Millennium City Entrepreneurs

An Anthropological Study of Entrepreneurship in Western Kenya

Fredrik Roe Bøe

Thesis submitted to the
Department of Social Anthropology

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO
Spring 2010
Abstract

This thesis is based on a six month long anthropological fieldwork amongst the Luo in the western Kenyan city of Kisumu. It explores the activities of entrepreneurs who try to capitalize on the expansion of the city’s airport. The airport is currently being upgraded to attain international status. The airport upgrade will expectedly bring more western tourists, researchers, aid workers and others to the region.

This region of Kenya have for years been marginalized and cut off from access to state resources since the late sixties. The Luos have for decades been associated with oppositional politics. An important objective for this thesis is to explore how past and present developments on the national political arena have great impact on the strategies and actions chosen by the entrepreneurs. The consequences of the Kenyan General Election of 2007, its ensuing violence and the swearing in of the ultimate Luo leader, Raila Odinga, as Prime Minister are particularly relevant.

Through empirical evidence I show how the entrepreneurs focus their time, energy and money on activities aimed at gaining access to state and foreign capital.
Table of Contents

Abstract.............................................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................... 11

Theorizing Entrepreneurship .............................................................................................................. 13

Place and History ............................................................................................................................... 16

Kisumu ................................................................................................................................................. 16

Usoma ................................................................................................................................................. 19

The Airport Saga............................................................................................................................... 20

Kenya’s Vision 2030 ............................................................................................................................ 22

Methodological Reflections .............................................................................................................. 24

Participant Observation ...................................................................................................................... 25

Newspapers.......................................................................................................................................... 26

Anonymity............................................................................................................................................. 27

My Role ............................................................................................................................................... 27

Outlining of the Thesis ....................................................................................................................... 28

Chapter 2: The Luos of Kenya........................................................................................................... 29

Introduction.......................................................................................................................................... 29

The Decline of the Luo? ...................................................................................................................... 29

Odingaism.......................................................................................................................................... 31
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4: The Opportunist</th>
<th>67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will Raila do?</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising to the Occasion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hilton of Homestay's</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Different Prospect</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Difficulties</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Search for a Partner</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Cultural Broker</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5: The Broker</th>
<th>83</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixon</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediatory Position</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasing Away the Spirits</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Ask the Ancestors to Leave?</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: An Entrepreneur and his Community ............................................. 97

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 97

The Kogony Clan .................................................................................................... 99

Myth of Genesis ..................................................................................................... 100

An Informal Interest Group .................................................................................. 102

The Entrepreneur in Question .............................................................................. 103

The Well .................................................................................................................. 105

The Clan Election .................................................................................................. 106

Leverage .................................................................................................................. 109

Buying Land ............................................................................................................ 110

A Big Man and a Small Boy .................................................................................. 111

The Entrepreneur and His Community ................................................................. 113

Concluding Remarks ............................................................................................ 114

Chapter 7: Concluding Reflections ....................................................................... 115

References .............................................................................................................. 118
Newspaper articles and electronic media
Chapter 1: Introduction

Anna Tsing (2002) has shown us how metaphors of flow characterize our way of thinking about an imagined global interconnectedness. The metaphors invoke the image of a river flowing through the landscape with great impact on everything in its path. In the globalised economy this flow is money which is seen to circulate freely throughout our world (Tsing 2002:463). Like Tsing, James Ferguson (2006) criticises this way of looking at global connections. He argues that Africa is an inconvenient continent when scholars and defenders of structural-adjustment programs try to explain how the processes of ‘globalization’ cover the planet. Ferguson denounces this way at looking at globalization and says that for sub-Saharan Africa capital is not “globe-covering” but rather “globe-hopping” (Ferguson 2006:37-38) Capital jumps from one point to another and ignores everything in-between. This capital also tends to be directed towards enclaves that are isolated from the wider societies in those countries. These enclaves are often centred on extracting minerals like oil and gold for the supply of world markets. In this case “the “movement of capital” here does not cover the globe; it connects discrete points on it” (Ferguson 2006: 38).

A partly World Bank funded airport expansion, in a politically and economically marginalised part of Kenya, seemed like an interesting topic to conduct a study on. An airport clearly served as an image of how the African continent is connected to globalisation via discrete points. During the colonial era the British sought to connect their colonies through airports by creating an Imperial Air Route from Cairo to Cape Town. The western Kenyan city of Kisumu became an integral point on this route (McCormack 1974). Today, the upgrading of Kisumu Airport into reaching international status is part of a larger plan to transform the city into a regional economic growth cluster. In this case capital was also clearly ‘hopping’ from one point to another, from the ‘West’ and the Kenyan state to a city and region that for
long had been cut off from state-driven development (Smith 2006:430). I wanted to explore the imagery and the metaphors employed by residents of Kisumu, how they fictionally positioned themselves in relation to these highly exclusive flows of global capital. Early on my study started evolving around entrepreneurs seeing immense opportunities unfold with this new influx of capital into the city and the expected rise in the number of foreign visitors in the wake of the eventual airport upgrade. The entrepreneurs adhere to the fictional notion of capital as flowing from industrialised centres to the less developed regions of the world. Gaining access to this flow is a pivotal concern.

In their article Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming (2000), Jean and John Comaroff holds that millennial capitalism at the dawn of the 21st century is “both capitalism at the millennium and capitalism in its messianic, salvific, even magical manifestations” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:293). This type of capitalism is a “gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:292). Millennial capitalism has been monumental in changing the ways in which people think about wealth creation. A rise in gambling, speculation and occult economies are some features of this change. Fortunes can come in an instance and be swept away just as abruptly. These features have one thing in common: “the allure of accruing wealth from nothing” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:313). The ‘allure’ of becoming rich in an instance I find as a common feature among my informants and can be related to their attempts of getting access to the global flow of capital, which for them in most cases means teaming up with westerners in one way or the other.

The main objective of this thesis is to show how my informants direct their entrepreneurial activities towards getting access to an imaginary flow of global capital. Why is this so? Being that the Kisumu region has until recently been cut off
from state resources another important question to ask is: how can the strategies and actions undertaken by these entrepreneurs relate to past and present political developments in Kenya?

Theorizing Entrepreneurship

The term entrepreneur can be labelled an ‘emic’ category deriving from western economic thought widely incorporated into everyday speech (Barth 1963:5, Hart 1975:5). In anthropology the usage of the term has been too broadly applied and, as Hart (1975:6) notes, “it is clear that the word is normally used by analysts to mean whatever they like”. For this study it is important to accentuate that the term entrepreneur is widely used by informants in their descriptions of themselves. Constituting this emic term is an understanding of entrepreneurship as the actions of innovative individuals constantly in pursuit of economic profit.

I rely heavily on Fredrik Barth’s definition found in the introduction to The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway: “to the extent that persons take the initiative, and in pursuit of profit in some discernible form manipulate other persons and resources, they are acting as entrepreneurs” (1963:6). Barth’s open-minded interpretation of profit and cost makes the scope of what can be called goods wider. Goods should not only be considered in its strict economic sense and should include more than “monetary” and “material” forms. Barth includes “power, rank, or experience and skills” and sees profit as the “net rewards in all these various forms”. This type of profit can again be converted into a monetary or material form. Likewise costs may incur in just as intangible forms. In its analytical sense of the word entrepreneur does not connote a person or a role. In Barth’s view entrepreneur is “an aspect of a role: it relates to actions and activities, and not rights and duties” (Barth 1963:6). For some of my informants entrepreneur is clearly a role carefully enacted in various circumstances.
Barth (1963:9-10) identifies three main concepts employed to make an analytical model of entrepreneurship. The model focuses on the relationship between the entrepreneur and his community and how certain structural factors in that community influence and inhibits entrepreneurial activity before and after it is set in motion. The first concept concerns the niche of the entrepreneur which Barth describes as “the position which he occupies in relation to resources, competitors and clients”. What ‘tools’ the entrepreneur uses to utilize his niche may be called his assets and constitutes “the sum total of capital, skills and social claims which he may employ in the enterprise”. Assets is Barth’s second concept. When the entrepreneur then has chosen his niche and his assets are set, restrictions occur which limits his mobility. These restrictions constitute the third concept in Barth’s model and “define requirements and opportunities” for the entrepreneur which determines whether his enterprise fails or succeeds (Barth 1963:10).

These three main concepts represent the instrumental variables that influence the choices undertaken by the entrepreneur. In addition to this Barth stresses the various social costs that the entrepreneur might endure if he goes against moral and social values apparent in his community (1963:10-12). This shows how entrepreneurship is morally embedded in society, to paraphrase Alex Stewart (1990).

Important for Barth is the idea that society consists of several distinct spheres of exchange. Within these spheres of exchange there is circulation of different goods and services. The value of these goods and services cannot be used in another sphere unless it goes through what Barth calls channels of conversion. For example, an enterprise needs both money and administrative clearance in order to succeed. In the case of Northern Norway it is not legally possible to use money from the sphere of private capital into the political sphere in order to buy a political decision. It is however legitimate to sponsor a political party in order for that party to easier gain votes in an election. If this fosters a political decision of the entrepreneur’s wish the
conversion is complete (Barth 1963:10-12). But, as he himself notes, the boundaries of the spheres are not absolute. “The threat of loss through excessive costs” (Barth 1963:12) creates a barrier between spheres undesirable for the entrepreneur to cross. If he does choose to cross the barrier it will injure him either, or both, material and social costs.

As Barth shows in his Economic Spheres in Darfur (1967) the entrepreneur tries to bridge different spheres in the pursuit for profit: “entrepreneurs will direct their activity pre-eminently towards those points in an economic system where the discrepancies of evaluation are greatest, and will attempt to construct bridging transactions which can exploit these discrepancies “(Barth 2002:158 (1967)). Among the mountain Fur in the Sudanese province of Darfur Barth identified two distinct spheres. Where in one sphere certain goods were eligible to be exchanged for cash the other sphere was more restricted and evolved around exchanges of millet, beer and labour. In the latter sphere millet production and the building of houses were done ‘voluntarily’ by men in the community who were given homebrewed millet beer in return for their labour. In the early 1960s an Arab merchant started spending parts of the year here. He approached the community and asked to borrow land to cultivate, something which he was granted. When the merchant settled he brought with him large quantities of millet bought at a lowland market where the prices were lower. The merchant made his wife make beer from the millet and when the beer was done he gathered work parties to come and cultivate the land. Instead of making the men sow millet he directed the labour towards the cultivation of tomatoes, which clearly belonged to the cash sphere. When the merchant harvested the tomatoes and sold it at the market he made a considerable cash profit. The merchant came from outside and saw the difference of value in the system and managed to bridge the cash sphere with the highly restricted millet-labour-beer sphere. As others had started emulating the merchant Barth concluded that the system with two economic
spheres was unendurable and had to eventually be re-evaluated and could in the end lead to social change (Barth 2002 (1967)).

For Northern Norway Barth (1963) finds the mediating roles, the brokers, to be most apt at making a profit. The persons who act as middlemen between peripheral economic dependent northern communities and the Welfare State find their entrepreneurial opportunities and niches in these mediating roles. As brokerage is central in this thesis I will theorise it further by relying on Jeremy Boissevain (1974). He sees the entrepreneur as manipulating two types of resources, often found in combination. The first order resources are the control of resources such as land, jobs and specialized knowledge. Those who control the first order type he calls patrons who manages to attract a large following of clients with the use of his resources. Those who controls second order resources, for example networks and strategic contacts with resourceful people, Boissevain calls brokers (Boissevain 1974:147-148). A person only becomes a broker if he is willing to manipulate the second order resources at his disposal. The broker is thus ideally a “professional manipulator of people and information who brings about communication for profit” (Boissevain 1974:148). He is the link between different worlds so to speak and thereby a transmitter for information from both worlds. Boissevain (1974:158-159) notes that the profit, what he calls the tariff, brokers make “consist of services, information, status, good will, even psychological satisfaction”. Boissevain states that money rarely acts as tariff and that the value exchanged between the brokers and others comes in the form of credit or delayed ‘payment’.

Place and History

Kisumu

On the morning of 16 January 2009 I arrived in the Kenyan city of Kisumu in the Nyanza Province to conduct a six months long anthropological fieldwork. Around 16
hours earlier I had left the capital Nairobi travelling on a colonial relic, the railroad, before I eventually arrived in Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria. The railroad which had been constructed by coolies\(^1\) from the Indian subcontinent had reached Kisumu in 1901, at that time named Port Florence. Unofficially dubbed *The Lunatic Express* (Miller 1971) because of its immeasurable costs the railroad is a symbol of colonial state power and the superficial nation-state that superseded it. Perhaps it was the railroad’s symbolic linkage to state power that lead slum residents in Nairobi and Kisumu to uproot several kilometres of rail tracks when incumbent President Mwai Kibaki was declared winner in the highly disputed General Election of 2007? Perhaps the Luo of Kisumu and the Nyanza Province in general, who had largely been convinced that ‘their’ leader, the ultimate Luo ‘Big Man’ Raila Odinga, would win the election, now were tired of being marginalised and therefore symbolically cut themselves off from the state?

The descendants of the Indian railway workers are today regarded as the city’s upper class and are as a group in control of many of the major businesses in Kisumu. Animosities between the Asian minority and the majority of Luo inhabitants are widespread and had its most profound impact during the violence following the General Election when many Asian owned shops and businesses were burnt and looted. In addition properties owned by Kikuyus\(^2\) were looted and burnt. It was pointed out to me on several occasions that Asians were believed to have voted for Kibaki and to have contributed to his campaign. When this took place Kisumu’s main commercial area, Oginga Odinga Street, was in havoc. Kisumu was one of the places in Kenya that was hit hardest by the post-election violence. The chaos lasted

\[-------
\]

\(^1\) Indian workers whose descendants are now called Asians Kenyans or just Asians.

\(^2\) Ethnic group of President Kibaki and viewed by many as the arch-rival of the Luos.
until the signing of the so called Peace Accord in April 2008 between President Mwai Kibaki and main opposition leader Raila Odinga, brokered by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The crisis was Kenya’s worst in its 46 year long history and attracted extensive international media coverage. When I started my fieldwork the power-sharing agreement between President Kibaki and now Prime Minister Odinga had lasted for nearly nine months.

In 2001 Kisumu was officially granted status as a city and joined the ranks of the East African metropolises of Nairobi and Mombasa. But it is safe to say that Kisumu lacks a ‘city’ feeling and, though populous, seems rather peripheral and laidback compared to the other two Kenyan cities. In Kenya’s 1999 census Kisumu was estimated to have a population of 322,734 (ROK 2003). The city is widely considered to be the ‘capital’ of the Luo ethnic group, the third largest in the country after the Kikuyus of central Kenya and the Luhyas further northwest. For many years Kisumu and the province of Nyanza have been associated with oppositional politics and have therefore mostly been cut off from state-driven development initiatives since independence (Smith 2006:430).

Prior to my arrival I had read that Kisumu was a city with immense opportunities business wise (Colombia University 2007). Ambitious plans had been made to turn Kisumu into the top regional “business and tourism hub” and vast sums of money was put aside for various infrastructure projects which included funds for a major upgrading of Kisumu Airport (Daily Nation 24 June 2008). Also, in 2005 Kisumu had been granted status as the world’s first Millennium City by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Close cooperation between the Kisumu Municipal Council and the UN-

---

I was told that the 2009 census is due to be announced in the autumn of 2010. When I asked Kisumu residents how many people they believed lived in their city the number varied from 500,000 to 1,500,000.
HABITAT, led by renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs, was bent on reaching specified parts of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDG), especially concerned with housing and so called “slum upgrading”, in the city (UN-HABITAT 2005).

There is a significant presence of western researchers, NGO volunteers, aid workers and missionaries in Kisumu. With them there has come a large influx of foreign capital into the city in recent years and a large number of locals seem to put their time and energy into obtaining access to this influx. Prince and Geissler (2010:57, fn26) notes that in the last decade or so the increase of foreign capital into Kisumu has been directed at HIV-related NGOs and research. This has led to an increase in service-related businesses in the city including a growth of shopping malls, cafes and restaurants that makes their profit from servicing the needs of young and well-educated Kenyans and foreigners working with aid and research. My informants were of the opinion that the expansion of Kisumu Airport would lead to an increase in the number of foreign researchers, NGOs, aid workers and tourists and thereby a growth for the services catering for them.

Usoma

Usoma is a flat semirural area of land that administratively falls under the Kogony sub-location. The area is home to Kisumu Airport as well as the city’s major industries such as a state owned grain mill, a bottle factory owned by the Coca Cola Company (Equator Bottles) and Kenya Pipeline. The pipeline is one of the most important suppliers of oil and petrol to landlocked countries further east, notably Uganda, Rwanda and eastern Congo and there is always a significant presence of petrol trucks from these countries in the area. Though the home of several major companies, I was told by people in the area that few locals had found employment with these companies. Fishing used to be an important source of livelihood for many but has lost its importance as overfishing has pushed fishermen to travel further than before in order to catch fish. Many households hold goats and cattle and cultivate
their own foodstuff as well as cash crops like chilli and sugar canes. Usoma is the most important part of the Kogony clan’s ancestral land.

The Airport Saga

On July 25th 2009, a little over a month after my fieldwork ended, President Kibaki in cohort with Prime Minister Raila Odinga officially commissioned the KSh\(^4\) 2.9 billion expansion of Kisumu Airport. *The Nation* (25 July 2009) saw this joint activity between the two leaders as a sign of unity and an attempt to heal the rift caused by the 2007 General Election and its ensuing violence. The construction work however had then been going on since December 2008, even though it had been due to start in September the same year. A long-entangling row between the Kenya Airport Authority (KAA) and the Kogony clan, represented by their Council of Elders, had hindered the work of the Chinese engineering company in charge with extending the runways. The Kogony clan claims the area of Usoma, where the airport is situated, as their ancestral land. The quarrel evolved around the compensation of Kogony clan members for their loss of land which included both individual and communal tenure. An agreement was made in November 2008 leading to a compensation of over 56 KSh million (*The Standard* 28 December 2008).

It was with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 that the British colonial authorities in Kenya decided to build an airstrip in Kisumu to further enhance their control over Lake Victoria and protect their imperial pet project in East Africa, the Mombasa-Kisumu railroad. Colonial administrators approached the inhabitants of Usoma, the area deemed most viable for building a so called *aerodrome*, or airfield, and asked to *borrow* some of their land for as long as the war was going on. The Kogony elders at the time made a verbal agreement with the British and were

\footnote{Kenyan schillings. 100 Kenyan schilling = approximately 8 Norwegian kroner (NOK).}

20
promised their land returned as soon as the war had been won. The British then expropriated 507 acres of Kogony land and built the first airstrip of what was later to become Kisumu Airport. As the elders never signed a legal contract with the colonial authorities they had little to show for when the newly-born colonial state broke its promise of returning the land.

In 1942, with another World War in progress, the colonial authorities saw a need to expand the Kisumu Airport and its facilities once again. The Kogony elders now demanded a written contract with a promise of compensation with a similar piece of land at a different location. The British were ‘allowed’ to expropriate 373 acres of more land and promised to set aside hundreds of acres to relocate clan members in the surrounding areas of what today is the small town of Muhoroni, 50 kilometres east of Kisumu in Nyando District. According to clan elders the British stalled the handout of land in Muhoroni and in the time after independence this particular land was instead handed over to members of other Luo clans, as well as to other ethnic groups, by the government of Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Also, parts of the 373 acres expropriated in 1942 were first used to situate army barracks for The King’s African Rifles and were later turned into a golf course after the war, today known as the Nyanza Golf Club. Some of the land has also gone to private companies that have established themselves in the area. Apparently 31 acres of airport land were illegally allocated to private companies and politicians under the rule of President Moi in the 1990s. Some of this land was allegedly given to Prime Minister

---

5 This information comes from members of the Kogony Land Council of Elders Welfare which represents the interests of the Kogony clan as a group today. From now on I will refer to it as the Council of Elders or just the Council. If not made a specific reference to, the further outlining of what clan members refer to as The Airport Saga are based on information from elders. Because of limited time I was not able to carry out any in-depth archive studies in Nairobi to further illuminate this issue.

6 A colonial regiment under British command that consisted of indigenous men from the African colonies.
Raila Odinga and his brother Oburu Oginga as ‘payment’ for their sudden support of and collaboration with President Moi after the 1997 General Election.

To recapitulate then, the Kogony clan has never received any form of compensation for land expropriated by the colonial authorities in the years of 1914 and 1942 under colonial rule. After independence the Council of Elders, without success, demanded, as well as tried to persuade, the various Kenyan governments to grant them reparation. The KSh 56 million compensation clan members received during my fieldwork was for the land expropriated for the current expansion. Although being planned since the late 1970s it was only after President Daniel arap Moi resigned, following his defeat to Mwai Kibaki in the 2002 General Election, that the idea of modernizing Kisumu Airport became more than just talk.

**Kenya’s Vision 2030**

In 2008 the Grand Coalition Government published their plan for the first phase of what is known as *Kenya Vision 2030*. In the foreword to the document President Kibaki writes that the aim of *Kenya Vision 2030* “is to transform our country into a modern, globally competitive, middle income country, offering a high quality of life for all citizens by the year 2030” (ROK 2008:ii). In Chapter 3: *Foundations for National Transformation*, the Government points to the importance of improving infrastructure in reaching these goals. Roads, harbors, railroads, communication systems and aviation are pointed out in particular. The Government aims at “building an international airport in Kisumu to serve as the aviation hub for the Great Lakes Region” (ROK 2008:22). Further, together with Mombasa, Kisumu will get status as a Special Economic Cluster (SEC) which will enable Kisumu to become a regional industrial and manufacturing zone. The development of regional markets is seen as crucial in attracting *Foreign Direct Investments* (FDI) to the country (ROK 2008:11-12).
More foreign donor support and external private capital are expected to increase substantially as the Government implements these policies (ROK 2008:13)

Also proclaimed crucial for the Kenyan Government is the development of the country’s human resources stating that “Kenya’s main potential lies in its people - their creativity, work ethic, education, their entrepreneurial and other skills” (ROK 2008:38). In order to promote an “entrepreneurship culture”, which according to the Government will help reduce poverty and spur economic growth in Kenya, “potential entrepreneurs need human resource development” which must be facilitated by the state (ROK 2008:44). Swedberg (2002:7-8) notes that entrepreneurship came to be understood as a crucial element for a country’s economic performance and became a part of the political agenda when Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher took the reigns of power in their respective countries during the years of 1979-1980. Reagan and Thatcher’s entrance onto the world stage David Harvey (2005:39) puts as the starting point for the “neoliberal revolution”.

In his A Brief History of Neoliberalism David Harvey (2005:2) defines neoliberalism as:

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade

Following this has been “Deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state” (Harvey 2005:3). Kenya Vision 2030 is consistent with what Harvey sees as the implementation of neoliberal policies. He puts forth the contradiction between the neoliberal state’s emphasis on free market principles on the one hand and the neoliberal state’s active and coercive role in creating a good business environment on the other (Harvey 2005:79). For the neoliberal state it is of grave importance to make the state into an effective and competitive entity in the globalized economy. Entrepreneurship is seen as fundamental in creating wealth and reducing poverty (Harvey 2005:64-65). Since the neoliberal state puts a special emphasis on the
individual’s absolute freedom it now becomes the individual’s own responsibility to take care of itself. As Harvey (2005:65) writes “individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings”.

Methodological Reflections

Traveling in Tanzania and Kenya in 2007 I had noticed a significant presence of Chinese companies in charge of foreign and state funded infrastructure projects. I wanted to study this presence and people’s notions about the Chinese arrival in East Africa and the flow of capital that seemed to accompany them. As I was in Kenya in October and November 2007 I became aware of the tense political situation in the country. I followed the General Election and the ensuing crisis from Norway. My interest in Kenyan politics started here and continued throughout my fieldwork and during the writing of this thesis. Against the backdrop of having been one of the places hit hardest by the post-election violence and the fact that a Chinese engineering company had been given the task to expand the city’s airport, Kisumu seemed like an obvious place to conduct fieldwork.

Before arriving I had read online about the problems between the Kogony clan and the Kenyan Government regarding compensation for the clan’s loss of ancestral land. From the very start the Kogony clan and the compensation was a central concern for me. Getting to know Kogony clan members was easy as many were interested in telling me about the Airport Saga and their quarrels with the state. From early on it proved difficult though to engage in contact with the Chinese. Only two of the 22 Chinese that worked for the company spoke English. In addition the Chinese lived in a guarded compound right next to the airport and, I was told by people living in the area, hardly interacted with locals. In addition, certain informants throughout my fieldwork seemed reluctant to put me in contact with the Chinese. When following Kenyan media one might get the impression that corruption is an integral part of
infrastructure projects in the country. It is tempting to speculate that certain informants wanted to hide information about corruption but I have no concrete evidence for that.

My initial plan in retrospect seems to have been overly optimistic with regards to access to the field and proved difficult to carry out. The focus of my fieldwork swiftly changed to studying entrepreneurs who were seeing opportunities unfolding with the airport upgrade.

My first main informant was Ben. I first came in contact with Ben who rented out a room to me in his guesthouse. It turned out that Ben was in the process of buying a piece of land near the airport as he saw the area as a promising area to invest in (to be described in detail in Chapter 4). Through Ben I made contact with residents of Usoma and saw that Ben was hardly the only entrepreneur with an interest in this area. From here on I established a network of informants and came in contact with other entrepreneurs. Some of these entrepreneurs were Kogony clan members who put me in contact with the Kogony Council of Elders.

**Participant Observation**

In his study of social change in two Indonesian villages Clifford Geertz (1963:4) writes that the anthropological method, “intensive, first-hand field study of small social units within the larger society”, is especially apt for studying economic development on the microscopic level. Parts of Geertz’ focus was on entrepreneurs. Monica Lindh De Montoya (2000:334-335) argues that the discipline’s focus on the method of participant observation and its holistic approach towards culture makes social anthropology well-suited to study microscopic activities such as entrepreneurship. However, since anthropology “has little ambition of being a predictive science” there have been relatively few studies on entrepreneurship (De Montoya (2000:334).
This was, hardly surprising, the method I relied on. Olaf Smedal (2001:132) writes about the tendency Norwegian master students to rely on structured interviews with individuals. This, he fears, will have a negative impact on the discipline’s main method. The few interviews I did try to carry out were semi-structured. I often felt that the information gathered in this way was a result of carefully processed thoughts and did not reflect on what people actually did. I therefore chose to wait to conduct interviews of individuals’ life histories when I knew more about the cultural and social context I was operating in (Mintz 1979:25-26). I interviewed the life histories of my three main informants at the end of my fieldwork.

**Newspapers**

In order to contextualize and to understand Kenya’s contemporary political landscape I relied heavily on reading newspapers. Following Kenya’s two leading daily newspapers, *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, became of pivotal concern for me. Eduardo Archetti (1994) regards the study of written sources as fundamental in understanding the complexity of a society. Politics and current affairs was something my informants paid widely attention to, accordingly so did I. Kenya was still feeling the consequences of the post-election violence with massive food shortages and many internal refugees. Akhil Gupta (2008) argues, in his article about corruption and the state, that in order to study “the state” the anthropologist should analyze public discourse and focus on how people imagine the state. He stresses that the traditional face-to-face ethnographic approach is not irrelevant but rather not suited on its own to grasp fully how people imagine and experience meeting the state. This is because of the method’s emphasis on experience-near fieldwork and qualitative data which in many cases might lack the ability to understand how the state is discursively constructed. In order to comprehend this, and thereby contextualise, one should combine fieldwork with the analysis of newspapers (Gupta 2008:213). However, as Archetti (1994:26) notes, it is important to be aware of the limitations of
written, as well as spoken, words when it comes to understanding a society and its culture, identity and history.

**Anonymity**

Early on I realized that it would become difficult to anonymize the Kogony clan. In that case I would have been forced to anonymize the airport and Kisumu itself which in effect would have been impossible as I write about an airport expansion in an area inhabited by Luos. I have changed the names of all my informants and have made anonymous geographical locations where necessary. I have though not anonymized to the extent that my data has been changed in any significant way. I follow the arguments made by Halvard Vike (2001) that anonymity should not be applied to broadly if it means changing your data and thereby the relevance of one’s research.

**My Role**

My role as a white European researcher in a black African community effected my data gathering in various ways. The landscape around me bore the marks after white rule; indeed my area of study around the airport was probably one of the areas that had hardest felt the brunt of suppressive colonialism. At the same time people seemed to be used to having western researchers studying them. The American led Centre for Disease Control has been operating just outside Kisumu since 1979 which has brought western researchers to the area for decades. I also felt an uneven balance of power when talking to people. One man I talked to in a funeral put it this way:

> You mzungus come here to study us with all your knowledge and all your degrees. You are so educated and have all these special skills. In fact we fear you! It is true, we fear you.

Most importantly though was how entrepreneurs tried to include me into their projects as I perhaps was seen as a way to gain access to the fictional flow of capital. As this thesis shows I play a central part in many of the empirical examples cited.
Outlining of the Thesis

Chapter 2 explores the political and economic marginalization that has characterized the Kisumu region since independence. It explores the Luo narrative of decline, which claims that the Luo were once Kenya’s elite but who declined at the hands of their Kikuyu rivals during the early days of independence. The chapter shows how many features of the Luo narrative can be linked to Usoma, where I conducted my fieldwork.

Chapter 3 presents some of the young entrepreneurs in this study who see themselves as being part of a Kenyan generation of change. They have broken with what they call ‘backwardness’. Further, it explores the entrepreneurial self-image and the entrepreneurs’ individualistic ideology.

Chapter 4 explores the entrepreneurial activities of one of the young men described in the previous chapter. This entrepreneur sees opportunities created by recent political developments on the national level; the post-election violence and the swearing in of Raila Odinga as Prime Minister, as well as by the ongoing airport expansion.

Chapter 5 explores the activities of an entrepreneur who has his niche in being a middleman, or a broker, between Usoma residents and outsiders. We will see how his vast network often places him in advantageous positions.

Chapter 6 looks at an entrepreneur who must balance between the needs of his community and his own self-interests. This community is the Kogony clan. We get to follow the entrepreneur as he tries to extract a disproportionate share of the compensation money from the state and the World Bank.
Chapter 2: The Luos of Kenya

Introduction

This chapter gives a short historical account of the Luos’ political place in colonial and post-colonial Kenya. The Luos’ strained relationship to their political arch-rival, the Kikuyus, will be explored. Additionally, the notion of ‘Luoness’ will be explained as the result of an intermingling between external and internal forces.

I will explain Raila Odinga’s role in Kenyan politics and throughout the chapter show how Odingaism is an intrinsical part of my fieldwork. My area of study, Usoma, can clearly be linked to modern Luo history and the Luo narrative of decline. The chapter investigates some of the perceived and real correlations between the Luos decline and the Odinga family’s rise. The murder of Kenya’s Foreign Minister, Robert Ouko, in 1990, which once again was seen as a marginalization of the entire Luo community, can, real or fictive, also be traced to Usoma. In the end I claim that the victory of Senator Barack Obama7 in the American presidential race lead to a feeling that the Luos now were finally on the rise, albeit only for a short period and at the very start of my fieldwork.

The Decline of the Luo?

The political marginalization of the Luos is accompanied by a myth about a glorious Luo past. Lesa Morrison (2006) describes how a narrative of the Luos as repressed by a jealous Kikuyu enemy dominates the Luo self-representation. However, Morrison

7 Whose father was a Luo from the small village of Kogelo, located in Siaya District in Nyanza Province.
argues, this picture is sometimes exaggerated as the Luo narrative also tend to claim that the Luos were once Kenya’s elite. Apparently, during the fifties and sixties the Luos dominated academia and were doing extremely well in this area compared to other Kenyan ethnic groups. Then, in the early seventies, the Luos declined at the expense of others, especially at the expense of their powerful Kikuyu rivals. Morrison (2006:120.122) gives credence to the notion that the Luos of Nyanza are worse off than people of other provinces when it comes to health, wealth and education. However, there is more of a myth involved rather than reality when Luos give claim to a glorious elitist past, despite the fact that the Luos have given Kenya some of its greatest minds. Prince and Geissler (2010) writes that the political and economic crises that hit Kenya hard during the 1980s and the ensuing foreign imposed structural-adjustment programs destroyed the hopes and expectation of ‘development’ that had followed independence. Accompanying these crises was the HIV/AIDS epidemic which contributed to “the Luo contemporary sense of loss” (Prince & Geissler 2010:4). As the Luos declined: “the political fate of the Luo community in post-colonial Kenya became directly tied to the dynastic fortunes of the Odingas” (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009:10). Oginga Odinga, the supreme Luo cultural and political leader at the time, passed his leadership onto the shoulders of his son Raila when he died in 1994.
Odingaism

There is a word you will probably hear a lot and that is Odingaism. Odingaism is the Odinga dynasty and their ways...Raila is a charismatic leader who has all the characteristics a leader should have... He knows how to talk the crowd, he has survived [an] assassination, tried to become president and he is first of all clean when it comes to corruption.... At least when you compare [him] to other politicians...But now with the maize-scanal we will just have to wait and see what happens...You know, Raila Odinga is not just a name, he’s an institution!... I think that many people feel that way about him...

Ben

As I understand it, based on the explanations given to me by Kisumu residents, Odingaism is a special brand of political -isms that refers to the exceptional hold the Odinga’s, and especially Raila, have over the Luos. Like his father, who was put under house arrest after President Kenyatta banned oppositional politics, Raila was incarcerated by the Moi regime, earning him popularity across ethnic lines. Raila’s unquestioned position as the ultimate Luo ‘Big Man’ has for years enabled him to be a key player in national politics (De Smedt 2009). The BBC calls him “Kenya’s king-maker”, referring to Raila’s political alliance with Mwai Kibaki, which enabled the latter to become president in the 2002 election. The BBC also notes that by critics he is called a “party-wrecker” who shifts political alliances and creates and merges parties whenever he finds it suitable (BBC News April 17 2008). At the moment, Raila is the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and, as previously mentioned, is the Prime Minister of Kenya.

It is said that the Odinga family controls Luo political life at all levels of both Kisumu and Nairobi and decides who will get a bump up the ODM hierarchy and who will

---

8 The ‘maize-scanal’ was a massive corruption scandal that unfolded during my fieldwork. Officials in Ministry of Agriculture had illegally sold huge amounts of maize flour to Southern Sudan at the time when the country itself was experiencing food shortages.
loose influence. In order to make it as a successful Luo in Kenyan politics it is clearly not in your best interest to go against the will of Raila and his family. Raila’s eldest son Fidel, named after the former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and his older brother Dr. Oburu, who serves as Assistant Minister for Finance in the coalition government, are seen as two other important figures in this family dynasty. In addition to the mentioned “hold on Luos” (Badejo 2006), Odingaism also refers to the family’s involvement in business and private enterprise. Odingaism and Raila’s leadership over the Luos are often portrayed as something ambiguous. It is often presented as the only viable option available in order to achieve a minimum of Luo ascendancy over political power.

In his book *Raila Odinga: An Enigma in Kenyan Politics*, Nigerian political scientist Babafemi A. Badejo (2006:313) stresses Raila’s many different sides, ranging from being a “Castro type of socialist” and deeply against American involvement in Vietnam to becoming a “pragmatic liberal democrat” who, as his father, combined politics with private enterprise. Raila, who is an East German educated mechanical engineer, started in 1971 the company *Standard Processing Equipments Construction and Erection* (Spectre) together with a German in need of a local to set up a business in Kenya. Problems concerning capital lead Raila to seek support from a technical assistance program funded by the West German government that was aimed at helping promising African entrepreneurs (Badejo 2006:282-283).

So what is the background for *Odingaism* and why is it so closely related to the notion of ‘Luoness’?

**Inventing Traditions**

Often depicted as a pre-colonial relic, African ethnicity, labeled ‘tribalism’, has been seen by both western scholars and by African leaders and intellectuals as a ‘collective irrationality’ standing in the way for the pursuit of development and modernity (Vail
as cited in Berman 1998:306). As will be briefly outlined below, ‘tribalism’ is a highly modern phenomenon that has been created through the interaction of both internal and external forces.

Colonial Africa was characterized by the institutionalization of ‘Big-Man-Small Boy’ politics where chiefs and headmen came to act as brokers between the colonial authorities and local communities (Berman 1998:330). These patron-client relationships, on the one hand between the colonial state and chiefs and headmen, and on the other between the latter and local communities were seen as a continuation of tradition and customary law by the new administrators (Berman 1998:321). This was in fact a rewriting of “local histories of allegiance and custom” and led to the formation of a new emerging class of “chiefs and their clients [who] divided the benefits of colonialism for themselves and transferred its costs - principally the coerced export of labour - on to those with weaker claims on their patronage” (Berman & Lonsdale 1992:1-2). These men were very often opportunists who lacked the influence and authority ascribed to them by outsiders (Haugerud 1995:123). Chiefs and elders were given the right to define ‘customary law’ and by that “defining communal membership, gender relations, access to land and control of labour and resources” (Berman 1998:326). These chiefs became the first pieces in a system with patron-client relationships that was to shape both the colonial and post-colonial state (Haugerud 1995:130).

The creation of chiefs and their subsequent control of an administrative unit, the ‘tribe’, with fixed demarcated boundaries were ways through which the colonial authorities could exert indirect rule over their colonial subjects without, as they saw it, challenging ‘tradition’ (Ranger 2003). This ‘invention of tradition’ transformed “flexible custom into hard prescription” and acted as a useful categorization of African peasants and workers who did not fit into the invented traditions of capitalist Europe, for both the European colonizers and their African subjects.
(Ranger 2003:212). The invented tradition that did, however, transfer from Europe to Africa was the idea of a ruling elite consisting of gentlemen and professionals (Ranger 2003:214).

In the African colonies the emergence of a literate intelligentsia, educated at European missionary stations, was also crucial for the development of the concept of tribalism (Berman 1998:326). Jomo Kenyatta for instance, Kenya’s first president and a student under Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics, tried in his book *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) to draw a picture of what he saw as Kikuyuness. Kenyatta was later to lead the independence struggle against the British and became known for using ethnicity (read: tribalism) as a manipulative political tool during his time as Kenya’s first president, until his death in 1978 (Berman & Lonsdale 1992).

Also for the Luos ethnographic books were produced to put a finger on where to draw the line between this group and others. *History of the Southern Luo* (1967) by Betwell Allan Ogot for instance tries to locate a common Luo history and has contributed to a sense of collective identity. Cohen & Odhiambo (1989:39-40) notes that both Kenyatta and Ogot “participated in the invention of these ethnic communities - if they were not actually responsible as their foremost inventors”.

**The Luo Union**

In the 1920s and 1930s, several ethnically exclusive welfare organizations were formed throughout Kenya. Together with a group of young mission-educated intellectuals, Oginga Odinga established the Luo Union, whose aim was to promote Luo welfare and to protect and enhance Luo beliefs and customs (Parkin 1969, Parkin 1978, Carotenuto 2006, Carotenuto & Luongo 2009). The organization arose out of the rapidly expanding diasporic communities of Luos in cities like Nairobi and Kampala. Since Nyanza was seen as unfit for establishing white settler farms, especially due to a high rate of malaria, the province had became a labour reserve for the colonial
state. Young wage-earning Luo men were sent all across Kenya, as well as to other parts of East Africa, to work as casual labourers on big infrastructure projects. This brought about the Luo diasporic communities which was fundamental in the instrumental shaping of a collective Luo identity. Carotenuto (2006:55) argues “that the Luo union was a local attempt to regulate the cultural boundaries of the colonial encounter” which at the same time worked within the framework created by the colonial state and actively put to use a colonial creation, the ‘tribe’, to define its boundaries.

Odinga, as an extended arm of the Luo Union, founded the Bondo Thrift which was later renamed to Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation (LUTATCO). The organization’s goal was to promote investments in western Kenya by Luos throughout East Africa. This was at the end of World War 2 when Kenyan trade and investments was dominated by Indians and European settlers (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009:6). The new regional networks that originated from LUTATCO were later used by Odinga and his followers to strengthen their position within the Luo Union (Carotenuto 2006:58). The organization was also formed on the background of resentment against the favoritism the British colonial authorities showed towards the Indian community with regards to commercial opportunities (Atieno-Odhiambo 2002:233).

Parkin (1978:218) argued, only two years before the Luo Union’s official demise, that the organization had a tendency towards factionalism and that this tendency was part of a Luo cultural logic with “a principle of internal opposition which holds factions in changing but balanced complementarity”. For Odinga the Luo Union served as a base for his “traditionalist” supporters during the 1960s. At the time the Luos were roughly fractioned into two groups, one supporting Odinga and his idea of African socialism, while the other supported the younger and more liberal and West-leaning trade unionist and politician Tom Mboya, with his focus on
modernization and individualism. The conflict between collectivism and individualism became a struggle over the representation of Luoness. In addition to his socialist leanings Odinga represented elderhood, “true” Luo traditions and the groups’ links to its rural ‘homeland’. He was given the name Jaramogi, meaning a ‘person of Ramogi’, after the Luo forefather Ramogi (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009:9). Also, Odinga became associated with advocating “tribalism” while Mboya held a distinct “non-tribal” position. Mboya also represented renewal and youthfulness and was therefore seen as breaking with Luo customs concerning the power of elders (Parkin 1978:221). When Mboya was assassinated in 1969 Odinga was reaffirmed as the supreme Luo leader (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009:10).

Not long after Mboya’s assassination Oginga Odinga was put in detention by President Kenyatta after an infamous incident known as the Kisumu Massacre which led to the complete marginalization of the Luos (Odhiambo 2004). What preceded the incident was the opening of the Nyanza Provincial Hospital to which the socialist-leaning Odinga had managed to receive Soviet funding for, giving the hospital its nickname ‘Russia’. In cohort with Odinga, Kenyatta was seemingly in Kisumu to witness the event. The crowd was shouting obscenities at the President while he himself surprisingly took an increasingly hostile position against Odinga while addressing the crowd:

And me, I want to tell you Odinga while you are looking at me with your two eyes wide open, I have given my orders right now. Those creeping insects of yours are to be crushed like flour. They are to be crushed like flour if they play with us. You over there, do not make noise there. I will come over there and crush you myself

Kenyatta’s guards then opened fire and shot and killed over a hundred people and wounded hundreds more (Odhiambo 2004:31)
Ofafa Memorial Hall

The land on which Russia is situated I was told used to be owned by Oginga Odinga himself. The same was also true for the headquarters of the former Luo Union, The Ofafa Memorial Hall. What is commonly just known as ‘Ofafa’ became an important arena for gathering information, especially on Luo politics and history, during my fieldwork. The building is situated next to the busy Kakamega road a couple of kilometers away from the city centre and is a well known dilapidated landmark. Ofafa serves as a symbol of the Luo decline as well as a symbol of the ubiquitous Odingaism.

The building is named after the former Luo Union Treasurer and Councilor of Nairobi, Ambrose Ofafa, who was killed by Mau Mau9 insurgents in 1953. The motive is thought to have been Ofafa’s collaboration with the British authorities who, as a response to the Mau Mau uprising, had deported Kikuyus from Nairobi in what was known as Operation Anvil. Ofafa was believed to have helped actively in this deportation and facilitated the take-over by Luos of vacant houses and filling the gap that arose with absentee Kikuyu shopkeepers. The British saw a potential ally in the Luo community and urged Luo men to join the Home Guard and quell the uprising. Instead of joining hands with the British against the Kikuyu, the Luo Union, fronted by Oginga Odinga, funded the building of a memorial in Kisumu named after the former treasurer. The structure was completed in 1957 and came to serve as headquarter for the Luo Union (Badejo 2006:50).

Today the building is the headquarters for the Luo Council of Elders, the successor of the defunct Luo Union. ‘Ofafa’ is suffering from insufficient funds for maintenance

9 The Mau Mau was the name of the rebel group that fought against British rule. It consisted mainly of Kikuyu men.
and, I was told by informants, looks nothing like during the glory days of the 1960s. As I spent some time at Ofafa I noticed how the building served as a source of nostalgia for many, remembering a ‘lost’ Luo greatness. Including having a bar that draws politically interested Luo men to eat and drink and discuss current affairs, other main activities here include fundraising events aimed at improving Luo welfare, conferences and educational courses. A few hundred meters down the road towards the city is the popular shopping mall Tuskey’s which attracts expatriates and people from the middle and upper classes.

In much the same way as the Luo Union was considered to be controlled by Oginga Odinga, the Luo Council of Elders is widely believed to be under the control of his son Raila. When Raila comes to Kisumu he regularly pays a visit to Ofafa to speak with council members. An example of Raila’s alleged control comes from my own fieldwork. On a hot day in March I’m having lunch with Dixon, an informant, at Ofafa, eating ugali and roasted goat meat. We are sitting inside, away from the steaming heat. To the surprise of many guests, two Asians wearing dastars walk in and start doing measurements and quality check on girders and other support beams in the fatigued building. Most of the Ofafa customers pay close attention to the mysterious Asians who drive away in their company pick-up truck 20 minutes later. An emblem on the side of the vehicle tells us that these men work for a big Asian-owned engineering company. Then, a lot of commotion starts among the Ofafa guests and I hear Raila’s name being mentioned several times. Dixon disappears for a moment into the crowd to try figure out what is going on. When he comes back he tells me that many of the people present seem to believe that Raila is planning to tear down the entire building. The reason for this, apparently, is because Raila wants to sell the property to private developers who are looking for a place to construct a

\[10\] Sikh turban
roadside supermarket. After a few weeks, this rumor was soon overtaken by other rumors, one saying that the Asians were there to see if it would be possible to add another floor to the building and that Raila in fact wanted to renovate the building. Another rumor suggested that members of the Luo Council of Elders, under the control of Raila, were in the process of selling Ofafa to a nearby college, a process that included kickbacks and shady deals. Though I was not able to find out what was true in the end the example shows the power of Odingaism and its relation to the Luo narrative of decline. Ofafa itself serves as a symbol of the foregone heydays of the Luo Union and by that a symbol of the claimed Luo glorious past. The fact that Raila is seen as capable of selling away an important Luo symbol like Ofafa is expressive of the ambiguity many people Luos have towards Odingaism. At the same time as Raila is seen as the only option available in achieving national political power for the Luos he is also often seen as enriching himself at the expense of the entire Luo community.

Crony Capitalism

During the Cold War Kenya was often depicted as an African success story who despite living in a dangerous neighbourhood managed to maintain stability and economic growth. Haugerud (1993) notes how this image was tarnished in 1990 when Kenya went from being depicted as a “miracle” to an outright “disaster”. In the newly-ended superpower rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union Kenya had been a valuable ally for the Americans in their attempts to contain the spread of communism on the African continent. Now the regime of Daniel Arap Moi lost its strategic importance and was suddenly subjected to severe criticisms from international aid donors who demanded “governance” and fight against “corruption”. In order to maintain a steady flow of donor funds into the Kenyan economy, and by that a steady flow of income to his cronies and patronage network, Moi adopted parts of the outside world’s perceived recipe for success, at least in
official rhetoric, and allowed for multi-party elections and the implementation of more comprehensive structural-adjustments programs, put in place by the IMF\textsuperscript{11} and the World Bank, than before (Haugerud 1993:4-8)

As a response to diminishing state resources the Moi regime started borrowing money in an increasingly rapid pace, quadrupling external borrowing from 1976 to 1985 (Klopp 2001:110). The new conditions related to external borrowing from the early 1990s made Moi and his cronies in the state apparatus look for other sources of patronage resources. Land was not under the same scrutiny as aid flows were and became an important patronage resource for the Moi regime. “Land-grabbing” thus proliferated and new demands for access to patronage resources increased with the advent of multipartyism and new political players. These new demands have led to an escalation of corruption in Kenya (Klopp 2001).

**The Death of a Minister**

The events that took place during a few days in February 1990 stand out as yet another symbol of Luo marginalization within the postcolonial state, this time at the hands of the Kalenjin of Central Province. Dr. Robert Ouko, Foreign Minister for Kenya and a Nyanza Luo, was abducted and left dead in the wild on the property of his Koru farm just outside Kisumu. The authorities first reported that Ouko had committed suicide. The fact that he had been shot twice in the head and had half his body burnt to ashes convinced Kenyans, and especially Luos, that this was an act done by the orders of top officials, some say by President Daniel arap Moi himself (Cohen & Odhiambo 2004). Allegedly, Ouko was being groomed by the Americans to become their Kenyan president of choice in the event of multiparty elections. In February 1990 Ouko and Moi went on a charming offensive to the West, notably the

\textsuperscript{11} International Monetary Fund
US and UK, to try to persuade their allies not to decrease their donor support to Kenya. This trip apparently soured the relationship between the President and his minister. On a press conference in Washington, President Moi was asked uncomfortable questions about Kenya’s dubious human rights records and lack of transparency. Moi was caught off guard by the nosy press and Ouko eloquently answered the questions his President could not. This and the seemingly good tone Ouko enjoyed with the American President Bush and Secretary of State James baker supposedly infuriated President Moi. Robert Ouko’s murder, along with the murder of Tom Mboya and the incarceration of Oginga Odinga, are perhaps the foremost symbols of Luo marginalization (Cohen & Odhiambo 2004:74-75).

The Molasses Plant

Ouko’s murder was quickly linked to a factory situated in the area where I conducted my fieldwork. The factory in question is the Kisumu molasses plant which was the largest single investment in the Kisumu region ever since the building of the railway and was a joint venture between the Kenyan state and international donors (Cohen & Odhiambo 2004:183). The construction of the plant started in 1978 and its main purpose was to produce mainly fuel alcohol, in addition to several other byproducts, by sugar collected from western Kenyan farms. Almost four years and $106 million in foreign lending later the plant was 90% completed. By that time it had become clear that the project had been overambitious and eventually stalled (Badejo 2006:288).

The Kisumu molasses plant became intrinsically linked to Robert Ouko’s political career from when he first ran for the Kisumu West parliamentary seat in the late seventies. Ten years later Ouko made the revival of the plant one of his top priorities during the run-up to the parliamentary election of 1988. The resuscitation of a “white elephant” like this was frowned upon by many (Cohen & Odhiambo 2004:202).
In the investigations carried out after Ouko’s death, led by Scotland Yard Detective Superintendent John H.B. Troon, it was indicated that controversies regarding the molasses plant were a likely reason for the killing of the minister. Troon admitted though that he lacked evidence to link the murder to the molasses plant and to high-ranking officials. One of the names that reoccurred in the investigation was that of Nicholas Biwott, Moi’s right-hand man and one of Kenya’s wealthiest individuals. Biwott allegedly worked against Ouko’s efforts to revive the plant as he was interested in getting the plant sold as scrap, in which case he would be able to siphon off money in the process (Cohen & Odhiambo 2004:205-211).

Then, as the Moi government decided to sell the plant in 1996, Raila and his brother Oburu Oginga bought it through their company Spectre. The brothers managed to be given a 99 year lease on the plant in 2001 which led to allegations about land-grabbing (Badejo 2006: 287-295). The Kogony clan and the neighboring Korando clan, on whose ancestral land the plant is located, demanded compensation for their loss of land. A row broke out in 2004 when the Korando and Kogony clans, represented by their respective council’s of elders, demanded compensation. Clan members had been promised jobs and ‘development’ in return for selling their land to the state in the seventies. The general sentiment was that this agreement had not been upheld by the state and that Spectre’s 99 year lease was illegal. Less than a year later an investigation over the alleged illegal land acquisition cleared the Odinga’s and Spectre of any wrongdoings (Badejo 2006). The controversies surrounding the Kisumu molasses plant in many ways resembles the controversies regarding the airport. Also here Raila is believed to have an important role and the Kogony are demanding compensation. Ouko’s constituency included the people of Usoma. I was told by Kogony elders that Ouko defended the clan against state and KAA “land-grabbing” right before he was murdered.
More Land grabbing?

A dirt road that recently underwent improvements winds itself through large parts of Usoma. It begins in the vicinity of the pipeline where foreign petrol trucks patiently wait for fuel to bring back to their landlocked countries further east. A few kilometers later it ends up at the Kisumu-Busia road just next to the molasses plant. The dirt road and its planned asphalting faced the possibility of being stopped during my fieldwork. The reason for this was that the expansion of the airport for a long time threatened to cut off the road. Before the expansion work at the airport began the main airstrips, measuring each a length of 2000 meters, were to be extended by another 1000 meters. However, as the construction work began it soon became apparent for the Kenya Airports Authority (KAA) that they needed more land. In one of the weekly meetings of the Kogony Council of Elders it was uttered by several elders that the two Chinese engineers who had made the assessment plan for the additional enlargement had concluded that a 70 meter extension towards the lake would be sufficient. 70 meters meant that the road would remain and that its planned asphalting could commence. Something that clearly complicated the matter was the demand made by Raila Odinga for a 300 meter expansion instead of the proposed 70 meters. According to the rumors Raila wanted to “grab” the redundant land for himself and then either sell it off at highly inflated prices to private companies or use the land as a patronage resource he could reward his political supporters with. The Prime Minister was apparently putting pressure on the longtime Managing Director of the KAA, George Muhoho, to meet this demand.

The idea that Raila would ‘grab’ airport land is linked to his alleged receiving of Kogony land from President Moi in the 1990s and his alleged illegal takeover of the molasses plant. Then, in January 2010, around six months after my fieldwork, the KAA announced that a 300 meter additional expansion was underway. When the construction work is finished airport land will stretch all the way down to Lake Victoria, cutting off the road and dividing Usoma in half. In an announcement
Muoho assured that people in the area would either be relocated or compensated for their loss of land (East African Standard 7 January 2010).

The Rise of the Luos?

During the first two months of my fieldwork I was often told the narrative of a Luo decline. But people spoke of the group’s marginalization as something of the past. A different and more positive narrative seemed to have overtaken the negative one. Four days after my arrival Senator Barack Hussein Obama was inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States. As Obama traces his paternal roots to the small village of Kogelo in Siaya District many Luos celebrated his victory over John McCain in the presidential campaign as their own. The democratic manner in which the American election had been held contrasted starkly with the Kenyan election the year before when Raila and the Luos had been ‘robbed’ of their victory. At the same time Obama confirmed the stereotype about the Luos as producers of Kenya’s greatest minds (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009)

President Obama’s father, Barrack Hussein Obama Senior, had exceeded greatly in his studies during the 1950s and was thought eligible to study abroad, in the United States. Through the so called “Student airlift”, which had been arranged by Tom Mboya and then Senator John F. Kennedy, Obama Senior flew to Hawaii to study where he met the future president’s mother. The symbolism here is clearly obvious. Mboya and Kennedy, who both later was assassinated, brought Obama Senior to the U.S where the latter produced a son which would later become president. It was perhaps the notion of President Obama as the product of Mboya’s and Kennedy’s airlift that created the desire of getting Obama to fly ‘home’ to Kisumu. ‘Home’ was
here the village of Kogelo where his Grandmother\textsuperscript{12} Sarah Obama still lives. As a tourist, like many others, I visited Sarah Obama in Kogelo.

In the autumn of 2008 Kisumu Airport attained brief international attention when Nyanza MPs proposed to further expand the airport so that it could be able to handle the landing of a Boeing 747, in this case the American President’s world famous \textit{Air Force 1} (For example see BBC News 17 October 2008 ). In February 2009 the Kenyan newspaper \textit{The Weekly Mirror} could report that ODM MPs, lead by Prime Minister Odinga, was now seriously pushing for more funds to be released by Parliament to boost the expansion. But the Prime Minister was quick in announcing to Kenyans not to expect material rewards by the new president but instead “capitalize on the goodwill to do business with the Americans”. During the early months of my fieldwork it seemed that many expected that an Obama presidency would lead to a rapid development of the region, especially in the form of improved infrastructure. The same has been observed by others (Carotenuto & Luongo 2009, Madiega, Chantler, Jones & Prince 2009). Another observation I made was of the high expectations about an increase in the influx of foreign capital and tighter trade relations with the United States and other western countries. A common desire was that Kisumu Airport would from now on be directly connected to world cities like London and New York.

\textbf{The Inauguration Day}

And so to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: Know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.

\textsuperscript{12} Actually ‘step’ grandmother. As she was the second wife of Obama’s Grandfather she ‘inherited’ him as her own grandson when the President’s biological grandmother died.
To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society’s ills on the West - know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

Excerpts from Obama’s inaugural speech, 20 January 2009

(CNN 2009, my italics)

Shops in Kisumu were closed on the day of the inauguration and people stayed home from work. On Kisumu’s Oginga Odinga Street people were wearing Obama buttons and t-shirts. While I was standing on the sidewalk reading a newspaper article about the president-elect, cars and people lined up in procession went by me. A ‘mock’ Obama as well as a ‘mock’ Raila standing on the back of a pick-up truck were saluting the people of Kisumu. In front of the car a young man was holding up a large framed photograph of the two men symbolizing their joint Luo leadership. In Kenya the Luos had climbed in the political hierarchy and was now situated in their most powerful position since Oginga Odinga’s falling out with President Kenyatta in the sixties. In the United States a Luo was now taking over the White House. This optimistic state of euphoria met me when I started my fieldwork. After a couple of months the atmosphere changed and the feeling of decline and resignation seemed to have returned.

Two days after Obama’s inauguration The Daily Nation (22 January 2009) remarked that there was a “stark contrast between US and Kenya fetes”. The newspaper noted that in Kenya Obama’s win resembled the feelings of hope and a new beginning that had dominated the country when Moi took over the reigns of power after Kenyatta died in 1978 and when Kibaki replaced Moi as president after the 2002 election.
A ‘mock’ Obama, flanked by a ‘mock’ Raila on his right and a ‘mock’ Sarah Obama on his left-hand side, salutes the people of Kisumu on the inauguration day of Barack Hussein Obama as the United States’ 44th President.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter gave an outline of the Luos’ role in Kenyan politics and history. It showed how a narrative of a decline claiming that the Luos were once the country’s elite accompanies the political marginalization with the postcolonial state. The narrative of a glorious past resembles more a myth than a reality. The ‘real’ decline of the Luos has been followed by a rise of the Odinga family, led by Prime Minister Raila Odinga. This Odingaism have had profound impact on Luo political life as well as the situation in Usoma, my area of study. Raila’s name is linked to the molasses factory as well as the airport. As we will see in the following chapters he also has an impact on the strategies undertaken by the entrepreneurs studied.
In the end we saw how Obama’s victory in the US presidential campaign gave the Luos a short-lived feeling of rise. As my fieldwork finished this new ‘rise’ had been replaced by the old ‘decline’.

I now turn to exploring three entrepreneurs in their thirties who emphasize their individualism and their modern lifestyle and who constantly compare themselves to the ‘backwards’ generation of their parents. They feel that their parents’ generation was too concerned with ‘tradition’ and that they squandered away the new beginning that accompanied independence in 1963.
Chapter 3: The New Generation

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce three entrepreneurial men in their thirties. This introductory empirical chapter is not so much about the men’s entrepreneurial activities. Rather it is about their self-image as entrepreneurs, their proclaimed ideology of unrestrained individualism and their breaking with what they see as ‘backwardness’. They do not adhere to the Luo narrative of decline to the same degree as their parents’ generation. Though the men are certain that the Luo have been marginalized for decades they believe this is to a great extent the Luos own fault. They consider themselves to be part of a Kenyan generation of change that will transform Kenya into a more prosperous and developed country. They tend to view their parents’ generation as having been to preoccupied with following Luo customs and tradition which they believe turned focus away from wealth creation and the development of Kenya. Luo custom and its egalitarianism is seen to hinder the men’s entrepreneurial fulfillments and they therefore seek to break with this ‘backwardness’.

The main protagonist of this chapter is Ben, which I will properly introduce. His friends and business partners George and Samuel are included in many of the empirical examples that follow but will not get a proper introduction. It is though safe to say that they share similar backgrounds to that of Ben. As sons of civil servants they grew up in Nairobi in middle class surroundings where they also attained bachelor degrees before moving to Kisumu to settle in their late twenties and early thirties.
Being an Entrepreneur

Ben and I are sitting in the living room watching satellite TV while his wife Millicent is doing the dishes in the kitchen. It’s dark outside and a long-anticipated rainfall has just started pouring down. Suddenly Ben receives a call on one of his cell phones from his friend Samuel who is often away on business. “Where are you now? Rwanda, Lubumbashi\(^{13}\), where?” he asks the person on the other end of the line while laughing before he switches over to Kiswahili. Samuel runs a gasoline station in Kisumu and an important aspect of his business venture consists of roaming the major towns and cities of East and Central Africa looking for large quantities of cheap fuel which he later sells in areas where fuel prices are higher.

A few minutes later we get visitors. Samuel and his wife Auma greet us warmly. Millicent has already put a big bowl with groundnuts on the living room table and has made tea. Not long after we have sat down the electricity goes out. This does not come as a surprise. Millicent is quick to light up a kerosene lamp and a few candles and the conversation continues. Ben and Samuel do most of the talking while Millicent and Auma usually only reacts if they hear something funny. Sometimes they roll their eyes at each other when their husbands brag about their seemingly successful enterprises.

The bowl of groundnuts is empty and Millicent goes into the kitchen to get some more. While she is away Ben tells us an anecdote. He recalls how as a schoolboy he often quarreled with his teacher Mary and that he was “a naughty boy”. One day Mary had asked her pupils what they wanted to be when they grew up. When it was Ben’s turn he answered: “I want to be the richest man”. Mary didn’t like Ben’s

\(^{13}\) Second largest city in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
answer and started yelling at him: “You are never content and you will never be! Not
before you drive a big Mercedes and dine with the President!” Ben finds his own
story hilarious and laughs for a long time. “And I did drive a Mercedes when I lived
in Nairobi”, he tells us.

From this short story Ben finds it plausible to claim that he has always been an
entrepreneur. “An entrepreneur is born an entrepreneur”, he declares while looking
at Samuel in search of recognition for his statement, “and an entrepreneur will
always feel lonely because nobody will ever understand his dreams”. Samuel agrees
and says that one should “follow the dream”. Ben continues: “an entrepreneur will
always follow his dreams”. But by this statement Samuel shakes his head. He tells us
that he believes an entrepreneur should never risk everything in one single project.
“An entrepreneur needs a stable business income”, he explains, “like me with fuel,
only then you can follow the dream”. Ben exposes what might best be characterized
as a gambling mentality and replies that “the entrepreneur sees an opportunity and
manipulates it to his advantage. You win some, you loose some. Even Donald
Trump\textsuperscript{14} has gone bankrupt; it is just part of the game”

\textbf{Entrepreneurship in Luoland}

One of Kenya’s many ethnic stereotypes, Shipton (2007) writes, portrays the Luos as
incapable of handling money. They are seen as “earnest enough perhaps but more
interested in cows, in clothes, or in big funerals for kin than in their bank accounts,
and unlikely to make a go of a business” (Shipton 2007:100). As Shipton notes the
stereotype has some truth to it and can be ascribed to intermingling factors such as
the uneven distribution of colonial infrastructural development and Luo sharing

\textsuperscript{14} Well-known American billionaire
ideals. The Luos are portrayed, by themselves and others, as the providers of Kenya’s greatest academic minds. The successful Luo trader or businessman however, “is the exception, not the rule” (Shipton 2007:101). One stereotype I often heard in Kisumu was that business and moneymaking for some reason falls more natural to Kikuyus and Asians and that Luos are more prone to administering and organizing. As Michael Chege (1998) shows these stereotypes have also been present in academia where alleged ‘African’ underachievement has been explained as a result of lacking the alleged cultural features necessary to bolster entrepreneurial behavior. Further, Kenya’s relatively good economic performance compared to its neighbors has been explained as a result of Asian control over economic life whose ‘culture’ is seen as more eligible for entrepreneurship. As mentioned the entrepreneurs in this study seem to adhere to the stereotypes described by Shipton and Chege and believe that ‘African’ success depends on the ability to break it off with ‘tradition’ and past negligence and lack of knowledge towards making money. As will be shown throughout this chapter Ben and his friends see themselves as having done exactly that, broken it off with tradition and who are now on their way to success and prosperity. Ben will now be properly introduced.

**Ben**

Ben is a 33 year old Luo who lives with his pregnant wife Millicent in what can be characterized as a middle class area of Kisumu. The couple lives in a gated compound which they rent from a Kikuyu businessman residing in Nairobi. They occupy the largest of four buildings that contains three bedrooms. The other three smaller buildings, as well as the extra bedrooms in their house, are being rented out to people preferably looking for long-term accommodation, mostly western researchers, aid workers and students. This homestay, named Down Town, is basically a guesthouse where customers can choose between sharing meals and facilities with Ben and Millicent, or the more secluded ‘cottage’ alternatives with self-catering
accommodation. I chose the first alternative and lived there for nearly two and half months. Ben soon became a valuable source of information and is a central person in this chapter, as well as the next chapter.

As Ben can usually get more money out of western customers he uses his energy to market his homestay at cafés and restaurants known to attract tourists and expatriate researchers. One of Ben’s stated goals is to get honourable acclaim in the international travel guide *Lonely Planet* as the safest and most pleasant budget option in Kisumu. The homestay’s website promises “a real African experience” and proclaims to be perfect for travellers in search of the “genuine”.

Ben holds a bachelor degree in Psychology from a Nairobi college from where he finished in 2003. While working for an insurance company after his studies he obtained a Certificate of Community Development and a diploma in Professional Counseling through evening courses. During his time as an insurance agent in Nairobi after his studies he was in a relationship with a colleague, a young Kikuyu woman. Ben ended this relationship abruptly when his girlfriend was offered a job because of her ethnic background. According to Ben this position should have gone to him as he was the most qualified person available. What he sees as ethnic favoritism, or “tribalism” as he calls it, he claims to be one of the major reasons why he in the end decided to move to Kisumu “where as a Luo I am treated fairly”.

Ben was born but only partly raised in Kisumu. Together with his parents and his older sister and brother he moved to Nairobi when he was around four years old. When Ben was growing up English and Swahili was taught and spoken at home and in school at the expense of DhoLuo\(^{15}\). “People here say we’re not even real Luo!” he

\(^{15}\) The Luo language
once explained to me, “just because we don’t speak proper Luo. But my real home is still in those sides of Siaya”. Ben was here referring to the Luo notion of home. What is considered to be a person’s real home is the area in western Kenya from where that person’s lineage originates from and where the ancestors are believed to live (Parkin 1978, Cohen & Odhiambo 1989, Shipton 1989, Shipton 2007).

The importance of the rural ‘homeland’ can be exemplified by Ben’s father, John, a Luo from Tanzania. John moved as a young man to Mombasa from Dar es Salaam where he was offered a job as a train conductor by a fellow clan member. Later on he was transferred to work at the railway station in Voi, a small market town in the Coastal Province. Here he befriended his superior, a Taita16 from the area, who later offered him to marry his daughter Ramona. She later became Ben’s mother and lived in Voi together with John for nearly two years. When Ben’s parents had saved up enough money they moved to Siaya District in Nyanza, where John’s lineage originated from, and erected a small rural home, also known as dala. But instead of moving permanently to Siaya they rented a house in Kisumu that later became Ben and his siblings’ first home. Four years after Ben’s birth John was offered an administrative job in the recently established Kenya Railways17 in Nairobi. The family followed suit and Ben was to grow up in an estate known for housing the families of Nairobi civil servants. When John later retired he and Ramona moved to Siaya and lived together on the plot where they had built the makeshift dala until John died of a heart attack eight years ago. Though Ben has a strained relationship with what he calls ‘tradition’ he too wants to be buried in Siaya when the day comes.

16 Predominant ethnic group in Voi
Siaya

On a quiet Saturday morning I’m driving Ben’s car towards Siaya. George and I have joined Ben to go see his mother who still lives in a village in this district. When Ben’s father died his mother Ramona was inherited by her deceased husband’s brother. Ben doesn’t like to use the word *inheritance* in its strict English sense of the word. He insists that this scheme is merely a way for relatives to take proper care of the woman in case of her husband’s death and that “these relationships were never sexual”. Ben’s mother now lives alone in the house she shared with her husband while Ben’s paternal uncle and his two wives have their own homestead just next to hers. Ben now refers to his uncle as “my father”.

As the car slowly runs through the scenic landscape of fertile but dry red soil Ben tells me that the Luos of this area are among the most friendly and hospitable people imaginable. “But they are backwards”, he continues, “and completely unaware of how the real world works. Me and George once tried to help them but it is not always easy”\(^{18}\). The young men see this ‘backwardness’ as Kenya’s most severe problem. Their view is that holding too strongly on to ‘tradition’ and ‘custom’ makes Africans in general lag behind the rest of the world in terms of ‘development’.

Around half an hour later we reach Ramona’s place, a relatively large building with a blue roof of corrugated iron sheets. The three neighboring structures are occupied by Ben’s new father and his other two wives. Along with the people living there, present is also an old man wearing a cane and a baseball cap. When I greet the old man he says something to me in Luo. The others start laughing. “He says you remind him

\(^{18}\) Ben and George used to run a NGO together that had a stated goal of “modernizing the mindset of rural Kenyans through the transfer of skills and capacity building”. Now they run another NGO which aim is to helping street children “off the street and back to school”.

55
about his Sergeant’, says George, “from those days in Burma”. As many other
Nyanza men (See Ogot 1963:269) the old man fought alongside British forces during
World War 2. He is eager to show me his uniform from that period but Ben insists
respectfully that we don’t have the time.

I am surprised to learn that we are actually on our way to a funeral. “I’m only there
to show my respects”, Ben tells me. Ben, George and I start walking towards the
funeral site and Ben again begins to explain what he sees as the reason for Kenya’s
alleged woes, as a matatu packed with funeral guests passes us:

Soon you will experience one of the greatest ironies of our people, Freddy. The people who
are willing to spend KSh 100 000 on a dead guy was never interested in helping him when he
was alive. Many are even only here to eat and drink for free. Half of them don’t even know
him… This is what’s wrong with our people...

When we reach the site the ceremony is already over and the casket is lowered into
the ground. Around 15 cars are lined up next to a large green tent providing shade
for dozens of people. After greeting the priest George and I find ourselves a couple of
chairs while Ben chats with relatives and acquaintances. I vaguely remember reading
something about a Luo lawyer whose funeral was beset by massive controversy in
the late 1980s (See Cohen & Odhiambo 1992). I ask George if he can tell me about it
but he is reluctant to do so. “Later” he tells me. When Ben comes over again he leads
us up to where the casket is lowered. We all take a moment of silence while Ben
makes a quiet prayer.

On our way back to Ramona George tells me about the lawyer, S.M Otieno, who was
married to a Kikuyu. When he died his wife wanted him to be buried in Nairobi
where they had lived together. Fellow clansmen in Siaya however demanded the

19 Matatus are minibuses operating as shared taxis. It is the most common mode of public transport in Kenya.
body returned to Otieno’s ancestral land so that it could undergo proper Luo burial rituals. Some Luos saw this as yet another attempt by the Kikuyus to hold them down. “They are completely paranoid in this area”, George says while grinning, “some day they might learn”. George follows up on Ben’s argument from earlier and states that “a new generation is taking over Kenya, a generation that will leave something behind for their children”. According to George, and Ben seems to agree, the generation of their parents were too concerned about meeting the demands of relatives and of following Luo customs that “when after 30 years of hard work they had nothing to show for”. Both men are determined to become wealthy and in a position where they can give their future children an easy start in life. They hold that the previous generation squandered away the opportunities that they claim were given to Kenya by the British at independence. As an example Ben points to how the rail service during colonialism was “classy” whereas now “everything is falling apart”.

We are Modern

“Millicent! Millicent! Freddy does not know that we are modern!” Millicent is out in the garden reading a book when Ben hollers her. “What’s wrong”, she asks when entering the house. “Freddy does not know that we are modern”, he repeats. “So what!? I’m reading! You scared me!” Millicent is annoyed and goes out into the garden again. Ben realizes that he pushed it a bit far this time. He continues:

I love teasing her but I should stop before the baby arrives... What I’m saying is that those people out there [around the airport], they are traditional, while me and Millicent are modern. We have our own church and don’t bother with rituals. And just look at my new lap top! Do I look traditional?

The starting point for this conversation has to do with Ben’s attempt to buy a piece of land near the airport, which is the main focus of the next chapter. In relation to this Ben has been invited to attend a purification ceremony needed before the land can be
sold for money. A ceremony like this is for Ben just another example of what he terms as ‘backwards’. I will later describe this ceremony in Chapter 5.

Together with Samuel Ben was among the key founders of a small congregation two years ago that consisted of former members of a Kisumu Pentecostal church. These 50 or so people broke with the church as a protest against what they viewed as a dictatorial and self-enriching church leadership. The row started when the church leader bought himself a new Land Rover. The protesters believed that the car sale could only have been possible for the leader if he had embezzled funds from the church. The congregation Ben and Samuel founded has doubled the number of members since it was established and now boasts nearly 100 people. The members are mostly well educated and relatively wealthy and are satisfied with the congregation’s laidback and open-minded atmosphere. According to Ben one of the founding goals of the congregation was to encourage Asian Kenyans to join and in the end convert them. This has not happened since “they like to isolate themselves”, as Ben puts it. Instead, surprisingly, a few American and Australian missioners, as well as young religious NGO volunteers from Europe, have started attending Sunday service.

The New Generation

In their study of regional business networks across sub-Saharan Africa McDade and Spring (2005) claim that a ‘new generation’ of African entrepreneurs has emerged. These entrepreneurs manage and own medium- and large-scale businesses in their native countries and thereby represent ‘the missing middle’ often pointed out by economists as the lacking component in achieving development on the continent. Through networking with other entrepreneurs in Africa they are capable of spreading their enterprise activities to neighboring countries and thereby gaining access to other and perhaps larger markets. The entrepreneurs help each other out
with problems concerning visa difficulties and necessary authorizations from the state bureaucracy. In addition they sometimes do business together and provide each other contacts within their respective countries. The entrepreneurs in this network are usually men in their thirties and early forties who often hold bachelor and master degrees from European and North American Universities. McDade and Spring (2005:38) concludes that this rising new generation of African entrepreneurs might act as catalysts in changing the economic conditions on the continent.

Although Ben, Samuel and George can not be considered to be as successful as the entrepreneurs described by McDade and Spring they see themselves as being part of this ‘new generation’, a Kenyan generation of change. Their emphasis is on breaking with rural ‘backwardness’ and ‘tradition’ which is regarded as inhibiting the ambitions of young Kenyans. Ben and George, for instance, are determined to leave something behind for their children and are embarrassed and annoyed about the previous generation’s inability to generate and accumulate material wealth.

This is reminiscent of Ferguson’s (2006) account of the Zambian ‘Chrysalis Generation’, or just ‘CG’. The word Chrysalis refers to the stage before the pupa turns into a butterfly and is also the name of a Zambian newspaper. In the newspaper’s inaugural edition of 1998 “a Lusaka entrepreneur and erstwhile biochemist” (Ferguson 2006:124) declared that Zambia was about to take off and that the new ‘Chrysalis Generation’ was now succeeding the ‘Question Mark Generation’ which had failed to identify the necessary measures needed undertaken for the country to prosper. According to the author cited by Ferguson “The CG will create its own wealth, fund its own independence and carve out its own niche in the global village of tomorrow” (Ferguson 2006:125). This can be seen as part of an African renaissance that swept the continent in the late 1990s, advocated and fronted by then South African President Thabo Mbeki. This ‘renaissance’ was based on neoliberal ideology and had a focus on individual achievement which in effect put the responsibility of
Africa’s problems onto the shoulders of Africans themselves and not on external foreign forces (Ferguson 2006:113-121, see also Hannerz 2004:128-130).

During fieldwork in the Taita Hills in the 1990s, not far from Voi where Ben’s parents met, Smith (2008) became aware of how young men referred to themselves as being part of a “dot com generation”. These men were better educated than their parents, spoke and wrote better English and not the least had access to the rest of the world through the internet. Surprisingly, people of this generation had a difficult time finding employment, something which fueled accusations about witchcraft in the area. This was contrasted against the previous generation of whom many, despite the lack of education, had managed to get formal employment. In the wake of foreign imposed structural-adjustments programs the Kenyan state civil service had experienced serious downsizing. The young men then, Smith (2008:80) writes, “tended to think of cooperative entrepreneurial commerce and religious revival and transformation as the only means available to them for achieving some modicum of success”.

A similar contrast is found between Ben and his father John. John had a secure job in Kenya Railways where he made a career and worked most of his professional life. As a labor migrant he sent money home to relatives both in Tanzania and Nyanza and was careful to maintain his rural ties. David Parkin (1969) writes that with the extension of the railway to Kisumu in 1901 the Luos spread throughout East Africa where they started working as artisans, menial laborers and clerks. During the early days of these migrations the Luos “strong ideology of ‘brotherhood’” provided migrants with help in getting accommodation and employment. Maintaining rural ties later proved important as it provided a useful network when some Luos decided to put up businesses or involve themselves in politics (Parkin 1969:186). As Grillo (1973:18) notes, the railwaymen of East Africa were relatively well off compared to their rural contemporaries who they were expected to help out. John for example
participated widely in and contributed with money to ceremonies in Siaya during a period when, according to Ben, the family’s financial situation was difficult. The thought of contributing widely to ceremonies, unless it concerns the burial of close relatives, is unthinkable for Ben, “it is a waste of money” as he once said. In contrast to his father, who could live a middleclass life with the income from his job as a civil servant, Ben claims that his generation can only live a “descent life” by being self-employed. Besides working a couple of years for an insurance company, Ben has been self-employed through numerous individual and cooperative enterprises. In addition to the homestay he runs an NGO from where he extracts money for personal use. Together with Samuel he is the owner of a safari tours company that gets most of its western customers from Ben’s homestay. In addition, Ben experienced revival as a Pentecostal from the time he finished his studies and thereby broke with his parents’ and his own childhood Catholic faith. The ideas advocated by Pentecostalism fits neatly with Ben’s individualistic ideology.

Breaking with the Past

Cohen and Odhiambo (1989:53-55) writes how sections of the urban Luo elite after independence instead of moving ‘home’ to Nyanza created a new ‘homeland’ in the former European settled highlands of central Kenya. The rural world “offered no opportunities for the forward-looking Luo” and moving there meant a possible impoverishment as a result of having to fulfill the obligations made by demanding rural relatives (Cohen & Odhiambo 1989:54). As Parkin shows this is also true for Kampala (1969) and Nairobi (1978) where urban Luos created an urban ‘homeland’ based on rural names and lineage affiliations. Ben, Samuel and George are the children of the urban Luos described by Parkin. Though they perhaps do not recognize it, their parents too may also be said to have broken it off with their rural homeland, though they also maintained ties with their kin. The labour migrations
and conversions to Christianity that took place during the 1950s and 1970s was at that time a break with the Luo traditional morality (Prince 2007:85).

For the ‘new generation’ there are other ways of breaking with ‘backwardness’. Ben and Samuel’s adherence to Pentecostalism is a good example. Meyer’s (1998) study from Ghana shows how Pentecostalism promises a new start and a ‘complete break with the past’. Often people approach these churches in order to solve personal problems related to wealth and health but it is the combination of “individual salvation in the Here-after and prosperity in this world” that is particularly appealing to many (Meyer 1998:320). David Maxwell (1998:369) makes a similar account from Zimbabwe and concludes that Pentecostalism offers “a framework with which to respond to the pressures of modernization” and “guidelines for material success”.

In addition to the ‘break with the past’ I believe Pentecostalism’s ideology of individualism is especially appealing to Ben and Samuel. As Smith (2008:84) notes for the Taita Hills Pentecostalism “provides an ideological, and deeply felt, support for being on one’s own, and for not depending on higher authorities for jobs and patronage”. But this is actually contradictory as Pentecostals often have to submit to the rule of patrons in the church (Smith 2008:84-85). This was an important reason why Ben in the end started his own congregation together with Samuel.

This breaking with the past means going forward to something new. It means breaking ‘free’ from ‘tradition’ and cultivate ones self-interests.

**The Entrepreneurial Self-image**

In his comparison of entrepreneurs in Tanzania and Indonesia Olav Øyhus (2003) finds that entrepreneurs in these two widely different countries tend to view themselves as mavericks who against all odds have managed to become successful.
These ‘lonely riders’ have overcome society’s structural constraints and stresses individual determination and freedom as the most important reasons for their success. Marris and Somerset’s (1971) study of ‘African’ entrepreneurs in Kenya gives tale of a similar individualistic self-image. But this study, which was conducted in the aftermath of independence, tells of a country where the economy is controlled by a few European conglomerates and Asian Kenyan traders. Only with access to government loans were African businessmen able to compete and try to break the existing monopolies. The African entrepreneurs who were granted loans tended to be mostly Kikuyu. Entrepreneurs from other ethnic groups claimed that this was a result of the Kikuyu political control of the country, an accusation which Marris and Somerset (1971:70) finds plausible but of which they have no direct evidence.

As Øyhus (2003:202) notes, “entrepreneurs are successful because they could manage and use relationships within their social environments as active business tools”. In other words they are not as individualistic as they often assert. For instance, through his relations within the congregation Ben is able to get a steady flow of religious American and Australian aid volunteers staying at his homestay. Also, he depends on Millicent and her fluent DhoLuo when buying and negotiating prices on food and equipment in the marketplace. Often, he is mistaken to be of non-Luo origin, on a few occasions even non-Kenyan which has mainly to do with his “fake foreign accent”, as Adil, an Asian business ‘rival’ of Ben, once put it. This sometimes leads merchants at the market, hawkers\(^{20}\) and artisans to ask Ben to pay unreasonable high prices on goods and services. As will be shown in the next chapter Ben’s Luo origin also works to his advantage when he is able to get his hands on a piece of land in Usoma at the expense of Adil who has been trying to do the same for months.

\(^{20}\) Small-scale street sellers
For the Public Good?

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis anthropological theories on entrepreneurship emphasize the individual’s pursuit and maximization of profit (See Barth 1963). It could also be argued that the entrepreneurs in my study are eager to contribute to what Werbner (2004) calls the public good. Writing on cosmopolitan elites in Botswana Werbner argues that the top minority elite of the country, who controls both business and politics, are not so interested in their own private accumulation of profit but rather are keen to contribute to the development of their country. He goes against what he terms “Afro-pessimism” on the behalf of “populist” anthropologists who tend to criticize the elite and side with the poor no matter what (Werbner 2004:18-19). Although the entrepreneurs in Werbner’s study cannot easily be compared to Ben, George and Samuel in terms of power, wealth and prestige there are certain similarities. Ben, George and Samuel are open about their goal of becoming wealthy something they see as beneficiary for the society as a whole. Though my informants may claim that their own pursuit of profit is good for the Kenyan society as a whole it is tempting to see these statements as self-justification for their own antisocial behavior. As I observed them throughout my fieldwork, as they were being ‘entrepreneurial’, their own self-interests and ambitions seemed to be the main priority.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has shown how a small group of young Luo entrepreneurs in Kisumu consider themselves as part of a generation that is leading Kenya towards change and prosperity. The men view custom and tradition as ‘backwards’ and as a major obstacle towards achieving development throughout the country. Ben, George and Samuel are all the sons of former civil servants and have lived most of their lives in Nairobi. Although they maintain contact with the ‘homeland’ and identify as Luo they reject rural life which they see as an obstacle against their own entrepreneurial
aspirations and the reason for why ‘Africans’ are relatively unsuccessful in business and commerce.

The men talk of themselves as *entrepreneurs* and have a self-image as free individuals going against the tide. Ben and Samuel for instance has rejected Catholicism which they grew up with and chosen a religion that is more in accordance to their ideology. They have broken with the past.

In the upcoming chapter we follow Bens’s attempt to buy a waterfront land plot close to the airport. His plan for the near future is to move *Down Town* to this area, something he believes will him a strategic edge over Asians Kenyans which he views as his main business rivals. In other words Ben, the entrepreneur, is trying to expand his enterprise and carve out room for himself in a niche controlled by others.
Chapter 4: The Opportunist

The following excerpt is from the blog site Jaluo.com, written just over a year before the post-election violence broke out.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH ABOUT ASIANS IN KISUMU
WUON ABILA
The entire Luo Community needs to wake up and Stop this stupid idea of allowing Asians to frustrate them. It is only in the Luo land where foreigners of Asian origins come and make millions of Money without any hinderance or care for the local interests. We need to wake up and stop this kind of mess. I have been reading alot of arrogance committed against the indigenous residents of Kisumu. Asians dont respect other races amongst them in Kenya. They are ignorant and lack proper etiquette of basic human rights. Asian should not own most property in Kisumu. Wake up Kisumu people, gone are those days when nobody could ask any question in regards to any body with a light colour be him an Arab, Asian, or a white person. They Should learn to co-existing with the Luos. They have to mingle freely socially in the society. They have to attend Harambes and donate money just like anybody else. They have to know that the Luos are in their home and the land is for the Luos. They have to respect the Luos freely without any condition. There is no reason to give them special treatment. I do not blame the Korando and Kogony Communities trying to get back their Land that was taken by the Ogingas in the name of Spectrum Properties under the Management of the notorious Israel Agina who collaborates with the Asians to frustrate the Local people. My last question; Who is going to save the Luos? It is a mess but the Asians need to learn to co-exist or get out of Kisumu.

Introduction

As already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis anthropological theories on entrepreneurship see opportunism as an integral part of entrepreneurial activity. This chapter explores the new milieu of opportunity thought to have been formed after the political turmoil and violence following Kenya’s disputed General Election in December 2007. When the post-election violence wreaked havoc in parts of Kisumu, the area administratively known as Kogony sub-location, of which Usoma

---

falls under, was no exception to this. On the contrary, areas along the Kisumu-Busia road experienced what one Kogony elder described as “ethnic cleansing”, mainly of Kisiis\(^{22}\) who are widely believed to have voted for President Kibaki. Also, and of more importance to my study, was the burning and looting of properties owned by Kikuyus and Asians in areas around the airport. A few buildings were completely burnt to the ground while some were brought down brick by brick and then later sold off or reused by local residents. I do not know the exact number of buildings burnt or looted in this area but it is safe to say that a large number of them can be classified as luxurious and fall under what people here quite generally categorize as *resorts*. The sentiments at the time of my fieldwork seemed to be that the region had a shortage of proper resorts to accommodate all the foreign visitors expected to arrive in the wake of the upgrading of Kisumu Airport to international status.

Apparently many plots owned by Kikuyus and Asians have since the post-election violence been sold off far below market value. *The Standard* (27 November 2008) could report that in the aftermath of “poll-related clashes” and the ensuing “uncertain political climate” Kisumu residents, Luos and Asians alike, were now selling their land and properties at “throwaway prices”. In addition, many Kisumu Asians had fled the country prior to and after the election. One Kisumu Asian termed this “the Asian exodus”, calling on memories of 1972 when Asians in Uganda were given 24 hours by President Idi Amin to leave the country (Pabari 2008). Since Asians in particular are believed to control economic life in Kisumu their rapid ‘exodus’ suddenly seemed to have opened up for new opportunities\(^{23}\). Many I spoke to however said that many Asians had returned and that most would be back in a

\(^{22}\) Ethnic group associated with areas along the border to Tanzania further south.

\(^{23}\) I was told on separate occasions that Asians as a group controlled 80% of businesses in Kisumu. Hardware stores, hotels, restaurants and industry in general were particularly pointed out.
matter of months. For certain entrepreneurs this window of opportunity needed to be utilized before it was too late. When even Prime Minister Raila Odinga was buying up land in Usoma it was evident that this area had potential.

When Ben happened to hear notice of a ‘beach plot’ for sale in Usoma he acted swiftly and convinced the owner, a well-off elderly woman named Caroline, to sell him the land. At the time, Caroline was in negotiations about selling the land to Adil, an Asian who owns the three surrounding plots. Apparently it was Ben’s Luo background that made him the preferred buyer. One of the reasons why Ben wanted this land was that it happened to be situated in the vicinity of one of Raila’s newly acquired plots. This had clearly added fuel to Ben’s aspirations about the development of this area and in the long run, he believed, it could be highly profitable to become the Prime Minister’s neighbor.

What this chapter reveals is how political developments on the national level, like the post-election violence and the swearing in of Raila, the ultimate Luo big man, as Kenya’s new prime minister, have profound impact on the strategies chosen and the decisions made by aspiring young entrepreneurs with an eye on Usoma. In this climate of political uncertainty rumors play a major role as a communicative tool and, more importantly, as an important source of information. The chapter also shows how Asian domination of the economy is not the only structural constraint facing Luo entrepreneurs. In the end it is the lack of economic capital that stops Fred from realizing his entrepreneurial dreams. It is also shown how mzungus24 are seen as possible sources of income as they are believed, often rightly so, to have more money and easier access to economic resources than black Kenyans. For many

_________________________

24 White people.
entrepreneurs in Kisumu, it seems, teaming up with westerners is a desirable and often attempted goal.

**What will Raila do?**

Why are Raila and family members increasingly buying up land in Usoma? Why are they interested in a dilapidated beach resort? Is Raila in a secret alliance with the Asian community in Kisumu? Is he planning to ‘grab’ airport land? And what will all of this have to say for property prices in Usoma? These are questions that are constantly put forth and answered by Fred and other entrepreneurs. Speculations about Raila’s next move are grounded in rumors stemming from the local and national printing press and from various people linked to the airport expansion. The rumors are closely linked to corruption. Haller and Shore (2005:14) writes that anthropological research can perhaps best be used in the study of “allegations of corruption and its effects” and not so much on corruption as an activity in itself. Anthropological studies of corruption therefore often resemble studies done on allegations and rumors about witchcraft. During my fieldwork I noticed how rumors were used as viable sources of information by entrepreneurs and that decisions were often made on the basis of such information. In his study of Bangladeshi migrant entrepreneurs in Naples Harney (2006) observed the same. He writes that “Rumour acts as improvised news in the absence of more formal and verifiable news” and that “the distribution of information, gives attention to the crucial communicative aspect of rumour” (Harney 2006:376). During my fieldwork rumors suggested that the Prime Minister was planning to build a resort, a golf course and storage facilities for the molasses plant. This would surely “bring development” to the area, several locals suggested, in the form of roads, running water and modern sewage facilities and not the least jobs for local residents. For local residents these rumors were often accompanied by a fear that Raila would “grab” airport land. An outsider like Ben rather hoped that Raila would grab Kogony land as he believed it would make
property prices soar in the area in general. I now turn my attention to Ben’s attempted ‘beach plot’ acquisition.

Rising to the Occasion

It is not common for Ben and Millicent to skip Sunday service but today is different. They are eager to have a look at the land plot which Ben is in the process of buying, not far from the airport and Raila’s land. With the help of a local resident named Dixon Ben has been able to hire some local teenagers to even out the land plot and prepare for future construction. Dixon is also acting as a middleman between Ben and Caroline, the owner of the land.

After breakfast we head into town and pick up George along the way. Ben needs to buy shovels and hoes at a hardware store that can be put to use on the plot. I tag along with Ben into the store where he buys two hoes from an overly friendly Asian man in his mid fifties. But Ben refuses to buy shovels there as he finds them to expensive. “He is only friendly when I’m with mzungus”, Ben tells me after we have left.

Instead we drive towards Kibuye Market where we stop to find some cheaper shovels. “In Kenya you have to bargain! You bargain!” Ben tells me just seconds before he starts negotiating with a seller at the market. To Ben’s surprise the seller demands twice as much money as the Asian at the hardware store did. After intense minutes of negotiating, switching between Dholuo, Kiswahili and English, Ben still ends up paying more than the Asian’s fixed price. Being that the shovels are of lower

25 One of the largest Sunday markets in East Africa.
quality as well; this is clearly not a bargain. Ben claims that the presence of me, a *mzungu*, was the reason for the substantial spike in prices.

We turn around and head for Usoma. After we have crossed the rusty railroad we turn left at the first junction towards the airport while passing the Nyanza Golf Club on our right hand side. Instead of taking left at the next junction we continue straight ahead, passing the Kisumu grain mill and the Equator Bottles factory (Coca Cola) before we reach the pipeline where foreign petrol trucks patently wait for fuel to bring back to their landlocked countries further east. As the car drives pass the heavily guarded[26] Kenya Pipeline I read out loud the writings on a billboard asking citizens to join Kenya Pipeline and the Government in their “Crusade against Corruption”. The others find this ironic as they see the government and the state itself to be the epicentre of corruption in the country.

In addition to a large pool of water, on the exact spot where the asphalt comes to a sudden halt, a flat tired Congolese petrol truck and a stubborn cow threatens to stop our further advancement. After a few minutes George and I are able to get the cow off the road while Ben manoeuvres the car out of the water. A sign tells us that the road ahead has undergone improvements as a first major step towards getting it fully asphalted. Large blue letters reveal that *The Swedish International Development Agency* (Sida) and the World Bank is funding this project. A couple of kilometers later the dirt road ends up at the Kisumu-Busia road just next to the Odinga family’s molasses plant.

[26] During the PEV Kenyan security forces were sent to guard this important installation. People in the area risked being shot if they came to close.
As we get closer to our destination we see a group of people gathered at the plot. The only shovel available is being used by an energetic young man while the other men there seem to await their turn to dig. We park the car and are welcomed by Dixon, organizer and middleman, who is in his mid thirties and who lives close by. Dixon, Ben and I each take a shovel and start digging while George and Millicent find shade under a mango three. After ten minutes or so Ben stops digging and wander around as if he is on an inspection tour. As I continue digging, and start sweating, I take notice of a word often used by the young men around me: odiero. I ask Ben what the word means and learn that “it is the Luo word for mzungo”. He starts laughing and says: “they tell me that I must be a very rich man who can hire a mzungu to work for me!”

I need a break and head for the car where Millicent has retreated to get a drink of water and a comfortable place to sit. She is over seven months into her pregnancy now and complains that “my back is killing me”. Millicent has brought sugar canes from home and gives one to me. After many unsuccessful attempts of tearing it apart with my teeth in order to get to the sugar, something which is clearly a source of amusement for the others, I give up. Millicent says sugarcanes remind her about snakes, one of her biggest fears. Her father used to have a sugarcane farm somewhere outside Kisumu when she grew up. Every summer he would set ablaze the fields of old sugar canes before he planted new ones, forcing out enormous pythons, as well as other snakes, which where hiding in the fields. Although she hates snakes she doesn’t believe there to be anything mysterious about them:

27 Actually it is the name of “a small fierce white bird”. Also used as a nickname for Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. See Parkin 1978:106.
People here are so superstitious. They believe that whatever comes from the lake must be something supernatural. These people are so backwards with no education... But perhaps now... You know, the post-election [violence] created a lot of opportunities here. The Luos rose to the occasion! We Luos are not really great business people, not like those Asians but now we are finally getting there...

The Hilton of Homestay’s

“Welcome to Benland!” Ben shouts and starts laughing. I’m with Ben who is showing the plot in Usoma to Charles, an NGO worker from Nairobi. Except from an old mud structure and a huge mango three there is not much there. Hyacinth\(^{28}\) covers what can dubiously be called a ‘beach front’ and Ben explains to Charles that the area in general is known to be a popular grazing ground for hippos that show up during the night. “I will have to get some dogs”, Ben tells us, “and a shot gun!” He is very excited and tries to explain his future plans by talking eagerly while gesticulating and drawing pictures in the sand. “I will build small huts that will together join in a circle”, he continues, “and in the middle I will get a huge cookout. My Australian friends love barbequing, they love it! When I build my resort I will invite them to Kenya”.

A few days later Ben, Charles and I are having supper, or ‘tea’, prepared by Ben and Millicent’s housekeeper. Charles works for a European aid organization in Nairobi and travels often to western Kenya and the Northern provinces to inspect the various development projects funded by his employer. He was one of Down Town’s first customers after Ben and Millicent launched their homestay only six months prior to the General Election in 2007. Since Charles is a Kikuyu he stayed away from Kisumu until the dust had settled from the post-election violence and the Grand Coalition Government had been formed. Still he feels wary about his personal safety in this

\(^{28}\text{Free-floating freshwater plant that often covers the entire Kisumu bay and harbor and that causes difficulties for local fishermen and commercial boat traffic.}\)
part of Kenya and says that without his friendship to Fred he would have never dared to travel to Nyanza.

After supper I’m invited to join the men to Charles’ cottage to discuss business. Ben and Charles both bring their laptops and each their bundle of documents. “Here is the thing”, Ben says before he pauses, “I want to franchise and I want you and Charles to join me”. Ben and Charles have talked about going into business together for more than a year. Charles has started a similar homestay in Nairobi and the two men cooperate by sending western customers each others way. Charles also arranges for European colleagues to stay at Down Town whenever they are on missions to Kisumu, providing Ben with a predictable monthly income. Now the two men want to join forces. Ben wants to franchise and allow for Charles to use his slogans and trademark. His idea is to spread the homestay throughout East Africa to cities like Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Mwanza, in addition to Kisumu and Nairobi. He wants me to join and set up a homestay, preferably in a city at the shores of Lake Victoria. Although I decline the offer he doesn’t seem to register it.

Ben wants to give us an idea of what he has in mind by showing us pictures of beach resorts from the Kenyan and Tanzanian coast. His favorite is Paje by Night\textsuperscript{29}, a popular Italian-owned beach hotel on Zanzibar. When I tell him I have stayed there on a few occasions he gets exited. Charles is also surprised and exclaims “this is not a coincidence!” Ben tells me all about his plans of getting a dhow\textsuperscript{30} in Mombasa “from where I can have large cookouts and fishing parties”. Also, in the long run it would be a goal to use the dhow to sail with customers to as far away as Mwanza in

---

\textsuperscript{29} See the hotel’s website at http://www.pajebynight.net/

\textsuperscript{30} A wooden sailing vessel which is a common sight on the Kenyan and Tanzanian coast where the dhows are used to everything from fishing to transporting snorkeling tourists to coral reefs.
Tanzania and to the Ugandan capital of Kampala when other homestays are in place there. He continues by telling me his ultimate business dream:

Look Freddy, this is what I’m thinking: in ten years time will it be possible to be as big in homestays as the Hiltons are in hotels? The Hilton of homestays… Is it possible? That is what I am thinking. All I need is a partner and some capital… Kenyan banks will never lend you money! Never!

Ben is confident that when the airport gets fully operational more tourists and researchers will find Kisumu to be a suitable travel destination, something that he is certain will benefit his enterprise. For example he believes that what he calls “the Obama factor” will draw many more tourists to the region, especially American tourists, searching for President Obama’s Kenyan roots. Ben’s plan to move his homestay to Usoma will supposedly give him a strategic leverage over his fiercest competitor, an Asian family who, according to Ben, “controls the homestay business of Kisumu” and thereby some of the flow of foreign money. Moving his homestay to Usoma, close to the lake and far away from the busy area he resides now, will offer a fresh new alternative to the expensive and “extremely racist” Asian family. Also, the proximity to the airport Ben believes will be attractive for “mzungos who are always in a hurry”.

With this business idea Ben is trying to carve out room in a niche occupied by an Asian family. This proves to be difficult and he fails in the end. I will explain why shortly. First I turn my attention to another Asian family, those who first tried to buy Benland but who were sidestepped because of their ethnic background.
A Different Prospect

I’m not really sure what we own out there. In fact we wanted to develop something as well. But now with 2012\textsuperscript{31} around the corner we will just sit on it. There is no rush...

Adil

I am sitting in an office in town talking to Adil and his parents, Asians whose relatives settled in Kisumu even before the advent of the railroad in 1901. They own the three land plots surrounding Benland and have for years been interested in getting a hold of the latter. Adil, a UK educated man in his mid thirties, is in charge of the day-to-day operations of his family’s furniture business. They started up in the 1950s as one of the first large-scale furniture manufacturers in the region and together with other Asians they enjoyed a monopoly on the sale of quality furniture in western Kenya for decades. Now business is slower and harder. Many Luo craftsmen have during the last 15-20 years or so started small-scale furniture businesses and sell their products by the roads and in the marketplace. The family, as well as the small-scale manufacturers, now also faces serious competition from Luo businessmen who import cheap furniture from China. “But people will come back to us when they see the low quality of the Chinese”, Adil’s mother says.

The family holds UK passports\textsuperscript{32} and as many Kenyan Asians they fled to London, where they also have relatives, before the General Election. Adil tells me that “men usually let their wives give birth on British soil”, in order for their children to also hold multiple passports. The post-election violence, he says, reminded Asians about their vulnerable position in Kenya. Adil puts it this way:

\begin{center}
\_
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{31} The year of next General Election

\textsuperscript{32} At the dawn of Kenyan independence Asians were automatically granted passports by the British authorities.
We live a very comfortable life here. We work from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon. Not like in Europe where there is a lot of stress. But people here are jealous and hate us. They will also steal from you whenever they get a chance.

The family claims that this ‘jealousy’ was the reason why Caroline, the land owner, in the end preferred to sell to Ben. Adil points at his arm and says “when they see the colour of your skin they see money”. They claim to be a bit relieved for not getting the land because, in contrast to Ben, they don’t think that building a resort next to Raila’s land is necessarily beneficial. A few years ago a Nyanza MP approached Adil’s father with a document stating that the previous owner of the family’s land had signed a sales agreement with the MP before he sold it to them. It turned out however that the signed document from 1990 could not be genuine as the previous owner had actually died the year before, in 1989. The MP eventually backed down but this incident stands for the family as a cautionary example of how politicians are prone to abusing their powers.

I ask them about their recent meeting with Ben where also Dixon, who had facilitated the meeting, was present. “I had heard he was a bit of a con man so I was sceptical”, Adil tells me. Ben had wanted to buy two of the family’s surrounding plots but was unable to pay a deposit. Adil first demanded a deposit of KSh 100,000 which then Ben managed to negotiate down to KSh 30,000. But when Ben was unable to come up with any money at all Adil ended the meeting.

Financial Difficulties

In the signed agreement between Ben and Caroline the price for the land was set at KSh 700,000. Ben pledged to have ready KSh 200,000 at the day of the signing, of which KSh 50,000 would function as a deposit. The two remaining payments, each at KSh 250,000, was decided to be paid within three months. If the agreed upon terms are not met by the buyer within 90 days I was told that land deals in Kenya face the risk of being annulled in which case the deposit goes to the seller. Not long before I
moved into *Down Town* Ben had paid the first agreed upon sum of KSh 200 000 to Caroline. After a few weeks he asked me if it would be possible to pay him in advance for next month’s rent, something which I did. This was just days before the next payment was due and Ben was struggling to come up with enough money. On the last day before the deadline I followed him around Kisumu as he even tried to sell his car. In the end he managed to collect KSh 40 000, of which 30 000 was my in-advance payment for next month’s rent. Although Ben did not uphold the agreement he was given another deadline of one month which he also failed to keep. The agreement was in the end annulled and Ben unfortunately lost his KSh 50 000 deposit.

Ben often complained about the difficulties innovative entrepreneurs have in being granted loans from Kenyan banks and that the global economic recession had made it even more difficult. “There is no flow of money in this country” he once told me, “you have to be a muhindi33 or a politician to make it”. As things were getting tougher for Ben he had difficulties paying his bills on time and was unable to pay Dixon the money he owed him for arranging for the teenagers to work on Benland. There were in addition several other agreements he failed to uphold at the time. He then increasingly stayed more at home, in the guise of waiting for the baby to arrive. I saw him starting to pay more attention to his western customers and how he tried to involve them into his enterprising projects.

**In Search for a Partner**

”And this is Freddy, he is my partner”. Ben is showing the guesthouse facilities to a Kenyan couple and surprises everyone by introducing me as his business partner. I

33 Term often used derogatory about Asians.
know he has done the same before a couple of times. Ben sees them off and when the couple has left he comes back in again. “You see, they really think you are my partner”, he says, “in fact I will write on the webpage that the place is owned by a Norwegian”. When I don’t approve of this he seems disappointed but tells me he understands.

You know my friends from Australia? They wanted me to go into business with them but it was me that turned them down in the end. It’s not easy doing business with someone you have only known for a few months... The reason why I want a mzungo as my partner is because it will open up to new markets...

He once also tried to include a Belgian scientist, a biologist, who stayed at Down Town into his business projects. The biologist one day decided that he wanted to build an aquarium where he could keep fish from the lake. Ben helped him in getting the materials he needed: glass, glue, a saw to cut the glass and not least the fish. When the biologist finished his aquarium Ben requested him to build one for him as well, which he did. When Ben then got his aquarium he showed it to friends and neighbors and persuaded several people to buy the aquarium. The biologist, who had a lot of time on his hand, said he could build a few more aquariums for Ben if he wanted. Eventually, the sale did not really take off. But the biologist promised to send Ben some pumps for the aquariums as he left for Belgium.

A Cultural Broker

In *Siaya* Cohen and Odhiambo (1989:112-114) write about men who under the early decades of colonialism were referred to as *jopango*. These were the first migrant labourers who went to work on settler farms and who brought back to their rural homes with them objects from the Europeans. “The *jopango* were brokers among cultures” (Cohen & Odhiambo 1989:114) and were often seen by their fellow Luos as being like the *mzungu*. “I’m used to being around mzungus” Ben often said, or “people say I will soon be like a mzungo”. This I see as Ben’s most valuable
entrepreneurial asset as most of his income came from western customers. With this income he is capable of living a comfortable middleclass life. But his extraction, so to speak, is not enough to expand his enterprise effectively. His incomes were often unreliable and prospects could change by the day.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have seen an entrepreneur who advanced on an opportunity but who was incapable of bridging a good idea with sufficient financial backing. The chapter revealed how recent political turmoil, the disputed General Election with its ensuing violence, generated hope for aspiring entrepreneurs. The burning and looting of Kikuyu and Asian owned businesses and resorts, and not least “the Asian exodus”, were the prime reason for this. Especially Asians are seen to control economic life in the city and their leaving became a window of opportunity for Ben and other Luo entrepreneurs.

The expansion of the airport to international status was believed to draw many more foreign visitors to the region. At the same time there was assumed to be a shortage of resorts capable of accommodating these expected foreign visitors after the post-election violence. And why had Raila Odinga bought up so much land in the area?

Ben’s failure to realize his dream of building a resort came to an end because of financial difficulties. He therefore, more extensively than before, tried in various ways to benefit from his western customers, a dependable source of income.

I now turn my attention to Dixon, the broker who negotiated the land deal between Ben and Caroline. We will see how brokerage acts as Dixon’s entrepreneurial niche.
Chapter 5: The Broker

Introduction

In this chapter we explore the brokerage position of Dixon, a Kogony and Usoma resident in his thirties. I will claim that Dixon has found a niche in facilitating other Kogony residents’ channels of conversion. Through the use of an extensive network he has created a niche in organizing purification rituals of land and other ceremonies, like funerals. As mentioned in the previous chapter Dixon acted as a land broker in the deal made between Ben and Caroline. He also held a mediatory position when Adil and his family, in the time before Ben came along, were interested in the land plot. Also, Dixon often acted as a broker for me during my own efforts of gathering information and in getting acquainted with Kogony clan members. We will investigate how Dixon exploits his networks and his middleman position between Usoma residents and outsiders. As shown in the last chapter Ben tried to include me into his enterprising projects. In this chapter too we will see how my presence is seen as an access to foreign flows of money as Dixon tries to start a CBO with my ‘help’.

Dixon

Dixon is the son of his father’s second wife. As a young married man, without sufficient funds to construct his own house on a property given to him by his father, he is ‘forced’ to build a small house next to his mother. This building is only for temporary use and will be demolished during a ceremony when the new house is ready. Dixon has now lived at his fathers place for nearly seven years after he got married and will soon start the construction of his own house. At least that is what he hopes for. On his land plot, just on the side of the road, he has two small buildings, one made out of mud and the other made out of bricks, both of them with
iron-sheet roofs. The mud building is mainly a storage facility for bricks and other construction materials and tools and is situated not far from one of the resorts that were destroyed during the post-election violence. On requests from other locals he uses this building as a café, selling dishes of *ugali*[^34] and *nyoma choma*[^35]. He also sells alcohol, mainly cheap spirits made at Raila’s molasses plant nearby. As he doesn’t have a liquor licence he has faced some difficulties, forcing him to bribe individuals from the Kenya Revenue Authority to give him such a licence without asking any questions. With his liquor licence in order he is certain that he soon will be able to expand his enterprise. Dixon is dreaming about opening up a hotel and a restaurant. As with Ben he is certain that Raila will construct a beach resort or two. The effects of this will allegedly be a major influx of westerners seeking accommodation in the area. Raila’s resort(s) will be in need of electricity, running water and proper sewage facilities something Dixon thinks will benefit people in the area in general.

But Dixon is in a predicament. One the one hand he should, as a married man, show independence from his father and use time, money and energy to construct his own homestead for his wife and two children. On the other hand he dreams of becoming a wealthy man, either as a businessman or as a local politician, hopefully both, and wants to direct his limited funds into his own entrepreneurial projects. His cash comes from different channels. He produces bricks which he sells to people in the area, who is mostly in the process of expanding their homestead, and to subcontractors working for the Office for Public Works. Recently, he started growing cash crops, mostly chilli, on his land but it will take some time before the seedlings can yield any profit.

[^34]: *Ugali is sticky maize flour dough which is considered the main staple dish in Kenya.*

[^35]: *Grilled goat meat.*
Mediatory Position

In his classical study of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard (1940:163-164) shows how the so-called leopard-skin chiefs act as successful mediators between clans or individuals in disputes, that may otherwise lead to violence. The leopard-skin chiefs are ritual specialists and seen as standing outside society’s power struggle which in effect enable them to act as neutral brokers. Likewise, Barth’s (1959) study of the Swat Pathans shows how Saints act as brokers between feuding parties. For the parties the mediator guarantees for the parties safety and his advice and decision, which are justified with reference to holy texts, are duly respected and observed.

Dixon’s entrepreneurial niche is based on his position as a broker. I am not suggesting that Dixon is a ritual specialist of any kind, despite the fact that he organizes funerals and other ceremonies. But he holds a respected middleman position which is used to negotiate and mediate between local residents and outsiders. Also, he stands outside the only important clan institution, the Council of Elders. As a Kogony and a local resident in Usoma he has intimate knowledge of the various lineage affiliations between people here and their relations to different areas of land. Also, as he pointed out on several occasions, unlike Ben he is a ‘real’ Luo who speaks the language and knows the customs. In addition, as a former strategist for a prominent Kisumu politician, Dixon has a good foothold within the higher political circles of the city. In 2007 he had a falling out with his boss and started contesting for his civic seat, during the General Election that same year. His political network, which at a certain level includes MPs from Nyanza, seems to be Dixon’s most valuable asset. He helps and does favours for politicians and successful businessmen who want to buy land in Usoma in return for money as well as other favours. This is a niche he is trying to hold on to and is therefore careful to nurture and develop his ties with the elite further. Land plots near Dixon are getting more attractive and expensive as speculations and rumors about the future development of
Usoma are debated. Recently there have come many requests from local politicians interested in buying up land next to any of the Prime Minister’s plots. For Dixon the reason for this is obvious: “they want to befriend Raila so that they can make MP”.

Chasing Away the Spirits

The living room clock has already turned 11. Ben is using an awful lot of time this Saturday morning. The other day, Ben invited me to join him to attend a ceremony taking place on Benland. “They are going to chase away the spirits”, he told me, “it is important that I attend”. But today, he is apparently not going and I leave the house on my own. Already late I hire a tuc tuc, that with ease slips through the congested traffic in town and takes me to Usoma in a painstaking pace. I eventually reach my destination and pay the disgruntled driver an extra KSh 100 for the unexpected bumpy ride. I am not far from the molasses plant and can smell the strong reek of alcohol that dominates its surroundings. After a 20 minutes walk towards the lake I eventually see a large gathering assembled on Benland. Dixon comes to greet me and seems glad I have arrived but also disappointed by the fact that Ben is not present. Before I left home Ben told me to say that he was in Nairobi looking for money to pay for Caroline’s land. Regrettably I do just that; I lie to cover Ben’s back. Dixon is worried about his reputation as a land broker. He has been sticking his neck out and assured Caroline, as well as residents of the area, that Ben is a trustworthy person and a reliable payer. That Ben is not present, as he said he would be, Dixon interpret as an alarming sign. Though, the ‘fact’ that Ben is in Nairobi seems to reassure him, at least a bit.

__________________________

36 Three-wheeled auto rickshaw
The ceremony taking place on the land plot merges Luo customs with Catholicism. As I approach the ceremonial site I see a Catholic priest leading a procession of about 20 people going in circles around the dilapidated mud structure situated on the plot. Dixon tells me that the priest is “asking and telling the ancestors to leave”. The group following the priest is singing hymns in English and DhoLuo while the priest is throwing something which appears to be holy water onto three carefully marked graves I never really knew existed and which are painted white for the occasion.

Inside the building there is a small chair with no armrests and a bed missing a mattress. According to Dixon the bed symbolizes the omnipresent ancestors who live on the land. One of the mud walls inside the building has been turned into an enormous anthill over the years, a clear indication of its deserted state. The reason for why this fertile piece of land lie fallow has to do with the fact that Caroline and her deceased husband never managed to produce a son who could inherit it. According to Luo tradition sons are the sole inheritors of land and without sons around it will be abandoned. Dixon estimated that without a ceremony like the one today land like this might be put to use again only after two generations.

A group of young mothers with their infants sits under the huge mango tree on the left of the building as well as a number of older children watching the ceremony. Closer to the lake another group of women are preparing food which is to be eaten after the rituals. In front of the building Dixon has erected a tent that spans widely, providing shade for 50 people or so. He estimates that around 100 people “from all over Nyanza” will attend the ceremony, if only parts of it. As the organizer he is in

Unfortunately I never received confirmation about whether it was holy water or not. However, in a different ceremony I attended, which included the construction of a makeshift dala, a rural homestead, for a Luo who lives in Nairobi, holy water was widely used by a catholic priest who participated in the ceremony. When the dala was constructed, which was done in a day, the priest threw holy water inside the newly erected structure.
charge of collecting contributions from various hold, as well as making sure that there is enough food and of getting priests and elders to attend the ceremony. Because of his contacts with politicians he is often approached by Usoma residents and asked to organize for ceremonies and purification rituals of land. Politicians are known to contribute widely to large ceremonial events where the contributors’ names are often called up and praised. Dixon claims that certain local politicians set aside public money which, when handed out at ceremonies, are presented as their own personal contributions. But politicians rarely contribute to a purification ceremony of land, unless the person who owns the land is of political importance. The politicians are more likely to give large sums of money to funerary events, especially during election campaigns when they need to make their names and message known to potential voters. Although no politicians contributed to this ceremony Dixon are still left with around KSh 5000\textsuperscript{38} for himself when all the ceremonial expenses are paid for.

“My work here is done”, Dixon tells me and we leave long before the ceremony gets finished. As we walk in the direction of the molasses plant we are fortunate enough to get seats in a cramped matatu\textsuperscript{39} that brings us to Ofafa. Here we buy some beers which Dixon pays for with some of the many schilling notes he has tucked away in his shirt pocket. After a while Dixon tells me that he has been certain for quite some time that Ben is not going to pay up. Even so he arranged for today’s ceremony. “I can’t work for free!” he frustratingly shouts out and explains why he withheld information about Ben’s obvious financial difficulties from Caroline. As the land deal between Ben and Caroline would be annulled Dixon would be left without any fee at

---

\textsuperscript{38} I was told that an average Kisumu income is between KSh 4000-6000.

\textsuperscript{39} Minibus. A common mode of transport in Kenya.
all. The ceremony was the only channel of accumulation that Dixon had left in this case.

**Why Ask the Ancestors to Leave?**

The last *jabilo* of Kanyakago District is said to have made a curse at the end of the 19th century on people selling land (Shipton 1989:30). The reason for this Parker Shipton (1989) suggest is because of the Luo concept of *pesa makech*, or what he translates to “bitter money”. This is ill-gotten money obtained in a manner that breaks with the ideal egalitarian ethos and collectiveness of the Luo and is believed to be a result of the growing individualization of society. For the Luo there are several objects that ideally should not undergo commoditization. Land, tobacco, cannabis, gold and roosters are the most prominent here. A commodity that yields bitter money entails a combination of one or several of the following criteria:

- a product of the land, associated with ancestors and family, extracted by or for foreigners with unfair compensation, involving female labor but yielding disproportionate profits for men and especially young men, easily obtained in relation to its value, condemned as sinful in Christian churches, and perhaps illegal in national law (Shipton 1989: 55).

As Hutchinson (1996:83-86) notes, bitter money is strikingly similar to what the Nuer, a cousin of the Luo from Southern Sudan, calls the “money of shit”. This is money obtained from collecting and disposing of human waste from household latrines. As with bitter money among the Luo, the money of shit has restrictions on what and where it can be invested. It is not acceptable to buy cattle with money earned in such a manner, as the Nuer believe that this is polluted money capable of contaminating cattle and kill it. The restrictions in Luoland can be explained in a similar way where, for example, bitter money is not to be used in bridewealth. The

---

40 Medicine man or war magician. Historically important diviners in Luo society. I will come back this in the beginning of Chapter 6 when I briefly outline one of the myths of genesis of the Kogony clan.
Luo believe that the bitter money will stick to the person who conducted the wholly antisocial act of obtaining and using bitter money and create a series of misfortunate events for him and his family (Hauge 1974, Shipton 1989:29-31). A similar account is reported by Evans-Pritchard in his *Ghostly Vengeance among the Luo of Kenya* (1950:133-134) where he describes how misdeeds stick to a person and that the *jachien*, the “troublesome ghosts”, makes sure that whatever wrongdoing the individual has done is repaid. Ancestors, or rather their spirits, which can be either good or bad, are said to live on their families land. As the ancestral spirits play a most vital role in the patrilineal system, selling the land would be reminiscent of selling your own ancestors and by that your own kin (Shipton 1989:31). This thinking also applies when it comes to making a profit on goods deriving from the land, like gold or cannabis. But there is a way out of this. It is possible to ritually cleanse, or “launder”, the bitter money in a highly costly ceremony involving ritual specialists (Shipton 1989:40-42).

The ceremony described above was such a highly costly ceremony and was paid for by parts of Ben’s deposit as well as by various contributions from kin and acquaintances. Before the land could be fully sold to Ben it had to undergo this ceremony. As the example showed Dixon had realized that Ben would not come up with the money and thereby understood that he would neither be paid. His position as broker made it possible to withhold information from Caroline and the ceremony went ahead as planned. Purification rituals can then be seen as *channels of conversion* (Barth 1963) where ‘bitter’ money turns into ‘good’ money. Dixon then makes a considerable profit on other people’s conversions.

**Interethnic Network**

As well as having political contacts Dixon also have links to Asian businessmen. For example it was Dixon who introduced Ben to Adil, the Asian who was also interested
in Caroline’s plot. Indeed, Dixon also introduced me to Adil as well as to many other persons which has made this thesis possible. One such person is Terry, a Kisii who lives with his Luo wife Grace in a Usoma resort. Terry is a self-proclaimed “social entrepreneur”, it says so on his business card, and together with Grace he runs several businesses, the most important being a furniture and souvenir enterprise. As an outsider he struggles to keep on good foot with the community and has therefore tried to involve himself in several development projects aimed at improving conditions for orphans in the area. During the post-election violence he was too afraid to leave his house and feared for his life. Just up the road houses and compounds owned by Asians and Kikuyus, or “foreigners” as they are sometimes called, were looted and burnt. During these early months of 2008 Terry and Grace depended on Dixon on bringing them food and other necessities from town. The relationship between Dixon and Terry offers mutual benefits. Dixon makes money on his middleman position whereas Terry earns an ally and perhaps some goodwill in the community. Prior to my arrival Dixon had persuaded Terry to help fund the building of a dispensary in the area which would be especially aimed at helping AIDS orphans in the area. After some time Dixon tried to include me into projects concerning orphans.

**So what do you Intend to Do?**

Dixon and I are on our way to see a group of women who are doing volunteer work as teachers for a large group of orphans, many of whom have lost their parents to AIDS. The teaching takes place under the shade of a tree located at the homestead of a local politician. “As a sign of good will I request that you bring some maize or rice for the orphans”, Dixon told me beforehand. I have therefore brought five kilos of maize flour and five kilos of rice for the children. However, my main objective with the visit is to speak with a group of Kogony elders Dixon has arranged for me to meet. The elders have, according to Dixon, promised to give me detailed
information about the genealogy of the Kogony clan. Dixon had expected around 15 elders to come but most of them are apparently preoccupied with attending a funeral. I talk with the five elders that have showed up for about an hour before the owner of the homestead, the politician, arrives. The elders then suddenly have to leave for the funeral.

The teachers have by now managed to prepare porridge from the food I brought and are pouring it into plastic mugs which they hand over to the children. The politician, Dixon and I walk over to the tree to greet the teachers. When they see us coming the teachers get the children to put down their mugs and to stand upright. We are greeted by the children in English who then sing a song for us. I am then thanked by the teachers for bringing the food. One woman thanks God for my arrival and says “I am so happy you have come”. We are each given a chair. The politician then asks me: “So what do you intend to do? As you see they lack a proper roof over their heads and we can only give them one meal a day. What is your plans and how long are you staying?”. I answer truthfully that I don’t have any plans for the orphans. The politician looks very disappointed. “But I was told different” he replies and looks at Dixon. It becomes clear that Dixon has exaggerated the reasons for my presence in Usoma. Afterwards he tells me that he has been telling certain people that “you are here to help us”.

**Madaraka Day**

A few months later on June 1st it is Madaraka Day, a national holiday that commemorates Kenya’s independence from Britain in 1963. I have been invited by Dixon to attend the launching of a Community Based Organisation (CBO) which he has been involved in founding. The event takes place in town and manages to attract both Usoma residents and non-residents. It turns out that Dixon is acting as a figurehead for the organization which mostly comprises Kogony elders. The CBO has been created to attend to the problem of Aids orphans in Usoma and will act as a
representative for several smaller organizations that are working with these issues. Apparently, the CBO has been created at the request of several factories operating in Usoma interested in talking to someone else than the highly politicised Council of Elders. But most members of the CBO are in fact Elders actively engaged in clan politics. Therefore, to emphasise the organization’s ‘community’ profile, Dixon has been entrusted with the position as Secretary thereby making him the main spokesperson and figurehead for the CBO. Dixon tells me that registering as a CBO is the first step towards becoming an NGO and suggests that I help them with getting donor support from Norway.

Dixon tells me that the decision of launching the CBO on Madaraka Day is not a coincidence. On the one hand the day symbolises a new beginning. On the other hand Dixon are concerned that his links to Kisumu’s political elite have been weakened after he ran against his former boss in the General Election. Contributions from that hold to funerals and other ceremonies have lately diminished and he fears that his niche might be in danger. As the organizer of the CBO launching he is in charge with getting prominent persons to attend and contribute to expenditures. He is certain that most of the politicians he knows will today be preoccupied with trying to get close to Raila who is rumoured to hold a speech in Kisumu. When they then do not show up he can blame it on Madaraka Day and the politicians’ greed and lust for power and thereby hopefully retain his reputation as a trusted broker.

As I am about to sit down under a tent, the same tent that Dixon uses in funerals and ceremonies, I am requested by a young man “to sit up front in the VIP section” intended for the absent politicians. Around 50 people are present, a number way lower than allegedly expected. After a long introductory speech by Dixon he “requests that people in the audience come up and share their thoughts on development”. A man in his mid thirties who works for an NGO in Nairobi steps up. He emphasises the need for Usoma residents to utilize their land better. He
believes that with proper irrigation facilities the area will become suitable for
growing cash crops that, when ripe, can be flown into Nairobi and to Kenya’s
neighbours when the airport is fully operational. And since clan members have been
compensated for their loss of land to the airport he says that they will have the funds
necessary to buy equipment and organize for “a shared system of irrigation”. While
he is talking Dixon comes over to me and quietly asks if I can “be so kind and share
with us your views on how to become developed”. I effortlessly try to say no and
eventually walk up to the podium where I am given a microphone. ”I am very
pleased to have my good friend Fredrik from Norway here today”, Dixon says aloud,
“and now he will tell us about his own experience with development in his own
European country”. I don’t know what to say and try to win time by fumbling
about. After a few seconds I manage to stutter something vaguely about the
importance of “education”, “experience” and “hard work”.

The man who spoke before me comes back up again. “I think you…”, the man looks
through his notebook to find my name, “..Fred identified three important things in
achieving development; hard work, education and experience”. He speaks for nearly
20 minutes often making references to my ‘speech’. He praises small European
countries “who manage to keep their country developed and at the same time helps
us Africans”. The man comes down to shake my hand and thanks me for coming.

As the CBO launching is coming to an end I am asked to take photographs of the
organization members standing at the podium, though I am not the only
‘photographer’ there. After I have taken a few pictures I am asked to come to the
podium. The CBO members apparently want a picture of me with them. They want
pictures taken while I shake the hands of the many members. The last pictures we
take show me giving some sort of CBO certificate to Dixon while we both smile to the
camera.
Afterwards I once again end up at Ofafa with Dixon. Though I have a clue what was going on earlier I ask Dixon to explain why they needed pictures of me. He bluntly says that “it will now be easier to get registered as an NGO”. I feel irritated and accuse Dixon of having “tricked” me into coming. I also use the word “corruption”. “But you did it”, he tells me, “you helped us and we are grateful. You knew what was going on”. I calm down but am still not pleased with his answer. “You don’t understand Fred”, he says, “money comes from outside! We needed a mzungu so that they could think we had donor support.”

After my fieldwork it came to my attention that the CBO had successfully been turned into an NGO. With or without my ‘help’, this example clearly shows how money are seen to come from outside. The broker Dixon arranged for the launching of the CBO by using his network which now had also come to include me.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter investigated Dixon’s position as broker in Usoma. As an often used land broker he is often used to organize for purification rituals and ceremonies for land in order for it to be sold for money. As a land broker between Ben and Caroline he was the communication link between the two and was able to withhold information from Caroline about Ben’s financial difficulties.

We also saw how Dixon was the mediator between Usoma residents and Kisumu politicians. As his niche was deteriorating because of his falling out with his former boss before the 2007 General Election he tried to hide this for other locals in order to protect his reputation. In the end I was perhaps ‘used’ to enhance or protect Dixon’s reputation as a mediator. In the last example I was included in Dixon’s CBO project. This might have helped Dixon and the CBO members to upgrade their organization into an NGO.
Dixon will also appear in the next chapter where his mediatory position is put to use by the chapter’s main protagonist, Conrad. The chapter is about the Kogony clan and the compensation received by the state and the World Bank. We will see how Conrad tries to get a well, which is promised to the community as a part of the compensation, onto his family’s land in Usoma. We will see how he tries to outmanoeuvre his main rival, Otieno, who wants the well located on his land. The ‘winner’ will be heavily compensated for loss of land.
Chapter 6: An Entrepreneur and his Community

Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, members of the Kogony clan who inhabits the area of Usoma were granted compensation from the Kenyan state for their loss of land due to the airport expansion. During my fieldwork a total of KSh 56 million were handed out to 190 families who had been expropriated land from. Some families had lost their private land while others were only entitled to their small share of the expropriated communal land, known as Block D. Everyone I spoke to seemed to welcome the long-awaited compensation from the state. Therefore it was a surprise to me that many of the same people were convinced that a sudden enrichment of the community would lead to its rapid decline and downfall. “If you come back in ten years time you will see Usoma people begging in the streets of Kisumu”, Conrad, the main entrepreneur in this chapter, told me. Others shared his views and were drawing on Kenyan stereotypes about the Luo as backwards and incapable of handling money. Some compared the future situation in Usoma with that of Homa Bay\footnote{A Luo town and district in the southern part of Nyanza Province} a few years back. Gold used to be abundant around Homa Bay, drawing big foreign gold companies to the area. Locals who worked in the mines were paid well, at least compared to many other casual jobs available. But it was when residents of Homa Bay, mostly men, started excavating gold by themselves illegally that they got access to large amounts of cash. The story goes on to describe how the newly rich gold diggers wasted their money on alcohol and prostitutes,
leading to a rapid increase of HIV and incidents of crime. As time went by gold became scarce and the foreign companies left the area. The big-spending locals who were now used to having great amounts of cash in their hands were now forced onto the streets of Homa Bay as beggars or, if lucky, moved to Kisumu or Nairobi in search of low-paid casual jobs.

Several clan members, who themselves were to receive compensation, believed that the nouveau riche of Usoma would start wasting money on luxury items and activities they could not afford in the long run, like buying and maintaining Mercedes cars and making a habit of drinking bottled beer at expensive restaurants. When asking Dixon about this, he smiled and shook his head while saying: “You know money has its own characteristics. When you get use to walking around with many thousand bob every day it is very hard to stop”. In addition, many expected land prices to soar since many families now would be without land but have vast amounts of money to purchase new land. To my surprise everyone seemed very reluctant to call the compensation money ‘bitter’ (See Chapter 5). Elders in particular argued that the compensation money could not be bitter since the land had been “stolen” from the clan in the first place.

This chapter explores the activities of one entrepreneur, Conrad, and his attempts of getting access to disproportionate sums of the compensation money from the state and the World Bank. He meets hindrances along the way and tries not to be seen as enriching himself at the expense of the community. Of importance here is the locating of a well which forms part of the compensation. Conrad wants well located on his land while Otieno, an elder, wants the well located to his land. The chapter

42 Common usage when referring to cash money.
follows this quarrel. as well as the consequences of its outcome. First though I will
give a brief outline of the background of the Kogony clan.

The Kogony Clan

The oldest mentioning of the Kogony clan I have come across is in British social
anthropologist C.W. Hobley’s study from 1903: *British East Africa: Anthropological
Studies in Kavirondo and Nandi*. Investigating the genealogy of the Luo ‘tribes’ in the
region he makes one reference to a clan he calls the *Kogonya* (Hobley 1903:329). *Dhoot*
(plural: *dhoudi*) is the Luo word for what in English is known as ‘clan’, or a maximal
exogamous lineage group. The Luos can be considered to have a polyeconomic
lineage system. As Parkin (1978:178-179) notes, paraphrasing Southall (1952), it
diffs from that of plain segmentary lineage systems since the segmentation begins
with the polygunous family “where each of the wives of a single family head acts as
a focal point for the eventual development of a distinct lineage”. The lineage is
therefore connected to a territorially defined *home*. Membership to a lineage is clearly
defined from kinship, either real or fictive, and a person’s ownership over land stems
from this same lineage.

Luo society can clearly be defined as a gerontocracy which emphasizes the
importance of elders and their supreme knowledge. Because of their age elders are
considered to be closely linked to the ancestors (Shipton 1989, Parkin 1978). Clan
elders are seen as the proprietors of the knowledge concerning lineage affiliations
and clan history in general. But this knowledge is fluid and are constantly produced
and reworked by elders. This “economy of history production”, as Cohen and
Odhiambo (1989:30) writes, often takes place during what they call ‘workshop
history’. The history of the Kogony clan was often presented to me during such
‘workshops’ usually under a three with 5-30 elders at a time, where the reaching of
consensus on genealogy and producing simplified versions of the clan’s history were
priorities. As mentioned it is the Council of Elders that is the foremost representative of the clan. It has the stated objectives of enhancing the welfare of the Kogony, to preserve the knowledge of the clan’s history and genealogy and speak for the clan on issues concerning communal land.

The Kogony are part of the larger Luo ‘tribe’ known as the Jo-Kisumo, which according to Ochieng (2002:44) entered today’s Kisumu around the year 1820. The most common claim made by elders was that the land of the Jo-Kisumo stretches all the way to the borders of Seme district in the west and all the way up to the northern hills in Kajulu. The Jo-Kisumo consists of two moieties, or groups, called the Joka-Omwa and Joka-Omwidi. The Joka-Omwa was involved in conflicts with other groups further west before the 1820s and was therefore pushed into the Kisumu area where they merged with the Joka-Omwidi. The Kogony, together with five other clans, falls into the first moiety. There were after a while conflicts between the two moieties and the Joka-Omwidi at one point “denounced the Joka-Omwa as foreigners alleged to have fled from Kanyamwa, in South Nyanza” (Ochieng 2002:45). But it was the Joka-Omwa who in the end became dominant in the area, pushing the Joka-Omwidi away from Kisumu (Ochieng 2002:44-45).

**Myth of Genesis**

The story of how the Kogony gained ownership over the land in Usoma comes in slightly different versions when speaking with individual elders. I will therefore rely on the version that was most frequently told to me by clan elders’ during ‘workshops’. The story starts with the Kogony main ancestor, *Osir Rabar*, who came from Kanyamwa Location in South Nyanza “on the other side of the lake”. Here Osir Rabar’s people were in a violent conflict with another tribe. Since he was the bravest
man of his tribe Osir Rabar was sent away from Kanyamwa in search for a new place to settle down for his people. He sailed alone across the lake and to the shores of what is now Kisumu and went ashore in an area today owned by a well known hotel. The area of Kisumu was by then occupied by another tribe. Osir Rabar soon discovered that the people he had come across in Kisumu did not have spears to defend themselves. He therefore went back to his conflict-ridden home in South Nyanza where he gathered some of his people and convinced them to join him to fight the people across the lake. It turned out that Osir Rabar had been fooled. The men of the other tribe did have spears and were able to defend themselves effectively against the invaders.

Osir Rabar then came up with an idea. As a medicine-man he had special powers and intimate knowledge of herbs. Hauge (1974: 121-122) describes medicine-men and their powers as very important for the Luo, the category jabilo being most important. According to Dixon jabilo literally means doing witchcraft. But this is not a proper description of the word, I was told by Kogony elders, since jabilo is regarded as “good magic” whereas witchcraft has negative connotations. “War magician”, as that used by Parkin (1978:227), I find to be more in accordance to the elders’ descriptions who also emphasized the importance of conquering the land through battle.

Osir Rabar’s plan involved using his unearthly powers and consisted in disguising himself pretending to be a traveling hawker selling tobacco. He told the people of

43 Tribe as a category was always used during these stories and used as marker for both clan and ethnic groups.
44 The Sunset Hotel situated in Milimani, a posh residential area of Kisumu.
45 William Ochieng (2002:44) claims the group holding areas of the airport at that time were another Luo group known as the Kajulu.
46 See Ochieng (2002:44) for a similar story about a scout named Osir Waringa son of Ochuka.
Kisumu that he had settled camp on top of a nearby mountain and that they could get tobacco for free if they came to see him. When the people arrived Osir Rabar cast a spell on them using a special potion he had made from his herbs. He bewitched the men of the tribe and turned them into his slaves. This achievement earned Osir Rabar the name Osir Bilo, after the word jabilo. Osir Bilo then became ruler over the enslaved people and over his own tribe which he moved to Kisumu from Kanyamwa. Osir Bilo then took nine of the enslaved men’s women to be his wives. These nine wives came to represent the nine different subgroups, or sub-clans47, of the Kogony that occupy the nine different areas of the clan’s territory. The nine sub clans are as follows: Jokomore, Jokombima, Joka Okong’o, Joka Ratip, Joka Odongo, Joka Asewe, Joka Niyambok, Joka Achola and Joka Wasongo. Since the sub-clans occupy different areas of land which are of varying importance to the KAA, members of certain sub-clans are entitled to more money in compensation than others. They therefore often represent different political units within the Council of Elders.

**An Informal Interest Group**

I will apply Abner Cohen’s (1974) term *informal interest group* to describe the Kogony clan. Cohen writes that for some groups structural constraint might inhibit them to become formal organizations. He points to “ethnic groups, élite groups, ritual groups, groups with secret patterns of symbolic action, and groups organized as cousinhoods” as especially prone to this (1974:90-102). The organizing of groups like these is based on different types of obligation. Kinship is one feature that can create a sense of obligation to a collective. Membership in the Kogony clan with its segmented lineage system is exclusively based on descent. This exclusiveness creates

---

47 It should be mentioned that two elders, both in their late seventies, insisted on calling the subgroups for houses. As mentioned above, wives act as the focal point for the development of new lineages (Parkin 1978:178-179). Since the woman’s main sphere is the household it is perhaps not strange that these elders would refer to clan lineages as houses.
rights for the individual as well as obligations towards conforming to the group consensus. As Cohen (1974:77) writes “there is always opposition between the individual and the group to which he belongs to in respect of rights and obligations”. The group will invoke symbolic patterns to uphold its authority structure. As mentioned earlier age and authority have traditionally been symbolic patterns found in Luoland. As the Kogony lacks any formal organization the Council of Elders has been left with the sole responsibility of representing the clan. As the highest authority the Council sometimes manages to mobilize members into collective actions. For example, the Council have ordered, or urged, clan members to halt the airport expansion several times by putting about roadblocks and hindering construction work by attacking Chinese and others working there (For example see *The Star* 2 October 2008).

Within the council I have identified to antagonistic groupings, *Elders* and *Young Elders*. The former category comprises men over 50 who by virtue of their age are entitled to respect, an automatic saying in Kogony affairs and thereby a permanent seat in the Council. The Young Elders comprises men between the ages of 30 and 50 who have lived large parts of their lives in Nairobi and Mombasa where some were also born. They moved to Kisumu only when they themselves were in the process of getting their own families. Some had bachelor degrees from universities in the same cities and more importantly spoke fluent English. The Young Elders were often in charge of their own businesses in town and were used to a steady cash income. The Elders within the council relied on the knowledge and expertise of the Young Elders in order to fight for the compensation.

**The Entrepreneur in Question**

Conrad is a married man and a father to three who lives in town with his family on the outskirts of Milimani. But as a Kogony he spends a lot of time in Usoma. He runs a retailing business together with two other men at his own age and have specialised
in office supplies. He lived in Nairobi together with his parents until he was 23 where he also obtained a bachelor degree in marketing. His father, who worked for a large retailing company in the capital, managed to get Conrad a job at the company’s branch in Kisumu. Conrad accepted the job offer but only stayed with the company for a couple of years until he had managed to save up enough money and secured a loan from his wife’s uncle, a prominent politician, to put up the business he is now a part-owner in.

In addition to being a “businessman”, as he describes himself, Conrad is also actively involved in politics. During the General Election of 2007 Conrad contested for a Kogony sub-location civic seat. He started his campaign earlier than most of his political rivals and managed to find people willing to donate money for his political venture. One important contributor was Wilson, also a Kogony, who is regarded as a traitor since he acts as a subcontractor for the Chinese company expanding the airport and is seen as enriching himself at the expense of the Kogony community. Why Wilson supported Conrad I was never told.

Altogether the campaign machinery collected over KSh 1 million, apparently surpassing the budgets of most of the other nine candidates contesting for the same seat. Conrad bought two old matatus which he used in the campaign. Loudspeakers were mounted on top of the cars and used by young campaign volunteers who drove around in the area trying to convince people to vote for Conrad. One of Conrad’s strategic weaknesses was that he lived in town, too far away from the political battleground around the airport. Also, he often did not have food for unexpected visitors, who were potential supporters. In the end Conrad did not win the seat and two matatus now goes in shuttle from the airport to the main bus and matatu station in Kisumu.
Conrad is also actively engaged in the Council of Elders and as a skilful Young Elder holds one out of several different post in the Council that are voted over in so called clan elections every two years. I now turn my attention to the rivalry between Conrad and a respected elder, Otieno, who is also active in the Council. Their political rivalry within the council is in fact a quarrel over money and the access to compensation from the state and the World Bank.

The Well

The main ‘price’ of the rivalry between Conrad and Otieno lies in locating a well, which has been promised to the community by the Kenya Airport Authority (KAA) as a part of the compensation. Both men are interested in locating the well on to their own families land, something in the event would lead to heavy compensation by the KAA. The properties of the two men are both eligible locations for drilling wells. Access to clean freshwater has been a huge problem for residents during the last two decades. Equator Bottles (Coca Cola) and Raila’s molasses factory have laid claim on the only natural water points in the area. Beside the nearest open water point, which is a few kilometres away, people rely on rain and the highly polluted lake to supply them and their animals with water. The drilling of a well will improve conditions for many in the area, known for its high rates of waterborne and infectious deceases.

The locating of the well is to be decided by the Council of Elders. The election, which takes place just over a month or so before the compensation handout, is therefore of utmost importance for Conrad and Otieno. Conrad holds an elective position in the council but will during the upcoming election try to run for a post higher up in the hierarchy. The current leader, the Chairman, is in the United States and has recently managed to extend his visa permit with another six months. The post as Chairman gets elected by the Council members themselves whom have decided to re-elect their leader. The new composition of the Council will lead the clan when the compensation is handed out. By virtue of his position as a respected clan elder
Otieno has tried during the run-up to the Clan Election to encourage people to vote for Conrad’s contestants. Apparently, Otieno has also been gossiping, claiming that Conrad is becoming more and more like Wilson, the traitor, and thereby more interested in individual profit seeking than he is in the needs of the community.

Conrad has the support of Wilson and Dixon in this matter. As with the General Election, Wilson has provided Conrad with money he can use in the Clan Election. In a conversation with Conrad, Dixon and Wilson I learnt that the latter two wanted the well constructed on Conrad’s land. Wilson admitted that he wanted to be given the job as the main contractor for this project, while Dixon was interested in supplying the construction work with bricks.

I now turn my attention to the Clan Election. As we will see in the next example Conrad is also able to get support in other ways. For weeks he has used Dixon, the broker, to try to persuade prominent Kogony politicians and businessmen to endorse his candidacy.

The Clan Election

For over a year the Council has been split into two different factions. A group of about 20 Elders, which mostly comprises Elders from two of the smallest sub clans, left the Council after internal strife and created their own alternative council, claiming to represent the entire Kogony clan. This has been seen as illegitimate by large segments of the community. Amid accusations of working against the best interests of the community there have also been expressed concerns that this rogue council in fact are jointly controlled by state organs like the KAA, Office for Public Works and Kenya Pipeline and by private companies such as Equator Bottles (Coca Cola). Quarrels over the right to represent the community in negotiations with the state and others, and in the media, are now coming to an end. Members of the splinter group have been allowed to participate in the election in return for their
resolution of the alternative council. The idea is that the community shall “unite and talk with one voice”, according to Conrad.

Dixon and I are late because of a meeting we had with a Kisumu politician, a Kogony, this morning. Dixon told me beforehand that he “just wanted to make sure that the guy would support Conrad”. The election takes place under an enormous fig tree, allegedly the burial ground of a great Kogony warrior. Literally nailed to the tree is a fence marking several acres of land expropriated by the KAA, which Dixon tells me he has heard is the site for a future airport storehouse. Under the shade of the tree a crowd of around one hundred people, most of who are sitting on the ground has lumped together. When we arrive people are still showing up and members of the Council, who are mainly Young Elders, sits on a row of chairs in front of the crowd together with a representative for the local authorities. A group of Elders are sitting on chairs and resting their backs on the fence while drinking Coca Cola and ginger ale. One of the Young Elders is explaining to the crowd in DhoLuo how the election will take place. Dixon translates for me. The Young Elder is saying that the election needs neutral observers to count the votes. Suddenly the Young Elder points in my direction and Dixon says: “if you are asked to be an observer will you accept it? We need some transparency”. I feel obligated to join the already existing team of election observers and am given a chair together with the other observers sitting next to the Young Elders.

Before the election takes place a number of issues are debated. Council members address the crowd, which is growing by the hour, and debate issues regarding the development of the area: the planned road that might come to a halt because of the expansion, KAA’s promise to build a primary school, a dispensary, a well and other facilities in the area, the promised jobs set aside by the KAA for Usoma residents and so forth. One man reads up loud from a list the names of the many families entitled to be compensated for their loss of individual and communal land. 190 families are
on this list something which is widely known from before. Some people threaten to leave if the voting does not commence soon. When a man in the crowd shouts “let us vote!” he gets support by the crowd.

The bickering between Young Elders and people in the crowd continues and the level of shouting comes to an all-time high. The Elders sitting with their backs against the fence goes back and forth trying to mediate between the parties. As the debating goes on the politician I met with Dixon shows up. When I met him earlier this morning he was neither wearing a shirt nor shoes. Now he is wearing a ‘cowboy’ outfit with a black hat, dark blue shirt and trousers and newly polished boots, according to Dixon a sign of power. The shouting stops as the politician enters the shade of the fig tree and salutes the Council members, particularly the Elders. The politician delivers a speech in DhoLuo. At the end of his speech, in English, he stresses that the community should find a leader that can unite and offer “new blood” to the Council. He points his finger at Conrad but does not say his name. After the speech the politician takes a seat next to Conrad.

The election eventually starts and people present can propose candidates for the different posts. Cashier, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and a number of other titles are to be handed out. Some of the men in the Council, mainly Young Elders, are eager to be re-elected and propose themselves. Otieno surprisingly proposes Conrad to one of the posts and urge the voters to endorse his candidacy. This comes as a surprise since it was only yesterday that Otieno warned people against Conrad saying that he was only interested in enriching himself at the expense of the community.

Men who are interested in filling the different posts gather around in the middle, between the Young Elders’ chairs and the crowd. One post is voted over at a time and the candidates stand upright in silence waiting for the result. The voters raise
their hands when their preferred candidate’s name is announced. Together with two other observers I meticulously try to count the fingers in the crowd. “How do you like our secret African election?” one man asks me while I walk around. People in the crowd start laughing.

When the post Conrad is contesting for is to be voted over there is only one other candidate running. Conrad comes from one of the biggest sub-clans while the other candidate is a Young Elder named Arnold from the smallest one. The latter has apparently been doing a lot of campaigning beforehand, trying to buy votes with “handouts” and by holding parties and feasts. Elders of Arnold’s sub-clan, who formed part of the rogue Council, fear that they will be marginalised in the composition of the new Council after the unification. It becomes clear that Conrad wins with an overwhelming majority and the team of election observers concludes that there is no point in counting the votes. Arnold later wins another post in a landslide, “in order to keep the peace” as Conrad puts it.

After the election I walk with Conrad and Dixon towards the highway. Conrad suddenly spots Otieno and jogs towards him. I ask Dixon what is going on. “The old man helped us win the election. Now Conrad will give him a little something for his troubles. You know, he’s very old”.

Leverage

Why did Otieno suddenly endorse Conrad’s candidacy in the election? At first sight it might seem as if Conrad bribed Otieno to endorse him but the reason is rather more complex than that. As mentioned the two men have been rivaling over the decision to locate the well. A common problem in the area, especially with regards to the compensation, is that many families have not had title deeds to show for to prove that the land plots they live on are actually theirs. The same was the case with Otieno. The land he lives on comprises two plots. One of the plots turned out to be in
the name of one of Conrad’s matatu drivers, an Elder and a close relative of Otieno. When I asked the driver why he wanted to sell it to Conrad he replied that he needed money to pay for wife’s hospital bills. How he had got it in the first place I was never told. With Otieno’s title deed in his hands Conrad has suddenly gained a significant leverage over his rival. “Now he just wants to be my friend” as Conrad puts it, “he knows I can kick him off his land”. Conrad ‘wins’ the quarrel with Otieno and at the end of my fieldwork plans were being made to drill the well on Conrad’s family land in Usoma.

**Buying Land**

Conrad’s newly acquired strategic leverage over Otieno makes it possible for him to pressure the Elder in different ways. Through his advantageous position in the Council Conrad learns that the KAA might be interested in acquiring several small pieces of land throughout Usoma, in addition to the land acquired through the use of expropriation and compensation. Also, he is confident that prices on land will soar as soon as the compensation money is handed out. It is expected that many compensated clan members will try to get their hands on land both within and outside Usoma, something that will likely lead to a rapid increase in property prices. In all of this he sees an opportunity to make a considerable economic profit without much effort.

Together with Otieno, Wilson (the traitor), a representative for the local authorities and me, Conrad is inspecting a flat piece of land not far from where the airport expansion work is going on. We see Chinese engineers overlooking their workers a couple of hundred meters away from where we are standing. Conrad intends to buy the land from Kennedy, a young man he just refers to as “the drunkard”. Kennedy seems more than willing to sell the land which he inherited from his late father only two years ago. It’s now midday and Kennedy has already spent the KSh 3000 he received from Conrad earlier that morning on food and alcohol and is clearly
intoxicated. Conrad and I walk around on the plot and Conrad seems to have difficulties hiding his disgust for Kennedy:

I’m buying this piece of land. In just over a month I will make over a hundred percent profit. It’s good money and I don’t have to do much work either… The man, he is a drunkard! A stupid drunkard! It’s his own fault if he wants to sell it. Me, I’m just a businessman…

The public official prepares the papers for signing while the others retrieve identification documents from their pockets. Wilson and Otieno are acting as witnesses. Conrad needs this land deal to be approved by a respected Elder in order for the sale to be seen as legitimate in the community. Buying land from a person who is “sick from alcohol” might easily be seen as immoral. Conrad is already risking a lot by having Wilson, “the traitor”, act as a witness. Otieno is the key to a continued high degree of community goodwill for Conrad, an important asset for an entrepreneur involved in local politics and who also has higher political ambitions.

The deal is signed and Conrad takes out a brown envelope from his pocket. It contains KSh 50.000, the first out of three equal-sized payments. When Conrad tells Kennedy that he will only give him 47 instead of 50 notes, Kennedy gets furious. Otieno calms him down and reminds Kennedy that he has already been paid KSh 3000 this very morning. Kennedy falls off his chair and starts laughing.

**A Big Man and a Small Boy**

A few weeks after the election I meet Conrad at Ofafa for lunch. He has bought himself a lot of new clothes. In addition to wearing a new white shirt, a black pair of trousers and some newly polished black shoes he is also wearing rings and cufflinks. I ask him how much his new Nokia phone cost him whereupon he replies: “you know I cannot longer be seen with a rubbish phone. It only cost me around KSh18000”. We soon start to talk about his new post in the Council. He seems very pleased about the latest developments and tells me that his chances of winning a
councilor seat in the next Kenyan General Election in 2012 are high. He has the most important Elders supporting him and his work in the Council will be remembered by the community in 2012. He continues by saying:

Right now I have over 30000 people supporting me. If I say jump, they will jump… You know, during the election [2007 General Election] one MP in Central Province won with only having 4000 votes. He rigged it. Only his people were allowed to vote…. Even me, I can win this way. We are 30000 people! I think I can make MP…

Dixon arrives after 30 minutes or so with a map showing land plots in Usoma. He has been in the vicinity of Ofafa trying to persuade a wealthy businessman to buy land from an acquaintance of him. He shows the map to Conrad and explains what land plots are for sale. Conrad have since the election requested Dixon to keep him updated on this after his successful resale of the land plot he bought from “the drunkard”.

After we have had a few beers Conrad disappears to the restroom. Dixon’s speech seems to be under the influence of alcohol and he moves closer so that I can hear him correctly: “You know, I was thinking, perhaps you know a philanthropist back there in Norway who would be interested in sponsoring me with my education?” I honestly reply that I do not know any philanthropists and ask him what kind of education he is interested in obtaining. He explains his plans of getting “a certificate in community development” from a Kisumu Catholic college and how this would earn him respect and entrusted positions in Usoma. It would also gain him an advantage if he was to contest for a seat in the 2012 General election. As a politician, he is careful to stress that:

I will work for the best interest of the community and I would not become corrupted. Not like Conrad. In fact Conrad’s belly has increased, he’s getting too fat! But now I don’t want to lean in front of people anymore. I want people to lean in front of me!

Conrad returns and Dixon abruptly stops talking and instead orders another Guinness from the waitress walking by. Conrad is paying.
The Entrepreneur and His Community

As shown in the examples above the entrepreneur as a member of an informal interest group are constantly under pressure to conform to the will of the collective (Cohen 1974:42-43). In his account of Frafra entrepreneurs in Ghana, Keith Hart (1975:9) stresses that enterprising individuals should find a balance between their own pursuit for profit and the wider interests of the community. A tension between the individual and his community is most likely to occur:

when accumulation is achieved by a culturally unacceptable transfer of value from the community to the entrepreneur, when conversion of surplus income into capital formation and private consumption leaves little for immediate redistribution to the community and has negligible indirect effects on community prosperity in the longer term (especially if the entrepreneur is a major channel for income drain out of the community) and when he rejects community standards of social behaviour (Hart 1975:13).

As mentioned, in the weeks prior to the Clan Election Otieno’s gossiping implied that Conrad was only interested in the pursuit of personal enrichment. This was a threat to Conrad’s enterprise and in order to win he was dependent on the Elders endorsement of his candidacy. Otieno’s endorsement of Conrad’s candidacy was one important reason why the latter won. Conrad’s control over Otieno’s title deed made sure that the well was constructed on his family’s land and helped in his purchase of Kennedy’s land piece without loosing community goodwill. So, in his search for profit Conrad is quite clearly not only after political power or community recognition of his “expertise” (Eidheim 1963:73), he also has purely economic reasons for involving himself in clan politics. Here lies the danger to Conrad’s enterprise. As the clan election showed he cannot be seen as exclusively pursuing an economic profit, especially not at the expense of “the community”. The mutual political-economic engagement between Conrad and Wilson has created a fear among clan members that Conrad is becoming increasingly concerned with personal enrichment. In many East African societies there is a perception about life as a zero-sum game were one person’s success and wealth are created at the expense of others (Isichei 2004:112).
a society where “age, wealth and respect come together” (Shipton 1989:20) Conrad depends on Elders’ support to ‘make it’.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter looked at how the compensation of Kogony clan members led an entrepreneur, Conrad, and his rival, Otieno, into quarrels. Both men wanted a well, which had been promised as a part of the compensation to the Kogony community as a whole, located on their land. The man who would get the well located at his family’s land would be heavily compensated by the KAA, who were in charge of the compensation handout. This contentious issue was to be decided by the Council of Elders after the Clan Election had decided the composition of the new council. Both men therefore involved themselves more extensively into clan politics than before. Conrad in the end won and got the well drilled at his family’s land.

Because of his hold on Otieno’s title deed Conrad was able to pressure the Elder to endorse his candidacy as well as getting him to act as a witness in his land deal with Kennedy, “the drunkard”. Conrad needed the support of Otieno to carry out entrepreneurial activities that would else have been regarded as illegitimate by the community. Conrad managed to get his hands on a disproportionate share of the compensation and must be considered to be a successful entrepreneur.
Chapter 7: Concluding Reflections

The entrepreneurial activities of my informants were targeted towards the expansion of Kisumu Airport. When finished it will be granted international status and will, perhaps, be capable of handling President Obama’s Air Force One. The international airport, it was believed, would lead to a high increase in the number of westerners flocking to Kisumu. A rise in the flow of money into the city was expected to follow. The opportunities, seemingly, were immense.

These opportunities were also related to recent political developments on the national level. The violence following the 2007 General Election had lead to a temporarily ‘Asian exodus’ from Kisumu. The Asians left behind a void that certain Luo entrepreneurs tried to fill. Asian owned resorts were looted and burnt during the post-election violence and Kisumu suddenly lacked the facilities to accommodate the many westerners that soon were expected to arrive. Even Prime Minister Raila Odinga, said rumors, was planning to build a resort. The ‘beach plot’ Ben tried to buy was located next to one of Raila’s newly acquired land plots. This, he believed, could only be beneficial. Dixon, who brokered the land deal between Ben and Caroline, also believed it could be beneficial to live next to a future Raila owned resort. Dixon was certain that it could have great positive impact on the hotel and restaurant he was hoping to start.

For ‘the new generation’, the airport and its expected material benefits would enable them to become the ‘change’ they proclaimed Kenya badly needed. They viewed their parents’ generation as having been too preoccupied with following ‘tradition’ and with maintaining their rural ties. The young men believed this had hindered the former generation of moving ‘forward’. For the new generation, the Luo decline was partly explained as the result of their parent’s alleged inability and lack of
knowledge to accumulate material wealth. Consequently, they wanted to break it off with the past and create a new future on their own terms. For Ben and Samuel, Pentecostalism became a way to move forward. ‘Backwardness’ and ‘tradition’ was seen as inhibiting their entrepreneurial aspirations and Pentecostalism fitted neatly with the men’s individualistic ideology.

In the end we saw that members of the Kogony clan received compensation for land lost to the airport expansion. Many Kogony living in Usoma believed that this sudden enrichment of the community would lead to its rapid decline and downfall. Even so, clan members welcomed the compensation and felt that it was way over due. The state compensation created a quarrel between Conrad and Otieno over where to locate a well. The quarrel’s final draw was in the Clan Election. By getting a hold of Otieno’s title deed, Conrad managed to manipulate the situation to his advantage. At the end, Conrad was showing off his newly acquired wealth and proclaimed that in 2012, the time of the next General Election, he believed he could manage to become an MP, as he had the Kogony community supporting him as well as the necessary financial funds because of the compensation.

In this thesis I have explored the various ways in which Luo entrepreneurs in Kisumu focus their “actions and activities” (Barth 1963:6) towards gaining access to an imagined flow of global capital. The entrepreneurs tried to make bridging transactions between their own enterprises and this flow. In a region which has been politically and economically marginalized since early independence, this relatively recent influx of capital has created dreams and hopes for a better future. The allurement of becoming rich and powerful in an instance seemed to be commonplace. In order to achieve this, it seems, people tried in different ways to get access to outside capital. For my informants, that often meant trying to team up with westerners. Service-related businesses in the city have experienced rapid growth in recent years, taking care of the needs of western aid workers, volunteers, researchers
and, recently, tourists, as well as young university educated middleclass Kenyans employed in the foreign funded NGO and research sectors. In Kisumu, I claim, wealth is seen to come from outside. Establishing a connection to the outside world was clearly a priority and “The allure of accruing wealth from nothing” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:313) was clearly evident. Access to the imaginary global flow of capital was a desired goal.
References


Berman, Bruce & John Lonsdale 1992: *Unhappy Valley, Book One: State and Class* Edited by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale London:


No 1-2, vol. 12.


**Newspaper articles and electronic media**

*BBC News* 17 April 2008: ‘Odinga: Kenya’s king-maker’

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7068055


http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/767402.stm

*Daily Nation* 25 July 2009: ‘Kibaki, Raila seek to heal wounds of poll violence’


Star 2 October 2008: ‘Kogony Clan Youths Threaten to Attack Chinese Contractors’
http://www.marsgroupkenya.org/multimedia/?storyID=232855&=Kenya+Airports+Authority&page=5

Weekly Mirror 21-28th February 2009: ‘Kisumu airport to host US air force one’