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Paternity matters: premarital childbearing and belonging in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong

Nolwazi Mkhwanazi and Ellen Block[*]

In this article we discuss the role that fathers and paternal families play in acknowledging and caring for children born outside of a recognised union in two southern African communities – Nyanga East, South Africa and Mokhotlong, Lesotho. While these communities are geographically and culturally close, there are important differences in the responses to the care of children born outside of a recognised union. In Nyanga East, despite not paying damages, the genitor and the paternal family are increasingly becoming involved in the care of children, even when they are no longer in a relationship with the mother; whereas in Mokhotlong, if a pregnant woman is not in a formal or informal union with the father, she and her family effectively erase the genitor's role in the child's life. We argue that these local variances in the kinship dynamics arise from people privileging different kinship relationships. We suggest that in both contexts kinship is manipulated in order to find a place where a child will be well cared for, enable educational opportunities for young mothers, and privilege employment opportunities for adults who bring much-needed income into households. The article reinforces the importance of contextually specific understandings of kin relations and a fluid and processual understanding of kinship itself.

Keywords: kinship; paternity; premarital childbearing; Lesotho; South Africa

Introduction

Childbearing is an important life course event that not only creates networks of relatedness but also in some cases marks the transition to adulthood for both men and women. While fertility has declined across southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, the decline has been slower than in other parts of the Global South (Bongaarts 2008; Moultrie. Sayi, and Timæus 2012). While acknowledging the processual nature of marriage, recorded data show that the rates of this formally recognised union have declined across the region (Mokomane 2013; Meekers and Calvès 1997; Meekers 1992; Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie 2009). Yet even in the context of declining marriage rates, coupled with high HIV prevalence, childbearing remains important (Booth 2004). Given the changing circumstances in which young women are having children, researchers have turned their attention towards the economic and social consequences of an increasing number of young black women having children outside of marriage in southern Africa (Macleod 1999a; Harrison 2008; Varga 1999; Wood and Jewkes 1997; Kulin 1988).

The local variances of kinship dynamics that are produced with the birth of children outside of a recognised union have received little attention in contemporary southern Africa, with the notable exceptions of Preston-Whyte and Louw (1986) and Madhavan (2010). In this article, we are interested in the role that fathers and paternal families play in acknowledging and caring for children born outside of a recognised union. We draw on two locales – a township in the Western Cape of South Africa and a rural community in highland Lesotho – to argue that despite the differences in outcomes regarding genitors and their roles in the lives of children born outside of a recognised union, people in both communities privilege different kinship relationships through their manipulation and negotiation of the care and lineality of children. As Madhavan, Harrison and Sennott (2013) note, it is important to have a nuanced and heterogeneous understanding of community responses to premarital fertility.

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Through extended case studies of two young black mothers in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong, in this article we highlight the cultural, historical, economic and geopolitical reasons that lead to the acceptance of paternity in one instance and the denial of paternity in the other. These case studies, and the other ethnographic materials presented here, are representative of trends that have emerged over the course of long term fieldwork in both communities. We shed light on the central role that women and the extended family play in pursuing, or deciding not to pursue, the support of genitors and their families in caring for a child born outside of a recognised union. Our comparison of these two locales thus lends important insight into nuanced variances in the constructions of local kinship in the contemporary context.

The urban township of Nyanga East in the Western Cape, South Africa and the rural mountainous district of Mokhotlong in Lesotho are similar in many ways.[1] Both have high levels of poverty and unemployment (Kingdon and Knight 2005; Swartz 2009); both are organised around idealised and entrenched notions of patriarchy that conceal a female-dominated domestic order (Jones 1996; Harrison, Short, and Tuoane-Nkhasi 2014); both are ravaged by the AIDS epidemic, which shows only marginal signs of abatement (Zuma et al. 2016; Lesotho Ministry of Health and Social Welfare 2010); and both are responding to the decreasing occurrence of marriage processes and their associated practices (Mokomane 2013; Meekers and Calvès 1997), particularly the payment of bridewealth and "damages" by men and their families (Mkhwanazi 2010; 2014; Turkon 2003). Yet there are some important differences related to how, by whom and when the mother's family makes claims on the family of the genitor (biological father) with regard to the care and support of a child born outside of a recognised union. These varying claims-making strategies have resulted in significant differences in the role that fathers and paternal families play in the lives of these children.

In many black Southern African communities, historically the genitor's family would pay damages (in Xhosa, called *inhlawulo* and in Sesotho, called *litsenyehelo*)[2] to the girl's family (Kaufman 2001; Hunter 1936; Hunter 2010). This was often a one-time payment of cows or the cash equivalent. The payment of damages accords paternal recognition and lineal belonging – meaning that the child would care for that ancestral line – and allows for the possibility of patrilocal care. As with any cultural practice, however, the payment of damages are "long-standing, complex, and changing" (Kaufman et al. 2001, 152).

According to our fieldwork, in Nyanga East families rarely seek the payment of *inhlawulo*, due to a variety of reasons, including genitors' inability to pay because of economic hardship, as well as previous rampant denial of paternity. Recently, however, despite not being able to afford the payment of *inhlawulo*, genitors have increasingly begun to accept paternity. While the genitor may never actually pay *inhlawulo*, he contributes financially towards the child's upbringing when possible and assumes the role of pater (social father) even when he is no longer in a relationship with the mother. This allows the paternal family to help with childcare, to claim the child as belonging to the father's lineage and, when resources permit, perform the attendant rituals that cement a child's place within the patriline and his/her relationship with the ancestors. Thus even in the absence of marriage, bridewealth, or *inhlawulo,* in Nyanga East, a child's network of care has increasingly now begun to include the paternal family. If a child cannot be cared for in the immediate household, he or she is sent to live with a relative who is able to provide care – usually a maternal or paternal grandmother. This is particularly true when, in its early years, a child needs intensive full-time care (cf. Mkhwanazi 2010, 2014).

In Mokhotlong, if a pregnant woman is not in a formal or informal union with the father, she and her family effectively erase the genitor's role in the child's life by stating that the father is unknown to anyone outside the immediate family, and by cutting off all contact between the

two families. While the identity of the genitor is usually known to both the mother and her parents, the maternal family rarely seeks support for the child from the father or his family. The child does not have a relationship with his or her father and often does not even know his identity, and the paternal family has no claims to the child. This means that the child does not belong to the father's lineage or clan, which has social and economic consequences for both the living and the dead by disrupting the inheritance of property, the continuation of the patriline, and the ongoing connection of kin to their ancestors. In Mokhotlong, the tenuous links to paternal families in the absence of a recognised union persist. Geographical distance and concerns around the quality of care children might receive within the paternal family prevent young women from drawing on those kin networks to assist in the daily care of children born to unwed mothers (cf. Block 2014).

At first glance, children born outside of a recognised union in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong have very different possibilities regarding belonging and care. In Nyanga East, a child would have access to a wider range of kin, including the paternal family, to call upon for care and assistance; in Mokhotlong, the frequent erasure of genitors and their kin would appear to narrow the caregiving options for children. A closer look at these varying practices within the two communities, however, reveal that they are similar strategies that are both directed towards the same ends – that is, creating and manipulating kinship in order to find a place where a child will be well cared for. In order to understand the context in which contemporary kinship practices emerged, we begin with a brief discussion of the issues that significantly impacted southern African families in the twentieth century. We show how, historically, black families in South Africa and Lesotho were affected by the same social and economic pressures and responded to these in similar ways. We then provide two contemporary extended case studies drawn from Nyanga East and Mokhotlong that explore these nuanced differences in ethnographic depth and detail.

A brief history of the family in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong
Colin Murray, in his important study of Basotho families, argues that "(t)he instability of conjugal relationships, the haphazard patterns of socialization and the high rates of illegitimacy are all largely attributable to the circumstances of migrant labour" (1981, 113). The protracted social disruption of migrancy on family life has similarly impacted amaXhosa in South Africa. For more than a century, peaking from the 1970s through the 1990s, Basotho and Xhosa men have worked in South Africa, primarily as gold miners. Recruited on contracts that ranged from four months to two years, these men travelled large distances from their families to work under dangerous conditions for pitiful wages. During the most intense periods of migrant labour, men and women were separated for an average of a year, with men returning for a month or two to fulfil their conjugal duties (Moodie and Ndatshe 1994; Murray 1977, 1981). Many miners were separated from their families for the better part of several decades, creating tensions and divisions that harmed social relationships, weakened recognised unions, and by extension, impacted childcare practices and the role of fathers in their children's lives.

While sustained migrancy disrupted and strained recognised unions, it also empowered women in rural South Africa and Lesotho. During the periods of highest male migration in Lesotho in the second half of the twentieth century, formal marriage to a miner was the most viable way to access remittances. However, the massive retrenchment of male migrant labour from Lesotho in the 2000s, and the increase in migrant work available to women in garment factories in the lowlands of Lesotho and as domestic workers in South Africa, have allowed Basotho women to access remittances without having to be part of a recognised union (Boehm

2006; Hosegood, McGrath, and Moultrie 2009). In contrast, South African women began migrating to the cities from the early twentieth century. According to Coplan, between 1921 and 1951, the female population of South African cities increased by 500% (2007, 112). Some women came in search of their errant partners, others in search of income-generating opportunities (Delius and Glaser 2002). On arrival, women were faced with hostile conditions and for many, survival meant "manipulating their sexual and reproductive capacities" (Ramphele 1989, 408). Hence one of the lasting impacts of migrant labour and urbanisation in both Lesotho and South Africa was the rise in "illegitimate births and paternal desertion" (Rabe 2006, 31). This trend signalled a shift in idealised norms, so much so that writing in the 1960s remarked that the high rates of illegitimacy and the tendency towards matrifocal families were "against Xhosa tradition" (1963, viii).

Historically, among both the Basotho and the amaXhosa, in the ideal family formation a man would establish an independent household near his parents' home upon entering a recognised union. Fathers were not regularly engaged in daily carework, but are at least remembered as authoritarian, powerful, and needing respect (Hunter 2006; Mkhize 2006). However, even by the 1970s, the ideal of an authoritative and cohabiting father was, as Murray states, "an irregular and transient phenomenon" (1981, 106). Migrant labour removed fathers from households, and whatever bond, intimacy and care fathers did provide outside of the ideal of the stern authority figure was also undermined by migrant labour, which increased fathers' importance as providers but decreased their affective attachment to their children (Hunter 2006).

More common in both Mokhotlong and Nyanga East in the second half of the twentieth century has been the increased visibility of multigenerational female-headed households. In the 1960s, Mayer commented that in urban areas of South Africa "illegitimacy and matrifocality […] [are] two sides of the same coin" (1963, viii). In Lesotho in the late 1970s, less than 20% of households consisted of the nuclear family ideal, and procreation outside of marriage was already commonplace, even if it was not socially sanctioned (Murray 1981; Spiegel 1981). In both contexts, there was an increase in multigenerational, female-dominated households, often organised around the care of children – a household arrangement that has persisted since the emergence of HIV (Siqwana-Ndulo 1998; Harrison, Short, and Tuoane-Nkhasi 2014. Subsequently, marriage across sub-Saharan Africa has become less common (Mokomane 2013; Meekers and Calvès 1997). Yet in both Nyanga East and Mokhotlong, childbearing remains important as a marker of social distinction and adulthood, and procreation outside of a formal recognised union is common (Mturi and Moerane 2001; Mkhwanazi 2010). Both communities have ways of integrating children born outside of a recognised union so that the children's kinship and belonging is not questioned or contested. For example, children are often given the surname of their mother, and paternity is usually attributed to the maternal grandfather.

In both communities in the recent past, sexual intercourse and childbearing outside of a formally recognised union were stigmatised and deterred in a number of ways, including virginity testing, naming practices intended to shame the mother and child, and exclusion from the patrilineage (Mturi and Moerane 2001; Makatjane 2002; Hunter 1936). While these practices have declined, there remain a number of signs that childbearing outside of a recognised union is not overtly socially sanctioned. For example, parents discourage their children from having sex while they are young and not in a recognised union, and women who are not in a formally recognised union seek prenatal care – and the disclosure of sexual activity it inevitably involves – much later than those who are (Mkhwanazi 2010; Mturi and Moerane 2001; Newman et al. 2011).

Despite the idealised discourse from parents, pastors and HIV-prevention campaigns that discourage sex and childbearing outside a formally recognised union, the practice is clearly socially accepted if not socially sanctioned in both communities. Between 1977 and 1992, premarital births in Lesotho more than doubled from 10% to 22%, notwithstanding a decrease in the overall fertility rate (Makatjane 2002; Mturi and Moerane 2001). In South Africa, the high rates of teenage pregnancy and the late median age of marriage (27 years old) means that most women are likely to have their first birth outside of a recognised union (Madhavan, Harrison, and Sennott 2013).

Nyanga East: Ayanda's story[3]

"Kind," "nice," "beautiful" and "ambitious" are the words that Ayanda used to describe Mlungisi, her first boyfriend. Ayanda said that she immediately felt "a connection" with Mlungisi, but that she pretended that she was not interested. A few weeks after they met, Mlungisi told Ayanda that he loved her. He asked her out on a date. She sought permission from her parents, and while her mother was hesitant, her father said that she could go. Mlungisi took her to see a film in Century City, a big shopping centre on the outskirts of Cape Town. Ayanda was 15 years old. Mlungisi was 17 years old. Three months after their first date Ayanda and Mlungisi had sex.

"It was an afternoon on Saturday, I remember the day," she said. "He called me to say that he wanted to see me. I told him to come to my house. While I was waiting for him, my mother asked me to go to the shop but I told her that I had an appointment. My brother said he would cover for me and that he would explain to my mother. Mlungisi came to fetch me, he waited for me on the street corner. He asked me to accompany him to his house to fetch his jersey. When we got to his house, we went to his room. He told me that he wants to stay with me and that he misses me so much. We were chatting and so on and then it happened. When I asked him for a condom he said he didn't have it. He also tried to tell me not to think about it. After we were done I told myself that I am not coming back here. If he asks me to come to his house again, I will refuse. I told him how I felt and he understood."

After this episode Ayanda's menstruation ceased. She told her grandmother who told her not to worry because she knew of girls whose menstruation stopped when they began a relationship. As she had not experienced any other symptoms associated with pregnancy, such as morning sickness, Ayanda took her grandmother's advice. Several months went by and Ayanda's noticed that her clothes were becoming tight. She also noticed that her body was changing. Ayanda confided in Mlungisi. She told him that she didn't understand what was going on because she had sex with him once then her period stopped but her grandmother had said it was nothing. Mlungisi told her that she was pregnant. He told her not to worry because he would support her. Ayanda told her grandmother that she suspected that she was pregnant. Her mother had also begun questioning her about her weight gain. At her grandmother's suggestion, Ayanda's mother took her to the hospital where her pregnancy was confirmed.

Ayanda said that when she realised that she was pregnant, she felt very sad because she would be "a disappointment" to her parents. She explained that her family was already "suffering" and that she tried to help by giving her bursary money to her mother to supplement the household income. The bursary, which amounted to R500 a month, was meant to be used for school-related expenses including transport and stationary. Ayanda feared that when the school found out about the pregnancy, they would withdraw the bursary and her family would lose this much-needed income.

Ayanda's mother was angry. She had not realised that her daughter was sexually active. At home she tried to beat Ayanda but her husband stopped her, telling her that "what is done, is done." She told Ayanda that she knew the pregnancy was a mistake, but they would raise the child. When Ayanda told Mlungisi that the hospital had confirmed that she was pregnant, Mlungisi was happy. He told her that he wanted to continue with their relationship, and that he would help her look after the child. Mlungisi dropped out of school and found some work. With his earnings he was able to contribute to his family's household income and give Ayanda money to pay for her transport to school. When Ayanda suggested that she should drop out of school, Mlungisi advised her against it. He told her that his mother was planning to move back from the Eastern Cape and she could help them to look after the baby.

When Ayanda's family approached Mlungisi's family to report the pregnancy and ask for *inhlawulo*, they were welcomed and told that their visit had been expected for some time. The negotiation of *inhlawulo* was fairly straightforward. Mlungisi accepted paternity. A sum of R10,000 was agreed upon. Mlungisi's family protested that the amount was too high so the families agreed that the payment be postponed until the end of 2014.

As Ayanda's pregnancy became more visible, she started spending a lot of time at home. She and Mlungisi began to see less of each other. Ayanda started hearing rumours that Mlungisi had another girlfriend. When Ayanda confronted Mlungisi, at first he denied it, but later told her that he needed another girlfriend because she was never around and he couldn't sleep alone. Ayanda suggested that they end the relationship. He pleaded with her but she insisted and stopped taking his calls.

On the day of the birth, Ayanda's brother called Mlungisi to let him know Ayanda was in labour. Mlungisi and his mother called Ayanda several times but she refused to take their calls. She called her parents to tell them that she was going to switch off her phone because Mlungisi and his mother "were driving [her] crazy." Ayanda gave birth to a baby girl who she named Yami (mine). After the baby was born, Mlungisi did not come to see the baby immediately. He would call often to tell Ayanda to tell Yami that he loved her. His mother called Ayanda regularly to check up on Yami. She worried that if Mlungisi did not spend enough time with the child they would lose the opportunity to bond.

One day Ayanda brought her school friends, some of whom were boys, to see Yami. When Mlungisi saw them leaving the house he threatened to beat up the boys. From that day on he would call Ayanda's mother and ask her permission to see the baby. If Ayanda's mother needed to be away for the day, she would ask Mlungisi to take Yami to his house so his mother can look after her. "I am lucky" she said "because even though Mlungisi and I didn't stay together, I didn't drop out of school. My child is looked after and I have been supported even though we are all suffering."

Ayanda's story is not unique. In Mkhwanazi's last visit to Nyanga East in 2013, she encountered an increasing number of teenage mothers who had received childcare support from the genitor and his family (Mkhwanazi 2014). Yolanda, for example, ended a relationship with Sandla who was abusive towards her. She did not realise that she was pregnant. She told her new boyfriend, Lizo about the pregnancy. He encouraged her to send a delegation to his family to negotiate *inhlawulo*. Knowing that he was not the genitor, Yolanda ignored his suggestion. Instead she approached Sandla and told him that she was going to have his child. Yolanda was surprised that Sandla did not deny paternity. She was even more surprised, after Samkeliso's birth, that Sandla insisted on contributing financially towards his care. Recently, Sandla began insisting on his right to spend time with his child.

However, this paternal acceptance is a new trend. When Mkhwanazi began this research over a decade ago, genitors commonly denied paternity and their families colluded with them by refusing to pay *inhlawulo*. The explanation for the refusal to pay *inhlawulo* was that they could not be sure that the alleged genitor was indeed the father given the conflicting stories of the girl and the alleged genitor. The genitor's family would often propose that negotiations could only resume after the baby was born and after they had a chance to verify if s/he bore a resemblance to the alleged genitor. This strategy of delaying the payment of *inhlawulo* is not new; denials of paternity have been a long-standing feature of the negotiation of childcare (cf. Hunter 1936; Pauw 1963.

Given that early childbearing was seen to bring shame to both the girl and her family, the refusal to pay *inhlawulo* was humiliating. Thus when the baby was born, the girl's family often avoided negotiating with the genitor's family, and instead, assumed the responsibility of raising the child. Historically, a child who was born outside of a recognised union was regarded as the child of the mother's father or her brother. These maternal kin provided support for the child and performed rituals on his/her behalf. The child was raised as part of his/her mother's domestic family unit. It was previously common for genitors to be absent in the lives of many children. However, recent research has shown an increasing willingness of fathers, especially young fathers, to being involved in the lives of their children. This research also draws attention to the challenges that the father faces in trying to negotiate their involvement in raising their children (Bhana and Nkani 2014; Hunter 2006; Swartz and Bhana 2009)

Lesotho: Mpho's story

Mpho's pregnancies always started with a dream. Not her own, but her mother's dreams. In the dream, there was a child sitting on the dirty ground on top of a pile of human faeces and there were snakes fighting over the child. This was how Mpho's mother knew somebody in her family was pregnant. The first time the dream was about Mpho, she was 19 years old. She had been dating her first real boyfriend, Thabo, for about six months when they had sex. It was Mpho's first time and they did not use any protection. About a month later, Thabo told Mpho he thought she was pregnant. She suggested perhaps he noticed some changes in her body. Shortly afterwards, Mpho's mother asked her "When did you last see your period?" She told Mpho that she had had her dream. She immediately confessed to her mother, stating: "I had to tell her the truth… Every time she has a dream, we know she is right. She has never made a mistake." The mother advised her to wait until the boy's family came to speak with them. Two months later, Thabo showed up at Mpho's house with his parents to discuss the situation. The two families had known each other for many years. Mpho's mother was not on good terms with them, and her father had passed away a few years prior. Thabo's mother announced that she would not have Mpho as a daughter-in-law, so Mpho's mother told them to leave, saying: "Go away with your boy. I can raise my grandchild by myself."

Mpho and Thabo secretly continued their relationship throughout the pregnancy and after the child's birth. Mpho saidthey were in love. When their daughter, Mosele, was three months old, Thabo sent an invitation to Mpho, saying he wanted her to come to his village for a ceremony that his brother was having so she could visit with his mother. Mpho was nervous, but hoped Thabo was trying to make amends between the two families so they could be together. But, the day before the visit she ran into a friend from the same village who told her that the ceremony for the "brother" was in fact Thabo's own wedding. Mpho was crushed. She considered going to the ceremony anyways. She said: "I had this pride. I can show him I do not care… I wanted to, but my heart, *mmmm*, I was not ready to face that." Instead she took sleeping

pills and went to bed for three days. Neither Mpho nor Mosele, who is now eight, has had any formal contact with Thabo or his family since then, though they occasionally pass each other on the street unacknowledged.

Nearly two years later, Mpho commenced a new a relationship. Three months into the relationship, the condom broke during sex and she became pregnant. Her mother informed her that she had had her dream again, but Mpho told her that her period had not returned since her first child, so it could not possibly be about her. Mpho considered an abortion, as she was struggling to take care of Mosele. She made a few half-hearted attempts to abort the child, including drinking bicarbonate of soda, and putting methylated spirit on her genitals, but she couldn't follow through with it. She decided against it because she had been warned that it would hurt her chances of having more children in the future, perhaps if she got married. When Mpho told her boyfriend that she was pregnant, he denied the pregnancy. She said: "He just disappeared, he did not even want to greet me on the street. So I just accepted it, because I have to live with the rejection." She didn't go to his family because she felt ashamed of having two children without a husband and did not want to have to face another disappointment. She was depressed, spent much time indoors, avoided talking to her friends and neighbours, and would go three or four days without taking a bath.

Mpho hid her second pregnancy from her mother for eight months. Mpho confessed that she made sure she did not get out of bed before her mother left for work, and made sure she was dressed in baggy clothes when her mother returned. Finally, after eight months, when she could no longer conceal the pregnancy, she told her mother. Her mother admitted that she had known about the pregnancy for months, and proved it by showing Mpho some diapers and baby clothes she had bought in preparation for the child. Her second child, a boy, was born a few weeks later.

Her mother was very understanding and supportive, saying she had always wanted to have more children before her husband died. Mpho moved to the lowland town of Butha-Buthe where her mother was working, so she could have help with childcare. After a few months, her mother moved back up to the highlands, but Mpho stayed in Butha-Buthe with the children to look after the house. She was casually dating another man who worked as a taxi driver. She was not in love with him, but she says they were having fun. She was taking contraceptive pills, but since she saw this man fairly infrequently, she decided to only take the pills for a few days before and after they had sex. Predictably, the pills failed, and Mpho found herself pregnant for a third time. When she confronted her lover, he told her: "I feel sorry for you, I see you like to have babies, but I am not ready to be called 'papa'!"

With her third pregnancy, Mpho decided not to tell her mother at all. Instead she relied on the assistance of a neighbour who helped her throughout the pregnancy, took her to the hospital during labour, and helped her care for the baby – another boy – after the birth. When the neighbour finally called Mpho's mother, the mother fainted. Mpho felt sad and ashamed that she had made life difficult for her family. She moved back up to the highlands and her mother took all three children with her to Butha-Buthe, saying she was too young to care for them, and raised them as her own.

A few years after the birth of her youngest son, Mpho fell in love with a close friend named Koenane. When he proposed marriage, she tried to send him away, telling him: "Goodbye my friend, we had a good time but I am not marriage material." She felt that she could not marry Koenane because he was a "pure boy." But Koenane persisted, and they are now married and living with her oldest child, Masele, who moved to Mokhotlong to attend school. Koenane wanted to live with the two boys as well, but Mpho's mother has been living with them for many years, and says they are her children. She told Mpho, only in half jest, "Don't even bother buying

socks for them." But Mpho is happy they are living with her mother, because she loves them and takes good care of them. She says: "I can never be angry with my mom, she has helped me a lot."

Recently, Mpho found out she was pregnant again, and at the same time tested positive for HIV. She is worried that the pregnancy will bring up the bad memories of her previous three experiences of abandonment and desolation, and she is struggling to deal with her HIV status. But, Koenane is thrilled and supportive. He has already bought toys for the child and agreed to get himself tested. While this story seems to have ended well for Mpho, her experience of rejection by the fathers of her first three children is typical. In Lesotho there are many unmarried women with children, and the only fathers that are involved are still in a relationship with the mother. Like Ayanda's story, unwed mothers in Lesotho often confront the boy's family to seek damages (in Sesotho, called *litsenyehelo*). Young men occasionally accept paternity of the child, especially if they are still in a relationship with the child's mother. However, they also frequently deny paternity, ignore requests for a discussion with the girl and her family, agree to support the child but never follow through, or disappear until the issue has blown over and the girl and her family have moved on. More often than not, men might pay a small amount of money on a few occasions during the child's infancy, then stop sending anything. It is very rare to encounter young Basotho women whose biological fathers (genitors) support a child financially or have retained a relationship with a child even when the relationship with the mother has ended. As another young unwed mother, Mosa, said, it is only in rare cases that the father or his family will "accept" the baby if the father is not in a relationship with the mother. Sometimes denial happens even if they are in a relationship. Mosa's boyfriend told his mother: "I know her. But we are not in a relationship." Mosa says it could be worse. Usually, Mosa claims, the boy will say: "I don't even know her. That's the first time I'm seeing her."

Childcare in context

As described earlier, the social, historical and political economic context leading to the increase in childbearing outside of a recognised union in both Mokhotlong and Nyanga East have many similarities. Yet, the care and belonging of babies born to unwed mothers is surprisingly different. While in Nyanga East, genitors are increasingly involved in their children's lives, in Mokhotlong, paternity is essentially erased if a couple is not in a sexual relationship. The difference in the responses to premarital fertility, we suggest, has to do with the circumstances under which young uncoupled mothers and their families make claims on genitors and their kin.

In both rural Lesotho and Nyanga East, women are at the centre of these differences in response to pregnancy outside of a recognised union. Women like Ayanda and Mpho are no longer merely at the whims of their boyfriends, whose acknowledgment of paternity previously would have shaped their futures and their children's futures. Rather, young women and their families have increasing agency as to the manner and extent of involvement that fathers and their families will have in the lives of their children. While young men and their families can, of course, deny paternity and refuse to provide any financial or social support to their biological kin, women must first choose to make a claim upon the genitor and his family. In Lesotho, as Mpho's case exemplifies, women are increasingly choosing not to pursue the support of their patrilineal kin. Instead, families are pooling their resources and their affective energies around their maternal kin. In contrast, young women and their families in Nyanga East are finding it increasingly advantageous to pursue significant caregiving relationships with their genitors and their families – a trend that has increased despite, and perhaps, in light of the decrease in the practice of *inhlawulo* payments, which put unreasonable financial demands on very poor families. In both contexts, the decisions of young women and their families to pursue the support

of paternal kin (or not) – and subsequently, the decision of the paternal family to accept or deny the request – are influenced by a variety of structural and social factors. None of these factors can be pointed to as the singular explanation for the regional differences presented here. Instead, young women and men work within a series of constraints and opportunities that influence their decision-making processes. Some of these factors are explored below.

Most obviously, there are differences in terrain. The geographic dispersal of Basotho in rural areas makes co-parenting between two separate families difficult. In Mpho's case, for example, none of the paternal kin (with the exception of Thabo's family, though not Thabo himself) live in Mokhotlong, where she currently lives. In rural, mountainous terrain that is difficult to get around, and in a context of complex caregiving needs stemming from HIV/AIDS, cohabitation is increasingly important to shaping care (Block 2016b). The geographical separation of families makes it difficult for a child to have occasional visits with the paternal family. While geography is only one factor – and albeit a secondary one – in shaping care for children, it is a significant deterrent in a context where ties between a mother and genitor are already deemphasised. In Nyanga East, the geographical proximity of Ayanda and the father of her child enabled a relationship to be formed between the two families.

Also, in Lesotho, there exists a tenuous relationship – both in theory and in practice – between young women and their mothers-in-law (Murray 1981;). While secondary to the impact that the decline in customs such as bridewealth payments has had on maintaining alliances between families, this ambivalence and mistrust between affinal kin has at least facilitated a shift toward matrilocal patterns of childcare (Block 2014). In the absence of a formally recognised union, young Basotho women do not trust that their boyfriends' mothers would take good care of their children. Furthermore, it is neither physically possible nor socially desirable for Mpho's children to be picked up for an afternoon by their fathers or paternal grandmothers. This is not the case in Nyanga East. Living in an urban locale, proximity allows for easy transfer of children and childcare practices are subject to the scrutiny of neighbours who would report neglect either directly to Ayanda's family or to one of the many social workers in the township. While these same affinal tensions do exist in South Africa as in Lesotho, the social and economic advantages of mutual assistance outweigh the social antipathy that young women often feel for their mothers-in-law.

Opportunities for work and education are key to decision-making around childcare in both Nyanga East and Mokhotlong. In Nyanga East, pregnancy used to mean the end of education for many girls. Since the South African Schools Act passed in 1996, teenage mothers are now encouraged to return to school. Having access to both maternal and paternal childcare reduces the economic burden that the care of children born outside of a recognised union places on maternal families by allowing paternal kin to share in the care of the child. The obvious advantages of this arrangement for paternal kin are that it allows them access to the child without having to pay the large amounts of money for *inhlawulo*, which many households cannot afford. In Nyanga East, childcare decisions also hinge on the economic viability of the household. Thus decisions about childcare for a schoolgoing teenager who became pregnant would depend on the ability of able-bodied family members to find work. The turn to paternal kin opens up options for the teenager and her family. Mlungisi's decision to drop out of school was not because he had already secured employment. Formal employment for young people in South Africa is scarce and this is even worse for those who do not have a school-leaving certificate. Mlungisi's decision was based on his promise to help support his child. It is a reminder of the continuing conservative ideas about gender roles that persist where young men see fatherhood as being about providing the material

resources that enable care whereas women are confined to being the ones who do the intimate work of providing childcare (Hunter 2006; Morrell, Bhana, and Shefer 2012).

In Lesotho, as the entrenched reliance on migrant labour indicates, Basotho privilege work opportunities, which are scarce, over other social responsibilities. According to several years of fieldwork in this community, if a young unmarried woman with children is able to obtain work, and her work takes her away from her natal home, her family will find a way to care for her children so that she can access wage labour, from which they will all benefit (Block 2016a. Childcare, then, is left to members of the maternal family who are unable to find work. Due to high unemployment rates, particularly in the rural areas, a willing caregiver is usually not difficult to find. In contrast, while education is highly valued in Mokhotlong, it is also highly variable. Lesotho, like South Africa, implemented an Education Act in 2000, which mandated that all primary education be free (Ministry of Education and Training 2000). This same Act mandated that pregnant students could not be temporarily expelled from school, as they had previously been. However, secondary education is costly, and many families cannot afford to send all their children to high school. Furthermore, despite the Education Act, young pregnant women still experience discrimination while in school, and pregnancy is still a high predictor of school dropout in Lesotho (Molapo et al. 2014).

In summary, families in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong are making childcare decisions based on similar factors: geography, kinship, education, and labour opportunities. Most importantly, both contexts arrange childcare so as to enable educational opportunities for young mothers, and to privilege employment opportunities for adults who bring much-needed income into households. These decisions are motivating young women and their families to pursue (or not) the involvement of genitors and their kin.

Kinship strategies in context

In both Nyanga East and Mokhotlong, children born to unwed mothers play an important role in the maintenance and reproduction of sociality, and are a product of particular social, cultural and political economic circumstances. Yet, close investigation of practices surrounding unwed mothers, in particular as they pertain to the involvement, responsibility, and even acknowledgement of the genitor and his kin, underscore differences in both kinship ideals and social praxis and reinforce the importance of contextually specific understandings of kin relations and a fluid and processual understanding of kinship itself. What appears to be most important is the contexts under which young women and their families seek to make significant financial and caregiving claims on young men and their kin. The end goal of these claims to secure the care of children while enabling economic and social viability. The malleability of kinship is the mechanism which allows these various claims to be made.

As contemporary scholars of kinship are well aware, the rules of kinship are flexible and are constantly being renegotiated and reinterpreted as the needs of communities shift. For Basotho and amaXhosa, strategies around family formation continue to change as social and economic conditions change. As Mkhwanazi (2006) has demonstrated elsewhere, the assumption that premarital pregnancy is undesirable, abnormal, and deviant is in many ways unfounded. This work demonstrates how communities find different ways to navigate the legitimacy of children in the context of contemporary economic and social relations that do not necessarily lead to a union or a recognised social father.

We know very little about the involvement of young unmarried African men (or non-African men for that matter) in the lives of their children (Madhavan 2010). Studies of fertility and childbearing have historically and continue to focus on mothers for reasons both practical

and social (Watkins 1993). Yet, it is evident that "structural and historical factors condition the extent to which fathers are involved" in the lives of their children, both within and outside of marriage (Madhavan 2010, 141).

Kinship strategies arise from social conditions, which are shaped by historical economic and political conditions. As social conditions change under pressure from these outside sources, so do particular kinship strategies. Instead of families made up of proscribed kin groups, we see emerging a pattern of so-called "families of care." In Nyanga East, these families of care for children born outside of a recognised union increasingly include both paternal and maternal kin, even when the mother and father are no longer in a sexual relationship – a shift that has taken place over the last decade. In Mokhotlong, families privilege a child's maternal kin, and effectively erase the child's paternity, so long as the biological parents are no longer in a sexual relationship, in order to ensure that he or she is well cared for. What these two contexts have in common is that they manipulate the idealised rules of kinship in order to maximise their desired social and economic ends. With social change comes different social strategies of care. The inherent flexibility of kinship enables minute constant adjustments, which allow families to adapt to changing social conditions. With the increased acceptance of children born outside of recognised unions in both locales, young women are the gatekeepers making decisions about the potential roles genitors and their families will play in the lives of their children.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Notes

1.   This comparison of the communities is based on the authors' long term fieldwork in the areas. Some of the points raised here are evident in previously published work. See Mkhwanazi (2010, 2014a, 2014b) and Block (2014, 2016a, 2016b).

2   Xhosa and Sesotho are the dominant languages spoken by the research participants in Nyanga East and Mokhotlong, respectively.

3.   The case studies selected from both locales are representative of trends the authors have noted over several years of fieldwork in their respective communities of study.