Routledge Studies in African Development

CHILDREN'S LIVED EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY AND VULNERABILITY IN KENYA

GOING BEYOND MULTI-DIMENSIONALITY

Elizabeth Ngutuku

LSE Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa

ROUTLEDGE

Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya

Drawing from ethnographic research, this book presents children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Kenya. By taking the case of Siaya, Kenya, which has some of the lowest indicators of child well-being, the book presents children's complex lived experience from three interlinked everyday spaces of the home, the school and support programmes.

It argues that children's experience is formed at the interstices of material lack, historically as well as politically located factors and the complex context of social relations. The book is anchored in an innovative methodology of listening softly to children's voice. Aimed at fully capturing children's experience, listening softly focusses on the different ways that children's voice happen. The book challenges scholarship to go beyond multi-dimensionality and re-imagine children's experience as complex and entangled, use methods that are attuned to capturing children's messy experience of poverty, and be 'widely awake' in each intervention context to capture the emergent fluid experience of children.

Presenting a non-linear, contextual, entangled and complex experience of poverty and vulnerability, this book will be of interest to scholars and students in the field of Poverty Studies, Development Studies, Childhood Studies, Social Policy, Critical Studies, Human and Child Rights, and African Studies.

Elizabeth Ngutuku is a researcher at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is also a Research Fellow, at the Faculty of Education Practice and Society, University College London, and a Research Associate at the Department of Communication and Media, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability considers the complexities, entanglements and fluidity of existing frameworks and categorizations in child poverty and vulnerability. Written in a clear and engaging style and meticulously crafted arguments , the book offers highly original and stimulating insights into the field of childhood and children's rights studies.

Karl Hanson, *Director of the Centre for Children's Rights Studies, University of Geneva, Switzerland*

This exceptionally argued book, children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability provides an interesting reading about changing representations of childhood in resource-limited settings in Africa. These perspectives that draw from locally embedded notions of childhood, parenthood and poverty have significant implications for child protection policy processes

Erick Otieno Nyambedha, *Professor of Anthropology, Maseno University, Kenya*

Children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability draws on children's voice to frame their experience. The nuanced injustices, inequities and resilience provided complexify the realities of growing up in an African context. It is a must-read for policymakers, teachers, postgraduate students and others who work with children.

HB Ebrahim, *UNESCO Co-chair and Research Professor for Early Childhood, University of South Africa*

The book Children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability draws from award-winning ethnographic research. Written in a lucid and engaging style, it is a must-read for those interested in epistemic justice for children, the epistemologies of the South, poverty and social justice debates for children.

Auma Okwany, *Associate Professor of Social Policy The International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands*

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Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya

Going Beyond Multi-dimensionality

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To my mother Alice, and my father, Kīmulī

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1 Introduction

Rethinking Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability

It was a hot sunny afternoon, six months into my fieldwork in Siaya, Kenya. I was going to see one of the caregivers who was fostering four children, whose mother had died a few months before the start of this research in 2016. On the way, I encountered Ayo, a 7-year-old girl I had seen the previous day, in the Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) Centre, also called an Early Childhood Care and Education Centre (ECCE). Her pseudonym denotes the way I encountered her, with the nature of birth name that means 'one who was born on the way'.[1] Ayo was wearing a beautiful school uniform bought by her biological mother. Ayo had two mothers: her biological mother, who was dead, and her 'other mother' or her foster mother. The 'other mother', a distant relative, took her in with her two brothers and their then 18-month-old sister, Awino. Their first-born brother, who was 19 years old, was incarcerated after he got into conflict with the law after their mother's sickness and death. Ayo's mother had died of *Chira*, the local term for HIV/AIDS. Ayo was also taking *dawa* (Kiswahili word for medicine, also used as a euphemism for HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral drugs). Ben, Ayo's 14-year-old brother, was a co-caregiver to their other siblings, along with the 'other mother'. He combined schooling with selling *Togo* (straw for making mats) and burned charcoal for fuel to support their 'other mother', who worked on people's farms for a living. Ben called his sisters and brother 'our children', a semantic kinship complex that denoted his caregiving roles. Their mother's house, not far from the home of the 'other mother', was still locked, but Ben occasionally cleaned it out to connect with memories of their mother.

In this encounter, Ayo was happy to be transitioning to Class 1 in the new year. Later in the year, she did not graduate with the other children. The teacher said she had a fee balance of 400 Kenya shillings or an equivalent of 4 euros. As I prepared to pay for it, the teacher changed her story, saying that Ayo was not good enough academically and was afraid she would fail the Class 1 entrance exams. According to Kenya's education policy, Ayo was not supposed to pay school fees under the public ECCE and was not supposed to sit for class one entrance exams.

Ayo had two aunts (sisters to her mother). However, as Ben told me, their husbands did not want them to foster the children. But I also learned that some

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children did not want to leave their parents' homes or their parents' graves to become 'outsider children' in their relatives' homes. Ayo, Awino, Ben, and Paul all shared a bed made of old clothes on the floor. Their aunt occasionally bought them food. Even though Ayo and her siblings were part of the 'other' mother's household, they sometimes lived like two households, distinguishing between their property, like cows, and that of the 'other mother'.

The state, too, was relatively absent in their story. Before she died, Ayo's mother was receiving the state Cash Transfer for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) grant. However, they were no longer receiving the grant because biometrics in the form of their mother's fingerprints were required for proof of identity or even life in this regard. Following up on the grant was expensive and time-consuming for the 'other mother'. Besides, she was a widow or literary referenced as *Chi Liel*, a wife of the grave, and she was receiving the same grant for her daughter.[2] Therefore, she couldn't receive the same grant twice since the two households had merged in the eyes of the state. The 'other mother' was thus thinking of indirectly 'hiring' a caregiver to receive the cash grant on the children's behalf, but she was a little worried she would not get somebody she could trust.[3] A widow's caregiver group subsidized Ayo's ECCE Centre, and she was taking a midday meal, a cup of fortified porridge. This was the only meal of the day for most children in this centre.

Ayo's story of a poor and vulnerable child is not complete because it can never be. Her story is like a rhizome, fluid, changing, a map with many connections, fragmented but still holding together, and a multiplicity. Her story is the story of the children in this book. The book accounts for children's lived experiences of poverty and vulnerability. This story begins not by describing what poverty and vulnerability mean for children that I encountered like Ayo. Instead, I present this experience as it unfolds, showing differently located children's experience in the diverse spaces of home, school and support programmes. Ayo's story and that of other children show how different issues around poverty and vulnerability connect in their lives in complex ways. Like Ayo's case, the book presents the experience of children, who sometimes live under the shadow of death and poverty but still negotiate in a context of hope and resilience.

Key Arguments in the Book: Starting from the Personal

Starting from Ayo's story, the book flags the social-relational challenges such children face and children's emergent agency. These children, in Siaya's context and similar contexts in Africa, affected by HIV/AIDS, which has left several children orphaned. However, like in Ben's experience, the book presents the different ways in which such children draw on their relations and other material objects in their contexts. These include graves and memories of their dead parents and relatives that they use to negotiate their identity and rights. Like the various dimensions of Ayo's experience, who was orphaned, fostered, a potential outsider child and a sick child, the book also shows how children's experience of poverty and vulnerability defy easy categorization.

The book presents an account of children's experience as understood through ethnographic research. This research, carried out between 2016 and 2017, involved intensive engagement with children's experience, zigzagging, and keeping with its flows, or what I have called 'mapping'. This mapping, as both the process of doing research and the outcome, enabled a perspective that goes beyond the linear conceptions of child poverty and vulnerability in the form of deprivations and lack, causes and effects. Instead, the rhizome, an imaginary for complexity, interconnectedness, fluidity and non-linearity of experience, is the book's central methodological, analytical and organizing principle (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The book shows how different issues, including material lack, identity, social relations, discourses and representations, children's agency and politics and participation in programmes of support, connect in complex ways.

I also argue that we cannot separate our understanding of child poverty and vulnerability from the methods we use in investigating it. I therefore reveal how the innovative methodological tools and non-linear approaches enabled a nuanced understanding of children's experience of poverty (Lather, 2013: 635). As weaved throughout the discussions in the book, the methodological approach and sensibility, which I term as *listening softly to children's voice*, enables a better understanding of children's complex experience. This approach goes beyond relying on the spoken voice, as reflected in the voice of Ayo's teacher earlier, but also on what is not said, the processes of silencing and the diverse ways in which children's voice happens.

The arguments are also inspired by studies showing that identity and experience does not operate aspatially but is located within relations, places and landscapes that people inhabit (Bondi and Rose, 2003: 232; Marker, 2003: 372; Mohanty, 2003). In addition to locating this experience at home, I also locate it at school, where children encounter difficulties in participation but where school is also seen as a way out of poverty. The book also locates this experience in various support programmes, showing how these programmes, which strive to get children out of poverty, are implicated in children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. These programmes, in many ways, accentuate children's vulnerability. Exploring and presenting children's experience in the three interlinked spaces of the home and the school and the programmes of support enables a perspective on poverty that is attentive to the complexity, interconnectedness, distinctiveness, fluidity and contingency of experience, or a rhizomatic cartography.

This book is part of an emerging body of research that is being inspired by philosophy to investigate complexity in people's lives and specifically children's reality (see Bailey, 2017; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 2, Gabi, 2013; Lather, 2007; Sellers and Honan, 2007;). This unfolding experience of children is located in Siaya, one of the counties with the lowest indicators of child well-being in Kenya, and the national context of Kenya more generally. I also draw from other contexts in Africa and from child poverty discussions in other contexts, including the global discourses and practices on child poverty and vulnerability.

The arguments in this book and the research partly draw from my experience working with children for many years in Africa. My day-to-day reflexivities provided the main impetus for this research. The personal and shared fragments of biography indicate difficulties of de-linking knowing from ethics and one's location. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 104) put it, personal stories can become political, stretching larger stories until they wail, making them stutter or stammer. Foucault (2000: 458) puts this more clearly when he presents research as a fragment of his autobiography:

> Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been based on elements of my own experience. This means that I theorized always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, or my relations with others that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly a fragment of autobiography.

On a personal note, the research and the arguments in this book were inspired by the story of my mother and, by extension, myself. The diary of her narratives, which I have kept for years, has influenced me. In her narratives, she characterized herself as a child of a blind, single mother growing up in pre-independence Kenya. Despite this characterization, her biography is profoundly personal and distinct, complex, and sometimes contradictory, and it is a biography that resonates with that of the children in this book. Her stories are about stoicism, her grandmother's tenacity in affording her a little education despite her grandfather's refusal. Her stories are about her role as a *de-facto* family head, caring for her five siblings and her blind, unmarried mother. Even though there were no programmes for needy children then, her agency and dealings with the colonial security guards stood out as she sometimes positioned herself as a needy child to access services from the colonial masters. This was coupled with her subjectivity of refusal to be appropriated as an 'outsider child' (a category I explore in Chapter 5). Though placed within the context of historical Kenya, her agency was jarring. These puzzles of a simultaneously vulnerable and agentic child were inspiring.

I connect these biographical perspectives with my other personal diary on the children of Siaya, starting from when I visited Siaya, my research site, for the first time on a project exchange in 2002. I met Atieno, whose husband had died of HIV/AIDS and was herself infected and bringing up her two young twin boys. The biography of her children's resilience amidst precarity and her own narrative of the refusal to be inherited by her husband's brother (a perspective I explore later in this book) was a useful point of introspection for me. Such an encounter with this caregiver in the then Siaya context, and my work in Siaya over the years, where widow caregivers were referenced as victims of a tradition, birthed a desire for a different lens in understanding children's and caregiver experience.

This book, which branches out from this personal, is an invitation to rethink the taken-for-granted perspectives in accounts of child poverty and vulnerability

and how our work with children can influence their lived experience. Drawing on my over two decades of work with children, the arguments in this book can also be read as a social critique of our understanding of the experience of child poverty and vulnerability in specific contexts. My introspection was guided by the accounts of children's and caregivers' resilience amidst precarity and discourses that mispresented them during the moral panic around HIV/AIDS. This was early in the millennium when I entered the field. If childhood in Africa was not under siege, it was said to be on the brink. Using our location to put to the test an approach that nuances children's voice would not only be a useful science that aids in understanding the ambiguity, contradictions and complexities of children's experience, but is also a social justice issue (Lather, 2007: 152).

As the book shows, these support programmes where I worked for many years are a site where the experience of children is constructed, enacted and can even perpetuate poverty (Foucault, 1972: 49, Green, 2006: 1110, Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler, 2012: 301). Such programmes are seen as spaces of governmentality or what Foucault (1991: 100) sees as 'conduct of conduct', or the various strategies used to govern or control people's behaviour towards the desired outcomes. However, the book approaches these discussions on the role of programmes differently. I take notice of the fact that in the African region in general, there is a prolific base of scholars who have deconstructed the role of interventions in constructing children and their needs and in deconstructing the OVC as an iconic category in development (Fassin, 2012; Meintjes and Giese, 2006). This book does not locate these representations as all-determining in children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. I also do not position the Orphan and Vulnerable Child (OVC) as the 'workhorse' of programmes of support as has been the norm in most literature. Instead, I show how the category is (sometimes) used creatively by children, those who work with them, and the caregivers for their ends. I am also concerned with the various ways in which the deployment of the category influences children's lived experience. For both these support programmes and everyday spaces, the book responds to two questions. The first one is how does such an encounter of children and representations of their needs, identity and personhood re(de)fine the embodied experience of child poverty and vulnerability? Second, the book also focuses on how the category of a poor and vulnerable child can be loosened from its dominant understandings, not only to deconstruct it but to reveal the perspectives on its fluidity.

Much has been said about how vulnerability in the development discourse can make children objects of humanitarian assistance. Vulnerability as a concept is also seen as a form of a zeitgeist that can silence children's resilience in the face of challenges and generally, marshal the same negative signifiers associated with the category (Adefehinti and Arts, 2018: 2; Brown, 2014: 37; Cheney, 2017: 30). In getting around this dilemma, some have coined different terms deemed as less stigmatizing. These include, among others, terms like low-income parents, parents experiencing poverty, hardship or disadvantaged children and children living in poverty, 'Challenged but Hopeful and Resilient Children' (Ridge, 2009;

Seruwagi, 2012: 14). However, these terms do not resolve the tensions and are no less stigmatizing (see Penn, 2007: 27).

This book therefore places meanings of poverty and vulnerability in contexts and engages the notions of vulnerability in dominant development discourse. For example, in the everyday context of Siaya, the research site, there is no one-to-one local term for a vulnerable or poor child. A child is referred to as *nyathi*, and the term for children is *Nyithindo*, while an orphan is *kich* and *kiye* (plural). As a reflection of how global discourses and meanings of a poor child have permeated the local spaces, interactions with communities revealed that the term 'OVC' has also been adopted into local discourse to refer to these children. The term *Nyithindo machandore* was therefore used to represent children who are suffering. They were also referenced as children receiving *kony* (assistance) from organizations. These children were distinguished, for example, from those receiving support from being fostered by relatives. When I asked the caregivers who a poor and vulnerable child is, they noted that these are the 'children whom we know by how they live'. Such a phrase is an imaginary for difficulty and complexity and points to children living in hardship. Claiming that they 'know' these children wrestled the power from outsiders like me and repositioned the needs of children and rights as locally defined and embedded (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013). Living well (*dak maber*) alludes to well-being (as opposed to ill-being) in the sense of receiving proper care, affection, nourishment and protection and thus goes beyond material well-being only. In their research in Eastern Africa, Smiley and others (2012) make the same argument that orphanhood is an inadequate measure of vulnerability for these children. It is these locally embedded and vitalized notions of vulnerability and poverty that the book is interested in.

Rethinking Children's Voice and in Poverty Policies and Interventions

This book also shows the need for rethinking the voice of children in understanding their lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. There is already a lot written about how children's voice is missing in child poverty programmes. For example, in their report on how children experience poverty in Kenya, Belarus, India and Bolivia, Boyden et al. (2003) noted the absence of children's voice in programmes on child poverty. Tafere (2012: 2), in research on child poverty in Ethiopia, also revealed that little attention was given to children's perspectives of poverty. Interventions based on adult voice may sometimes be contrary to the lived reality of children and may occlude the subjective and relational experience. In Kenya, for example, a review of Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes papers revealed that issues of child rights were not considered, including limited participation of children (Espey et al., 2010, Heidel, 2005: 30).[4] This was the same for the 'Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation' (ERS), 2003–2007, which did not include children's perspectives. Indeed, neither the Economic Recovery Strategy nor the subsequent investment plan referenced children or their rights (Heidel, 2005: 14, 21 and 32).

The absence of children's voice in child poverty interventions is the case for most of Africa, as Hulshof (2019: 3) has noted:

> The positive development outcomes achieved in Africa's social protection programmes say little about the extent to which key international development actors comply with the procedural substance of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the right of the child to be heard with their views being given due weight.

While this book addresses the absence of children's voice, its vital contribution is how it engages with what is seen as the voice in such poverty programmes. Some authors have noted that what is often seen as children's voice in interventions includes 'ticking the voice box' (Cheney, 2017: 5). Further, children's voice as used in development programmes and discourse is more about what children say, failing to consider other ways through which children enact their voice (I'Anson, 2013: 109, Lather, 2009: 19). A case in point is Hart's ladder of participation that deconstructs children's participation and voice by exploring various phases of the involvement of children. This ladder has been critiqued for its failure to include a 'phase of textual redaction' or a phase in which a child is given an opportunity to reflect, amend or withdraw what they said (I'Anson, 2013: 109).

The book, therefore, contributes to the growing body of scholarship advocating for the need to go beyond the spoken voice and listen to children's voice carefully and differently (see, among others, James, 2007; Murris, 2013; Spyrou, 2016). James (2007) cautions us to be wary of methodological pitfalls when invoking children's voice. Murris (2013), drawing on Fricker's (2007) notion of epistemic justice, also notes that children can be wronged when their knowledge and voice is disallowed. She argues that this silencing is more accentuated if the child is poor or seen as a beneficiary of charity.

This book, therefore, responds to the calls for dimensioning children's voice. These dimensions include, among others, voice as the present, the absent, silence, the unsaid, voice that is entangled with that of adults and the various processing of silencing (Britzman and Elden, 2000: 28; James, 2007; Lather, 2009: 2; Mazzei, 2007; Murris, 2013; Syprou, 2016;). Devault (1999: 177) noted that 'silencing' may mean 'quieting, censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion, ghettoization, and other forms of discounting'. Such perspectives on silencing are even more critical for children and, especially, those living in poverty because of their positioning in generational relations.

Going Beyond Multidimensionality in Understanding Children's Experience of Poverty

As the title suggests, this book engages the multidimensional thinking in child poverty. There is an emerging perspective that child poverty is a complex socio-economic phenomenon, and measures should go beyond income (Abdu and Delamonica, 2018: 881). As a starting point, it is acknowledged that child

poverty is characterized by the interdependence of various aspects like lack of food, shelter, health and education, and care, among others (Espey et al., 2010: 3). Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012: 292) define poverty by noting that

children living in poverty are those who: experience deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.

Hardgrove et al. (2011: 3), in a Young Lives research, take a multidimensional approach to child poverty.[5] Poverty is conceptualized as:

> a complex, dynamic phenomenon that is subject to both contextual specificity and multiple interacting causes. It highlights the contributory role of risk and uncertainty, power imbalances and abuses, rights violations and insufficiency of assets. Thus, poverty is manifested primarily by diverse material deficiencies, susceptibility to risk, uncertainty and infringement, and constraint on choice. Household poverty, therefore, means having insufficient assets or resources, experiencing insufficient security and having access to insufficient options to ensure the safety, integration and well-being of all members.

The above views show that child poverty is not just material but also relational and draws on child rights norms. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly, 2007 Resolution on the Rights of the Child adopted a definition of child poverty that to some extent takes a starting point of 'differential experience of poverty in childhood', affirming that poverty in childhood is different from adulthood (Jones and Sumner, 2011: 8). Taking a starting point of poverty as the deprivation of a right, the conceptualization of child poverty according to the resolution acknowledges that;

> Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) provides in article 27(1) that children should enjoy a standard of living that is adequate for their mental, spiritual, moral and social development. An adequate standard of living is therefore not just material but covers a child's living conditions in their totality. This article thus is a wide net that captures all other rights, including the rights to health, social protection, and survival.

In Kenya and Africa in general, the current approaches to understanding child poverty draw on the notions of child poverty as a deprivation of rights (Abdu and

Delamonica, 2018; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UNICEF, 2017; Arts, 2017). For example, the multidimensional approaches to child poverty measurement, and mainly the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) methodology, 'identifies children as poor if they are deprived of basic goods and services that are crucial for them to survive, develop, and thrive' (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UNICEF, 2017: 8).

There have been attempts to nuance how rights interface with the analysis of poverty. For example, Abdu and Delamonica (2018: 884–885) argued that there are general human rights deprivations and other rights whose deprivation constitutes poverty. In this thinking, 'the deprivation of a right that constitutes poverty is what makes the person poor'. Rights are seen as having a constitutive relevance to poverty if their fulfilment is 'mainly determined by material resources, and a person's lack of command over economic resources leads to their non-realization' (Delamonica, 2021: 147; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006: 2). There are also arguments that not all rights in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child therefore constitute poverty. For example, it is argued that the deprivation of some rights, like lack of protection from violence, maybe more an indicator of the quality of life for children but not a measure of poverty. Seen in the tradition of MODA, poverty is a material deprivation (Delamonica, 2021).

While such arguments around measurement are useful, this book that focuses on children's lived experience is concerned with some of these deprivations often seen as falling in the realm of general well-being. I am inspired by Bessell (2022: 540), who noted that while the approaches in the multidimensional turn may enhance our understanding of poverty, they are limited since they fail to adequately cater for how the nonmaterial aspects of poverty affect the attainment of human rights and capabilities. There are also arguments that while MODA is context-specific, it still draws from household data, relies on parameters selected by adults and does not adequately cater for the voice of children. Further, while MODA is seen as child-responsive, it is not child-centred (Bessell, 2022: 540).

Authors like Hulshof (2019: 1) have also supported the need to go beyond multidimensionality. He argues that the economic vulnerability of children, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, should be understood within the context of their social vulnerability and 'complex relationship with their caregivers and broader society'. Other authors have also noted that children's experience is contextual, contingent and emergent (Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 6; Prout, 2005; Tisdall and Punch, 2012: 253). Child poverty and vulnerability cannot, therefore, be divorced from other forms of deprivations, broader structures and relational aspects of poverty. The book also takes the view that children's rights are interdependent and indivisible. This means that it is not just the material poverty of children at stake, but other sets of rights as embedded in other articles of the UNCRC as well. For example, article 26 provides for the child's right to benefit from social security from the state, considering the 'resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child'. Other rights in the Convention that have a bearing on the situation of

poor children include rights to education (article 28), health care (Article 24), special care for children deprived of a family environment (article 20) and good care for children who are fostered or adopted (article 21). Poverty interacts with children's rights in mutual ways, and poverty may also interfere with the children's right to be heard. Poverty can be both a cause and effect of rights violations, which in turn lead to social exclusion and poverty (see also Khan, 2009) for a perspective on poverty as the ultimate denial of human rights.

While these universal rights norms are important for the arguments in the book, the processes through which children access these rights are also crucial. The book also focuses on how children lay claims to and/or interpret their rights, even some that may not be embedded in the UNCRC or the Constitution. These alternative ontological perspectives on children's rights, or 'rights as living' are central arguments in this book (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013).

Repositioning Child Poverty as a Complexity: Introducing the Rhizome

Drawing from the arguments above and to better understand children's experience of poverty and vulnerability, the book repositions this experience as complex. This thinking is inspired by Deleuzean thinking on the rhizome as a metaphor for complexity. A rhizome, a non-arboreal plant with numerous non-linearly connected tubers, distinguishes between a tree that is linear with a root and trunk system. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7) noted that a rhizome comprises lines connected in non-hierarchical, non-linear and complex ways. This philosophy perceives reality not as linear or multidimensional but as a multiplicity, entangled and as a map or cartography (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). The rhizome metaphor as used in this book holds the potential for rethinking children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability from a methodological and ontological perspective. This is by showing how different factors in children's experience interact in complex ways. The book, therefore, presents children's experience as contingent and fluid and a site where various forces and factors interact with their material situation (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013: 676; Sellers and Honan, 2007). The complexities go beyond the material and include how discourses of poverty and vulnerability interact with children's agency. Osgood (2016: 160) indeed argues that Deleuzo-Guatarrian concepts provide space for thinking about children differently and understanding how they may resist, appropriate or even circumvent everyday realities.

The book approaches child poverty and vulnerability as an assemblage using the rhizome principle of heterogeneity and multiplicity. This means that the interactions and connections between the diverse issues in children's context lead to a complex experience that cannot be reduced to causes and effects (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8, 23; Law, 2004: 61). Guided by this view of complexity, throughout the book, I use experience instead of experiences, to intentionally show this dimension of children's reality which is unit but not singular, is entangled and not fragmented. Such a perspective on the lived experience of

children engages the prevailing notions that see the experience of children living in poverty and vulnerability as an essence and, therefore, categorize it.

In thinking about children's experience as a rhizome, the breaks with the hierarchical structures or lines of flight are what I position as children's agency (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 9). Conceptualizing children's agency this way, therefore, engages what is seen as the under-theorization of children's agency. For example, Tisdall and Punch (2012: 252) see studies on children's agency as 'overwhelming empirically by their sheer numbers but underwhelming theoretically'. As an assemblage, I show how children's agency is located within various constructions of children's needs, rights, identity and their lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. Agency, as used in the book, therefore tells us more about the structural challenges within children's emergent context (Rose, 2004: 20; Tisdall and Punch, 2012: 259).

To make sense of the interconnections in children's experience, the principle of cartography in a rhizome guides the overall arguments. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 6) argue, a rhizome, like a map, has multiple entryways and exits. This book applies the principle of cartography as an instrument that I used to map the experience of children, including the entangled connections in this experience. I also use cartography as a tool that enables us to see a perspective on the fluidity and complexity of these entangled perspectives (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013: 671; Taguchi, 2016: 39).

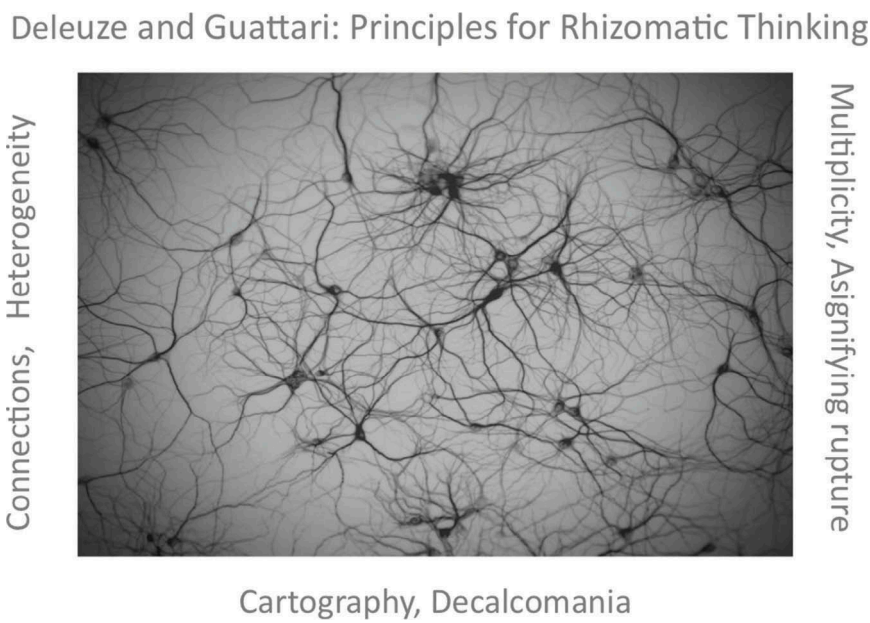

Figure 1.1 Principles of a rhizome (Mackiness, 2014)

In staying with the complexity of children's experience of poverty, another thread in the book is the complex nature of gendered poverty and vulnerability. The intersectional theory avers that 'subjects are situated in frameworks of multiple, interacting forms of oppression and privilege through socially constructed categories such as gender and "race"/ethnicity' (Geerts and van der Tuin, 2013: 171). There is almost a universal agreement that women and girls would be more affected by poverty because they face the biggest traffic in these intersectional marginalizations. However, this book presents gendered vulnerability in ways beyond intersectionality. This thinking draws inspiration from authors who have called for methods that exceed intersectionality. It also responds to the emerging views that intersectional analysis does not cater to the dynamism and contingencies of experience (Lather, 2013: 642). Geerts and van der Tuin (2013: 172), drawing on Barad's (2007) perspective of diffraction, which is both a theory and framework for assessing how differences are entangled, suggest a move from intersectionality to interference by arguing that:

> A fully worked out 'interference theory' would [allow] gender researchers from many disciplines to produce precise case studies that demonstrate how power … is intrinsically out of phase with itself and how, therefore, the production of the most surprising interference patterns is inherent to its working.

This openness that enables nuanced perspectives on how gender takes salience for differently located men, women and children is the main approach to understanding gendered vulnerability and poverty in the book. Taking this entry point does not mean that gender is not important, but the focus is on how gender entangles the experience of children in complex and contingent ways.

Overall, the arguments in this book respond to the key cartographical question: how is it both to be and to be constructed as a poor and vulnerable child? In approaching the experience as complex, the book shows how various material, human and non-human factors, including social relations, policies, identities, schooling systems, participation in support programmes, discourses, children's politics, their rights, and claims-making interact like a rhizome. Therefore, children's experience of poverty, as presented in the book, is both lived, constructed, enacted, performed and influenced by the material reality of the children involved. Such a reading is only possible when using methods attuned to such messiness as I reveal in Chapter 3 (Law, 2004: 70).

Putting Child Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya and Siaya in Context

Here, I will start off by locating the discussions in Kenya. Children and their well-being play an important role in Kenya. By 2020, Kenya's population as shown in Figure 1.2 was estimated at 51.99 million and 54.03 million by 2022 (World Bank, 2022). The 2016 estimates indicated that children aged 0–14 years and 0–19 years were 41 and 52 per cent, respectively, of the population (National Council for Population and Development, 2018: 16).

Child poverty and deprivation is an important lens through which children and childhood in Kenya are perceived. In 2014, an average child in Kenya was seen as a poor child with indications that 80 per cent of all children in Kenya were poor (Government of Kenya (GOK) UNICEF, 2015: 8). The combined Third, Fourth and Fifth State Party Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) also revealed that poverty affects children more than any other age group (GOK, 2012: 31). Poverty in Kenya was therefore presented as having a young face (GOK, 2011: 8). A poverty study by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UNICEF (2017) revealed that child poverty in Kenya was rated at 45 per cent. There were stark differences between urban and rural areas, with the latter displaying high levels of child poverty. Like in most of Africa, these statistics should also be read with state policies and funding. For example, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its Concluding Observations on Kenya's third, fourth and fifth State Party Report, noted that budget allocations for education and social protection for children did not match the needs of children (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). In many countries in Africa, Kenya included, child poverty remains a defining context for the inability to implement the rights of children (see also Arts, 2014). While these statistics demonstrate the effects of poverty on the well-being of children, they only provide a partial picture of the experience of poverty by children or what poverty means for children experiencing it. Such statistics, as Rose (1991: 680) noted, can reduce a complex experience into single figures, which then determine what needs to be done to address a particular issue. This book, therefore, examines children's complex lived experience that goes beyond these statistics.

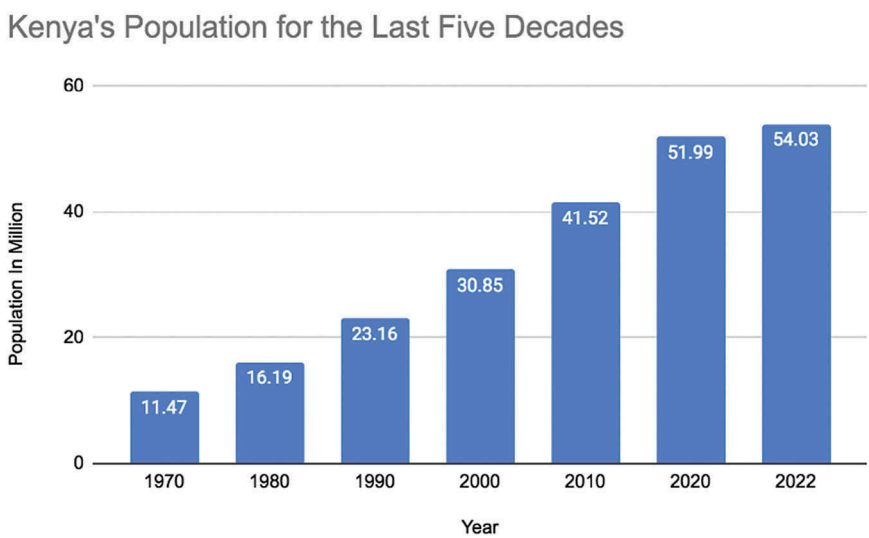

Figure 1.2 Population trends for the last 50 years in Kenya (World Bank, 2022)

The arguments in the book are located in the context of Siaya County, one of the 47 counties in Kenya situated in what was formerly known as Nyanza province.[6] The research was carried out in three sub-counties: Ugunja, Rarieda and Alego-Usonga as shown in Figure 1.3.

The 2018–2022 Siaya County Integrated Development Plan indicated that children and young people below 20 formed the bulk of the population, and the trend was projected to be the same up to 2030. Figure 1.3 shows this trend in the youthful population of Siaya. The high number of children and youth in the population indicates a high youth dependency ratio, which is normally associated with poverty because the resources are shared with the less economically productive members of society.

Child vulnerability is also exacerbated by the specific peculiarities of Siaya. Siaya is one of the counties with high poverty levels in Kenya and, therefore, has a weak capacity to support children (GOK, 2013: xx; Okwany and Ngutuku, 2018). Like in the entire former Nyanza region, poverty levels in Siaya have been attributed to Siaya being positioned as the fulcrum of opposition politics for years. This is because the first leader of the official opposition hailed from Siaya (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012; Kanyinga, 1995). Kanyinga argued that politicians from Siaya who rose to power in the national government did not engage in meaningful development because their rise to power had not been enabled by the opposition, which the majority of people in Siaya supported (Kanyinga, 1995: 87). (See also Cifuentes, 2012; Muhula, 2009.)

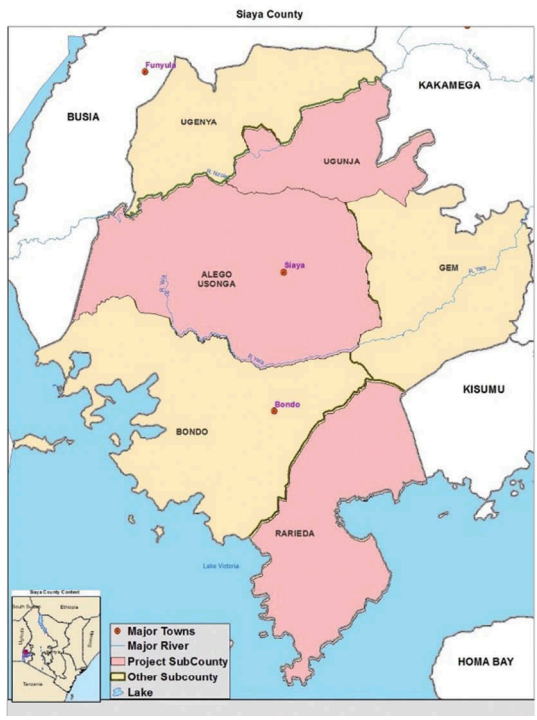

Figure 1.3 Map of Siaya: Constructed by Margret Mwangi, GIS Expert Nairobi

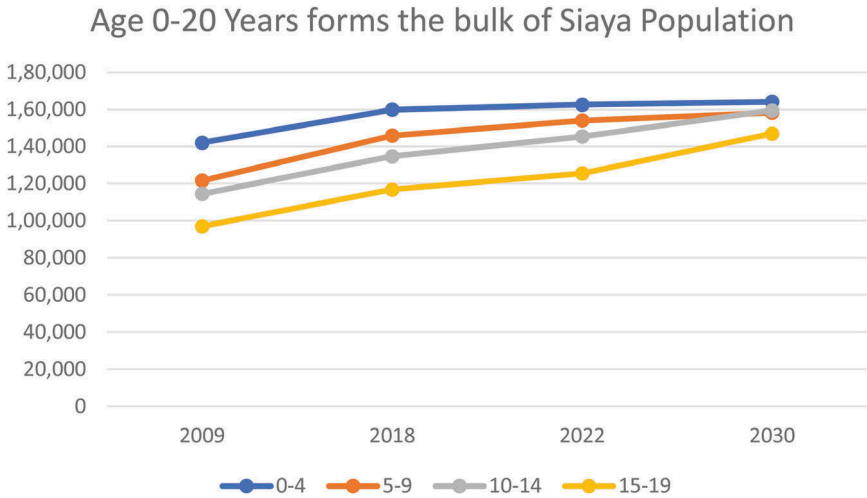

Figure 1.4 Population of Siaya 0–19 years (Government of Kenya, 2019)

There have also been relatively high levels of incidence of HIV/AIDS. In 2014, Siaya ranked fourth highest among the top ten counties with the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS nationally (GOK, 2014). These high levels of HIV/AIDS are important in the arguments in this book for two main reasons. During my research, several of the children were orphaned, some due to HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS also explains the presence of many organizations supporting children, like the ones I engaged with in this research. According to UNICEF's 2015 State of the World's Children Report (UNICEF, 2014), in 2013, in Kenya, it was reported that about 190,000 children were living with HIV/AIDS, while AIDS orphaned 1.1 million and 2.5 million other children orphaned by different causes. During this time in Kenya and Africa, more generally, children's experience was predominantly lived and negotiated around the moral panic over HIV/AIDS, with many organizations working with children to support their needs (Nyambedha, 2008).

Writing a Book like a Rhizome: Order of Chapters

The arguments in the book are organized as a rhizome, with distinct but related chapters that show how children's experience is interlinked or a cartography. The arguments are also organized around children's experience in the interlinked specific spaces of school, home and support programmes. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 24) argued that: 'lines leave one plateau and proceed to another' in a rhizomatic way. Therefore, each chapter is connected conceptually by the metaphor of a rhizome.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the key arguments in the book, showing the motivations. I located this research as a fragment of my autobiography, drawing on my experience and work with vulnerable children and a search for a different science in understanding child poverty and vulnerability beyond multi-dimensionality. I also noted the need to include children's voice and dimension it, while weaving other conceptual threads in this introduction, including discourse, power and governmentality. I have also introduced the rhizome, the main guiding conceptual thinking in the book. Chapter 2 focuses on the representations and constructions of the needs and rights of children, child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya and Africa from a rhizo-genealogical perspective. I organize this review around key periods but in a non-linear, historical manner. These include the late colonial period and early independence (1952–1970), the period beginning in 1990 when care for children affected by HIV/AIDS was the dominant discourse. This is followed by the contemporary period after the year 2000 when the term Orphaned and Vulnerable Child became (and continues to be) the vocabulary of interventions and the imagination of children. This non-exhaustive rhizo-genealogy provides a context for understanding children's experience as material, historically embedded, located in political economy, and discursively imagined.

Chapter 3 provides a perspective on 'doing the cartographies' of child poverty and vulnerability. I position research as an intervention showing how I affected, was moved and was affected by the research. I also present a methodological reflection on how I approached the field tentatively and researched the entangled experience of children. I present the approach of 'listening softly' and the emergent child-centred methods I used to capture children's experience and voice as a multiplicity.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6, offer perspectives on the lived experience of children in the spaces of the home and school. In Chapter 4, I explore the experience of caregivers and how they negotiate the day-to-day realities of caregiving in situations and contexts of precarity and lack, as well as other dominant social norms in their locales. The main argument is that the diverse ways caregivers negotiate within this space influence how childcare is provided. In Chapter 5, I ask, 'Who are the poor and the vulnerable children in Siaya?' I present a perspective on leaking, porous, ambiguous, contingent and fluid categories of children living in poverty and vulnerability. By providing fleeting accounts and glimpses of how children may occupy specific categories simultaneously, I reveal the need for revisiting our categorical practices in policy and research. The lines in Chapter 6 come from Chapters 4 and 5. The chapter explores the lived experience of children with schooling as one of the nodes in the experience of a poor and vulnerable child. By exploring the various challenges children face as they participate in schooling, I engage the discourse of 'Education for All' policies as reflected in free education policies in Kenya and Africa in general. I also point to the need to go beyond the formal rights to education to a perspective on how children redefine their rights to education and also lay claims to their right to education as a route to a better future.

Chapters 7 and 8 explore an important node in the experience of being a poor and vulnerable child. These are the discourses and constructions of child poverty and vulnerability in policies and programmes. These chapters also present how children position themselves within these discourses and constructions of their needs, rights and identity. In Chapter 7, I bring the structural discourses on the needs of children discussed in Chapter 2 into conversation with the interpretations and representation of the needs of children and their identity in select programmes implemented by state and non-state actors in Kenya. My starting point is that, while the experience of children may be seen as primarily material, these needs are also 'culturally constructed and discursively interpreted' (Fraser, 1989: 81). I demonstrate how children's needs and rights are problematized and contested through relations of power, across interlinked sites including the state, local and international non-state actors, the community, children and, by extension, their caregivers. Here, the key point is that it is not only children's needs at stake, but whose voice is seen as authoritative in interpreting needs.

In Chapter 8, I present the embodied and embedded experience of children and their agency in responding to or navigating the dominant representations of their needs, rights, identity, and experience in support programmes. Drawing from select practices, I provide a perspective on how the identity of the poor child is articulated in day-to-day discourses and interactions. I argue that while children and their caregivers may take the subject positions offered to them in programmes and become subjectified, they also engage with, negotiate, resist or subvert these subject positionings. These rhizomatic cartographies in support programmes also overflow and are linked to other sites such as the home and school. This perspective engages the reader to disrupt their linear reading sensibilities and make connections between the discussions in Chapters 7 and 8 with the earlier Chapters 4 and 5 on children's experience in the household.

In Chapter 9, I (re)turn the encounter with Ayo and revisit the key arguments in the book. I demonstrate how the experience of being a poor and/or a vulnerable child is gendered, unfinished and incomplete. The cartographies I built through this book imply that I don't offer any blueprints for action but signposts for policy, research, practice, scholarship and policy.

Notes

1 I use pseudonyms throughout the research to protect the identity of children and caregivers as I explain in Chapter 4.
2 There is no name for a widow among the Luo community, my research site. A woman whose husband has died is called a wife of the grave. This implies that the woman is committed to the grave of her husband as I later explain.
3 Hiring a caregiver would mean getting somebody to receive the grant for Ayo while pretending to be the caregiver. The hired caregiver would in return get some compensation for these services.
4 These are strategies suggested by the World Bank as conditions for continued lending to governments in 1990s.
5 Young Lives is a longitudinal study of poverty and inequality tracing the lives of children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam since 2001.

6 Prior to devolved government in 2013, Siaya was one of the districts that formed a province. After the advent of devolved government some districts became counties automatically and other districts were merged to form counties.

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2 A Genealogy of Policies on Poor and Vulnerable Children and Youth in Kenya

Introduction

Policymaking processes often rely on specific knowledge, images or frames and discursive mechanisms on the identity, needs and rights of those targeted by policies. This chapter, a genealogy of policies on poor and vulnerable children in Kenya, specifically and in Africa generally examines how various discourses on poor and vulnerable children and youth emerge and connect in different moments. Drawing on various texts from Kenya while seeking generalizations for Africa, this discussion is not a policy tracing but a Foucauldian genealogy that draws upon history to problematize and critically engage the present.

This genealogy provides the changing representations of the experience of child poverty and vulnerability. I explore the context and situation in Kenya where the discourse of a poor and vulnerable child emerged and continues to thrive, with specific implications for children's experience. This exploration is structured around key non-linear historical periods. These periods act as signposts for understanding the discourses and representations of children's needs, rights and identity. The periods are the late colonial and early independence periods (1952–1970), when the needs of young people were conflated with discipline and used as weapons for control. The period from the 1980s when the image of a street child was seen as a source of shame, and the period beginning from the 1990s when what I call an 'HIV/AIDS afraid psyche' influenced policies and interventions for poor and vulnerable children across Africa. I complete the analysis by merging these periods into the contemporary moment starting in 2000. The argument is that the category of Orphan and Vulnerable Child (OVC) became and continues to be the dominant way of thinking about child poverty and vulnerability. I also argue that these representations are not neutral but influence policies, including social protection and welfare policies for poor and vulnerable children and youth.

The chapter also explores how various discourses connect in different moments and when a specific discourse may draw from, re-member (or flatten out) previous or another discourse. Instead of defining a poor and vulnerable child, different ways and contexts in which the category emerged are presented, including how child poverty and vulnerability were imagined. The case of Kenya especially

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exposes the complex mix of the discursive policy system on the welfare of poor and vulnerable children and youth in Africa. This perspective responds to Fraser's (1989: 166) view that needs identification and construction is a contested terrain where 'groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate needs'. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) perspectives of reality as a rhizome and a map with complex connections are also used to link this thinking with Foucauldian genealogy. The latter draws upon history to problematize and critically engage the present, exposing the taken-for-granted frames or images (Garland, 2014; Schmid, 2010: 2104). A genealogy begins with 'questions posed in the present' to trace and understand how they came to be this way and to engage with what has been taken as a given and for granted (Garland, 2014; Schmid, 2010: 2104). Khoja-Moolji (2018: 17) says this of genealogies:

> Genealogies are philosophical and historical examinations that elaborate the ways in which knowledge-making practices intersect to produce/erase subject positions … genealogies are not traditional histories or teleological narratives of progress; they do not have singular origins but multiple beginnings and middles. They are rhizomes … with no beginning or end per se and go off in different, unpredictable directions.

Several questions guide the discussion in this chapter. Is there a discernible ontology of a poor and vulnerable child or youth in these constructions and discourses? Who has the power to define the needs of children and young people, and whose voice is missing? In what ways may perspectives on structural inequalities be silenced? What present and future subjectivities for children are imagined in these discourses? How are these discourses entangled with others in the past or the present? What do these discourses mean for rights and citizenship entitlements?

Historical Context of The Poor, Vulnerable Children and the Youth in Kenya

Placing the representations of child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya and Africa generally in their colonial and early postcolonial context and antecedents reveals how specific 'keywords' and constructions of children and youth and their needs were assembled. These keywords have arguably unspoken assumptions that need to be examined (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). The colonial government played a role in creating a cadre of specific vulnerable and poor children and youth, and the welfare of children and young people was linked to control and governance in the colony. For example, the late colonial period, especially during the fight for independence (from 1952), created vulnerabilities for many children. Kenya's colonial authorities declared a state of emergency from 1952 to 1956. This aimed to control the insurrections for independence, especially during the Mau-Mau

(1952–1960). Consequently, many children and young people were rendered vulnerable because their parents were detained (Mbugua, 2012).

As one of the strategies used against the 'rebellion', the villagization policy, which was also effected in other British colonies, is a significant departure in this analysis. This policy forced especially people from the Kikuyu community in central Kenya (who hosted the Mau-Mau rebellion) to move into 'protected' villages. Initially, the policy was couched in the language of protection, but its actual intent was part of a colonial governmentality because Africans were corralled in these villages against their will. Their traditional villages were destroyed to ensure that they would not be used by the Mau-Mau activists and as a general way of curbing support to freedom fighters. In some contexts, several families were cramped in one house in some villages, surrounded by barbed wire and ditches, and continuous surveillance and excessive discipline were imposed on them. Children were also said to be suffering from disease and hunger (Sandgren, 2012). Children's vulnerability was also accentuated by the fact that the colonial government ordered the destruction of food crops. During this period, education in the colony was also scarce since the British colonialists destroyed most independent schools because they were seen as Mau-Mau sympathizers (Kinyua, 2009).

The definition of needs is not neutral, and it involves cognitive struggles between those with the power to know. Needs may also be 'psychologized' without attention to structural causes. For example, the colonial government relied on Carothers, a British psychologist's work, to give scientific weight to this villagization policy. He was commissioned to inquire into the causes of and remedies for the Mau-Mau uprising that was predominantly led by the Kikuyu community. Ignoring the effects of the dislocation of the Kikuyu by the colonial authorities, he argued that the Kikuyu were suffering from the effects of the transition from traditional ways to modernity (Carothers, 1955: 22). Wilkinson (2017: 31) argued that such a view was paternalistic and infantilized the local men and women by projecting the British ideals and gender norms on the colony. In justifying what he saw as the Kikuyu's putative forest-like nature, he recommended, among others, that even after the war the villagization policy was good since it stopped young men from going to the villages and coming back to the city. This argument bolstered the need for continued sanitization of the cities and urban areas from the black youth and ensured ultimate control by the colonialists.

Another colonial practice in 1954 that affected the well-being of children and youth was 'Operation Anvil'. Here, perceived Mau-Mau loyalists in Nairobi were detained, screened and sent to detention camps. Others were repatriated to the reserves to clear them from the streets of Nairobi. Wives and children were sent to separate detention camps, and other children were left without caregivers. Indeed, there was an Operation Anvil for children, albeit one that was supposed to soften women who were seen as hardcore Mau-Mau. This practice was, therefore, geared towards making them lose their loyalty to Mau-Mau through concern for the welfare of their children (Ojiambo, 2018). Ocobock (2010: 223–

225) noted that the roundups were very swift, leaving children lying in their cots unattended for days. Lind (2019: 338) has called these colonial practices and their role in child vulnerability the process of 'vulnerabilization' or different ways in which the state creates conditions of vulnerability.

Conflating Child Welfare, Discipline, Child Protection, Colony and the Nation

Child welfare and interventions relating to young people in the late colonial period can be termed a specific imperial undertaking and statecraft aimed at ensuring the smooth running of the colonial empire. With concerns about an empire teetering on the brink of collapse, the state, or what Ocobock (2017) called an elder state, used male youth for control, often couched in the language of welfare. An elder state also applies to decolonization, where young people, particularly male youth, were used as weapons in the decolonizing and postcolonial project. Youth and children, especially the poor and vulnerable, were, therefore, a site where race, gender, poverty, vulnerability, generation/age, colony and later nation were constructed.

In 1954, the colonial government established the Ministry of Community Development in response to child and youth protection issues. This provided social services such as education, probation and community development (Mbugua, 2012: 11). In 1955, the Prevention of Cruelty and Neglect of Children Ordinance was enacted. This Ordinance can be seen as part of a social and bio-political project because, besides protecting the well-being of vulnerable children and youth labelled 'destitute', it was supposed to address the increasing cases of juvenile crime (Foucault, 2008). The rise in crime was attributed to young people who had moved to urban centres as a result of forced migration or because of the death of their parents (Hilton, 2016; Kinyua, 2009). Through this Ordinance that was protective and correctional simultaneously, one can trace the genesis of the failure of the state to distinguish between child discipline and child protection. This is because delinquent children were lumped together with the poor and/or those made vulnerable by colonial actions.

Indeed, the Emergency (Welfare of Children) Regulation of 1954 gave the district commissioners the right to detain young people under 16 years of age, including those whose parents were detained or missing, before being transferred to approved institutions for care until the end of the emergency period. This led to the loss of freedom for many children. Ocobock (2010) further notes that children were taken to detention camps, primarily street children, who were seen as thieves and criminals when this intervention failed. No distinction was therefore made between poor and vulnerable young people who needed protection and the delinquents. This child protection model, where protection was conflated with discipline, was later reflected in the Children and Young Persons Act cap 141 of the laws of Kenya of December 1963. This law also targeted children found begging, gambling, buying drugs and children whose parents were not taking care of them. Consequently, communities, teachers and guardians could

discipline such children (Mathieu, 2012). This intervention model is still applied in Kenya, for example, in addressing street children who, in some cases, are taken to rehabilitation centres and treated as criminals.

During this period, a colonial government that was reticent to provide for the welfare of children relied on non-governmental organizations and the Child Welfare Society of Kenya (CWSK), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), was formed in 1955 to provide support to neglected children (CWSK, 2015). Also, many other organizations emerged to support or rehabilitate children and vulnerable populations. Other examples of how the colonial government collapsed delinquency, poverty and vulnerability were the establishment of rehabilitation centres and clubs for youth, sometimes run by non-state actors. For example, boys who were rehabilitated through the Starehe Centre, a key colonial welfare institution, were seen as 'desperately poor boys, many of whom were homeless, orphaned and embarking upon a life of crime' (Hilton, 2016: 235). Thomas Askwith, a colonial development officer, argued that the Centre was for the 'vagrants and orphans' (Askwith, 1995: 117). These youth were therefore variously referenced as destitute, vagrants or poor boys, homeless, orphaned, engaged in crime, and sometimes even terrorists (Hilton, 2016; Ocobock, 2017).

By disguising their governmental role in the empire, the discourses of destitute children by the colonial officials were discursively divorced from the actions of the colonialists. For instance, the role of the colonial government in creating a cadre of disobedient or criminal and 'destitute' youth (a 'youth in crisis' meta-narrative) was glossed over (Hilton, 2016: 240). Instead, in Carothers' style, their situation was attributed to the 'breakdown of tribal responsibility caused by the social changes from subsistence to cash economy in the rural area, and the rapid urban development' (Hilton, 2016: 240). The pressure on land due to the colonial authorities' annexation of African land was also left unquestioned. The hut tax that the colonial government imposed drove people from the rural to urban areas in search of work, and most of them, including their children and youth, joined the urban underclass (Tarus, 2004). Not only was the poverty of children and youth in the streets problematized, but poverty and vulnerability were also conflated with poor parenting. For example, in casting images of incompetent [black] caregiving, several authors have noted that the colonial government criticized parents for failing to bring up their children in proper ways. Therefore, the colonial state took up the ideal role of parent figure, exerting parental authority over these young people (Ocobock, 2006; Ojiambo, 2007: 199). Such conflation of poverty with poor parenting is still evident in some contemporary support programmes.

Labelling boys and young men as vagrants or criminals reflects similar anxieties in the history of sanitizing urban spaces by clearing away the poor in England and later global discourses of street children in the 1990s who were seen as criminals. Baughan (2020: 60) notes that instead of the needed reforms, the colonial government and NGOs sought to 'remake' these youth into colonial subjects, thereby remaking the society. These colonial welfare organizations also

maintained the state 'on the cheap' by supplementing the state to provide for the welfare of young people (Baughan, 2020: 62).

The discourse of a destitute quintessential male, deviant or potentially rebellious youth or child that circulated thrived on the exclusion of the girl child and the hypervisibility of male youth. For example, Griffin, the founder of Starehe Boys Centre, reportedly argued against starting a similar centre for 'rehabilitating' and providing education for girls affected by the Second World War, poverty and late colonial insurrections and control. This denied the evidence that, indeed, girls, too, were affected by the Second World War and its aftermath and by the Mau-Mau uprising (Kinyua, 2009). These gendered binaries did not serve the youth in question but the colonial project of control, as was evident in the provision of education, where boys were seen as in need of education compared to girls. The absence of girls in these narratives was explained through the needs of the colony since, as it was imagined, 'idle' boys would form political parties, the then enemies of the colonial state (Askwith, 1995: 62). Askwith was less subtle on the social engineering roles of this type of rehabilitation when he argued that later (after the Mau-Mau uprising), the youth involved in the resistance movement, had similar characteristics as the youth who had little education.

The postcolonial state that followed in these footsteps also hardly provided for the needs of children and youth. Instead, this role was relegated to the family or community through the collective spirit of Harambee. Thus, the continuation of a minimalist state in Africa where NGOs primarily finance interventions in children's affairs is a colonial heritage. Fashioning child and youth welfare to meet the needs of the colony parallels current programmes and policies for vulnerable children in Africa. It might override concerns about the rights and well-being of poor children. This is for example seen through the focus on the needs of children on the streets, another archetypical category in child welfare in Kenya and Africa that I explore next.

Children of the Debt and Street Children as Victims and Source of Shame

While colonialism created identities of a vagrant, destitute, delinquent or terrorist child and youth either in need of protection or punishment, the postcolonial experience undoubtedly perpetuated these representations in various policies on children. For example, the 'shameful' street child category could be seen as the legacy of global economic policies promoted by the World Bank and the IMF, as discussed in this section. Research pioneered by UNICEF in the 1980s in Colombia and Brazil used more subcategories of the street 'of' or 'on' the streets. These categories were exported to Africa, where similar representations of this category as the most vulnerable continued. For example, in its annual report in 1989, UNICEF provided what has been seen as 'guesstimates,' putting the number of children on the streets at that time at 100 million (UNICEF, 1989). While such guesstimates may point policy towards the urgency of a policy issue, they may lead to bad policies or fatigue, fail to offer a perspective on lived

experience and may lead to policies that reduce realities to numbers instead of addressing the rights of children and their needs.

In staying with Kenya, and drawing rhizo-discursive lines between the discourse of clearing streets in colonial Kenya and later discourses and practices, one sees similar lines of thought on vulnerable children on the street as victims and as shame. Street children were seen as one of the unpalatable legacies of the World Bank/IMF's Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s. SAPs introduced cost-sharing measures in the health and education sectors. Consequently, key sectors lacked funds, and local populations were deprived of essential services. In Kenya, SAPs were said to create 'children in debt' as these programmes were seen as leading to the 'exodus' of children to the streets (Gakuru et al., 2002). Similar representations were evident in Tanzania, where street children were criminalized and said to be gangs, prostitutes and drug peddlers (Lugalla, 1995).

Relatedly, street children in the 1980s and beyond were also seen as victims following the effects of rapid urbanization in Kenya. Rapid urbanization and corresponding rural–urban migration were linked to the degeneration of care values so much that the then-president Moi in Kenya appealed for a return to solidarities of care. Seen through the aesthetics of the city, the media represented children as defiling Nairobi, the once famed 'city in the sun', with their Charles Dickensian manners of begging (Drummond, 1993). With a lack of government support, these children (termed as urchins or children of the bins) negotiated their social contract with caring individuals or various NGOs for support or admission for rehabilitation (Mathieu, 2012).

The year 2002 saw a return to the colonial discourses of sanitizing the streets by expelling children and youth from the streets. Droz (2006) noted that children were separated from their families and taken to separate camps for rehabilitation. Also, he argues that President Kibaki's government focused on the rehabilitation of street children to present itself as a better regime, casting the former regime of President Moi as uncaring. Droz contends that this strategy was not just about disciplining children in a literal sense but also about disciplining populations. This was because the government was concerned with clearing the streets of 'lazy people' and disciplining everybody (including the street children and their families) into a work ethic.

The actions and discourses around clearing children and young people from the streets during the colonial period and the Kibaki presidency portrayed some similarities, i.e. they were both guided by nationalist concerns while neglecting children's rights and well-being. Second, in their concern with their image and the aesthetics of the city, both did not interrogate the role of structural issues in the experience of street children. Such an analysis should also not be lost to the perspective that these rural areas, where most of these poor people were expected to live, had few livelihood opportunities for young people. They were also silent on the alienating education system that pushes young people to cities upon completion of schooling.

While street children were a legacy of SAPs, an orphaned and poor category child was seen as the legacy of HIV/AIDS. This archetypical category guides child welfare policy in Kenya and Africa in general, which is what I now turn to.

Welfare and Needs of Children as A Disease: OVC as Spectre and a Crisis

OVC is a 'keyword' utilized in most of Africa's child poverty and vulnerability policies. Green (2007: 147) argued that OVC is 'an emotionally compelling category and a dominant tool kit for child poverty'. OVC has typically been seen as quintessentially a poor child and has been connected to the emergence of HIV/AIDS. For example, the genesis of OVC policy in Kenya can be traced to the first Kenyan parliamentary debate on the creation of a national orphan support fund in 1995. In this debate, OVC was used as a signifier for a crisis of childhood and nationhood. Accordingly, an orphan was defined as a child between 1 and 18 years old who had lost a mother and not both parents. The understanding was that the father would eventually also die due to HIV/AIDS (GOK, 1995, 2041). Discourses of HIV/AIDS as a catastrophe were also marshalled in this debate, and it was not just that children were seen as orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, but it was said that they would also die in large numbers (GOK, 1995: 2040–2042). These projections, including the imagined future catastrophe, were also happening elsewhere where HIV/AIDS was seen as 'ravaging' millions in Africa. Meintjes and Giese (2006: 410) referred to these projections on HIV/AIDS in South Africa as 'spinning the epidemic' while employing the language of drama. Such a disproportionate focus on orphanhood and its conflations with HIV/AIDS was at the expense of other children's needs and rights and masked other vulnerabilities (Meintjes et al., 2010: 47).

In Kenya, the issue of child-headed households seen as a spectre was at the centre stage of these discourses of children affected by HIV, where children, 10-to-12-years-old were said to be heading households (GOK, 1995: 2043). This spectre was often compared with a romantic past where communities cared for their children. Anxieties, therefore, centred on the possibility of children becoming street children in the future. In South Africa, Meintjes et al. (2010: 47) troubled this discourse of child-headed households, noting that these households tend to be transient since children are eventually cared for by relatives and that these households are complex. In Chapter 5, I show the complexity of such a category whose characteristics cannot be fixed in advance (Ngutuku, 2019).

With the predominance of the OVC category, the discourse of the 'spectre' of street children that had occupied much of the policymaking in the 1990s mutated. For example, while there was already a fund for street children in Kenya, street children were seen as less deserving and support for them was seen as misplaced. Their 'privileged' begging childhood was also emphasized since, compared to those orphaned by HIV/AIDS, they had parents who used them to beg (GOK, 1995: 2104). This illustrates how specific lines in the assemblage of needs and rights discourses in policies may change at different moments when other

needs emerge or even mutate into something new altogether (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In contemporary programmes and policies, one can still observe the same exclusionary and normative frames that disproportionately focus on some categories of children. This mutation of the needs of some categories in policy discourses also reveals how global aid faddism could lead to neglect of existing social policies, like the case of support for street children in Kenya.

In most of these discourses, in Africa, children and orphaned children specifically were seen as the embodiment of the country's future. In Kenya, the OVC category was seen as bad for the country in the present because they would be harbingers of poverty for the nation in the future. In prevailing upon people's conscience to support OVC, the dis_ease-causing rise of OVCs was represented through the image of a sick state that could not fulfil its obligations to its citizens (GOK, 1995: 2044–2045). This discourse can be connected to the postcolonial development sensibility in Kenya, which was built on eliminating poverty, disease, and lack of education (GOK, 1965). Policies on children were therefore supported because HIV/AIDS was seen as the debris of a sick state that once haunted the newly independent Kenya. These imaginaries of support to children seen as vulnerable as a break from the past were evident in several African countries. For example, post-apartheid South Africa still struggles with addressing the evils of apartheid on children and where HIV was seen as 'eroding precious and hard-won development gains made since 1994' (Republic of South Africa, 2005: 10).

The representations of poverty and vulnerability were not 'unaccompanied' and were drawn from and connected to the global cognitive struggles around OVC. The entry of the 'keyword' OVC into the development realm and its association with child vulnerability in Kenya was a by-product of the global processes around HIV/AIDS as a disease affecting considerable parts of Africa. This was specifically relevant for the East and Southern Africa region and Kenya in particular. These processes included the drafting of the 1994 Lusaka Declaration, attended by 15 countries and which laid down a framework for supporting orphans; the 1998 UN Discussion on Children Living in a World with AIDS; the 2001 United National General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS where there was a special action plan for children and the 2002 UN Declaration on A World Fit for Children. Various documents showing the magnitude of HIV/AIDS and its effects on children were also crucial in these processes. For example, during 1994–2004, a series of publications on 'Children on the Brink' echoed the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS problem and its effects on children and poverty. Examples include the United States Agency for International Development and others (2003) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS et al. (2004). In 'Africa's Orphaned Generations', HIV/AIDS was said to have created a generation of 'Africa's orphans', and the world was admonished to avert this 'grave' matter to prevent 'orphaning generations of children' (UNICEF, 2003: 4). A sequel to this publication in 2006, 'Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations' (UNICEF, 2006), continued with the narrative on the need to come to the aid of Africa to avert a generational catastrophe. These publications that provided a perspective on the number of orphaned

children, argued against institutional support and shifted responsibility from the state to community-based support for children affected by HIV/AIDS, often seen as the poorest.

Elsewhere, UNICEF set the agenda in a similar tone but with a different accent, emphasizing the need to avert a catastrophe of monumental proportions and worried about the silence around it. In 2002, UNICEF's Executive Director marshalled sympathy for a shock at the OVC statistics. Endearing herself to the nations that she called friends, she referenced the rights of children for survival but also emphasized the 'right' to political survival for nations that were being threatened by HIV/AIDS orphans, as evidenced in the discourse below:

> The silence that surrounds children affected by HIV/AIDS and the inaction that results is morally reprehensible and unacceptable. If this situation is … not addressed now with increased urgency, millions of children will continue to die, and tens of millions more will be further marginalized, stigmatized, malnourished, uneducated, and psychologically damaged. The implications of this are monstrous … by creating millions of orphans as it kills the very men and women vital to the functioning of society, HIV/ AIDS sows the kind of political instability that can lead to strife and outright war.
>
> (Bellamy, 2002: n.p.)

In Kenya at the time, a human rights report appropriated the metaphor of death titled 'Kenya in the Shadow of Death', fanning the discourses of catastrophe. It revealed that HIV/AIDS not only impoverished households but pushed children to the streets and affected their right to survival and development (Human Rights Watch, 2001: 3). We should not lose sight of the fact that while HIV/ AIDS was a veritable threat to populations, the shock around child poverty and vulnerability was misplaced, as demonstrated by the Joint Learning Initiative on Children (JLICA) studies. JLICA was an international learning initiative by donors, policymakers, researchers, activists and people who had HIV/AIDS for collective learning on HIV/AIDS that brought together actors from the Global North and South. It demonstrated how, despite millions of dollars targeting AIDS Orphans and drawing largely on the moral panic caused by 'shocking numbers', only 10 per cent of children affected were reached by both state and non-state at this time. The rest of the children were cared for within families (JLICA, 2009: 9).

From Discourse of Crisis to Practice: National Action Plans and Care by Community

The 'keyword' OVC continued to dominate the child poverty and vulnerability interventions in Kenya and became the ubiquitous lens through which children deemed deprived and vulnerable are viewed. The vulnerability of children was framed in terms of the breakdown of community safety nets. Therefore, international organizations and the government were working towards a return to community care for OVC. For example, in response to the UNGASS

requirements 2001, an intervention termed 'Orphan Competent Community' was implemented in 39 communities in 13 farming districts in Kenya. The communities wrote social action plans to support orphaned children in their localities, and each community was given a grant of 4,000 Euros (Skovdal et al., 2011). This model was also present in several African countries. For example, a 2005 policy framework for OVC in South Africa had similar discourses that these children were suffering, and the community was invited to support them. This call for 'caring together' was the same in Tanzania, where village-level actors called Most Vulnerable Committees cared for the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS (Correl and Correl, 2010).

In repositioning the perceived social contract between the children and their communities and not with the state, this narrative of strengthening the community to care for OVC seemingly excused the state since the essential state services for children orphaned by HIV were lower in most African states. Other initiatives were the OVC Strategic Plans that dealt with the 'orphan crisis'. These plans drew on the global definition of the term OVC. For example, in the Kenya OVC Plan 2007–2010, an orphaned and vulnerable child was defined as a child 'whose vulnerability is due to parent's mortality or morbidity or household poverty or other social-economic factors that make it hard for children's needs to be met' (GOK, 2008: 13). In this Strategic Plan, the justification for an OVC intervention was positioned within a frame that viewed the vulnerability of children whose parents had HIV as beginning even before the death of their parents. This was because of the increased responsibilities for many children and potential exposure to abuse, lack of education and related vulnerabilities.

With Southern and Eastern Africa seen as the epicentre of the epidemic and that of the OVC crisis, these plans were developed in 29 out of 35 countries in sub-Saharan Africa between 2004 and 2007. Further, 92 per cent of the plans included OVC in their national AIDS plans and several others in their PRSPs and national plans. While these plans enabled funding for child issues, questions have been raised about the exclusivity of an OVC lens and the utility of stand-alone plans for OVCs, leaving out other children like those affected by conflict and natural disasters in the region (Mathieu, 2012). The plans also revealed the tragedy of policy push by donors. For example, a review of the Tanzanian plan shows that the policy was alive on paper but dead in practice. The government or even the NGOs did not fund it, and it was not even integrated into the local governance processes (Correl and Correl, 2010).

Further, African countries were to adapt to this framing of needs, sometimes to the detriment of their local child welfare policy. Reynolds (2014) noted that this was against the programming guidance in other countries like South Africa, which did not allow programming on children based on the causes of their vulnerability. This was also against the prevailing strategies at the time, primarily developed by UNICEF and others, which had argued against the exclusion and stigmatization of children affected by HIV. A focus on dead parents, despite a child having one parent, neglected the living parent and ignored children living in poverty (Meintjes and Giese, 2006). Such categorization, for example,

restricted funds from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDs Relief (PEPFAR) to children in HIV prevalence areas whose vulnerability was not HIV-related (Reynolds, 2014).

Conclusion

The non-linear policy genealogy on poor and vulnerable children presented here illuminates the discourses of child poverty and vulnerability and the poor and vulnerable children in policies and programmes. The attendant policy discourses map into each other, revealing ruptures, continuities and discontinuities. The discourses and representations indicate that the category of the poor and vulnerable child is constructed variously by diverse, powerful actors through often contradictory understandings of children and young people's needs. The discussions have revealed no fixed ontology for a poor and vulnerable child in the policy. Instead, the category is an assemblage comprised of legitimate needs and rights of young people; knowledge and expert discourses; local, national and international politics; views about nationhood and historical discourses. While these discourses of needs and identity are shifting, the interstices around the shifts are visible. Without eliding the material aspects of poverty and vulnerability, the key argument in this chapter is that these representations provide certain versions of poverty and vulnerability in different historical and conjunctural contexts. In addition, specific discourses may invite certain acts of paternalism in relation to children and caregivers, or they may render meaningful certain interventions. These discourses and representations also imagine certain citizens and invite particular subjectivities for children and their caregivers. By providing specific ways of being a child, they act as nodes in the cartography of children's lived experience (Saukko, 2003: 7). However, I do not imagine a discursive determinism in these discourses. Children may fail to take up the narrow subject positions allotted to them by the dominant discourse, or their experience may stutter these representations (Willemse, 2007: 474). These possibilities are later explored in the book. The definitions of needs and policy prescriptions are also based on who has the power to define and act on needs. Indeed, as Cheney (2007) rightly argues, those willing to frame the needs in a particular way have access to funding.

The discussions on social protection and welfare support the view that most social protection policies tend to 'emerge from the supply side of the social contract' (Cherrier, 2015: 2). These representations also go beyond simple policy framing that appeals to conscience to raise funds. In reality, they represent the interests or hopes of adults, not children, and this is a problem (Schmid, 2009; Hulshof, 2019: 3). Moreover, the discourses on needs often steer away from structural causes of poverty like land rights, dispossession, and lack of education. Therefore, there is a need to include the voice of children and youth, and their lived experience should inform social protection programmes. As I argue throughout this book, policy prescriptions that emerge from such constructions may be out of touch with Africa's context and approximate what Adesina (2011)

sees as policy merchandising by powerful actors. This merchandising may not be the only problem. More worrying is that framing the needs of children in a particular way may foreclose alternatives, as I later show in the book. There is also a need for constant reflection on effects of these discourses on children.[1]

Note

1 A version of this chapter was published in the *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy in Africa*. Ngutuku, E., 2022. A genealogy of policies on poor and vulnerable children and youth in Kenya. Routledge. London

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3 Listening Softly to Children's Voice

Generating Cartographies of Children's Experience of Poverty

Introduction

This chapter presents the two-pronged cartographical methodological approach used in researching children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. This approach enabled me to research through the lens of representations, on the one hand, and mapping or doing cartographies of how this experience is enacted in the different spaces of the home, the school and support programmes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The chapter showcases an innovative approach I called 'listening softly' to children's voice. Listening softly goes beyond the act of listening. It is an approach, a sensibility and a posture in research.

Various authors have emphasized the importance of going beyond the spoken voice to understand people's experience in a nuanced manner. For example, Willemse (2007: 23–24) talks of 'listening against the grain'. According to her, this involves awareness of the power differences between the researcher and the narrator and the discourses around which the narration is embedded. Listening against the grain also means listening to what is said, including the silences and subtexts and also acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed during a research encounter. Mitchel (2009: 77–96) would call it 'hearing and listening with soft ears', which means listening to nuances of voice, going beyond interpretation, and listening to voice that is entangled with discourses. Lather (2007: 89) shows the complexity of how voice happens by pointing to the need for 'priming one's ears differently' so as to hear even the unheard voice. Murris (2013: 245), while bringing it close to the voice of children, talks about the need to 'remove metaphorical sticks from our ears' to hear the voice of children, especially children who are marginalized.

While in sync with these scholars, I wanted to confound the process of listening in research by devising a language of my own while drawing on what is already said about listening to children differently (Foucault, 1972: 27; Leafgren, 2007: 13). I call this nuanced approach, 'listening softly'. Listening softly is an approach and a sensibility to research and not a concept that can be defined beforehand, but one for which I only offer signposts for understanding, and by throughout the book, showing how it happened. In doing so, I draw from the Deleuzean tradition, where concepts are not defined in advance. Still, meanings

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become apparent when the solution to the problem for which the concepts were devised is realized (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 16). Listening softly as a methodological innovation and experimentation enables me to confront the settled ways of thinking about children's voice with the diverse ways this voice happens in day-to-day contexts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Schmidgen, 2015).

As an orientation towards voice, listening softly shows how I approached children's experience and voice in a non-linear and emergent manner and through mapping like a rhizome (Ngutuku, 2022). I mapped this experience in the space of the school, home and support programmes. Listening softly also demonstrates how I listened emergently through a method assemblage that went beyond triangulation or obtaining a polyvocal voice. Instead, it involved researching the interlinked dimensions of children's messy voice, and voice as a multiplicity (Mazzei, 2009). In listening differently, these methods were slow, phased and emergent, enabling me to capture children's nuanced realities. The method assemblage also involved several encounters with participating children, each guided by the need to understand and capture the unfolding and complex experience. I was inspired by Law's (2004: 10) argument of the need to move tentatively in the field. Law used Appelbaum's (1995) metaphor of a blind man who gropes around as he encounters novelty, meaning he takes longer walking. However, he argues that in this stopping and tentative movement, the blind man gains sensibilities that a sighted person cannot have.

Listening softly through such methods also involved obtaining the subtle nuances of children's voice, including 'whole body listening' (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012: 740). Such listening meant paying attention to silence, body language and hesitations. It also involved being introspective about what influenced what I heard from children, including my own and other adult discourses in children's contexts (James, 2007; Spyrou, 2011). Within the framework of rhizomatic thinking, research does not perceive ethics as separate from the research methodology but as entangled. Listening softly was, therefore, an ethical posture. As I show, ethics and research were entangled throughout, and as a researcher, I became part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty (Barad, 2007).

In terms of representation, listening softly enables the reader to hear this voice in its multiplicity, and this extends to the way I present this voice in this book, including the use of diverse methods in my writing. These include using whole narratives, speech markers, researcher journals and diaries. I, therefore, attempt what Fels (2012: 55) called 'performative writing', which enables the reader to become part of the 'telling as it unfolds' as a co-performer, to hear the voice in its rawness. I start providing nuanced accounts of how I listened softly with a focus on ethnographic research and the ethnographic re-turns that enabled me to listen deeply to the context.

Mapping Children's Entangled Experience Through Ethnography

In studying children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, I wanted 'to meet children in their experience' through an engaged interaction with them

(Smith and Greene, 2015: 205), when talking about the need to capture complicated experience, referred such encounters as 'in-depth listening and long-term engagement'. Like was the case for Marker (2003: 371), my continued stay in the community while hosted by a community member enabled me to listen to the 'spirits of the stories' of child poverty and vulnerability by encountering children who enacted their everyday experience in the 'soul' of Siaya, Kenya, my research site. My continued community engagement included working with organizations supporting children, visiting children at home, at school and in different community spaces and taking walks in the community. The fact that I was interested in the lived experience of children and how it is represented in diverse spaces meant that I also divided my time between being in Siaya, where the children were located, and in Nairobi, the country's capital, to interact with other national programme leaders. At the same time, mapping children's experience facilitated a perspective on how this experience was entangled at the local, national and global non-concatenated scales (Isin, 2009: 370).

I worked in three of the five sub-counties in Siaya, including Rarieda, Alego-Usonga and Ugunja. This selection was influenced by factors such as the presence or absence of organizations supporting vulnerable children, poverty levels as indicated in county planning reports and operation of the cash transfer programme for vulnerable children. In these sites, I selected four organizations detailed in Chapter 7 and in eight schools, working with children who were constructed as poor and vulnerable. I worked with five research assistants from the research sites who enabled me to access the communities and children. The assistants also helped translate from Luo, the local language, into English or Swahili. The research assistants also provided important perspectives on children's lived experience as we interacted on an ongoing basis.

Encountering Children and care Providers

Based on the cartographic nature of this research, I use the concept of encountering children in the research site instead of calling this 'selection'. The first category of children I worked with was children participating in child support organizations and those in households benefitting from the state cash transfer programme. These children whose perspectives I explore in Chapter 5, were already externally defined as poor and vulnerable by those who provided support to children. These constructions as vulnerable were the entry point for investigating the lived experience of poverty and how representations in various spaces. define this experience. However, the boundaries between children who were supported and those not supported were fleeting since some children who were not in mainstream programmes were also supported by organic groups formed by caregivers. Caregivers with children in support programmes also referred me to other children at home and in schools. I sought consent from the caregivers before approaching the children. In each encounter, I only proceeded after the child or the group of children had indicated a willingness to do so verbally and before each session.

In this book, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of children. I wanted to involve the children in selecting their pseudonyms but this proved difficult. Initially, I used names that I could remember but those that were in line with the Luo cultural naming norms (according to the time of birth, place of birth, circumstance of birth, gender, or protective functions). I later stopped giving children pseudonyms that drew from their local language unless I was sure the child would relate to the name. I was aware of the argument by Fashina (2008: 73) that, in the African context, names play a more significant role and 'they have souls' that can even intercede for the bearer in ritual contexts.

In some cases, I have used Western/Christian pseudonyms because some children introduced themselves to me using their English names, even though they used their Luo names in their day-to-day lives. My use of pseudonyms to protect children was not without personal tensions. Children always started by giving their names in our discussions or research essays. In my quest to protect their identity, I have therefore grappled with, but not resolved, the fact that their experience and narratives, which are real, have been anonymized.

For children with whom I interacted in-depth throughout the research, their caregivers, primarily women, automatically became part of the research since they were at home when I visited. I also interacted with other caregivers through income-generating activities organized by organizations or through self-help groups. Teachers also participated in the study because they regularly interacted with vulnerable children in schools. In the four main non-government organizations (NGOs) I worked with, I had discussions with and shadowed or observed programme staff, community health workers, project staff, and local and national government leaders. I now turn to the methods I used to investigate children's messy voice.

Methods as Messy and as an Assemblage

The lived experience of children, which was formed in part by the same discourses that I was investigating, and which are predominantly captured through children's 'messy voice', presents a messy scenario. This voice can draw on children's competence, agency, vulnerability, and dependence. This voice is also located within adult relations of power and a context of widespread poverty and vulnerability (Elden, 2013: 78). Drawing on Law (2004) and Lather (2010), I, therefore, characterize the methods I used in investigating children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability as messy. Law (2004: 2) notes that messy reality reflects multiple, slippery, changeable, and temporary realities. This is the nature of all lived experience. As Elden (2013: 70) notes, the lived experience as a messy reality 'needs to be captured in ways that allow messiness and multidimensionality to become part of research'.

As part of listening softly and in going beyond triangulation or pluralizing voice, I used methods that enabled me to capture such reality. These methods were not just simple steps in data collection but can be seen as a method assemblage which, according to Law (2004: 14), does not produce 'neat, definite, and

well-tailored accounts'. Therefore, each successive encounter with participating children was guided by previous encounters and was geared towards capturing complex perspectives in children's experience as it unfolded without fixing it in advance. In addition, entering into the conceptual and ontological messiness of children's lived experience meant that I used methods that enabled children to tell about themselves without necessarily framing themselves as poor. For example, initially, I would start by asking children to narrate their experience. However, most of them did not know where to start and I allowed them to begin anywhere and from any perspective, not just on suffering and lack. Some children narrated their experience before birth, revealing their parents' expectations of a good life for example.

By acknowledging that 'children's experiences cannot be found on the surface', I mainly utilized narrative conversation methods (Greene and Hill, 2005: 4). I also did repeat go-along discussions with children as they walked their way from school to their homes for lunch. Kusenbach (2003: 463) noted that 'when undertaking go-along interviews, the researcher accompanies the research participants in their natural contexts, and they ask questions and make observations about the experiences of the research participants'. This is also called a 'systematic hanging out'. I also engaged in go-along conversations with my research assistants and informants daily, clarifying impressions about the community and children.

Photo narratives with select children also enabled me to capture the realities of children that could not be accessed using other methods. Johnsen et al. (2008:196) have noted that 'photographs act as tangible resources helping research participants tell a narrative about themselves and their everyday geographies'. The children kept a camera for one to two weeks, taking photos primarily at home because cameras were not allowed in school. Photos were sometimes a collaborative effort between members of the entire household. I discussed the photos with the children to ensure that the interpretation was theirs and followed up on other children mentioned in the photos or other insights as they emerged. For example, Lucia (17 years old), who had taken a picture of her family's old house with two doors, said that the extra door enabled her to escape from being sexually abused by her cousin. I had been following up on Lucia's experience of vulnerability under the hands of this cousin and the stepfather. Still, this revelation jolted my assumptions about what an old house would mean for a vulnerable child beyond showing a degree of poverty. By narrating her photo in ways other than those we are used to, Lucia's picture as her voice revealed the prosthetic visuality in photos. Such perspectives are transformative since they expand our ways of seeing, enabling us to see through the perspectives of those we encounter in our research (Garoian, 2010). The photos also sometimes depicted the aspirations of children, as well as a sense of conviviality and hope for a better life instead of suffering. For example, three girls who were supported by a non-governmental organization took photos of themselves in a school uniform, indicating their belonging to school-going childhoods, a space they had been formerly excluded from.

Figure 3.1 Lucia's house with two doors (Lucia's Photo)

Initially, children were not willing to talk face-to-face about their situation, especially about more personal issues, such as the death of their caregivers. I, therefore, used semi-auto-ethnographic essays to enable them to relay their experience comfortably. The essays also allowed children to perform their experience, communicate issues of the death of their parents relatively more comfortably, and obtain a sense of catharsis from a painful experience. Through essays, I also got a perspective on the silenced elements in children's voice and on the different processes of silencing. This was possible because I could revisit some issues emerging from the essays in follow-up encounters with children or whatever direction the 'lines of flight' took in the rhizomatic assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In one example, the essay of Otieno (11 years old) gave me a perspective on the silenced elements in children's voice but also the different processes of silencing. He noted in his essay that he and his brother slept in a house with a leaky roof. A few days earlier I had visited his grandmother and found out she had a good house. During a subsequent narrative conversation with Otieno, we discussed his perspectives on the leaky house within the context of his grandmother's good house, and he was quiet about it. I later learned that children who were prepubescent or pubescent were not allowed to sleep in the same house with their caregivers if the caregivers were sexually active. I later understood that this practice became embedded as a tradition since houses were small in the context of poverty and did not have sleeping spaces for different

family members. My research assistant had presented this practice as unquestionable, and a given in Luo culture and he had told me that children could not talk about it. I only accessed the silenced perspectives through discussions with other informants. This practice emerged as a key source of vulnerability for many children, especially for girls in the research site, some of whom shared sleeping spaces with cattle in the separate cook house.

Select children also kept participant diaries, recording their day-to-day experience. In the first round, these dairies indicated routine activities like waking up in the morning, going to school, and what they did (moment by moment) without reflecting on these experiences. With time, the participants became more introspective and focused on their experience, like going without food, and perspectives on how they were treated by other children and adults, among others.

To go beyond the linear knowledge production and to listen differently, I was inspired by St. Pierre's (1997: 184) argument that we need to bring the 'outside into our research projects' or what she called 'response data'. Giving my data a contextual account involved checking some of my findings with different research participants and informants and cross-checking my interpretations of the local language. For example, I checked various terms used in English, such as 'wife inheritance', for their local equivalents. This way, I avoided fixing meanings through the dominant language or misrepresenting local perspectives. I also brought in data obtained from linguistic insiders as I clarified several issues that emerged during my research.

My writing after each day was a site of further engagement with children's experience through diffractive journals/diaries. I kept a journal of my daily impressions and daily reading of the data collected. In addition to helping me recount the events of that particular day, the journals helped me focus on future research thoughts. In listening softly, my journals provided spaces for recording my thoughts and impressions, which I also exposed to further scrutiny in subsequent encounters with research participants or visits. The diaries also mapped how I was connected with the children and the realities I encountered in the field, bringing my reflections on the margins to the centre of the analysis (Dalgleish, 2016: 94; Reynolds, 2014: 137).

For example, my diary about Pius (13 years old), who was HIV positive and who refused to grant me an interview, indicates how I went about listening softly through my diffractive diary:

> We had been waiting at Pius' home for almost an hour, and he did not show up even after his father and mother sent for him. We met him on the way, and he walked on as we stopped to greet him. My research assistant said that Pius' mother thought that he was unhappy with his HIV status. I remembered our conversation earlier in the month, where the mother and the research assistant had noted that Pius went for Anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs on his own and was living positively. We did not anticipate problems in seeking consent to interview him. The research assistant had a feeling that Pius refused (refused … the first refusal in my research, I should note) the interview because he thought we would talk about his HIV status. A few days

> before this, he had asked his mother to explain to him how he got the disease. Did something escape me as the research assistant and Pius' mother talked in low tones earlier in Luo when I felt abandoned on the uncomfortable wooden bench? Or was there a discordance between what adults say and what children say? Could it be possible that his mother's story of Pius being at home with HIV was just a reaction to my presence as a researcher? Beyond interpretation, how can I apprehend this 'messy voice' that includes Pius' refusal, the silence, and the mumbled conversation between his mother and the research assistant? Why were they sighing and avoiding eye contact with me? Is this even silence or a 'noiseless voice'? (Mazzei, 2009: 49) As a non-Luo speaker, an outsider in this instance, an adult, and an ethical researcher who does not want to ask sensitive questions, could this then be a 'voice in the crack' that I should just let to escape me (Mazzei, 2009: 48)? Should I revisit the mother or Pius to 'probe for deep-seated meaning' of this refusal or should I 'redefine what it means to hear and … listen' (ibid.: 49) or children's right to be heard? Also, should we accept refusal, body language, and exclusion through local language and others not as silence but as a voice?

Diffractive Readings of Data

Personal notes were my first step towards a diffractive reading and analysis of data and opportunities for 'listening softly' through 'whole body listening' (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012: 740). I noted the silences, the absences in the voice, the composures of the research participants, and the body language as the conversations went along. For example, I noted the laughter, jokes, and metaphors that children and caregivers employed in our interactions. I also took note of how caregivers talked about the death of their children or relatives, their experience of trauma and the silences around it. I also noted the *in-situ* discussions and impressions as I traversed the communities and interacted with children and caregivers. My notes, like my diaries, were also a site for identifying what needed further research.

In listening softly to the recorded conversations, I brought myself to the research as I noted my feelings and embodiment as I researched children's experience. This, for example, involved noting my fears with the children about their uncertain futures, their hopes for a better future, and sometimes my anger about their situation. I also established the silences in the conversations and any diacritical markers (like hesitations, sighing, breaks, and tonal variations), all of which had specific meanings in the contexts of the conversations. These conversational aspects also proved helpful in enabling a grasp of diverse voice by not only interpreting the silences but also researching silences during subsequent encounters.

In keeping with the rhizome approach, data analysis was a continuous process that started as soon as the research commenced. Data analysis was also, a rhizo-analysis, where data, methodology analysis and theory intermingle (Sellers, 2015: 10). In the final analysis, I did not code data but did a diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Mazzei, 2014; Taguchi, 2012). According to Barad (2007: 25), diffraction implies reading insights through each other to obtain nuanced perspectives [to diffract them]. (See also Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: ix.) Thus, instead of

analyzing data against the theoretical frameworks, I read the data through the theory and the theory through the data. This meant that data pushed me to work through theory to explain it, and that theory also enabled me to look up data and examine how both were related. Authors such as St. Pierre and Jackson (2014: 717) and Mazzei (2014: 743) argue that diffractive analysis is not linear but rhizomatic and leads to new knowledge. These diffractive reading of data brings entangled and quantum differences in perspectives to the fore (Barad, 2007). Such an analysis is enabled by asking diffractive questions instead of condensing children's experience and drawing on the researcher's role in the research (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). For example, in my analysis, I asked: What is children's experience in this text/encounter? Does this experience relate to other children? Which children are the point of reference, and what is their voice? How do these discourses connect to other discourses? Do these subjectivities, experiences, and realities cohere around anything, or are they contingent on each child? Such analysis also produces messy text and data that loosely cohere around specific ideas of children's lived experience (Fels, 2009; Lather, 2007; Law, 2004).

Uncomfortable Reflexivities

Research on the lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is bound up with complex ethical issues. I located these issues and the research as part and parcel of children's lived experience of poverty. I, however, reflect on a few issues that emerged from my research. Regarding reflexivity, I drew on the emerging critique of the perspective that a researcher can see the world from afar or be detached from reality (Barad, 2007: 30; Davies, 2014: 73; Haraway, 1997). Pillow (2003: 192) calls for a reflexivity of discomfort that goes beyond a confession of our innocent practices or honesty in research to a reflexivity that disrupts and questions our research practices – including failure of our research practices.

The ethical complexities of the research on which this book is based show that the research was entangled with the reality of the children I was researching (Barlot et al., 2017: 531; Reynolds, 2014). For example, some children and their families felt helpless in the face of their overwhelming needs, and the community and children, in some cases, expected me to provide support to them. Since my research involved several encounters, I sensed that the caregivers and the children might have thought I was coming back in some instances because I wanted to support them. I, however, did not label this as raised expectations and, in some cases, supported children by buying them food wherever I could afford it. I saw what would be seen as raised expectations as children's claims to a good life just like everyone else (Ngutuku, 2022).

In some cases, children placed their expectations in terms of possible reciprocity in the future. One participant noted, 'I don't have a uniform, shoes, sweater, and I have a sickness called asthma. So, buy for me if you can, and if you help me, when I grow up, I will remember you and your helper [my research assistant]'. These vernaculars of expectations cannot just be dismissed as a

performance of suffering (see Chouliaraki, 2016; Fassin, 2012) for a perspective on suffering as a performance.

Research on children's lived experience was painful. However, I saw children's pain as part of the data and, therefore, as part of their lived experience, developing intimacies with it. For example, the thought of children saying that they sleep without food and smile about it because they hoped this would one day pass or their vivid accounts of the death of their parents was painful and numbing. I also encountered the death of two children who were part of the field research. The first case was a 17-year-old boy who one project supported. I reflected on how I was told over and over again by the social worker that his death could have been averted and how my appeal for his support might have come too late. His death, however, was not just an emotional encounter but was part of what I call 'uncomfortable data' and the cartographies of children's experience that I was interested in. The assemblage of issues that emerged through his death included, among others, his material situation and lack, his 'refusal' to seek health care due to his religion that forbade seeking secular treatment, and social relations of lack of support by his extended family. Other elements were subjectivation through the support he received from the project, with the social worker saying that the boy was not obeying programme rules, as I later discuss in the book. In addition, at the time of his death, the doctors were on industrial strike in public hospitals in Kenya, so he could not get the necessary health care. Another node was the system of accountability within the organization that supported him because even hiring a car to take him to the hospital just before he died had to be authorized by the head office of the organization, thereby losing valuable time. Talking and writing about the death of this boy makes us aware that the death of poor and vulnerable children does not just take the time between the time I met this boy and when he died. Death can instead take 'months, years and generations' (Page, 2017: 21).

Ben, who was 16 years old, also provided a perspective on his mother's death and his pain. Recorded in his essay, he chronicled the pain of being an orphaned child and encountering the death of a parent. He narrated how they moved to town after the death of their father and the way his mother became weaker and weaker. Ben even held an imaginary dialogue with me through his essay, saying: 'Surely, can you put your hope in such a person'. Such a phrase was loaded with issues that I may never comprehend. He continued to explain how he eventually heard people wailing, announcing the death of his mother. As part of his experience of vulnerability, the essay enabled him to enact his experience and perform not only his grief, long bottled, but also his childhood. Ben completed the mourning through his essay by saying, 'Alas! My lovely mother had died'. In the Luo culture, when somebody dies, people send a signal by wailing to alert others in the community. As they wail, they also talk endearingly about the person and hold a dialogue as if the person were alive. Children, too, have a role in this mourning, and my research allowed them to remember even the good things their poor parents lived for. These are the stories we rarely hear because we do not want to sensationalize pain or to be seen to be addicted to the wounds or the suffering of children (Brown, 1996). As a way of connecting to children's

experience, I could not move away from sharing their pain as I imagined what they went through each day.

This 'emotional data', like that of St. Pierre (1997: 180), was sometimes overwhelming. Debriefing, 'avoiding being pricked' by the pain of children and at the same time allowing myself to be 'pricked' existed side by side during this research (Page, 2017: 23). Like St. Pierre (1997: 181), I found my validity as I engaged with this pain. Ahmed (2004) claimed that we ought to link pain to what pain does to those experiencing pain. She also argues that we should not forget the historical injustices implicated in this wounding. This is what I try to do in this book, even as I talk about children's pain, sometimes in a nuanced manner.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the innovative cartographic approach I used for this research as I mapped children's experience from the interconnected spaces of the household, the school and support programmes. My approach of listening softly enabled this. In rendering the term 'listening softly' philosophical, I have avoided defining what it means or how it works. I have instead asked myself, with Foucault and others, 'Does it work? What new thoughts does [listening softly] make possible?' (St. Pierre, 2004: 285). In explicating Deleuzean philosophy, May (2005: 22) advised us that the 'destiny of philosophical concepts and philosophical positions lie not with truth or falsity of their claims but with the vistas for thinking and living they open up for us'. As I have shown, listening softly was not just a method but a sensibility of approaching research on children's lived experience. Listening softly became possible due to my long-term engagement with children's experience through ethnographic research. I have also demonstrated how I listened softly, a juxtaposition of listening as a sensory action and the affect that qualifies the listening and researching children's voice beyond what they say.

As an ethical orientation aimed at doing justice to and with children's voice, I have shown how I listened emergently through a method assemblage that went beyond triangulation or obtaining a polyvocal voice. I listened through various child-centred methods, each encounter influencing the subsequent one. These methods gave me a perspective on the interlinked dimensions of children's messy voice and voice as a multiplicity. Hughes and Lury (2013: 787) admonish us to think about methodologies differently, not only as tools for investigating social realities but also think about how these methods also need to be 'designed for capture and for care … [and], how they may be attentive to how the social world may be engaged'. In this book, I will show how this methodological approach enabled me to get a more nuanced perspective on children's experience of poverty and vulnerability.

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4 Caring for Children in Marginalized Spaces

Introduction

> Since adults are poor, children are also poor.
>
> (Discussions with caregivers)

This chapter offers a perspective on the context and the lived experience of caregivers of children and how they negotiate the day-to-day realities of child caregiving. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I present the context of insecure livelihoods and food insecurity, showing the different ways these affect caregiving in general and the experience of caregiving in particular. Such difficult circumstances amount to what I characterize as caregiving in 'cramped spaces' or 'choked passages' (Biehl and Locke, 2010: 323; Deleuze, 1995: 133; Rose, 2004: 280). Rose's (2004: 280) characterization of cramped/ choked spaces as an assemblage of difficult contexts where relations [are] intolerable, where movement is impossible, where change is blocked, and voice is strangulated is a helpful starting point for the arguments. The second part explores the difficult caregiving context for widow caregivers, who are referenced as *Chi Liel* – a wife of the grave. I demonstrate how unequal gendered and other relations in the community that are attached to this identity influence the caregiving experience. The chapter also explores another place-based identity of alive but dead husbands/ fathers. As I show, the concept of social and economic widowhood and, by extension, alive but dead or what I see as zombie fatherhoods is part and parcel of cartographies of children's lived experience of vulnerability.

The key argument in the chapter is that while such difficult contexts portend difficulties in caregiving, they also act as a basis for creativity as caregivers design strategies to overcome caregiving as they seek to come to terms with their challenging contexts. I therefore weave into the arguments these strategies that caregivers use to deal with the exigencies of their everyday contexts. While such creative strategies are seen as coping strategies in the mainstream poverty literature, In Deleuzean thinking, I position these as a 'sense of becoming' within difficult contexts. Deleuze (1995: 170) characterized becoming as 'individual and collective struggles that people undertake to come to terms with events and

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intolerable conditions and to shake loose, to whatever degree possible, from determinants and definitions'. Presenting these strategies serves two purposes. I reveal the need for action to intervene in the challenges that give rise to such strategies, and two, such strategies, as an end, also become part of the children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability (Rose, 2004: 280). I start by exploring the context of insecure livelihoods.

Insecure Livelihoods and Caregiving: The Ocean is a Dessert

Insecure livelihoods are one of the leading causes and manifestations of poverty and vulnerability in Kenya and Africa generally. Here, I provide examples and nuanced accounts of how insecure livelihoods affected the daily lives of the caregivers and their children.

One of the most common livelihoods of the caregivers I interacted with was selling charcoal to other community members as fuel for cooking. Those involved in this trade explained that it was a precarious form of livelihood since it did not bring in a secure income. For example, discussions with a widowed caregiver caring for her six grandchildren revealed the following.

> I burn charcoal, and I get the trees from that hill. [Points to a container full of charcoal at the corner and says they are like sticks]. Selling this batch has taken me two weeks because we only sell when it rains and when people cook indoors. It becomes hard to sell over school holidays because many caregivers sell charcoal with their children.
>
> Her neighbour, another widowed caregiver who also sold charcoal to support her children, noted that she sold charcoal worth 500 shillings (about 5 euros) in a week.

Selling charcoal revealed another perspective of poverty. Most houses in the communities I interacted with were small, and cooking was done outdoors using wood fuel. During the rainy season, it was not possible to cook outside, so cooking with charcoal was done inside the house. Charcoal livelihoods and use in cooking, like in the case of Siaya, are also connected to poverty and other forms of vulnerability. For example, exposure to smoke poses risks to children. A World Health Organization report (2018: 1) revealed that in 2016 air pollution caused an estimated 4.2 million premature deaths, almost 300,000 of whom were children under the age of 5 years. Exposure to air pollution in this way is correlated with poverty, with low-income families unable to maintain clean air for themselves and their households. Another research on the relationship between charcoal burning and poverty in Africa supports this argument, revealing that charcoal production and use can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning and depletion of forest cover (Zulu and Richardson, 2013). The depletion of forest cover was dire for Siaya, where landholdings per family were small. For example, when I asked the caregivers about the possibility of diminishing forest cover through charcoal burning, their reaction demonstrated the entanglement between poverty and

what would be seen as apathy on environmental destruction because many noted that God would provide them with a way out of their situation.

Caregivers also engaged in small-scale livelihood activities like roadside vending of vegetables and/or other basic commodities like milk. For example, the grandmother to Mary and Aaron (9 and 11 years old, respectively), who was also disabled, sold *sim-sim* (sesame balls) at the local market and described the difficulties of this task. She bought the raw sim-sim on credit from a shopkeeper and paid it back after selling. Aaron helped her in selling after school in the evening and on market days. However, the daily profit of 40 euro-cents each day was not enough to sustain the three of them, and Aaron's diaries also corroborated these difficulties of looking for buyers.

Similarly, Brigid's caregiver sold *mandazi* (fried buns) by the roadside, and with the proceeds, she supported her three young children and a fostered child. She noted:

> I have seven children of my own. I have four younger children. I sell *mandazi* by the roadside. With that small trade, I take care of my children.

As a food coping strategy (see Dlamin et al., 2024), selling these buns by the roadside was common in this community because some caregivers could not afford three meals daily. Some children reported that they would eat a *mandazi* bought from the roadside as lunch or dinner. Other wares that caregivers sold by the roadside included mats, ropes, sugarcane, peanuts, seasonal fruits; however, vending constituted insecure livelihood strategies. Selling sugarcane was the main income-earning activity for Lucia's grandmother, who was 62 years old. This involved travelling for approximately three hours to a farm where she bought the sugarcane and then to the small market to sell. Because she was poorly, on weekends and when schools were closed, she was assisted by Lucia who was 17 years old. Lucia attested to the vulnerability and difficulties of such a livelihood in her research diary. She often referenced selling sugarcane as 'our usual situation' because that is what preoccupied her most of her time. In connecting the vulnerable sugarcane vending to poverty in the community, Lucia referenced how community members were often buying on credit but not paying back. Like many other caregivers, Lucia's grandmother did not have assets that could be sold for her day-to-day needs and those of Lucia. They owned only one cow, which Lucia called 'our lovely cow' in her diaries. Studies have shown that ownership of assets like housing, financial savings or pensions, among others, plays a role during economic shocks (Searle and Köppe, 2014).

It was not only Lucia's grandmother who relied on the support of her foster child to eke out a living. Several other caregivers, including Allister's mother, who was blind and whose livelihood was selling paraffin oil for lighting, were in the same situation. Being blind, she noted that she could not deal with money, so her son sold paraffin in the evening after school each day. Again, we see another connection between her livelihood and those of other people in the community whose livelihoods were also precarious. This is because in these rural areas that

are not often connected to the national electricity grid, household items, like paraffin oil, were bought in small quantities and on a daily basis. Several children also described their daily motions of going to the market to buy food, vegetables or other items each day after school.

The sensibility of buying small portions of commodities depending on how much cash one has, commonly termed a *kadogo* (small) economy, is a strategy that traders and consumers employ to come to terms with the constraints in the economy. The *kadogo* economy as a survivalist approach was popularized in Kenya in the 1990s when prices of most commodities became unaffordable to the masses, and the sellers started buying and repackaging industrial consumables into smaller quantities for sale, especially in urban slums (Mukeku, 2018). With time, the *kadogo* economy has permeated every marginal space in Kenya, including the opportunity to buy essential items like sugar and cooking oil by the spoonful, especially in rural areas and urban slums (Donovan and Park, 2022; Mukeku, 2018). These caregivers in Siaya are thus not alone. The phenomenon of buying only in small quantities, as Donovan (2020) noted, should be connected to the larger economic situation in the country, which he called a 'Zero Balance Economy'. He draws from the experience of mobile phone users who find themselves with zero airtime balance and argues that zero balance is a situation of volatility and unpredictable illiquidity for most people. Such an economy affects not just the purchase of basic commodities but also access to other services like health and education. Some literature reveals that such an economy may perpetuate poverty because the high premiums are passed on to the poor. Donovan and Park (2022) note that those who benefit from the *kadogo* economy are not the poor or the working-class masses but the Capital. However, for the poor like those I interacted with, the *kadogo* economy was the only way survival strategy since there were no alternatives. Indeed, in some cases, when I stopped by the village shops to buy sugar for caregivers, I had to specify the quantity and not take for granted that the sugar was packed in kilograms.

Other caregivers engaged in small-scale livelihood activities like making bricks for construction to sell within the community. However, they noted that such a livelihood activity was demand-driven, with few opportunities for selling the bricks. When there was nothing for the caregivers to sell, some turned to their labour as their main asset, working on people's small-scale farms in exchange for monetary daily wage or food. These caregivers also enlist the labour of their children, who also reported the insecurities involved in selling such labour. Twelve-year-old Naomi revealed through her essay that: 'after doing that contract, that person refuses to give you money and tells you that you are poor and that is why he can't give you money. Sometimes you and your family even stay hungry for two days'.

The labour in people's farms is not without other complications. For example, Nyasimi et al., (2007: 56) earlier noted that, while the Luo community may rely on their labour on other people's farms to earn a living within the context of poverty, that form of survival is reliant on the availability of rural wage work which is not a sustainable resource. It was even more unsustainable in my

research communities because most farm wage activities were hampered by the seasonality of food crop farming and unreliable rainfall. Working in agricultural labour is also associated with poverty because those working on other people's farms tend to neglect their own farms (World Food Programme, 2016: 6).

In Rarieda, one of the research sites, some caregivers mined gold dust in Abimbo for their livelihoods. In Siaya, artisanal gold mining is one of the livelihood activities because of the presence of gold dust in some parts of the county. The sector is said to employ about 100,000 people in Siaya alone (Adinasi, 2023). Like in the rest of Africa, such forms of mining, as Hilson (2016: 553) argues, have 'continued to be on the periphery of mainstream development policymaking and thinking' and therefore receive inadequate support from the state. Apart from the exploitation of the miners, some children noted that due to the unprotected nature of gold mining, the health of their caregivers was also affected.

Within the context of youth unemployment, another livelihood strategy was operating bicycle or motorbike taxis, commonly known as *boda boda*. *Boda bodas* are part of the growing transport economy in both rural and urban areas in East Africa and became a ubiquitous form of transport in 2000 in Kenya (Ehebrecht, 2020; Ibrahim and Bize, 2018). This trade involved ferrying people within the community for an average fee of 50 Kenyan shillings (50 euro-cents). The *boda boda* industry in Siaya was listed as one of the major sources of employment for youth in the Kenya National Adolescent and Youth Survey of 2015 (National Council for Population and Development, 2017: 21).

What is ignored in these arguments and success stories of the *boda boda* industry, however, is its gendered nature, with mainly male youth dominating. More worrying is also the precarity of this livelihood activity. For example, the motorcycles were usually rented from other people, and the operators were expected to remit a constant amount of money each day to the owner, even if no profit was made. It was common to see about a dozen *boda boda* riders waiting for customers at each designated motorcycle stage within the community. For example, one of the caregivers noted that her teenage grandchild was renting a *boda boda* and paid the owner 400 Kenyan shillings (about 3 euros) daily. She told me:

> If the road is dry [i.e. there are no customers], the owner takes the bike from him, and then returns to selling charcoal. That's how we live.

Her assertion that 'that is how they lived' expressed as a form of sighing was a commonly used metaphor for poverty and vulnerability. However, this case also indicates how the *boda boda* industry and the young men, in particular, were being exploited by these 'regimes of capital' at various layers, leading to further vulnerability (Ibrahim and Bize, 2018: 77).

In staying with the rhizome, these metaphors of complicated living, engendered by insecure livelihoods and other factors, should also be connected to the lack of support for livelihood enhancements or income support through social protection for these caregivers. For example, Aoko, a 7-year-old child with a

disability, and her six siblings and cousins were not supported by any state or non-state programme. Her mother had informed me that she had spent years petitioning to be enrolled in the state cash programme for vulnerable children. She noted that 'they [i.e. the government] keep coming around and writing our names [i.e. registering their names], but they don't give us feedback. They say your name did not return [meaning you were not selected]'. Aoko's elder sister, who had completed high school, worked as a precarious domestic worker, and the rest of the children were struggling through primary school. Characteristic of how the poor cope by disposing of assets, Aoko's mother had already sold the few goats she had to seek medical care for Aoko, who had a muscular degenerative disease.

In mapping Aoko's case, I draw further lines between insecure livelihoods and access to health care for the children under the care of these caregivers. In Kenya, most hospital services are paid out of pocket. There is a contributory (and more recently non-contributory for select groups) public medical insurance, the National Hospital Insurance Fund, which enables one to access services in public hospitals. By the time of the research, the Fund only catered for outpatient charges, and most of the caregivers I interacted with had not signed up for it. Some caregivers reported that, when sick, they prayed and just hoped to get well. One can argue that praying away the state–citizen contract is part of the cartographies of children's and caregiver's experience in such contexts (Ngutuku, 2018: 24).

Figure 4.1 Charcoal livelihoods in Siaya (own photo)

Figure 4.2 Brick-making livelihoods Siaya (photo by Ben)

A lack of government support for traditional fishing livelihoods also accentuates the problem of insecure livelihoods in the region. For example, due to the proximity to Lake Victoria, one of the largest freshwater lakes in Africa, some people in Siaya engage in small-scale fishing as an economic mainstay. Fish is a staple food and protein source for the Luo people and a historical livelihood

source. However, for several years including during my research, Lake Victoria had been infested with the rhizomatic water hyacinth. This made fishing difficult since the boats could no longer go through the lake or land at the beaches (see, e.g. Wawire and Ochiel, 2004).

In one of the three research contexts, the lake was referred to as *bahari*, [1] *a* Swahili word for a large expanse of water. However, this once expansive body was metaphorically rendered a desert by one of the youth research participants. When I asked the boy what his father did for a living, he noted that he was no longer fishing because the *bahari* had become a desert due to the water hyacinth infestation. The emptiness of the ocean, an icon of plenty, and its inability to nurture the communities that once relied on it also refer to the abandonment by the state, which has failed to control it (Alal, 2017).

The effects of this drought in the lake were demonstrated in the experience of Alidi's 21-year-old caregiver, a fisherman. He had to hire the fishing route and the fishing equipment from other (more established) fishermen (see also Medard,

Figure 4.3 A view of the water hyacinth in Lake Victoria (own photo)

2015 for a perspective on the politics of fishing in Lake Victoria). He only made about 100 Kenya shillings (about one Euro) each day because he shared the profit with the owners of the fishing route and the fishing equipment. This was the only money available for food for the family of four, including his wife, his sister (16 years old), and Alidi (7 years old), and monthly rent. Alidi's caregiver was, therefore, threatened with eviction by the landlord because he had not paid rent for four months. Pius' mother, who sold silver fish in small quantities in the community, was also affected by the dwindling fortunes of the *bahari*. She stopped selling because the supply was limited. When I visited her again, she had resorted to farm-piece work and had gone to help a neighbour to harvest cassava on her farm in exchange for a few tubers of cassava for food. Insecure livelihoods are also connected to food insecurity, another node in vulnerable caregiving in the research contexts I now turn to.

Food Insecurity as a Cramped Context of Caregiving

Food insecurity and hunger affects every aspect of Siaya's childhoods in diverse ways. Runguma (2014: 149) noted that 'Siaya is a perennially food insecure county whose inhabitants rely heavily on the market for food supply'. The government of Siaya's Integrated Plan 2013–2017 indicated that Siaya produced food that could only cover the population's food needs for nine months a year (GOK, 2013). A World Food Programme (WFP) report (2016: 4) also indicated that Siaya was one of the most food insecure counties, occupying the eighth lowest position of the 47 counties in Kenya. Like in the rest of Africa, the main challenge of relying on farming as the main livelihood is that a large percentage of farming in sub-Saharan Africa is rainfed. Effects of harvest failures, market volatility affecting production and other shocks in farm-dependent households are also significant factors in poverty (Hilson and Yu, 2022: 95). Crop failure was evident during the two planting seasons I was in the field. Small farm sizes also affect food security, making caregiving precarious. In a study on food security in Uganda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Mali and Tanzania, Giller et al. (2021: 1431) support this view by arguing that 'farm size is a major determinant of food self-sufficiency and household's ability to rise above the living income threshold'. In Siaya, food insecurity was exacerbated by the lack of state support to farmers, leaving them at the mercy of a few charitable organizations offering support to farmers in the form of loans, but often in ways that were sometimes seen as predatory.

I was also interested in how food insecurity manifested in the day-to-day experience of children. During some research visits, I observed caregivers with only a little food harvested from their farms. For example, when I asked Pascaline's mother (a widowed young caregiver) how much maize harvest she got in the previous season, she pointed to a small quantity of food in a corner and laughingly said 'that's all'. With her monthly salary of only 2000 Kenyan shillings (about 20 euros), humouring away her hardships as her sense of becoming was her only resort. Earlier, she had shared with me that her children, for a second season in a row, would be forced to go to school without breakfast or might take

black tea for lunch for a couple more months. Other children reported going without food and being bothered because their caregivers could not afford a meal. For example, when I asked some very young children what made them unhappy at home, one noted that she was unhappy when she saw her grandmother worrying about food. Caregivers corroborated these experiences, stating they did not have enough food for their children: 'Sometimes we don't get enough food in the house. Sometimes we cook late because affording three meals is hard'. Other caregivers reported other strategies of becoming in relation to food insecurity. These included cooking only one meal a day and sometimes cooking lunch later in the day to avoid cooking supper. Recent research in South Africa by Dlamini and others (2024) reveals similar food coping strategies like limiting portions of food taken, reducing the number of meals, skipping meals for a day, and sending household members to eat elsewhere, among others. Such food coping strategies may help households cut down on the amount of food they consume, but they affect the well-being of children (World Food Programme, 2016: 6b).

Other creative strategies for dealing with the lack of food were observed. For example, caregivers inculcated into their children notions of resilience in the face of hunger. A focus group discussion revealed this:

CAREGIVER 1: We need to involve our children in our livelihood strategies and show them how to work so they know how difficult it is to bring food to the table. This will make them understand that money and food come from hard work, and sometimes these are not there.

CAREGIVER 2: You should be free with your child. Then, they know when their grandmother did not bring food to the table. Involve them in knowing there is nothing [no food] in the house. Involve them in knowing that you will not borrow money to feed them. I have used this strategy and would have died long ago had I not done so.

CAREGIVER 3: Be open with them [fostered children]. Tell them that, even if their parents were alive, things would still be challenging, and sometimes there would be no food. Let them know that there are some children with parents who lack food.

Diffracting these strategies of becoming and notions of children's participation rights, one sees the ironies of poor childhoods in Siaya. These notions of child participation engage our understanding of participation as embedded in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12. They can be seen as a negative form of participation. While such participation, to some extent, enhances children's resilience to hunger, lack of food negatively impacts their well-being and rights. Bringing the rights of children and the state as the guarantor back into the rhizome reveals how state abandonment necessitates these practices. Such abandonment is despite the intention to provide these rights to food through the Kenya Constitution. Article 43(l c) provides that every

Kenyan, irrespective of their circumstance, has a right 'to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality'(Kenya, 2010).

During my interactions with the children, they indicated that going without food was expected, and they were not supposed to bother the caregivers if there was no food. Brigid's essay (11 years old) revealed this as follows:

> My mother wakes up in the morning to go to other people's farms. She comes back with money for lunch, not breakfast. Sometimes, we prepare small [a little] food that does not satisfy us. Sometimes, she comes with no money, and we just thank God. None of us can say we are feeling hungry. What makes me happy is that when my mother doesn't get food, she tells us why and assures us that one day we shall eat.

Instead of thanking God for food before eating, as is usually the case for most people in this community, the mundane practise of prayer as a strategy for becoming becomes a site for staking claims for future food, as I also show in Chapter 6 (Sanghera et al., 2018: 545). Children also used discursive strategies, including noting that 'one cannot die of hunger' or 'we do not like cold food in the morning' as a way of coming to terms with the lack of food at home. Even though expected to be resilient, children's bodies defied these forms of becoming and showed signs of stress and disease. For example, Ayo's sister Awino (18 months old), forced to eat once a day, was evidently malnourished. In one of the photos taken by her brother, she was crying over an empty flask of porridge. (See also Ngutuku, 2018: 21.) In the next section, I offer yet more specific perspectives on the cramped space of social and economic relations and children's experience by exploring the experience of caregivers, most of whom were widowed.

Caregiving as a *Chi Liel*

> Being a widow has its challenges, but being a widowed caregiver is hard, too.
> (Discussion with caregivers)

As earlier noted, Siaya shows a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Death, though not all related to HIV/AIDS, was a defining context of Siaya's childhoods during my research. Some of the caregivers I encountered were taking care of children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. In some cases, children constantly discussed death as something normal. For example, in one short discussion, Oketch (20 years old) mentioned death nine times. This was the death of family members who were important to him and who would have provided him support after the death of his parents. Some of the children I worked with were cared for by widows. A widow among the Luo is *Chi Liel* – wife of the grave.[2] Being a widow, therefore, emerged as one of the key nodes in the vulnerabilities of caregiving. In this section, I only explore the gendered relations of care for widowed caregivers. I show how the individual and collective ways these women constitute

themselves as subjects in their daily lives (Honan, 2007) and as they respond to these unequal gender relations also become part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of vulnerability. Further, these challenges and how the caregivers engage with them, or what is seen as the 'minor politics of the cramped spaces of the everyday', also reveal that children's vulnerability goes beyond material lack (Rose, 2004: 279–280).

Chi Liel refers to a woman whose husband has died and who chooses to stay in her matrimonial home without seeking remarriage. Nyarwath (2012: 104) argued that there is no widow in the traditional Luo universe, and one is either married or not. He also added that 'despite the death of her husband, the woman remains a wife of the deceased, and by extension, of the clan into which she married. So long as she remains a wife, she cannot be married again'. The *Chi Liel* I interacted with cared for a range of children, including their own or fostered children. There was also a levirate union termed *Lako* in which after the death of the husband, a widow is obliged to marry her husband's sibling or someone who is socially classified as such. This person, who takes over the duties of the husband, 'inherits' her and is called a *Jater*. The institution of assuming responsibility for care over a deceased brother's wife is called *Lako* or *Ter*, or what is referred to in the literature as wife inheritance.

This view on wife inheritance has been a subject of commentary mainly from gender and human rights advocates who see the practice as disregarding the human rights of the *Chi Liel* (see Nyajom, 2006). Nyarwath (2012: 100) notes that '*Lako* as an institution of care is conceptually, and in principle and practice, different from wife (widow) inheritance' and that referencing *Lako* as widow inheritance is to disregard Luo customs. Other scholars argued that the levirate union, common in some communities in sub-Saharan Africa, provides informal security and smooth continuity within the socio-cultural context for the widow after her husband's death (Miruka et al., 2015). *Lako* was also supposed to protect children left behind and ensure that the children are retained within the clan. As a surrogate for the dead husband, it provided the continuation of the husband's roles, therefore alleviating any social difficulties/filling social gaps in the experience of the wife and her children (Kudo, 2018; Miruka et al., 2015; Nyajom, 2006; Perry et al., 2014; Prince, 2011).

Within the context where the community capital that accorded the associated rights was waning, being a *Chi Liel* for many women with whom I interacted signalled vulnerability and, by extension, difficulties in caregiving. For example, some younger widows were often accused of having killed their husbands for sexual escapades with men in the community. One caregiver reported a case of a neighbour who was accused of killing her husband or what was referred to as 'eating Ugali' with one's husband.[3] These rumours that played a role in regulating gendered relations in the community were stigmatizing to the caregivers. In the spirit of rhizo-analysis, where several meanings are plausible, one can bring the rumours back to the assemblage of the institution of *Lako* itself and poverty. This is because with increasing commercialization and corruption of the role, some *Jater* were poor men who were unable to support their own families. In

such a context of poverty, becoming a *Jater* involved being fed by the widow, and some *Jater* were reportedly even abandoning their own biological children. Being a *Chi Liel* was therefore not only a problem to the widow but was also seen as a problem for other women and their children in the community, and respectively, their husbands and fathers.

In getting to terms with the difficulties of caregiving as *Chi Liel* and the associated gendered norms, the *Chi Liel* had organized themselves into self-help groups. In addition to engaging in diverse economic activities or what is seen as 'philanthropy of the poor' (Okwany et al., 2011: 75), these groups ostensibly provided moral support and other non-material exchanges. For example, in these groups, the caregivers engaged with the discourses that misrepresented their identity. Through these groups, the caregivers also engaged the discourses of burdened caregiving that characterised their identity, instead emphasizing the status and symbolic capital that such caregiving conferred to them (Llobet and Milanich, 2018: 176). For example, they represented themselves as deserving of their status as widowed caregivers, thereby transgressing the governing power of tradition. They also encouraged each other to stay strong and support the children under their care. One caregiver noted: 'We have to bring up our children; everybody is doing this. What do you do?' The *Chi Liel* also used these groups to engage with the day-to-day stigma they face in everyday spaces. For example, one caregiver group noted the following:

> When you are kind to those who discriminate against you as a *Chi Liel*, you will be trampled upon, and they will take your land. But we encourage each other to report or take them before an assembly. Sometimes, we tell them, tomorrow, you will die, and your children will become orphans and your wife, a widow, may be exposed to the same.

Dangling the threat of death into the face of the wrongdoer would, at least in this case, offer a reprieve for the widowed caregivers.

The identity as *Chi Liel* was not just lived but also performed in our day-to-day encounters. In some of these encounters, being a *Chi Liel* was reproduced differently and reworked as a positive identity that enabled caregivers to take good care of their children. In my day-to-day interactions with caregivers, I for example listened to the subtexts in the *Chi Liels'* day-to-day talk or 'glib comments that index surpluses of meaning' (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013: 671). Through banter, the women downplayed their hardships as *Chi Liel*, instead casting their dead husbands as angels. Drawing on the biblical notion of the afterlife, they joked that the husbands had gone to prepare a place in heaven for them, and they would be reunited. Others sarcastically presented men as better angels compared to women who would be more bothered with caregiving roles, including watching if their children on earth were suffering. In using satire to represent their role as 'non-angels' or potentially 'bad angels', these caregivers also revealed the silenced notions of male privilege since most men tended to marry immediately after the death of their wives. These women can also be said to be engaging the

tradition that ties women to the grave or their matrimonial home. As I showed in my research, there is no corresponding term for a widower among the Luo, or what I presented through the lexical impossibility of a *Chuor Liel* (Ngutuku, 2020). As I devised it, a *Chuor Liel* or a husband of a grave would be what Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 7–8) see as a 'shocking word' in this culture. Women's jocular assertions, therefore, signalled a need for democratizing cultural relations. Within a context of generalized insecurity, the grave was no longer fulfilling its protective role for most of the C*hi Liel*. These jokes also engaged culture on its terms by indicting men who were seen as irresponsible and, as reported by some children, were allowing the stepmothers to mistreat the children.

When I asked one of the caregivers taking care of seven young children about the children under her care, she noted: 'I am taking care of seven children, and I started when they were very young. We were born to take care of orphans'. Another caregiver also referred to herself as a good caregiver, taking care of her three grandchildren who had walked for more than 15 kilometres from their paternal relative's home after the death of their mother. These caregivers were, therefore, enacting their position as caregivers, not as one to be pitied but as one to be respected. Roy (2003: 77) noted that, according to Deleuze, 'becoming is the transformation of life through the refusal of closed structures within which difference can be confined'. While these women emphasized the status and symbolic capital that such caregiving conferred to them (Llobet and Milanich, 2018: 176), we also need to consider that such forms of agency by women also reveal the constrained structures they have to engage with.

Some of the caregivers subverted the governing power of tradition and, in our interactions, contested the tradition of wife inheritance, justifying their position as happy and not inherited. For example, some *Chi Liel* portrayed *Jater* as giving women stress and 'milking' or appropriating what was left behind by the deceased husband. Another woman said the following:

> When my husband died, I did not think of getting a man. For what? I am busy with my children and family. A man comes to give you stress and wants to live in luxury. He comes to vandalize all the wealth and milk everything.

These examples reveal the denigration of the practice of *Lako*. These men, who were supposed to provide care and socio-cultural protection to the widows, were therefore cast as 'vandals' in a material and sexual sense. The vandal discourse also needs to be plugged into the problematic evolution of the practice of *Lako* from its protective intent and origins into an exploitative sexual and economic union, where some men used it for sex and/or economic gain. Nyarwath (2012: 108) noted that such men whom he argued had entered *Lako* for material benefits 'were only seen at home during mealtime and bedtime'. I observed some of the younger widows with young children borne of such unions, which exacerbated the vulnerability of both the widows and their children.

Despite taking such lines of flight and refusing to be inherited, at least discursively, the practical and discursive challenges of being a *Chi Liel* still placed

limits on such redemptive agency by women (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). For example, the structural constraints like moving to a new house that required a man to be present or required sexual relations was such a barrier. This is because, among the Luo, it is customary for sons who have started their own families to move from the bachelor hut in the father's homestead.[4] This is called *goyo dala*, literally shifting away to set up his own homestead. In case a husband dies before setting up their home, the widow is expected to shift homes with the *Jater* to stand in for the deceased husband and 'move' her. Over time, this has progressively included performing sexual relations couched as a form of cleansing to enable her to rejoin community life. Many women noted that another outstanding alternative was seeking refuge in the church. The church was, therefore, not just protective in a spiritual sense but in a social sense (Ngutuku, 2024; Nyambedha, 2004; Okwany et al., 2011).

Faced with these impossibilities and 'choked passages' (Deleuze, 1995) imposed by tradition (including perceptions of being unclean), some women were reportedly inherited discreetly for the convenience of adhering to norms but disengaged later and chose to bring up their children on their own. For example, when I discussed widow inheritance with one caregiver, she responded past my question and argued that only those willing were inherited. Arguably, this can be seen as a form of veiled silence since I later learned that she was inherited at some point but disengaged. (See Mazzei, 2007: 77 for perspectives on veiled silence). Her silence was her way of protecting herself from my scrutiny of her actions and morals. Other women put on a façade by arranging for a *Jater* as a disguise and moving to a new home with him, thereby duping the gatekeepers of tradition.

The bargaining position of the caregivers played a more significant role in the decision to stay single after the death of the husband, like the case of one woman. Her relatively well-paying job enabled her to care for her two children and two fostered ones. Another caregiver, a widow taking care of her 3-year-old grandson, was already receiving support from her son, who was working. She was not inherited by the time of our encounter. Women without such a fallback position did not have much room for manoeuvre (Agarwal, 1997: 4). However, as I have argued earlier, the effects of class must be seen within the context of cartography of other complex social relations as I have sketched here. These perspectives, therefore, point to a need to strengthen caregiving in these marginal spaces of material lack and choked spaces of social relations that define the identity of a *Chi Liel* caregiver. In the next section, I explore the categories of social and economic widows, represented through the metaphor of zombie fatherhoods as ubiquitous categories that influence Siaya childhoods.

Social Widows: 'Alive but Dead' Husbands

Besides lack, poverty was also constructed through the behaviour of the parents. Here, I present a category of fathers labelled by another neologism as 'alive but dead'. Such a neologism enables us to see that poverty and vulnerability was not just understood through orphanhood but also the dominant representation of

fatherhood in the community. 'Alive but dead' was a category of fathers who were not providing for the needs of their children, and so their children were said to live like orphans and their wives like widows. For example, Gabriel, though not an orphan, said in our first encounter that his father was 'not there'. I initially took this to mean his father was dead because that is often how death is expressed by many in the study community. Through his grandmother, I later learned that his father was alive but not providing for his needs. As she noted:

> Gabriel doesn't have a dad. The father went away. He left when Gabriel was 3 years old and lived in Nairobi. The man has not helped my child in any way [resigned look]. Gabriel has to burn and sell charcoal.

It was not uncommon to see some men in the village drunk as early as 10 am. Such fathers were, therefore, also seen as 'alive but dead'. For example, Donald, who described himself as a co-caregiver with his mother, described his father, who was an alcoholic, as 'alive but dead'. Donald's case is comparable to that of Allister, who mentioned that his father was not taking care of their school-related needs because he was drinking. In playing a good wife, his mother had intentionally been silent about this aspect of their father's behaviour during our earlier discussions. Instead, she had represented her husband as a supportive father who provided for the family's needs. I later learned that Alister's father had engaged in the practice of wife inheritance practice six times and was drinking.[5] Similarly, Brigid's aunt, who had fostered her, also described Brigid's father as 'alive but dead' when she noted: 'Brigid's father has a job but drinks a lot. My sister is widowed. Those with dead husbands are better off'.

In placing this discourse and reality within programmes that support vulnerable caregivers, we learn that being 'alive but dead' was caught up with and was part of the cartography of discourses circulated in support organizations in Siaya. This is because widows were seen as more needy. As we encounter it in subsequent chapters, this lateral discourse presents carers with husbands as better off. In taking another line in the cartography of this discourse, declaring some irresponsible husbands as dead even though they are alive would set the wife free to fend for their children as a *Chi Liel*. Indeed, some children stated that they lived with their mothers, even though their fathers were alive. It was only after several interactions that I discovered the fathers were not providing support or were living with other women and had neglected their care duties.[6] Without listening softly, children's assertion that they were living with their mothers in other dominant and patronizing critical research would be seen as lying about the death or absence of their fathers to benefit from interventions fraudulently.

Declaring the husbands as 'alive but dead' was one of the strategies used by women who were participating in widowed women's groups, and it was a pragmatic approach to their day-to-day solidarities. Women from one women's group remarked that the group was a better husband to them because they were able to get loans and build their houses or borrow money for school fees for their children. For example, Nyar Ugenya (one of the caregivers in a widow caregivers'

group) was not a *Chi Liel*. However, she was admitted into the group because the other women reasoned that even though she was married, she was as badly off, if not worse, than the *Chi Liel*. Her husband was declared by the group 'alive but dead', and she was therefore seen as meeting the group's criteria for membership. In locating such discourses within the requirements for participation in groups, the women can be seen as responding to what Fraser, (1987: 115) sees as an administrative interpretation of needs. This is because most of the charity organizations supported only widows; after all, widows were seen as more needy. However, this argument should not take away these women's agency in framing these husbands as dead.

For some of these caregivers, however, it was the 'blocked passages' (Biehl and Locke, 2010: 323) where opportunities for livelihoods were missing that was the main problem. This is because fathers who might even want to be alive for their children were symbolically killed by the economic system and lost face. Men who could not perform their breadwinning roles were (in a symbolic sense) emasculated and became 'zombie' fathers. In specific contexts, therefore, the notion of the father as a breadwinner can also be seen as a 'zombie category' (in both a symbolic, theoretical and literal sense) (Meer and Modhood, 2014). In Siaya and similar childhood contexts, we cannot continue framing the male head as the breadwinner.

Zombie fatherhoods should also be placed within the context of the poverty divide in Kenya, where the rural areas, including Siaya in this case, are ignored in development efforts. This was the case for Agnes, a 62-year-old grandmother who was fostering her daughter's children. She explained that the daughter and her husband could not provide for the needs of the children because they did not have a regular source of income: 'She only comes to ask for help from us. She relies on us. [Exclaims and laughs.] She thinks we live in Nairobi while she lives in Siaya'. A report by Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative in 2020 indicates that more than 80 per cent of poor people in Africa live in rural areas (Oldiges and Jennings, 2020: 1). There is often in these areas constrained state social service provisioning coupled with the dominance of insecure livelihood activities as I have already shown in this chapter. Thus, those in the rural areas rely primarily on those in the urban areas, where they may also be competing for opportunities with others.

In this section, I have sketched a category of fatherhoods, seen as zombie fathers. As I have demonstrated, these fatherhoods that are part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of vulnerability should be connected to the assemblage of factors, including insecure livelihoods and marginalization of rural areas. They should also be connected to the subjectivities occasioned by programmes of care and caregiver agency as women and men seek to come to terms with the burden of caregiving.

Conclusion: Constrained Contexts of Caregiving

The discussions in this chapter have revealed that being a caregiver for poor and vulnerable children was not just material but was fraught with contradictions,

challenges, despair, and blockages, as well as hope and dreams. I have explored the context of insecure livelihood, food insecurity, and unequal gendered relations of care. The chapter has also explored how women use various strategies to come to terms with their challenging contexts. For example, while acknowledging that the community safety nets for childcare are strained, women have used self-help groups to circumvent economic and discursive challenges in their caregiving and reworked the sense of community according to social protection for children. These strategies by caregivers stuttered the fluency of the dominant discourse of the inadequacy of such caregivers (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 105; Rose, 2004: 280). Caregivers practical, gendered and maternalist agency, their subject positions and their sense of becoming also provided hope to these carers and enabled them to get through the day-to-day challenges. In the subsequent chapters, I connect these discussions as I continue responding to the question, what is the lived experience of child poverty and vulnerability? The next chapter explores the complex question: who are the 'poor and vulnerable' children?

Notes

1 *Bahari* literally means ocean in Swahili. In Luoland the word refers to a large expanse of water and not just an ocean. The Luo word for both lake and ocean is *nam:* I use the word ocean to demonstrate the ironic conflation of expansive waters of the ocean and the desert-like livelihoods of the communities in Siaya.
2 The plural for this term is *Mondliete*, wives of graves. However, I continue to use this term in its singular sense, not as a way of misappropriating a people's language and culture but as a gesture aimed at demonstrating the singularity of the experience of widow caregivers.
3 Ugali is a local maize staple dish eaten in most households in this region. The term 'eating Ugali with one's husband' meant killing one's husband.
4 Within the context of poverty, some men who cannot afford to build their own houses continue living in their father's homestead, some however are reported to only change the direction of the door in such a way that it is not facing the direction of the father's.
5 Being a serial *Jater* is another distortion of the practice of this union signalling the commercialization, exploitative aspects as a man cannot provide, protection for so many households without neglecting his own and these households.
6 A *Jater* has his own home and moves in with the widow temporarily or appears sporadically because the home still belongs to the deceased husband as do children borne of the union.

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5 Who Are the Poor and Vulnerable Children?

Rhizomatic Categories

Introduction

This chapter engages with the double-sided question of 'Who are the poor and vulnerable children?' I provide a perspective of children's lived experience, which is simultaneously material, socially constructed and fluid like a map. In keeping with the cartographic nature of the arguments in the book, I connect children's experience at home, in support programmes, and in the school. As an entanglement, children's experience engages the categorical practices used in understanding the experience of child poverty and vulnerability. I argue that these existing categories standardize experience, and do not adequately capture the processes of vulnerabilization.

In a move that can be seen as being caught up in my argument, I take the heuristic entry points of the already constituted categories but approach them with ambiguity, creating room for seeing complexity in each category (Goethals et al., 2015: 89; Ngutuku, 2019). Other categories also emerged during the research and were enabled by my cartographical methodological approach. This was as I listened carefully, and what I located as listening to the field where children's voice, unheard or not previously well heard, emerged. The outsider child and the child moving after projects is one such experience as I later assemble for the reader.

In Deleuzean tradition, instead of presenting the characteristics of children in these categories, I palpate or feel them out. I am influenced by May (2005: 20–22), who used the analogy of palpating or how doctors identify lesions they cannot see. They accomplish this by creating 'zones of touch' using their fingers to determine the intensities in the lesion and, therefore, giving a voice to the lesion. Palpating enables me to present the textures of children's experience and the associated non-linear processes of vulnerabilization, without necessarily fixing any essential characteristics or identities. It also enables me to explore children's agency as they come to terms with specific representations of their identity and challenging material contexts. Such agency and sense-making, as I reveal, become part of the cartographies of a poor and vulnerable child.

Presenting the fleeting leaking, porous, ambiguous, contingent and fluid categories is not a claim for new truths. Instead, I aim to offer a perspective of 'new

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vistas' for imagining children's experience (May, 2005: 22). Children's experience, as presented in this chapter, draw from the experience of a few children. However, as a cartography, I show how this experience connects, articulates or disarticulates with the experience of other children. Presenting children's experience in ways that are 'unfit to fit' (Lather, 1993: 681), the dominant categorizing regimes reveal the dynamism and untidiness of children's experience, which we must remain attuned to. Seeing these categories in a fresh light would also enable us to stay as close as possible to each child's experience in our work (Ngutuku, 2024: 32). I start this exploration by presenting the fluid category of children staying on their own.

The Fluid Category of Children 'Staying on Their Own'

I present the experience of 'children staying on their own' through the lens of two families. This category is known as 'child-headed households', a commonly used analytical perspective (Chademana and Wyk, 2021; Mturi, 2012). Meintjes et al. (2010), while exploring the experience of child-headed households in South Africa, have argued that this category is not only temporary, but the dynamics of children's experience are not well understood. Evans (2010) has also noted a need to investigate the dynamics and temporalities in this category in Africa. In settling for the term children staying on their own and under erasure, I am not concerned with the transient nature of the households but the complexity of children's experience.

Oluoch and His Siblings Experience

We start with Oluoch and his family. He was 24 years old at the time of the research and lived with his three young siblings, one who was attending primary and two were in secondary school. As Oluoch noted, the family had been 'staying on their own' from the time Oluoch was 17 years old, following the death of their mother. Literature around such vulnerable children has tended to take a starting point of the death of their parents (see Foster et al., 1997). For Oluoch and his family, such views fail to consider, for example, how prolonged sickness and accident that wiped out the family's resources structured their vulnerability. After the death of his mother, Oluoch spoke about the support he received from a well-wisher when he said, 'a well-wisher gave me a bicycle worth 5,000 Kenyan shillings (50 euros) and the pastor in the church gave me a school uniform, and this is the day my help came'. Oluoch and his siblings stayed in their grandmother's house for some time, but not before their paternal uncle relocated to the village from the city and forced them out of their grandmother's house. Oluoch, case was not new and cases of disinheritance for children during this time were reported (Bellamy, 2004; Evans, 2012).

Literature from Africa on child-headed households also presents them as transient, based on the ability of the extended family to organize themselves to care for the children (Foster et al., 1997: 166). However, in my research, several other

factors determined whether relatives took children in. The dynamics of such transience are also worth our attention. For example, the fluidities in Oluoch's experience were evident when a well-wisher who was supporting him in school became widowed, and Oluoch dropped out of school again. His exit from school resonates with the experience of children in other African countries who reported similar challenges with schooling. For example, see Maila and Mabasa's (2023) research in South Africa. Another node in the status and experience of Oluoch's family emerged when he was employed as a domestic worker and, together with his three siblings, moved in to live with the employer. Oluoch eventually received support for school fees from a non-governmental organization (NGO), and he combined schooling with work as a live-in domestic worker. Without paying attention to his caregiving roles, this organization recruited him as a volunteer, and he lost his job as a domestic worker and, consequently, his accommodation. The family was then forced to rent a small house at the market.

As part of his sense of becoming and coming to terms with the hardships in his context, Oluoch had instructed his siblings not to disclose their orphan status. As he stated: 'We are very strong, and nobody knows my brothers are orphans'. His refusal to describe himself as poor or suffering may be in response to the sense of shame that defines poverty as a status. Kyomuhendo et al.'s (2019) research in Uganda reveals the sense of shame that accompanies the label of a poor or an orphaned child, with children reporting being stigmatized by others and teachers in school. Oluoch's agency also disrupts the iconography in some literature that presents orphaned children as cashing in on the status of an orphan for material support (e.g. see Ansell, 2016; Cheney, 2017). We also need to stay with the rhizome-like unfolding nature of Oluoch's experience. For example, taking such 'lines of flight' and failing to disclose enabled Oluoch and his siblings to claim a space of 'normal' childhood and liberated them from relations of stigma and shame, it had material repercussions. As I later argue in Chapter 6, confessing that one is poor or orphaned enables these children to get material and other support in school.

Oketch and Stella's Narrative: Itinerant Childhoods

We move to another family, Oketch and Stella, that I explore through the metaphor of itinerant childhoods. This reference reveals the tangled aspects of children's identity, and the fluidities and complexities of this experience. Oketch's experience like a rhizome, though having its middle as staying alone as he described himself, was simultaneously an orphaned child, a child caregiver, a fostered child and a poor child in status transit. Death and 'being alone' were the vernaculars of his narrative, as revealed through his semi-autobiographical essay, conversations in situ and observations at home and school. He described himself as 'living on his own' from an early age after his four maternal aunts, his father, mother, and grandmother died in that order. He then left school to work for several years.

> I was staying with my grandmother and my sister. After a few minutes [means short period], she went [died]. By bad luck too, my mother died. They were four sisters [hesitates], and all had passed. Then the project people [children's home] came, they took my sister. This forced me to just stay alone in that home.

However, a close reading of Oluoch's narrative tempered his view of being alone by showing his enduring relations with others beyond his immediate family (Ursin and Lysa, 2022). This is because, as I elaborate in Chapter 6, the head teacher in his school and the cook were acting as his surrogate parents, supporting him with food and approaching funding organizations on his behalf. It is also important to note that his immediate family, his father's relatives, were not supporting him. Like in most of Africa, in Siaya's childhoods, within the context of poverty, the traditional orphan supporting extended family has been restructured. See Foster's (2004) seminal work on how child-headed households in Zimbabwe were restructured in this period. In staying with the dynamics of such families, Oketch was not just alone since he was a caregiver to his stepsister Stella (12 years old), whose mother had also died. Therefore, Oketch provided what is seen in most of Africa as sibling care. As noted in Oketch's vignette, Stella had previously been placed in a children's home but was later withdrawn by Oketch's cousin since she was suffering in the children's home.

The experience of Oketch and Stella was a rhizome where new nodes emerge, and others die. This is because four months after fostering Stella, their cousin died in a road accident. Therefore, their 21-year-old cousin's wife, a mother of two, became Stella's caregiver. The whole family, including Stella, also moved to stay with the mother of their cousin's wife. This was another burden on their 42-year-old grandmother by marriage, who had rented a house in the shopping centre and was also caring for another adult daughter and her child. Stella and Oketch's lived experience was still mobile, and when I visited again, Stella had moved to stay with Oketch because their cousin's wife had left home to look for a job. She had told Oketch that they were no longer related. Indeed, her cousin's wife had earlier on asked me: 'Who will pay Stella's school fees? The one who was supporting her died'. On a different date, further encounters with the family revealed that Oketch had approached Stella's former children's home to accept her back. His reasons sounded pragmatic and revealed the complex contexts under which poor children make choices. For example, there was no food at home most of the time, and Oketch would eat at school. In one of my diaries, I noted: 'In a traditional sense of the household, this would not qualify as a household where members eat from the same pot' since Oketch would be eating from school and Stella would have to struggle to look for food or go without (see Pillay, 2016: 2). Oketch had also hoped that, after completing class eight, the children's home would pay for Stella's secondary school fees. This is an investment that children put in these programmes of support, hoping to be supported with high school education later in life (see also Ngutuku, 2022).

In keeping with the complexities and fluidity of children's experience, I observed and listened to Stella negotiating care with her brother, pointing out the weaknesses in the care at the children's home and making claims for a different type of care.

> Oketch, please, do not allow me to go back to that place (children's home). They do not pay for fees after the end of primary school. We can pay for ourselves in another school, or my uncle and grandmother can support me. There are other people in my grandmother's village who can take care of me.

It can be said that Stella claimed her right to be heard by challenging assumptions about what type of care she was entitled to (CRC General Comment No. 20, para. 19). Her brother's actions in heeding her views around care resonates with the provisions of UNCRC Article 12(1) of giving weight to Stella's views.[1] In mapping these actions further, Stella and Oketch's agency behove us to move our analysis of such households beyond either vulnerability or resilience and analyze these two as co-constitutive (Adefehinti and Arts, 2018; Cheney, 2010; Meintjes and Giese, 2006; Pillay, 2016). For example, in a movement that characterized the lives of these two children, Stella in 2017, started living with her great aunt (grandmother's sister) in another community. Living with an elderly and economically constrained grandmother could introduce new vulnerabilities and potential status transit and mobility. This mobility was evident in relation to her brother Oketch because two years after my research when I visited in 2018, he was no longer 'staying on his own' but had moved in with a well-wisher in the community. Whilst he was silent when I asked him why he had moved, a staff member in his school told me that Oketch was frequently calling in sick. Teachers thought he was a victim of witchcraft. This fear of witchcraft was a new node in understanding his experience of status mobility. Such a node cannot, however, be abstracted from children's contexts, and it behoves us to understand children's lived experience in its singularity. In the next section, I explore the experience of an outsider child.

The Fluidities of Being an 'Outsider' Child

In this section, I present the experience of an outsider child that emerged as a key node in the assemblage of vulnerability in Siaya's childhoods. At the beginning of my research, I had settled for this category as 'the illegitimate' child or 'born out of wedlock' since some of the children I worked with fitted into such a category. Two encounters that made me revisit my apparent certainties of thought about this category are worth noting. The first was an encounter with a 13-year-old boy who lived with his grandmother. Even though his father had died, he noted that his mother had abandoned him, leaving him to struggle on his own. Another encounter was in one of the schools where children identified others they perceived as vulnerable in their school. They noted that some children did not have both parents and that other parents had run away. Clarke and Parsons (2013: 40)

argued that 'rhizome researchers search for research aspects that are sometimes ignored'. In becoming a rhizome researcher, these two accounts enabled me to research this experience, which I characterize as an outsider child experience.

Starting with what we know, the illegitimate child, I located this experience within the context of Siaya childhoods and locally embedded notions of protection. In the everyday patrilineal imaginaries of Siaya, all children, including those born outside marriage, are said to be automatically accepted into the biological father's household and entitled to care and support. However, these expectations did not resonate with the experience of some children I encountered. In the Luo imaginaries, a pregnancy before marriage was derogatorily labelled as an *Ich Simba* or a bachelor hut pregnancy. Simba, the traditional Luo bachelor hut constructed for each pubescent boy, marks their transition to manhood. Whilst young men could interact with girlfriends in the huts, sexual intercourse was forbidden. A child from a 'bachelor hut pregnancy' was seen as illegitimate even if the marriage occurred later. If such a child accompanied the mother to her new matrimonial home, such a child was descriptively referenced as *nyathi ma obigo*, a child the mother came with.

In settling for the outsider child concept instead of an illegitimate child, I anchor the arguments in Deleuzean thought, where concepts are not just signifiers of reality but are devices that draw from the complexities or the chaos of the empirical world. This concept has a prosthetic effect since it enables me to pry open the normalized and settled ways of thinking that silence some aspects of children's experience if they do not conform to the dominant category. Using this concept, therefore, enabled me to investigate the tangled issues in the experience of these children and other experience that may not necessarily fit into the known category of an illegitimate child (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Gane, 2009; May, 2005).

The concept of an outsider child unravels for the reader a complex experience that cannot be categorized. This concept speaks to the experience of children born out of a marriage and stigmatized by norms around belonging. This experience in Siaya's context of precarity speaks also to the experience of children who, due to their evolving circumstances of care, straddle the insider–outsider experience at different moments. These are children from prior marriages who accompany their mothers when they marry or remarry and those living with maternal relatives after their parent's death. Within specific contexts of identification and belonging, an outsider child is also a labouring child who engages with the norms that surround representations as an outsider, with the variegated outcomes of this labour becoming part of the experience of being an outsider child. Importantly, we need to note that these dimensions of experience can be simultaneous and shifting, and each obtains different salience in terms of vulnerability and implications for children's agency and rights, depending on the context (Ngutuku, 2024). Lucia's experience starts us off.

Lucia's Experience – Belonging, Unbelonging and an Outsider

In terms of belonging, Lucia can be characterized as a child simultaneously in and out of place. Lucia was 17 years old and in high school, and she encountered difficulties whilst living with her stepfather and eventually with her maternal relatives. Her mother, who was 14 years old when she gave birth to her, eventually got married when Lucia was 4 years old. When Lucia was 12 years old, her parents disagreed on who should care for her, leading to the breakdown of their marriage. She noted:

> I listened to a phone conversation between my mother and my father … He told her to surrender his four children and remain with her fifth. I asked my mother, [who is this fifth child?] … and I also asked my father, and he said, [you are the one]. That day, my father disowned me. That day, I learned that I was not his child … I went to stay with my grandmother.

Whilst staying with her grandmother brought her some reprieve from her suffering, other nodes in Lucia's outsider status emerged. This is because she faced stigma from her late uncle's orphaned son, who lived with her grandmother and who taunted her to look for her biological father. When I asked Lucia's 62-year-old grandmother about Lucia's biological father, she responded past my question whilst arguing that her daughter then was too young to know about the father of her child. Lucia's experience resonates with Gabriel's, who reported similar pressure on her then-unmarried mother.

> There was a dispute on why my biological father was not caring for me. My mother's father forced her to look for my father … She did not find my father and came back with me. She then abandoned me with my poor grandmother.

Getting back to Lucia, the failure to reveal the identity of her father had larger repercussions since she had also adopted the stepfather's name. Her stepfather was continuously telling her to pay for continued use of his name or change it. It is important to note that the Kenya Children's Act 2022 protects the rights to a name and identity. However, the law does not anticipate cases where children's right to a name may be affected in this way. Further difficulties obtained from the fact that when a person is over 2 years old in Kenya, a name change is only possible through a deed poll, a legal document declaring an intention to change the name (Government of Kenya, 2010). Many families, however, cannot afford the costs involved in following up after such processes. This supports Kabeer's view (2006: 99) that for those living in poverty, the formal guarantees of rights 'entails unaffordable costs and barriers'.

Lucia also reported that the stepfather had conspired with her cousin to take away Lucia's school certificates to prevent her from joining high school:

> After securing a sponsor for my education, [he] conspired with my father to hide my school certificates. [I] reported it to the chief (local administrator), who forced them to return them … This did not stop his attacks, and I wanted to take my own life.

Like the other children living with stepparents, Lucia noted that her cousin said she was making the household poorer. Such a view and notions of 'outsiderness' ought to be plugged into the Luo cosmo-ontologies. For example, I learned that it is believed that God compensated children born out of wedlock for growing up without a father. When such children live with a stepfather, it is believed they would have blessings from the stepfather and God, whilst the stepfather's children will only have one source of blessings. Some outsider children were, therefore, said to take the blessings of legitimate children or what was seen as *kawo hap* (Ngutuku, 2024).

Despite Lucia's suffering as an outsider child, she also exercised her agency by using her relationship with her grandmother to claim rights to belong as a daughter of a daughter. She also claimed her belonginess as a carer to her grandmother and appealed to her interdependency with her grandmother (Ursin and Lysa, 2022). Lucia had, for example, expressed a desire to join a boarding school to avoid trouble with her cousin. As part of how I moved and was moved by children's experience, I connected Lucia to an organization that offered to take her to a safe space. Lucia, however, refused the offer, citing a lack of bus fare. She also declined my support with bus fare, noting that she wanted to stay with her grandmother, to whom she had ethics of duty, because of her vulnerable, sick body (Gyekye, 2013). Here we see that by capitalizing on her relationship and obligation to her grandmother, Lucia contested the allotted subject position of an outsider. She also questioned the borders of the accepted forms of belonging and identity by positioning belonging as intergenerational care (Bloemraad and Sheares, 2017: 854; May, 2011: 373). Lucia's troublesome cousin, himself orphaned by HIV/AIDS, did not have the same endearing relationship with their grandmother and was seen more as an outsider in this relationship. Ngira's (2021) research among the Abagusii of Kenya shows how children may lose their caring entitlements if they don't perform their responsibilities to the family. Therefore, Lucia's refusal of rescue manifested her voice as an excess, which could not be contained in her initial argument that she lacked bus fare. Her refusal behoves us to go beyond rescuing such children as victims of discrimination and to acknowledge such relational and interdependent agency (Abebe, 2019; Hanson, 2016; Ursin and Lysa, 2022). Supporting Lucia might also mean exploring other opportunities in the community for support, as happened earlier when a community member took her in.

In 2017, I learned that Lucia's cousin passed away. Her grandmother reportedly was happy because Lucia was finally safe. Further lines of vulnerability emerged because her grandmother had to sell her small piece of land to transport the cousin's body home, and she was reportedly stressed and sick because of this. In another return to the field in 2018, I found out that Lucia had been taken in

by a well-wisher, who was supporting her education. Therefore, one can argue that Lucia's experience was cartographical, where new nodes multiply, others emerge, or mutate as others die (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 15).

Representation As 'Generations of Outsider Children': Mary's Story

Mary's story sheds light on the experience of outsider children who are also mothers. Before being fostered by her maternal aunt, Mary lived with her elderly maternal grandmother. She had given birth when she was 16 years old, positioning her child as another outsider in her maternal relatives' home. Her mother's sister explained Mary's suffering as an outsider child.

> My brothers wanted to kill her when she was pregnant … Her unborn child would be another burden to our elderly mother. My siblings stopped supporting my 80-year-old mother. When I took Mary in, they told me to stop educating a 'prostitute' and two children from another family.

Like several other children in similar situations, Mary's education sponsorship was also stopped when she became pregnant, noting that; 'he [sponsor] went cold on me'. Staff in the organizations providing support to such children expressed the same view that retaining such children in school would lead to what was seen as moral contagion. These contestations around the deservedness by student mothers are not new and resonate with similar contestations not only in Kenya but also in Africa, where girls are sent away from school when they become pregnant (Ngutuku, 2006; Wekesa, 2023). The discourse of contagion also needs to be plugged into the broader nationalist concerns in Kenya. For example, when I asked a senior officer in the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Secretariat if the government should provide cash support to such children, he compared Kenya to South Africa (which provides a cash grant for vulnerable children, especially children of single mothers). He noted that supporting children would encourage three generations of children born to single mothers. Struggles over support to such children, therefore, were linked to economic needs and struggles for reproduction and fertility.

Chhachhi (1998) explored similar parliamentary debates in India that centred on who should bear the costs of reproduction, with debates focussing on whether it was the state, the employer or the husband. Providing these benefits to women was seen as shifting the responsibilities of the heads of families to the employer. She also explored eugenics anxieties (like those by the official above) where working-class men were accused of uncontrolled reproduction. The official's discourse reveals veritable fears that such benefits would sanction promiscuity and lead to overpopulation. Such views deflect attention from vital structural issues in children's contexts.

As part of what would be considered as doing rights with name (Isin, 2019), when the father of Mary's child refused responsibility, Mary named her child after herself. In mapping outcomes of such agency or labour, we see the possibilities

and limits of various forms of becoming by children (Roy, 2003: 78). First, the failure to include the father's name in the birth certificate may be a practical consideration since until 2014, Kenya's Births and Deaths Registration Act 2012 only supported the inclusion of the father's name in the birth certificate if the father had consented, or if there was proof of marriage by the time of the child's birth (GOK, 2012). Further, whilst agentic, naming child after self may also introduce other vulnerabilities since, in some instances, some mothers fail to register the births of their children since a father's name is often required. Failure to apply for the birth certificate may introduce further vulnerabilities when seeking government services, usually pegged on registration. Some children who do not have a father's surname may also be stigmatized.

Insider and Outsider and Children Labouring to Belong

Here, I continue showing the complexities of the experience of outsider children by presenting the experience of children straddling the experience of being insiders and outsiders at different moments. Lina's emergent experience is the first node in this exploration. Lina was 15 years old and born to a 15-year-old mother. Her mother remarried and took Lina with her, and her new husband adopted her. After the death of Lina's adoptive father, Lina's mother remarried, leaving her children with their paternal relatives who neglected them. Culturally, since the father had paid a bride price for the mother, the children belonged to the father's household. Plugging this action further into the local culture, leaving her matrimonial home was against the traditional Luo norms. As earlier noted, a woman remains a *Chi Liel*, a wife of the grave and children like Lina were supposed to be protected through *Lako*, the institution of taking care of the wife and children of the diseased as discussed in Chapter 4 (Nyarwath, 2012).

The children left behind were suffering, and against the culture Lina's mother demanded to withdraw her children and live with them in her new marital home. The stepfather eventually disowned them, and Lina and her three siblings moved in with the brother of their biological father in a small house. Lina and her siblings, yet again, were taken by their mother's sister, who was also struggling without a secure livelihood and were seen as outsiders again in their maternal relatives' family. Eventually, Lina was fostered by another well-wisher in the community with the understanding she would benefit from education after providing childcare services to her new guardian.

Lina's experience resonates with Ochieng and Otieno, who were 11 and 13 years old. They were also left behind by their mother when she remarried after the death of their father. They lived with their 51-year-old paternal grandmother, who was suffering from HIV/AIDs. In a creative drawing research activity, Ochieng drew a picture of a boy named Moses. During our one-on-one conversations, Ochieng looked dejected, an observation that rhymed with the neglect he reflected in his essay. During a later interview, he noted that he was staying with his grandmother to provide her with company. Listening softly through his creative drawing, he represented himself as a child 'struggling on his

own'. Later discussions with my research assistant revealed that the children were not allowed to stay with their mother in her new home because, culturally, the man had not adopted them. Whilst the older children might have been aware of the reasons for staying with maternal relatives, the younger children were given various reasons for this situation. Some were informed that they were staying with maternal grandparents to provide them with company or to benefit from better schools. Therefore, during our discussions, some children's views were tangled with this adult view. Such a perspective approximates May's (2011: 369) argument that 'shared cultures and values, or understandings of who "we" are and what "we" stand for' may not be shared with everyone, and more so children.

Children's right to live with their parents was also a factor of poverty. Some grandmother carers argued that whilst their daughters or daughters-in-law wanted to take their children with them after marriage/remarrying, some struggled economically. This was the case for 6-year-old Cynthia, whose grandmother noted that her daughter relied on them and could not stay with Cynthia. For some children, however, the potential fear of violence made it hard for them to stay with stepfathers. For example, for another 12-year-old fostered girl, her stepdad physically assaulted her when she was young, and she therefore walked with a limp. Another family adopted her twin sister after being repeatedly told she was not family. For Donald, another outsider child, his stepfather had adopted him when he was young. However, a family member assaulted him, injuring his genitals ostensibly to deter him from siring children within the family.

These forms of misrecognition also persist due to the failure of the law to protect children since the Kenya Children's Act 2001 (Government of Kenya, 2001), which was in place during my research, was silent on the maintenance of stepchildren. And whilst this has since been corrected through the revised Children's Act 2022, these legal provisions cannot always assure protection. This is because the state is not the only player, and children's best interests, as embedded in the law, exist alongside those of the community (Antonsich, 2010: 649).

To understand the experience of outsider children, we also need a perspective on the strategies children use to avoid becoming outsiders as pointers to the constraining forces (Roy, 2003: 77). Children appropriated norms on place-belonging and identity to position themselves as insiders in diverse ways. Some children choose to live with their paternal relatives even in the face of difficulties. For example, the siblings of a 7-year-old boy were taken in by their maternal grandmother because of ill-treatment by the stepmother and father. This boy, however, claimed his right to belong and to be treated well in his father's household. He was reported to be occasionally crying on his mother's grave when mistreated. He also refused to be fostered, so his parents stopped mistreating him. We see how this boy's agency forcefully materialized through a non-human entity, his mother's grave. As earlier noted in Chapter 4, this grave entitles him to proper care and protection. Leaving would cause him to lose this identity, becoming an outsider in his maternal relatives' home or to unbecome (Isin, 2019). His right to be heard (in line with UNCRC Article 12, as explained

earlier) did not need to be exercised through speaking directly, but this could be done through an alternative performance of his agency. The boy's actions denoted 'voice as a doing' since our focus on his voice shifts to the outcome of his action and the way his actions interact with other agents, including his mother's grave (Mazzei and Jackson, 2017)

Similarly, 14-year-old Ben and his three siblings, including Ayo, as earlier noted, were fostered by a vulnerable distant paternal relative, a *Chi Liel*, whom Ben endearingly called 'the other mother'. To fend for these children, the 'other mother' sometimes left Ben's 18-month-old sister at home alone. Ben and his siblings also shared a small sleeping space on the floor. And whilst their relatively well-off maternal aunts occasionally supported them, their husbands were unwilling to take in the children, seen as outsiders. Ben maintained his status as an insider by drawing on the community rituals and beliefs as a performance of his place-based belonging and rights claims (Bell, 1999; Sanghera et al., 2018: 545). He showed photos of him cleaning the house where they had lived with their mother and the grave, noting that doing so calmed him when frustrated.

For Ben and the other stepchildren, being rooted in their biological father's home and, therefore, an insider is also connected to how ancestral places are viewed by the Luo. Identification is by a father's place of origin. For a woman, the prefix *nyar* (daughter of), and for a man, *wuod* or *ja* (son of) represents belonging and is always patrilineal. A person is therefore identified both as a

Figure 5.1 Ben's photo of his mother's grave

daughter of the father and the village/community. Moving to the stepfather's home or living with maternal relatives would interfere with these place-based and relational norms of belonging.

Other practices maintain the social category of an outsider–insider child (Fortier, 1999: 43). For example, land to construct a bachelor hut and the position of the hut in the father's homestead (*Dala*) is such a practice influenced by gender and birth order. For example, since Ben was 14 years old and expected to build his bachelor hut, it would be difficult for him to be fostered by maternal relatives compared to his younger siblings. Further, the spatial arrangement of a typical Luo homestead communicates the sons' birth order and identity. In that order, a firstborn son builds his hut immediately to the right of the gate and the second son to the left. An outsider son, like Donald, earlier discussed, a mother's firstborn, would construct his bachelor hut to the left, thus revealing his parentage if he had not been informed. In seeing through class, some parents often buy land and construct houses for stepsons elsewhere if they can. For many children I interacted with, however, being a poor and an outsider child further constrained them since their parents could not buy land elsewhere. In returning gender, girls were said to be more likely to be accepted by stepfathers because they would eventually move out of home and also bring benefits in the form of bride wealth (Okwany et al., 2011).

Figure 5.2 Ben's Photo of his family's old house

Article 24(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that

> every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the state.

We, however, see that these children seen as outsiders faced several vulnerabilities. They also exercised their living rights as they positioned themselves within these care contexts. Whilst culture is not static and evolves, as I have argued above, these unwritten cultural laws on identity cannot be solely addressed through legal enforcement of the rights of the child. This is because children's sense of belonging is claimed, lived, and enacted through these institutional cultures, and it is not necessarily between the citizen and the state. These rights are also claimed in relationships (Nguyen et al., 2007: 34; Ursun and Lyssa, 2022). This, therefore, requires duty bearers, including communities, to take action to protect children facing these vulnerabilities.

Children on the Move After Projects

In this section, I provide a perspective on children who were 'following after projects' or 'scouting for good Samaritans'. Within the Kenyan landscape of child support, as noted earlier, there is limited support by the state, giving rise to several non-governmental organizations that are working in support of children in poverty. In 2014, in Siaya alone, there were over 100 organizations that were providing support to vulnerable children. Like elsewhere in Africa, children have therefore, entered into an assemblage of local and international relationships and global rights norms, which are, to some extent, undermining these rights (Okwany and Ngutuku, 2018). My research, therefore, revealed a specific experience of children who have developed particular subjectivities of chasing after projects of support. These observations support McDonald's (2009) work that shows how specific institutional arrangements, like support programmes, influence children's experience or constitute their experience in specific ways.

Musa's experience starts us off by showing these mobilities. Musa was born to a teenage mother who eventually married, leaving him with his maternal grandmother. By the time of the research, he stayed with his aunt in another community whilst his grandmother was still the primary caregiver. This is because he argued that there were more opportunities for earning a living in his aunt's place than in his grandmother's. He also hung around his grandmother's home because he had earlier enrolled in an OVC project from which he was 'exited' after he completed high school. The decision to exit him was not communicated to him. He, therefore, kept the hope that he would be supported with college fees, which meant travelling occasionally to the project and stopping his work as a boda boda rider. Indeed, when he heard that I was in the community interacting

with children, he moved in again with his grandmother and even gave me his school reports.

Such mobilities after projects were also revealed by children seeking out support from projects by themselves or what I characterized as 'sensibilities of survival' by looking for good Samaritans to support them. This was the case for Shauri (15 years old), who was orphaned and had been out of school for a year due to a lack of school fees. After her mother's death, she was fostered by her aunt, who also died in 2014. Shauri then started living with her older brother, who struggled to educate her, and she occasionally stayed with her aunt in another city. Shauri moved back to the community from her aunt's home when she learned that an education project supported her friends. Her younger brother was also said to be moving around looking for *wazungu* (foreigners) to support his education. Later, in 2017, I learned that Shauri had moved from their brother's place to stay with another relative and was looking for another project to support her.

Like several other children in Siaya, Purple can also be characterized as a child 'adopted' for projects. She started living with her aunt in 2015 after a girl's education project was established in Siaya. Some caregivers, therefore, imported children from other communities. These sensibilities of importing children for projects need to be plugged into the practices in these organizations where project leaders are expected to meet targets for the enrolment of children as set in the projects. Communities in this project site were, for example, encouraged to bring girls who were out of school, even those living in different parts of the country. Purple's aunt narrated the decision to live with her as follows:

> I approached the project and told them I had a needy child, and the mobilizers allowed her into the bridge centre. Girls who had been out of school were doing accelerated learning, hoping their education would be sponsored.

Discussions with other informants in this project indicated that several of the children benefitting from fee support in that project had migrated from different parts of the district and came to be 'adopted' this way. Unterhalter and North's (2011) research on organizations focussing on gender equity in education in South Africa revealed similar cases where, despite sometimes well-meaning intentions by organizations, the staff on the ground may focus on narrower options like hitting targets, but using specific practices such as the project in question.

In taking another line in this cartography, we also see that other vulnerabilities accompany partial rights for the children adopted for the project. For example, Purple's caregiver, who was her aunt, was categorical, stating that her responsibility only went as far as taking her back to school and not catering for her other needs. In a photo dialogue, Purple showed a photo of her aunt's toilet and bathroom, contrasting it with how she used to bathe in the river in her biological parent's home. She, however, expected more support from her aunt's daughters. Her aunt, however, noted that she did not want to transfer the burden of supporting Purple to her own daughters, who were also boggled with their family

responsibilities. Circumstances later forced Purple to move to her parents' home again and thereby leave school.

I follow with another example. When I interviewed Linda's caregiver, who was benefitting from one of the projects, she said that Linda was an orphan. However, I noticed a muffled exchange in the local language between the caregiver and my research assistant, who was well-acquainted with the family. The caregiver later said that her parents were alive but needy. In a follow-up discussion with my research assistant, I discovered that Linda was registered in one of the projects as an orphaned child even though both her parents were alive. Beyond listening softly to identify 'untruth', it was more useful to listen to identify the reasons for these children and caregivers' subjectivities of moving after projects.

The layered complexities in the experience of a child moving after projects need to be carefully understood. It would be easy to vilify caregivers who import relatives for projects or projects that work with these targets. First, in engaging Cheney's (2017) research, these children are not just moving to compete for charity. Fundamentally, they are also moving to claim their rights, albeit from the NGOs, who compensate for the state's absence. These children are also making similar claims on kin-based relations. These forms of support should, therefore, first and foremost be seen as spaces where children negotiate their living rights to care (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Isin, 2009). Another line in the cartography of these subjectivities is the need to engage exceptionalism in providing support to children, where most organizations provide support based on their core competencies and ability to negotiate with donors. Regions that may not have such a competitive advantage or where no NGO is operating may be forced to 'export' their children elsewhere, where projects are active.

In the next section, I get into the lines of categories again to further disrupt them and present further nuances on the entanglements in the 'fostered child category'.

The Fostered Child Category: Engaging What We Know

In general, most of the children I encountered in my research or those who were described as poor and vulnerable were fostered children. Whilst the characteristics of this category seem obvious, we need to revisit how this category connected rather disparate complex experience children, some of whom may tick the boxes already discussed above. Evans (2010), in her research, emphasizes the need to understand the dynamics of generational relations in foster care arrangements. In exploring this category, I aim to bring to the fore the different entangled challenges in the contexts of children and the diverse ways in which children claim their rights and exercise agency (see also Cheney, 2016).

In revisiting the cramped contexts of caregiving in Siaya as explored in Chapter 4, I found that most of the foster families were poor themselves. Fostering was, therefore, guided by notions of 'blood' and a need to support kin relations in contexts where state support is limited (Cheney, 2016; Foster et al., 1997). For example, Lizzy (16 years old) was serially fostered by different relatives over the

years. Her elder brother Donald argued that Lizzy had been fostered for 'tea', implying that she was fostered to benefit materially. He noted that:

> My sister stayed with several sets of relatives, and she suffered. My parents would agree if a relative said, I want to go with her. This was difficult, but at least it gave her an opportunity to have a cup of tea [breakfast] in the morning.

Similar but slightly different circumstances played out in the case of Sharon (14 years old). Through her essay, whilst noting that her orphaned status was the reason for being fostered by her aunt, she also emphasized her material and emotional lack.

> My parents died when I was five years old. When my parents died, I was left alone at home. I was struggling to look for food, and I was walking barefoot [ed]. I had only two pieces of clothes that were tonned [worn out], and my hair was shaggy. There was nobody to take me to school.

Priest, who was 7 years old, was taken in by his aunt because his material needs were not being met. Children who were not necessarily fostered also moved in between relatives in search of material and psychological support. This is what I have called fluid fostering. For example, for Philip, who was 15 years old, his diary revealed that he sometimes stayed at his father's home, his grandmother's home and sometimes at his friend's home. This had earned him the label truant. However, a close reading of his experience revealed that it was his way of coming to terms with the challenges he faced. For example, after school, he sometimes found it difficult to return home, which was far from school and stayed with his friend who lived next to the school. However, staying with his friend whilst addressing the challenges of the distance to school did not address his other material needs, like food. He noted: 'When I go to Brian's place, I do not go to the main house. We sleep in an old house. I do not want people to think I go there because I want their food'. Shauri, another participant, moved between relatives when she perceived that her grandmother was hard on her but without severing ties with her grandmother. Children's agency of moving from one relative to another was located within generational relations of power where their mobility was represented as disobedience and lack of gratitude. One of the caregivers noted the following: 'These orphans are stupid. They like running from one family to another. My niece runs back to my mother when she misbehaves'.

Fostering children was also done for reciprocity, with the expectation that the children would provide companionship and support for caregivers. One of the caregivers living with a young adult who had been fostered when young noted the following: 'This is the child that God brought to us. He takes good care of us'. This is because the fostered child reciprocated the family's education support by watching over their home and supporting the elderly caregivers. Some

children who did not reciprocate, as we saw in Purple's case, were vilified and taken back to their original home. Abebe (2010: 466) argued that the nature of the relationship between the foster parent and the deceased relative determines how well children will be treated. However, my careful reading of perspectives and encounters through each other, as embedded in my rhizomatic diffractive methodology, also enabled me to surface the complexities and perspectives in this experience of being a fostered child. Focussing on the narrow perspective of maltreatment might erase other perspectives. For example, in the absence of other state-sponsored support for elderly caregivers, the biological children of these caregivers are also investing in these fostered children to support their ageing parents. These findings counter those of Cheney (2010) in Uganda, whose research revealed that relatives competed to foster children based on the perceived benefits in the form of transfers from the state or the NGOs. Instead, I argue that we need to focus on the dynamics of the process of fostering in specific contexts and for each child and explore how the practice has metamorphosed in contexts of generalized economic insecurity and poverty.

Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter engage the categorical criteria often used in classifying children in programmes and policies. I have revealed that poor children occupy simultaneous, fluid, and contingent categories of outsiders, orphaned, fostered and children in status transit and itinerant trajectories. There are also those children on the move in search of other support, those fostered, and those *de-facto* heads of families, among other characteristics. These status contingencies had implications for how support was provided and how children's needs were constructed. For both children adopted for projects and those fostered by caregivers, what is clear is the issue of partial rights that are being accorded to these children. For the outsider children, whilst there are legal provisions and rulings relevant to their well-being, the way the rights involved are claimed or practised in day-to-day encounters, or children's living rights and law, need further attention[2] (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 10). Further, whilst there may be key nodes around which a particular children's experience is formed, one cannot standardize the experience of these children. I call for the need to go beyond categories of children living in poverty and vulnerability and to be attuned to the intricacies, indeterminacies and contingencies of the experience of children. I take up the implications of these contingencies and incomplete experience later in the book's concluding chapter. In the next chapter, I continue mapping how the experience of a poor and vulnerable child is located or enacted in school and through education.

Notes

1 This article states that 'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the

child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. While this article is directed at states, it has become a widely referred to standard for child participation and is also pursued and/or practiced by many civil society organizations and individuals. Thus, Oketch can be seen as having handled the situation in the spirit of Article 12.

2 See Constitutional Petitions 193 (2011) and 484 (2014). These challenged the Children's Act 2001, respectively, on parental responsibility for children born out of wedlock, and the right to have their father's name included in the birth certificate for children born out of wedlock.

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6 Cartographies of Children's Schooling Experience

Introduction

This chapter explores schooling and education as one of the nodes in the assemblage of a poor and vulnerable child. Children's experience, as they participate in education within contexts of material lack, is part of cartographies of children's experience of poverty. This is because education, or at least from the rhetorical perspective of it, influences and shapes children's experience and future imaginaries. Bessell (2022: 553–554) has argued that education provides the most immediate opportunity for children to live the lives they aspire to and sees lack of education as a form of opportunity poverty. She further avers that material deprivations influence the nature of schools such children attend and the experience of individual children with education. William et al. (2015) research in Rwanda also reveals that whilst children see education as a pathway out of poverty and as a right, access is still a challenge for poor children.

In connecting the lived experience of schooling and the experience of education, there has been a tendency to explore challenges in schooling and education outcomes for poor children from a cause-and-effect perspective and a demand and supply angle (e.g. Kabubo-Mariara and Kirii, 2006). There is an over-emphasis on institutional failures and household factors in such situations. For example, low enrolment among the poorest students has been explained in terms of lack of supply, the opportunity cost of attending school, the perceived low returns from schooling in the labour market or other factors such as the distance to school. For girls, the existence of female teachers and separate toilets has received much attention (Oketch and Rolleston, 2007: 156–157).

What is left out in these discussions is the finer textures, intricacies and contingencies of the schooling experience for poor children. Further, the processes of negotiation by children and how they lay claims to their right to education have received minimum attention. Borrowing a neologism from Richerme (2013: 257), this chapter 'complexificates' a poor child's schooling experience, recasting it as an assemblage of complex factors.[1] This act of complexification from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective of 'how things connect rather than how they are' opens up new perspectives that may not be easily accessible through the traditional analyses of children's experience of poverty and schooling (Tamsin, 2010:

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147). I also present how children lay claims to their right to education from a range of actors. These rights claims and the alternative futures children construct through education emerged as part of the experience of being a poor child. Children's experience with schooling and the associated challenges are also influenced by education policy. I, therefore, locate the education policy not just as a context, but as part of the assemblage of schooling experience and, thereby, a site where children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is enacted and/or performed. Thinking this way enables me to read the policy diffractively with children's experience and their rights claims not only to education per se but also to a good education.

In the rhizome frame that guides the overall arguments in the book, the arguments in this chapter follow those in the cramped context of caregiving in Chapter 4 and connect with Chapter 5 on the intensities of children's experience through a non-categorical perspective. They also connect with lines in the subsequent chapter that examines how children re-work the interpretation of their rights to education in their everyday experience of support programmes. First, I foreground the education policy in Kenya and Africa.

Foregrounding Education Policy in Kenya and Africa

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 provides for states to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all' (UN General Assembly, 2015). Like many African countries, Kenya is a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (UN General Assembly, 1989). It is, therefore, bound by Article 28(1), which obligates states to protect children's rights to education equitably. Article 53(1) of the Kenyan Constitution (Kenya, National Council for Law Reporting Kenya, 2010) provides a right to 'free and compulsory basic education' for all children.[2] The Constitution in Article 21(1) mandates the state and state organs to 'fulfil the rights and fundamental freedoms in the bill of rights'.

The education policy in Kenya embeds the right to education for children from early childhood. The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) has a long history in Kenya. It is provided for in the County Early Childhood Education Bill (GOK, 2014a), where Schedule 5(1) states that 'every child has the right to Free and Compulsory Early Childhood Development and Education'. Schedule 5(2) of this Bill provides for non-discrimination in the enjoyment of this right, including on the basis of economic ability (GOK, 2014b). Some aspects of preschool and Early Childhood Education are also covered under the Basic Education Act (GOK, 2013). Under the 26th schedule of this Act, the devolved county government should provide funds for developing infrastructure for training in pre-primary education and childcare.

The right to Free and Compulsory Basic Education for every child is codified through the Kenya Basic Education Act (GOK, 2013).[3] This obligation includes protecting marginalized or vulnerable children from discrimination in accessing

or participating in basic education. In Kenya, Free Primary Education (FPE) has a long history. It was already embedded in the Kenya Sessional Paper number 10 of 1965, in which the newly independent government committed to eliminating 'lack of education, poverty and disease'. This was seen as a way of abolishing inequalities and segregation in the colonial education system (Cifuentes, 2012; GOK, 1965: 1). This was the case in the three Eastern African countries, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, where governments in the immediate post-independence policy period focused on correcting the social and economic disadvantages created by colonial social policy (Somerset, 2005). For example, poverty, disease and ignorance were the three main enemies of development, as popularized by the first president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Nyerere (Aikaeli and Moshi, 2017). In 1974, FPE for classes one to four was implemented by the government of Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya and extended to classes five to seven in 1978 by Moi, the second president (Abuya et al., 2015; Cifuentes, 2012). Like in most African countries, the Structural Adjustment Programmes popularized and imposed by the IMF and the World Bank in 1985 introduced cost-sharing in the education sector. Parents were expected to contribute to education costs except for salaries for teachers and other staff. This affected many children, especially those from poor households.

Guided largely by political expediency, the Mwai Kibaki government (2003–2013) used the promise of FPE to set itself apart from the former ruling party led by President Moi. FPE was re-introduced in 2003, and tuition fees were abolished (Abuya et al., 2015: 5). The Education for All Movement (EFA) of the 1990s guided this move towards Free Primary Education, supported by donors. However, as Bray and Kwo (2013: 484) argue, EFA goals were broader than Free Primary Education and included expanding ECCE and ensuring equitable access and quality. FPE as an election pledge was the same for several other FPE countries like Uganda and Malawi, which were also emergent multiparty democracies. In Malawi, for example, FPE, introduced in 1994, was a key election issue on which President Muluzi's newly elected government came to power. This policy shift signalled the 'new Malawi' and symbolized a sharp departure from the elitist policies associated with the previous regime (Al-Samarrai and Zaman, 2007). President Museveni of Uganda also campaigned in 1997 on a populist platform, with no data and no planning during the implementation of FPE (Riddell, 2003). The implementation of FPE was thus driven by a social contract with the electorate, leaving little room for planning or consultation with stakeholders.

In Kenya, in 2008, the Kibaki government also introduced Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) and covered tuition fees for secondary school students by awarding an annual capitation grant of Kenya shillings 10, 265 (about 100 euros) to each student (Nicolai, Prizzon, and Hine, 2014: 23). Parents would only need to pay the cost of provision of school materials, food, uniform and boarding facilities and other school development related expenses. Other countries like Ghana, DRC Congo, South Sudan, Madagascar, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Togo and Rwanda all have Free Education policies. Whilst in Zambia, primary education

has been free since 2002, in 2022, President Hichilema extended Free Education up to the secondary level (Phiri, 2022). EFA policies, even though political, are not necessarily negative. For example, despite its perceived populist inclinations, the re-introduction of FPE in Kenya saw enrolment levels rise, and it was estimated that the enrolment increased by 35 per cent from 0.969 million in 2002 to 1.312 million in 2009 (Somerset, 2009: 244). In Kenya, a host of other provisions sought to facilitate schooling for children from poor backgrounds. These included a state-funded Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children, bursary programmes for school fees administered by the national and county governments, and non-state actor education programmes for marginalized children. These bursaries in several African countries are seen as enhancing students' transition and are supported by institutions such as the World Bank.

Despite such policy and programmatic efforts, many children from poor households in Kenya and most of Africa still encounter challenges in attaining their legal right to education and education is not free after all. Further, education policies in Kenya and most of Africa often silence the entanglement of the learners' experience at school with the experience at home. In the next section, I provide a perspective on children's experience in Early Childhood Education as I explore the entangled and complex factors in children's schooling experience.

Excluded Before They Start School

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) in Africa is often depicted as important in ensuring children's well-being in the present and in the future. Some international organizations have, for example, referred to ECCE as a compensatory mechanism for children living in poverty (Serpell and Nsamenang, 2014). For children from deprived households, exclusion from schooling and problematic inclusion starts in early childhood. I take the example of one child, Ayo, whose story at the beginning of the book demonstrated how children are excluded due to different and interacting factors. This exclusion, as we saw, happened even though the Kenya County Early Childhood Education (ECD) Bill of 2014 stipulates that children in public institutions should pay no fees.

According to Sessional Paper number 14 (2012), the state is supposed to provide capitation grants to the ECCE centres to cater for special needs children, including poor children (GOK, 2012: 91). However, at the time of my research, the ECCE Centres were underfunded. Caregivers were expected to pay money for teachers' salaries and midday meals. We should remember that, like most African governments, the Kenyan government has only played a regulatory role in ECCE since its independence. For example, in 1963, the Young Children's and Young Persons Act mandated the Ministry of Health and Home Affairs to provide this regulation; later, in 1966, the role was vested with the Ministry of Cooperatives (Kabiru, 2023). This is the same for counties like Uganda, where the state has left the provision of ECCE to private providers whilst playing a regulatory role (Khamis, 2022). The situation is slightly different in Francophone Africa, whereas Barry (2023) observes ECCE has been left to the private sector,

making even the regulation difficult. He also noted that social safety nets are required beyond funding to enable learners to participate substantively.

In Kenya, the requirement for young children to take exams before they transition to primary school is another key factor that excludes them from the benefits of education. This is a problem because the Basic Education Act (GOK, 2013) in Article 34(4) provides that public schools should not administer exams related to a child's admission to a public school. An assessment is only allowed to place the child at an appropriate level of education. The Sessional Paper 14 of 2012 also stipulates that a child should transition automatically to primary school (GOK, 2012: 35).

Testing for school readiness as a universal norm in ECCE, as Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 10) note, standardizes experience. In the meritocratic school system in Kenya, exams are also used to cover the problems of lack of spaces in primary school and as bait to force caregivers to pay school fees. Other scholars have also raised questions about what they see as the 'schoolification' of early learning in most African countries, with little focus on the developmental aspects of ECCE (Choi, 2006; Moss, 2013; Okwany and Ngutuku, 2023). Such an over-emphasis on school readiness ignores context-related issues, such as Ayo's situation, as we saw in the introductory chapter. She was not only orphaned but was suffering from HIV. Other perspectives on her life showed an entanglement of factors like lack of food at home and support from the state. Despite her HIV-sick body, Ayo (being a girl) was sometimes expected to take care of her 18-month-old sister, and this further truncated her schooling experience.

Ayo and her five peers, whom I interacted with in the ECCE centre, were excited about attending school. Indeed, when I visited Brigid's foster caregiver, she informed me that Brigid (5 years old) went to enrol herself in the ECCE centre even before her caregiver paid school fees and when she saw their neighbour's children going to school. Ayo's experience and that of other children involved in the ECCE centre were similar to Gabriel's, whose remembered childhood experience revealed the complex challenges relating to participation in education by young children. He could only go to the ECCE centre when a well-wisher supported him.[4] These cartographies of invoking education as charity from well-wishers pointed to the weakness in these children's social contract with the state (Ngutuku, 2018: 25).

Gabriel's problem was not just the lack of money for school fees. As he revealed, it was also his jigger-infested feet, lack of food and being abandoned by his biological father, as I explained in Chapter 5. He noted:

> I was five years old and was supposed to join ECCE, but I didn't know my father's whereabouts. Jiggers broke out, and my feet and legs became unsightly. My friends did not want me near them and chased me away like a dog … I wanted to join primary school, but I was told there was no money, and I started crying. After some time, [longer period] a good Samaritan told my grandmother to take me to school.

Discussions with a teacher in one of the ECCE Centres also revealed that half of the children had not paid fees for the term. This meant that the teachers would not be paid their salaries, affecting the quality of Early Childhood Education accorded to children. From a policy perspective, it was an issue that the county government, tasked with supporting these ECCE Centres, was not paying the teacher's salaries.

Basic Education: 'This Education is Not Free'

Despite Free Primary Education in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, education still takes up the bulk of expenses for poor households. The children I interacted with noted that primary and secondary education was still unaffordable because of the many levies households paid. The narrative of Gabriel, who sat his national primary school examinations in 2016, revealed these entangled challenges in schooling. His rhizo-narrative of stoicism and suffering through the education system was sutured through the various narrative worlds of his biographic essays, diaries and during ongoing conversations. His narrative was told and obtained as we walked from his swampy, dilapidated school or were seated in the house where he lived with his grandmother. He self-represented as a strong young man who saw the sky as the limit and wanted to be an engineer and study for a PhD. This narrative of wanting to become an engineer was constructed against the fear that he might not even complete his primary education. As Gabriel said, 'If God does not help us, I won't make it because we are just like this [poor]'.

Like the complex factors in Gabriel's experience, most children missed school from time to time because they were sent home to collect levies and costs of schooling that the Free Education Policy did not cover. For primary school children, these direct costs ranged from Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fees that were used, among other things, for employing extra staff (those not on the government payroll). The money was also used to pay security and County Education Board (CEB) levies. Other costs included examination fees, uniforms and school supplies, and for some transport services to and from school, and private extra tuition. The situation is similar in most FPE countries in Africa, where students must pay predictable and unpredictable costs. In Rwanda, learners pay for related expenses like accommodation and food during national examinations, examination books, school reports, and coaching (Williams et al., 2015). Similarly, Lindsjö's (2018) research in rural Tanzania revealed that the capitation grant in the fee-free education grant was woefully inadequate, and students had to pay extra costs.

In our encounters, children called these payments 'small things here and there'. For example, Naomi (12 years old) noted in her autobiographical essay that her older sister and brother left school and could not complete their secondary education because of these 'small things'. In another school, children noted the extra money required amounted to 450 Kenyan shillings (under 5 euros) per term. This 'small things' perspective was dire for poor children because they could not afford them. I also drew connecting lines between how poverty

was experienced at home, school and in support programmes. For the organizations providing support, the limits of the 'free' primary education policy offered further quandaries. For example, one programme officer working in Nairobi opined that their donor only supported secondary school children but not the primary school levies because of government policy providing Free Education. He noted the following:

> The donor is trying to align their policies with the government because primary education is free. Whether it is free or not [… hesitates] is debatable; the policy, to be honest [pauses], is not as free and compulsory as it should be. But they [i.e. the donors] will not allow you to pay for a class four pupil but will allow you to pay for a secondary school child. They are trying to remain true to the policy.

Child poverty was also defined through the ability to afford education, and caregivers employed specific metaphors in describing, but also critiquing this education system. For example, poverty was seen as 'lacking something to give to the teacher' in the form of school fees and other levies. This was the case for Brigid's father, who was described as follows by Brigid's foster caregiver: 'Her father drinks a lot. He has nothing and can't promise a teacher anything like a goat, chicken, or even a salary'. Such semiotics drew from the fact that, when children were sent home for school levies, some relatively able caregivers would sometimes promise the teacher that they would bring the levies at a later date after liquidating some of their assets. Children whose caregivers had no assets or other meaningful livelihoods stayed at home for a considerable part of the school time. It is this lack of 'nothing to give to the teacher' that was targeted by the FPE in the first place. As Nguyen and King (2022) argue, eradicating school fees is supposed to have an 'income effect' because poor households have fewer assets. Eking out a livelihood was also imagined as 'looking for paraffin oil', and poverty was seen in terms of 'lack of paraffin oil for the lanterns'. Since most rural households are not connected to the national electricity grid, children use lanterns in the evening for schoolwork.

Within the context of these unpredictable expenses, the education system was also given material agency by children and caregivers and termed as 'bring this and that' (Barad, 2007). Priest's caregiver provided a perspective on these lexicons when she noted: 'I am very annoyed with the school system. It has become go and bring money and this and that. This education is not free'. Like in the case of ECCE, this problem was accentuated by the fact that sometimes children were sent home whilst others were doing exams to compel parents to pay. Sending children home during exams also reveals another line in the cartography of the 'this and that' education system: that of construction of the identity of the caregivers. In this practice, caregivers were represented as unwilling to pay school levies, hence these tactics of forcing them; as one of the teachers explained: 'These parents have to be compelled to pay for their children. Their priorities are sometimes misplaced'.

In addition to paying school levies, school uniforms were also an issue. In all public and most private schools in Kenya, the students are expected to wear school uniforms. In some cases, I observed children wearing tattered clothes or a home dress underneath their torn school uniforms. There has been a lot of commentary about the prohibitive role of school uniform in the Free Education system in Africa (see Evans and Ngatia, 2021). In my research, children who could not afford school uniform reported feeling out of place. In reading the role of school uniform for poor children from a new materialist perspective where matter (like uniform) can also be an object of desire, I argue that for poor children, school uniform can also enable admission to school-going childhoods and, therefore, attainment of short-term futures through education (see Ngutuku, 2022).

Negotiating within the 'free' but expensive education system also meant that, in some cases, older children took over the responsibilities of caring for their young siblings and paying for their levies by combining schooling and work. Such agency reveals the need to go beyond simple arguments about 'good' and 'bad' agency. Instead, we should be more concerned with what that agency reveals about the needs and rights of these children in question, as well as the gendered complexities and vulnerabilities of childhood within contexts of poverty. Further, poor children do not always consider the opportunity cost of going to school when combining school and work. For example, Oketch noted that, even though he worked and was getting good money to support himself and his grandmother, he did not see work as more important than his education:

> I got some work, but my mind was not there. I was thinking about school. One day, a particular lady came as I washed her car, and she encouraged me to go back to school … Even though I was the breadwinner, my grandmother was pleased about my decision.

Oluoch, on the other hand, combined schooling and education after the death of his parents. He noted that he did not leave school but was going to the farm and school on alternate days: 'I would take the school accountant something like Kenya shillings 500 (5 euros), and I would be allowed to stay in school for two days and then would be sent away again'.

Whilst the literature has tended to represent girls as taking the bigger burden of this care, the gendered experience of combining school and work was complex. For example, Gabriel (who doubled as his elderly grandmother's caregiver) noted that sometimes he did casual jobs in the community to get money to pay for school-related expenses. For Donald, who only completed high school after receiving support from well-wishers, gender played out differently in his schooling experience. His narrative revealed that birth order (being a first-born child from a poor household) in some cases can be more useful analytically in terms of gendered exclusion from education than being a male or a female. He represented himself as not only the *de-facto* breadwinner in his family but also as

vested with the responsibility of paying school fees and levies for his siblings, as he noted:

> As the elder son, I was a caregiver to my siblings. Other children depend on me, so I used to take small jobs to support them. I even used to sell my back-to-school shopping [given by a sponsor] to buy them books and other school supplies.

By the time we met, Donald was already working to pay for the education expenses of his siblings. Even though he had passed his secondary school exams well, he was conflicted about joining the university because he was unsure who would take over his caregiving roles.

Here again, I surface the complex lines of the gendered schooling experience. For example, whilst opportunities to combine work and school were available for older children, girls mainly reported engaging in piecework on other people's farms or helping sell wares in the market. Such jobs were not bringing enough money to pay school levies but were supporting in meeting day-to-day subsistence needs. When I visited Ayo's household two years later, at 9 years old, Ayo still had not transitioned to primary school. However, her brother Ben, drawing on his dividend as an older (more mature) male, had already joined high school. I learnt that a family had already fostered him to tend their farms in exchange for his school fees.

These examples of the way gender obtains differential salience in influencing the schooling experience for poor children do not mean that gender itself is not a vital marker, especially for girls. In going beyond intersectionality and leaning on Barad's (2007) ideas of reality as interference or diffracted, one would be keen to identify such cases where the waves of gender intensity are cancelled or checked by other characteristics like birth order in specific contexts. (See also Geerts and van der Tuin, 2013: 172.)

Assembling a Radio Without Cells: Hunger and Schooling

> A radio without cells is dead, brain minus food is dead, these children cannot perform well on an empty stomach.
>
> (Discussions with a teacher)

Here, I examine the interaction between hunger and schooling experience and how this experience is positioned within the larger experience of being a poor and vulnerable child. My daily interactions with children revealed how poverty assemblages in the household interacted with children's schooling as another assemblage in children's experience (see Ngutuku, 2022). The evocative metaphor by the teacher above, of a radio being assembled, albeit one that does not have cells, points to the need to interrogate the discourse of the merit-oriented education system that obscures lived experience like hunger. The adverse role of

hunger in the schooling experience has also been documented in other countries in Africa (Alderman et al., 2021; Wall et al., 2022).

I observed children who stayed in school over lunchtime in several schools. I also carried out go-along conversations with children as they walked home during lunchtime, who said there was no food at home. For example, when I asked Ayo and her five peers what they ate for breakfast, they replied '*onge*' [nothing]. Finding *ong*e for lunch was a veritable reality for the children in the research sites and affected their learning. A teacher supported this in one of the primary schools who said:

> When children go home, they do not eat. They say I did not find my grandmother, or I only got porridge, or I found *onge* [nothing].

Lack of food, or what I positioned through proliferation of concepts in my research as eating *onge*, therefore, is an exemplar of the suffering and sacrifices children make as they pursue these alternative futures through education. Most Day secondary schools, like all the rest in Kenya, had a lunch programme, supported by the parents through school fees. For some children, this lunch programme provided the only meal for the day. For example, Peter, a secondary school-going child, noted that sometimes he did not eat at home because there was no food in some cases, or he allowed his grandmother to eat the little food available at home. Such food coping strategies were the experience of other children I interacted with. To show how hunger structured children's schooling experience, children used specific semiotics of hunger. These included 'going to school with butterflies in the stomach' and 'going to school just like that'. As earlier noted, whilst many of the children in my research indicated that they do not complain when there is no food, there are limits to a sense of becoming, as Biehl and Locke (2010) noted, and hunger affected their schooling considerably. Gabriel's aspirations of becoming an engineer and a PhD in the future seemed unachievable because, in most cases, he stayed in school without lunch. In one instance, when I walked home with him for lunch, and we found no food, and his grandmother was not around, he exclaimed: 'There is nothing. I will just stay like that'.

The effects of hunger on the schooling experience should be connected to the lack of government support for feeding programmes for primary school children. Kenya has a long history of feeding programmes in schools, especially in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) dry areas. These programmes have been supported by the World Food Programme and were officially handed over to the government in 2018 (Langinger, 2011). In places where such programmes have been implemented, the 'magnet effect' has been reported where the meal acts as an incentive for children to enrol and stay in school (Langinger, 2011: 32). Like in most of Africa, school meal programmes are therefore seen as the antidote to the hunger crisis affecting learning. Such programmes are also said to have spiral effects because they enhance savings for poor parents who can use their income

to meet other needs (Alderman et al., 2021; Salifu et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2022).

For Siaya, most primary schools I interacted with did not have a feeding programme, and children went home over lunchtime for food. In one primary school, there was a school-feeding programme that I later learnt was supported by a *mzungu* (white) donor. This programme benefitted children from ECCE and Class 6. The rest of the children (in classes seven and eight) would each bring grains from home, and food was collectively prepared for them. The headteacher described this programme this way:

> They [children] are very healthy; I wish you were here during lunchtime. They don't just eat regular food. They eat a balanced diet.

The teacher's assertion that children ate a balanced diet draws rhizomatic lines between home and school, where children lacked food, let alone food rich in nutrients.

Characteristic of exclusion of the poorest, in some of these pro-poor programmes, children who could not afford these partial contributions in the form of beans, maize or money for paying the cook were left out of this feeding programme. This was the case for Michael, Ayo's brother, who was 11 years old. He was not eating at this school because his mother's sister had not brought the maize and beans that were required for him to benefit from the programme. I had only learnt that Michael and his siblings did not benefit from the feeding programme from Michael's elder brother, Ben. Ben, who was attending a different primary school noted that he sometimes went home over lunchtime to cook for his siblings, following which I sought to confirm from the caregiver. This was a different voice from the one the headteacher had earlier expressed in our conversation, where he had responded past my question when I asked him if all children benefit from the feeding programme:

> In Africa, you don't refuse people food when it is cooked [pauses and looks at me to emphasize the incontrovertible moral perspective of his assertion]. You do not chase away somebody when others are eating.

The teacher's response, later contradicted by the caregiver, Michael and Ben, tells us much about what voice does. Mazzei (2007: 77) noted that speakers may respond to questions not asked and avoid those that are asked. This may be done through intellectualizing or deflecting. However, the teacher could have indigenized his response in the above case through his narrative that drew power from tradition, presenting his voice as truth. By drawing on the notion of African generosity common among the Luo community, the veracity of his account could not be questioned until it was brought into contact with alternative voices at diverse levels. Besides listening softly as an end in this case, I want to emphasize these exclusionary tendencies in such programmes, which can be addressed

by introducing universal school-feeding programmes that address all children's needs.

Children of Small Schools

In this section, I present how representations of poor children affect the type and quality of education they receive. The school system in Kenya and most of Africa is tiered like a pyramid, with a tiny minority of prestigious national schools at the top of the pyramid, a larger minority of schools in the middle tier, and a substantial majority of district schools forming the base of the pyramid (Otieno et al. 2016: 17). The national schools recruit the best-performing students in the national exams countrywide. The provincial and county schools have the next best group to choose from. District schools draw from those who are left over from this selection process (Oketch and Somerset, 2010: 15; Muhangi, 2016: 17). The district schools, that I name *small schools* face infrastructural and funding issues and therefore structure the experience of poor and vulnerable children, most of whom attend these schools.[5]

In terms of identity of a poor and a vulnerable child, scholars have argued that the quality of infrastructure in a school can have a signalling effect, communicating the worth placed on the students attending a particular school and the quality of education offered (Branham, 2004: 1124; Okwany, 2014: 43). Okwany (2014: 17), research that examined an educational project that was providing support in the construction of schools in Kenya, reveals that when the school's infrastructure was improved student's self-esteem and their sense of worth improved. Outside Africa, Bessell (2022: 554), in more recent research in Indonesia, makes the same observation, noting that 'material poverty shapes both the nature of the schools that children can access and the experience of individual children'. She provides examples of how schools from disadvantaged communities receive fewer resources, leading to what is seen as collective forms of exclusion. My observations revealed dilapidated buildings and poor facilities, signalling the low-quality schools, often referenced as small schools in the research sites. The 'small school' metaphor was not only an infrastructural issue. It was also a symbolic way of representing the low-quality education reserved for these children and their perceptions of their identity, as noted by one of the teachers:

> Generally, we admit fair achievers and others who are below average, and we don't use the central selection system. We only select those who come to ask for vacancies. Our students have scored very low marks and are condemned if we do not offer them an opportunity. [Points to the wall] Only one child had the pass mark of 252 [out of 500] in class eight.

Placing children in small schools was also guided by other factors beyond performance and the exceptionally high cost of schooling in the other (well-off) schools. For example, when I met Gabriel two years after my field research, he had scored marks that would have enabled him to join a better school, but he was

enrolled in a small school near his home. In our earlier discussions, he had indicated that he was studying hard to join a better boarding school, a hope that he would still keep two years later. I had listened to his ambition and reflected on his future against the community leader's voice, who saw his ambitions as lofty, urging him to settle in the small school. Here, we can draw from Adala and Okwany (2009: 284) argument that 'the expansion of formal schooling does not guarantee equal opportunities in Africa, and only the affluent families are reaping the benefits'.

Whilst these 'small schools' enhance transition rates for children, the quality of education is equally important. In getting back to the rhizo-discourse of small schools, relegating poor children to small schools accentuates inequalities that have persisted within the Kenyan and African education systems since the colonial era. Adala and Okwany (2009: 283) noted that schools reproduced inequalities in late colonial Africa and restricted Africans to less skilled jobs. Cameron (1967: 40) explores the racial division of education in Tanzania that persisted after independence. In colonial times, education was stratified in terms of education for the Africans, the Indians, the Europeans and the other non-native populations. Such divisions, he argued, had implications for the resources, teachers' working conditions, fees, and such. Somerset (2009) also noted that whilst the three East African countries were driven by the need to abolish racial segregation in schools, this did not correct the inequalities because the colonial schools were still only accessible to the elites.

In these small schools, students still had to compete with their counterparts in the better-resourced government schools. For example, there was no substantive science laboratory in one of the secondary schools I interacted with. The only structure available, which the deputy headteacher called a makeshift lab, was used for biology, physics and chemistry experiments and was doubled up as an office. This school did not have a physics teacher either because the government had not posted one. The headteacher did not want to employ one temporarily because he feared the government might employ that teacher, who would transfer to a well-endowed school.

I also mapped the marginalization of schools in Siaya by connecting it to the political economy of marginalization in Kenya, where Siaya is perceived as an opposition stronghold, as earlier argued, so schools are under-developed. As noted in the 2014 Kenyan Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) review report, similar regional and political differences negatively impact pupils' access, retention and participation (GOK, 2014b). Accessing the right to education through 'small schools' for differently located children points to a need to rethink the substantive right to education for these children. The structuring of 'big' versus 'small' schools itself is against the values embedded in the Kenya Basic Education Act (GOK, 2013), where Schedule 4(f) extends the right of every child in a public school to equal standards of education. These interpretations of the needs and rights of children may further entrench structural inequalities.

However, as I argue elsewhere, the contradictory assemblages in being a poor-schooling child is that school itself, whether *small or big*, has another role.

Schools fulfil a short-term better future of interacting with others and reimagining oneself as a 'learner-child', with specific protections magnetized around such a category (Ngutuku, 2022). Therefore, we cannot ignore the social benefits and aesthetics of schooling and how these 'small schools' accord these learners a space in education and in childhood formerly denied. As Ansell (2015) notes, education shapes what it means to be a young person. Therefore, I turn next to how school was seen as an alternative caregiver for poor children in research contexts.

School as a Surrogate Caregiver: Subsidizing for Needy Children

Within the context of poverty, education occupied an important role in granting children rights and enabling them to lay claims to their rights. Children, in some cases, appropriated their status as needy and/or orphaned children to enhance their participation in schooling. Therefore, school can be seen as an alternative or a surrogate caregiver for poor children. Oketch perspectives are indicative of this role of schools:

> My mother was still alive, but we were suffering. The headteacher called me into his office. Then he told me he wouldn't send me home for fees … Sometimes, teachers could call me and give me their food at school. I was wondering, 'Why are they so good to me, and they are not my family?' Later, when I went to ask for a position in the secondary school, the madam (headteacher) told me to come the following day. She bought me a uniform and volunteered to help. From that day, she took me as her son. Later she handed me over to our new school principal. He is the one who takes care of me. The school cook helps me, too. I have paid nothing to date, but I am getting meals in school.

For some needy children, being (labelled as) an orphaned or a needy child was accompanied by some privileges that other children did not enjoy. These included retaining them in school when others were sent home for fees or sending them away and calling them back even when they did not have money. Peter (15 years old), an 'outsider' child, revealed that the headteacher often sent him away with the rest of the students but called him back. Peter compared this with his community, which knew he was needy but had not provided for him. Therefore, the school guaranteed Peter's rights, which the state and the community could not guarantee.

The agency of the school as a surrogate for needy children was a gendered assemblage, cartographies, that connected with those discussed in Chapter 5. For example, being a paternal orphan (whether a girl or boy) attracted more privileges than being a maternal orphan. Within the context of gendered notions of men as breadwinners, as earlier argued, widowed fathers were expected to cope better with their loss than widowed women.

It is, however, important to note that such a relationship of 'surrogacy' not only subsidizes the needs of these children but structures the experience of other

children in these schools and communities as well. Supporting needy children this way and providing for their relational rights showed social solidarity between teachers and the school. However, within the context of generalized poverty in Siaya, this kind of support can strain the already stretched resources of these small schools that can hardly afford to subsidize their pupils. Acting as caregivers to vulnerable children was not easy for teachers because they were struggling financially. One of the teachers explained this by using the semiotics of 'having to dig into his pocket' as he noted: 'It is not easy to have these needy children in my school. Sometimes I have to dig into my pocket [emphasizes digging into the pocket to show difficulty and struggle]'. The pain of this 'surrogacy' by the schools was entangled with the Free Education Policy, which gives a standard capitation grant based on the number of children enrolled. Parents are expected to meet some of the costs, and there is no extra money for poor children. This is despite the fact that Sessional Paper no 14 (2012) provided for 'needs-based capitation grants' for learners (from ECCE to secondary schools) to meet their extra needs (GOK, 2012: 77). The special needs grants only exist for children with disabilities, and not for some other poor and vulnerable children that I encountered.

Another strategy teachers use to enable them to play their caregiving role is 'scrambling' for the many bursary fee schemes available. It is established that government support and other bursaries aid in school retention since they cater to the extra costs incurred by vulnerable learners (Mamba, 2020). Bursaries and scholarships are also seen as important in Sustainable Development Goal number 4. Within this context of competition for bursaries, the experience of the specific children who have the school as their surrogate stretched its lines to other children, both outside and within these schools. Such children who were poor but did not receive the backing of teachers or for whom the school was not a surrogate would miss out on the bursaries. As a local administrator, known as a chief, who was tasked with signing the forms to confirm eligibility noted:

> Some teachers are aggressive and get many bursary forms for their students even though they are allowed only one. I cannot refuse to sign the forms because I would be accused of discrimination. Some needy children who do not have the support of the teachers don't even apply because they think they won't benefit.

However, in the above case, counting the number of scholarships issued to children from poor backgrounds is not enough. Looking at the experience of such children and others affected by bursaries will reveal more in terms of what it really means for no children to be left behind (Arts, 2017: 60).

Breaking the Habitus of a Poor Child in Education

In this section, I continue exploring how children, through their everyday practices of education, claimed their rights to education as living. According to Isin

(2009: 384), thinking about 'citizenship through acts' means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice, to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses'. In breaking this habitus and laying claims to their right to education, children oscillated between self-representations as able, agentic, vulnerable and dependent. These positions are not dialectical but co-constitute each other in the assemblage of children's agency. I offer examples of two learners, Peter and Naomi, showing how they repositioned their right to education and perceived education as their future.

Claiming Education for Girls

We start with the experience of Peter, a 17-year-old boy who sought out education by joining a bridge centre for girls run by a local non-governmental organization (NGO). This centre was providing accelerated learning for girls who had been out of school and aimed to prepare them for school re-entry, and he noted,

> When I finished Class 8 in 2014, I did not have school fees, and for the whole of 2015, I went to the bridge centre. I was the only boy. I kept hoping that one day, I would join high school. People discouraged me and asked why I was schooling with girls, but I ignored them.

Despite facing stigma, Peter's resolve was unrelenting and yielded fruits. Even though the organization eventually supported his female colleagues in transitioning to secondary school, Peter's grandmother was encouraged by his resolve. She mobilized funds from relatives to have him enrolled in high school.

Similar perspectives of boys appropriating 'girl's education' were revealed through another research in Siaya. For example, the project evaluation run by the organization supporting girls' education indicated that some boys joined these bridge schools. However, a close reading revealed a cartography of discourses explaining or contesting such agency. For example, this agency was explained as an 'unintended effect' of the project. The research also revealed that allowing boys to come to the centre would stop them from preying sexually on girls in the future (Muhangi, 2016: 38). Here, we connect this practice of allowing boys to participate in this programme as agency by the NGO staff on the ground. I found out that the organization, in addition to targeting girls, also admitted boys by using the discourse of unintended effects to subvert the targeting practices as embedded in the international donor discourse.

The donor's discourse of needs and rights, as exemplified in giving priority to girls' education and leaving out equally vulnerable boys, might be guided by the intersectional perspective that girls face more vulnerabilities than boys. For example, my interactions with children during the research revealed cases of teenage pregnancy and where girls were missing out on schooling. However, they were equally or even more vulnerable boys in the study sites. Some authors have noted that whilst girls are lagging behind compared to boys, problems of education participation are more attributable to poverty and place (see Ansell, 2015).

In going beyond intersectionality to a perspective on entangled factors in schooling for poor children and in correcting gendered vulnerabilities, interventions must, therefore, locate the vulnerability of boys and girls in their contexts.

In the first instance, one can say that Peter, an outsider living with an elderly grandmother, experiences intersecting marginalizing factors. However, in going beyond intersectionality to a perspective of interference patterns (Geerts and van der Tuin, 2017), in Peter's case, compared to that of girls (entitled to participation in the project), one sees privilege as non-linear. Here, we can say that whilst gender ordinarily privileges boys in most cases, indeed, there are 'places where the waves [of gender privilege] cancel each other or are, like the case of Peter and other vulnerable and poor boys' (Verloo, 2009 cited in Geertz and van der Tuin, 2017: 172). Unterhalter and North (2011: 4), whilst engaging the global discourses geared towards girls' education, argue that the 'global development agendas are too far away from the local conditions. They provide little guidance in negotiating the specifics of gender inequalities and affirming the localized elements of equality'. These received positions about gender equality in education access may not work if the complex relations are not addressed. Actions by Peter and others in claiming the right to education reserved for girls indicate that we must be attentive to locating these possibilities of gender power as an interference pattern (Barad, 2007).

Positioning Education as Future Breakfast

Despite the challenges in their contexts, children positioned education as the route to a better future. Berlant (2011: 24 and 45) would call such attachment to education within the context of challenges and impossibilities a form of cruel optimism. She sees cruel optimism as a 'relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or possible, and toxic' (Berlant, 2011: 24). She also argues that despite the impossibility of attaining such futures, people keep attached to these because of fear of a double loss, that would occur due to the loss of the fantasy itself as well as the attachment to it.

I now explore an example of a relational and non-dyadic claim for a better future by children through their right to education and through an analysis of Naomi's experience. I show that children's experience do not always conform to the diagnosis by Berlant (2011). I analyze the performance of Naomi's citizenship right to education and rights claims through her writing (Sanghera et al., 2018). In imagining a different future, Naomi saw working hard in school as a guarantee of a better future where her problems would cease. This was also a future when, together with her mother, she would take breakfast. She wrote this in her essay:

> I am working hard so that my mother will one day have breakfast. Sometimes, we do not have paraffin for the lamp in the evening, and I have a lot of homework. Sometimes, the teacher wants to grade and does not want

> excuses. My mother encourages me that one day we shall be like the others. Because we do not take breakfast, [they] take breakfast as we watch. I am working very hard so that one day myself and my mother could have breakfast and live in a big house … One day, I will be like their children.

Like many other children in the research sites, Naomi saw education as a guarantee to a better future life or whose agency, in Deleuzean proliferation of concepts, I positioned as 'future breakfast' (see Ngutuku, 2022). Such aspirations by Naomi and other children, who imagined the best of life through education, may look difficult within the context of economic and other challenges. However, in mapping Naomis' voice we see its potential. First, her voice was liberating at that moment because it promised a better future and release from a difficult present. Her voice also indicted a range of other people. These were those who gave their children food as other children watched and those who taunted her that she would soon drop out of school, as other portions of her essay and her diaries revealed. In referencing and laying claims to responsibility from a range of audiences, some of which she only referenced as 'they', she was claiming her relational non-dyadic rights, and not just from the state (Bloemraad, 2018: 5)

Reading Naomi's voice further, I see that working hard to help her clan might be targeting the clan or the community that may have reneged in its responsibility to help needy children like her. Beyond a better future of employability (Ansell et al., 2020), Naomi's voice expresses a future through education that affords egalitarianism and concern for one another. Indeed, with philosophical hindsight, she added, 'I will help the rich and the poor like "us" because nobody is poor or rich. All people are poor and rich'. Naomi, in this case, also made a claim to global humanity for what Bloemraad (2018: 19) sees as claims to 'equality, dignity, and inclusion'.

Since a map has multiple entry points, taking a different entry in the cartography of Naomi's discourse and agency, Naomi could be said to be aspiring towards a different future through education where she would help the community (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12–13; Kamberelis, 2013: 671). This is because being a member of a poor community meant that there was an expectation to support them. Through education, Naomi's redemption from her then state of poverty and vulnerability would, in turn, be a redemption for her poor community in the future.

Naomi's agency resonates with Gabriel, whose embodied agency was anchored in his intransigent hope and divine possibilities through education. Gabriel occasionally rose beyond human possibilities in imagining his rights through education when he argued: 'God knows. I hope my life will turn out for the better after I finish my education'.

These views by Naomi and other children who hoped for a better future through education show that hope for the future through education is less about these futures but a sustaining hope in the present (Berlant, 2011: 24). In further seeing the proliferating lines in Naomi's discourse, asking for accountability from a vulnerable community behoves us to question the role of the state in enabling

communities to play a role in providing for the needs of their children. The reader might recall the discussions in Chapter 5 that explained that the community safety nets Naomi referenced as 'they', although still thriving, were often stretched beyond their limit. They can be said to be safety nets, but safety nets with outstretched holes (Okwany and Ngutuku, 2018: 66)

I folded myself into Naomi's and other narratives by children, who wanted to be different through education. Listening sometimes to the tenor in their voices, their veritable anxiety under the burden not only of an uncertain future with education and insecurity about funding for their education. As an education activist, I continually reflect on how we can be 'present [with Naomi and other children] in thought and not through pity?' (Deleuze, 1994 109). How can others who work with children to do the same? How can we ascend to a space of accountability and responsibility for children and enhance rights to education for children living in poverty and vulnerability?

In Conclusion: Assembling a Poor Child Experience Through Schooling

The preceding discussions revealed that the processes and experience of participation in schooling by children living in poverty are not linear but complex and that the interstices around which the experience is formed are sometimes contingent and shifting. Whilst poverty was the starting point in my analysis of participation in schooling, I have favoured an approach that maps how different processes and factors interact in complex ways. Children's experience has, therefore, emerged as a messy, incomplete reality and process (Grellier, 2013).

Within the assemblage of participation in education, poverty also interacts with various other nodes of gender (that I have read as differently located boys and girls), locality, orphanhood and birth order. These also interact with other factors, including material and social relations, embodiment, and education policy not just as a context, but as an actant. I also (re)membered the haunting colonial inequalities that persist in education and the different shades of the 'non-free' Free Education Policy, where poor children are relegated to small schools. Despite these challenges, children positioned education as a route to a better future. Their imaginaries through education invite a visceral sense of responsibility, answerability and solidarity. This includes an ethics of care by various actors, including school actors and ultimately the state, as the final arbiter of the rights of these children. Coming full circle and reencountering Naomi, children's voice and reality interrupts our thinking on what education can do even in overwhelming challenges. It can accord breakfast, but also a future for justice, and justice as egalitarianism, yet to come, but one that is needed for the present.

Notes

1 I find 'complexificated' a better expression than 'complicated' since it connects better to rhizomatic perspectives.

2 Basic education covers primary and secondary education. The education structure in Kenya was changed to competency based curriculum in 2017. In this chapter, I focus on the old education system that is being phased out. This of 8 years in primary school, four years in secondary school and four years in University
3 Prior to 2016, Primary Education was eight years (for 6- to 13-year-old children) who exited after sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations. Secondary education lasts four years (for 14- to 17-year-olds) and children exited after sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations.
4 Well-wishers are philanthropic people in the community who support vulnerable children and especially those that are not related to them. The support includes paying school fees, buying school uniforms and other educational related support. This perspective is also connected to the angel discourse that I explored in Chapter 4.
5 This nomenclature has changed to National, Extra county, County and Subcounty Schools.

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7 The Politics of Needs Construction in Support Programmes

Introduction

Programmes providing for children's needs act as a space where the experience of being a poor and vulnerable child is located. In this chapter, I explore how different support programmes construct children's needs, rights and identity, arguing that these needs constructions imagine specific subjects or subjectify children and caregivers in various ways. As a starting point, this is not an account of how these organizations are meeting children's needs (or rights). Instead, I unpack how children's needs and rights are represented and the interactions of these representations with the identity, self-hood and material situation of children. In doing this, I am inspired by the argument that while children's experience is material, 'needs are culturally constructed and discursively interpreted' (Fraser, 1989: 81).

I approach the construction of the needs and rights of children as a site of power where groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish powerful interpretations. In some cases, those with an authoritative voice decide what counts as legitimate needs and rights of children (Fraser, 1987: 108; Fraser, 1989: 166). I also approach these needs interpretations as a rhizo-discourse since they draw from, are contested, and are formed across diverse discursive sites. These sites range from the state, local and international non-governmental actors, schools, communities, and households. Children and caregivers are positioned, and (re)position themselves, as specific subjects in these interpretations. As a researcher involved in intersubjective knowledge production, I was also part of the cartography of these discourses of needs and rights interpretations. As Moss (2006: 37) notes, a researcher 'cannot escape the need to interpret, construct and, if necessary, evaluate'. Children's and caregivers' encounters with these programmes, their contestations or appropriation of the dominant needs interpretations, become part and parcel of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

In the first section of this chapter, I present profiles of the four organizations and a government programme that were providing for children in three of the research sites in Siaya. These support programmes provide a context for my analysis of the discourses on how the needs of children are understood. I

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subsequently present four examples of discursive conceptualization of the needs and rights of children as I demonstrate the embedded politics and the subject positions offered to children in these interpretations. These examples are the quintessential category of the Orphan and Vulnerable Child (OVC), education as a need, the discourse on and practice of Voluntary Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and the State Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC). I end by presenting forms of therapeutic citizenship and negotiation of children's and caregivers' needs and rights through the biography and biology of being positioned and positioning self as an HIV/AIDS patient.

The Orphans and Vulnerable Children Project

The Orphans and Vulnerable Children Project (OVC Project) started working with vulnerable children in one of the three sub-counties in 2008. At the time of my research, the project was working with 900 households, some of which were affected by HIV/AIDS. This project was part of a larger programme in a consortium of local and international organizations funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This larger programme addressed a range of health needs, including HIV, child social protection and maternal health, among other related needs. It had a component of working with vulnerable children supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), also implemented in various African countries (see Reynolds, 2014).

Like similar projects under this large US-funded programme, the project addressed social determinants of health, including food and nutrition, protection, education, shelter, health, household economic strengthening and coordination of activities with other partners and the government. The project also worked with Primary Health Care Committees, and therefore, part of government structures and services were delivered and coordinated by Community Home Volunteers (CHVs). Vulnerable families were provided with productive assets and training on agri-business and supported on a saving scheme.

Sponsorship Project

Sponsorship Organization (hereafter SO) was an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that supported vulnerable children and worked through small community-based organizations. I worked with one of the community-based organizations funded by the Sponsorship Organization called the Sponsorship Project. This project worked with children described as deprived and vulnerable. SO's programming focussed on three life stages: The early years of birth to five years, which focussed on early childhood care, nutrition, and the health of young children. The Middle Ages (6 to 14 years) focussed on child protection, education, schooling-related support and general protection of children's rights. The other project sector addressed the needs of older children and youth (15 to 24 years). Children received money regularly from sponsors to

support their various needs, including education, food, and other needs. Funds from sponsors were also pooled together to support vulnerable children.

Children of Africa

Children of Africa, henceforth COA, targeted people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), and elderly guardians. COA worked on child development and community health and livelihoods. The organization identified schools for children who were seen as most vulnerable and worked through school-based clubs as an entry to the community. Children were provided with guidance and counselling and skills in agriculture and nutrition, hygiene and other life skills, including education and awareness creation on child rights. Caregivers were also supported through income-generating activities. Like all the programmes that work with such children and depend on donor funds, the programme was phasing out by the end of 2017.

Mercy for Children

The project by Mercy for Children (Mercy Project) was implemented through small community-based centres. This organization had a spiritual dimension and addressed economic and what was seen as spiritual poverty. It implemented various programmes that benefitted children at different life stages, including a child survival programme, a sponsorship programme and a youth leadership programme. The programme connected children to sponsors and aimed to reduce the burden of poverty on the family. The children supported were those seen as the neediest, those orphaned or staying with a widowed parent, and those who had not been sponsored by another organization. Children also met on weekends and holidays to participate in structured programmes, including academic tutoring, bible teachings, health care, food and nutrition, and games. Children also received school fee bursaries and school uniforms.

The Government's Cash Programme for Vulnerable Children

The government of Kenya has been implementing a Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children. This project was first piloted in 2004 in three districts, including Siaya, and initially covered 500 households, with each household receiving Kenyan shillings (KES) 500 (6.5 $ by 2004). The Programme was scaled up to 37 districts by 2008 (Pearson and Alviar, n.d.). This programme operates like similar programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, providing income support to the vulnerable (Donovan, 2015: 733). Each household enrolled in the CT-OVC Programme was receiving a cash grant of Kenya shillings 2000 (approximately 20 euros) disbursed every two months. The objective of the programme was to ensure social protection for vulnerable children by delivering cash to households. The cash was supposed to incentivize households to care for children through fostering and ensuring that children were retained in

families. Caregivers could use the money to buy food, clothes, and other services like education or health care. The selection criteria were that the household should be taking care of vulnerable children who were under the age of 18.

With this background, I present the discourse of needs and rights in these programmes in subsequent sessions.

Organizations as Surrogate Caregivers: 'We are OVCs'

All the organizations that I studied in my research framed the children they were working with as Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC), a status seen as accentuated by HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the caregivers who worked with these organizations were recruited into groups based on the OVCs they were supporting. What was clear was how the power of the international global discourse of 'OVCs' and its conflation with HIV/AIDS had permeated the local programme spaces. In responding to this discourse of a needy and vulnerable child, children supported by the Sponsorship Project, for example, noted that they were receiving support because they were OVCs. Some noted that: 'the Sponsorship Project helps children like us: orphans'. In lumping together all the children as OVCs, the experience of children who were not orphans was silenced. Importantly, by presenting a child affected by HIV/AIDS or being orphaned as the most critical need, the interventions failed to acknowledge or address the needs of other children who were also needy. Okwany (2009: 16) supports this perspective when she points out the need for interventions to focus on the rights of all children instead of the deserving needy. For most of these organizations, however, this may be a big ask because some of these NGOs are perceived as just filling in the gaps occasioned by state absence (Brass, 2020). Therefore, the responsibility of ensuring the rights of all children lies with the state, which has the muscle and resources as well as the ultimate mandate to protect the needs and rights of children. Further, in a context where these NGOs are expected to prove that their support benefits the neediest and those constructed as helpless, this form of targeting strategy is the norm.

Children utilized several idioms to communicate their needs and lay claims to support them by appropriating the category OVC. I obtained these discourses of their needs by listening to their accounts of what they saw as gaps in meeting their needs by these organizations. Their accounts in some cases simultaneously contested and appropriated the dominant scripts about their needs. For example, in a Focus Group Discussion, two youths (Musa and Rafiki, who were 20 and 17 years old, respectively) felt that since they were OVCs, they should receive school fees support. Their grandmother also had expected what she saw as her 'vulnerable children' to receive support from the OVC Project as she noted: 'When the children were selected, I thought they would be given all support including food, but this has not happened. My grandchildren sometimes sleep hungry, and they do not have blankets'. Children also shared that they expected support with school fees, uniforms, or books. While this was seen and observed as a need for most of the children I interacted with, it was troubling when they presented this

entitlement in relation to charitable organizations and not the state. Making claims to NGOs instead of the state supports Beer et al.'s (2012) argument that within the context of weaknesses and other external pressures, African states have accepted NGOs as surrogate partners in delivering services and in development. In such a context, children see these NGOs as the guarantor, for example, of their right to care and an adequate living standard.

Teachers also utilized the OVC category to claim support for children that they saw as needy. For example, one teacher in a primary school complained that children who the OVC Project recruited were disappointed because they were not supported as expected. He framed the support from the organization as an entitlement, reminiscing a romantic past in which the organization was supporting vulnerable children and noted:

> I want to tell you the truth about the OVC Project. After the project came on board, the school filled up [enrolment was maximum]. The children thought they would be supported but fell away when this was not done. The OVC Project used to pay school levies for supported children, but now there is nothing.

While the above claims, as earlier noted are occasioned by the inadequacy of the state, claiming support from organizations can also lead to 'projectification' of rights or meeting only those rights that fit into the objectives of these organizations. These observations resonate with the work of Meinert and Whyte (2014: 77), in what they reference to as the projectification of HIV/AIDS care in Uganda and not an entitlement from the state. The authors argued that since the government was missing, the patients entered into a specific care relationship with the NGOs providing for their needs. Such projects also worked in phases, each phase interpreting the needs differently. Some needs were therefore excluded if they did not fit into the project's objectives or funding cycles, leading to 'projectification' of care. One can make similar arguments in relation to the teachers' discourse about the OVC Project. This project, like most organizations in the research site, worked through phases, with some of the phases focussing on different aspects like empowering the community and not direct monetary support as the teachers expected.

It was common to hear children enrolled in projects worry about what would happen once these projects were phased out. Indeed, the caregivers and teachers represented the organizations as 'having taken their children', meaning taking over the caregivers' and the state's responsibilities. This was further articulated by a teacher in one secondary school who noted that 'these organizations come and take over the care of our children and change the face of this community.' This narrative of 'taking our children' has connotations of being possessed or owned by the organization, and the organization acting as a surrogate (and a more well-off) caregiver. At first instance, it can, therefore, be argued that children in Siaya, specifically the communities I worked with, appropriated this discourse and were subjectified this way. Nyambedha's (2008: 774) study in Kenya in the context of

HIV/AIDS revealed similar sensibilities where children claimed to be owned by the organizations. Cheney (2010), in enunciating how NGOs transform traditional notions of vulnerability, documents realities where some parents in one of the NGOs she interacted with in Uganda thought the NGO had taken over the well-being of their children and therefore relinquished their care responsibilities.

In taking this further, we must, however, go beyond notions of abdication of parental responsibility and the seemingly self-evident views of subjectification. We should instead focus on the legitimate care needs of children, which are at stake in these discourses and practices. We also need to question the practices of these surrogate caregivers (the projects) who were providing minimal support and in ways that are disempowering to children. For example, caregivers supported by the Sponsorship Project noted that being 'taken' without receiving full benefits meant some teachers picked on children. While other non-government organizations supported vulnerable children, in some cases, as we saw in Chapter 6, the schools also played the role of surrogate caregivers. In contrast, some children who were equally needy but recruited into projects were sent home frequently for fees and other school levies, expecting their sponsors to pay promptly. In addition to such supported children losing valuable learning time, we also see how care for children, as OVCs, takes a transactional dimension, with sponsored children being seen as a potential resource for the schools. Beyond these transactional aspects of care and representation of the OVC category, other teachers were reportedly stigmatizing the children supported by NGOs if they did not do well in exams, and yet they were receiving support. Thus, the children involved did not only enter into relations with these organizations but also with teachers who policed and regulated the care provided to these children.

The state's failure to adequately provide for the needs of children, resulting in adoption by non-governmental actors and the policing of care in various spaces, were some of the contradictions in the cartographies of the childhood of the 'poor' in Siaya. These cartographies are rarely made visible in most African literature, which takes the starting point of how children take advantage of the category or work the category out (see Cheney, 2012). These realities are also silenced in the literature that focuses on the 'fairy tale aspects' of the category or how non-governmental organizations participate in tales of suffering on behalf of vulnerable children (Ansel, 2015). Further, as I have demonstrated, such literature ignores how children may agentically use this category to further their well-being. The work of Bolotta and Devine (2022) in Sierra Leone on the discourses and practices around the OVC category reveals how children appropriate the category of a suffering child to improve their well-being, not just to target the largesse of NGO funds.

Piecemeal Support and Politics of Dependency

Here, I explore how the act and nature of piecemeal support provided by the organizations constitutes and is constituted by politics of dependency as a needs discourse embedded in the programmes of support. Most support organizations

provided limited support to child beneficiaries, which was seen as piecemeal support by children and caregivers. This, for example, included paying only some school levies, providing small seed grants and phasing out after a short period of working with children and caregivers. In most development literature, this type of support is often justified in terms of the need to reduce dependency on the organizations by needy children and caregivers and as an empowerment strategy (Lombe and Ochumbo, 2008; Cheney, 2012). One of the project leaders noted this:

> Giving is two-way; it can empower but can also create dependency. One has to pull away sometimes so that you don't create dependency … We want to support children and ensure they do not become dependent. A vulnerable child can benefit but can also fall into an entitlement mode.

The piecemeal support was also justified as a basis for ensuring that caregivers took an active role in caring for their children. Based on my observations, such support entrenched the vulnerability of children. For example, in a move likely to be seen as counterproductive, caregivers and children sought support from other organizations that had flooded the Siaya context. In the sites where COA had phased out and no longer provided fee bursaries, the caregivers had become members of other organizations as they sought support for their children. One head teacher noted that:

> After the programme stopped giving education bursaries, another community-based organization came in to provide support.

While it can be argued that these caregivers who opted into other organizations were displacing dependency elsewhere, a desire to meet their children's needs and rights emerged as their major motivation. The vital argument I wish to make is that justifying the provision of piecemeal support in education based on avoiding dependency itself is problematic. This term dependency, as Fraser and Gordon (1997: 122) argue, as a 'keyword' often used in development aid, has assumptions about the identity of children and their caregivers. It is not only patronizing, but it can also stigmatize. In connecting this discourse to other discourses, one remembers that similar debates featured prominently when the government was mooting the idea of implementing CT-OVC in Kenya, with arguments that it would lead to a 'dependency syndrome' (Ikiara, 2009: 21). This pejorative term, dependency syndrome as used in this case implies that those concerned are permanently looking upon other people for support and in the end avoiding any form of responsibility for their lives.

These official and technocratic narratives around dependency, as used by NGOs, silenced the perspectives of caregivers and children and their lived experience. For example, in the Sponsorship Project, children in primary school contested this view on dependency, arguing that the project only paid Kenya shillings 850 (8 euros) a year while the school fee and levies requirements were higher than

this. What is seen as a dependency also ought to be located within the practices of these organizations. For example, there is the fragmentation of support and interventions by these organizations, often based on the resources that these organizations have rather than on the holistic needs and rights of the children involved. Therefore, most organizations only provide services within their core competencies (see Banks et al., 2015; Brown and Kalegaonkar, 2002). When each organization only provides a fraction of vulnerable children's support, relying on several organizations is the logical outcome. Karki et al. (2023) problematize these perceived notions of dependency in humanitarian projects by aid recipients in Nepal. Using the Bourdieusian framework, they support the view that there is a need for understanding the nuanced realities like these on the ground.

I also sought to understand the perspectives of the programme leaders on the discourse of dependency and piecemeal support. One programme leader revealed the limited options in denouncing donor prescriptions in some cases:

> These donors are well informed that children are not going to school in the primary sector because of levies, but they don't want to step on the toes of the government. When you speak to them closely, [they] tell you they know that children are still sent home, but they use all sorts of explanations.

These views demonstrate that the power configurations between donors and receiving organizations are an essential node in the discourse of piecemeal support. Research in Rwanda reveals diverse considerations by donors who do not factor in school levies or other variable costs in their budgets because these are unpredictable (Williams et al., 2015). Embedded in these contestations around what the policy could accomplish or not was an insensitivity of both the state and the donors about the needs of primary school children who might not transition to secondary school, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Providing for the education needs of children was also a site of contestation around the identity of caregivers. For example, some programmes had a silent policy that children should be supported for education in cheaper schools. Caregivers who then enrolled their children in expensive schools were vilified. For example, in the OVC Project, there was a view that caregivers enrolled their children in costly schools in anticipation of support, as noted by the project lead: 'Some parents took their children to boarding schools, hoping the OVC Project would pay for them. How can a poor parent take their children to an expensive school if they cannot afford it?'

Here again, we encounter the connecting lines between this discourse and the 'small school' discourse that characterizes the lived experience of children with schooling discussed in Chapter 6. Parents, however, contested these linear accounts by noting that they were not targeting free donor funds, but wanted the best for their children. These views were also contested by children, who noted that the choice of schools was based on children's performance. In doing so, they questioned the limited interpretations of what children's rights to education are (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 6), in this case, seen by the NGOs as the right

to education but only in a small cheap school. Children's and caregivers' counter-arguments support the perspective that there could be discrepancies between the claims made by children and those who work with/for them (Van Daalen et al., 2016: 813).

Overall, the key argument in this section is the need to nuance these notions of piecemeal support and dependency by interrogating the narratives and practices of the organizations. We, for example, have seen that the type of support these organizations provide is not generous enough to induce dependency. There is also a need to be introspective about the language used on these vulnerable children since it bears unquestioned assumptions and can stigmatize, as we saw in Chapter 2. We now move on to how the needs of children and their caregivers are understood through their sick bodies and how this sits with children's lived experience of vulnerability.

Cartographies of Entitlement Through the Sick Body

By a mosque, I meet the father of Rafiki, one of the beneficiaries of the OVC Project. He is in his mid-30s, but he looks old and haggard. He grows tree seedlings by the lake. As we finish the conversation, he asks me what I could do for him. He wants a house. He apologizes for asking and says it is because he is taking *dawa*, ARV (for being HIV positive) and cannot do hard work. I hand him some money for transport. As he leaves, I reflect on how his only claim to support is through his biology and his HIV status (My research diary).

Rafiki's father, a father of four, was enrolled in the OVC Project. His first wife had died a few years before my research, and he had remarried. His confession to me might be characterized as part of 'confessional technologies' that governed people interpellated as HIV sick in Africa who had to position themselves this way to obtain support (Meinert and Whyte, 2014). Althusser (1971) has noted that people whose identity is labelled in a particular way are socialized to respond to this appellation. In this case, the person so interpellated participates in the discourse that hails (or interpellates) them. Underman and others (2017: 549) have also noted that 'efforts to be recognized as worthy subjects within a given biopolitical regime require rendering oneself and one's biosocial group as legible within such normative discourses'.

Like Rafiki's father, Alice was 56 years old but looked much older. Her sister had died, leaving behind three children in the care of different relatives, and Alice was looking after one of the children. Her oldest daughter lived in Nairobi, while her other son was an apprentice in a nearby shopping centre. Her other daughter had two children. She had no other meaningful livelihood besides the 40-euro bi-monthly CT-OVC grant she received. When I was preparing to leave after I visited her home, she said: 'Is there anything that somebody can do for those taking medicine [the local reference to ARVs]? People like us are weak but still have to take care of our children'. Even though she was active in the caregiver group supported by COA, Alice, in this case, chose to identify herself as taking *dawa*. Her identification and self-definition of her needs become the problem when she

capitalizes on this identity. Brown (1996: 192) argued that the confession may regulate the confessor, and this confession may become established as the truth about a particular category, in this case, caregivers and children who have HIV/AIDS.

The narrative of Mama Pius, whose four children aged between 2 and 13 years were enrolled in the OVC Project, did not necessarily cohere with that of Alice. However, in our sister talk that had become part of the sociabilities of our research encounter, she told me the following:

> I am now positive (sick with HIV/AIDS). My husband and my firstborn child too are sick. I struggle to bring these children up. We have to take ARVs; sometimes, doing so on an empty stomach is challenging.

These caregivers amplified their suffering and displayed their sick bodies to others, including me as a researcher, seen as a potential benefactor. However, one should go beyond a simplistic view of objectifying their needs and instead focus on the challenges in their lived experience, as shown above. Claiming support through their sick body also highlighted the other factors, including the role of interventions that have positioned themselves as guarantors of the rights of caregivers and their children. In such circumstances, a sick body was a resource. As for the case of these caregivers, Foucault (2009: 1) presents biopolitics as the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of a political strategy. However, these biopolitical or 'therapeutic forms of citizenship' were exclusionary since rights should be guaranteed for all citizens (Nguyen et al., 2007: 31) Researchers have termed this process 'AIDS exceptionalism', where a focus on HIV/AIDS occludes other issues such as poverty, violence, or food insecurity. These caregivers can, therefore, be said to be part of the global AIDS relief conversations aimed at creating 'biographical borders' between those who were seen as deserving and those who were not (Mai, 2014: 189). In making these contradictions intelligible, we also need to draw connecting lines between these confessional practices and the social contract the caregivers have with the state. This contract only exists in an idealized imagination in the Constitution, and caregivers are forced to use the diseased body as the currency for staking claims to support (Petryna, 2004).

In staying with the fluid experience and one entangled with the role of the researcher, staking claims to support through telling oneself as HIV positive was not linear and the research participants had shifting subjectivities. In some cases, based on the context of our discussions, the caregivers were able to momentarily wrestle themselves from the subject positions allotted to them in these dominant discourses of how needs are constructed and, therefore, 'untelling' themselves.[1] For example, as our discussion with Mama Pius unfolded, she briefly estranged herself from her HIV/sick body and narrated herself differently. She noted that HIV/AIDS was a good disease because, compared to other sicknesses such as diabetes, one could live longer. Minimizing the effects of HIV/AIDS enabled her to get on with the disease. As part of intersubjective knowledge production, I was also placed within this context of her untelling because I had earlier

encouraged Mama Pius to live positively for the sake of her children (Van Stapele, 2014; Willemse, 2007). In perceiving me as a mother like her, she felt comfortable capitalizing on the identity of a mother and not an HIV-sick person. The role of the community health worker who had accompanied me could also not be delinked from the way Mama Pius positioned herself in the discourse of HIV/AIDS sick body. This is because health workers inculcated norms of living positively to those who have HIV/AIDS. These shifting subjectivities where one 'tells' and 'un-tells' oneself from HIV/AIDS also performed a cathartic role to Mama Pius and gave meaning to her life.

There were also other practices of refusal to tell oneself as HIV positive but through another disease. Mama Allister, who was HIV positive and partially blind, was benefitting from the OVC Project together with her four children, narrated herself differently. She transcended her HIV status and presented her problem as one of chicken pox that affected her eyesight, making it difficult for her to take good care of her children. In diffracting the encounter at Mama Allister's home and the go-along conversations with the CHV, we see that representing HIV/AIDS as chicken pox may not be the 'untruth' that I initially imagined (Marker, 2003: 373). I recalled that in our conversation, she had kept silent on my question when I sounded like I doubted whether chicken pox could cause loss of eyesight. While I initially thought that my research assistant was part of this seeming 'untruth', after listening to the recorded conversation, I discovered that she did not support the caregiver's chickenpox thesis. Instead, using her power as a community health nurse, like Mama Allister, she had responded past my question and talked about chicken pox being a bad disease, which we could not contest (Mazzei, 2007: 77).

One can enter Mama Allister's discourse in various ways. By responding this way, both Mama Allister and my research assistant were protecting her against the stigma of being an HIV-positive person. Second, her focus on the loss of her eyesight defined what was more important to her. Her eyesight was the greatest need since its loss meant her inability to provide good care for her children and not her suffering from HIV *per se*, as the project imagined. In further folding her narrative through notions of identity as a performance, I aver that her narrative of telling against what was known about her was a performance of herself (Willemse, 2012). In folding her narrative, through Deleuze, such a performance was rhizomatic and an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This is because in describing herself as chicken- pox -sick, and against the allotted subject position of an HIV/AIDS ill body, she still participated in positioning herself as a deserving, needy and sick person. She was, therefore, simultaneously responding to the interpellation by biopolitics as a sick subject and the organization's therapeutic belonging discourse, simultaneously contesting it.

For children, the situation was different. During our interactions, my research assistants sometimes told the children (in the local language) to be lucid in explaining their needs to me. Even though some children were said to be suffering from HIV/AIDS, they did not articulate this during our various encounters. This can be partly explained by the generational relations of power, which might

make it hard for children to declare their status to a researcher. Another possible explanation would be the role of their parents/caregivers in making claims on their behalf. For example, Underman et al. (2017: 545), when discussing how children with severe disabilities are objectified in proceedings around care, refers to custodial citizenship. In this situation, legible others (including parents and community workers in this case) narrate children's suffering, to access rights on their behalf. In such contexts where children lack the language of speaking as therapeutic citizens, others choose to speak for them by appropriating their suffering. And while it was not clear if some of the parents had even informed their children of their HIV/Status, failure to declare their status can also be seen as a form of protection.

Research by Sumbi et al. (2021) in the Democratic Republic of Congo revealed that parents protected themselves and their children by failing to disclose their HIV/status. Brown (1996: 197) has argued that: 'refusing to speak is a method of refusing colonization, refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or subjection through regulation'. In these situations where children may lack self-determination in making decisions to reveal their HIV status to qualify for support, we need to reconsider how such telling on their behalf affects their rights to privacy and protection and eclipses their agency. In specific contexts of poverty, HIV/AIDS status may not be the most important thing to these children as the NGOs imagined. Here, we come full circle again and see that such agency through children's silence is messy since failure to confess this status may sometimes mean an exit from support. As I conclude, we see that the telling, the 'untelling', the 'retelling' and the 'not-telling' about children's and caregiver experience as HIV-positive subjects is messy but also part of the complex experience of poverty and vulnerability.

Discursive Construction of Income as a Need: Contesting the Saving Schemes as a Windfall

I now explore the multiple framing and silenced perspectives in interpreting and managing children and caregiver needs as read from the discourse of income as a need and the practice of Voluntary Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs). The VSLA was popularized in Africa by CARE International after it proved successful in Niger in 1992. In 2013, the model was already estimated to have been implemented in 26 African countries (Care International, 2013: 3). In this model, a few people organize themselves into groups and contribute money each week, keeping it in a cash box. The money is then lent to each other or shared after some time, and the funds can be used for small-scale trading (Flynn and Sumberg, 2018). A clustered randomized evaluation of these savings programmes in Ghana, Malawi and Uganda established that these income strategies improved participant business outcomes and enhanced inclusion (Karlan et al., 2017). These microfinance strategies are seen as the springboard for financial inclusion for the marginalized.[2] However, the caregivers' dynamics and experience with these and similar programmes and how they structure their experience

have not received adequate attention. Further, the unequal power relations embedded in this assemblage of the VSLAs have not been explored. I see VSLA as a global assemblage that applies to people in local spaces like Siaya. Schwittay (2011: 383) argues that when such global assemblages are 'territorialized in particular locales, they define new material, collective and discursive relationships'. They also structure relationships among poor people and the organizations working with them.

In all the four organizations, caregivers were expected to be in VSLAs to generate income to meet their children's needs. Lack of income was therefore seen as one of the key needs in caregivers' experience of vulnerability. The overall aim of such VSLA programmes is that the beneficiaries would generate enough income to get out of poverty or pull themselves up by the 'bootstraps'. In these organizations, the savings scheme was therefore represented as an initiative of the caregivers. For example, in the OVC Project, which was in the final stages of implementation, VSLA was labelled as a sustainability programme aimed at embedding the gains realized over the years.

The larger programme that funded the OVC Project represented the VSLAs as a runaway success story. There were also glossy accounts by project leaders of how caregivers used these proceeds to purchase school uniforms and pay school levies and fees. In fanning the runaway success discourse, the VSLA was seen as producing competent caregivers by strengthening their livelihoods, as was expressed by the programme manager of the OVC Project:

> [We] have seen that people who were not able to earn Kenya shillings 50 (50-euro cents) per day are now able to earn Kenya shillings 300 (3 euros). You won't believe it, but in 6 months, one group had over Kenya shillings 200,000 (2000 euros). These are vulnerable people who cannot take their children to school. They were walking in tatters [worn out clothes].

This success narrative gives VSLA material agency and the capacity to perform miracles; as the project leader added: 'It is unbelievable that a group that multiplied into four groups shared KES 1.05 million by the end of the year'. While some caregivers supported these narratives of success, challenges that affected the participation of the caregivers and other nuances were silenced in the grand stories. For example, while acknowledging that sometimes it was hard for the elderly caregivers to participate meaningfully in VSLAs, one of the Community Health volunteers working with the OVC Project presented the VSLA not as an economic activity but as a pastime.

> Some women are too old to work, but the VSLA helps them save a little money to benefit when the rest share interest by the year's end. [We] tell them they can even borrow KES100 (1 euro) so that they are seen to be part of the group.

Despite this view of participation as a pastime, some caregivers continued participating in these groups to obtain mutual support. Thus these VSLA

groups are not just economic resources as these project leaders imagined but are also emotional and social spaces (Karki et al., 2023).

According to some caregivers, the VSLA was not a choice but part and parcel of the intervention logic, and it had exclusionary tendencies embedded in it (Ezemenari et al., 2002). Some caregivers had left the groups because they could not afford to keep up with the required monthly savings. Briana (12 years old) noted that her mother left the group because she could not keep up with the necessary payments for the group membership. The financial inclusion mantra propagated by these organizations therefore does not pass the test. Indeed, some caregivers reported being forced to incur debts to pay off their loans. As one member noted: 'The VSLA is bothering us, especially if one has a loan. One does not have a voice in the group meetings because you are reminded you have a loan'. While leaving the groups was agency on the part of these caregivers, it also meant being cut off from the interactions with other caregivers.

Some of the practices assembled by the organizations, like ensuring that the caregivers attend the groups' training or saving meetings, were not responsive to the contexts of some of the children, like those who did not have regular caregivers. For example, Alidi's 20-year-old brother could not participate in the VSLA, and even his brother's wife, who was running a small hair salon business, did not have time for the meetings. Further, she did not perceive herself as Alidi's caregiver even though the project volunteer kept prodding her to join the group. Such a situation is an example of an administrative definition of people's needs that is one-sided and does not consider the perspectives of all the affected people (Fraser, 1987: 115). In Alidi's case, it can be said that the VSLA did not cater for different childhoods and caregiving arrangements. Despite such positioning, however, caregivers appropriated these savings groups as places of conviviality beyond the instrumental objectives of the interventions.

If we get back to the programme's views on mandatory participation, some of the programme leaders working with the Sponsorship Project in Nairobi contradicted her organization's discourse when she opined that the VSLA should not be imposed on caregivers as was the case in some of the organizations I worked with. Another staff member noted that interventions and the VSLA should be configured for each person and that 'we should behave like a tailor'. In both contexts, the staff opined that the caregivers needed training since they might not have the skills to manage the VSLA 'windfall' and may use the money on useless items like making hair and buying cigarettes. These perspectives still feed on the dominant misperceptions about the identity and motives of poor people. This Othering discourse connects to the discursive formation explored in Chapter 2 that imputed a problematic identity on the caregivers supporting vulnerable children. This discourse of training caregivers to become better consumers puts moral boundaries between the implementers, other more well-off and deserving consumers, and the poor. In the next section, I explore the discourse of CT-OVC as a state-funded income remedy and the associated experiential politics embedded in this practice.

Contesting Needs and Rights Through the Cash Programme

The State Cash Transfer Programme for Vulnerable Children in the research sites was one of the remedies for children's income and other protection needs. The CT-OVC implemented in several African countries has its share of praise and complaints (Awortwi, 2017). In the words of Haarstad and St Clair (2011: 216), these programmes have been promoted by 'elitist expert communities and international financial institutions'. The programmes are, therefore, not presented as part of social welfare policies and as a poverty alleviation strategy. In other contexts, they are also seen as a rights-based initiative that enables the fostering of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (Bryant, 2009). There are also concerns about the extent to which such programmes that focus on the poor as residual categories, to be targeted through safety nets lead to transformative social policies (Haarstad and St Clair, 2011). I am, however, interested in how the programme is positioned in the needs discourses and how caregivers respond to these needs interpretations.

One of the key issues that emerged was the adequacy of the transfers within the context of the needs of the caregivers. The discourses of cash transfer reveal specific assumptions about the identity of caregivers and the children. However, caregivers engaged with this subject-positioning in the official discourse of cash transfers. Their perspectives simultaneously contest and collude with the dominant representational discourses of beneficiaries' identity and children's needs and rights. For example, while there were expectations that caregivers should use the cash to purchase only the necessary food items, caregivers positioned themselves as purchasing individuals. They resisted the simplistic interpretations of their needs as a need to eat but as a right to eat well, as discussions revealed:

> [Laughing] Money helps us eat meat or fish instead of *omena* [silver fish]. We diversify the menu, and our children are happy … See that basket [points]; it is only used when we are going for the money. Children know when you are going for the money.

Indeed, children in one discussion confirmed this when they said: 'That day we eat fish and not *omena*. That day, we are grateful to *Dana* [grandmother]'. As Willemse (2007) averred, a discourse does not need to be uttered for it to be resisted, and the perspectives of children and caregivers are revealing. Eating well meant changing their diet from *omena* to eating meat once a month. *Omena* (understood through their very small size) could also be speaking to the discourses and representation as deserving only a basic diet due to their identity as poor. This is because *omena* has historically been plentiful, affordable and cheaper than vegetables. In the food hierarchy, it is framed as an inexpensive protein and a 'poverty food'. This everyday meal thus could not be served to a guest, for instance. Therefore, the perspectives of children and their caregivers contest the dominant scripts about the identity of the poor. These perspectives also contest the dominant thinking about children's needs and the views that their lives and

childhoods should be lived only at bare minimums as embedded in this social protection programme.

Using the money to buy meat instead of *omena* would be termed 'temptation goods' or 'public bads' in the conventional governing discourse of social protection. In addition to cigarettes and beer, such goods also include doughnuts and sugar in some cases. In my research, setting this would consist of meat as well (Banerjee and Mullainathan, 2010; Standing, 2012: 65). In diffracting further, the paternalistic and disingenuous nature of the 'rules' around the programme assumed that the poor are unable to make good choices. The silenced narrative was how childhood was structured in terms of good food for some children and not for others (seen as poor).

Some caregivers also acknowledged that the CT-OVC transfer value was inadequate for their children's needs. This countered the views of the chief official in the National Social Protection Secretariat, who indicated that caregivers provide very positive reviews and appreciated that the 'little they give was helping them a lot'. In justifying the small size of the grant, this staff also added that the 'caregivers were eating before we came'. Due to the small size of the grant, caregivers receiving the CT-OVC were also in other support programmes, for example, receiving benefits from NGO programmes or receiving school fees bursaries from the government. This happened even though rules that governed eligibility to only those children who were not receiving support from any other organization (Bryant, 2009: 69). This better-than-nothing discourse was also supported by some caregivers who presented the grant as 'manna from heaven' as they argued:

> The support is not enough, but it is free money. We do not know where it came from; it is like manna from heaven. You do not question what you have received by the mercies of God.

Taking this discourse as an example of a necessity to analyze beyond linear interpretations, I analyzed the perspectives of 'manna from heaven' beyond a linear discourse of docility, taking multiple entry points as I mapped the forces and discourses that might explain it (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12–13, Kamberelis, 2013: 671). At first, instance, even though the money was not much, it helped caregivers meet some of their needs. Second, as Sellers and Honan (2007: 157) argued, discourses are connected with others and do not operate as straight lines. This rhizo-discourse indexed the institutional position and discourse that the transfer was 'better than nothing' by the state officials earlier discussed. I also connect this discourse of manna with other contexts reported elsewhere. For example, Kalebe-Nyamongo's (2012) research on elite attitudes towards pro-poor policies in Malawi reveals similar discourses of cash transfer as free cash and manna from heaven. Finally, my presence as an outsider might have been perceived as a form of evaluation, with potential fear that I could give these reviews to the government with negative repercussions. Therefore, caregiver narratives of 'better than nothing' could be part of me as a researcher, influencing the world of caregivers.

The perspective that the OVC cash transfer heightens inequalities and erodes social capital in the community has been a central discursive motif in perceptions of what works or not for the cash transfer. For example, Kirera (2012) explored the role of negative capital in cash transfer in Kenya. One of the dominant discourses was that the caregivers receiving cash transfers were not working hard because they would still get free money. Such representations of caregivers as lazy were also fuelled by the notions that the caregivers who received transfers were not necessarily the poorest, with perceptions that the selection process was not transparent. For example, the evaluation of the Cash Transfer Programme in Kenya in 2009 revealed that the programme covered a significant fraction of less-poor households (Bryant, 2009: 74). Caregivers also reported that the community incited their children to rebel against them. For instance, during a discussion with caregivers and listening to the silence and body language, one elderly caregiver complained in the local language that her son had been influenced by the neighbours to demand money from her. Other caregivers noted that the neighbours would tell the children to assert themselves because they were sustaining the household through the transfer.

Research by Dahl (2014: 627) in Lesotho reveals that where a few orphans had been selected to receive support from charitable organizations, the communities utilized specific 'idioms of excess' to engage the inequalities embedded in the programme. This they did by arguing that the orphans were over-indulging in the NGO '*largesse*' and therefore were becoming too 'fat'. Caregivers encountered similar discourses in Siaya. Garcia and Moore's (2012) work supports this view that transfers can create social tensions, especially in contexts where everyone is poor. In deepening this literature, I also sought to understand how caregivers engaged with these discourses and perspectives. Caregivers had devised racialized subjectivities of responding to these claims and to maintain positive relations in the community, as one caregiver reveals:

> If we want people to keep quiet, we respond by telling them that this is *mzungu's* [white person] money. If they also come asking us who had visited [myself as the researcher], we will say to them it was a *mzungu* because people fear a *mzungu*, and they will not bother asking us what happened.

While, at first instance, the narrative of a *mzungu* and 'whiteness' evokes notions of racial superiority, such a narrative produces several readings and is a rhizo-discourse. Whiteness, in this case, becomes less about skin colour but a form of symbolic power (Blaagaard, 2009: 35). In the cartography of charitable giving, whiteness also had material agency; the power to provide for the needs of children. Read this way, as a researcher, I was also implicated in this *mzunguness* of charity, and my status as a researcher from abroad was fore-grounded. Drawing on the context further revealed a need to connect these racialized subjectivities to material poverty, where an outsider who showed interest in the poverty experience of children and caregivers was allotted the subject position of 'whiteness'. Further, reading this narrative through the cartographies of charity projects

revealed that global sensibilities of support have infiltrated the local spaces through interventions and defined children's experience. In the Siaya context, a *mzungu* was equated with charity because most organizations working with children were supported by white international donors. It was also not uncommon to hear caregivers referring to others who were in a position to support others as 'my *mzungu*'. In such cases, *whiteness* and charity (power to give) defined how these caregivers perceived support for people experiencing poverty. Locating this whiteness within history, we can also read it as debris of the encounters with the salvific work of European missionaries in Kenya who provided services like health education alongside the colonialists. And if we go further to locate it within Kenya's colonial legacy, whiteness is also equal to being well-off or living well. A *mzungu* was seen as a more appropriate rendering of income support than the state.

These idiosyncratic experiential politics in the cash transfer and how this affects the well-being of children contribute to our understanding of cartographies of the lived experience of child poverty and vulnerability within the context of the officially defined needs and interventions. The politics that caregivers enact also further our understanding of agency by caregivers as they position themselves within specific discourses.

Conclusion

I have explored the different interpretations of the needs and rights of children and the politics around them. I have argued that children's needs and rights are not a given but are a result of constant interpretation and contestation by different actors under fluid material and social conditions. I have also demonstrated that specific practices of fulfilling children's needs are modes of creating subjects. While these subjectivating technologies may render children and their caregivers as subjects through power relations, I have argued that these interpretations are non-linear and rhizomatic. The power to frame the needs and rights of children, in a particular way is therefore not a preserve of those with power but occurs within a field of complex relations and is an assemblage. This does not mean that children and their caregivers, teachers and project leaders, donors or even the state have equal power in this framing. I have endeavoured to map these differential intensities of power and what this means for children's experience. In the next chapter, I will continue presenting the lived experience of children in support programmes, the messy encounters between these interpretations of children's needs and rights, and the children and caregiver agency.

Notes

1 I use this term to refer to a specific way in which the research participants narrated experiences contrary to the expectations we had about them or did so strategically, or the way they contradicted earlier perspectives told about themselves.

2 There is extensive literature on savings schemes and how they function in getting people out of poverty and it is not the aim in this chapter to wade into this literature. The discussions here are more concerned with the narratives around the savings schemes as an assemblage of discourses, narratives and assumptions. I am also concerned with the discourses of needs construction through this programme and caregivers' experience with it.

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8 Subjectivating Practices in Programmes of Support and Messy Agency by Children

Introduction

This chapter offers a perspective on how the identity of the poor and vulnerable child is articulated in day-to-day discourse through specific technologies of governance in programmes of support. This is what I locate as subjectivating practices. Foucault (1982: 789) noted that subjectification is about the formation of subjects through power. He averred that:

> Power applies itself to immediate everyday life, [categorizes] the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, and imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.

Despite these practices being intended as subjectivating, I also present the embodied and embedded experience of children and their agency and creativity in responding to or navigating the dominant representations of their needs, rights, identity and experience in organizations or programmes of support. I explore these subjectivating practices from three perspectives. First, by presenting the micro-practices in projects funded by donors, I show how the global policies by the donors are translated at the local level with contradictory results. These practices are often seen as requirements for participation or conditionalities, and they position children as subjects with specific capacities and identities. They, therefore, offer specific ways of being a child generally and a poor and vulnerable child in particular (Davies, 2006: 425; Fraser, 1989: 165). Second, while children and their caregivers may take the subject positions offered to them and become subjectified, they also engage with, negotiate, resist or subvert these subject positionings.

I reposition such agency, actions or inaction as 'lines of flight' or politics. These politics engage the totalizing effects of these discursive narratives and regulatory practices (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013: 676). Taking a cartographical view, we will see that sometimes children and caregivers may use what is intended as modes of regulating them for their good, but sometimes in disabling ways.

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Such perspectives engage the dominant literature on this topic, which has taken a starting point that organizations providing support are merely spaces for governance. Diffracting further with children's rights as living, actions by children as they engage in these practices are also rights claims. Children reposition their rights and needs in ways contrary to the instrumental ways that their needs and rights are vitalized in these programmes (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Isin, 2012: 110). These actions by children reveal to us the nature of what I see as complex agency. We will see that agency is not something that children have (and is not defined in advance) but that its potential lies in the fact that it is constituted through specific relations in programmes (Gallagher, 2019). We must, therefore, be attuned to these contingencies and complexities of agency as we engage with what is often seen as the governing power of organizations. Ultimately, these subjectivating practices, and the associated actions, politics and rights-claiming by children and caregivers are also treated as part and parcel of the cartographies of a poor child's experience.

Even though the research unearthed several practices of subjectivation, I substantiate my arguments by examining four key practices. These are rules governing the participation of children in one programme, the discursive practice of positioning supported children as poor performers in school and the regime of the practice of writing letters to donors. I also present the cartographies of children's experience through the ubiquitous discourse and practice of 'exiting' children from programmes of support.

Subjectivation Through Rules and Associated Resistance

I start with a scene from my research, as noted in my diary: It is a sunny day in August when schools are on holiday. I went to the Mercy Project site, where a holiday camp is being held. This week, I am observing different activities. Children converge here each holiday and Saturday to engage in different project activities. Some children sit in the corner with a teacher and are trained to write letters to donors. Other children are cleaning. The director told me my visit was timely since children have an open day session, with no teachers, adults, or managers on site. They would discuss issues affecting them and the rules of engagement in the Project Centre.

The scene above explains the context of my engagement with children in one of the project centres. Here, I explore how specific requirements or rules of participation affect the well-being of children and the various ways children position themselves in these rules. I take the example of this activity; reviewing rules in the Mercy Project, as a starting point for my analysis. In this Project, children converged at the Centre each holiday and Saturday for different project activities. These include spiritual teachings, training in life skills or health, learning how to write letters to donors, vocational skills and sports. To ensure conformity to rules, the head of the Project had threatened to close the Centre if children continued being disobedient, hence the opportunity to review the rules.

When reviewing the rules of engagement, children contested the practice of going to the Centre every weekend and during the holidays. Even though the larger sponsorship programme expects children to attend the Centre for training and mentorship, the director noted that children were kept in the Centre for fear that they would be idle when school was out. Caregivers also noted that they liked it when children were occupied in the Centre because they might behave badly at home. Children, however, contested the intervention space and its assumptions about children's identity, needs, and rights. They, for example, challenged the organization's discourse on providing social-emotional support to children, an activity carried out at the Centre:

> Since we joined Mercy, it has been social-emotional training and the bible. [They] need to balance spiritual, socio-emotional and cognitive with some academic work.

Socio-emotional support and Christian religious education was at the heart of Mercy Project's interventions. Children were also provided with skills in compassionately relating with others. In examining this discourse against the views of children, we see that the training that articulated the Christian identity of the organization through needy children eclipsed other childhoods that did not need socio-emotional care. This discourse and practice, therefore, intervened in a universally vulnerable child subject. Secondly, positioning socio-emotional training as the main need can also be read as a thin and therapeutic definition of children's needs that depoliticizes their real needs (Fraser, 1989: 163). Lastly, in Foucauldian thinking, we must see power not as a reserve of an individual organization but as circulating between different actors. We, for example, cannot separate the activities of these local organizations from the intentions of international donor policies, some of which focus on influencing behaviour.

If we stay with the children in the Mercy Project space, children also faulted the rules that required that they go to the Centre every weekend and most of their school holidays. They argued that these rules flouted their rights to childhood and as human beings, as the following narrative reveals:

> [We] should not come here every day over the holidays and should not stay here for long. Perhaps [they] think because some of us are orphaned and there are no caregivers at home, [they] should act as our surrogates by keeping us here. [We] are human beings, and [We] need to visit our relatives.

Guided by the Foucauldian view that in theorizing power relations we should use resistance as a catalyst to understand those relations (Foucault, 1982: 780), making sense of children's perspective reveals the silent discourses by the organization. Valentin and Meinert (2009), while conflicted as to whether aid can be provided value-free, noted that these sponsorship NGOs (but also through mediation and translation by southern elites like some of these local NGO leads),

take over the role of parents and with the aim of ensuring proper and universal Childhood in the Global South. They argue that doing so infantilizes not only African children but also the parents. Green (2007: 144) draws on her own insider experiences in an international child-centred organization to support this view. She argues that spending by some actors is also about the 're-ordering of states, societies and sectors'. Schmid's (2010: 2112) work in South Africa clearly articulates the same position when she argues that the South African welfare system has appropriated the Anglo-American system constructions of irresponsible parents and, not the least, the 'rescue' social workers. In his commentary on the way the British public views the support provided to the poor, mostly in Africa, Kirk (2012: 248) notes that the donors view the support as more about 'making [them] more like [us]'. Coming to the Centre and the discourses circulating there can, therefore, be seen as a governing technology or programmes that are designed as a result of specific moral justifications or specific understandings of a particular problem (Rose and Miller, 2010: 183).

These technologies of governance are, however, not without effect on the caregivers and children concerned, as we have seen above (Li, 2007). For example, appropriating children's free time, as the above narrative reveals, is a closure to those very spaces that the organization seeks to open by supporting children and is therefore perceived as inhuman. The children above are, therefore, articulating an identity of a child who is not just a 'beneficiary of NGO largesse' but a subject with rights (Fraser, 1987: 111). Contesting the requirement to go to the Centre also means that children were questioning these global rules of philanthropy that governed this project and reversing these relations in their favour, even if only temporarily. The governing and disciplining practices by the organization that generated the above rights claims by children are often seen as 'disobedience' to rules of participation, as the director had informed me earlier. However, what is seen as 'disobedience' to regulations should be seen as a political act that repositions children's rights (Leafgren, 2007). Further, children's contestation around going to the Centre also reveals how these rules affect the economic well-being of the entire family. For example, some caregivers had to forgo the labour of the older children when they were engaged in the Centre over the holidays. As I observed, caregivers to the very young children, who were time-poor, had to accompany children to the Centre every time if there were no older siblings to accompany them.

Some children also faulted the seemingly discriminatory practices at the Centre, including teachers' selective treatment of some children. For example, teachers contracted to provide children with support in the Centre positioned them as charity beneficiaries. Children termed these actions as 'serving God through discrimination'. This discourse was an indictment on the sponsoring organization whose mission and intention was to serve God by releasing children from poverty. By using the local practices as a basis for questioning the core of the organization's mission and by introducing the lexicons of discrimination, children were laying a claim to better support. They were also challenging various

practices of support to vulnerable and poor children that have inequalities embedded in them (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013).

Children in this Centre also resisted the rules that required them to wear their school uniforms for non-mainstream school activities like the project activities. The project staff presented school uniform as giving children an identity, while children saw it as a form of control, as one of the participants noted.

> We are punished when we come to the Centre in flip-flops. We do not want to wear our good shoes in this place because nothing serious is taking place here. Why should we wear good shoes? They will just be worn out.

While the actions by the organization may be well intended, minimizing the need for being smart at the Centre is not just resistance to the uniform but, at first instance, can be seen as resistance to control and surveillance, and an indictment to the disciplining practices by the organization. Secondly, representing the Centre as a place that could possibly spoil their good shoes was jarring to the common imaginations of children's capacities. It ruptures our thinking on dependent childhoods. Lines of flight, seen as children's resistance, are sometimes also temporal because molar lines recapture them (Strom and Martin, 2017). This is because children's refusal to wear school uniforms would be considered disobedience, and children who did not go to the Centre or refused to wear uniform would be disciplined, as I reveal later in this chapter. Here, we pause again to see how the cycle of entanglement between the practices and subjectivities of children is perpetuated in such programmes. This is because the resistance generated by the governance in the Centre was neutralized by these same disciplining practices that created the resistance in the first place. We now turn to a different discourse of children as poor performers.

Resisting the Discourse of Poor Children As Poor Performers

Discourse of poor children as poor performers in school was ubiquitous in some of these organizations. Children in one organization benefitted from extra schooling support because they were not doing well. Discussions with the lead person in one of the projects confirmed this: '[Our children] feel entitled to free support, and therefore they do not work hard'. These allotted subject positions of poor performers can be stigmatizing. As Green (2007) noted, discourses that define children in interventions may misrepresent them in specific ways and thereby cause them harm. In staying with this discourse of poor performers, supported children were sometimes forced to repeat classes in their trajectory when they did not reach the cut-off points after the national exams. In all the four organizations studied, there was a cut-off point of 250 or 300 (out of the possible 500) marks before a child could be supported in secondary school. For children who had lower marks but refused to repeat classes, their parents were expected to pay for their school fees until their school results improved.

Children located themselves ambivalently within this discourse, with some noting that making children repeat school was wrong. David noted: 'In Class 8, I had 248 marks, but when I went to high school, my brain woke up. I realized that marks in class eight were not a good measure'. Jane, who was 16 years old, similarly resisted the discourse that children on support were poor performers when she noted: 'I attained 254 marks, and I am working hard to join university. If I had not scored 250 marks and above, I would have been taken to a polytechnic, those small vocational training centres'. Jane's narrative again connects to the discourse of small schools or small education for the children of the poor, as discussed in Chapter 6. Vocational education that Jane references is not well supported in Kenya and Africa in general. For example, Essel's (2014) work in Ghana reveals that vocational education tends to be stigmatized because, as we saw in Chapter 2, it was used by the colonialists as a way of offering inferior education to Africans. Essel also notes that the curriculum in most of these courses, as my research participants confirmed, remains inferior; another signalling effect around the identity of children (poor) who are supposed to benefit from it (Branham, 2004: 1124). While acknowledging that these children may have specific vulnerabilities that affect school performance, some project leaders justified this practice of using performance as a sorting mechanism as one leader noted:

> You do not expect a child staying with a grandmother to perform well. They might be looking for food in the evening when others are reading. Our hands are, however, also tied because we do not have resources. We have to sort these children out.

Here, by reading the reasons given by the staff above, we come full circle again and remember the case of Ayo in Chapter 1 who was forced to repeat preschool while silencing her difficult context at home. In flowing with the rhizome, other factors, like the quality of teaching/learning in the schools explored in Chapter 6, are not considered. The difficulties in the caregiving environment, where caregivers may not reinforce what is learned in school and lack of school provisions, are also part of the assemblage. This complexity cannot simply be reduced to grades. Failure to comply with these rules governing the expected performance may also pose other problems. For example, one of the girls interviewed noted; 'There is one girl who did not repeat a class; she scored 237 marks. She was departed [exited], and she got married, and the husband is now paying school fees for her'. Refusal to comply, as in the above case, may thus have far-reaching consequences, both within the generational power relations and material realities of poverty. One of the girls whose caregiver I visited had been discontinued from the Project because she did not attain the marks required for support with secondary school education. She eventually joined a vocational training college, but the organization did not support her further, and she dropped out.

For the Mercy Project, the discourse of exiting 'poor performers' into poorly resourced polytechnics was couched in terms of concern for children. The

director noted that they advised children who were slow in school to join polytechnics to get a fallback as they exited the Project when they turned 18. She reckoned that the children would, therefore, not be 'empty-handed' as they left the Project:

> We evaluate progress every two years. Children can be supported to university. Children who are already 18 years old but still in lower classes are seen as having clicked red (too old for sponsorship). When this occurs, we talk to caregivers to take them to polytechnics, where they learn basic life skills like hairdressing, tailoring, masonry, carpentry, etc. By taking them to a polytechnic, we ensure they do not come out empty-handed. We also do not want them to waste resources in high school.

Children, however, engaged with this discourse on the vocational route for poor children by subverting it while simultaneously appropriating it. For example, some argued that they chose this track after they completed primary school since they did not want to wait for four years to graduate from high school before getting a job. Such a subject position was a form of resistance that gave some of these children space to live as they saw fit (Willemse, 2007: 475). In reading children's perspectives through Deleuze and Guattari (1987), such a discourse also drew connections to the country context where the unemployment rate for school leavers was high. Ansell and others (2020), explore children's aspirations through education in India, Laos, and Lesotho. They argued in an economy that cannot meaningfully use people's labour, depicting school as the way to a better future may be perceived differently by children concerned. We move to another practice of courting strangers through letter writing.

Cultivating Subject Positions Through Letter Writing: Courting Sponsors

Here, we take another subjectivating device, the practice of writing letters to donors or what was seen by one of the caregivers courting the sponsors. Children wrote letters to sponsors informing them of their daily experience. However, some children also noted that they wrote letters to endear themselves to the sponsors. Beyond communicating with donors, letter writing allocates children's specific subject positions and constructs their needs and rights. The story of 11-year-old Alloyce was indicative of the subjectivating tendencies of letter writing. He was enrolled on the Sponsorship Project when he was only a few months old. By the time we met, his mother had been writing letters to potential donors on his behalf for over ten years. Alloyce occasionally went to make illustrations by drawing pictures for the potential sponsor. He had not yet received any support since his enrolment, and he was sometimes given biscuits and juice while others were receiving gifts from their sponsors. He noted, 'I also go to write letters. The other day I saw my friend, Kelvin, he was given a duck, but I was not'.

Similarly, 12-year-old Vicky, also enrolled in the Sponsorship Organization, had been writing letters for many years, but no support had been forthcoming. During a Focus Group Discussion with other supported caregivers, her mother, while laughing, referred to these potential sponsors as 'pen pals', a satire for a relationship that was only virtual but did not benefit her in this case. The subtexts in this humour parodied the relationship the donor or sponsor was supposed to have with the child. It also enabled Vicky's mother to 'humour away' the labour of writing letters to sponsors with no assured support. Such an everlasting 'courtship' affected not only the caregivers but also the children themselves, who worried about why their 'courting' practices had not procured a sponsor. When no support was coming, the local project staff told the caregivers that their children were not lucky, or their faces were not appealing any more. Vicky's mother noted that; There was a time [they] called us and told us if your child was 13 years old and no sponsor was forthcoming, they would deregister them and take new ones because it shows they are not lucky. How can a mother tell her child they are not lucky?

While some caregivers stopped writing letters in resistance, Alloyce's mother continued writing letters. She said that doing so was her way of *chiro-osiep*, loosely translated as 'marketing' herself for friendship or 'courting' the sponsors. She continued writing to make them like her child, even though she had been told that her son's face may not be appealing to some sponsors.

> I have never refused to go and write the letter; I have to [what do, what do you call it?], *chiro-osiep*. I keep the hope that perhaps by the time my child is in class 8, a donor will show up. I see writing the letters as one of the requirements for the donors. When you know God, you cannot give up.

The notion of 'marketing' children in this community was a form of subjectification, I noted during my several years of work, where caregivers would also give me photos of their children to 'market' them. Continuing to write letters when no support was forthcoming was a hopeful investment by these caregivers for a time when they would need the money for their children to transition into secondary school. This was the case for Alloyce's mother, who kept the hope that in the future, Alloyce would be supported when transitioning to secondary school. Diana, another sponsored child, argued that 'if you follow these people [Sponsorship Project] they might help in future'.

This waiting is also strategic for caregivers. For example, waiting by the projects enabled the caregivers to socialize with other caregivers whose children were supported, including engaging in income-saving groups and thus meeting their income needs on their own terms. Karki and others (2022) have noted that vulnerable communities rely on their own networks for emotional and other support, and donor aid is just one of the ways people seek to meet their needs. Continuing to wait by the Project, questioning the practice, but also drawing from it, was part of the resilience of these children and caregivers or their sense of becoming. Here, in reading this waiting as an affect of hope or as a temporality of

that which is yet to come, we see that this waiting is not just as optimism or cruel optimism as we saw in Chapter 6. Instead, it is a sustaining force and part of the resilience of children and their caregivers (Massumi, 2015: 2–3; Ngutuku, 2022).

These children and caregivers exhibited the resilience of a rhizome that even though wounded by waiting forever, 'may regenerate and forge new connections, new lines and pathways' (Leafgren, 2007: 97). It is these notions of resilience and justification for behaviour that are place-based that we must stay attuned to. In taking another line in the contradictions in the cartographies of children and caregiver experience, we must not forget that this patience can be paralyzing or stunting. This is because children and caregivers spent considerable time hanging by the Project (which meant they could not travel from the community for extended lengths of time), sending letters to donors and keeping hope that help would come one day. In the next section, I explore another ubiquitous practice, the process of 'exiting' children from support in projects, another governing and subjectivating device.

The Discourse of Departing as a 'Keyword' in Programmes

In this section, I present the subjectification of children through the practice of 'exiting' children from support programmes. In most social protection literature, existing programmes have been explained using different terms. One of these terms is graduating participants from social protection programmes. Cornwall (2007: 471) sees the notion of graduating as a buzzword used in social protection programmes. Graduation is seen as 'leaving a social protection programme after reaching a well-being threshold' (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2015: 1). In my research, exiting children were termed by the project staff and children as being departed. Used as an intransitive verb, to be 'departed' and its associated processes can mould behaviour, construct identity and thereby influence the experience of children. The term can also constitute a threat and has material agency (Barad, 2007). Departing can also mean loosening oneself from specific subject positions by claiming one's rights. In drawing from context, I continue using 'departing' (i.e. not 'departure') to interrogate the discourses in this practice and the associated practices.

Ageing Children Out of Support

The organizations I worked with presented 'departing' children from the projects as positive especially when the circumstances of the children were deemed to have changed. Departing was also, in some cases, pegged to children's age. Two of the organizations supported children until they were seen as independent or when the circumstances of the children and caregivers changed. This was presented as 'standing on their feet'. However, many of the children in these programmes were 'aged out of support' even though their circumstances may remain unchanged. When I inquired whether there were cases where children had departed from the programme after their circumstances improved, one staff from

the national office of the Sponsorship Project not only countered this but also attributed it to the identity of the caregivers:

> [Sighs] … ooh no, honestly, um, honestly … Honestly, if they do well, they do not want to say. They want to continue staying in the Project.

The absent present in the staff's discourse above, as (Derrida, 1997: xviii) argues, was the identity of the dishonest caregiver who would not report changed circumstances. These organizations are, therefore, not just operating in the domain of development but also intervening in the moral character of those concerned. In the Sponsorship Project, children were encouraged to complete their education before they reached the age of 24. After attaining this age, the beneficiaries were expected to ask the sponsor to support their siblings instead. It was, therefore, clear that the children leaving support did not match these ideals of graduation after attaining the right welfare threshold (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2015)

Departing as Punishment and as a Millstone

Children and caregivers had to comply with the administrative criteria for receiving support so they could remain in the programmes. When a child failed to comply with the rules for participation in the project activities, they were exited from the Project or what was seen as negative departing in one of the participating organizations. As noted earlier, these rules are measures aimed at making children conform to how their needs, rights and identity were defined (Escobar, 1991: 267). In the Mercy Project, one of the reasons for departing children was when children engaged in aggressive behaviour or behaviour that affects the well-being of others. A child could also be departed if they did not go to the Centre for two months without a valid reason. This was presented as a way of ensuring financial integrity because the sponsor was still sending support. These rules of global philanthropy translated into the local context in contradictory ways, and the attendant requirements, therefore, influenced the local space of how support was provided to poor and vulnerable children and, thereby, their experience.

In the OVC Project, a child exited the Project if the caregiver relocated to another site. Some caregivers in an FGD noted that they sometimes did not uptake livelihood opportunities elsewhere for fear of being considered non-resident. As we saw in Chapter 5, children had to keep moving between caregivers to comply with the rules. This movement had repercussions for the children's well-being because some children were not willing to move in with more well-off relatives for fear of losing support, as some children noted.

> We have to be around the home if a sponsor brings a gift, and one is supposed to receive it while posing for a photo to send to the sponsor. If you are away, the project leaders recall you back to the community

Staying in the community was, therefore, surveillance on the support the sponsors were providing, but affected children's well-being. Children, thus, lived in perpetual hope of support, sometimes without guarantees and with the threat of being exited hanging over their heads.

Girls who got pregnant were exited from the programmes because of the (mis)perception that they would influence others negatively. If the pregnancy was between two sponsored children, both of them were departed from the programme. The director of Sponsorship Project revisited the organization's international global principle that children who were benefitting from support were not supposed to be a negative influence on others (see also Ngutuku, 2006: 32). This was the case for Alidi's 21-year-old caregiver earlier discussed; where the project workers took a photo of her pregnant body and shared it with her sponsors, who withdrew support. We should also remember Gabriella's case, discussed in Chapter 4, where her support from the community stopped after she became pregnant. Standing on the moral high ground of protecting the sponsored children, the director of the Mercy Project suggested that instead, when a girl got a baby, it was best to sponsor the small child instead of the girl. One can argue that focusing on the baby sanitizes the organization's moralistic discourse, where the 'rebellious child' is excommunicated from the Project, but the 'young innocent one' is supported instead. This discourse can be read as a form of governing rationality whose epistemological character draws on discourses about the student mothers (Rose and Miller, 2010: 274). These forms of exit affected girls whose reason for getting pregnant cannot be explained only through their negative behaviour. The Kenya Demographic Health Survey 2014 revealed that over 13,000 student mothers drop out of school every year because of pregnancy (APHRC, 2020).

The moralizing discourses on 'sponsored mothers' were not shared similarly by the staff in the Sponsorship Project. This organization indicated that they did not send girls away or 'terminate' them (in the language used by this organization) after they became pregnant; 'We don't terminate them when they are expectant. We do behavioural change training, and she can be sponsored as long as she is in school'. Further, these notions of training for behaviour change are emblematic of the negative discourses on student mothers in Kenya, where the behaviour of student mothers is often seen through the prism of contagion while ignoring other complex issues in student motherhood (see Ngutuku, 2006; Wekesa, 2011).

Like in most of Africa, where pregnant girls do not continue in school because of stigma, support for such girls was not assured. See also Undie et al. (2015).

The experience of Donald (20 years old) furthers our understanding of how children were exited from programmes due to perceived disobedience of programme rules. His mother explained that sponsors supported him for three years in high school but stopped when Donald was in his final year. Donald and his mother were intentionally silent on the reasons for this (Mazzei, 2007). While Donald argued that he was not sponsored in the first place, his mother explained away the reasons and argued that the boy was told to stay at home by the

sponsors. Reading Donald's silence through his sister Lizzy's narrative was, however, revealing as she noted:

> He used to hang out with a friend who was also sponsored and whose behaviour was not good. One day, the friend got drunk and started fighting the teachers, and the teachers implicated my brother in this. The teacher told the sponsors about this incident. That's how they left him 'hanging' with no support.

Lizzy's discourse of how the organization left her brother hanging or what she aptly rendered in sheng (a slang that is a mixture of English and Kiswahili) as *kuhang'isha*, could have two connotations: hanging by a tree without hope or a future or being suspended without information about what was happening. This was indicative of the practices of departing children, which might leave children without options and depart them to the brink. Such power over these vulnerable children and the uncertainty over continued support accentuated their precarity significantly. The examples of these children who were exited from the programmes based on pregnancy (girls) and violence (boys) demonstrate the gendered aspects of control through the programmes of support. Departing children was also used as a threat to children, and departing was represented by some children as a 'thing' with material agency. One of the participants noted the following: 'This thing departing they hang it over our heads every time, even if one makes a small mistake. We are tired of the threat'. By naming the threat of being departed as a 'thing' hanging by the neck or a millstone, the children made visible how the right to support was still contested by the same organization that acknowledged the need for supporting children.

To contextualize how children's voices happen as a rhizome, children's perspectives on being departed were complex and dependent on the context of our interactions (Willemse, 2007).[1] For example, while children in the rules reviewing session of the Mercy Project earlier explored revealed that they did not like the threat of being sent away, this changed during later discussions with children in the same Centre. They noted that being departed enabled them to conform to the rules of charity as they noted: 'This is charity, one needs to adhere to the rules'. In rhizo-analysis, meanings expand into others, and some meanings are important in some contexts and not in others. In the first instance, this narrative might look like complicity with unjust rules and, therefore, a form of subjectification. A further reading of the organization's rules reveals that sponsored children are supported to enact themselves as deserving. Children can, therefore, be said to have adopted these forms of being seen as belonging and as insiders (Isin, 2009: 371). Further comparing with the earlier context of rules review, I also draw some inferences in this cartography of subjectivity – border-crossing in the performance of children's agency and identity. During the rule reviewing session, the children were informed by management that they were free to air their perspectives with no fear of reprisals. The 'recalcitrant', rule-questioning

sponsored child during the exercise of rule-questioning might, therefore, have been a response to this space accorded to children's voice.

We see further perspectives when we bring space as part of the assemblage in this specific agency by children. We can therefore add that the 'rules session', held in a large and seemingly anonymous hall, might have been perceived by the children as a favourable space to express resistance. As the only adult in the hall, I was accepted by the children. In the later discussions in focus groups, where children acquiesced to the problematic rules, we can argue that even though assured of confidentiality, children could have responded to my power as an adult and acted in their own interests. In going beyond adult power, children's apparent complicity with unjust rules also challenged my assumptions. By labelling such agency as ambivalent, I had failed to consider that children, like all agents, can critique from the same system they are complicit with. Therefore, children's agency in this and various other contexts acquired different meanings based on how they perceived the outcomes of their voice. Beyond honing on the contingency and fluidity of agency, these perspectives by children reveal the need for new visions, where children's right to care needs to be protected without fear of being departed.

Departing to Preserve One's Dignity

Children and their caregivers engaged with the discourses and practices in programmes and sometimes walked out of their own will or what I call 'self-departing'. However, such self-departing was not without material effects since children (and caregivers) were left without any support. For example, some caregivers and their children walked out of the Project when they did not get the support they expected. Interactions with children supported by the OVC Project revealed that they stopped making applications for school fee support, and some caregivers stopped submitting progress reports for their children to the organization when they did not receive any material benefits. In the OVC Project, the project volunteers noted that the caregivers accused them of only providing support in the form of a file (collecting data on children). Reynolds's (2014) work in South Africa shows how some programmes only collect numerical data instead of providing services. The agency of self-departing by caregivers and children is often seen as unruly by the programme staff (Fraser, 1989). During one of the visits to the OVC Project, one of the Project leaders castigated the community volunteers: 'Your parents are not serious. They don't care. You should push them more to give you the reports'. However, refusing to provide this information, which would be key in running the organization, is the caregiver's form of agency.

Other caregivers, such as Briana's mother, previously supported by a COA, walked out to preserve her dignity. She stopped going to project meetings because a project staff taunted her as she noted, 'My three children were part of the Project, and one day they were given school uniforms. She was unhappy and started complaining that I was receiving support, and she was not'. My research assistant supported these narratives of subordinate caregiver subjectivity. After

listening to the mother's narrative of 'departing' self, he had muffled her narrative and translated only parts of it. He later explained in English that he was castigating the mother for 'being a big head' (meaning she was stubborn and rebellious). He then (in the local language) told the mother that she should have a 'big heart' (meaning being obedient even to unjust rules) while participating in these projects. Possessing a 'big head' while participating in a charitable welfare programme where a subservient identity was the norm would be a misnomer. An assertive charity beneficiary can be considered an impossibility and an 'excess'. Hall (1996: 5) argued that identities have an 'excess' or the specification of what is usually seen as outside what is expected of that specific identity. Such an excess was seen as a problem and was regulated through being departed.

My research was also implicated in these notions of resistance, where some caregivers and children refused to be involved. For example, Aaron and Mary's caregiver noted that she would not participate in my research if I asked her to give me her national identity card. In reading about such refusal as voice, I learned that this was a response to the behaviour of support organizations that enlist children and caregivers into the programmes by asking for their identity cards, but offer no benefits to the children. Such refusal indexed the perception of organizations in other parts of Africa where NGOs were often seen as appropriating the suffering of populations for their benefit. Dahl's (2014) research in Botswana reveals how NGOs were perceived as feeding off orphans or financially exploiting them. Therefore, these actions by children and caregivers were ways of resisting NGO patronage and, by extension, by researchers.

Conclusion: Subjectivation and Resistance as an Assemblage

Following the discussions in the previous chapter, the discussions in this chapter have illustrated how discursive interventions for children may bring out and make fresh discourses on the needs of children to become intelligible and unsettle the existing ones. I have also demonstrated how children contest or appropriate the subject positions or their definitions of their needs and rights. Therefore, the identities that children and caregivers took within support programmes were shifting and multiple (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1995; Van Stapele, 2014; Willemse, 2012). The actions by children support the view by Hanson (2016: 474) that agency is not a quality a person possesses or not but materializes in decentralized practices in which children participate.

A scenario where children who question the NGO practices were exited from the support programmes might point to an impossibility of agency by poor children and their caregivers. However, in staying as close as possible to the assemblage approach, where things are connected in diverse ways, our primary concern should not just be about what a good or bad agency is or what agency is possible (Johnson et al., 2018: 577).[2] Our concern should be about what these actions do to our thinking, theorizing, and practices and the assemblages within which such actions are situated. For example, by locating this agency in the assemblage of unequal practices by the NGOs in contexts of poverty, we see children's response

to wrongs as agency that reveals the inequalities embedded in the way the interventions provide care. I argue that it is in the interstices of such excesses and children's acts of 'disobedience' to these demeaning practices of support that we could begin to re-imagine our work and practices in programmes of support. Such practices exacerbate 'lived inequalities' and demonstrate the fragility of children's entitlement to support (Donovan, 2015: 733).

Notes

1 See Willemse (2007: 29–40) for a perspective on how meanings and discourses change, based on the context. However, even though she located these multiple possibilities within relations of power, I see them as located also within the agency and politics by children.
2 According to Johnson et al. (2018: 577) ambiguous agency refers to the way children behave in ways that challenge traditional notions of how they should behave, and it is often seen as disobedience. It is also used for those who challenge the traditional norms of vulnerability or victimhood. Normally, in programmes of support by state and non-state actors, this agency is seen as disobedience and is refocused into 'responsible agency'.

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9 Conclusion

Children's Lived Experience of Poverty as an Entanglement

Introduction

In this chapter, I recapitulate and synthesize the key arguments presented in the book. The arguments in this book are derived from research that investigated children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in one of the counties in Kenya. While Siaya or even Kenya cannot be said to represent children's experience in general, exploring child poverty in this context was guided by the understanding that experience is situated in contexts. Therefore, children's experience in this context can be taken as an example of what it means to be a poor and vulnerable child in specific, fluid contexts. Drawing on this site and extrapolating for the broader contexts of poverty and vulnerability in Africa reveals the complexities of children's lived experience. This research is a pivotal addition to the literature on how children experience poverty in the Global South (Lukalo, 2021; Roelene et al., 2019).

The main argument is that as cartography, children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability can be understood from the context of the structural forces of economic and social-relational vulnerability at home. It is also the experience of difficult schooling within a context where schooling is seen as a way out of poverty, but one that does not always fulfil this promise of a better future. It is also an experience of being a child receiving state and other social protection support, where children encounter various representations of their needs and rights. I have, however, shown that children claim their rights as living and reposition their identity in these diverse spaces. These politics, in turn, become part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

The chapter also puts forward the book's contributions to policy, practice, research, childhood and poverty studies, and activism for child rights and well-being. For example, I bring back the significance of the role of the state, and the need to shift away from a client-based approach while showing how children can make claims toward full citizenship. I also draw implications for children's schooling experience, arguing for a need to attend to children's difficult present of schooling, for children in Siaya specifically and Kenya generally, to secure children's desired futures. Finally, in making a case for the need to complexify

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our research and intervention frames, the closing argument is that seeing children's experience as fluid, complex, and incomplete is not just a form of 'theoretical curiosum'. In cartographical thinking, I weave these implications with the key arguments, providing signposts for action in each section instead of blueprints.

Research as a Methodological Intervention: Research Beyond Multidimensionality and Spoken Voice

This research was intended as an epistemic intervention that engaged how we understand and research child poverty and vulnerability. The larger impetus for this research was the realization that while the prevailing rights-based approaches in understanding child poverty acknowledge the multidimensionality of child poverty, the messy, contingent, and fluid experience of poverty is under-theorized and empirically under-researched. Other childhood researchers have also observed a need for childhood studies to go beyond modernist agendas and examine contingent experience (Prout, 2005: 62 and 82). For example, Tisdall and Punch (2012: 253) argued that there is a need for childhood studies to cater for contexts and relationships that are changing and in transition rather than static. In heeding to calls for multi-disciplinarity, useful eclecticisms, and the need for theorizing the messy in childhood studies, I set out to understand children's experience using non-linear methods (Nieuwenhuys, 2013). In doing so, I turned to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) perspectives for inspiration. I found their rhizome thinking that emphasizes complexity, connections, and non-linearity helpful in this endeavour. In reading and putting Deleuze to use in 'my own way' (Mbembe and Comaroff in Shipley, 2010: 655), I have presented children's experience as a rhizome, a cartography and not an essence.

By placing the children's experience in the three interlinked everyday spaces – the home, the school, and support programmes – a key cartographical question guided the arguments in the book. I have explored how it is both to be and to be constructed as a poor and vulnerable child. This question has enabled me to go beyond focussing on the material lack, and from determining what child poverty and vulnerability is. Instead, I have explored and presented the productive entanglements at the interstices of the material and the discursive and other relational and structural dimensions of children's experience. I have also focussed on where and how this experience is formed, enacted, constructed, contested and re-imagined. I show that a rhizomatic reading of children's experience, that goes beyond measurements and shows the entanglement of fluid and contingent factors, exceeds multidimensional approaches to child poverty and vulnerability. Such an approach, as I have revealed, anticipates complex solutions, avoids linear, apolitical and ahistorical analyses, and valorizes children's voice.

In listening differently, this research was also motivated by the observation that children's voice was missing in policies and programmes on child poverty. However, the larger methodological impetus was that even when included, the voice in question is usually seen as the spoken voice, taken as a given. These views on

voice ignore other ways in which children's voice happen. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's corpus of creativity in the proliferation of concepts that engage thought, I devised the concept of 'listening softly' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25; Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: 26–27). I have offered this approach as a potential different science in understanding children's lived experience (Harding, 1991; St Pierre, 1997). In rendering the term 'listening softly' philosophical, I have also avoided defining what it means. Instead, throughout the book, I have shown the potential vistas the concept opens for us in researching and listening differently. Listening softly has gone beyond the sensibility of listening to a specific posture in understanding and apprehending children's voice.

In listening differently, I have demonstrated that the methods we use in research are also methods of intervening in the lives of children. Our theories and research methods also influence and make the world (Whatmore, 2006: 601). For example, the nuances of children's experience were enabled by my one-year ethnographic research and the subsequent field returns, where I watched children's experience as it unfolded and as I moved and was moved by it. Such long-term engagement was also guided by the conviction that children's experience of poverty and vulnerability goes beyond mere statistics and demands 'in-depth listening and long-term engagement' (Biehl and Locke, 2010: 318).

Listening softly also extended to how I approached the field in an emergent manner. Guided by perspectives of reality as a movement and cartography, I listened diffractively and emergently through child-centred and embodied methods. These methods included narrative conversations, photo conversations, semi-autobiographical essays, creative drawing activities, Focus Group Discussions, children's diaries and my diffractive diaries. These methods also enabled me to capture children's voice beyond what children say and revealed perspectives on voice that were entangled with those of adults, voice that was silenced and other processes of silencing.

This complicated listening and telling reveals the vulnerabilities of relying only on the spoken voice. It is a vital contribution to the growing body of literature in childhood studies that advocates for nuancing children's voice (James, 2007; Murris, 2013; Spyrou, 2016). Listening softly also means decentring researchers as knowledge producers and allowing ourselves to learn from children. Bringing all these together, listening softly produces textured perspectives on children's experience and makes new thoughts possible in our research and theorizing on childhood poverty and vulnerability.

By approaching children's voice differently, this research also contributes to epistemic justice for children. Acknowledging children's voice can contribute to childhood studies, poverty debates, social justice and policy for children. Children's voice, which emerged as an excess, also invites a visceral sense of responsibility and answerability to children by the state and other actors. Regarding activism, children's voice invites us to the solidarity of living differently for children and those yearning for dignified childhoods, like the children I interacted with.

Difficult Context of Child Caregiving

I have mapped the context of children's lived and constructed reality, or the spaces of being 'choked' by overwhelming forces (Deleuze, 1995). These are the contexts of economic lack, insecure livelihoods and food insecurity. These are also contexts of constrained parenthood, often structured by the death of children's biological parents, as well as unequal gender relations. While death due to HIV/AIDS has burdened the community capital of care, the discussions reveal that HIV/AIDS is also a material-discursive device for meeting the daily challenges of caregiving. Caregivers, in diverse ways, use their diseased status to claim fulfilment of their needs and those of their children. This experience of difficult caregiving also coalesces at the threshold of a seemingly distant state, as exemplified by the limited social protection support to children and caregivers. In locating these challenges within Kenya's history and politics, we have also seen that the context of Siaya also carries further challenges to caregiving because of Siaya's location as an opposition stronghold in Kenya. For many years, the ethnicization of power, like in most of Africa, has positioned Siaya as an outsider in development processes.

We can, therefore, say that the caregivers are not poor due to their inaction but rather because of a range of daily constraints produced by a specific constellation of personal, social, economic and political relations. For example, skewed gender relations, as well as gendered norms around care, are aspects of the cramped space of caregiving that I explored in this book. I have explored these relations in the context of widow caregivers, or the wives of the grave, *Chi Lilel*. I have shown an assemblage of processes at play in how these women provide care under conditions of complex material contexts. The widow caregivers, in their day-to-day spaces, also encounter various discourses on their sexuality, self-hood and caregiving capacities.

I have also explored the creativity in these complex spaces as children and their caregivers engage and remake their experience. Such creativity becomes part and parcel of children's lived experience and expands our understanding of what it means to be a poor and vulnerable child in specific contexts. For example, the caregivers use discursive and practical strategies to engage the over-coded and dominant views that position them only as vulnerable. They have organized themselves into groups, which act as spaces for philanthropies of the poor (Okwany et al., 2011: 75). These groups are also spaces for conviviality where the caregivers challenge the dominant notions of males as breadwinners and dominant tales that position these women as victims of widow inheritance.

Through their actions and narratives, I have shown how these women were resisting practices by the NGOs that have appropriated women's forms of mutuality by supporting only widowed caregivers. We have also seen the actions of women around what I located as zombie fatherhoods. In addition to behaviour judged by the caregivers and the children as irresponsible, such fatherhoods are also occasioned by precarious livelihoods and 'blocked passages' in Siaya. In

such contexts, even those fathers who want to be alive for their children are symbolically killed by the economic system.

In terms of implications for caregivers' actions and responsibility towards their situation, we see that the actions by these women go beyond notions of subversion of gender power. In pushing their politics beyond Foucauldian power (Foucault, 1980), I have positioned these politics as 'taking lines of flight'. Such politics have a transformative potential. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007: 36) noted: 'to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of the imaginary'. The caregivers' actions can disrupt the status quo and recalibrate, even in small ways, the gendered, economic and social relations of care. I am inspired by Rose's (2004: 280) argument that 'minor engagement with cramped space can connect up with a whole series of other circuits and cause them to fluctuate, waver and reconfigure in wholly unexpected ways'. One action that comes to mind is the need at the community level to address these skewed gender relations that make it impossible for some women to live the lives they choose to live as they care for their children. These actions also have implications for scholarship. This is because caregivers' subversion of difficult life circumstances, sometimes through humour, is often missed in the narratives that miscategorise these spaces.

In terms of required actions by the state, there is a need to address the challenges in these cramped spaces where caregivers have to rework their humanity in these often-dehumanizing contexts. Mbembe and Comaroff (in Shipley, 2010: 659). Adequate social protection measures would be a step in the right direction.

Children's Experience Beyond a Package: Rhizomatic Categories

In endeavouring to locate who is a poor and a vulnerable child? I have stepped in and outside the dominant categories used in understanding children's experience of vulnerability. This attempt revealed the difficulties of tidying children's experience into neat categories. I have taken the entry point of various heuristic categories to complicate these existing categories. Referencing categories while disavowing them served four functions. First, I responded to the knowledge gap earlier identified of the need to understand children's experience 'complexly' without packaging it or fixing it as an essence. Second, I was also guided by the view that categories may eschew diversity and gloss over experience that deviates from the norm of the categorized experience (Reynolds, 2014). Third, by exploring the fluidity of these categories, I revealed the entangled factors and processes at play in the experience of these children. These included material conditions, social and other relations, structures, identities, rights-claiming strategies and everyday subjectivities of children. Finally, in engaging the dominant categorizing practices, I also offered glimpses of how children may occupy simultaneous fluid categories.

When engaging with the issue of street children, some authors have questioned the assertion that categories of vulnerability are fluid. Gigengack (2014: 8) argued that talking about categories and experience as 'fluid' risks overlooking

the structural issues influencing children's experience and that these categories are only fluid from a theoretical perspective. In responding to such a perspective, I argue that presenting children's experience as fluid also reveals the need for paying attention to the contextual differences and idiosyncrasies of this experience. We need to perceive these not just as simple contextual differences; their entanglement and contingencies are key as reflected in the book.

Such an idiosyncratic approach may seem at odds with policy. This is because, in policy, categories define groups who are assumed to share particular qualities, and these qualities make it possible to subject them to the same policy (Bakewell, 2008: 436). This is even more critical since categorizing is often seen as a way of articulating the global agenda for vulnerable children. However, I argue that taking an idiosyncratic approach to policy yields important insights for our contextual understanding of experience of being a poor and vulnerable child. The approach I suggest for policy behoves us not to rely on predetermined maps but to map reality as we encounter it (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013)

I am not alone in this endeavour; others have made similar arguments. For example, in supporting the fluidity and idiosyncrasy of experience of children, Goethals et al. (2015: 87) suggested we approach the context with an attitude of 'not knowing', thereby creating spaces for understanding complex experience. Such ignorance also pushes one to want to know what the context offers. In taking a middle ground, finding out how specific contexts make some experience more plausible than others would be a stepping-stone to knowing children more fully. Such an approach, for example, can make visible some experiences, such as those of children who are seen as 'outsiders', as discussed in this book. Such children, as Bakewell (2008: 450) argues, may be living out of the focus of 'bright lights of policy'. Biesta (1998: 505) calls this sensibility of approaching the context as intervening with an 'ignorance that does not show the way, but only issues an invitation to set out on the journey'. It would also mean heeding Maxine Green's call to be 'widely awake' to the context of children's experience and to respond to any emerging issues. Being widely awake would reveal how children may be complexly disadvantaged, and the processes and non-linear relationships involved (Fels, 2012: 54).[1]

In terms of policy, these minutiae of children's experience, like the one explored in this book, should also assist policy design and implementation agencies and actors in better connecting the larger dots in children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. Such an approach would ultimately invite complex solutions to children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. The Sustainable Development Goal number one of ending extreme poverty in all its forms (including as it affects children) in complex ways comes to mind here. As a signpost on the map, valuable questions for programmes and policy, among others, would be the following: How do we factor in possible changes in the experience of children? How do we capture the fluid and emerging experience of children? What other categories or experience might exist within a particular context? This means that predetermined categories do not drive the agenda but openness to what is available takes an upper hand.

Children's Experience Within Schooling: The Future as Imaginary

The discussions in this book reveal that schooling is one of the sites where the experience of being a poor and vulnerable child was located. Like in most of Africa, Kenya's Free Education policy is not free. The travelling free education policies do not always pass the test of ensuring universal education for poor children (Adesina, 2011). Such policies in some cases serve the needs of diverse actors involved, but also do not adequately cater to the lived experience of diversely located learners. While economic lack poses challenges for children's participation in schooling, the arguments in this book show that it does not write the entire script of the problems that children face. Therefore, I presented this experience with schooling as an assemblage and a messy reality that brought together various material and discursive perspectives. Beyond the cost, other factors in the assemblage included, for example, the quality of infrastructure and the norms about the needs and identity of poor children. There was also a latent expectation that children of poor caregivers should attend low-quality schools, which I termed 'small schools'. An education policy historically and tacitly structured along the lines of inequality also explains children's experience.

Children's schooling experience was also defined by their politics and their rights claims. Poor children's schooling, therefore, is a site of contradictions, where children enacted agency, claimed, contested and shaped their rights to education through everyday practices and their voice (van Daalen et al., 2016; Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013; Sanghera et al., 2018). Through education, children also imagine a different future for themselves and their families. In a context where children's circumstances looked difficult, like eating *onge* [nothing] for breakfast, the 'one day' in the future, when most children said they would eat breakfast, might seem distant. I have, however, argued that constraining children's imagined futures to a temporal future is to miss the message in their hope through education (Ngutuku, 2022). This is because education also fulfils various other needs of children in the present, such as enabling them to belong and access some of their other relational and protection rights, with schools acting as surrogate caregivers for some. Therefore, education as a route to a better future for these children is not just a deceitful promise or cruel optimism where they are chasing a future they cannot attain (Berlant, 2011; Ngutuku, 2022). Coming full circle and re-encountering Naomi, children's voice and reality interrupts our thinking about what education can do even in overwhelming challenges. It can accord breakfast, but also a future for justice, both for the present and for the future.

Children's experience within education invites a visceral sense of responsibility and accountability. We will need to bring back the rights of children into education policies. This means asking the 'right-Rights' questions and, for example, constantly asking: whose interests are served by education policies? Second, one must be introspective about how such policies respond to learners' aspirations for a good life. Children's 'future one day' must be translated into a present with a sense of urgency. There is, for example, an urgency to ensure that poor children

receive quality education instead of relegating them to small schools. Action is also required from other broader levels. Processes like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) come to mind here. I concur with Arts (2017: 59) that 'the nature of the MDGs has encouraged many countries to focus on the easiest to reach'. This has resulted in disregard of the situation, needs and rights of especially vulnerable or marginalized groups. Here, we remember that the MDG focus was more on gender parity, which might be relatively easy to measure. In Chapter 6, I explored how some children were gate-crashing into similar programmes aimed at gender parity. For the SDGs, the lived experience of children explored here reveals that it may be worth revisiting what is meant by Goal Number 4 in terms of equitable and quality education for all or what it means to have no child left behind in schooling.

The Lived Experience of Children in Support Programmes

In exploring the children's experience of poverty and vulnerability, I also took the entry point of support programmes. I have argued that the personal can be a site for theorizing, and like Foucault, the research was a fragment of my autobiography (Foucault, 1980). Entering into the field when the Orphan and Vulnerable Child category was the lens for imagining poverty and vulnerability provided the material for critical reflexivity like the one, I have engaged in this book.

In the absence of adequate state support, vulnerable children and their caregivers can be said to have entered into a trustee relationship with non-governmental actors who were providing for their needs and rights (Okwany and Ngutuku, 2015: 29). I have revealed a specific architecture of governance on the bodies of children through the definition and satisfaction of their needs and rights in these spaces (Foucault, 1979: 172). Support to children meant entering into an assemblage of local and global discourses and being a supported child becomes a part of a poor and vulnerable child experience. The fulfilment of the needs of children through these programmes emerged as paradoxical, as the organizations simultaneously supported but also undermined the interests of children. For example, in programmes of support, Siaya childhoods, like poor childhoods elsewhere in Africa, have been redefined, with some childhoods burdened through rules. I have also explored a range of discourses, including discourses of supported children as weak academically, as feeling entitled to support or as disobedient.

These cartographies of children's experience in programmes have implications for different actors, including state and global actors. First, from a citizenship rights perspective, I am guided by the arguments we developed elsewhere (Okwany and Ngutuku, 2018: 69) that there is a need for a citizenship approach instead of a client-based approach. This will enable children and their caregivers to lay claims to their rights and entitlements even as they receive support. Such an approach should also enhance the capacity of children and their caregivers to

lay claims to their rights and entitlements and hold duty-bearers accountable. Second, problematizing the practice of support also exposes the façade of interventions that purport to protect the rights of children while at the same time disrespecting them through their modes of intervention. I am also inspired by Ansell (2016: 173–174), who argued that, in addressing child poverty in Africa, there is a need to adopt a social justice framework and for a contextually located interrogation of the different processes that interact in marginalizing children. These practices of control by support programmes can be read as part of these marginalizing forces. Interventions for children, therefore, need to be loci for ethical practice and should be guided by accountability to children (Arts, 2017: 59; Moss, 2006). Third, I would add an activist tone to this argument by noting that since childhoods are already burdened with poverty and other types of vulnerability, they do not need to be burdened with surveillance in support programmes. A reflexive intervention would ensure that support to children does not further foster vulnerability.

The arguments in the book also further innervate discussions on children's agency. Instead of reading children's agency as (only) something we give to children, agency emerged as a doing, as relational and in flux (Blaisdell, 2016: 34). I have revealed the creativity of children in challenging the norms in support programmes by enacting alternative subject positions and vitalizing their needs and rights differently (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys, 2013: 6). For example, children engaged with notions of inferior education provided to them through various support programmes and questioned the appropriation of their leisure time by these programmes. They also introduced other rights grammar, including their notions of entitlement to what would usually be seen as charity. They claimed other rights, including visiting relatives and not wearing a school uniform during weekends and holidays. In so doing, they redefined their rights and shaped what their rights ought to be.

Overall, I argue that subjectivation practices in support programmes emerged as incomplete as children and caregivers refused to be appropriated or as they accepted and/or were appropriated. I have read these strategies through Deleuze and argued that it is the experience of living in the 'choked spaces' of interventions sometimes triggered specific forms of agency by children and their caregivers (Deleuze, 1995: 133). If we diffract these strategies through Foucault, we can use children's resistance as a 'chemical catalyst' to understand those relations of power in support programmes (Foucault, 1982: 780). Bringing these two readings together, we can argue that these governing practices in programmes were not always determining and were stuttered by children and caregivers' incomplete and fluid agency. These perspectives engage governmentality literature on its linear sensibilities around the relationship between political rationalities (how the problem to be governed is defined) and technologies of practice [the practices put in place to respond to the identified gaps] (Rose and Miller, 2010: 273)

Hill (2000: 182) cautioned that the governmentality framework does not fully explain how technologies of governance shape experience since children are not

homogenous or a monolithic category. She also noted the complex issues in any one site and that the technologies are multiple. As I have done, looking at these contradictions and diffractive readings of the shifting and fluid children and caregiver agency provides a better understanding of how these technologies influence experience. Indeed, the angle I took in my arguments was that these strategies and sensibilities by children as they respond to these forms of governance themselves rhizomatic, in turn, become part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. In other words, children's agency as they interact with the constructions of their needs and identity defines a poor and vulnerable child.

Staying with the children's agency, children can use diverse material and non-material things to enact their agency. As we saw in Chapter 8, children used the space in the child development centre to critique the rules of the programme. This revealed how subjectivities are formed in complex ways. These interactions and perspectives on how children's subjectivities are formed in support programmes invite scholars to re-imagine children's agency and decentre the subject of childhood studies (Spyrou, 2017). Such agency by children engages some views that posit that children's agency rarely jumps scales (Ansel, 2009). Indeed, perceiving children's agency as cartographic redefines the concept of scale by positioning these scales as tentacular and amorphous (Isin, 2009: 377). For instance, children's actions touch on and reveal the role of programme leaders who translate global policies, the role of the state, action by donors, and how these complexly interact. I hold the view with others, for example, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013), that children's claims-making can shape how others, including the state, provide for their rights. Isin (2009: 381) also added: 'Acts produce actors that become answerable to justice'. As I have demonstrated, these various actors must be answerable to children. Ultimately, children's actions reveal a need to return rights to these programmes in their lived forms (Karlsson, 2019: 73).

Watching the OVC Category: Representing Painful Childhoods

I have explored how the term Orphan and Vulnerable Child (OVC) category has been used to explain or address children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. I have gone beyond the deconstruction of the category, as has been the case with scholarship. In doing so, I was guided by the need to understand how children interact with the category and how these interactions influence their experience. I therefore placed the category in different spaces, watching it for its varied work.

In its genealogy, in Chapter 2, I argued that a poor or a poor and vulnerable child in Kenya, like in the rest of Africa, is a historical child. When placed in its colonial antecedents, a vulnerable child was a creation of the colonial empire, and children were eventually seen as a threat to the colony. Therefore, the structural issues in children's experience were often silenced. In its postcolonial antecedents, the poor and vulnerable child became an icon of nation-building and breaking free from the throes of colonialism. In the wake of HIV/AIDS, the

OVC category performed another function: Sick bodies not only represented a sick state but also a sick economy and a sick future brought about by OVCs. In the global arena, the category consolidated the interests of nations, and more so the Global North, who were motivated by the need to avoid bad futures brought about by Africa's needy, sick and orphaned children. In Chapters 7 and 8, I also placed the category OVC in the day-to-day spaces of the households and programmes of support. The category provided evidence of the subjectivation of children and caregivers, as children sometimes appropriated the category for their material benefit or broke loose from its dominant codings. When used in support programmes, the OVC category can also aid in meeting the needs and rights of children but also in articulating the identity of particular organizations. It can also be a tool for governing children and populations in general.

These arguments about the work the category OVC does are presented at a time when there is a proliferation of research on deconstructing representations of children in policy and practice. Watching the OVC category as I have done in the book enables me to be less judgemental and instead critique the deployment of the category in scholarship with care (Barad, 2012). I pose the same challenge to other scholars: how can one deconstruct but still not lose focus on the well-being and rights of the child in critical, deconstructive research and childhood studies?

In engaging with the category of the suffering orphan and Vulnerable Child, I have represented the agentic, the aspiring, as well as the suffering child. Focussing only on the traumatized and suffering child would occlude other ways of being a child in these spaces. But a focus on children's pain, which also became my pain, has a role. Instead of seeing this as my addiction to children's pain or as an interest in spectacle, seeing the assemblage of factors in such pain holds a better promise (Chouliaraki, 2016). In talking about and researching this pain, the aim should not just be to deconstruct the painful experience of children but to act on it and to transform it. As we encounter the pain of children, we should act responsibly. I am influenced by Barad (2007: 235), who argues that in each opportunity for intra-acting we encounter, we should intra-act responsibly to ensure that we 'contest or rework that which has been excluded from mattering'. Death and children's pain have been excluded from mattering, mainly because of the fear of being accused of sensationalizing pain. While we should not use suffering or the wound to legitimize social justice causes like solidarity with children (Brown, 1996), we should also not forget the injustices implicated in this wounding (Ahmed, 2004: 173–174).

Gendered Poverty and Vulnerability: Re-turning Ayo

I have approached and presented the cartographies of children's lived experience as a rhizome and, therefore, complex. This applies in the same way to the gendered experience of poverty, which is complex. For illustrative purposes, we revisit Ayo, a girl who sometimes had to care for her young sister and missed school. Other axes, such as birth order and level of maturity, illness, and poverty,

also defined her. For example, because she was young, other more able relatives and neighbours could not foster her for reciprocity. Her brother Ben, older than Ayo and also more mature, seemed more privileged because he was fostered for education. At the same time, Ayo could not transition to primary school from preschool because of a lack of school fees, among other needs.

Similarly, I identified gendered rhizomatic permutations in the experience of other fostered children. For instance, fostering would provide dividends for girls who are more likely to be fostered to provide household labour. I have, however, also explored other possible adverse outcomes based on gender, like some girls being mistreated by foster carers. Discussions also revealed that, while girls may be fostered for their household labour, they are also seen as more 'disobedient', and some reported being returned to their biological homes. I explored in Chapter 5 how, in some instances, outsider girls faced less scrutiny from the adoptive families because of the perception that they would not compete for the resources of insider children like boys would do. Girls would also bring in resources like bride-wealth and, therefore, seen as less threatening. I also presented how paternal orphans (both boys and girls) may be more privileged regarding social protection opportunities. In specific contexts, programmes meant to address gender inequalities in education may also further exclude some deserving children like maternal orphans. Being brought up by widowed caregivers, as was revealed in Chapters 4 and 7 even though privileged in programmes for support, has other vulnerabilities embedded within it. This is because there are social relations that govern the sexuality and identity of widowed caregivers.

Therefore, I cannot claim with Crenshaw (1989: 149) that the traffic is only heavy on girls and/or that it is only girls experiencing marginalization at the crossroads. The processes and factors that influence children's experience are not linear but complex, and the nodes around which their gendered experience is formed are sometimes contingent and shifting. They may shift around gender, birth order, age, maturity level or the caregiver's social status, with some children having bigger dividends than others. While gender is still a helpful category in the analysis of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability, it does not entirely write the script for their experience. Therefore, the gendered experience of children emerged as a messy reality and an incomplete process (Grellier, 2013: 93).

The issue here is not to dissolve gender as an analytical tool in understanding children's experience but to underline the various implications of this gendered messiness. First, I favour and recommend an approach that maps how the processes and factors (including gender) interact in each context. Second, this experience must be captured by methods attuned to such messiness. This is, therefore, an invitation to widen the research frames used in capturing the shifting nodes in children's experience and to examine how policy, programmes, and scholarship can respond to the variegated gendered challenges. Third, this awareness also points to a need for an ontological shift in conceptualizing the gendered experience of poor and vulnerable children and a need to explore it as multiplicity. By placing differently located girls and boys in a shifting and fluid

analysis context, we can see the marginalization of specific children from a fresh perspective.

As admonished by Garneau (2017: 331), it is also possible to ask new questions about gendered marginalization in every context without forcing a perspective that girls are more vulnerable than boys and, at the same time, without undermining the feminist project of ensuring equal starting points for both boys and girls. Scott's (2010: 14) view is that while gender is an important category for social analysis, it should remain an open question in different contexts. Approaching gendered experience from a new feminist materialistic perspective, I find Geerts and van der Tuin's (2013: 172) view more inspiring. They argue that 'we should observe cases where the waves of gender privilege or marginality cancel each other or are weakened'. Therefore, these gendered quotidian experiences of girls and boys exceed perspectives from intersectional theory. I also extend a further invitation for research around these complex gendered differences in diverse contexts. Baily and Holmarsdottir's (2015: 841) invitation for a new generation of scholars who endeavour to understand gender inequalities differently is worth paying attention to. This line of thinking is part of emerging research that reveals that we must re-imagine gendered inequalities [and children's experience in this case] beyond intersectionality and perceive inequality as an interference in this and diverse contexts.

Tentative Ending

Inspired by Deleuzean arguments on the incompleteness of a rhizome, I now bring the arguments in this book to a tentative close. I have provided a re-reading of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, not as linear, by recasting it as rhizomatic. The perspectives explored here should enable us to understand children's experience differently. The book also responds to some of the key ontological, epistemological and methodological challenges childhood studies face (Tafere's, 2012: 23). Children's complex experience of poverty and vulnerability does not mean we cannot know these children. It means we can know them complexly and should stay as close as possible to children's lived experience in our work. I am not reifying this way of knowing, but I issue an invitation for others to explore the vistas that have opened up through the arguments in this book. In the Deleuzean philosophy of becoming, ending with the figure of vistas is a good place. We should continue and begin our journey, research and work with vulnerable children with an attitude of knowing them better and differently.

Note

1 Maxine Green used the concept of wide awakeness to imply to be 'vividly aware' and imagine or see those things that one would normally not see. They are moments when a person recognizes things that they had not considered before.

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