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EAST AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY
AND HOW THEY CAN INFORM WESTERN ECCLESIOLOGY

BY

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M.A., Olivet Nazarene University, 2016

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Family Ministry
in the School of Graduate and Continuing Studies
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS BY

Benjamin David Strait

“East African Perspectives of Family and Community
and How They Can Inform Western Ecclesiology”

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THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN FAMILY MINISTRY

Thesis Advisor

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To Sarah Reed, my East African mother

Life is common

—Yusufu

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Preface

When I was first introduced to the concept of Family Ministry while finishing my Bachelor's degree, I was struck by how Family Ministry was more than simply involving parents in Children's ministry or Youth ministry. Instead, Family Ministry became to me a general refocus of what the Church is meant to be. Family Ministry, then, was a rethinking of how we do church as a whole rather than how we work with young people. As a consequence, Family Ministry became about developing the community of the local church.

Interestingly, while studying Family Ministry I noticed a trend in writings and conversations that revolved around explaining the underdeveloped view of community that we, as Westerners, had. It became clear at that point that in order to better understand the role and function of Family Ministry we would need to develop our perspective of the role and function of community itself. And, since Westerners seemed to have an understanding of community that is centered around the individual, it became necessary to explore how other cultures understand community so that we may learn from them.

Unfortunately, academic research into how other cultures function as community is sparse. Specifically, African perspectives of community are largely a mystery to those who have not been exposed to African cultures. Even then, for those who have been exposed to the African culture, achieving an understanding of that culture to the degree of being able to articulate the main ideas behind such understandings of community is difficult.

In several conversations I have had with fellow students, friends, and family, there was a common notion that people in Africa know how to do community better than we could in the West. However, when pressed, I had not met someone who could articulate the differences or explain any practices in detail that speak to Africans being better at doing community than Westerners. Even though they were not able to explain the differences, they still held firm to the notion that Africans had more robust perspectives of family and community than Westerners did.

Therefore, in the interest of developing a more robust understanding of community for the sake of improving the concept of Family Ministry, it became necessary to conduct research into how Africans understand community and family. Beginning with the short list of those who have done some research on this topic, I embarked on the journey that has resulted in this thesis.

The work involved has been greatly assisted by my friends, some of whom I now consider to be family. I would like to thank my academic advisor, Dr. Leon Blanchette, for his outstanding affirmation and encouragement of the work that has resulted in this Master's Thesis, and for his continued assistance in its development and success.

I would also like to express my gratitude to both Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois and to Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya for their strong support of both myself and this research.

Lastly, I want to show appreciation for all those with whom I served, lived, and experienced life in East Africa. Your willingness to teach and demonstrate has been a tremendous benefit to my life, and I am confident that your participation in my life and this work will benefit many more.

As a note to the reader, all names of participants have been kept confidential through the use of aliases.

Glossary

baba. Father

dada. Sister

East Africa. A collection of countries on the east side of the African continent. For the purpose of this thesis, the term “East Africa” will be used to reference the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

extended family. Term used to describe the collection of individuals who are biologically or legally related. An extended family includes multiple nuclear families, and a single extended family can number in the hundreds or thousands.

harambee. An event that is held by an individual or group in order to raise funds for an event, item, school fees, or some other need or needs.

kaka. Brother

mama. Mother

nuclear family. Term used to describe the family unit that is comprised of a mother, father, and their immediate offspring. A single nuclear family typically numbers from around two (the mother and father) to a dozen or so.

Introduction

In the late 1960's, a work written by John S. Mbiti titled *African Religions and Philosophy* was published. That marked the first time that the Western world was exposed to native African thought, spirituality, and lifestyle on a level far deeper than what may be offered by Westerners who had only visited the continent. After all, John Mbiti was a native African himself; a member of the Akamba tribe of East Africa.¹

Since that work was published, along with its more up-to-date second edition, some scholars have disagreed with John Mbiti's interpretation of particular African practices. This was not surprising, as his work was the first of its kind and could only offer generalized perspectives for an entire continent with few specific examples. Nonetheless, his insights are still used as a framework for those who wish to study African thought, spirituality, and life.

As groundbreaking as *African Religions and Philosophy* was at the time, and as well respected as it is today, very little literature on African families has been developed since then. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of books available to Western readers that deal with this particular portion of sociological information. At the time of this writing, only six published books of credible authorship that deal with the matter at hand were able to be found. Also, it was only in the last decade that written works such as *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century* and *African Families and the Crises of Social Change* have been published.

However significant those works were, the inner-workings of African families and communities remain elusive to outsiders. What “family” means to Africans, how it functions, and why it matters are questions that remain to be without answers. Even those scholars who wrote the aforementioned works admit that such books only focus on the external influences to African families and how African families are affected by them,²

1. John S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Halley Court, Oxford: Heinemann, 1969.

2. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi, and Baffour K. Takyi eds. *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2006. 277.

but as of the writing of this thesis no such work has been done that sheds light on African families themselves.

It should come as no surprise that Westerners are typically very fond of African lifestyles and perspectives of community. I cannot recall how many times I have heard “Africans” referred to with reverence for the way in which they interact socially with one another and with outsiders. Unfortunately, as much as we may respect African ways of life and desire to emulate them, we are unable to articulate what exactly “community” means for Africans. We can only interpret what we see and experience, and often times what we observe is only a pale reflection of what actually is. In regards to African perspectives of community, we may notice how they act and talk with one another and make general statements about how “this seems to be how they view community,” but that is as far as our observations may take us. As it stands, African perspectives of family and community continues to be a topic of which the outside world is ignorant.

It was from this large gap in research that this research set out to discover just what “family” and “community” meant to native Africans. To attempt to decipher how every tribe across the continent uses and views these concepts would have been a task far too large for one person, so this thesis had instead endeavored to establish a general view of these two concepts held by the people of the Eastern Africa Region. Depending on where one looks, the East African Region would be comprised of different lists of countries. For the purpose of this research, this thesis focused on the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. These countries share cultural traits that are similar enough that a general understanding of “family” and “communities” may be established. There will certainly be specific people groups that do not adhere to the generalized statements made herein, and this should be anticipated by anyone wishing to do further studies in this area.

Beyond the East African sociological aspects of family and community that were studied, this research also sought to learn how such perspectives may help the Western church develop in its ecclesiology, specifically in the area of Family Ministry. After all, we seemed to hold African views of community to a high standard and trumpet African lifestyles in our churches. It stands to reason that this respect towards African thought should be evaluated that we might better understand what exactly we are trumpeting.

Perhaps we have been misunderstanding African lifestyles and support actions or ways of life that stem from harmful philosophies. Along with that, perhaps there is more to the story than we are being led to believe and delving further into this topic may uncover new ways of thinking for us from which we could greatly benefit.

In summation, this research focused on two primary questions: how do present-day East Africans understand and practice family and community life? And how can East African perspectives of family and community aid Western concepts and practices of ecclesiology? The first question is what guided the field research and scholastic study. The second question is how Westerners may apply what this study revealed.

It should come as no surprise that the questions this research sought to answer are quite large. One could break down the first question into four different sub questions.³ However, it is necessary to remain general in this study since no work has yet been done in this area. This research could have certainly studied one particular tribe, but without a broad framework from which to launch this study it could have easily come to wrong, or even harmful, general conclusions. As such, this study sought to establish that framework from which others may build. It was not an objective of this thesis to make specific claims of one particular people group.

Fortunately, Mbiti and other scholars have already offered a framework from which we may understand African communities. The inherent problem, however, was that such information was already half a century old. In that time, East Africa especially had experienced significant change in that time, from post-colonization of Western powers, Westernization, modernization, genocide, mass displacements, and changing perspectives of gender roles. In light of this, it was pertinent to ask the question, “Do present-day Africans still hold traditional views about the family and community?” It was this question that established the starting point of this thesis, and from which the aforementioned questions develop.

3. The four sub questions would be: What are the day-to-day functions of the East African family? What are the different gender roles within the home? What are the expectations placed on individuals within a community? And how are resources shared within a community?

The claim this thesis will herein demonstrate, from study and research in the field, is that present-day East Africans still hold traditional views about family and community. In demonstrating that claim, this thesis will explain what East African views of family and community are, how families function from day-to-day, and what roles the community plays. After establishing those facts, this thesis will then explain how such views and practices can inform our understanding of Family Ministry, which ought to be a prime example of living in communion with others.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

In the introduction it was made clear that there are few written works that discuss East African families and communities. Even though there have been few contributions to this area of study, those few contributions carry significant weight and offer valuable insights upon which modern research can take place. These contributions discuss the topics of identity in African philosophical concepts, value systems, childcare, and distribution and use of resources in African communities.

East African Concept of Identity

In relation to understanding East African perspectives of family, it is critical to understand the profound interconnectedness of people. In identifying an understanding of “family,” it may be more helpful to work backwards to Western thinking. For example, Western thought begins with the individual, moves outward to the nuclear family, to the extended family, then to the local community, and so on. African thought may best be understood by working in the opposite direction. In this case, identity begins with the local community, moves inward to the extended family, then the nuclear family, and finally to the individual. In fact, it is noted that “The ‘typical’ nuclear family is a rare phenomenon in Africa and is an idea borrowed from Western Culture.”⁴ This is a useful concept to have in mind while taking this journey of thought, especially considering that in the Western world society is built upon the individual, while in African thought society is built upon the community.

It is important for a Western reader to realize that East African perspectives of community and family life stem from deep-seated philosophies, and are not merely abstract expressions growing out of views similar to Western views. It is necessary to begin at the foundation of such thoughts: the East African concepts of identity and personhood.

4. Aderanti Adepoju, *African Families in the Twenty-First Century: Prospects and Challenges*. (New York: Universe, Inc., 2005), 15.

John S. Mbiti was the first scholar who published works pertaining to this topic in a wide scope, and was able to distribute them to Western readers. Of the many profound statements dealing with this topic, the most poignant was Mbiti's articulation of one's personal identity: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."⁵ To illustrate:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsman, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife 'belong' to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsman, even if they bear only their father's or mother's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual.⁶

Without first comprehending this notion, the rest of African thought regarding man as both individual and corporate is difficult—if not impossible—to understand.

Again, it is important to emphasize how this perspective on identity is practically opposite to Western thinking. In the mind of the Westerner, identity begins with the individual. A great example of this is Rene' Descartes' famous line of *Cogito, ergo sum*, or, "I think, therefore I am."⁷ Here, the core of identity stems from within the individual and extends outward. This is in staunch opposition to the African perspective that would say, "I belong; therefore I am."⁸ Thus, for the African, the core of identity stems from the community and extends to the individual.

Similar to the thought that the identity of the individual belongs to the community, Benezet Bujo wrote on the inherently communal nature of the individual in his book *African Theology in its Social Context*. Although focusing mostly on developing a functional Christian theology for Africans, Bujo included reflections on the nature of human existence when he said that "[In] every area of life, the individual has one basic

5. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 106.

6. Ibid, 106.

7 Justin Skirry, "Rene' Descartes," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/descarte>.

8 Sarah. A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*. (Hagerstown, MD: McDougal Publishing, 2000), 42.

responsibility: to strengthen the life of the community, be it clan, tribe or nation.”⁹ In light of this, it is easy to see that the core identity of an individual human being in an African context is inherently tied to the community. In a more pointed manner, the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Africa Nazarene University, Rodney Reed, put it this way: “The individual does not exist except in the life of the concrete community. Without the community, the individual has no life and no meaning.”¹⁰ This may sound well and good, but the practical results of this concept carries consequences at which many Westerners would cringe.

For instance, one facet of African culture that is difficult for Westerners to adapt is how resources are shared in African contexts. In his book discussing African perspectives of resources, time, and social activity, David Maranz began his chapter on “Use of Resources” by stating the following:

In this chapter *solidarity* means “mutual economic and social support, hospitableness, putting group interest ahead of individual interest to the extent of showing a definite bias against individuality, and active participation in society.” In a word, it means interdependence rather than independence. It also means living in community rather than living in social or spatial isolation.¹¹

Putting this into a more specific context, Maranz noted that, for the African, “to have resources and not use them is hoarding, which is considered to be unsocial.”¹² In other words, by having money or food and saving it instead of using it is to be socially irresponsible, especially when one has others around him who could benefit from those resources. Once again, we return to the foundational communal perspective of African

9. Benezet Bujo. *African Theology in its Social Context*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 96.

10. Gift Mtukwa and Rodney Reed, “Christ our Ancestor: An African Vision of Christology and its Moral and Social Implications and the Dangers of Contextualization,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45, no. 1. (Spring 2010): 6.

11. David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*. (Dallas: SIL International, 2001), 13.

12. *Ibid*, 16.

thought that says, "Man is nothing without men."¹³ There is an incredibly strong bond that connects people so that resources are not viewed as "mine," but as "ours."¹⁴

Value Systems

As an extension of the underlying thoughts of personhood, it should not be surprising to discover that East Africa has, as an inherent part of its society, a value system that is quite different than the Western world. This difference is seen in that Africans put more emphasis on relationships over and against efficiency and productivity. This could be best explained as the difference of Western cultures (mostly cold-climate cultures in nature) being more task-oriented than hot-climate cultures (which defines most African groups) that are more relationship-oriented.¹⁵

David Maranz went into great detail to explain the particulars of how African relationships function, and noted that "In Africa, you do not forget or neglect your friends. If you forget them or are too busy to take time for them, words cannot make up for your having put them, in effect, into a category of secondary concern."¹⁶ Leading up to this point, Maranz explained that, in African relationships, material and financial exchanges are not only appropriate but expected, since "A friendship devoid of financial or other material considerations is a friendship devoid of a fundamental ingredient: mutual dependence."¹⁷ This is in stark contrast to Western thought, where "Disinterested friendship is the ideal [...]. Any friendship that includes material considerations is suspect."¹⁸

African relationships function to perpetuate and edify themselves. Mutual dependence is expected and required if one is to be seen as functioning in legitimate relations with others. An example of this is when an African demonstrates her solidarity with others. For example, a friend who shows solidarity by attending the funeral of her

13. David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*, 22.

14. Sarah A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*, 65.

15. *Ibid*, 24.

16. David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*, 74.

17. *Ibid*, 65.

18. *Ibid*, 66.

friends' family member. Attending, helping to fund, and grieving at a funeral is not done exclusively by the ones who are immediately affected by the death. Rather, even a friend participates in a funeral in order to show her solidarity with those who are affected. As it is, the funeral becomes a means to an end; it functions to benefit relations with others by demonstrating solidarity through sharing of resources, giving of time, and mutual emotional expression. This example shows that in an African context, relationships exist for the purpose of relationships and everything becomes a means to that end. Thus, the value system in most of Africa determines what is right and wrong through how something benefits or harms one's relationships with others.¹⁹

East African Family Life Cycle

It is traditionally thought in the Western world that a tree best represents what a family looks like. It begins at the foundation (the trunk of the tree) with one person who establishes the family's core identity. Then, it extends to large branches, then smaller branches off of those large branches, and continues on until it reaches the leaves that represent all current descendants of that original ancestor. Such a picture represents dozens, if not hundreds, of generations separated by time and space over the course of centuries.

This image of a tree representing the life of a family is an excellent example of how Africans understand their own heritage also, but they take it to a deeper level than Westerners do. Mbiti noted that many African tribes still recognize their first ancestor by name, and that “[These] figures add to a sense of common origin, unity, oneness and togetherness, and stand for national consciousness.”²⁰ This tribal identity is so strong that “[A] person has to be born a member of it, and he cannot change his tribal membership.”²¹

Not only is tribal identity strong, but it is also far-reaching. In speaking of kinship, Mbiti said,

The kinship system is like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in a given local group. This

19. David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*. 96.

20. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 100.

21. *Ibid*, 101.

means that each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else.²²

In fact, this perspective is taken so seriously that “when two strangers meet in a village, one of the first duties is to sort out how they may be related to each other, and having discovered how the kinship system applies to them, they behave to each other according to the accepted behaviour set down by society.”²³ Mbiti continued to say, “Such being the case then, a person has literally hundreds of 'fathers,' hundreds of 'mothers,' hundreds of 'uncles,' hundreds of 'wives', hundreds of 'sons and daughters'.”²⁴ In view of this, one can see that the African family tree may be extensive, but it is highly connected even at the leaves.

There is another aspect of the African family that must be taken into account in order to best understand the life cycle of a family. This is the notion that a family is born again continually. In Gikuyu culture, as noted by Mbiti, “In the birth of a child, the whole community is born anew; it is renewed; it is revived and revitalized.”²⁵ Although he only spoke of the Gikuyu tribe of East Africa, given the corporate nature of African communities and the strong interconnectedness, we may safely assume that although other tribes may not explicitly affirm this statement, there is an inherent change in the family when a child is born. Mbiti also said that the birth of a child has an impact on the whole community and not exclusively the nuclear family. To have a child is a blessing which is shared by all and not only the mother; “She has no more claims over the child as exclusively her own; the child is now 'scattered' like her shaven hair, so that it has a hundred mothers, a hundred fathers, a hundred brothers and hundreds of other relatives.”²⁶

This perspective of community means that a family life cycle is continually perpetuated and has no certain beginning or end since it is essentially being born again

22. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 102.

23. Ibid, 102.

24. Ibid, 102.

25. Ibid, 112.

26. Ibid, 112.

over and over as new life enters into it. By extension, that new life is continually growing and reproducing.

Role of Community in Raising a Child

An old African proverb states that “It takes a village to raise a child.” While some have regarded this perspective as idealistic or even harmful in Western contexts since it seems to reduce the importance of the nuclear family,²⁷ it is a fitting description of how life works in East African communities.

As was already mentioned, when a child is born it is not viewed as belonging exclusively to either its biological mother or biological father. Rather, the entire community into which the child is born shares a mutual responsibility for its upbringing. Thus, not only is the nurture of the child shared by all members of the community, but also discipline and instruction are shared by that same group.²⁸ Often times, these support systems external to the nuclear family serve to be the primary support system for children (and elderly).²⁹ One representation of this can be found even amongst a child’s siblings, known as “sibling caretaking.” Thomas Weisner explained this as “children [looking] to other children for assistance and support as much or more than to adults.”³⁰ Going further, he said the following:

Sibling caretaking—older children doing child care, usually in the context of other domestic chores and tasks, under the overall management of adults in the home. In this kind of system children are expected to turn to parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, grandparents, and socially recognized others for help. In turn, they are often expected to assist others in their family.³¹

In fact, the care of children by the community is so enmeshed in African thought that “Mothers provide support and nurturance for children as much by ensuring that *others*

27. Karen E. Jones. “The Family in Formational Years.” In *A Theology for Family Ministry*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 24-25.

28. Aderanti Adepoju, *African Families in the Twenty-First Century: Prospects and Challenges*, 10.

29. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi and Baffour K. Takyi, eds. *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century*, 216.

30. Thomas S. Weisner, *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*. (Westport and London: Bergin & Garvey, 1997), 24.

31. *Ibid*, 23.

will consistently participate in doing so as by doing so directly themselves.”³² This caretaking of children even extends to members outside of one’s own biological family or domestic group, and includes members across other households and families.³³ It even goes so far as to include “child lending,” which is the process of someone ‘lending’ their child to another family to be taken care of for a period of time, and this practice is common amongst African peoples.³⁴

This idea of corporate responsibility stems from the philosophical understanding of the nature of personhood—that is to say social connections.

[...] there is high moral value placed on family social support. That is, shared caretaking and support is not seen only as a convenient, available way to keep one’s household going (although it does assist in that goal); shared support is also viewed as a morally valuable, appropriate way to respond to meeting this goal.³⁵

As a result, it is not surprising that a community as a whole takes on an active role in teaching, guiding, disciplining, and caring for each child. In fact, if we are to take Reed’s previously observation seriously about how the community is what gives the individual her identity and purpose, then for a community to neglect the care of a child or restrict its care to the biological parents is a way of refusing the child its identity.³⁶

Applying East African Community Perspectives to Western Ecclesiology

This is the main purpose of this thesis, and it is also the most difficult to speculate. Given that African thought is so different than Western thought, and many of its ideas directly juxtapose Western ideas, it is easy to be pessimistic about the viability of applying such views in the Western world. Fortunately, there were a few who have already done work that has proven that African thought on family and community can, in fact, be applied in a Western context.

32. Thomas S. Weisner, *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*, 24.

33. *Ibid*, 24.

34. *Ibid*, 25.

35. *Ibid*, 26.

36. Gift Mtukwa and Rodney Reed, “Christ our Ancestor: An African Vision of Christology and its Moral and Social Implications and the Dangers of Contextualization,” 6.

Diana Garland, in her over 600 page work *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, outlined a multitude of thoughts, personal reflections, and stories which emulate African practices of community. For example, her work included notions of an expanded understanding of family,³⁷ expressions of solidarity with one another³⁸, and larger community practices. These aspects of community directly mirror East African perspectives of community. The only thing missing from Garland's book, which would render this thesis mute, was a connection of these thoughts to East African community practices and perspectives.

There are other authors as well who have argued for the rethinking of practices and methods in Western contexts which mirror East African ideas of community and family. For example, in Csinos' and Beckwith's book *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, they discussed the need of having all people participate in the life of a community,³⁹ and even dedicated an entire chapter to exploring intergenerational community.⁴⁰ Another example was Joyce Ann Mercer, who has been known to support the idea that children should have their identity formed by the local church community.⁴¹ However, like Garland, these authors have not directly attribute their thoughts to African philosophy or practices (most likely because current research has not yet been done to make this possible). They are still listed here as possible examples that East African perspectives can, in fact, be applied in Western contexts.

Although these individuals have been advocates for methods that have been at play in East Africa for generations, such as shared responsibility of the raising of children in a local community, they have lacked deeper philosophical foundations and have not had a chance to observe potential outcomes that derive from multiple generations of

37. Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Field Guide*. Downers Grove: (IVP Academic, 2012), 110-112.

38. Ibid, 412.

39 David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity press, 2013), 110-125, 140-154.

40. Ibid, 140-154.

41. Jerome W. Berryman, *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace*. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 179.

practice. Both of these can only come from studies and observations made of communities which have had such methods implemented for decades. As such, exploration of East African thought and practice can help to strengthen and deepen family and community methods already in place in the Western world, while also providing guidance and warning against potentially negative outcomes. It was in regards to the gap in academic research of East African culture and the lack of strong philosophical foundations for Family Ministry that the research for this thesis developed.

Chapter 2

Methodology

African notions of community life, which were discussed briefly in the previous chapter, seem to be an ideal for Westerners, even though it is still unclear what exactly African notions of community life are. This is where we find a large gap in research that sociologists themselves recognize. For example, it was suggested in *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century* that studies be done that investigate various topics of African life including “family interaction” and “the role of religion in family processes.”⁴² Because of this, it becomes necessary to move beyond the theoretical and conduct research that focuses on the functions and practices of African communities and families.

Although some research has been done to this degree, albeit very broad, such research is now almost half a century old. In that time, Africa has experienced major social changes such as post-colonization of European powers, civil wars, mass displacements, modernization, Westernization, shifting governmental practices, economic prosperity and hardships, to name a few. These dramatic changes may very well have had an impact on how Africans understand the role and practices of community, and so it became necessary to assess what – if any – changes have been made, to what degree they have been made, and what the current views are. It was to this end that ethnographic research was conducted in order to discover present-day East African perspectives of family and community. Although a more all-encompassing African view of community may have been desired, it was not realistic at this stage of African studies due to time and resource limitations.

The main question this research sought to answer was as follows: What are current East African perspectives of family and community? This primary question led into the following: What is the role of family and community? What does daily family life look like for East Africans? And what does daily community life look like for East

42. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi and Baffour K. Takyi, eds. *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century*, 277.

Africans? For several reasons, it was determined that the best approach to answering these questions was through qualitative research.

Approach to Conducted Research

Given the nature of the questions this research attempted to answer, an ethnographical research approach seemed the most reliable for this study. Due to the fact that there was relatively little research into this subject, physically relocation was necessary for the purpose of conducting interviews with native East Africans, perform observations, and exposure to the native culture as much as possible. Also, this research was not attempting to develop an answer for a specific question or issue. Instead, it was attempting to establish a broad understanding. This type of goal was best gained from qualitative research methods, which “provides an overall orienting lens.”⁴³ This style of research also relied on multiple sources of data,⁴⁴ of which this research took advantage.

Another reason the qualitative research method of an ethnography was chosen was because this research revolved around a particular people group. By extension, it also relied upon multiple data sources such as written materials, interviews, observations, and personal exposure to the native culture.

Collection of Necessary Data

At the beginning of this research, and before relocating to East Africa to begin the more intensive part of this study, I read whatever written materials I could find that pertained to East African families and communities. Unfortunately, there were only a handful of books available to Western readers that deal with this particular portion of sociological information. At the time of this writing, only six books of credible authorship that deal with the matter at hand have been published. There were other works, however, but they tended to touch briefly on this subject and do not go into great detail. For example, Benezet Bujo’s book *African Theology in its Social Context* is focused on African theology but, he wrote that “[In] every area of life, the individual has one basic responsibility: to strengthen the life of the community, be it clan, tribe or nation.”⁴⁵ This

43. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE publications, 2009), 62.

44. Ibid, 175.

45. Benezet Bujo. *African Theology in its Social Context*. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock

quote by Bujo was the most detailed description he gave of African perspectives of family and community, and most other books related to African life handled this topic with equal brevity.

Once I had collected all necessary information from written sources, research gaps in currently available literature were identified. This helped to prepare more adequate questions and to focus on particular instances of East African life once field research began.

While working on the field, frequent notes were made based on personal observations during the time spent living life with native East Africans. These notes pertained to interpersonal relationships such as various social roles, interpersonal expectations, forms and content of communication between individuals, and general interpersonal interactions. Multiple interviews with individuals, with whom solid relationships had developed, were also conducted. These relationships allowed unique insight into the participants' answers, and also allowed better questions to form.

As a major part of this research, there was time spent living with several families, moving from one household to another, across Tanzania. This provided an excellent opportunity to observe first-hand how families function from day-to-day, what various roles comprise the family, what the expectations are for those various roles, how guests are treated, what the expectations are for those guests, and how East Africans themselves understand "family" and "community" through their interactions.

The data gathered from these observations and interviews were recorded either through the use of a voice recorder for interviews or through written notes.

Analytical Procedure Used to Draw Conclusions

The analytical procedure used to draw conclusions based on the information that was gathered involved comparing and contrasting what information was gathered with the written information that has been already published and distributed.⁴⁶ This was something that was done throughout the research process in order to better process the information at hand, and adjustments were made to the research approach if necessary.

Publishers, 1992), 96.

46. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 27.

By analyzing information in this way, this research either affirmed what has already been written, filled in the gaps created by a lack of proper research, or even offered a correction to outdated information. Because there was such a lack of adequate information regarding East African perspectives of family and community it was difficult to develop a more substantial measure for determining if information was trustworthy or faulty. However, given the accounts of multiple individuals, the information left was dependable due to strong similarities between my observations and conducted interviews, since the validity of qualitative research depends on the agreement of perspectives between participants.⁴⁷

Number of Participants and Why That Number Is Sufficient

For this research, there were 19 participants with whom interviews were conducted. There were several more beyond that number with whom personal relationships developed. This number was sufficient because the combined testimonies and practices of these 19 individuals helped to establish a framework of better understanding of East African families and communities.⁴⁸ These participants were also significant because the majority of these individuals came from different locations throughout East Africa, and those who were not living in East Africa during this research had spent most of their lives as native Africans.

Use of Instruments

For the purpose of this study a voice recorder, pen, and paper were utilized as the main instruments. Data was recorded either through audio or written mediums, and ultimately it was collected and stored in three locations: a personal computer tablet, an external hard drive, and a USB flash drive. These instruments were only available to the researcher in order to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

Ethical Considerations for Research

Due to the nature of this research and the heavy reliance upon verbal interviews, one of the most difficult issues that was faced was developing good questions for the research participants. The most helpful contact in East Africa, Verna, advised caution in how

47. John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 190.

48 Ibid.

questions were worded. Because of the hospitality that is inherent to East African cultures, if any of the research questions appeared to be slanted or assuming a particular answer, then the participant would answer in such a way as to validate the research assumptions even if they are incorrect. It was also advised that by informing participants that they were being asked questions for research, such a statement would be subliminally altering the participants' answers, since they would be more apt to simply agree with the hypothesis rather than disagree with any preconceived thoughts on the matter.

For these reasons, the research had to adapt quickly how to handle interactions and develop questions with the participants in such a way that did not presuppose a particular answer or perspective. As one could imagine, this made developing questions much more difficult because the questions had to remain open and yet still relevant to a specific topic of inquiry. Also, as per the regulations on working with human participants in research post-Nuremberg Trials of 1945 and 1946,⁴⁹ this research had to creatively develop a way of explaining this research to the participants, and inform them of their rights and voluntary status.

Confidentiality Statement

As a critical step in the interview and observational process, each of the participants were made aware by the researcher (through a translator, if necessary) that their identity would remain confidential throughout the entire process of research. They were also made aware of the fact that at no time, either in the present or in the future, would their identity be revealed to anyone except the researcher. As such, any reference to the participants or partners in this research was made confidential through the use of aliases.

Summary

All throughout the ethnographic field research, tools that were appropriate for interviews, observations, and general qualitative-type studies were utilized. The tools were used in order to ensure accuracy of collected data, conformity with research laws governing ethical principles, and confidentiality of the participants.

49. National Institute of Health. 2013.
http://phrp.nihtraining.com/history/04_history.php

Chapter 3

Results

As previous chapters have demonstrated, there was a significant lack of present-day research into the inner workings of East African families and communities. Therefore, it became necessary to take a closer look at how this part of the human race lives. What follows is the result of such field research that attempted to account for the aforementioned gap in current literature on the subject of how East African families and communities function and what purposes they serve.

General Perspectives of Family and Community

East African families and communities function day-to-day as a single living organism. As one participant said, “Life is common.”⁵⁰ What he meant by that was that life is shared among the members of a community, whether biologically related relatives or those who live in close proximity with others. Throughout this research, close interaction with several native East Africans took place, and insights were made into how this view of communal living works itself out in daily life.

As the title of this thesis suggests, this research centered on how East Africans viewed and practiced life within their communities and within their own families. For this reason, this research focused on how East Africans understand family; what functions it serves, what roles various people play, and who comprises family. It also focused on how East Africans understand community in general; what functions it serves, how it is practiced, and what expectations are placed on those involved in their communities.

In East Africa, there is a clear but broad understanding of what community is and what function it serves. People can rely on one another, share resources, and can even discipline the children of other families, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Structure and Functions of Families

How an East African family is structured can be quite broad. For some, when asked about their definition of “family” they answered by saying, “a father, mother, and their children.” This was a very common response from the participants. However, as the

50. Yusufu, interview by author, Grand Rapids, March 31, 2014.

discussions went on, it was discovered how East Africans actually understand the structure of family as far more inclusive. Yusufo, for example, made the following remark:

Each family is different. Some are based on the father. Some involve an elder-child hierarchy among children. Typically, the roles of the family are divided between the roles of the daughters and the roles of the sons, and the parents are the providers.⁵¹

This reflection seems to support the idea that a family in an East African perspective is similar to the Western concept of the “nuclear family.” However, George defined family as not being nuclear, and includes “father, mother, children, adopted children (nieces, nephews, and other biologically-related children who are not the offspring of the parents they live with), relatives, and grandparents.”⁵² In light of this latter perspective, East African families are inclusive of all who are related by blood and marriage.

Similarly, Eugene described the family as being comprised of a husband, wife, and children. He went on to explain that family is also broad, and extends to uncle, grandparents, and other relations. For Eugene, not only did this broad understanding of family extend across many different relations, but it also extended through many generations. For instance, Eugene could go back his family history 500-600 years, recalling oral traditions that have been passed on through his family.⁵³

Although he was from Ethiopia, Eugene’s perspective of family history was one that was encountered in Western Kenya while attending a workshop. During this workshop, several men were asked to name their family’s patriarchs (or, in other words, the fathers in their lineage) five or six generations separated. Without hesitation, all of the men who were asked about this responded with the names of their ancestors. It would seem, then, that East African perspectives of families not only include the nuclear family but extend across varying blood and marriage relations and even historical generations.

In East African culture, the function of families is difficult to differentiate from the function of community in general. There is shared support, shared responsibilities,

51. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

52. George, interview by author, Nairobi, September 25, 2014.

53. Eugene, interview by author, Nairobi, October 15, 2014.

and the overall function of the family is to strengthen the whole family through the contributions of the individuals. These aspects are equal to the aspects of East African perspectives of community in general, and so it becomes difficult to distinguish where the views of families and communities differ. However, there are certain practices that are inherent to families that are not as prevalent in larger communities.

For example, one important aspect of how families function is sibling caretaking. This is the care that siblings provide for one another within a family, regardless of the presence or absence of parents and/or adult guardians in the home. The most common form of sibling caretaking is simply an older sibling carrying her younger sibling on her back (typically this is a female carrying her younger sibling), feeding them, and providing discipline if necessary. One participant, Jennifer, noted that sibling caretaking is very common, and she saw it happen frequently where she lived.⁵⁴

Not only does sibling caretaking involve more domestic practices, but can also include financially taking care of one's younger brothers and sisters. David, who was the oldest child in his family, was expected to give money and support to his younger siblings because he was the oldest and thus responsible for taking care of those younger than him in his family.⁵⁵ In a similar way, James's older brother was responsible for James's school fees and related costs for his education while growing up. When questioned further about this, James acted as if this was a common expectation within families; that siblings would take on financial responsibilities for one another.⁵⁶

In general, as another participant, Ruth, said, "Family members can be called on for help,"⁵⁷ whatever that need for help looks like. Eugene, for example, said that in Ethiopia "The family is the counseling office; both nuclear and extended. If there is a problem that the immediate family cannot help with, you can have extended family help you with it."⁵⁸ Even with spiritual matters the family is responsible for helping one

54. Jennifer, e-mail message to author, September 18, 2014.

55. David, interview by author, Dodoma, August 21, 2014.

56. James, interview by author, Mwanza, August 19, 2014.

57. Ruth, interview by author, Nairobi, August 13, 2014.

58. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

another, since “Not even the pastor is sought for counseling.”⁵⁹ Overall, the family is the main source of spiritual support in Ethiopia.

The extended family plays a special part in East African family life as well. In many instances, when there is a group of people, it is almost impossible for an outsider to differentiate between who is related to whom and how, especially since many people live with extended family members. As such, the nuclear and extended family dovetail into each other in East African cultures to the point that one is almost unable to differentiate between the two.

For example, Ruth said that “[It is] not unusual for people to have their relatives live with them, such as nieces and nephews, and be treated no different than their own children.” In fact, she had a niece who was living with her and her family in Mbeya at the time of this research.⁶⁰ Another of the participants, Edward, had a young girl who was living with his family. She helped with chores that other children were doing, such as taking dirty dishes to the kitchen, cleaning around the house, and other such household duties. She functioned no differently than the other daughters, and so it was thought that she was Edward’s daughter. However, after a few conversations, it was learned that she was his niece for whom they are caring.⁶¹

According to the participants in this research, this type of caretaking by other family members did not indicate some sort of financial or relational trouble within the nuclear family to the point of needing to send one’s children to live with a relative. From the several families where it was witnessed to take place, many times it was because there were more opportunities available to a child if they lived with someone else, or because relatives could use extra help around the house, or for any number of reasons. In fact, during the travels for this research, there was only one family who did not have relatives living with them. Having extended family members live with other extended family members was a very common occurrence in East Africa.

59. Eugene, October 15, 2014

60. Ruth, August 13, 2014.

61. Edward, interview by author, August 8, 2014.

Certainly, however, there are times when the extended family is called upon to care for other family members because of a crisis situation. Yusufo gave an example of this when explaining the roles of extended family:

If my brother died during a war and left some kids, I have to take care of those kids now. For example, my cousin does not have a way to help his kids go to school. If I have some resources, I can pick two or one and have them stay in my home. They eat with my kids, and I help them at school. I pay the fee for the school. You can help relatives, neighbors, widows, those who don't have income who are poor. If you have some income, you can help.⁶²

Even Jennifer echoed these same sentiments when she said,

It is very common to support a relative. I can think of at least five examples off the top of my head of people in this village who have taken in sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and helped take care of them and help with school fees. From the examples I have seen they also treat them as their own children.⁶³

Another participant, George, was taking care of a few of his nieces; paying for their school, housing them, and generally raising them as his own daughters.⁶⁴ These are all examples of how common it is, and even expected, that extended family members take care of one another to the point of raising nieces and nephews.

Roles within the Home

As with any culture, East African communities retain their own ways of household living. When it comes to how a home functions, there were several roles of day-to-day living that were able to be observed and discussed with the participants. From who does the cooking, to who eats when, and to what roles non-family members have within the home, this aspect of East African culture is one that is not easily exposed to the outside world.

Yusufo once gave a detailed explanation of what happens on a day-to-day basis within his household.

For us, each evening, we cook and sit around our table and share our food together. That's how most people do in Africa. Most people eat [with] all the family together. You cannot see someone who is busy in his [own] room, another busy in his [own] room. If it's sleeping time, you go to your

62. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

63. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

64. George, September 25, 2014.

bed and you sleep. If you are not asleep, you are in the sitting room. We talk; tell stories. Even in our culture I have to tell my kids some stories.

I can tell my stories; some history. I can tell them how we used to live many years ago. All those things. I will tell them how I grew up, they will know my name, my father's name, my grandfather's name, up to maybe five generations. They have to know the lineage. They have to know [who] did this, [who] did this, up to five generations.⁶⁵

He went on to explain that he even shared songs from his heritage and taught them to his children, and he shared details about his day. His children even shared details about their days, so that everyone knew what was going on in each other's lives.⁶⁶ Eugene made note of this while describing Ethiopian life when he said that the "core" family has daily interactions.⁶⁷ Rather than one large meal a week, East African families had daily interactions and conversation with one another. While conducting this research, I could not recall ever meeting someone who did not have daily interactions with his or her family, even if they lived in the city where more individualization and exclusion was prevalent.

In more specific roles, James said that men eat separately from women.⁶⁸ His wife, Jill, followed that up by saying, "Women do not allow men into the kitchen."⁶⁹ It was true, actually, that while I was living with James and Jill, Jill was very uncomfortable if I even asked if I could help her in the kitchen. However, another participant, Ruth, not only allowed me to help in her kitchen but walked me through how to make some authentic Tanzanian dishes. As time went on, Jill did allow my translator, David, and me to help her water her garden. Interestingly, James, Jill, and Ruth are all from the same tribe and grew up with one another. At the time of the interview, they were living in separate cities.

Even Yusufu made mention of how the kitchen is not where men belong. When asked about different roles of the home, he even said that if men are found in the kitchen

65. Yusufu, March 31, 2014.

66. Ibid.

67. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

68. James, August 19, 2014.

69. Jill, interview by author, Mwanza, August 19, 2014.

they will be told, “This is not your territory.”⁷⁰ In my own experience, while preparing for a large community event in Nairobi, I went into a large kitchen where about a dozen women were working to prepare the food. Once I stepped in, many began to laugh or give me quizzical looks. Even one of my good friends made a comment about how strange it was that a man had come into the kitchen.

On the subject of separate expectations for men and women, Edward once explained that women in the house eat separately from the men.⁷¹ This was witnessed many times while traveling, and sometimes guests would eat separately from the entire family either during a different time or in a different location. Even when it came to bathing, the male leader of the household would bathe first, and then the other men, followed lastly by the women. Fresh water would be prepared for each person, so bathing in the morning took some time depending on one’s access to water and available bathing locations. For example, there was a time I was staying with a family and had my own bathing facilities and could bathe whenever it was convenient for me. There were also other times when I stayed with families who would share a single bathing space, and so I had to wait until that space was available before I could clean myself.

In regards to the role of raising children, as was already discussed earlier, there are particular roles within the home that should be addressed. For example, older siblings are responsible for taking care of the house if the parents are away. Yusufo explained this using his own family as an illustration:

If you are the firstborn, you [also have] some responsibilities. For example, I have a daughter; she has almost 22 years. But, like today, me and my wife are not home. [My daughter] is home right now as we are talking. She has to take care of her brother and her sisters. She can cook for them, she can even wash clothes for them. She can even do different things, she can take care of the other siblings because [she is the oldest].⁷²

In a very general sense, the oldest siblings are to take care not just of their younger siblings, but are also responsible for looking after the household if the

70. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

71. Edward, August 8, 2014.

72. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

parents are away. This practice of sibling caretaking is not uncommon for Westerners.

There was one particular role within the household that became of special interest in during the research, and that was with what is known as a “house help,” or “house helper.” Quite simply, a house helper is someone who is hired by a family to help around the house with cooking, cleaning, and other household duties. When asked about how common this practice was across East Africa, Jennifer said, “It depends on the economic status of the family but if they can afford it then yes, it is common to have a “house girl” to help with cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the kids.”⁷³ In many homes, it was difficult to determine if the house helper was a member of the family or some acquaintance who was hired. Most of the participants treated them like their own children; paying school fees, allowing them to live in the house, and generally raising them as their own child. This type of treatment was not always the case, as Jennifer confessed that “Some are probably treated like family and some not so well.”⁷⁴ Although house helpers may be treated poorly, when questioned about this practice Ruth said, “House helpers are treated just as their own children, and it is expected that they be treated that way.”⁷⁵ Even if a father and mother still have children living in the house, they may still hire a house helper.

While working with Edward, it was noticed that he and his family had a house helper who stayed in the same room as the daughters, and she had been living with them for nine months. When asked, he said that it was very common to have a house helper in homes where the parents and/or other adults in the home work during the day.⁷⁶ However, it was not determined why exactly people hire house helpers in East Africa, whether it was for economic reasons, scarcity of time, a status symbol, or to help those who are in financial need.

Overall, the various roles and responsibilities we see in East African households

73. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

74. Ibid.

75. Ruth, August 13, 2014.

76. Edward, August 8, 2014.

tend to be gender-divided. House helpers, for example, were always female since that role involves cooking, cleaning, and tending to younger children. Even general ideas of work were divided by gender. As Yusufu said,

There is some job or occupation which belongs to the boy, and this work belongs to the girl. You see, it's like you cannot tell your daughter to lift up those heavy things or to do hard work. It's like they are different."⁷⁷ He followed this up by saying, "[As a man], you have to provide food. When [the food is at home, the women] manage the work."⁷⁸

Yusufu was communicating the nature of East African households to divide responsibilities between men and women.

Distinguishing between Biologically Related Family and Non-Biologically Related Friends

Although there appears to be a strong link between those who are biologically related, it is fascinating to note that the way East Africans practice everyday living involves role playing that is exercised by both biologically related individuals and by non-biologically related individuals. In other words, it is difficult for an outsider to distinguish between who is family and who is not based on how East Africans treat one another.

In fact, many East African communities include neighbors and other community members in their definition of family. In Ethiopia, for instance, Eugene explained that "If a person is not biologically related, but has responsibility, they are family."⁷⁹ So, if one person is responsible to another, then they are considered to be family. Conversations with Yusufu confirmed this reality when he said that even neighbors can be considered family just as blood relatives are considered family.⁸⁰

This treating one another as family is not just a reflection on how a community functions, but it also carries over into how people within a community refer to one another. When asked about this, Jennifer remarked that "People refer to each other a lot as *dada* (people often say "habari ya dada yako?" - how are you my sister?) or *mama* or

77. Yusufu, March 31, 2014.

78. Ibid.

79. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

80. Yusufu, March 31, 2014.

baba or *gogo* (grandmother) even if they are not biologically related.”⁸¹ However, she did go on to explain that the community in which she lived had a lot of interconnected blood relations. In other words, Jennifer had difficulty knowing whether two people were related or not, so she was unable to distinguish if these types of greetings took place between people who were not related due to the fact that so many in her community were related by blood.

This view of including non-blood related individuals as family was not something that was immediately admitted by East Africans being interviewed. At first, many of them defined family as “mother/father/children” or simply those who are blood related. But, as the conversations developed, the use of family-like language was used to describe the connectedness of those who live in community with one another. For example, Ruth said that “non-blood or [non-]marriage-bound people cannot be called “family.”⁸² Later on, however, she brought a friend of hers over to her house and said that she calls her “family” because of how close they are.

Sometimes the use of family language is seen as more exclusive. In conversations with George, he explained that in Africa, non-biologically related individuals can be accepted as family, but only if they have been deliberately accepted into the family.⁸³ In other words, not just anyone can be considered family just because of proximity but only those who are intentionally accepted. He did admit, however, that it was very common for people to be a part of a non-biological family.⁸⁴

He then began to elaborate on the notion that those groups who share a common social bearing considered themselves as family. As an example of this, he referred to those who lived in the Kibera slums. He said, “They are poor, neglected, not cared for, and no one else shows interest, so they unify under that social oppression.”⁸⁵ In light of

81. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

82. Ruth, Mbeya, August 8, 2014.

83 George, September 25, 2014.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

this shared social circumstance, those who lived in the Kibera slums saw each other as members of the same family and looked out for one another.

Interestingly, a conversation took place with Eunice who also remarked on those who live in Kibera. Having lived there herself, she mentioned that people who lived in Kibera *used* to identify as one group and show solidarity with one another, but they do not any longer. Instead, they have begun to hide their identity in order to avoid the negative stigma of being seen as poor, inept, or destitute.⁸⁶ This does not detract from what George was explaining in reference to a family being a group with a common social bearing, but it is important to note the sociological transition the people in Kibera have made in regards to their own communal identity.

Eunice herself had described her own process of development when it came to the concept of “family.” She said in an interview, “When I was a child, I thought: father/mother/children, [...] also, extended family; uncles, etc.” In other words, when she was a child she understood family to consist of those who are biologically related. She went on to say that, after being educated, she sees “family as the ‘setup of believers that fellowship together.’” Similar to what George was saying, Eunice identified family as a group of people who shared a common social bearing, which was different than saying that family was a group of people who are biologically related. In this case, a family can be a group that has a religiously-centered social bearing.⁸⁷ This mirrors what George, an active member in his local church, referenced in regards to how he viewed his church as being a family since they all shared a communal identity and common beliefs.

As another example of the inclusive nature of East African family language, while I was living with one of the participants, his daughter of about nine years old began referring to me as “Uncle Ben.” The reason why she did this was difficult to determine; whether this was because I was older than her and so she referred to me as “uncle,” or if it was because I was a guest and she simply wanted to show respect. Either way, it spoke to the inclusive nature in which family language was used within a community between those who were or were not be biologically related.

86. Eunice, interview by author, Nairobi, October 22, 2014.

87. Ibid.

In a specific example of the way family language is used and applied, we can look at a certain tribal practice. In the Luhya tribe of Kenya, Eliza once explained, the young men who are circumcised at the same time are all given a special name (as a group). For example, every boy being circumcised in that ceremony would be named “Wakesa,” or any other name, from that point on. After that moment, the tribe sees them all as brothers.⁸⁸ Even if these young men are all related by tribe, the event of circumcision is a moment in which these young men become brothers, whose bonds are deeper than a friendship.

While talking with Eugene, he was asked about the Ethiopian social groups known as *idires* and if they could be considered “family” since they are organized groups of connected people who take care of one another. He said that “Family is closer than *idire*. Members of an *idire* are not considered ‘family.’”⁸⁹ In other words, although certain social groups may appear to be as close as a family, and may even function as a family would, such groups would not be seen as a family in and of themselves.

In an interview with Violet, she was asked to explain what she understood “family” to be. She answered that “Family is people related by blood, or [family can be] just friends. But, generally, the first thing is people who are related by blood.”⁹⁰ In other words, the main people who are considered family are those who are related by blood, but non-blood related individuals may also be considered family.

When clarity was sought by asking if friends can be considered family, Violet further explained by saying, “Yes, friends can be considered family. Because you might have an attachment with them. You may have expectations of them that are met through the attachments you have with friends.”⁹¹ This further supports the notion that East African perspectives of family are based more on how individuals function and interact with one another than how they are related (or not related). This is not much different than Western culture, where non-family members are able to be active participants in

88. Eliza, interview by author, Nairobi, October 21, 2014.

89. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

90. Violet, interview by author, Nairobi, September 16, 2014.

91. Ibid.

each other's life just as much as, if not more than, blood or marriage-related family members. However, Violet touched on a unique concept in East African culture since East African culture, as was explained earlier in this thesis, relies heavily on the community of the family. But here, Violet was drawing attention to the fact that non-family members can be seen as family even if they are not related.

While in Tanzania, it was noticed that it was common for people to greet one another as *kaka* and *dada* (brother and sister). When Violet was questioned about this, and if it was a common occurrence in Kenya, she answered, "I think it's just a Tanzania thing. It's not that common even in rural areas [of Kenya]. They call each other by name, or 'mama so and so' but it's not that common."⁹² When that answer was followed by asking if it was common to refer to close friends using family-like titles (such as "sister," "brother," "mother," and "father.") she said that it was common.⁹³ In this case, the distinction here would be that in Tanzania people refer to even strangers with family titles. However, in Kenya people only refer to family members and close friends using family titles. This supports what the other participant, Jennifer, said about how interactions were between the people at the village in which she lived.⁹⁴ It is plausible that this is due to the cultural difference between Kenya and Tanzania and not due to the impact of Westernization in Kenya, because many rural parts of Kenya are not yet influenced by Western ideas of the family that would restrict family titles to those who are blood-related.

Functions of Community

From what was seen, heard, and experienced, East African families and communities serve to sustain and care for the individuals who function within them. From the aspects of communal discipline, to the sharing of resources, to the general group identity, East Africa is built from the foundation of mutual responsibility to one another. This perspective was seen through the observation and evaluation of several core aspects of East African communities.

92. Violet, Mbeya, August 13, 2014.

93. Ibid.

94. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

Communal Discipline

One of the roles of a community is that children are to be disciplined. Although the parents do play a role in the discipline of their children, it is also the responsibility of the community to raise a child. As Yusufu explained,

[If] I can see your kids are doing something wrong, I punish them. I tell them “Don’t do this!” I can even beat them. In the evening, I can tell their dad what happened.

It’s not good to see kids doing something wrong and say, “Ah, I’m not in charge” and do nothing. No! If you don’t rebuke them, then in the evening the villagers will say, “Those kids did this and this. Where were you?” If you were there, you would be in trouble because you did nothing.⁹⁵

Everyone in the community is responsible for raising a child to the point that if discipline is not exercised when a child is doing something unacceptable, then the individual who witnessed it and did nothing would be held accountable.

This sentiment was also echoed by Ruth who said, “Children are expected to treat men and women in their community as their own parents, and neighbors can discipline children.”⁹⁶ Not only do members of the community treat the children within the community as their own and can administer discipline, but the children are to treat each adult member of the community as one of their own parents.

Another of the participants, Jennifer, explained that in some rural parts of Kenya there was a practice referred to as “caning,” where “Teachers, watchmen, parents, etc. [carry] around a stick and [use] it to discipline a child.”⁹⁷ She went on to explain that, from what she was learning, “This is a ‘shame-based’ culture so they really believe that shaming a child will result in them being more disciplined and behaving ‘better’ be it in school or at home.”⁹⁸ Even though she admitted she had only heard of this practice of “caning” in stories, it reflects the common perspective that any member of a community may discipline the children, and that children are to show respect to all adults as if they are the children’s own parents.

95. Yusufu, March 31, 2014.

96. Ruth, interview by author, Mbeya, August 8, 2014.

97. Jennifer, September 9, 2014.

98. Ibid.

This practice of communal discipline is not reserved exclusively for children, however. In Nairobi, there were frequent stories of women who would be stripped naked by a group of men and forced to stand in the middle of an intersection. This was a form of public discipline in the eyes of many people. The women would be those who were dressed in provocative attire, and so a group of men would publicly shame them for not dressing more modestly. This was a way in which members of the community, even strangers to one another, would discipline other members of the community for not acting appropriately (or, at least, what was considered appropriate within the local culture).

Another example of discipline within a community may be found in what is known as “mob justice.” Everyone who is a part of a community takes ownership of what takes place therein, and so everyone has the right to discipline another person if that person is acting contrary to the acceptable lifestyle(s) or practices of the local culture. When a person acts contrary to what is acceptable those who are a part of the community take it upon themselves to administer disciplinary action against him or her as a form of correction or punishment.

It is difficult to say for certain if there is a difference between rural and urban areas, but a general lack of trust towards local and national governments was noticed when it came to maintaining order and administering discipline. A natural outcome of this distrust was that members of local communities would take upon themselves the responsibility of maintaining order and administering discipline. Sometimes the actions of discipline would be quite severe, such as burning a man alive who was caught stealing. Whatever the action, the idea behind it was the same: the responsibility of administering discipline and maintaining social expectations rests upon all members of the community.

Sharing of Resources

The kind of interconnectedness and mutual dependency shared by East African communities can certainly be complex, but they come with several notable benefits. These benefits include availability of, and access to, needed resources; mutual care and upbringing of children; and a significant amount of human contact.

The sharing of resources is one that many Westerners struggle with when they visit East African communities. In my own experience of travelling with teams, this topic has led to much frustration and even humorous situations. In the West people tend to be

more possessive of their resources and ownership is an important issue. In East Africa, however, the general sense of ownership follows the idiom of “What is yours is mine, and what is mine is ours.”⁹⁹ This stems from the collective identity of the community that says, “I am because we are; and because we are, therefore I am.” The sharing of identity also extends to the sharing of resources.

In a conversation with Eliza, she mentioned that Africans never have a budget set aside for things.¹⁰⁰ This is due to the fact that “What is gotten is used.”¹⁰¹ For example, once someone receives a paycheck for his work others may come to him asking for financial assistance paying for a bill, for food, for school, or for a vehicle. Since he has the resources available, he gives them the money. Although he is in possession of it, the finances he holds ultimately belong to the community as a whole, and so it is used quickly due to the many represented needs around him. Eliza went on to say that this concept derives from the shared concern of “How do we help [this other person] before ourselves?”¹⁰² In other words, how can a person contribute to helping the needs of his community before helping himself?

An example of this concept, in terms of financial sharing, can be seen on many mission trips to East Africa. As for myself, I have been on several short-term mission trips where finances were extended in order to help a local church or community that my team visited. However, as time went on, my team began to question how the given money was being used. This was because we would give finances for a certain project or purpose, but then when we returned a couple years later the money ended up being used for some other purpose. As it turned out, once we gave money to the local people a need would arise within the community and so the money went to address that need. This could very well be the result of what Maranz explained as a more immediate need arising

99. I have not heard this quote attributed to any one person. But, while preparing for and performing my field research, this concept was very prevalent.

100. Eliza, interview with author, Nairobi, October 21, 2014.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

and thus taking priority over available finances (whether budgeted for something else or not).¹⁰³

Sharing of resources is not tied exclusively to finances. It extends to all aspects of life. For example, a family of Westerners who lived in Nairobi used to own a very nice grill. One day, a friend of theirs asked to borrow it. As time went on, they never received the grill back from the friend who borrowed it. As it turned out, that friend then loaned the grill to someone else, who then loaned it to another person. By the time the family knew what had happened, the grill had exchanged hands at least three times. The family was not upset, however, because that was what they expected when they lived in an East African community. Then, when the time came for the family to need a grill for a camping adventure, they simply borrowed another grill from a friend of theirs. And so the cycle of resource sharing continued.

Another participant, James, lived in a house surrounded by two other homes. These three homes were owned by the same man, and each family shared the same outdoor lavatory and bathing area. Although there were three homes, there were at least seven families living in that small community at one time, with each family having a single bedroom within a house. This was another example that sharing of resources includes finances, materials, and even space and accommodations.

Yet another example of the sharing of resources includes my personal experiences while doing field work. While I was travelling across the area and staying as a guest in people's homes, I used a pair of slippers when walking around indoors. Accompanying me on my travels was my translator, a native East African named David. On one of the first days we were on the field I noticed David had gone into my luggage and put on my slippers. At first I was surprised, since I had been looking for them that morning. However, thinking back on what I had learned regarding East African culture, I realized that this was an expectation of living within an East African community. As time went on, I began to expect David to use whatever I had brought along, even if it was my own bath towel and soap.

103. David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*, 14-20.

In a similar experience, I had once loaned a green jacket of mine to a close friend. It was a cold day in Nairobi, and I noticed that my friend was only wearing a T-shirt. I gave him my jacket so that he could remain warm, since he was going to be outside a lot that day. Because sharing resources was expected in that culture, I never expected to receive the jacket back. In fact, I fully expected to see it being worn by someone else on the street while I was doing shopping someday. Although I never saw someone else wearing it, I also never saw the jacket again.

Naturally, one can expect that this kind of resource sharing can easily lead to scarcity. After all, if a person's paycheck is used up before he gets home, or he keeps lending out his clothes for others to use, then it follows that one can easily end up having very little to live off of or depend on when an emergency or large event comes up.

While the sharing of resources and necessity of sharing what one has with others tends to perpetuate a continual issue of scarcity for the individual, George referenced several options East Africans have for taking care of one another when scarcity of resources leads to problems. For example, he talked about a particular type of "Family," known as a *chama*, that is a group that comes together to empower themselves. It is a collection of individuals who each contribute financially over a length of time and at certain intervals. When one individual has a great financial need, they make a withdrawal from the pool of finances. George mentioned that the Equity Bank in Kenya started this way and now has over 9 million accounts.¹⁰⁴

He also talked about a similar organization, known as *Ukriso na Ufanisi wa Anglicana*, or "Christianity and Prosperity of Anglicans." This group functions like a bank, however one must be a Christian in order to join. The organization is broken down into small groups of five people who meet regularly. Each person makes a contribution regularly, and if a need arises they meet and send contributions from the collected funds.¹⁰⁵

In Ethiopia there are similar systems in place. In talking about the resource benefits of East African communities with Eugene, he discussed in greater detail the

104. George, September 25, 2014.

105. Ibid.

functions of an *idire* or *ichurb*. These groups are formed social groups in the cities for the purpose of helping people to stay connected to each other even if they move away from their families who live in the more rural parts of the country. They organize funds for funerals and weddings, help those who are sick, or those who are otherwise in need of assistance and can disperse funds immediately upon need. Every member of these groups gives a certain amount of money monthly in order to be a part of it. These groups are in place to help others in times of need “since they are so busy, but still need to have needs taken care of via social connections.”¹⁰⁶

One other means of financial assistance that is common in East Africa is what is known as a *harambee*. Basically, a *harambee* is an event in which someone holds a community fundraiser to help pay for a large expense. Jennifer once described a *harambee* she attended for a friend whose aunt had passed away: “She had a hospital bill around \$6,000 [USD] and the hospital was refusing to give the family the body until the bill was paid. So the community organized a *harambee* and they raised the money.”¹⁰⁷ Jennifer also said that she had seen *harambees* raise money for churches, a student’s fees for school, funerals, and weddings.¹⁰⁸ In fact, another participant named Weston explained at one point that he had held a *harambee* to raise funds for his college tuition¹⁰⁹.

In talks with Yusufo, he summarized the attitude of East Africans in a more general sense when it came to living in community and helping one another. He said, “In Africa, one person is sick and all the neighbors will come. They will take him to the hospital.”¹¹⁰ The aforementioned groups and practices, such as the Equity Bank, *Ukriso na Ufanisi wa Anglicana*, *harambees*, an *idire*, and an *ichurb* are all representations of this general philosophy that East Africans share: others offer assistance whenever another member of the community needs help.

106. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

107. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

108 Ibid.

109. Weston, interview by author, Nairobi, October 12, 2014.

110. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

Yusufo also elaborated on this concept by sharing his own personal experiences between living in East Africa and living in the United States:

Every month we provide for [my brother] somehow. My [older] brother was helping me with \$100 per month for 3 years while I lived in Kenya and my [older] brother lived in the States.

Even in Africa, if you are a friend of mine I can come to you and say, “Hey, I need food items, if I can borrow maybe 100 dollars to buy food. When I get money I will give you back. You can give me 100, I can buy all I need. When I get money, I will return it to you. Here in America, if you want to borrow money you have to go to the Bank and return it with interest.

Here [in the city where he lives], we are many Africans. But most of them, I know where they live, I go there to visit. Even some come to visit my house. We can share. We say, “This company, they are hiring and you can apply.” We can share, we know each other. If I have a party, I will invite them. They will come with money, or food. If I have a marriage wedding, they will come. If we have a conference in this church, we will invite them. Even those outside of [this state].¹¹¹

This example shows how East Africans maintain their connectedness and share not only resources but information, time, energy, and life in general. Many times, in fact, the sharing of time, resources, and life overlap. When questioned about this, Jennifer described this concept in the following way:

Yes, definitely the social interaction and use of goods is communal. [...] people regularly share foods, goods, finances, and labor to assist one another. Whenever you go to a house they always offer you chai (Kenyan tea) and if it is a meal time they would insist that you sit down and eat with them even if they didn’t know you were coming. And if you turn down chai or food (and don’t eat a lot of it) then people can get offended. Saying “I’m not hungry or I am ok or no thank you” is sort of frowned upon and really hard for someone to understand when they offer you food and chai. It is also not uncommon at all to ask for money to help with different things.¹¹²

In light of this, it is not only common for people to share goods and time with one another, but it should be expected that people will ask for money, food, or other resources.

Expectations of Living in Community

111. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

112. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

Within a community, there are certain expectations that everyone lives by and are held to. These expectations serve to strengthen the community by keeping everyone united, knowledgeable of each other's lives, and ensure that everyone within the community is taken care of.

There is a practice in Tanzania called *Nyumba Kumi*, or "The 10-House Rule" that Edward once explained.¹¹³ This 10-House Rule outlines the shared community responsibility between 10 neighbors or "houses." As part of the rule, whenever someone from the community is going to have a visitor the host needs to inform the other nine "houses." That is one aspect of the rule, and Edward did not elaborate much on the concept except to say that it is used to ensure that neighbors within a small local community look out for one another and are involved in each other's lives so that no one is "cut-off" or neglected by the rest of the community. He also said that it is an old rule, but it has not been used much. He also mentioned that it is beginning to be used in the cities of Dodoma and Arusha.¹¹⁴ In fact, while I was staying with him and his family, Edward explained to me that his neighbors were told I was coming, even though I was only staying with Edward and his family.¹¹⁵ This was an exercise of *Nyumba Kumi*.

In conversations with Jennifer, who worked in rural parts of Kenya, she was asked if she had ever heard of this 10-House Rule. In response she said, "I have heard of *Numba Kumi*.¹¹⁶ I think from a friend who used to work in Tanzania."¹¹⁷ If nothing else, this supports the notion that rules governing more communal living are beginning to take place in parts of East Africa. However, it seemed to be mostly in Tanzania since Jennifer followed up on that comment by saying, "I don't believe that system exists where I am."¹¹⁸

113. Edward, interview with author, Dodoma, August 8, 2014.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Because Swahili is still primarily spoken rather than written, some words can be written in different ways. Here, Jennifer and I spell the word *Nyumba* differently, even though it is the same concept.

117. Jennifer, September 18, 2014.

118. Ibid.

Another one of the participants, Ruth, explained that neighbors could go visit each other any time. Making plans to visit were unheard of – people came and went freely.¹¹⁹ This was indicative of the view that East African members of a community are expected to visit one another so regularly that making plans is almost a foreign concept. As an example of this, while I was staying with Ruth and her family, we took a day to walk in to town when Ruth and her husband Eman stopped during our walk to see who had died in a local funeral. While we were waiting there, Ruth began spending time with some of the people who were attending the funeral.

Later on, Violet, who was also there, was asked about the incident. Specifically, she was asked if the people who were present at the funeral would expect Ruth to show up to it as well. In response, Violet answered, “Yes. To show up and be a part; to take part assisting and all that.”¹²⁰ Violet was also asked if that sort of community responsibility – to take part and assist – was because Ruth was related to the person who had passed away. “No.” Violet answered, “Just a neighbor.”¹²¹ Throughout the everyday lives of people, others were not only welcomed, but expected to share in the life moments of one another. This was a lived-out example of the reality that “People are automatically included in everything happening in their presence, whether it is a conversation, a meal, a television program, a sport being played or most anything else.”¹²²

Although that funeral was in Tanzania, another participant later explained the process of attending funerals in her country of Kenya. She mentioned that it was expected that one not only show up at the funeral, but that he wail with those who are grieving. She went on to further explain that if he did not cry and wail at a funeral, then those attending would assume that the person died due to some ill will on his part because he was not wailing.¹²³ Although it was not determined if this was a particular tribal or local

119. Ruth, August 8, 2014.

120. Violet, September 16, 2014.

121. Ibid.

122. Sarah. A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*, 55.

123. Interview with a domestic violence worker, Nairobi, October, 2014

community practice, it did illustrate that there are expectations put on those who live in community with one another.

When the topic of communal expectations was discussed with Yusufo, he elaborated on several aspects. He was questioned on the role of neighbors in each other's lives; what responsibilities they share, and what is expected of them. He answered with the following:

If you don't have relatives who live close, then neighbors are in charge. If something happens to your house, the government workers will ask the neighbors, "What happened? Where were you? What did you do?"

[...]We also have those people who have different behavior. When you are in trouble one day, you will see no one at your house because you did not help others. [...] If you get in trouble, they won't help. They say, "Ah, it's him. Leave him! We are going to see how he does. It's him who is [in trouble]." [No one will help you] because you do not participate in different activities.¹²⁴

Yusufo then went on to illustrate how mutual care in everyday life takes place:

Example, we are 28 families. On Monday, we will go to ___'s farm and help out. On Tuesday, we will go to ___'s farm. On Wednesday, it's ___'s farm. We will cultivate, plant, etc. at those places. On Thursday, ___'s farm (etc.). That's what they can do. They help me, and the next day they help another one. The people share; they work together, help each other, etc.¹²⁵

Eugene shared a similar perspective when referencing life in Ethiopia. He talked about how his father was a farmer, and invited widows to come and stay at his house during harvest. The widows would then help with the harvest, and they would be housed and fed during that time. He said that such practices were common in Ethiopia, and that people generally sought to help one another. As another example, he said that if someone was sick, others were responsible to help. Also, if someone had a funeral or wedding, others were expected to take part.¹²⁶

Eugene did mention a difference between the urban and rural areas. In Addis Ababa, an urban center in Ethiopia, he mentioned that the strong influence of Western worldviews (through television, movies, and other media) had caused people to

124. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

125. Ibid.

126. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

disconnect so that no one greeted each other anymore. However, he did buffer this by saying that they still came together for weddings and funerals.¹²⁷

Community Care of Children

Yet another common practice within communities was the mutual care of children. Mary, another participant, said, “If I am gone, my neighbor can take care of my children.”¹²⁸

This is supported by Eliza, who said that orphans are cared for by community¹²⁹.

Although speaking specifically about orphans, Eliza was still communicating the same truth that the whole community is responsible for the upbringing of its children. In fact, Eliza explained that in the Luhya tribe’s culture, taking a child to an orphanage was an abomination because the child should not be cared for by those outside of the community, unless the child was born under incest.¹³⁰

Interestingly, Violet was taking care of a young girl at the time of this research. While she was discussing the connectedness of those within a community, she elaborated on her experiences:

I have a girl who is 12 years old. We are not related, but I take care of her during school and holidays, she comes to my place. I take care of her shopping for school and all of that. She calls me “mom.” But we are not related in blood, and our cultures are so different. In school she is proud that she has a mom somewhere. Someone she can call a friend, or have a girl talk with. It happens.¹³¹

When asked if this was common or unusual, she answered, “[This is] not unusual. In the beginning it would be weird, but as days go by people are embracing it. Many people are doing the same thing, just embracing someone else’s child they are not related to.”¹³²

Once again, this illustrates the notion that communal caretaking of children is an expectation of the community. Even though people may not be biologically related, there

127. Eugene, October 15, 2014.

128. Mary, interview by author, Nairobi, October 15, 2014.

129. Eliza, October 21, 2014.

130. Ibid.

131. Violet, September 16, 2014.

132. Ibid.

is still the sense of responsibility for raising the children of a community, no matter what type of connection one has with the children.

In terms of the expectations society places on people who live in community, there is a growing difference between those who live in rural areas and those who live in urban areas. Violet described this difference by saying that, in the city, “People only think about ‘me.’ And rarely do they come together to [get to know one another]. They don’t even like knowing who they live next to. The children get to know [those around whom they live], but adults in this culture just keep to themselves.” She contrasted this with country living: “But out in the village / rural areas, almost all people know each other.”¹³³ When questioned if the cultural expectation of living in the city was that you kept to yourself, and if the cultural expectation of living in the country was that you participated in the life of others, she answered with a simple, “Yes.”¹³⁴

Further into that discussion, Violet even confirmed that the expectations of community participation was so strong in rural areas that others in the community will gather together and have a meeting with someone who was being too reserved and private, and they would tell that person that they need to participate and help more in the community. She also confirmed that in the city, people simply ignored one another.¹³⁵

Hospitality towards Guests

One common theme that surfaced when Westerners were questioned on East African community living was how East Africans are incredibly hospitable. Although those Westerners who were questioned could not articulate an example of this, this research found it to be true that East Africans are very hospitable towards one another and guests.

While traveling around Tanzania and staying in the homes of various hosts, much was learned of how guests are treated in the homes of both the wealthy and the modest. There were certainly variations to the observations, but the underlying attitude towards guests were consistent throughout interactions with host families while conducting research.

133. Violet, September 16, 2014.

134. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

When questioned about how visitors are normally treated, David remarked, “Visitors are treated as family.”¹³⁶ This seemed to be true in my personal experiences, since I was able to do things with the family and even had expectations placed on me (such as Jill not wanting me to be in the kitchen with her).

In households where there is only one basin with which to bathe, the guest usually bathes first (after the male leader of the house). I had an interesting occurrence with this on my first homestay, where the family had kept re-heating the water in the basin over the course of an hour or so as they waited for me to take a bath. However, I was not used to this practice and my translator did not mention that they were waiting on me. When I questioned him on why no one had said anything to me about the water being ready, he remarked that the guests can bathe whenever they want to, and from that point on I noticed that household schedules function according to what the guests would like to do and when.

Although the participants did not comment much on how East Africans practice hospitality towards guests, there were many experiences from which to draw some general conclusions. For example, in all of my visits my hosts went out of their way to ensure that I was comfortable, well fed, and had opportunities to do whatever I wanted to do. In one instance, my host ran out of money while trying to feed my translator and myself and had to borrow money from friends and neighbors in order to purchase more food. I was shocked at first, and even talked with her about leaving early. However, it was quickly learned that East Africans love hosting guests in their homes, as this host ended up arguing with me because she wanted me to stay even longer. This example proved the following to be true:

In most hot-climate cultures, hospitality automatically means taking in and caring for the traveler. If you are visiting someone’s home, they take full responsibility for your needs. They house, feed and entertain you, and you are not expected to pay for anything. You are under their roof, and this means you should have no needs that they cannot provide.¹³⁷

136. David, August 21, 2014.

137. Sarah A. Lanier, *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*, 74.

In several other situations, hosts would purchase extravagant gifts for their guests – gifts that were purchased beyond the normal means of income for some hosts. In all circumstances, however, those who were hosting made a genuine effort to build relationships with their guests, even if it came through large personal expense.

Given the relatively little research done in this area of study, it would be presumptuous to make statements regarding the nature and character of specific East African families and communities. In light of this, it is helpful that Yusufo said the following:

Even here in America, some families are good and some are not. That is common everywhere. We have some bad people who have bad behavior. We have those people even in Africa. Even if we have a common culture, you cannot say, ‘All people are like this.’ We have people who only take care of themselves.¹³⁸

Even if many aspects of East African life are to be admired, they are not representative of the entirety of how everyone in that culture lives. There are exceptions to every rule and observation, and this is true even in East Africa.

138. Yusufo, March 31, 2014.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the findings of field research done in East Africa that focuses on the perspectives people in that area hold of family and community. This chapter also examines gaps in the conducted research, proposed improvements for future research into East African families and communities, and what future research can focus on by building off of the conclusions of this thesis. This chapter ends with proposed ways in which East African perspectives of families and communities can benefit Western ecclesiological practices in order to benefit the communal nature of church.

At the beginning of the research process, it was assumed that East Africans still hold traditional views and practices of family and community that are reflected in works of research that are several decades old. During the time since those works were written, East Africa had undergone significant changes including European occupation, a large influx of Western thought, rapid modernization, fights for independence from Europe, genocide, growing poverty, and mass displacement. It is safe to assume that such events would cause a shift in perspective on a number of issues including the roles and functions of family and community. However, this thesis demonstrated that although Western terms and concepts related to families and communities may have been referenced or directly said in interviews, the way in which life is currently practiced within the East African family and/or community reflects those traditional views and not Western views (except, to a limited extent, in a few Westernized urban areas such as Nairobi).

Findings in Research

The objective of this thesis was two-fold. First, given the lack of current research into East African views of families and communities it would be greatly beneficial to answer the question of what current views East Africans hold of families and communities. Second, this thesis explored the practices of East African families and communities such as roles within the home, how sharing of resources works within a local community, expectations individuals place on one another, the shared responsibilities of a community as a whole, and even some practices and perspectives of hospitality.

This body of work answers these questions through field research that involved interviews with East African participants (both those who have lived in East Africa but currently live in the United States, and those who have lived in East Africa their entire lives) and observations while living with East Africans, and through referencing the limited number of scholars who have touched on this subject in the past.

The research that is presented in this thesis supports the hypothesis that present-day East Africans still hold the traditional African concepts of family and community that are discussed in the literature review. And, even though East Africans may use Western concepts when defining family (for example, that a family is comprised of a father mother, and their offspring), the ways in which family is practiced in East Africa is more inclusive and does not distinguish between nuclear and extended family members.

This thesis also answers, to the extent that the research was capable, how present-day East African families and communities function. It offers a glimpse into the day-to-day life of East Africans that other modern research has not yet explored. Although modern scholars and researchers have focused on East African ways of life, this thesis demonstrates that their focus has been on external influences to East African families and communities and have not explored the internal practices therein.

East African families and communities observe many practices and perspectives that are to be admired. There are several positive aspects such as the frequent exchange of goods and finances, the interconnected nature of relationships, and the attitude towards hospitality. There are also some concepts that can be taken too far and have led to problematic situations, such as how communal discipline has given rise to mob justice mentalities and public humiliation.

In terms of East African families, it is faulty to claim that the nuclear family is the center of East African family life. The extended family members are so integrated into the lives of one another that it would prove more helpful to do away with the terms “nuclear” and “extended” and simply retain the term “family” because the nuclear and extended families in East Africa dovetail into one another so much as to almost be indistinguishable. And, if they are distinguishable, there is no tangible benefit to such a distinction. All members of a family are expected to be involved in each other’s lives so

profoundly that they even raise one another's children and take responsibility for their education.

Looking at the findings of this research, it shows that present-day East Africans still hold those traditional views of community. Every person sees themselves as an inherent and integral part of a larger whole. As a result of this perspective, they give up their possessions for the benefit of another, they willingly share their time with one another, they sacrifice beyond their normal means in order to ensure the comfort and care of another person (even a stranger), and they also expect that each person is an active participant in the life of the community.

There is a definite give-and-take aspect to this understanding of community. One cannot be a parasitic participant who only receives help and never offers to help another. One must live up to the same expectations which he applies to others, and he is expected to apply those expectations to others. There is no such thing as an isolated individual in an East African community.

The many examples that have been shared only scratch the surface of what life in East Africa is like, but the same foundational truths remain constant. That is, everyone is dependent upon each other and the growth of the community is of utmost importance. There is no individual accomplishment without the community. As the African proverb says, *Iwapo unataka kwenda haraka, nenda peke yako; iwapo mnataka kwenda mbali, nendeni pamoja*. In English, "If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." The overall success of the group is inherently tied to the participation and sacrifices of the individuals therein. This is the practical conclusion of what was observed and experienced.

Difficulty in Research Techniques

Due to the fact that this research was conducted within the scope of a Master's thesis, it is not as exhaustive as it would have been if it were conducted for a doctoral dissertation. The time spent on the field conducting research was limited to only around five months, whereas research done for a more intensive academic purpose might have extended to a year or more and may have even involved a team of researchers given the limited amount of research that has been conducted on this topic thus far.

There was also difficulty in gauging the authenticity of the responses of participants. Although the more time that was spent with participants allowed for more authentic answers, it was explained before entering the field that people's answers may be altered in order to appease my expectations. This was due to the hospitable nature of East Africans; that they would give the answer they thought was desired by the research in order to make their guests happy.

Because of the possibility of disingenuous answers, considerable care was taken in developing questions for the participants. There was also some difficulty in explaining the purpose of this research to the participants, although the required guidelines as set forth for research projects involving human participants were adhered to. It should be noted that such research guidelines were developed in the Western world following World War II as a result of the Nuremburg trials¹³⁹, and likely did not account for different world cultures where revealing the intention of the researcher could, in fact, alter the responses of participants and thus make the results of the research disingenuous. In the end, the questions that were asked of the participants were as unassuming as they could be made. But, given the nature of East Africans, it was possible that some of their responses were altered in order to be more hospitable to an outsider and guest.

One other difficulty in the research techniques was the time required to develop relationships with the participants to the point of allowing for genuine conversation and honest answers to research questions to take place. One should note the times of the interviews and recognize that many of them took place either in the middle of August 2014 or, as a good number of them, the middle to end of October 2014. This was the last half of the time spent in East Africa. The amount of relationship building that became a prerequisite to an interview was something not expected, and resulted in limiting the amount of interviews that could be conducted.

Gaps in Research

Although the title and scope of this thesis includes a handful of countries, the true scope of this research took place within two countries: Kenya and Tanzania. The intent of the research was to visit other countries during the time in the field, but other responsibilities

139. National Institute of Health. 2013.
http://phrp.nihtraining.com/history/04_history.php

and limited finances did not allow for that to take place. As a result, the conclusions set forth in this thesis are limited to those two countries, with only one or two participants representing the views of other countries such as Ethiopia and, to some extent, Uganda.

As a consequence of the previously mentioned need to develop relationships with native East Africans before conducting interviews, there were a limited number of interviews that could be conducted during the travels in Tanzania. Those interviews were restricted to those who were hosts. There were a couple instances where conversations with others took place, but those interviews were terse in nature due to not having adequate time with them to develop the necessary relationship beforehand.

At the conclusion of my research it was recognized that the results that had developed could only be applied generally, since there are no doubt stark differences from family to family, tribe to tribe, and country to country. As a consequence, it was difficult to draw conclusions that seemed too specific. An example of this was when I stayed with two families who were from the same tribe. One family was receptive to my helping in the kitchen while the other was hesitant to the point of not liking me being around the kitchen during meal preparation. Whether this was due to my being a guest, a male, or both, I was not sure. Also, it was difficult to tell which family, if either, was an anomaly in that culture; to allow a male guest to help in the kitchen, or not to allow a male guest to help in the kitchen, or perhaps neither.

Proposals for Future Research

While conducting this research, it was noted how expansive the gap is in East African sociological studies. Even the availability of works written by native authors was scarce. For example, only two books relating to African concepts and practices of family were located in one of Kenya's most prestigious educational institutes. Even then, neither one of the books dealt specifically with East African perspectives.

From this point, it would prove helpful to study more intensely the day-to-day functions of a typical family. Even here there would need to be a distinction between rural and urban families, and even a distinction between tribes. For example, the study of a Maasai family who lives in rural Northeastern Tanzania would be much different than a Luo family who lives in rural parts of Western Kenya since they serve different

functions, have assimilated Western practices to different degrees, hold different positions of political authority and influence, and have different historical roots.

There have been written works that dealt with the changes facing African families due to Westernization and modernization such as a change in how many women entered into the workforce, how sibling caretaking was affected, and how mothers and fathers who work outside of the home affected the functions within a home, as examples.¹⁴⁰ However, these only account for changes facing the nuclear family. What has not been researched is how modernization and Westernization affect the extended family as well.

How East African Perspectives of Family and Community Can Inform Western Ecclesiology

Within the last decade there has been an increased interest in Western churches to focus on what is known as “Family Ministry.” This term and its concepts have stemmed from a response to “silo ministries,” where portions of the local church population are segregated according to their age group and/or life stage.

Those who have advocated for Family Ministry shared common themes of intergenerational involvement, shared responsibility on the part of the local church community for the raising of children and youth, and increased participation on the part of each member of a local church for the benefit of the local church as a whole.¹⁴¹ Whether those who have advocated for these changes focused on children’s ministry, youth ministry, or another area of church ministry, these individuals have proven to be proponents of changes that reflect common East African practices found within their families and communities.

Because of the increased interest in Family Ministry among church leaders, an awareness of East African perspectives of families and communities can aid proponents of Family Ministry in understanding various practices that have been a part of East African culture for generations. An added benefit of this awareness is that church leaders

140. Thomas S. Weisner, *African Families and the Crises of Social Change*. Yaw Oheneba-Sakyi, *African Families at the Turn of the 21st Century*.

141. Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Field*. Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). Michael Anthony, and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*.

do not need to devote so much time and effort in developing new concepts and practices since they can reference concepts and practices that already exist and are practiced on a large scale.

Specifically, proponents of Family Ministry can learn much from the East African practices of establishing expectations for family and community members to care for one another, the inclusive definition of how one defines “community,” shared responsibility for the raising of children, and sharing resources between members of the community. Western churches can greatly benefit from these practices that are common to East African lifestyles as the interest in Family Ministry continues to increase.

Expectations for Family and Community Members

As we see demonstrated in East African culture, setting expectations for family and community members serves to promote the overall health and vibrancy of the local community. By adopting the perspective that all individuals are to be cared for, and that everyone has a part to play in caring for one another, the whole community becomes stronger and much more flexible as responsibilities for care are distributed among all of the members and not exclusively held only by those in positions of authority.

In East African communities, the care for one another is so strong that the need for professional caretakers is almost nonexistent. There is no need for professional counselors, and the only need for outside help is for those who have medical or spiritual expertise. Other than those individuals, the local community itself maintains the responsibility of ensuring the care of each of its members.

By adopting this perspective of community, churches in the West could be places where community members take ownership of their roles as ministers of the Gospel of Christ. And, in doing so, they promote an atmosphere of discipleship where everyone is caring for one another. This could likely be practiced to the point where the local church can sustain itself even in the absence of a pastor because the local community has taken upon itself the responsibilities of spiritual and emotional care.

Inclusive Definition of Community

Although this aspect refers to changes in terminology, words are powerful devices. In East Africa, by using family titles in reference to other individuals who are not biologically or legally related implies a bond and level of comradery amongst even

strangers. Using such terms makes for a fundamentally different relationship, since it refers to the way or depth to which people are connected and not merely their identifying characteristics (such as a personal name).

In the West, this inclusive use of family terminology may not be that easy to promote. However, the concept of including others into the local communities is certainly beneficial to the West's understanding of what Family Ministry should be. It should be inclusive to even strangers, and all who come into the midst of the local communities should be welcomed not as outsiders but as fellow participants.

By not allowing themselves to take advantage of a more inclusive understanding of community that invites the outsider or the visitor, local churches stunt their own growth as Christian communities. Without meaning to, the community establishes a barrier to entry by treating visitors as strangers who need to be accepted through some sort of process whereby they adhere to the local community expectations. Certainly there should be a level of expectation for members of a community, but that should not bar an outsider from being included.

Shared Responsibility for Raising Children

In East African communities, it is demonstrated that the community shares a responsibility for raising children. As such, the entire community is unified in ensuring that the culture of that community is passed on to the next generation.

As a Christian culture, the Church in the West could benefit from this perspective by relying on the whole community for the spiritual development of children, and not exclusively the biological parents. There is a greater chance that the beliefs and practices will be passed on to the next generation. This also speaks to the level of adhesion the local community ought to have, in order that the children may live in a local culture where everyone shares the same beliefs and expectations.

Although this view does not abolish the need for there to be teachers or instructors, by establishing the expectation that all members of the community are responsible for the raising of its children will impress upon the members the deeply communal nature from which the Church in the West can benefit. The faith is meant to be

passed on, as per one of the most basic tenants of the Church.¹⁴² By sharing the responsibility of raising its children, the Western church can better fulfill this mission.

Sharing Resources between Members of the Community

It is established in the early parts of this thesis that sharing resources in the manner in which East Africans practice would be difficult for a Westerner. However, there is something to be said for the non-possessive way in which East Africans view their own resources. Resources are viewed not as personal objects to be used according to the judgment of the individual, but they are viewed as belonging to the greater community to be used according to the judgment of that community.

By relieving themselves from the strong individual attachment to things or finances, the churches in the West can better respond to needs that are represented within those local communities. Food could be given to those in need. Transportation could be used to help a mother pick up her children from school. Finances could be used to help a struggling family during a difficult time. Facilities can be used to assist an event or gathering, or to provide shelter.

It seems natural that Westerners would have a very difficult time adopting to the notion that we can share our towels, soap, and slippers with one another, but the idea of sharing resources and not hoarding them is one that can help the church in the West function more like a family and less like a business. It can also help to promote a fuller understanding of Family Ministry, which builds off of the concept that the Church is family.

Conclusion

This thesis has identified the existence of a wide gap in research relating to East African families and communities, conducted research into the current perspectives and practices of East African families and communities, explores areas of research still lacking in this field, and also demonstrates ways in which the research herein can benefit Western ecclesiology by using Family Ministry as an example.

It is not clear how well East African perspectives will be received by Westerners, especially since many ideas such as sharing resources and the shared responsibility of

142. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

raising children strongly conflict with modern Western understandings of personal responsibility and childcare. This is especially true given that Western and East African perspectives of identity begin at opposite ends. However, just seeing a glimpse of East African culture and thought can have an impact on how Westerners see themselves, their communities, and the ways in which they live.

**Appendix A:
Olivet Nazarene University IRB Approval Letter**



Project Title: East African perspective on family.
Principal Investigator: Ben Strait
Co-Investigator:
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Leon Blanchette
IRB Protocol Number: 05132014_02U Strait

Type of Request: Original Continuing Amended

IRB Determination:

Exempt from Full Review:

- Project involves normal educational practices in established educational settings
- Research information does not identify human subjects in any way; directly or indirectly
- Research involves information that is publicly available
- Other:

Expedited Review

Full IRB Review

Disapproval

Approval: Above minimal risk Minimal risk

Provisional approval (*pending permission from administration of site where data will be collected*),*

Date of review: 05.13.2014


Dale L. Smith, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board, Chair

5-13-2014
Date of Approval

IRB approval will be effective for one year beginning at THE DATE OF APPROVAL. If the year elapses, the applicant must file a continuing request. Any changes to the research as authorized by this confirmation must be amended by the researcher and submitted for IRB amendment approval.

*Once approval has been granted from outside organizations, this documentation should be forwarded to the ONU IRB. No data should be collected prior to site approval.

If you have questions regarding review procedures or completion of this IRB application, contact the **Chair of the Institutional Review Board at IRB@olivet.edu or by phone at 815-928-5142.**

One University Avenue, Bourbonnais, Illinois 60914-2345 (815) 939-5011 www.olivet.edu

**Appendix B:
Africa Nazarene University Approval Letter**



AFRICA NAZARENE
UNIVERSITY

19th August, 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Ben Strait

This letter is to certify that upon review of the letter of confirmation from his degree granting institution, The Olivet Nazarene University, and a vetting of his research proposal, Africa Nazarene University (ANU) has agreed to an affiliate relationship with The Olivet Nazarene University for the support Ben Strait while he performs his research project, entitled, "East Africa Perspective on Family."

Mr. Strait is expected to complete his research in less than six months. ANU is hopeful with this letter of support he can be granted a research permit from your institution to begin this very timely and necessary research.

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact our University.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rodney Reed'.

Prof. Rodney Reed
DVC, Academic Affairs

Appendix C: Transcripts of Participant Interviews

While working with the participants, there were certain criteria that developed for establishing participant designations. As such, each of the participants has an alphanumeric designation that briefly describes their background. Each designation is broken up into the following parts:

12233-4

1. Gender: Male (M) or Female (F)
2. Life Station: Unmarried adult/adolescent (UM), married without children (WO), married with children (WC), married with youth (WY), single parent with children (SC), or single parent with youth (SY)
3. Residence: Kenya—rural (KR), Kenya—urban (KU), Kenya—transitory (KT), Tanzania—rural (TR), Tanzania—urban (TU), Tanzania—transitory (TT), Uganda—rural (UR), Uganda—urban (UU), Uganda—transitory (UT), Africa—rural (AR), Africa—urban (AU), Africa—transitory (AT)
4. Number

Table 1.1. Participant Designations

Alias	Designation
Yusufo	MWCAT-1
Edward	MWCAT-2
James	MWCAT-3
Eugene	MWCAT-4
Eman	MWCAR-1
Bradley	MWCAU-1
George	MWCAU-2
Weston	MWCAU-3
David	MUMAU-1
Peter	MUMAU-2
Christopher	MSCAU-1
Jill	FWCAT-1
Mary	FWCAT-2
Ruth	FWCAR-1
Harmony	FWCAU-1
Eunice	FUMAU-1
Jennifer	FUMAR-1
Violet	FSCAT-1
Eliza	FSCAT-2

Source: Data from research notes, East Africa 2014.

The following transcripts are from interviews that contain more substance than the main body of this thesis is able to use properly. They contain significant insights given that would greatly benefit anyone who wishes to study East African culture, so they are included here.

Yusufo, March 31, 2014, Grand Rapids, MI (MWCAT-1)¹⁴³

Each family is different. Some are based on the father. Some involve an elder-child hierarchy among children. Typically, the roles of the family are divided between the roles of the daughters and the roles of the sons, and the parents are the providers.

Me: How does the family function? Who does what, what is expected of different people in the family. I know you mentioned your eldest son, when you're away, he's the one in charge.

Yusufo: Yeah. Maybe we have. They work differently because each family has his own behavior or culture. But, especially if I talk to African family, African family, especially if I - in general, most people in Africa, the family is based on the father. The father is more responsible in the family. That means he eats like, it's like he's the one who is in charge.

The wife is also a helper. She can help. Then, as I'm saying, in our country, or in our culture, or African people, the first born – if you are the firstborn, you have also to take care of, you have some responsibilities. For example, me I have a daughter, she has almost 22 years. But, like today, me and my wife, we are not home. She is home right now as we are talking, she is home. She has to take care of her brother and her sisters. She can cook for them, she can even wash clothes for them. She can even do different things, she can take care of the other siblings – you say siblings?

Me: Yes.

Yusufo: Yes. Because she the elder. When we are not there, she can take over, and she can do different things. And she can work for those siblings, that's how we do. That's one and also, in our culture also in Africa, let me say in Africa. We have also different duties. Because I'm saying this is uh. You can have, there is some job or occupation which is, belongs to the boy, and this work is belongs to the girl. You see, it's like you cannot tell your daughter to lift up those heavy things or to do hard work, and you still have your son – you see. It's like they are different.

143. When this interview took place the process of acquiring IRB approval for research had already begun, but the approval process was not finished. At the time, it was unknown that this interview could not be conducted outside of IRB approval. However, the requirements of disclosing information with the participant, such as the protection of his identity, his willful participation, and the right he has to remove his participation at any time were explained to Yusufo. This participant was also contacted during the writing of this thesis (4/12/16) to let him know the interview took place outside of IRB approval, and he was willing to allow his contribution to remain a part of this thesis.

The sons, maybe they can take care of some, some work or some job, and daughters, they can do also another one, because. For example, in our culture, a man—when you usually go to the kitchen, they will tell you, “this is not your territory.” You see? That means, the ladies—they’re the ones who are supposed maybe to cook, to wash the dishes, you see all those stuff in the kitchen, it’s like they belong to the ladies. You see?

Me: Yes.

Yusuf: But, if it’s to look for the food, what we are going to eat, you are in charge as a man. You have to provide for them food – many thing. You have to go outside maybe you bring that home. When they are at home now, they are going to manage the work.

Me: So the men go out and get everything and the women sort of take over the work?

Yusuf: You see? That’s how especially in our family we do. you can provide food for the family, but when the food is just at home my wife or my daughter, they are the ones who can take over and work in the kitchen they can do for you they can do this and this and this and this. You finished to eat, they can even take those dishes they wash. You can do because of civilization – civilizations I don’t know how to pronounce, because people are going, they are learning from outside country – culture, they can take the culture from outside. They can do that because maybe they used to travel another country, they see how other people live, they say there is no job for ladies, there is no job for men and women. All of us we can do together, but those are outside culture. They learn from somewhere. You see?

Me: Yeah.

Yusuf: But, traditionally, they have some area they have to be busy as a ladies or women, and you as a man you have some area where you have to be busy more than women because that’s the culture

Me: So, as a son, what are some of the responsibilities that sons have?

Yusuf: Yes. For example, most of families in African you can have, they are farmers, maybe they have cattle like cow, sheep, goats, uh. Peas, you see? Many things, those cattle. They, sons, or those young boy, he can go to the bush with the cattle, maybe sheep either cows, he can take care of those cattle. That’s one, if you don’t have sons, your daughter can do that, but if you have sons, they all already known we are in charge to take care of our cattle like cows, sheep, depends on what cattle you have. If you have sheep, they know the ones who have to take care of them in the pastures, and we have to feed them there until the evening until they come back with. They know.

Me: Okay.

Yusuf: Also, they can fetch water. Because uh, most of families in Africa they don’t have water in the house. You can see maybe they have to go far from their home to fetch water. If it’s too far you have to go there if you are a son. Yes, you can just ride a bike or you can walk.

Me: So it’s the son’s job to get the water?

Yusuf: Yes, he can go and fetch water, bring the water home. Even the ladies they do but sometimes we have some area where the sons, they know we are the ones who have to do this. You see?

Me: Yes.

Yusuf: The ladies, they know maybe our duty is this and this. But, in case there is not somebody who can do that. If, for example, my son has another things to do and he's working, and he goes to the job and there is nobody to take care of this sheep, one of my daughter can do that, or my wife or me. That's just in case there is nobody to do that, but in our, especially in our family in Africa, all that stuff, it is like they are divided. You, boys deal with this. You girls, deal with this. That's how in Africa sometimes we have those different duties and different people to be in charge of that.

Me: So what do the parents do then?

Yusuf: The parents, if you have a job you go every day to work, you can go morning you go to work, either you can do your own business selling something on the market or you are employed somewhere. You have to go and do your work. If not, some of them, many of them, especially those who doesn't live in the town, for example we have many people who live in the village. In the village there is a job but not too much, so many people there are farmers.

Me: So they just stay at home to work then?

Yusuf: Yeah. They have to go to work and the fields they have to cultivate. Theater they can plant maize, rice, wheat, different crops. So, then they have to go to work outside the family to provide for the family. For example, if I'm employed maybe I'm a teacher, maybe I'm a nurse, or I'm just going somewhere to cultivate my farm. So morning I can pick my tools or instruments then I go to work, then I will be back evening. But if I still have kids at home they can go fetch water, they can cook, they can even wash clothes, and they can even clean the house. When you will be back, you cannot go to the farm to cultivate then, when you be back again you have to do this and you have kids at home, you see?

The big concern with the parent, they have to provide for the house. How are we going to eat today? Where are we going to fame the food? You see? And if we are renting house, who is going to pay the bill if we live in town? But if most of people who live in village they have their own house. But, they have to go to cultivate, to the farm, also even men they have to , they can take care of cattle, cow, or sheep because we have different countries and different people. For example my kids, they are going to school, and I have cattle and I have to take care of those cattle, so I have my cow and my sheep and I can put all of them together then I have to keep to take care of them, I go with them outside in the bush, they spend the whole day there to take care of them, then evening I will be back.

And my kids there, they are also back from school, but when they come home they have something to do. Because, for example, as I was saying, they don't have water in the house, they have to go fetch water, maybe it will be close or far from your home, they can go take, looking for firewood because if there is no gas or electricity they have to go and found the firewood, you see?

They can go with their cloths to the river then they just wash to the river, you see? The best thing to understand is this country, your country, is developed. The people live in a high style life, but some African countries they are not developed, so we still live in primitive life, that means maybe they have to go to fetch water far from home, they have to look for firewood, they have to look for many things because they don't have at home. Even where we have some lamps we have to, because we don't have electricity in the home, some area there is no electricity, there is gas and they have to put in a lamp. Or they go to sell to but that one. People are too busy because many things they don't have, and they have to go and look for it.

Me: That's the more, like out in the villages and that. Is it very different in the city?

Yusuf: Yeah, in the city they are different.

Me: Is it pretty common for siblings/family members to send money to each other?

Yusuf: Yes. Even when I'm here (in the States). Every month, I and my brother send money to our father (who lives in a refugee camp in East Africa). Sometimes he lives with our sisters in the camp. Every month we provide for him somehow. My brother was helping me with \$100 per month for 3 years (while I lived in Kenya and my brother lived in the States).

Me: Who takes care of the children when you (parents) are not home?

Yusuf: Some families have lower income. But they still have that kind of... In America, most of American people, each one lives his own life. But in Africa, if I have ability to help you, I can help. That is what's different from our culture

Me: Are you expected to help me, then? If I need help and know you can help?

Yusuf: Yes. Even in Africa, if you are a friend of mine I can come to you and say, "Hey, I need food items, if I can borrow maybe 100 dollars to buy food. When I get money I will give you back. You can give me 100, I can buy all I need. When I get money, I will return it to you." Here in America, if you want to borrow money you have to go to the Bank and return it with interest.

In Africa, not only money. He can give food. In Africa, we can share life. Life is common. If you have a problem, you can talk to your neighbor and brother. Even people you don't know. Also, in Africa, if I live here I will know all these people who surround me. I can go to my neighbor, stay with him, talk, eat food, bring tea/coffee, we can just talk with him and get to know where he goes to work... If I live here, I will know all these people who surround me. In America, it is not easy to knock on neighbors. It is like we are sharing – we can share. We can share my food with my neighbor, my money, my time. I can help him if I have possibility. Especially if you are able, you have to do that.

In America, it's not like that. Each one lives his own life. You can die here and nobody will know. In Africa, one person is sick and all the neighbors will come. They will take him to the hospital.

Me: Not just family members do that?

Yusuf: Just neighbors. If you don't have relatives who live close, then neighbors are in charge. If something happens to your house, the government workers will ask the neighbors, "What happened? Where were you? What did you do?"

Me: So the neighbors have responsibilities?

Yusuf: Yes, and that's how we live in Africa. Sometimes I don't have food, and you have. If I have no food to eat, he will go to his home and bring some food. In Africa, we just share. If we have celebrations like marriage or graduation, all these neighbors will come and celebrate with you. If you are mourning if somebody dies, all these neighbors will come. Which is different in this country (USA).

We also have those people who have different behavior. When you are in trouble one day, you will see no one at your house because you did not help others.

Me: So, if I don't help other people, they will not help me?

Yusuf: Yes! If you get in trouble, they won't help. They say, "Ah, it's him. Leave him! We are going to see how he does. It's him who is there." Because you do not participate in different activities.

Me: But I'm expected to. I'm expected to know people and help out?

Yusuf: Yes. That's Africa behavior.

Me: Everyone who lives in the village helps out (at the farm)?

Yusuf: Yes. Example, we are 28 families. On Monday, we will go to ___ farm and help out. On Tuesday, we will go to ___'s farm. On Wednesday, it's ___'s farm. We will cultivate, plant, etc. at those places. On Thursday, ___'s farm (etc.) That's what they can do. They help me, and the next day they help another one. The people share; they work together, help each other, etc. If they have a ceremony but don't have money, they will bring what they have; beans, rice, etc. Each one has to contribute what he has so he can do something.

Because we share life... if I'm here at the village, maybe the other people are not there. Then I can see your kids are doing something wrong. I punish them, I tell them "don't do this," I can even beat them. In the evening I can tell their dad what happened. It's not good to see kids doing something wrong and say, "Ah, I'm not in charge" and do nothing. No. If you don't rebuke them, then in the evening the villagers will say, "eh, those kids did this and thing. Where were you?" If you were there, you would be in trouble because you did nothing. Those are African culture and families.

In Africa, also, for example. If my brother died during a war and left some kids, I have to take care of those kids now. For example, my cousin does not have a way to help his kids go to school. If I have some resources, I can pick two or one and have them stay in my home. They eat with my kids, and I help them at school. I pay the fee for the school. You can help relatives, neighbors, widows, those who don't have income who are poor. If you have some income, you can help.

Me: From what I'm hearing, when it comes to everyday activities, it's not just the family, but the people you live around; friends, neighbors. So it's much more fluid/mixes.

Yusuf: Sometimes in Africa, I have my family. I have my family; me, my wife, and my kids. And you have to take care of this. But apart from this, I have another family here who is maybe my neighbor. I have to know how he is. I have also, another one over

here which is over here; my community where I live, because your family, neighbor, then community.

In Africa, we have some languages. If you are a man, just only taking care of your family, even if there is some meeting or something to do in the community, they will not invite you. They say, "This person is not a man. He is just in his home." What we call a man in Africa, general understanding, is one who can take care of his family here, but also he can take care of neighbor here, and he can even move out of community here. That's what we call a man.

My house, I have to manage my house and provide for my kids and my wife. But if my neighbor is in trouble and doesn't have what he needs and does not have enough space to cultivate, and if I have big space to cultivate, I will divide my land so my neighbor can cultivate.

So, apart from my family. I have to look "how is my neighbor here." Not only neighbor, but "how is my community?" if there is a common problem, you have to sit together to try and find a way to solve those issues. Maybe it's in my house, or my neighbor, or my community.

In Africa, community is huge.

Me: So neighbors and community... you can consider them family also?

Yusuf: Yes, yes. You can consider neighbors.

Me: So not just blood relatives?

Yusuf: They can be relatives. My neighbors can be relatives or they are just my neighbor.

Me: Even relatives who live far away are still family, but do you consider people here to be family also?

Yusuf: Here (in West Michigan), we are many Africans. But most of them, I know where they live, I go there to visit. Even some come to visit my house. We can share. We say, "This company, they are hiring and you can apply." We can share, we know each other. If I have a party, I will invite them. They will come with money, or food. If I have a marriage wedding, they will come. If we have a conference in this church, we will invite them. Even those outside of Michigan.

June 20, we will have an African conference here. People from a different State, even from Africa. It's huge. It's a little bit large in our culture. In USA you say, "Family," it is too small.

In my house, here in Africa. We have to eat/share food together. Here in America, people told me: you have maybe 2-3 kids. You can be busy in your room, your sister in her room. You can even have one week of not sitting together because you are in your room with your TV, computer, or phone. If you want to eat, you go to the fridge and pick. Sister, the same thing. They put a schedule sometimes to eat together.

For us, each evening, we cook and sit around our table and share our food together. That's how most people do in Africa. Most people eat all the family together. You cannot see someone who is busy in his room, another busy in his room. You go to the room when you want to sleep. If it's sleeping time, you go to your bed and you sleep.

If you are not asleep, you are in the sitting room. We talk, tell stories. Even in our culture I have to tell my kids some stories.

Me, I'm not good to sing, but my wife knows to sing. Sometimes we can sit together and sing some songs. I can tell my stories; some history. I can tell them how we used to live many years ago. All those things. I will tell them how I grew up, they will know my name, my father's name, my grandfather's name, up to maybe 5 generations. They have to know the lineage. They have to know that person did this, that person did this, up to 5 generations.

I say, "I'm going to sing this song, and I'm going to teach you this song"

Me: That is common?

Yusuf: Yes, it is common, people sit together. I will tell people my story: morning I did this, afternoon I did this... That means each one can give his own information; where he's been the whole day.

Since I'm a Christian, we take time to sing, to pray.

Me: So there's always something going on when you are in the house together?

Yusuf: Yes.

Me: (Referencing someone's experience with using the term 'imaginary friend' in Kenya. The response to using that idea was, "Why would I need to make someone up? I'm always around people!")

Yusuf: (laugh) Yes.

Me: Is that common? Is 'imaginary friend' a concept we in America have made up?

Yusuf: We spend a lot of time with friends and family members. For example, here in Michigan, I have 3 brothers and me (4 brothers). We can just meet, maybe twice per month. [...]

Me: You do everything together?

Yusuf: Yes. We do everything together. [...] We have information from each other, and we know what is going on with my brother.

Sometimes, many times, I can be rich. Even my brother. If we have another brother who is not, we will say, "How can we help our brother? Because his life is too low because of this or this. How can we help?" I can have this, you also this, and we can put together. That's how we live. But, sometimes there is a change because people are traveling and have to spend, you know, they are looking at another culture. So some pick some culture.

Me: In Africa, or here in the United States?

Yusuf: Even in Africa. In the city, they do not have enough time to spend together. They are too busy working to make a lot of money, to be rich, to get to a higher level. There is a difference between city and those who live in a village. In a village, they have enough time to spend together. But in the city, people are too busy. Each one is also doing his own... But still having this common things in our families. Even if they are busy, but they can meet one day they can meet, they can talk, they can share idea, and see if they can help.

Me: To take care of neighbors, like you said?

Yusuf: Yes. Neighbors in Africa is like my brother or my sister. Because they are the ones who has to share what we have. If I say “neighbor” in Africa, don’t think it’s just... My neighbor is like my relatives. I can say that because even if, you here in America, even if I see this house burning with a fire you do not go there – you call 911. In Africa, we don’t have 911, you have to go. You call this neighbor.

Me: So you’re responsible for what happens?

Yusuf: Yes. You have to help. House is burning, or there is fighting, or what. You have to help, to go there. Maybe the kids did not fetch water and it is evening time. They will come to your house, and you can give 1 gallon of water. In Africa, we share. If you don’t share in Africa, the older community will know __ is not good, he does not want to share. They go and talk about __, why he’s not sharing with the others? Why? He is rich or has a problem? Then they will wait until you get in trouble, then they say, “eh, let us see ____...”

Me: Even the African community that is here, you still do that here?

Yusuf: Yes. For example, when they came here, most do not know how to drive. When they came here, even if they know to drive he does not have a car and he needs to get some food. He will just call – “we need to go to the store.” I get in my car, I pick them up, we buy what we need to buy, and I drop them off.

Me: Your kids, do they do the same thing? When they grow up, get married, do you expect to do that as well or will they be different?

Yusuf: (laugh) We don’t know. We are asking ourselves if this culture will continue. With this generation it’s okay – they will. But maybe with the next generation it will disappear. Because the generation that is here today, they see something we are doing. Even I can sit in my house with my wife and tell them some stories and I say, “If somebody needs help and you have a way to help, just help.” I can say that to them. [...]

Me: Are you thinking your kids will do that (helping neighbors) because they see you doing it?

Yusuf: Yes, my kids will do. But the next generation we are not sure. Because, each country has his own behavior or way to live. People here are too busy, or just taking care of themselves. So we don’t know if our culture will continue to another generation. But sometimes it can happen because I remember we have been traveling many countries. We used to live in another country which is not our country. When I was young, there was many people and our dad did not like us to lose our language. Now, he told us, “If you are outside, you can talk any language you want. But in my house, we have to talk our language.” And we didn’t forget our language. Even here, I tell my kids, “learn English, talk English, but in this house, sitting together and eating together we are going to talk our language.”

Because, we have a proverb: “If you lose your language, then you lose your culture.” If you have your language, you have your culture. Even here in America, some families are good and some are not. That is common everywhere. We have some bad people who have bad behavior. We have those people even in Africa. Even if we have a common culture, you cannot say, “All people are like this.” We have people who only take care of themselves.

If you keep to yourself and your spouse dies, you will cry by yourself and no one will come to your funeral. We have those people, but they are an exception. Even in America we have good families and those who are very tough.

My kids know all my brothers. We don't call my brothers "uncle." If he's younger than me, they will call him "young daddy." If he's my elder brother, they will call them "grandpapa." We don't call them 'uncles.'

[Loose paraphrase] When I came to America, I did not have curtains. The pastor of the church helped me. They came and put up curtains. After school, they helped pick up my kids. After that period, there is a member here who takes my kids to school, and another drops them off at home. When I changed the address, the people changed the process. If I take the kids to school, no one will pick them up. I have to call the pastor to pick them up. If he cannot, others will.

Even in America, people will help each other. But each one is in charge of his family only, but there are people who can do this or this.

Me: You really only help out people that you know, from my experience. People who help others they don't know is the exception.

Yusufo: In Africa, it is common. Those who don't want to help, they are few. But when they are in trouble they will cry out. If he's in trouble, then let him help himself. So, it's common in Africa. Here, it's not, but in Africa it is.

It is almost opposite. We know every time you cross the border you can expect change.

Me: What are some things you do – how do you practice your faith as a family? Some things you do, like pray or sing that you mentioned?

Yusufo: It is different, but in my house on Saturday evening we have a service in my house.

Me: Just for...

Yusufo: Yes, here every Saturday evening we have a service in my house. We have to cook and eat early, so we have to do that before my young children go to sleep

Me: Just the people who live in your house do this?

Yusufo: Just my wife and kids. After eating, we just sing. My kids can sing – me, I'm not better at singing. They will lead some songs together. Also, those songs, we have in our mother tongue. So after singing those songs, I come with my Bible and read one or two verse, then I will talk to them. Then I will ask if anyone has an issue and needs prayer request. Then we pray and go to sleep. We do this very Saturday.

We can do this even on another day. My wife and I can do this even if my kids are asleep. We can just sing, read, and pray together. We pray together. That's how we can share our Christian life in our families.

Sometimes, I can go to my neighbor who is an African family. So, every Sunday by 6 we have service. Some African people will come, and we meet together like 10 or 5 families. We sing, preach, and then we pray. That's our Christian life.

In this family, if we are talking Christian area, I have to teach my kids what I believe. I have to teach them who is Christ Jesus whom we believe. I have to explain to them, because some of them are still young and cannot understand but I have some few

words I can tell them. Then, we can pray together. And I'm doing this because I know in America, maybe after 20 years, 18 years, my kids will move, get another job somewhere else. Us, as parents, we have to give them basic foundation with what we believe and try to show them how we can meet together and pray together so that those days we are not together, they will be able for themselves they can read a Bible and pray also.

We put seed. We don't know if it will grow or not. But our responsibility as a parent (and pastor) is to plant the seed. If we say, "my father used to do this in our family." So, because I'm growing up I will do the same thing as my father was doing. That's growing, it will be better. If he says, "No, I don't want that stuff." If I plant the seed and do that practically so that he can see what I do. I have to do my own part. That's what we do.

Even me, while I was growing up my father was a Christian and a pastor. He was doing this when we were kids, and I saw him doing this. I am doing this – it's like a seed my father planted in my thoughts, so I'm just trying to do this so that my kids, also, will do that. We just try to see not only in the Church where we can share, worship, pray, and sing. But even in our house. We give God just a short time to be with him as the whole family. I'm saying this practically according to my house, but maybe another one has other practices.

But, we have some areas where 5-10 families who live near each other meet Friday or Saturday evening have time to pray together.

Violet, August 8, 2014. Mbeya, Tanzania (FSCAT-1)

Violet: In city/urban, neighbors do not know each other, and do not speak with one another. If going into town, you are expected to take yourself, not ride with someone else. (In the rural areas, this is not the case). And children know each other and their parents, but parents do not know each other.

Violet, September 16, 2014. Nairobi, Kenya (FSCAT-1)

Me: How do you understand family; what is your perspective on what family is?

Violet: Family is people related by blood, or just friends. But generally the first thing is people who are related by blood (the main people who are considered family)

Me: So friends can also be considered family?

Violet: Yes, friends can be considered family. Because you might have an attachment with them. You may have expectations of them that are met through the attachments you have with friends.

Me: Is there a difference between the attachment with family and the attachment with friends? Are there things you can do with family that you cannot do with friends?

Violet: Yes, there are. There are things you can do with friends that are more attaching than what you can do with family.

Me: So, you can be more attached to friends than family?

Violet: At times it gets to that point, where you get more attached to friends than family; if your family is away and you have friends close by.

Me: In that situation, you would ask your friends for help first before you family?

Violet: Yes.

Me: Is that something you've experience s around where you live, or is that common throughout Kenya?

Violet: In these days, it is coming up. Before, people would run to family first, but people around where I live people trust friends first, before family. But if it is a family issue; like one of the relatives back home, then you look for the family that is around me – people who can be with me during that time.

Me: What are the things that you would need help with?

Violet: Not necessarily with help. If you need people to have a function like visitors; people coming to your house and everything. It's difficult to call on family members, but I can call on one of my workmates if I need help. Maybe at night, my child is sick or something so I will call my friend to come and assist. Family members are there, but they are not there. I think these days, attachment with friends is much stronger.

Me: Why do you think that is?

Violet: I don't know [sic] our blood family relationships are... I don't' know why friends are much closer than family members.

Me: Do people live further from family than they used to?

Violet: Yes, that could be one reason

Me: Is that something that is just in cities or in rural areas also?

Violet: Even in rural areas. People would look for their neighbors before calling relatives who are in cities or other rural places. But in rural settings some immediate families live closer, but for those who have family far away you just call immediate people first.

Me: Is there anything you would call just your family for, and not friends?

Violet: Yes.

Me: Like what?

Violet: Maybe if there is one of my family members who is in a rough situation. Family members can give advice, or there are some family practices that you cannot go to friends with.

Me: Is that different from place to place, what those things may be?

Violet: Not really

Me: Many people in Tanzania take care of nieces or nephews that I have seen. Is that common?

Violet: It's becoming common. You just fill the need of taking charge of the children if the parents are not able or maybe they are ill or alcoholic. If you look at the mother of these children and you take charge. I can take my brothers children and take care of them like my own; take them to school, feed them...

Me: Does that only happen with people who are blood related?

Violet: No. Not blood related. For example, I have a girl who is 12 years old. We are not related, but I take care of her during school and holidays, she comes to my place. I take care of her shopping for school and all of that. She calls me "mom." But we are not related in blood, and our cultures are so different. In school she is proud that she has a mom somewhere. Someone she can call a friend, or have a girl talk with. It happens.

Me: Is it common or unusual?

Violet: Not unusual. In the beginning it would be weird, but as days go by people are embracing it. Many people are doing the same thing, just embracing someone else's child they are not related to.

Me: Is it common for any orphans to live on their own when they don't have a family they can go to?

Violet: Yes. There is an orphanage where, during school holidays, they are allowed to go visit the people who go visit the children's home. People have the children stay with them for holidays, and then they take them back.

Me: Are there a lot of orphans that remain, or do most go somewhere?

Violet: They try their best to get as many children as they can to go somewhere

Me: Do the families that do that take the same children?

Violet: Different. But, there are some families who get attached to specific children who want to come back and pick that child. They tend to create a bond where if they are asked to pick another child that are not comfortable; they are only comfortable with 'this' child.

Me: Is it common for orphans to form their own families?

Violet: Yeah, it is becoming common.

Me: What do you think of that?

Violet: I think it helps a lot to make people feel lie, if you are an orphan, they feel like they have a place in society where they have people who can care for them. They feel there is a creation of families through friends who can embrace them in society and be like anyone else. It is very difficult to get to know some orphans.

Me: Why?

Violet: Because the way they have been in society and embraced together, you would not know they are orphans unless you ask them or they tell you.

Me: How is community different in the cities than rural areas?

Violet: In the cities it is very different. People only think about 'me.' And rarely do they come together to know this is my neighbor. They don't even like knowing who they live next to. The children get to know them, but adults in this culture just keep to themselves. But out in the village / rural areas, almost all people know each other. You know my homestead, I know your homestead. I can come and pick something and go to my house and you come back. There is a close bond in the people in the rural areas. But in the cities, everything I have is mine. So if you neighbor comes, it's like he is crossing [sic] it's a bit tough.

Me: How big are the rural communities?

Violet: It's big, depending on the village. [Referencing the size of Mbeya, where people knew who our hosts were and would ask them why they have not gone to a local funeral that was a fair distance from the house.]

Me: So people there would expect her to show up to the funeral?

Violet: Yes. To show up and be part, to take part assisting and all that.

Me: Was she related to the person who died?

Violet: No. Just a neighbor.

Me: How do people in the cities develop the friendships you talked about (interdependent) if they are only focused on themselves? Does that happen just in the workplace?

Violet: Neighbors, no. Almost 2.5 years, my neighbors do not know each other. I am much closer to the people I work with, go to church with. I am closer to them than my neighbor. Cities are becoming boring. There are some areas in the cities where we know each other's households. We can borrow things and come together. But in urban flats people are staying by themselves. In Urban, there are different levels, so... there are urban places, but communities where neighbors work together and know each other's households. Other places, you stay in your place I stay in mine

Me: Is that the expectation? If you live in the city you stay by yourself, but in rural areas you are expected to be a part of the things that happen and help out?

Violet: Yes.

Me: [In reference to another participant in Mbeya] If you don't help out, other people would sit with you and tell you that you need to help more. Is that common in rural Kenya?

Violet: Yes.

Me: In the cities, if you spend too much time with your neighbors they will sit down with you and tell you to keep to yourself?

Violet: No, they will just ignore you.

Me: How do families help each other spiritually?

Violet: In Kenya, it is difficult. Most families do not spend time together. It's like they expect you do grow by yourself by going to church and reading your bible. But in some Christians families where there is a strong Christian dad and a strong Christian mom they usually have Bible study sessions. Every evening, or before they depart for their duties they sit down and pray. In most families, time to sit down and grow spiritually, it's up to the individual person. There are times we have organized cell groups, you go to someone else's house which helps to build. But as a family together, we do not have times for devotions in the family together. Women are the ones who take the responsibility of praying for our families every single day, every morning women take the responsibility to be the spiritual leaders of the homes. I don't know about pastors homes, but usually women are the spiritual leaders of the home.

Me: It seems like sometimes when families do come to church the father doesn't come. Is that common?

Violet: It's different. Sometimes they do not come; they bring the families to church but stay outside in their vehicles. There are some who come with their families.

Me: Do you know why they would not go?

Violet: I don't know if it's because they're not Christians, I have no idea what to say about that.

Me: Sometimes close friends become like family, like you said. Do they sometimes help each other spiritually?

Violet: Yes.

Me: How so?

Violet: Friends help each other spiritually

Me: What do they do?

Violet: Maybe you are close with some friends, and maybe you know someone is going through something. You come together to pray about it, encourage the person. With a person back home there is no one to listen to him/her, and there is no one to encourage them.

Me: Even in a Christian household?

Violet: I think in a Christian household it is different.

Me: In Tanzania, people would call each other “*dada, kaka, mama, and baba.*” Is that common here?

Violet: I think it’s just a Tanzania thing. It’s not that common even in rural areas [of Kenya]. They call each other by name, or ‘mama so and so’ but it’s not that common.

Me: With friends you are close to, do you refer to them with family titles/reference. Such as ‘sister’, etc.

Violet: Yes.

Me: Is that common?

Violet: It is common.

Jennifer, September 18, 2014. Nairobi, Kenya (FUMAR-1)

Me: I am assuming the area you are working in is more rural. Is this correct?

Jennifer: Yes I am in a rural village in Western Kenya.

Me: In Tanzania, there is a community system some people use called *Nyumba Kumi*, where groups of ten households worked together to maintain security in their neighborhood. Whenever a visitor was coming or events are taking place at one household, the other nine households need to be made aware of it. Have you noticed a similar system where you are?

Jennifer: I have heard of *Numba Kumi*. I think from a friend who used to work in Tanzania. I don’t believe that system exists where I am.

Me: In the community where you are, would you say that the social interaction and use of goods is communal? For instance, do people regularly share food, goods, finances, or labor to assist one another?

Jennifer: Yes, definitely the social interaction and use of goods is communal. Yes people regularly share foods, goods, finances, and labor to assist one another. Whenever you go to a house they always offer you chai (Kenyan tea) and if it is a meal time they would insist that you sit down and eat with them even if they didn’t know you were coming. And if you turn down chai or food (and don’t eat a lot of it) then people can get offended. Saying “I’m not hungry or I am ok or no thank you” is sort of frowned upon and really hard for someone to understand when they offer you food and chai. It is also not uncommon at all to ask for money to help with different things. Often the community will hold *harambees* to raise money for churches, school fees (for a child’s high school or university education) for a funeral, a wedding, hospital bill, etc. I recently went to a *harambee* for a friend whose aunt died. She had a hospital bill around \$6,000 [USD] and the hospital was refusing to give the family the body until the bill was paid. So the community organized a *harambee* and they raised the money.

Me: Is corporate discipline common there? For instance, it is accepted (or even expected) that adults can discipline children even if the children are not their own offspring? If so, how does such discipline take place?

Jennifer: Did you mean to say “corporal discipline”? If so, the answer is yes. It is a common practice here in schools and in homes (although technically illegal in Kenya). I think it is acceptable for adults to discipline even if it is not their own offspring but I don’t know for sure. It is actually referred to as “caning” here. I have never seen it. I have just heard stories. It is not common to see people in authority – teachers, watchmen, parents, etc. carrying around a stick and using it to discipline a child. From what I am learning, this is a “shame-based” culture so they really believe that shaming a child will result in them being more disciplined and behaving “better” be it in school or at home.

Me: Have you noticed any sibling creaking, such as older siblings taking care of younger siblings in a parent-child type of way?

Jennifer: Yes, it is very common for older siblings to take care of younger siblings. I see it a lot.

Me: Do households typically employ house-helps? If so, are the house-helps treated differently than the biological offspring of that family, and how so?

Jennifer: It depends on the economic status of the family but if they can afford it then yes, it is common to have a “house girl” to help with cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the kids. I think it varies on how they are treated. Some are probably treated like family and some not so well.

Me: Is it common, or have you seen, people of a household supporting a relative? For instance, I have seen some people take in their nieces and nephews and have treated them as their own children, but is this practiced where you are?

Jennifer: Yes it is very common to support a relative. I can think of at least five examples off the top of my head of people in this village who have taken in sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and helped take care of them and help with school fees. From the examples I have seen, yes, they also treat them as their own children.

Me: From what you have seen, how do members of each age group (or life-stage) typically interact with one another?

Jennifer: I am not exactly sure how to answer the question about life stage. If you have something more specific let me know and maybe I can answer better. But what I do see is there is a gap of sorts between parents and children, meaning the parents very much exercise authority over the children and the children are taught to respect their elders. It seems (to me), there is less of a mutual relationship than what I see in the US. In rural Kenya, the older you are the more respected you are. There is a running joke between myself and one of the elders in the village, he always says "You know, Jennifer, in America people don't like to be called 'old and fat' but here it is a great compliment!" Also, being fat (or having a big belly) here is a sign of wealth and status.

Me: Lastly, I have been in places where people refer to each other - even strangers - as *kaka* or *dada*. Have you noticed that happening where you are?

Jennifer: Yes, people refer to each other a lot as *dada* (people often say *habari ya dada yako?* - how are you my sister?) Or *mama* or *baba* or *Gogo* (grandmother) even if they are not biologically related but I think it speaks to more of the communal living and how everyone seems to be related in one way or another whether they are in-laws or distant relatives or "cousin-brothers".

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