, he finds it extremely difficult to play this role. If a migrant, he often cannot send remittances, or, if he is resident, he has few opportunities for earning a regular income.

Some women have altogether lost access to their husbands' incomes, taking on full financial responsibility for themselves and their children. Where the man is a migrant, this de-coupling of the rural and urban components of households leaves women as effective household heads, but, unless they are widows, their authority is provisional - attendant on the possibility of their husbands' intervention. They therefore usually lack the ability to acquire or dispose of household assets as they see fit.

The declining ability of most rural households to satisfy their food requirements from farming has also thrown up a contradiction between the desire of men who are still trying to provide their wives with a cash income that allows their wives to remain at home and the growing need for them to find off-farm sources of cash. Although there is considerable resistance to independent economic activity by women, many men have eventually abandoned their hostility. Women who trade typically commented that their husbands had not at first liked the idea, but then they saw that they could bring home money and they no longer objected.

Wives of resident men who trade regularly typically have much more authority than those who do not, because their command of a cash income gives them a greater voice in household decision-making. Many of these women are striking individuals - authoritative in manner and tireless in their struggles to find cash.

A strong woman (dhako ratego) - Grace Ochola

Grace Ochola's husband, James, had an industrial accident in 1968 and lost his job in a tea-processing plant in the Nandi Hills. He has been at home ever since. He is not able to do farm work because of his injury, but he herds his cattle and works as a Church teacher.

Shortage of money for school fees prompted Grace to start regular trading in 1977 and she now trades virtually full-time in second-hand clothes; one of the best-paying types of petty-trading available locally, although illegal. She buys clothing in Nairobi every week and sells it in Sondu market.

She farms with hired labourers, whom she herself pays. Grace makes all the decisions about the farm, but James and she both sell crops and whoever sells them keeps the money.

Grace pays for all the household's food purchases and she also finances the bulk of the children's school fees. James and she have together bought a plot of land and they are jointly paying for a rental house to be built on it.

Women at different stages of the life-cycle face different constraints on their efforts to earn an adequate cash income. Many of the younger women have heavy child-care responsibilities and very small plots of land for growing crops; older women, though freer to trade or do farm labouring, are often far more burdened by the need to pay school fees.

Women also differ in their ability to earn a regular income. A comparatively small number are able to become regular traders, but a more common pattern is for a woman to juggle several activities.

Women on their own - Margaret Owete and Jennifer Ajowi

Margaret Owete and Jennifer Ojwang's husbands are low-income urban migrants. Margaret's husband is a tailor and Jennifer's husband is a night-watchman. Jennifer's husband never sends money home and Margaret's husband sends about KShs.50 every few months.

From selling vegetables, on which the profits are lower, Margaret has built up a business as a maize trader in Sondu market, making a profit of KShs.50-70 a day, three times a week. This feeds her and the one child still remaining at home but in order to pay her son's secondary-school fees, she used to work as a farm-labourer in Kericho District, going every week in the weeding and harvest seasons.

Unlike Margaret, Jennifer has no single, major source of cash income. Her house is in a poor state of repair and she has almost no furniture. She has 9 children and a garden of 0.5 acres on land that floods easily, and in the 1988 floods she lost all her crops. She survives by selling baskets, by farm labouring and from the money, food and household goods she is given by relatives.

The key to the differences between these women appears to lie in the fact that Jennifer has so many children that she has never been able to save money to use as capital to start regular trading, her income being immediately swallowed up by her food purchases. Moreover, Margaret has a much smaller household, which greatly reduces the time she has to spend looking after her children.

Most households where the husband has returned to live at home receive only small, infrequent remittances and the various income-earning strategies these men follow have already been described. The pressing need to find a cash income has led some men to appropriate their wives' labour for the purpose of cash-cropping in a manner similar to the conflicts played out in the 1930s and 40s in the households of the rural elite. In other households the failure of men to engage in farm work or find a reliable source of income has prompted women to take on most of the farm work and decision-making and often also most of the financial responsibilities. The differences in power relations are clear in the cases of the Otienos and the Opiyos.

Male takeover - George and Alice Otieno

George Otieno and his wife, Alice, are in their early thirties. In 1985, he lost his job as a tractor driver on a sugar estate and he returned to Koguta, trying to make a living locally by combining farming and brick-making.

George has a two-acre farm. Alice and he plant and weed the crops together, but Alice does the harvesting alone, because it coincides with the time that George makes bricks. He makes all the decisions about the farm and he gets the income from the tomatoes and onions that Alice sells in Sondu market. He also pays for food, clothing and large household-goods, while she buys small things for the house. He gives her money each week.

Alice does about two days' paid farm labouring in the weeding season and she regularly makes and sells baskets. But George recently decided that she should start trading in small things like soap, while he intends to look for work again in the Sugar Belt.

George's appropriation of Alice's labour power and his takeover of all significant economic resources have their origin in the ideological legacy of labour migration and the shrinking resource-bases of rural households. A man living at home who tries to feed and clothe the household is a good husband and his involvement in farming is seen as a help to his wife, not a takeover of her sphere.

Men who are involved in farm work describe themselves, and are described by women, as 'helping'. This role involves an entitlement to a role in farm decision-making and a share of crop income and it is then only a short step to full appropriation, justified by the man's greater financial responsibilities and his ultimate ownership of the land. An older woman has more authority to resist full appropriation and work out a compromise whereby her husband and she share crop income and financial responsibilities. Younger women like Alice, still seen as newcomers to the community, are more likely to be in her position.

Greater female responsibility - Martin and Catherine Opiyo

Martin Opiyo used to do casual work as a picker on a tea estate in Kericho. For most of the time that he worked in Kericho, his wife, Catherine, lived in Koguta. He used to send her fairly regular remittances, which she used to buy food for the household and wheat flour that she made into mandaazi (a kind of doughnut) and sold. When he was not picking tea, Martin did a little grain trading from home, but he did very little farm work. After his return for good in 1977, he continued in this pattern, but he eventually sold the donkeys he used for grain transport to pay school fees and now he has no regular source of income. He still does very little farm work.

Consequently, the bulk of the farm work has fallen onto Catherine, while Martin also takes very little role in making decisions about the farm. He spends most of his time looking after his small herd of cows and goats.

Catherine and Martin have 3 adult sons and 2 adult daughters. The sons very occasionally send money home, and one of the daughters regularly sends small amounts to her father and mother separately. The Opiyos are fostering one of her sons and her daughter often comes to stay in the school holidays.

During the period when he took part in the budget survey, Martin received KShs.3000 in bridewealth and, as well as purchasing bridewealth cattle for one of his sons, he bought KShs.218 of food: a large proportion of the household's expenditure on food that month. Normally, he does not contribute much to food purchases, as the bulk of the money for these comes from the baskets that Catherine makes. Her health is now too poor for her to get money from trading or farm labouring and illness sometimes prevents her from making baskets. Martin was able to step in by using the money he had received for bridewealth. On other occasions, the household has to manage without purchased foods.

The Opiyo household demonstrates what happens when the husband does not fulfil expectations of what constitutes a 'good husband'. His wife takes on most day-to-day financial responsibilities by default, but she usually lacks the resources to do more than keep her head above water, because women find it very difficult to accumulate capital for large-scale trading or sinking into seeds and hired labour for cash cropping.

Contemporary domestic relationships: conclusion

Relationships within households in contemporary Koguta, and the ideology which legitimates them, are in a state of flux, experiencing severe strains that are exerting pressure for change.

The inability of growing numbers of men, migrants and returned migrants, to meet their households' needs for cash originates first in a crisis in the urban labour-market that has stemmed the flow of remittances and, second, in a long-term decline in the local economy that has undermined the ability of farming to fulfil the food needs of most rural households, while also limiting opportunities for earning a cash income. Decades of labour migration have given rise to the expectation that men and women follow a division of responsibilities in which the husband acts as a 'breadwinner', but economic necessity makes this division contentious and often unsustainable.

Consequently, new divisions of responsibility, sometimes amounting to new household forms, are appearing. But male involvement in finance and decision-making covers a spectrum from considerable control to desertion and no clean break can be made between male- and female-headed households.

In the households where husbands' remittances and visits are so irregular that the wives are effectively household heads, male involvement is often intermittent; women's authority is provisional. This point applies with even greater force when the husband lives at home but does not contribute much to the household food supply. Negotiating spheres of authority in such cases is a delicate business. Women gain access to most productive resources through their relationships with men, husbands and sons, and their power over these resources is therefore temporary and subject to challenge. Indeed, another trend which may grow is towards appropriation of a woman's labour-power by her husband in households where the man has given up trying to survive on the urban labour-market and is attempting to get a cash income from farming.

The one avenue to accumulation by women on their own account, trading, is severely limited by low demand in the local economy; by their farm and domestic workload; and by deep-seated hostility on the part of men to the threat trading carries of a loss of control over women and a disruption of the rural household. Many rural women have therefore seen their economic responsibilities increase, but find it almost impossibly difficult to fulfil them.

The less a man can contribute to the household budget, however, the weaker is his case against his wife's trading, and it has been shown how some men now acquiesce and even encourage their wives to start trading. In one case the decision was taken as part of the husband's strategy for household income-earning; more commonly, it reflects a pragmatic acceptance. If the woman becomes a successful trader, her domestic power grows with her responsibilities and she may successfully challenge the material and ideological constraints which so hem in other women. Women

like this are a small minority and trading is such a low-earning and risky activity that few can hope to emulate them. It is still far from clear whether their example will legitimise more widely the growing need for women to look for off-farm sources of income.

Conclusion: Migration and Changing Divisions of Labour

Several themes run through this analysis of changing relationships within households in Koguta. In the background are the series of transformations in the political economy of Western Kenya which have taken place since the beginning of colonial rule (the emergence of mass labour-migration; economic decline; and the impact of the crisis in the urban labour-market). These transformations have both rested on and precipitated changing household divisions of labour, in the narrow sense of who actually does what and in the broader sense of divisions of domestic responsibility and power. Labour migration involved upheavals in domestic relationships, but these have not been unilinear. Broadly speaking, the advent of a migrant-labour economy initially threw much of the burden of household reproduction onto women, but declining agriculture and rising urban real-wages in the 1950s and 60s together promoted a growing role for remittances from migrant males in the reproduction of many households. More recently, rising urban unemployment and underemployment, together with falling urban real-wages, have put enormous strains on the links between the urban and rural Koguta people and many women, again, are shouldering responsibility for household reproduction.

A second important theme has been differentiation. In the outline of changing divisions of labour just given, the term 'many' is used several times because patterns of change have been far from uniform, being bound up with processes of accumulation and impoverishment at the household level that have themselves been subject to profound long-term changes as constraints, opportunities and individuals' strategies have altered. Very broadly speaking, some women became more economically dependent on their husbands, losing control over decision-making, while, in others women have been largely cut-off from access to male incomes and have, in the process, become substantially autonomous from male authority. Many women have found themselves in intermediate positions, where spheres of responsibility and control are the objects of conflict.

In some households resident men appropriated their wives' farm labour-power, while in others the woman worked the farm on her own account. In yet others a division of gardens, crops and crop income has been negotiated.

The non-uniform, non-linear nature of changes in household divisions of labour has raised the question throughout of the processes by which the changes described in terms of other levels of analysis (political economy; household differentiation) have been registered, and struggled over, within households. Although they sometimes obscure these processes, changing gender ideologies can provide insights into them by illuminating the terms on which struggles within households have been played out.

A key element linking the different levels of analysis has, accordingly, been the concept of spheres of responsibility, since these have provided the arena in which domestic struggles have taken place. The ability, and willingness, of women and men to play expected roles has been profoundly affected by the interaction of changing circumstances and ideas about rights to resources and appropriate roles.

While, in some respects, these ideas have changed several times, in others they have proved more enduring. In particular, it appears that a distrust of women's commitment to both their marital and natal homes and an association of women with forces of disorder, was long reinforced by the threat that female mobility holds to the pivotal role women have played in keeping together rural households in the absence of their husbands. Now, though, these ideas are under challenge from women with a pressing need to find off-farm sources of income.

Successive changes in the regional political economy, altering processes of accumulation and impoverishment, and a variety of responses to changing circumstances have given rise to a flux in key domestic relationships and the ideologies which justify them. This is why the relationship of changing ideology, behaviour and cirmcumstances in Koguta is so difficult to analyse. But it is an analysis which is worth attempting, because it provides an opportunity to avoid an ultimately sterile opposition of action and structure and recognise their mutually constitutive relationship.

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