An Economy of (Dis)Affections:
Women-Headed Households, Cash Transfers and Matrilineal Relations in Kenya South Coast

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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specified in the text. I further state that no part of my dissertation has been or is concurrently being submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification.

The dissertation does not exceed the word limit approved by Degree Committee of the Department of Social Anthropology.

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Summary

This thesis explores how woman household heads in Msambweni of Kenya South Coast maintain matrilineal relations in the face of socio-economic constraints and historical social, religious and state patriarchal pressures on matrilineal kinship organization. Matrilineal relations in Msambweni have historically transformed and remain constrained particularly by certain patriarchal/patrilineal-like projects promoted by the state and Islam - for example, legal statutes for marriage, land and property inheritance have historically privileged men and promote patriarchal conjugal family. However, the interaction between such state and Islam projects, and Digo traditions (*chidigo*) has informed the complex kin relations and performances that operate in the everyday relations between men and women in Msambweni today. These continue to operate alongside socio-economic constraints associated with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, deaths and high divorce rates, and unemployment, which also challenge networks of kinship support and the position of men as heads and breadwinners of households. Following this, women are compelled to take up household responsibilities as heads and providers of their households. Many of my informants were beneficiaries of a recent government subsidy program, cash transfer scheme for orphans and vulnerable children (CT-OVC),*"mradi"*, that deliberately targets woman headed households. Within the context of *mradi,* woman headed households are explored in this study as a platform for negotiation, contestation and reinforcement of matrilineal ideologies and practices in Msambweni. Contrary to dominant male-centric anthropological scholarship on matrilineality in Africa, this study privileges perspectives and experiences of women by considering how they perform and live with matrilineal kinship. Woman household heads capitalized on the emergent complexities associated with matrilineal kin relations to constitute and fend for their households, and as an opportunity to forge access to resources such as land, off-farm income activities and *mradi* in order to survive. Specifically, economic performances of woman household heads as survival strategies operate within the matrix of gendered affections and disaffections of matrilineality. Matrilineal ideologies remain alive through strategic and effective invocations by woman household heads to remain central in the household economy not merely as mothers or carers of children, but as providers of their households for the sake of 'strength' to their particular matrilineages (*fuko*). In Msambweni, therefore, matrilineality becomes significant simply not as rules and/or descent, but through gendered economic performances of women. This provides a considerable range for women's authority and autonomy.

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Acronyms

CT-OVC	Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
KES	Kenya Shillings
Kshs.	Kenya Shillings
GBP	British Pound Sterling
LOC	Local OVC Committee
GOK	Government of Kenya
NHIF	National Health Insurance Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
BIG	Basic Income Grant
CCTs	Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
PANES	Plan for National Attention to Social Emergency

Glossary of Kiswahili and Kidigo Terms

Arusi (Kisw.)	Islamic marriage/wedding
Baba (Kisw.)	Father
Baba mdide (Kid.)	Father's younger brother
Baba mvyere (Kid.)	Father's elder brother
Babu (Kisw.)	Grandfather/great grandfather (plural *mababu*)
Bara (Kisw.)	Upcountry
Baraka (Kisw.)	Blessings
Baraza (Kisw.)	Community gathering
Benki (Kisw.)	Bank
Bibi (Kisw.)	Wife, old woman
Boda Boda (Kisw.)	Motorcycle taxi
Bwana (Kisw.)	Husband, master
Chai rangi (Kisw.)	Tea with no milk
Chama (Kisw.)	Group, association
Chidigo (Kid.)	Digo tradition/custom
Chifudu (Kid.)	Female health/fertility cult
Chirimo (Kid.)	Agriculture
Chirwa (Kid.)	Child illness inflicted by a moral infringement
Chitambulisho (Kid.)	National identity card
Dzumbe (Kid.)	Father's land
Fuko (Kid.)	Matrilineage
Heshima (Kisw.)	Honour
Homa (Kisw.)	A cold/flu
Ise (Kid.)	Father
Jamaa (Kisw., Kid.)	Kin, close friend, family, society
Kadhi (Kisw.)	Muslim judge
Kawaida (Kisw.)	Normal
Kaya (Kid.)	Fortified villages, Mijikenda sacred forests (plural *makaya*)
Kibarua (Kisw.)	Casual job
Kimila (Kisw.)	Traditional way
Kiserikali (Kisw.)	State law
Kisharia (Kisw.)	Islamic law/tradition
Konho (Kid.)	Mother's land
Kore (Kid.)	Blood-money
Kuchetuni (Kid.)	Mother's side
Kufikiriya (Kid.)	To think
Kulumeni (Kid.)	Father's side
Kuluphira (Kid.)	To Trust, to rely on
Kumpha (Kid.)	To give
Kusaidiya (Kid.)	To help
Kusaidiyana (Kid.)	To collaborate
Leso (Kisw.)	Women's cloth wrap
Liwali (Kisw.)	Muslim governor
Lwanda (Kid.)	Meeting house for clans

M'beberu (Kisw., Kid.)	Colonialist
Madeni (Kisw.)	Debts (singular *deni*)
Madrasa (Arabic)	Islamic teachings
Mahamri (Kisw.)	Doughnuts
Maharagwe (Kisw.)	Beans
Mahari (Kisw.)	Dowry
Mahunda (Kid.)	Bridewealth
Makuti (Kisw.)	Palm leaves, thatching material made of dried palm leaves
Malezi (Kisw., Kid.)	Upbringing, paternal filiation fee
Mama (Kisw.)	Mother, woman
Mama mdide (Kid.)	Mother's younger sister
Mama mvyere (Kid.)	Mother's elder sister
Mapingane (Kid.)	Incest ritual
Matatu (Kisw.)	Minibus
Maumivu (Kisw.)	Pain
Mayo (Kid.)	Mother
Mbari (Kid.)	Patrilineage
Mchetu (Kid.)	Woman (*plural achetu*)
Mdzomba (Kid.)	Mother's brother (Plural *adzomba*)
Mikoma (Kid.)	Ancestresses, ancestral spirits (singular *koma*)
Mjeni (Kid.)	In-married man, visitor (plural *ajeni*)
Mkaza mwana (Kisw., Kid.)	Daughter in-law
Mkopo (Kisw.)	Loan (plural *mikopo*)
Mkpwoi (Kid.)	Parallel cousin (Plural *akpwoi*)
Mlume (Kid.)	Husband, man (Plural *alume*)
Mlungu (Kid.)	God
Moro (Kid.)	Meeting house for *kaya* elders
Moyo (Kid., Kisw.)	Heart (plural *mioyo*)
Mradi (Kisw.)	Project
Mradi wa mayatima (Kisw.)	Cash transfer for orphans and vulnerable children (CT-OVC)
Mtaani (Kisw.)	Village vicinities
Mtumwa (Kisw., Kid.)	Slave (plural *atumwa*)
Mudir (Arabic)	Muslim governor
Mudzi (Kid.)	Homestead (plural *midzi*)
Muhogo (Kisw.)	Cassava
Muhondo (Kid.)	Tomorrow
Munda (Kid.)	Field/farm
Mwalimu wa dini (Kisw.)	Muslim diviner/teacher
Mwana (Kid., Kisw.)	Child (Plural *ana*)
Mwanangu (Kid., Kisw.)	My child (Plural *anangu*)
Mwenehu (Kid.)	Sibling (Plura *enehu*)
Mwenehu mchetu (Kid.)	Sister (plural *enehu achetu*)
Mwenehu mlume (Kid.)	Brother (plural *enehu alume*)
Mwerya (Kid.)	A network of communal/cooperative support
Mzee (Kisw.)	Elderly person
Nafasi (Kisw.)	Space

Nafuu (Kisw.)	Relief
Nashukuru (Kisw.)	I am grateful
Ndoa (Kisw.)	Marriage
Ngambi (Kid.)	Digo council of elders
Ngoma (Kisw., Kid.)	Dance, drum
Nguvu (Kisw.)	Energy, strength
Nyumba (Kid., Kisw.)	House, household
Pesa (Kid., Kisw)	Money
Piki piki (Kisw.)	Motorcycle
Rafiki (Kisw.)	Lover, friend (plural *marafiki*)
Raha (Kisw.)	Happiness
Rera (Kid.)	Care for/look after a child
Rika (Kid.)	Age-set
Riziki (Kisw.)	Blessing, provisioning, subsistence, portion
Rungu (Kid.)	Ritual's hut
Serikali (Kisw.)	Government
Shamba (Kid., Kisw.)	Land
Shamba la fuko (Kid.)	Matrilineage land
Shamba la mbari (Kid.)	Patrilineage land
Skuli (Kisw.)	School
Soko (Kisw.)	Market
Tajiri (Kisw.)	Rich/wealthy person
Talaka (Kisw.)	Islamic divorce
Tasa (Kisw., Kid.)	Barren
Tumbo (Kisw., Kid.)	Belly/womb
Tumbo mwenga (Kid.)	One belly/womb
Tundza (Kid.)	Care for something or person
Uarabuni (Kisw.)	Arab world
Udzomba (Kid.)	Relations with mother's brother
Ugonjwa (Kisw.)	Disease
Uhala/Kuhala (Kid.)	Informal marriage
Ukoo (Kid., Kisw.)	Clan/lineage
Urembo (Kisw.)	Beauty
Ustaarabu (Kisw.)	Arab culture
Utumwa (Kid., Kisw.)	Slavery
Uungwana (Kisw.)	'Civilization'
Uzao (Kisw.)	Offspring
Wali (Kisw.)	Rice
Zamani (Kisw.)	In the past

Introduction

An economy of (dis)affections

Hekima pulls the door and closes it behind her. She then sits on a wooden stool low to the ground and fastens her shoe laces. I greet Hekima and ask if she is going to the mosque. Hekima looks at me and says, "go to the mosque? Then what will my household feed on? I am going to pay my children's school fees and then go to the fields to do some weeding." I remark, "You told me the *kadhi* (Muslim judge) was very helpful when you wanted a divorce (*talaka*)?" Hekima looks at me wistfully and responds:

> Everything has its place here at our place. When I had problems with my husband's people for cultivating on his land, I did not get help from the *kadhi*. My brother called me and I came back home and he gave me this house. I thank Almighty God he [*kadhi*] helped me with the *talaka*. But that does not mean I have to go to the mosque when I do not have time. Us women don't even go to the mosques a lot like men do. We have a lot of things to do. Like now, I promised the teacher at my children's school that I will pay school fees today because I have received *mradi* funds (funds from a government social assistance programme, the cash transfer scheme for orphans and vulnerable children), and if I do not go there (to the school), he will send my children home. Also, my sister and I cleared a piece of land at the fields in Magweni and we have planted some maize and cassava. When I am done with the teacher, we are going there to weed and check on the fields.

At the market centre, I meet Mwanapangani, a woman in her late thirties. She operates a food stall where she sells most of the local foods such as *chai rangi* (tea), *mahamri* (doughnuts), *wali* (rice), *maharagwe* (bean stew) and beef stew. Although she lives in a mud dwelling, she is building a stone house which she tells me she finances with funds she receives from the cash transfer scheme for orphans and vulnerable children (CT-OVC, Kisw. *mradi wa mayatima*, popularly known as *mradi* in Msambweni)[1] and with support from her daughter who works at *Uarabuni* (literally Arab

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[1] The CT-OVC scheme is popularly known as *mradi (*literally project*)* in Msambweni. In contemporary Kenya, the word mradi is used to refer to a program intervention by the government or non-governmental organizations. It has its origins during the era of the second president of Kenya, Daniel Moi, when it

world). We get to talking about women and their economic lives in this area and how they cope with the overwhelming marital fluidity and financial challenges. Mwanapangani explains jokingly that she has been in three different relationships and she recently got into a relationship with a man ('in-married') who she jokingly calls elderly (*mzee*) because of their big age difference. I glance with puzzlement at her and she quickly remarks that Islam and *chidigo* (Digo tradition/custom) allow a woman to remarry if she wants to: "if a woman experiences problems in her marriage, she cannot just stay in that marriage. You quit and get yourself a better life. Even when your husband dies because there are many diseases these days, you can observe the mourning period *kisharia* (Islam tradition) and marry again afterwards if you like." I chip in, "what about the children?" "Problems arise," she says, "because a woman cannot inherit her husband's land, that's not the tradition here, but in *chidigo*, children belong to women. Then you have all the children to look after." I ask, "then, what happens?" "I do not have a problem myself," she replies, "I married here. My husband came, I did not go to his place. Even this *mzee* found me staying here. He has no adequate means, he helps just a little. But I have my own titled land where I do my cultivation, I have my business, I have my house and I receive *mradi* funds to feed my children."

In one of the Children's Department's offices, I sit with a government official and a local representative of the CT-OVC and we chat about the logistics of the scheme. Looking at the list of beneficiaries that he has just handed to me, I comment on the nature of distribution of the beneficiaries, "I just see names of women, where are the men?" The local representative laughs and says, "it is not the case that there are no men, it is because in our community many things have become the business of women. When you visit the households, you will find women in everything. Women have taken the front line." "But not in weddings and gatherings," the government official jokes. "It is the women who usually make most of the arrangements and even attend in more numbers than men," the local representative responds. The government official adds, "men still sit in front and women at the back?" "In Islam, that's how things are thought to be. But when you look closely, women these days have more money and land. In fact here in our Digo community, women can inherit and many of them have stood for their houses. That is why you see many of those in that list are women," the local representative explains.

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became a popular tool to earmark government's projects in the country. In this dissertation, I use *mradi* to refer to Msambweni's CT-OVC scheme, as used by my informants.

Listening to these conversations at the beginning of my fieldwork in Msambweni, I was baffled by the way people talked about *mradi*, Islam and Digo traditions (*chidigo*). All three operate as crucial factors in the everyday lives of people in Msambweni. However, unlike Islam and *chidigo* which have a long history in Msambweni, *mradi* was a recent government market-oriented social assistance project intended to have social and economic impact on households, particularly the lives of women and the children they looked after. Prior to conducting this research, discourses about cash transfer schemes had circulated widely across the country and beyond, with their implementation, particularly in Kwale, applauded as very successful. Women, who were deliberately targeted by the scheme, were placed in the centre of the success story and loudly attributed with "improved lives" (FAO 2013). As Joseph Hanlon and his colleagues (2010) would have it, by just giving money to the poor women, "a quiet revolution" was showed to have happened in Kwale. Following this, Kwale's CT-OVC scheme, as one of the pilot programmes, became an exemplary model and basis for the expansion of cash transfer schemes across the country (FAO 2013). Most cited successes were investments in small business enterprises, acquisition of property and animals, and improved levels of food consumption. Cash transfers also exhibited high retention of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in the beneficiary households, increased rates of children's school attendance and performance, decreased child labour, and strengthened community networks (Asfaw et al 2012; FAO 2013; Oxford Management Policy 2013; Taylor 2013; World Bank 2012). In a context known for high poverty rates, marginalization and the failure of past state development projects, the success of such a woman centred and market oriented government funded social assistance project warranted such attention from development analysts[2].

Moreover, some parts of Kwale such as Msambweni, the home of the Digo peoples, are often distinguished from neighbouring closely related ethnic groups, the Mijikenda[3], through a history

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[2] For instance, the aggrieved failure of *harambee* ('pull together') self-help projects introduced soon after independence by the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta (Oendo 1988), and the recent backlash of the 60,000 land title deed issuance by the ruling government to address the squatter problem on the coast (Ringa 2013; Musyoka 2014).

[3] The Mijikenda (or *Makayachenda*) ethnic group comprises nine members, the Digo, Duruma, Giriama, Rabai, Ribe, Kauma, Kambe, Chonyi and Jibana. The nine groups are considered to have a shared history of migration (from Singwaya), and closely related languages and traditions, which denote "shared sense of identity and interests" (Willis and Gonna 2013:5). Before the invention of the term Mijikenda in the 1940s, the nine groups were referred by the Portuguese as the *Mozungulos* in the seventeenth century (Spear 1978; Willis 1993), and later in the

of matrilineal organization and a largely Islamic context which I discuss in detail in Chapter 1 (see also Gerlach 1960; Oendo 1987; Spear 1978). Due to this, colonial historical accounts, and scholarly and contemporary discourses consider Digo's social organization to be complex, unique and difficult to understand. Luther Gerlach described it as neither "matrilineal, patrilineal, double unilineal, or even bilateral" (Gerlach 1960: 40). Digo's matrilineal organization (among other factors) was conceived by colonial administrators as backward (see Gillette 1978), and is often associated with land and property inheritance complexities (Ng'weno 1997; 2001) and marital instabilities (Gomm 1972; Oendo 1987). Yet a significant transformation of the matrilineal organization, including suggestions of a possible shift to patrilineality due to underlying religious, economic and political transformations was noted over 50 years ago (see Gerlach 1960). In anthropology, similar observations in different matrilineal contexts have continued to sustain debates on the 'fragility' and demise of matrilineality in the context of 'modernity' and neoliberalism for several decades (Gough 1961; Douglas 1969; Nave 2016; Peters 1997a). Central to such survivalist debates also has been women's subjugation and authority in matrilineal contexts (see Peters 1997b). Although, as I show below and in Chapter I, such assertions have been challenged on several grounds such as treating matrilineal organization as a "totality" (Peters 1997a:137, 138), undermining the gender relations and history (Peters 1997a, 1997b; Poewe 1981) and failure to focus on matrilineality as lived (Johnson 2013).

Undoubtedly, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 1, Digo matrilineal organization has been shaped by state and Islamic ideologies and practices, as well as socio-economic factors. Today, matrilineal relations have been transformed and remain constrained particularly by patriarchal/patrilineal projects promoted by the state and Islam - for example, legal statutes for marriage, land and property inheritance have historically privileged men and promoted the patriarchal conjugal family. To make matters more complicated, after Kenya attained independence in 1963, the government turned to implementing woman-centred development projects which were market oriented and informed by a patriarchal perspective. These have not received as much popular attention as *mradi.* Nevertheless, the interaction between state and Islam projects, and *chidigo* ideologies and practices has informed complex kin relations and performances that operate in the

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nineteenth century others referred to them as *Wanyika,* meaning the people of the 'wilderness or bush', perhaps because of their settlement in the hinterland away from Mombasa (Brantley 1981; Spear 1978; 1981; Willis 1993).

everyday relations between men and women in Msambweni today. Interestingly, these provide ground for negotiation of relations of male and female kin, and matrilineal kin relations become located and relocated in women's lives through such negotiations. We can see from the conversations with Hekima and Mwanapangani, for instance, and as I show in the rest of this dissertation, that Islam, *chidigo* and *mradi* inform a certain form of navigation by women to access certain relationships (particularly matrilineal) and statuses. At the same time, while Islam stipulates that women should 'stay at the back', women harness status and 'stay in the front'. Meanwhile, this phenomenon continues to operate alongside socio-economic constraints associated with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, deaths and high divorce rates, and unemployment which not only challenge networks of kinship support and the position of men as heads and breadwinners of households, but also compel women to take up household responsibilities as heads and providers of their households.

Research questions

Taken together, my interest to understand matrilineality and gender relations in an Islamic context, the discourses of the Kwale cash transfers, and the above narratives collected at the initial stages of my fieldwork informed the central argument in this dissertation. My broader question rested on how a government's market oriented social assistance project that deliberately targeted women operated with so much popularity and notable success in a patriarchal Islamic context with a history of matrilineality, a success that put women significantly at its centre. Specifically, I was tasked to understanding how women's engagement with *mradi* shaped their lives in the context of transformed matrilineal practices and ideologies, patriarchal state and Islamic projects and ideologies, and with prevalence of socio-economic factors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and illiteracy. To respond to these questions I draw on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between September 2014 and October 2015, combined with brief field visits in September 2016 and April 2017 and archival research. Unlike previous studies on kinship and marriage among the Digo which focused on perspectives of men, in this dissertation, I privilege the perspectives and experiences of women to show *mradi* and woman headed households as platforms for negotiation, contestation and reinforcement of matrilineal ideologies and practices in Msambweni. I also explore broad historical forces such as Islam and colonialism that have contributed to the complexities of the matrilineal performances I describe. The broader objective is to examine the

relationship between gender and kinship and social and cultural change. Specifically, I explore how woman household heads in Msambweni maintain matrilineal relations in the face of socio-economic constraints and historical social, religious and state patriarchal pressures on matrilineal kinship organization. I argue that woman household heads capitalized on the emergent complexities associated with matrilineal kin relations (associated with the historical transformations) to constitute and provide for their households, to care for, invest and 'make' futures for children and their households, and as an opportunity to forge access to resources such as land and off-farm income activities, including *mradi* in order to survive. In this way, I argue that matrilineal ideologies remained alive through the success of woman household heads in remaining central in the household economy not merely as mothers or carers of children, but as providers of their households giving 'strength' to their particular matrilineages (*fuko*). Following anthropological studies on performative kinship, I suggest that in Msambweni, therefore, matrilineality became significant simply not in the form of rules and/or descent, but through the gendered economic performances of women. This in turn provided a considerable basis for women's authority and autonomy. In short, *mradi* activated an economy where women navigated and harnessed authority through those aspects of matrilineality that were constrained and complicated by patriarchal projects. This is what I term an economy of (dis)affections.

Existing literature

Households, gender relations and matrilineality

The available literature on the Kenya's Coastal region generally describes the origin and history of the Mijikenda peoples (Prins 1952; Spear 1978; 1981; 1982), the Swahili and Arabs (Prins 1961; Willis 1993), contestations of the oral traditions of Mijikenda origin (Morton 1972; 1977; Allen 1983, 1993; Walsh 1992; Helm 2000) and the invention of the Mijikenda ethnic identity (Willis 1993), gerontocratic leadership (Brantley 1978), slavery and squatters (Cooper 1980) and trade and socio-economic relations (Herlehy 1984; Udvardy et al. 2003). From a gendered perspective, some scholars have discussed issues such as women's participation in rebellions during the colonial period (Brantley 1981), land and agricultural labour (Hoorweg et al. 1995; Waaijenberg 1993), women's groups (McCormack et al. 1986; Udvardy 1998), health and fertility rituals (Amuyunzu 1988; Udvardy 1990, 1992), gender dynamics among the Swahili (Askew 1999), and

political status, authority and traditions (Bresnahan 2010; Orchadson-Mazrui 1998). Some recent studies have focused on the dynamics of conservation and cultural heritage (Willis 2009; Wynne-Jonnes and Walsh 2010) and eldership (McIntosh 2009a, 2009b), tensions with religious and ethnic identity (Gearhart and Giles 2013[4]; McIntosh 2009a; Willis and Gona 2013), Islam and politics (Kresse 2009; Mwakimako and Willis 2016; Ndzovu 2014) and Muslim women's participation in Kenya politics (Alidou 2013).

Although a great deal of this literature focuses generally on the Kenya coast and the larger Mijikenda ethnic group, there is considerable literature specifically on the southern coastal hinterland, especially on the Digo. This literature describes the history and social organization of the Digo (Gerlach 1960; McKay 1975), entrepreneurship and culture change (Gerlach 1963), marital instability (Gomm 1972, Oendo 1987; Mraja 2007), spirit possession and exorcism (Gomm 1975), the political and social status of "backwardness" (Gillette 1978), health and development (Oendo 1988), the growth of Islam (Sperling 1988; Hartnell 2009; Park Kyung 2012), women's participation in health and fertility rituals (Udvardy 1990) and self-help groups (McCormack et al. 1986; Oendo 1988), and land and property inheritance (Ng'weno 1997; 2001). Some recent studies have focused on food insecurity and community coping strategies (Makoti and Waswa 2015) and land and mining conflicts and corporate social responsibility (Abuya 2015).

This broad literature is significant for understanding the general context of my research. However, two strands of literature set the scene for the argument I present in this dissertation. The first literature focuses on households and gender relations. Roger Gomm (1972, 1975) and Ayuka Oendo (1987) have provided analyses of the relations between men and women within the context of Digo marriages. Central to their analysis is marital instability. Their studies provide contradictory views about women and the notion of household. Gomm, for instance, discusses the dynamics of women's marital and sexual relationships as a "problem of social control" (Gomm 1972:96). Because the ideal form of marriage is where men are expected to negotiate and permit women's marriages and divorce, if women move from one marital relationship to another to another due to what Gomm (1975:533) conceives as exposure to social change, then these women

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[4] *Contesting identities: the Mijikenda and their neighbours in Kenyan coastal society,* co-authored by Gearhart & Giles 2013 gives impressive collections of the social, political and ethnic struggles of the Mijikenda in the present Kenya context, especially in their relations with their immediate neighboring communities on the coast.

fail to adhere to the outlined social norms which fall within the rubric of male control. In the event of a desire to end a marital union, argues Gomm, a woman's decision is not dependent on her own decisions or aspirations, but on the sympathy and support of her brothers and mother's brothers. He writes, "A woman's own brothers and her mother's brothers are likely to view her complaint about her marriage with some sympathy so long as such problems do not arise too frequently and it is from her brother and her mother's brother that a woman can expect most male support for her view point and succor in times of trouble" (1972:107). Elsewhere, Gomm disputes women's autonomy and authority by arguing that "while women can and do inherit land and valuable tree-crops, they rarely inherit a controlling interest [because]..an estate [is] managed by a trustee…Trustees are males" (1975:532). Yet while Gomm observes women's ability to stage spirit possession and exorcism events where they persuade men to provide material resources to women , he goes on to argue that men do so in their position as controllers of marriage and of women as "harlots" with performances simply viewed as overstretched desires for material resources (Gomm 1972, 1975).

Similarly, Oendo (1987) shows marital unions as the domain of men who control women's involvement in such unions. Like Gomm, he acknowledges women's marital arrangements as dependent on the voice of the males. For instance, Oendo argues that a woman would be required to convince her kinsmen in order to win their support for a divorce (Oendo 1987:58). Additionally, failure to heed a father's choice of a marriage partner is conceived as lack of honour (*heshima*) to their fathers and kinsmen (ibid:49,50). But Oendo also observes that women would "kick out" men on the basis of household economic contributions (ibid:53) and that women would make decisions regarding their subsequent relationships including establishing their own households (ibid:52).

The contradictions in the representations of women provided by Gomm and Oendo are connected to a largely implicit ideology (largely Western) of the household/domestic life where men are supposed to be heads of households and controllers of domestic life including marriage transactions, and of households as bounded units defined by conjugal contract where women are viewed as a homogenous group characterized by shared subjugation and oppression. This stands in sharp contrast to the gender performances I describe in this dissertation. What I bring to the fore in this dissertation is the way women constitute and reconstitute themselves both as heads and

providers of households. And as kinswomen, all of which is embedded with both creation and maintaining of powerful social networks and relations in an overwhelmingly patriarchal context.

The focus on households and gender relations has long been a popular topic in anthropological enquiry (see for example Rosaldo 1974; Ortner 1974; Collier and Rosaldo 1981) and beyond the discipline as well (see Boserup 1970). My assessment of woman headed households and gender relations among the Digo in Msambweni is informed by feminist anthropological scholarship (inspired by Foucault) that privileges the analysis of history, agency and the power of people as human subjects, and the role of different spaces and different opportunities in producing and reproducing, fashioning and refashioning, and sanctioning certain subjective experiences and meanings. I focus on women's perspectives and experiences as negotiators of social meaning and as creative and reflective human subjects. Women imagine and think about their lives and those of others at different times and spaces. Indeed "people as human subjects reflect upon the dynamic matrix of relations in which they are embedded" (Moore 2016:19). In light of this, Henrietta Moore invites a focus on "power as an aspect of gender relations" because "gender relations are involved with power" (Moore 1992:134). Moore asserts that gender relations involve "processes of bargaining and negotiation, which go on between individuals and groups, [and] have the power to alter flow of resources and access to resources" (ibid:138). In this way gender relations structure and are structured through "household relations and interactions" and broader social and economic processes (ibid:137).

The second strand of literature relevant to the argument I present here is that focused on matrilineality. In the case of the Digo, the most relevant scholarly work is that of Luther Gerlach. In his thesis 'The social organization of the Digo of Kenya' (1960), Gerlach describes Digo's kinship organization as loosely structured, such that neither matrilineality nor patrilineality could be assumed to be central features of Digo kinship organization (Gerlach 1960:40). But he also observes a possible demise of matrilineality due to an increasing shift toward patrilineality arising from the effects of slave trade, Islam and colonial state policies, and emerging market economies. In this dissertation, I argue Gerlach's perspective was guided by his focus on the Digo's systems of descent and like other anthropologists at the time of his writing, the assumption underlining the "matrilineal puzzle" aided his analysis. This masked the aspects of matrilineality that are characteristic of the everyday social and economic relations and performances of the Digo. As

observed by Michael Peletz (1988) in his analysis of matrilineality in Negeri Sembilan, descent-focused analysis pays little attention to other factors related to matrilineality such as matrifocality and matrifiliation, and as I show in this dissertation, for example, it undermines practices such as caregiving and household provisioning, which are also central to the organization of Digo kinship practices and the everyday life. I argue that an understanding of Digo kinship requires a move beyond descent to a focus on kinship as performative (Sahlins 2011:5) and as lived (Johnson 2013).

Anthropologists have provided a wide range of critical analyses of descent and alliance focused perspectives ranging from, for example, Leach (1961), Schneider (1984) and Yanagisako and Collier (1987) to Peletz (1988, 1994) and Carsten (1995, 2000). Writers of matrilineality debates have centred on male authority and women's subjugation in matrilineal context (see for example Schneider 1961; Schneider and Gough 1961), and the demise of matrilineality, that is whether or not matrilineality would survive in the rapidly growing market and political economies and economic change (Gough 1961; Nave 2016:287; Peters 1997a).

To assume the 'death' of matrilineality is to assume its underlying significance in different contexts. As supporters of this assertion have shown, this has to do with male authority, we are told, because matrilineal practices such as uxorilocal residence arrangements and male exercise of authority and control cannot cope with the demands of capitalism and 'modernity' (see Phiri 1983). In light of this, the perception that women lack autonomy and authority in matrilineal contexts pre-occupied the analyses of the contributions provided in the volume *Matrilineal Kinship* edited by Schneider and Gough (1961). It is not surprising the volume was a special dedication to Audrey Richards who first outlined the perceived complexities and contradictions of matrilineality through her famous "matrilineal puzzle" concept (Richards 1950). Clearly, the pre-occupation with exercise of authority by males in kinship organization outlined both by Richards and the contributors of the *Matrilineal Kinship* (1961) and even earlier works such as of Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1949) arguments of marital exchanges and affinal alliance, was largely shaped by their view of kinship organization as a "totality" (Peters 1997a:137, 138). It is not surprising that even with Richards' earlier observation of the "independent behaviour of the Bemba women, their easy rights of divorce, the evident of power of the older women in the village life, and the unique position of the royal princesses', she went on to argue that such features were not a sign of "something like a real matriarchy" (Richards 1934: 268 cited in Peters 1997a:134). This view of

authority was overwhelmingly taken up in the volume by Schneider and Gough (1961), and even Schneider himself went on to reinforce that in matrilineal societies, only "group replacement runs through the line of women" (Schneider 1961:7) whereas authority is a male domain, such that men have "authority over women and children …[and hold] Positions of highest authority within the matrilineal group" (Schneider 1961:6).

Writing in opposition to the "matrilineal puzzle", scholars such as Holy (1986), Lancaster (1981), Peters (1997b) and Poewe (1981) have held that matrilineality provides "greater degrees of independence, autonomy, formal authority in local politics and ritual, control of income, decisions concerning child-bearing, family relations and so forth enjoyed by women" (Peters 1997a:134). Against this backdrop, scholars have also shown how a focus on gender and history may help reveal the realities of matrilineal practices and ideologies and how historical processes shape gender and matrilineal relations and ideologies (see for example Apter (2012) and Peters (1997a, 1997b); see also Phiri (1983)). More recently, Jessica Johnson (2013) has explored gender relations and matrilineal practices and ideologies in the context of justice (*chilungamo*) in Malawi. Although cautious of a historical perspective, Johnson's shows the relationship between the resilience of matrilineal practices and gender relations.

This dissertation takes up the arguments of matrilineality and gender relations provided by scholars who support the resilience of matrilineality and its interrelationship with gender relations to provide an ethnographic account of matrilineality and gender relations as lived and performed in contemporary Kenya South coast. The most relevant scholarship to the argument I present in this dissertation is Marshall Sahlins recent seminal text *What kinship is – and is not* (2013, see also 2011). In this work, Sahlins provides a thoroughgoing perspective of what he terms "performative kinship" (Sahlins 2011:5). The notion of performativity, explored also by Judith Butler (1993), invites a focus on enactments in everyday life. Sahlins argues that a focus on "'realities' of practice" such as "commensality, sharing food, reincarnation, co-residence, shared memories, working together, adoption, friendship, shared suffering, and so on" as well as the "'essentialisms' of structure" such as procreation allows one to view kinship as "participation in one another's life" (Sahlins 2011:5, 14). He holds that kinship is about "mutual relations of being", thus as performance, kinship is "subject to negotiation" and kin relationships can be both made and remade, maintained and broken (Sahlins 2011:5, 9; see also Nuttal 2000:4).

Sahlin's perspective provides a point of departure for my analysis of gendered performances of matrilineality in Msambweni. I explore how the performative nature of matrilineality is cushioned and pursued through the intersection of *mradi* and women's economic performances in relation to the constitution of households, household provisioning, caregiving and experiences of ill health. I also draw further inspiration from Jessica Johnson (2013), Michael Peletz (1988, 1996), and Pauline Peters (1997a, 1997b) to consider the role of specific historical conditions in understanding gender relations and matrilineality. Johnson, Peletz and Peters demonstrate that historical processes are key to understanding continuity and change in kin relations as well as exploring the dynamics of women's authority and status in matrilineal contexts. This assertion is clearly discussed in Chapter 1, where we will see how Digo matrilineal relations and ideologies have historically transformed as gender relations get defined and redefined by social, state and Islamic patriarchal projects in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Throughout the dissertation we will also see how the significance of matrilineality is reckoned with economic performances of women and how this gives flavor to women's autonomy and authority. In this dissertation, an analysis of women's household economic performances and the scope for female autonomy and authority underpin the arguments I make with regard to *mradi* (CT-OVC).

Cash Transfer Scheme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC, *Mradi*)

The CT-OVC scheme is one of the social assistance programs (*inua jamii,* 'uplift the household/community')[5] deployed by the Kenya government to promote fostering and retention of children[6] within households due to the effects of HIV/AIDS such as rising numbers of orphans and vulnerable children, and an accompanying notion of the breakdown of kin-based support systems. The program involves giving a regular non-contributory sum of approximately £29.56 (Kshs. 4000)[7] on a bi-monthly basis to the selected households, regardless of household size (FAO 2013). These households are selected on the basis of poverty and the presence of orphans and vulnerable children[8], that is, children in the care of a chronically ill or elderly parent(s) or caregiver (Kenya CT-OVC Evaluation Team 2012). Although woman household headship is not one of the

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[5] Other social assistance programs target the elderly, disabled people and those in hunger stricken areas in the country.
[6] The program considers children to be anyone below 18 years old.
[7] Exchange rate as at 23 May 2018 (1 GBP equivalent to 135.30 KES).
[8] Henceforth OVC.

criteria used for eligibility, the program deliberately favours households headed by women. Some of the reasons cited for this endeavour include assertions that women-headed households demonstrate better 'progress' than households headed by men. This is based on claims that unlike their male counterparts who are likely to 'waste' the money on 'unworthy' projects such as alcohol (Ferguson 2015), women, for instance, invest in productive projects such as off-farm enterprises and acquisition of property and animals, and improve levels of household food consumption (Asfaw et al. 2014; FAO 2013).

While the program is considered unconditional, recipients are expected to ensure children's school attendance and child health. In light of this, households headed by women have also been presented as achieving increased rates of children's school attendance and performance, high retention of orphans and vulnerable children, decreased child labour, and strengthened community networks (Asfaw et al 2014; FAO 2013; Oxford Policy Management 2013; Taylor et al. 2013; World Bank 2012). In sum, women-headed households benefiting from the program are charged with higher material and immaterial contributions to the households and local economies.

Since its inception in 2004 as a pilot program (formally approved and implemented in 2007), the local community has been involved in the actual selection of eligible households. For example, members of the community (known as location OVC Committee, LOC) identified eligible households who were usually agreed upon (or disagreed) at community gatherings (*baraza)* (Government of Kenya (GOK) 2006). However, the government has gradually adopted an enrolment technique whereby after household surveys have been carried out, and the data processed through a management information system at the national office in Nairobi, the reports on selected households are sent to the respective county and sub-county Children's Department offices, that in turn inform individual households of their enrolment through the location OVC committee representatives (LOCs).

Biometric data is then collected from the parents or guardians of the children. Usually two adults living with the dependent OVCs in the same household are recorded as next of kin in CT-OVC database, and are issued with payment cards. Payments are made bi-monthly through specific banks in the local town centres. The banks and the concerned government officials usually arrange the payment dates, and the information is passed to the informants through the LOCs. A one-off

bi-monthly payment is usually made to each recipient on production of a payment card and biometric information is obtained. It is expected that all recipients collect their funds within the specified dates. On very rare occasions do *mradi* recipients fail to collect their payments during those dates because, as I gathered from my informants, everyone looks forward to the payment dates.

As of 2014, the CT-OVC program reached approximately 240,000 households over the 47 counties in the country (Handa et al. 2015; Mwasiaji 2015). According to information obtained from the Children's Department in Msambweni, Msambweni's CT-OVC, popularly known as *mradi,* reached 2224 households in June 2015, of which over 65 percent of the caregivers are women. Impact evaluations of the CT-OVC scheme estimate that the program contributes to 14 per cent of the beneficiary household monthly expenditures (Asfaw et al. 2014; FAO 2013), and suggest a change in household consumption behaviour, with high expenditures on food, clothing and medical care, especially in women-headed households (Asfaw et al. 2014). From my analysis, the 'magnitude' of *mradi* contribution to household's expenditures was not evenly distributed in the households because the households were unique in the way they raised their income, and expenditures varied from one household to another. However, for many households, sometimes, *mradi* formed a contribution of over 20 per cent of my informants' household income (see for example Figure 1 below).
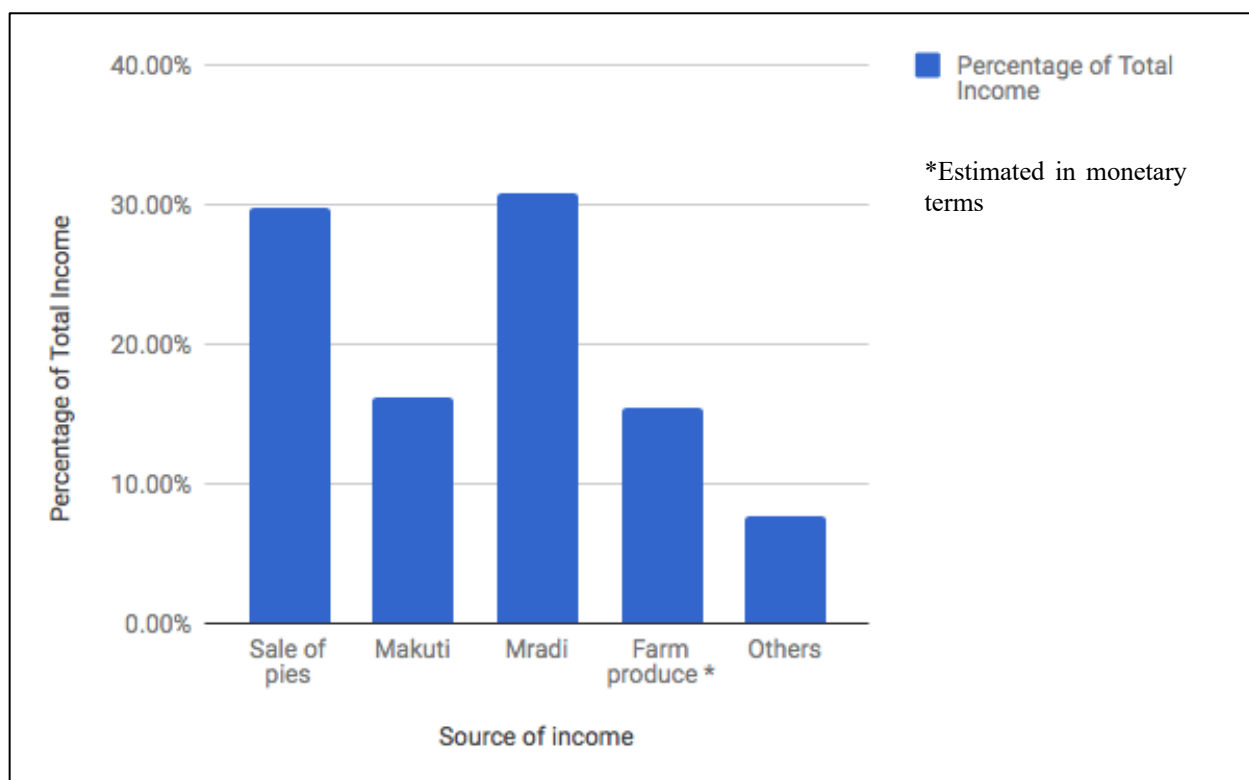
Figure 1.1 Mwanakombo's Household Income in February 2015

A recent development for cash transfer recipients is free healthcare access in specified public and private hospitals in the country. Whereas citizens are generally required to make some contribution to the National Healthcare Insurance Fund (NHIF), particular citizens including those benefiting through the CT-OVC such as the women who are the focus of this dissertation are not obliged to make such contributions because the government pays their premiums.

Due to socio-economic crisis and diseases, especially the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, a demand for cash and kin support is very alive in many households. Considering the challenged sources of farm and off-farm income available to many people in Msambweni and with so many living expenses resulting from the everyday necessities of the households such as salt, sugar and kerosene, and other household necessities such as medical care, education, weddings, funerals, and building houses, "cash is so elusive for most [people in Msambweni] that expenses of a reasonable life are terribly hard to cover with the pittance most households actually bring in" (McIntosh 2009a:99). Consequently, *mradi* funds were a significant contribution to many households (particularly woman headed households), especially because it is a regular source of income.

There are two sets of literature on cash transfer schemes. First is development focused literature mainly assessing the impact of cash transfers in different parts of the world, including Kenya. This literature proposes CTs as a suitable mechanism for addressing poverty among the poorest populations (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2011; Garcia and Moore 2012; Hanlon et al. 2010; Monchuk 2014; UNICEF 2012; World Bank 2011; 2012; For Kenya see Bryant 2010; Ikiara 2009; Kenya CT-OVC Evaluation Team 2012) especially in female-headed households where the greatest improvement has been reported (Garcia and Moore 2012; Monchuk 2014; Asfaw et al 2012; World Bank 2012; FAO 2013; Oxford Management Policy 2013; Taylor et al. 2013).

The second set of literature challenges the positive development focus which is assessed only against development objectives on the grounds of trust and social capital (Attanasio et al. 2005; 2009; MacAuslan and Riemenschneider 2011), stigma and discrimination (MacAuslan & Riemenschneider 2011), exclusion of deserving poor through targeting mechanisms (Cookson 2016; Farrington and Slater 2006), reproducing social inequalities and divisiveness (Ellis 2012), contradicting understandings of citizenship (Tessitore 2011) and encouraging women's "social adjustment" (Bradshaw 2008).

Few anthropologists have provided ethnographic and analytical reflections on cash transfer schemes. For instance, James Ferguson reflects on the Basic Income Grant (BIG) for South Africa. Ferguson holds that BIG falls within the new neoliberal thinking about poverty (especially in the urban areas) (2007; 2009). However, he challenges the campaigns for BIG on the grounds that as a new "mechanism of government", it is actually not clear how BIG as a development project will address well-being and improve the lives of the people it seeks to prepare for the market (Ferguson 2009). In his brilliant account *Give a man a fish* (2015) Ferguson also invites interrogation of the forms of claim-making relationships that cash transfer schemes such as BIG may engender or set in motion (see also Ferguson 2013). However, while his work provides a crucial analytical reflection, he does not provide a specific ethnographic account of cash transfer that can actually describe the everyday lives of the peoples they target, especially those living in poor households.

From a rather gendered perspective, Julienne Corboz (2013) explores the impact of conditional cash transfer schemes (CCTs) among poor single mothers in Uruguay. Corboz argues that CCTs in Urugay have produced and reproduced many challenges among single mothers. She observes

that the 'good' of having received the money (by becoming a beneficiary) does not translate to women's authority or autonomy or their household's well-being. For instance, these women now suffer from new forms of problems such as lack of participation in self-help groups as required by the schemes due to insecurity, children (especially boys) cannot go to school because they have to offer protection for the new furniture and assets in the houses, and that further dependence on men often arises due to broken kinship networks and reproduction of traditional gender roles as women have to adhere with conditions of the CCTs (Corboz 2013). Corboz's work, although a Uruguay case study, provides perspectives of women to show the realities of everyday engagement with cash transfer schemes. However, her over-emphasis on the negative aspects of cash transfers glosses over significant roles that cash transfers play in making and remaking relationships within and beyond households, or provide a basis for the creation and maintaining of women's authority.

Writing about cash transfer schemes in Western Kenya, Erick Nyambedha (2011) views cash transfers as a new form of social 'welfare' mechanism that complements traditional mechanisms of support and care for widows and orphans such as the *duol* (communal eating arrangements). In this context, Nyambedha holds that cash transfers have shaped people's perceptions and practices of care and support, especially with the increasing effects of HIV/AIDS and of the socio-economic crisis. Thomas Neumark's dissertation (2014) explores how cash transfers inform cultivation of relations in an informal urban settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. Neumark shows that cash transfers, as new resources available to the beneficiaries, became embedded in "processes of managing and making claims on others", processes that involved generating, maintaining as well as breaking "particular relationships and particularities of certain relationships", what he sums up as "caring for relations" (Neumark 2014:v). Nyambedha's discussion and Neumark's exploration speak to some related themes that emerged in my fieldwork. Neumark's work, especially, invites a reflection not only on the importance of relationships, but also on how certain factors shape the way such relationships are carefully and creatively made, remade, maintained or broken. As we shall see, in Msambweni, cash transfers are crucial spaces for negotiation and enactment of matrilineal kinship. As we shall see, the interaction between matrilineal relations and the particular cash transfer (*mradi*) explored in this dissertation emerges as a platform for women to forge and negotiate kin networks as well as women's negotiation and reinforcement of their status, autonomy and authority in an overwhelmingly patriarchal context.

Fieldsite

Msambweni is one of the four administrative constituencies of Kwale County. Although the name is used for a constituency, a sub-county, a division and a town, in this dissertation, Msambweni refers to the broader administrative constituency, especially covering villages around Ukunda and Msambweni towns where I carried out my fieldwork (see Map 1). Covering an area of 3,267 square kilometres, Msambweni constituency lies south of Mombasa from the Mwachema River which borders Tiwi and Diani Beach to the north, the eastern side of the Shimba Hills on the coastal plain, and goes down at Vanga which is on the border of Kenya and Tanzania to the south[9]. Msambweni constituency has a population of about 288393 people and 59484 households, comprised mainly of the Digo (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) 2013)[10]. The major towns are Ukunda (peri-urban and rapidly urbanizing) and Msambweni (gradually urbanizing).
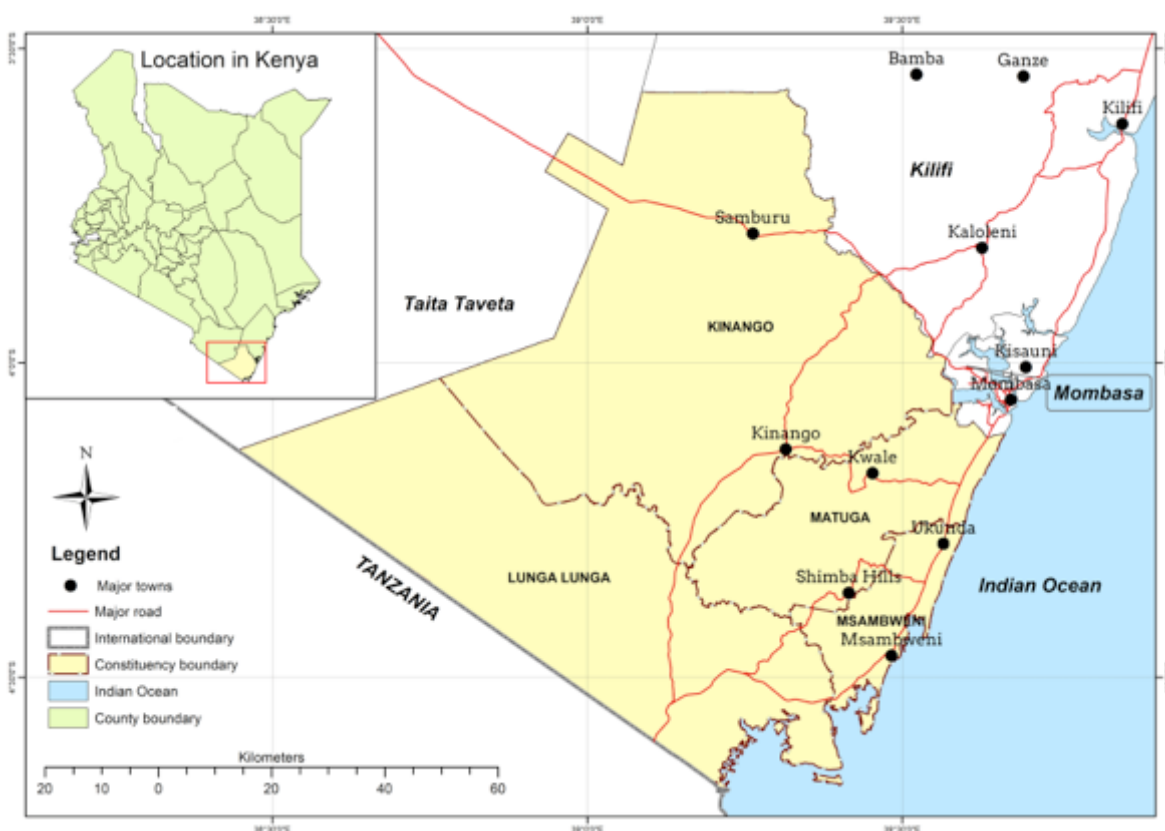
Map 1: Location of Msambweni in Kwale County

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[9] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Msambweni [accessed 8 May 2018]
[10] Available at https://www.knbs.or.ke/constituency-population-by-sex-number-of-households-area-and-density/ [accessed 11 May 2018]

The region is characterised by a scenery of beaches, reefs, fossilized corals, and low clifftops, which form a significant part of the tourism industry in the Kenya South Coast. Other tourist attractions around the region include Shimba Hills National Reserve, a marine reserve and Chale Island. The economic situation in the Kenya South Coast is usually considered to have begun declining since the late nineteenth century when the Digo lost their position as middlemen in trade between the hinterland and the coastal region (Kibet and Nyamweru 2008; see also chapter 1), and was further affected by a perceived marginalization arising from management of labour and land distribution and redistribution during the colonial and post-colonial periods (Cooper 1980; Kanyinga 2000). In the decades following independence, however, several plots along the shoreline were bought by Europeans (most of them Italians and Anglos), who built luxury resorts and private residences. Although this created jobs and commerce both for those who resided in the towns such as Ukunda and for those on the outskirts and the further hinterland, the region's economy once again faced significant challenges in the 1990s (McIntosh 2009a:30). For example, the tourism industry suffered the effects of the politically instigated Kaya Bombo tribal clashes in 1997 where attackers (most of them Digo), targeted nonindigenous residents, of the embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in August 1998 which were associated with coastal Muslim communities, and of the 2007 post-election violence (ibid). Scourges such HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of high rates of poverty, illiteracy and recent terrorist activities have also been a big blow to the economy of Kenya South Coast.

Fishing is another source of livelihood - largely a male activity. However, fishing practices have been significantly affected over the years due to low prices of fish, "over-exploitation and subsequent depletion of fish stocks" (Ochiewo 2004:390). Additionally, farming is done on a small scale mostly by women: due to historical land distribution challenges, squatting problems are still live issues, and many people do not have large plots of land (Oendo 1988). Borrowing land for purposes of cultivation or to build a house is very common. I encountered several instances of women and men who borrowed land from a relative or a friend. There are also pieces of land which were conceived as community land: "belonging to no one and just lie there for use by anyone in the community." I encountered stories of women who said they cleared this land and planted their crops. As I highlight in chapter 1, people in this community have a history of conceiving land as belonging to God not individuals (see also Spear 1978). Maize, cassava and cowpeas were

mainly planted for household consumption and some women kept small gardens for vegetables. In many instances, women sold some of their agricultural produce. However, most households bought their products at the market. Other sources of livelihood that the Digo depend on are coconut palm (for coconuts, palm wine, and palm leaves for artefacts such as mats and as thatching material), small-scale business ventures such as *boda boda* (motorcycle) taxis, selling of *leso* (women's cloth) and grocery shops. Women engage in most of these livelihood activities (with the exception of *boda boda* business), although at varying degrees, some more engaged than others. Although formal employment is not common among people in the villages, women are employed as teachers in the local schools, nurses in the local government hospitals and in other local government institutions. I also observed that women and men worked as casual labourers in the sugar factor, Kwale International Sugar Company Limited in Kwale. Few people in the villages worked in the mining company, Base Titanium in Kwale.

Although the Digo have much in common with the other Mijikenda peoples, they are often distinguished by their history of matrilineal organization and by the fact that they are largely Muslims. Although much has changed, people still talk about matrilineal descent (*fuko*, pl. *mafuko*) in the broader context of a body of cultural codes glossed *chidigo* (Digo custom/ tradition). Sometimes, *chidigo* is also used to refer to Digo customary law, especially in discourses on marriage, land and property inheritance. Historically, *fuko* is the basis for cultivating the sense of belonging to the society, for example, children are conceived as belonging to their mother's side (*kuchetuni*). Additionally, *fuko* was the basis for settlement and the provision of social order and control of land after migration from Singwaya, access to land and resources (for both men and women). Provision of care and mutual help to all members, especially during times of bereavement and illnesses, was done through *fuko* relations (Spear 1978:7; Ng'weno 1997; Oendo 1988:33,34). Participation in what was viewed through the lens of male and female domains such as trade, the council of elders (*ngambi*), agriculture (*chirimo*) and fertility rituals (*chifudu*) was informed by matrilineality (See Chapter 1; see also Udvardy 1992; Spear 1978).

Fieldwork

I carried out my fieldwork for fifteen months in September 2014 – September 2015, September 2016 and April 2017. I gathered information through a combination of participant observation,

interviews and extended conversations, archival research, women's diaries and life histories. During the first month, September 2014, I divided my time between the OVC Secretariat in Nairobi where I had extended conversations with government officials, and the Kenya National Archives where I carried out archival research pertaining to Digo local history, kinship and property relations. Contact with the OVC Secretariat was facilitated by government officials working in the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services (now Ministry of East African Community (EAC), Labour and Social Protection) and the Department of Children's Services, Nairobi. Initial contact with these officials was established with the help of Erick Nyambedha from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Maseno University. The OVC Secretariat officials facilitated establishing contacts with government officials in Kwale who worked on the CT-OVC scheme (popularly known as *mradi* in Msambweni). The CT-OVC scheme works under the Departments of Children's Services at the county and sub-county levels in the country. In Nairobi, I also carried out an interview with an official of the Africa Platform for Social Protection (APSP).

After introduction to various areas within Kwale where CT-OVC operated, I settled for Msambweni and Ukunda because they are largely dominated by the Digo whose history of matrilineality is central to my research, and also because of their urbanizing features and, as I show below, accessibility between the two locations.

In October 2014, I moved to Msambweni where I carried out the next phase of my fieldwork. I began with conversations with the government officials working with the Departments of Children's Services in Kwale and Msambweni (see Image 1 for Msambweni's offices). The government officials helped me familiarize myself with the logistics of the scheme and I was able to access CT-OVC registers and a sample of the cash transfer household survey forms. The registers were crucial for understanding the nature of distribution of the CT-OVC beneficiaries over Msambweni and the household survey forms provided information on the sort of data collected about the households. From these, I randomly sampled 47 households (25 households around Msambweni town and 22 households around Ukunda town). During the first month, I conducted a household survey of selected households with a combination of conversations with both men and women in the villages. Considering the sensitivity of issues surrounding the CT-OVC scheme such as money and that some beneficiaries were victims of HIV/AIDS, the government officials in Kwale and Msambweni suggested the need to work with people who were

familiar with the program and who were known in the villages. Following this, two location OVC committee representatives (a male and female), and one woman who had previously worked on Kwale CT-OVC scheme as a volunteer were availed to me by the government officials in the Children's Department in Msambweni and Kwale respectively. During my initial contact with the villages, they introduced me to the villages and the local administration (chiefs, sub-chiefs and village elders), and helped me to identify the households that I had randomly selected for the initial visits. Their initial introductions to household intimate activities such as weddings proved to be very useful for my future participation in similar events and activities, otherwise it would have been difficult for a stranger to be welcomed so earnestly and freely to such intimate events as the concerns of safety discussed below suggest.

Image 1: The old (left) and new (right) offices of the Department of Children Services in Msambweni

As people grew accustomed to my presence, and became intrigued by my research into their local history, kinship and economic relations, they began to open up and many informants were

forthcoming. I began visiting the households and villages without the LOCs and the volunteer, although I would contact them for assistance when necessary. In the next eleven months, I collected women's life histories and most of the women also agreed to keep diaries (with varying periods of one to four months) in which they recorded their everyday expenditures and income, and other activities that they engaged in. At the same time, I engaged in participant observation in households and other arenas such as the Children's Department in Msambweni, wedding events, funerals, market centres, women's grocery shops, women groups (*chama*), and community gatherings (*baraza*). In these spaces, I observed interactions and listened to the everyday conversations of people. In order to preserve anonymity and ensure confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for my informants and for some places. I have used Msambweni generally to refer to both the villages and the towns. As I have shown above, Msambweni is used administratively to refer to an electoral constituency, a sub-county, a division and a town.

In September 2016 and April 2017, I made follow-up visits in Msambweni. During these months, I gathered further information on CT-OVC and land and property inheritance through interviews with my informants and had conversations with some politicians and government officials in the region.

Every fieldwork experience brings its own dilemmas, complications and strategies (McIntosh 2009a:38; Peletz 1996:16). The two significant challenges I faced were both finding a suitable place to live and getting immersed into the everyday intimate lives of people in the villages. Although I had assumed it would be relatively easy to find a household to live with, it proved to be very complicated. Initially, I explained my intention to live with a household to one of the government officials who advised me to observe my dress (to dress in long dress and if possible cover my head with a scarf like a 'Muslim woman') but told me that people in the village would be reluctant to host me to stay in their homes. A village elder to whom I told this echoed the official's sentiments. He was of the view that although people in the villages welcomed visitors/guests in their homes, it would be difficult for them to accept my stay in their houses. There were various reasons for this. First, the fact that my research involved investigation of the CT-OVC scheme, which was a state-funded project, and that some of the beneficiaries were affected by HIV/AIDS either by being infected themselves or caring for the victims of the disease, this would make people look at me askance. Additionally, there have been historical tensions

between the communities in the coastal part of Kenya and the state and nonindigenous residents including citizens from upcountry (*bara*). Particularly, Kenya coastal communities have persistently charged the government with the region's prevalence of poverty and marginalization which is underlined by different phenomena such as secessionist movement and discourses, and the politically instigated clashes of 1997 where nonindigenous residents in the Kenya South Coast were deliberately targeted. Moreover, due to the recent post-election violence in the country and increased terrorist activities in the coastal part of Kenya, both people and the government were on high alert. Actually, some friends and relatives of some informants whom I had just began working with were shot or arrested respectively on allegations of terrorist related affiliations and activities. Because of this, some people worried whether I was a government agent on an anti-terrorist mission. I remember being told on several occasions that people from elsewhere had been coming to the villages and called themselves researchers yet they "collected words" in the village and took them "up there" (probably meaning to government security officials). Similar experiences have been described by others researching in the coastal part of Kenya since the late 1990s. For example, Janet McIntosh has discussed how her fieldwork in Malindi in the later 1990s and early 2000s was shaped by safety concerns, both for herself and for her informants, and the "fraught relationship" between the Giriama and the Swahili who live in Malindi (McIntosh 2009a).

Furthermore, historical land injustices and disputes have persisted in the Kenya South Coast. Perhaps a good example is the conflict between the locals and the mining company, Base Titanium and the sugar factory, Kwale International Sugar Company Limited in Kwale. Many of these conflicts revolve around land ownership and 'unfair' compensation (Abuya 2015). These have historically shaped relations between the Digo peoples and others who are classified as nonindigenous residents. From the beginning of my fieldwork, I explicitly explained and positioned myself as a doctoral student and a researcher. During the initial stages, however, the everyday explanations and reminders to my friends and informants in the village about my ethnographic position as a doctoral student on a research assignment was always viewed against the fact that I am a Kenyan citizen from upcountry (*bara*), with a Christian background, and studying abroad.

Considering this and with concerns about safety issues, I rented a room in Ukunda town, where despite being the home of the Digo, the town is cosmopolitan compared to Msambweni town due

to the large number of tourists and also to being the principal commercial hub in the Kenya South Coast. It hosts people from diverse backgrounds and from different parts of the country and beyond. I also knew of some other researchers who lived or had lived in Ukunda. Due to the reports of previous episodes of terrorist attacks on public transport, I used a personal car to drive between Msambweni and Ukunda (22.4 kilometres apart, see Map 2). The use of a car also became very helpful when I was heavily pregnant and after delivery because I still continued with my fieldwork. I would park my car at certain places such as outside a household, a restaurant or a school where I had established good contacts. I would then walk in the villages to visit households where I had got well acquainted with the women. We would converse in the verandas or under trees in the women's compounds, do our hairs or decorate our bodies in preparation for an upcoming wedding, and engage in other activities such as weaving *makuti* artefacts or thatching materials, and household chores. Other times I helped in the women's grocery shops and at weddings.
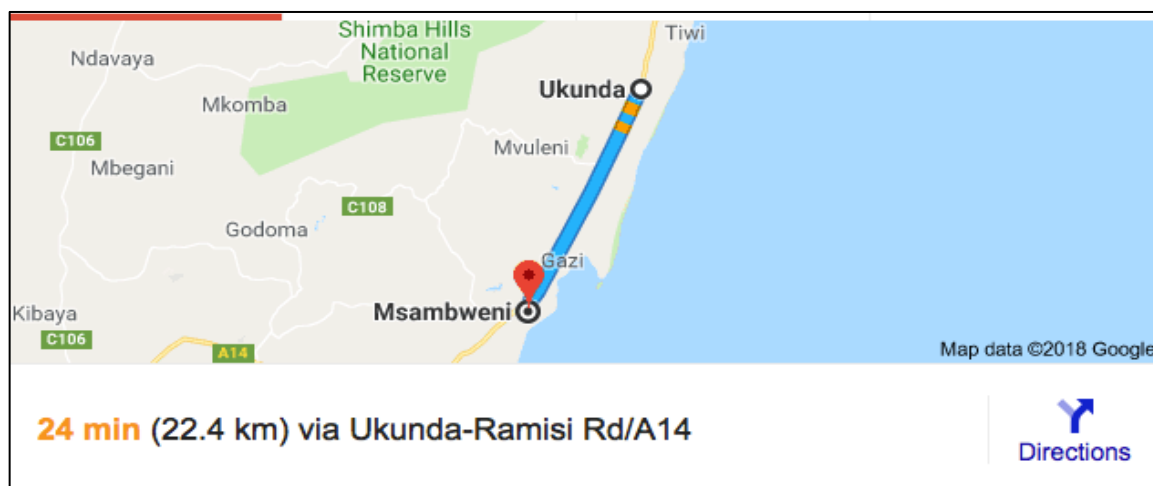
Map 2: Distance between Ukunda and Msambweni
(https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Ukunda,+Kenya/Msambweni,+Kenya/)

Another challenge emerged from being pregnant and becoming a mother during the course of my fieldwork. Due to the bodily and health changes associated with such circumstances, sometimes I would become unwell during household visits and it would be difficult to cope with some situations. To my surprise, both my pregnancy and motherhood shaped my fieldwork in very unexpected positive ways. First, the circumstances became a centre of interest for most of my woman informants, who suddenly became both 'mothers' and advisers concerning my situation

during the rest of my fieldwork period. This interest opened up many conversations and intimate relations with women who became very willing to have me investigate their intimate lives as they also became part of my journey to becoming a mother. The circumstance also won me the women's trust to stay until late in their households, especially those women I came to know well, and whom I accompanied to collect their *mradi* funds. It also helped me to reach out for interviews and extensive conversations with women's relatives and friends such as the elderly men supposed to have 'wisdom' about kinship and the local history.

Second, at one point, I engaged a Digo assistant who in addition to helping me with transcription and translation (see below), helped by driving the car when necessary. From the point of view of many people in the village, I was seen as different, in that I offered a job to one of their own. This was further informed by my dressing as a 'Muslim' woman which was conceived both as a show of respect and belonging, however temporary this was understood to be. One of the men working as a representative of the CT-OVC local committee gave me the name Mwanamvua (a replica of my native name, Syombua), a name he proudly introduced me by to people, but which also denoted how people were coming to accept my presence in the community.

Although Digo and Swahili are separate but closely related languages, and that many of my informants spoke Swahili during our conversations, there were instances when Digo was often used. In such instances, I was helped by a Digo assistant who translated conversations simultaneously and also went over recorded interviews in detail with me.

Overview of chapters

Chapter 1 lays out an historical overview of matrilineality and gender relations in Kenya South Coast from the pre-colonial period through to the post-colonial era. I argue in opposition to anthropological studies that contend matrilineality as weak or likely to 'die' in the face of a growing market economy and complexities of economic change, and instead agree with scholars who insist on a focus on gender relations and matrilineality in their historical context. The historical processes are explored to shed light on how the interaction of Digo traditions/custom, Islam and colonial and post-colonial projects activated contradictions and complexities in gender relations and performances of kinship. I argue that the complexities and contradictions of historical

processes provided a fertile ground for negotiation and reinforcement of matrilineal practices, and matrilineal kin relations became located and relocated in women's lives through such negotiations. I invite a focus on how different aspects of matrilineality change in different times and in different ways.

Chapter 2 discusses the way women constitute, reconstitute and manage their households, what I term 'householding'. Here, I show how female focality becomes a central characteristic of woman headed households in Msambweni. I argue against the view of woman centred households as simply matrifocal, that is, centred on women in their roles as mothers, and oppose analysis of households based on conjugality and the Western nuclear family. Drawing on feminist scholarship that invites a focus beyond a universalized view of households and relationships, I suggest a focus on women in the networks of the different relationships in which they live and are located.

In Chapter 3, I examine household provisioning, looking at the ways matrilineal ideologies and practices interact with socio-economic factors and state and Islamic projects to reinforce women's position as household providers and place them as the pillars of their household economy. I show the relationships and ideologies that women navigate in order to access and maintain resources and relationships and remain central to the household economy. In this chapter, I argue against approaches that seem to castigate affective relations and notions of reciprocity in Africa. In support of scholars in Africa that challenge the Eurocentric view of affective relations and reciprocity in Africa, I also move beyond the notion of love to a focus on blessings.

Chapter 4 extends the focus on women's navigation of competing and complex ideologies of matrilineality through a discussion of caregiving. I show how the interaction of different ideologies of care favours women where children are concerned. I argue that matrikin ideologies of care privilege the position of women in caregiving matters. By showing how caregiving becomes reinforced as a women's responsibility and as a platform for cultivation of women's status, I caution the view of over emphasizing caregiving as a 'burden' or 'disempowering'.

The focus on responsibility and obligations is also taken up in Chapter 5 where I explore the moral economy of claim-making from the perspective of women's narratives of ill-health. Here, I show how women's discourses of bodily ills captured in the language of energy and pain, and the

underlying notion of women's hearts reveal how women negotiated and enacted matrilineal relations of obligations and responsibility. I posit that claim-making relationships are not always about relations of inequality and invite a focus on how the body may be a potential site for imagining, forging and sustaining relationships with others beyond material or economic focus.

In the final chapter, I show how a focus on kinship as lived, experienced and performed by women in Msambweni helps unpack the underlying views about the demise of matrilineality and its 'disempowering' nature on the part of women. It attests to a focus on gender and history, and the diverse ways and aspects of matrilineality which are part of the everyday lives of people in their specific contexts.

Chapter 1

Builders of Resourceful Ties:
Gender, Matrilineality and History in Kenya South Coast

Introduction

It is a warm Sunday afternoon in November 2014 and I visit Meriamu to find her furious because payments she receives from *mradi* had been delayed and she was unable to hire casual labour for her farm (*munda*). The elderly woman, who lives in a newly renovated mud walled two-bedroom house, depended on *mradi* funds to finance her household activities including hiring labour for her farm and making contributions to a women's solidarity group (*chama*) where she was a member. I suggest she could make arrangements with the labourers to work on the farm and pay them when she received the funds, or perhaps ask her *chama* to lend her some funds which she would return when *mradi* funds arrived. Meriamu was reluctant to adopt my suggestion. After some time of deliberation, she looks vexed, pulls out a wooden stool that was next to her, seats me and says, "I don't want to multiply problems and shame myself. My people are already talking about me, saying that I am getting money from the government (*serikali*)." Apparently, Meriamu had 'borrowed' her piece of land from her mother's brother (*mdzomba*) where she cultivated and lived with her children and those of her deceased daughter. Since she started receiving funds from mradi, Meriamu told me that she had promised herself to do everything possible to make her life and that of her 'children' great[11]. "Putting all [her] mind in the *munda*" is one of the things Meriamu considered very important to making a great life for her household, hence the reason she hired labourers for her farm. Furthermore, according to Meriamu, ensuring sufficient food, clothing, shelter and education for her children is all that makes her stand out in her clan. She says, "I feel like a woman, a mother. I can avoid becoming a person who goes back and forth to borrow from my mother's brothers (*adzomba*, sing. *mdzomba*) every now and then. *Mdzomba* gave me land (*shamba*), it is my responsibility to make it produce enough for my children."

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[11] The word *ana* (children, sing. *mwana*) is loosely used by women to refer, rather inclusively, to both their biological children and those they look after (*rera*), in most cases, children of their divorced or deceased daughters (see chapters 2 and 3).

This incident reminded me of a previous conversation with Hatuma, who complained of disputes with her father's younger brother (*baba mdide*) over land (*shamba*) she inherited from her father, after which she used *mradi* funds to pay a government land surveyor who helped her to obtain a title for the piece of land. Hatuma told me she did this to 'save' herself from disturbing and worrying her matrikin (*jamaa*). In Hatuma's words, "if you have something to help yourself, you don't need to disturb your people (*jamaa*). I used the money to save my land, which was like helping my people because my mother (*mayo*) and her siblings (*enehu*) were getting worried." Hatuma continued to tell me that these days "women know how to do things for themselves."

As I got to know more about Meriamu's and Hatuma's households, and those of other women in Msambweni, I discovered that women had indeed taken up responsibilities to fend for their households and exercised authority in many activities in the villages and beyond. Moreover, several women told me they did not want to become 'a burden' or 'beggars' within their kinship support network, because, as one woman said, "when the backbone aches, the rest of the body becomes stiff." I was told that women are the 'owners', 'managers', 'backbone' and 'builders' of households. Describing a woman who operated a small business in a nearby local market centre, one man expressed that in their community, "women build households and make them firm."

To be sure, matrikin are charged with support for family members, especially women in times of, for example, death of husbands, illness, divorce, and weddings. In light of this, it is common for women to move in with their mothers and obtain material and other support such as land or houses from their male matrikin, especially mother's brothers or own brothers. Meriamu 'borrowed' her own piece of land, on which she has lived and cultivated for over three decades, from her mother's brother. When I enquired about the possibility of her *mdzomba* taking his land back, Meriamu wondered why and how he would do that: "he cannot just come and tell me to give back this land. In our community, you cannot do that to your kinswoman. I have my own respect and that is why he helped me, he is my *mdzomba*, from one belly/womb (*tumbo*) with my mother. We can't differ on this matter." As one village elder explained, it is a Digo practice that a woman "goes back" to her maternal kin in time of crisis: "when something happens, you [woman] go to

your mother's brothers because mother's brother takes responsibility for everything…Mother's brother is the shield for everyone…You cannot go to your father's brothers."[12]

To be sure, male authority is usually conceived as a norm among the Digo, but for many women like Meriamu and Hatuma, cultivation of independent forms of support shaped their position and relations with matrikin and others as women. This informed the way men exercised their authority, which was also constrained by underlying factors such as socio-economic crisis. Because of this, women would strategically explore matrikin support. Actually, when I first talked about women seeking support from their kin, a quick response was usually "I am doing this to help myself" or "my household." This does not imply that women did not seek assistance from other kin persons such as paternal and husband's kin. As I show in chapter 3, women's autonomy enabled them to embrace different strategic ways to gain support from different members within and beyond the kinship network. However, the first point of contact which was keenly presented as an assured form of support, was the maternal side (*kuchetuni*). It is important to note, however, that women's performances of seeking support were expressions of autonomy rather than of dependence on others, as well as expression of kin relations. I suggest that matrilineal relations become important through gender relations, and women and their economic projects are very central to this.

This assertion is at odds with anthropological studies that have increasingly "assumed matrilineal kinship to be incompatible with emerging economic and political systems of the twentieth century" and beyond (Gough 1961; Nave 2016: 287), and questioned its possibility to survive "particularly in the face of a growing market economy and economic change" in Africa (Peters 1997a: 126–127). Aided by Richard's (1950) "matrilineal puzzle", these assumptions have also been coupled with the contention that matrilineal organization did not provide significant range for women to exercise authority or autonomy (Schneider and Gough 1961; Schneider 1961).

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[12] *Adzomba* is usually used in everyday conversations to refer, rather broadly, to male matrikin, including mother's brothers and brothers. Sometimes it may loosely include sister's children, mother's sisters and grandmothers. Additionally, mother's brother and sister's children call each other *mdzomba* and are known to others as *adzomba*. Unless otherwise stated, I use *adzomba* (sing. *mdzomba*) to refer to mother's brothers. In this particular conversation, *adzomba* referred broadly to a woman's matrikin. The relationship established through mother's brother is usually known as *udzomba*. The terms *baba mvyere* (father's elder brother) and *baba mdide* (father's younger brother) are used to refer to father's brothers. They are used in relation with the age of the person being referred to. *Baba* is the Swahili equivalent of father.

Because female authority has no place in matrilineal organization, we are told, the exercise of authority by mother's brothers in matrilineal societies has gradually shifted to fathers and husbands. Scholars who support this argument hold that 'modernity' and the capitalist economy characterized by intensive commercial agriculture and labour migration forced families to patrilocal nucleated arrangements, virilocal residence patterns and patrilineal inheritance, and that such arrangements are not conducive to the exercise of the authority of mother's brother's and associated matrilineal practices.

These claims have been highly contested and disputed on various grounds. Scholars have opposed the treatment of kinship as a "bounded social structure" (Peters 1997a:128) or "totality or system" (ibid:137), undermining the gender relations and history (Peters 1997a, 1997b; Poewe 1981) and failure to focus on matrilineality as lived (Johnson 2013). In broad agreement with these scholars, I show in this chapter and throughout the dissertation that male-based analyses have obscured the reality of matrilineality, the actual relations of men and women, and the position of women in matrilineal organization.

Describing "the social organization of the Digo of Msambweni" over 50 years ago, Luther Gerlach termed it "multilineal" and held the tendency of the Digo to 'keep' such multilineal relations due to the strategic and particular benefits that accrued from each, what he terms "mutual security" (Gerlach 1960: 40). Gerlach arrived at this conclusion from his observation that Digo matrilineal structure, which once flourished under cross-cousin marriages, and avunculocal and matrilocal residence patterns, had undergone several fundamental changes, such that neither matrilineality nor patrilineality could be assumed to be central features of Digo kinship organization. For Gerlach, "the shift has never been complete to the extent of making Digo fully patrilineal and patrilocal", and they "now stand somewhere in the middle", hence making Digo kinship organization too complex to warrant a clear description as either "matrilineal, patrilineal, double unilineal, or even bilateral", but collectively as including all these (Gerlach 1960: 20, 39, 40). But, noting the effects of the slave trade, Islam and colonial state policies, Gerlach, like other anthropologists critical of matrilineal relations, worried about the survival of matrilineal organization and specifically reported an increasing shift toward patrilineality, especially with regard to domestic authority, inheritance and residence patterns - he observed shifts toward fathers

and husbands (rather than mother's brothers), patrilineal inheritance, and virilocal (patrilocal) residence patterns (Gerlach 1960).

As the vignette in the beginning of the chapter shows, it cannot be denied that in Msambweni, several changes have taken place with regards to matrilineal relations. I argue that due to a largely male-centric approach and over emphasis of descent and rules governing kinship, Gerlach underestimated the status and position of women in their historical context with regard to Digo kinship, hence the fragile or vanishing position he accorded matrilineality.

This chapter demonstrates how matrilineal relations become important through gendered economic performances of women from a historical perspective. Contrary to the arguments of the "matrilineal puzzle" and supporters of the demise of matrilineality, I agree with scholars who have also shown how a focus on gender and history may help reveal the realities of matrilineal practices (see for example Peters 1997b). As Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan (1994) and Pauline Peters (1997a, 1997b) argue, viewing gender and matrilineal relations with regard to contingent effects in space and time may help unpack how different aspects of matrilineality change in different ways that provide context to understanding kin relations and women's statuses. Indeed, different aspects of matrilineality change in different ways in different times and contexts. Thus investigation of historical changes in Msambweni from a gender relations perspective with regards to organization of pre-colonial activities such as trade, agriculture and health; Islam; colonial and post-colonial policies and development projects, shows that matrilineality becomes important in gendered relations at different times and in different ways, with women at the centre stage. I suggest that the resilience of matrilineality and the present status of women in Msambweni can only be understood in this way.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the period before the nineteenth century to demonstrate the different statuses occupied by men and women, and how these were performances of matrilineality and associated relations. I will then examine the patriarchal based ideologies of Islam and colonial state policies to demonstrate their effects on matrilineality and gender relations. I then discuss the gendered projects by the post-independence state that gradually shifted from male-based policies inherited from the colonial state to policies and developments that directly and indirectly targeted women. The attempts to target women in development projects have challenged

and changed the underlying assumptions about men and women, for example, with regards to women taking up household responsibilities. Women's conception of responsibility will be developed further in the chapters that follow. Finally, I will turn to the contemporary nature of matrilineality in Msambweni. I argue that the underlying contradictions and complexities with kinship practices and ideologies is due to permeability afforded by the interaction between current socio-economic factors and Digo traditions/custom, Islamic and state activities, and that this permeability provides flexibility through which women pursue matrilineal relations.

Digo matrilineal kinship until the nineteenth century

Kaya: the kinship village of women and men

Historical accounts and popular narratives point out that the Digo arrived in the Kenya South Coast in the sixteenth century and lived in large fortified villages (*makaya,* sing. *kaya*) that sat on hilltops and surrounded by dense forests. The positioning and structure of the *kaya* warded off enemies such as the warlike Galla pastoralists who, according to Digo oral history, drove Mijikenda tribes from Singwaya, the mythical point of migratory origin to the north of Kenya (See Map 3; see also Gerlach 1960; Spear 1978)[13].

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[13] Historical accounts of Mijikenda's origin, including the Digo, have been criticized and contested since the 1970s on the basis of archival, linguistic and archaeological evidence (See for example Allen 1993; Helm 2000; Morton 1977; Walsh 1992), and the recent shift of Mijikenda stories of origin and migration especially with regards to Islamization of some Mijikenda peoples such as the Digo. The challenge to providing a sufficient account of the Digo past, and broadly of the Mijikenda has been attributed to insufficient information by early explorers and researchers, as well as oral history (the traditions the Mijikenda could remember). However, Spear's account of the history of the Mijikenda in his *Kaya complex* (1978), which largely draws on oral history remains the only detailed account that continues to be referenced.
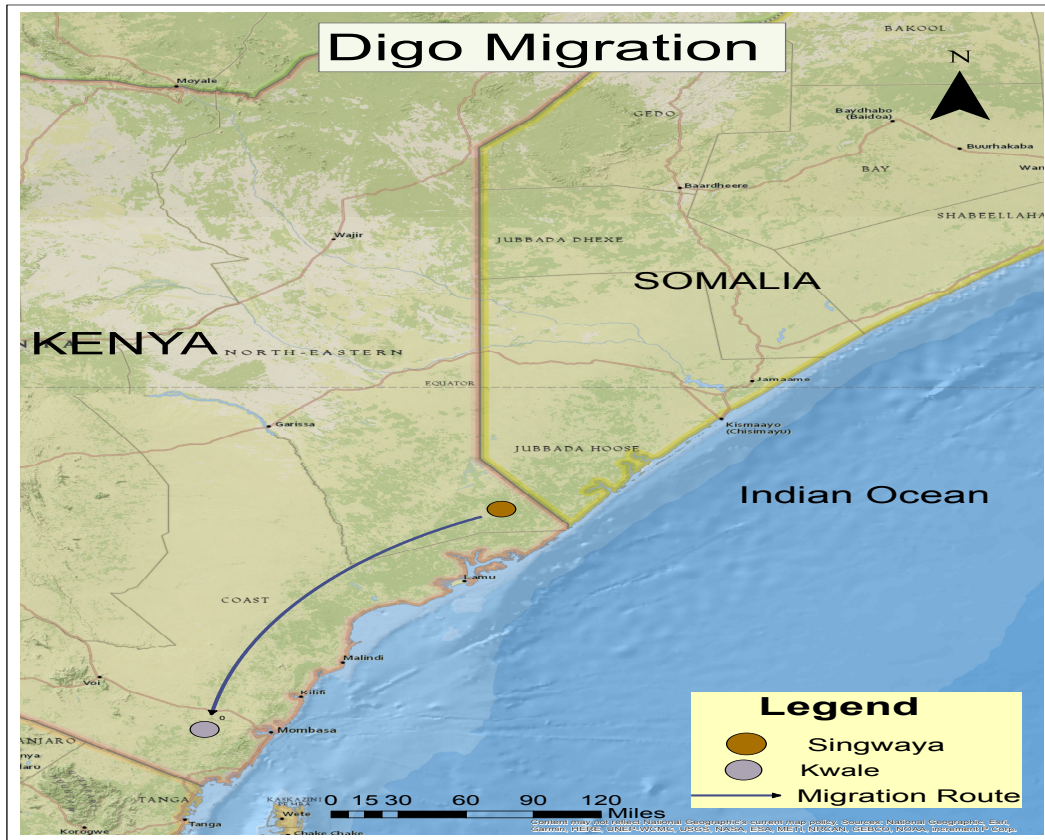
Map 3: Digo Migration

The *kaya*, as idealized in collective Digo memory, was highly structural, centrally and territorially divided on the basis of matrilineal clans (*mafuko*, sing. *fuko*)[14]. *Fuko* consisted of those who traced their descent from a common ancestress, with considerable weight given to the mother-right, whereby women remained united with their maternal kinsmen even after marriage, and dependent on them for social and economic support. Thomas Spear contends that "descent, inheritance and authority passed through the female line" to the hands of the mother's brothers (*adzomba*, sing. *mdzomba*) and husbands moved to their wives' homesteads (Spear 1978: 57). Spear also holds that uxorilocality and the avunculate were entrenched through restriction of marriages to endogamy and cross cousins, which allowed men to remain within aggregated

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[14] The Swahili equivalent word *ukoo* is used by the Digo to refer to clan and lineage.

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residences for the sake of control of property and to avoid isolation of their authority in their own matrilineal homesteads (ibid). By doing this, decision-making authority of kaya, matriclans and homesteads is shown to have remained centralized among the mother's brothers, and support to kinswomen to have remained assured since the mother's brother acted on behalf of women and their children. For example, *adzomba* took care of kinswomen's children and settled their marriage payments (Gerlach 1960; Spear 1978).

Of course, centralization of *kaya* authority through men as key players in the *kaya* is evidenced by the idealized arrangement of the kaya space with territorially-centrally-positioned male domains of matrilineages - meeting houses (*moro* for kaya elders and *lwanda* for clans) and homesteads (*mudzi*) of clan members. Only *chifudu* (fertility ritual) huts and granaries were tangible structures for women (see Figure 2.1). Inevitably, most of these domains were exclusively male, and through them men oversaw and exercised control and authority over many of the kaya affairs (kinship, political, religious and economic). Yet the gendered occupation of these domains as an expression of kinship should not be underestimated. As I show below, domains such as of eldership (*ngambi*) and agriculture (*chirimo*) depended on gender relations between men and women both as members of kin groups, and women exercised control over those domains such as *chifudu* that were designated for women as kinswomen.
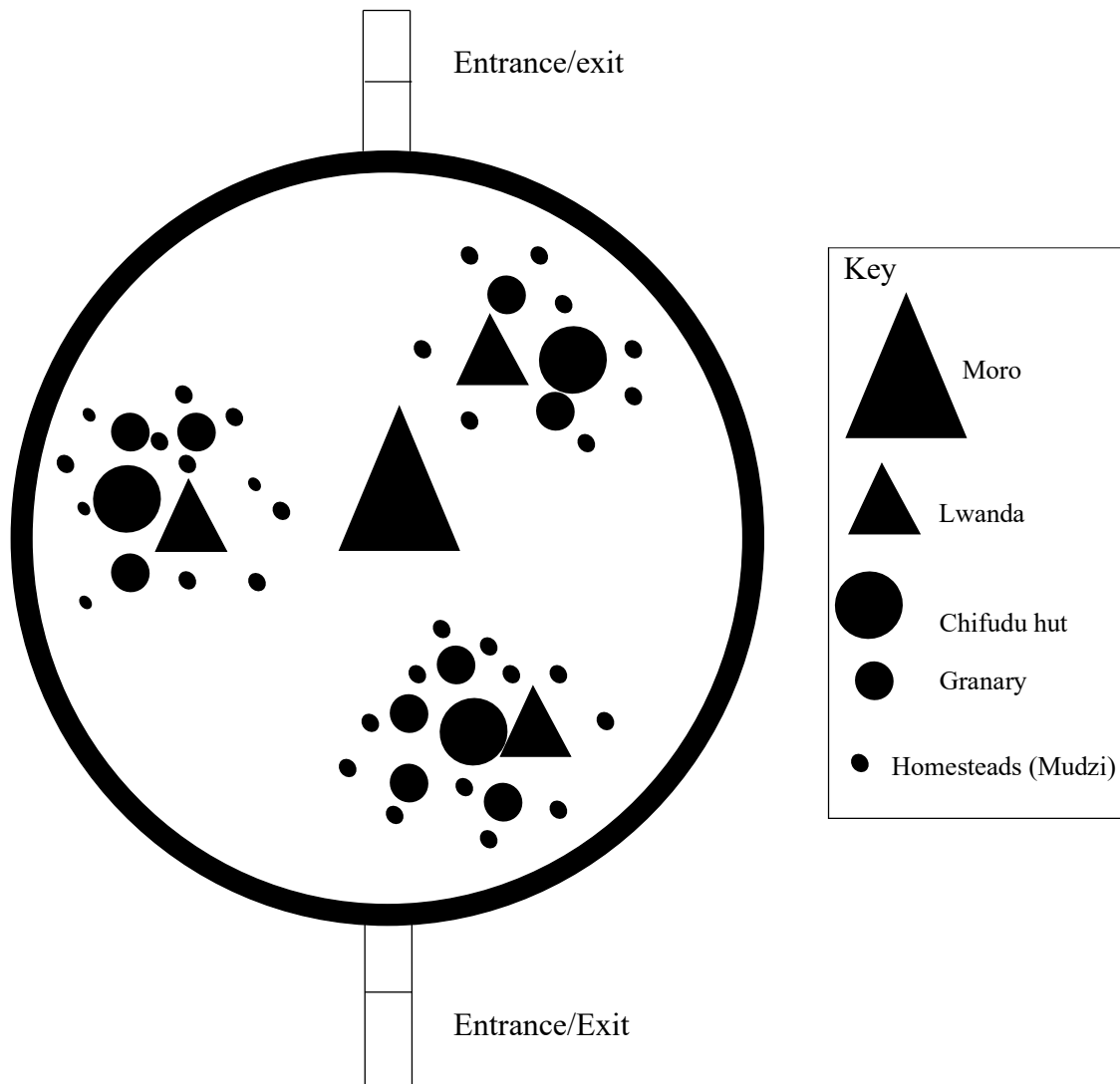
Figure 2.1 Male and female domains in pre-colonial kaya villages

Ngambi and the matrilineal men

Kaya and clan eldership was practiced on the basis of age and rank order based on matrilineal clans and male matrikin. For instance, the older generations of mother's brothers were initiated as the council of kaya elders (*ngambi*). As members of *ngambi*, men "took precedence following the order their matrilineal clans had settled in the kaya" with the senior elder of the kaya chosen on

the basis of matrilineal descent of the founding clan (Sperling 1988: 31). Generally, however, men were initiated to ngambi through age-set (*rika*) rituals, which were divided by seniority into sub-sets of *rika* (ten sub-*rikas*). As *kaya* elders, male matrikin managed crucial social, political and economic matters and resources of the kaya such as trade, warfare and disputes, inheritance and marital issues, pawning, and slavery (Spear 1978).

On trade, for instance, elders controlled trading activities such as blood-brotherhood relations. They also acted as "middlemen in the trade between the coastal towns and the interior", controlled items of trade such as livestock and agricultural products such as grain and sesame (which were produced by women as I show below), and monopolized the returns from trade such as cloth and ornaments (McIntosh 2009a: 39; Spear 1978: 66, 69, 106). As trade and political allies, kaya elders offered support to the Mazrui Arabs when they fought against Busaidi Arabs (Willis 1993: 61), and continued to be consulted by the Mazrui *liwali* (Muslim governor) "about matters of mutual interest" (Sperling 2000: 275), and for their participation in Mombasa politics and trade even after the war (Brantley 1981; McIntosh 2009b: 52).

Men were also members of various special societies (*chama*) whose membership was through payment of fees and undertaking of particular rituals rather than passage through sub-*rika*s. These societies also operated along matrilineal relations and men were endowed with various roles and statuses including distribution of resources, judicial and policing functions, and custody of secret knowledge of the kaya (McIntosh 2009a; Parkin 1991; Spear 1978).

Clearly, women did not belong to either *ngambi* or the special male *chama*s, and their exclusion from direct participation in domestic, economic and political authority of the kaya abounds in scholarly accounts. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that male matrikin are overemphasized with regard to their relations with women. For example, *adzomba*, in their different positions as elders of *kaya* and clans, and as homestead heads, are presented as if they 'stood' in place for women. I have noted above that *adzomba* were viewed to have responsibility and authority over women and their children in certain affairs - they acted on women's behalf, for example, in social and judicial matters, and undertook other responsibilities that ranged from caring of sister's children by paying their marriage and divorce expenditures, to pawning them as debt payments, giving them up during times of famine, and using them as blood-money (*kore*) to

compensate for murder by a member of the matrilineages (Gerlach 1960: 23; Gerlach and Gerlach 1988: 116; Ng'weno 1997: 68; Spear 1978: 69). Indeed, overemphasis of the position of *adzomba* obscured the reality of gender relations and the positions occupied by women.

The notion of 'standing' is familiar in other contexts in Kenya. For example, Elizabeth Cooper (2012) shows how 'standing' is an idiom used "to represent interests of another individual" in Western Kenya. However, in the context of Western Kenya, Cooper clearly shows that 'standing' expresses the practice of taking up responsibilities by both women and men depending on different household situations (ibid). On the contrary, in Kenya South Coast, analysis based on kinsmen concealed the everyday performances of women, especially in economic and kinship terms.

It is therefore not surprising that writers have submitted that men disliked uxorilocality and therefore capitalized on pawning and slavery to accumulate pawns or slaves in their positions as masters and as lineage heads to appropriate both their productive and reproductive services to the advantage of their lineages - specifically as a gateway to patrifocality and patrilocality. Household slaves or pawns[15] were not only held as labourers, but also as wives to men and/or their male kinsmen. These women added 'strength' to matrilineages of men who kept them since, as one village elder told me, "they did not have their own *fuko* (matrilineage)" (see also Gerlach 1960, 1963; Prins 1952). Furthermore, men found prestige and status in keeping many dependents, especially women, because they contributed to agricultural production and formed space for the continued exercise of male authority.

Indeed, pawnship was not unique to the Digo; it was a widespread phenomenon among many matrilineal peoples in Africa (see for example Mary Douglas 1960, and 1964 for Central Africa; Phiri 1983 for Malawi). According to many studies, pawnship formed part of male control over their kinswomen and their children as well as accumulation of the same. It was a route for male matrikin, especially lineage heads, to gain "access to persons over whom they were able to

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[15] As Gerlach and Gerlach (1988:116) contend, the practice of keeping slaves in Digo households was for purposes of "material debt, taken as compensation for blood debt, or given up by families during times of famine or war". Such slaves became pawns in the particular households/lineages and provided their productive and reproductive services to the particular lineages. As Mary Douglas (1964) argues for Central Africa, pawnship was different from true slavery practiced widely in many parts of East and Central Africa, such that "unlike the former, the latter severed all prior social ties" (Apter 2012:38).

exercise direct control…build up independent [patrilocal] families…[and] avoid the dispersal of their male kinsmen" (Phiri 1983: 264–265).

Overall, on the one hand, pawning was perceived as a matrilineal-to-patrilineal project for men to amass authority, and on the other, as a matrilineally informed oppression and deprivation of women. Such a project resonates with Ellen Block's analysis of kinship in rural Lesotho where maternal kin reinforce patrilineality through performances that seek to "justify (and privilege) a range of configurations of care" (Block 2014:713). Yet despite the fact that slaves bore children to Digo male matrikin as their masters and lineage heads, this did not change male affiliation to their descent groups nor the activities and relations they performed in their various capacities as kinsmen of kinswomen. In fact, the Digo choose not to speak about slave ancestry (Gerlach 1960; Gerlach and Gerlach 1988). I clearly remember speaking to some men and women about slave ancestry on several occasions and a short, dismissive popular response was, "those were 'works' of our great grandfathers (*mababu,* sing. *babu*)", and the great grandfathers of the time, as many people would say, are *adzomba*. This does not imply that through slave marriages or pawning men put matrilineality on hold. When understood through relations between men and women, men actually provided women space to build, strengthen and continue matrilineal relations since matrilineality among the Digo is understood in relation to women. Even when people in this community speak about *adzomba*, what such a relation emphasises is the central place of women in kinship terms. In fact, the Digo believe that women and not men are the continuity of *fuko*. As one informant put it "women are the continuous builders of *fuko*."

As I argue in this chapter and in the rest of the dissertation, the pattern of mother's brother as kinsmen (social affiliation to and relations with kinswomen) is still prevalent and continues to operate as a platform for expression of kinship for women and female autonomy, especially because women continue to strategically navigate and make claims on resources through their relations with male kin in various ways that give women greater social, political and economic authority (see for example, Gomm 1972, 1975 and Oendo 1987). Perhaps this could be explained in Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of 'practical' kin, that enactment of kinship is informed by "the satisfaction of the practical interests of an individual or group of individuals" (Bourdieu 1977:35). Here, I show that despite what others view as "tenets of 'official kin' doctrine" (Block 2014:712), women negotiated and navigated a series of complex and competing kinship ideologies

to achieve their goals of accessing resources and provide for their households. Additionally, the emergent conjugal units and new residence patterns (patrilocal) due to pawnship, slavery or other arrangements by men did not alter the matrilineal ideology, but rather informed transformation of matrilineal relations in various gendered ways that rendered matrilineality resilient and offered a growing autonomy for women (cf. Peters 1997a, 1997b).

Returning to *ngambi*, *chama* and *adzomba*, actually statuses of men, both in kinship, political and socio-economic terms, were cultivated and operated along gender-based matrilineal relations because while men occupied those spaces that were considered the realm of men, sustaining those statuses rested on their relations with women. In what follows, I show that men remained significant in the economic and political circle of the coastal economy and specifically the life of the *kaya* villages through their relations with (kin)women whose productive and reproductive roles were crucial, although portrayed by some scholarship as marginal in analyses of the organization of *kaya*, and in the pre-colonial Digo society generally.

Kinswomen in the kaya

Certainly, a keen look at *kaya* activities indicates that a male centred analysis of Digo pre-colonial past does not adequately capture the nature of kinship and gender relations at the time, especially because it ignores women and their position. Hard-pressed and marginal as women are shown to have been due to male domination over many crucial aspects of the *kaya* life and male control over women and their children, according to popular narratives of the *kaya* social system, women did participate and significantly exercised considerable influence and control over some important aspects including resource production and distribution, and ritual and medicinal practices. I suggest that a careful analysis of the idealized *kaya* activities such as agriculture (*chirimo*) and women's fertility ritual (*chifudu*) shows that kinship and authority were exercised through relations of men and women - these domains in particular show that matrilineal relations and the associated authority were actually about women.

Chirimo

Chirimo and trade were the mainstay of the Digo economy in the pre-colonial period. As mentioned earlier, trade was largely a male affair within the matrilineages. But women performed

the agricultural activities from which items of trade (especially grain and sesame) were obtained, and laboured for the subsistence economy of the *kaya*. Women cultivated land as feeders and reproducers of their matrilineages, and of the *kaya* society more broadly, but also as workers for the sake of trade (cf. Amadiume 1997; Spear 1978). On this basis, both trade and kaya subsistence thrived because women's agricultural labour (as mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters) remained alive - despite the fact that men controlled this labour and its proceeds. Even when men increasingly participated in trade and agricultural activities intensified, *chirimo* remained a woman-centred activity. The magnitude and significance of Digo's agricultural production in the coastal region was noted by an early Anglican missionary, Erhardt: "Almost all the semsem [sesame] and guinea corn [maize] imported at Zanzibar comes from them [Digo]... If the Wadigo do not choose to bring their productions in the market, the Islams have nothing to eat" (cited in Sperling 2000: 279). In fact, women still dominate *chirimo* to date, even with the rise of market economies or male-centred economic differentiation or accumulation, and against the mainstream anthropological backdrop of intensive agriculture as male-centred and more patrilineal-friendly (Poewe 1981).

Furthermore, while male matrikin controlled women's labour, in practice, there were surely occasions when women exercised some control as kinswomen. For instance, shifting cultivation (slash and burn technique) was practiced and organized with regard to matrilineal clans, and was highly gendered such that men cleared bushes and controlled clearing of new land, and women did the rest of the cultivation work including weeding and harvesting (Spear 1978). Moreover, since trade was a male sphere - of which successful trade caravans formed a point of prestige for men and the matrilineages - it is likely that women whose male matrikin participated in long-distance caravan trade assumed responsibilities that influenced high yields for the matrilineages such as managing others' farm labour as senior lineage members (especially grandmothers) or within networks of communal/cooperative support (*mwerya*) - often comprising members of a matrikin group. Considering this, it would be unfair to reduce control of *chirimo* exclusively to men, for example, production of high yields to cultivate or maintain status for the matrilineages. The extent to which women influenced high yields through *mwerya* was recounted by several of my informants within the realm of women pooling and managing agricultural activities. For example, Mwanatumu remembered what her mother told her several years ago:

Women did not cultivate like we [Digo women] do it today. Our grandmothers were strong and organized *mwerya* [women's networks of collaborative help]. They would cultivate a farm (*munda*) of one woman today, tomorrow for another woman, just like that until all work was done and they waited for harvesting when *mwerya* was organized again. Unlike these days, our grandmothers' granaries were separate from their houses and they ensured they kept their granaries full.

Women also managed separate fields for their particular domestic units, both as individuals or groups of individuals. In fact, polygamous marriages are described in the context of women managing separate fields and domestic units, both as a result of absentee men in the households due to polygamy and trade (Gerlach 1960; Gillette 1978; Spear 1978). This is not to imply that women could only hold positions of authority in the absence of their kinsmen. As an everyday practice, senior women (especially grandmothers and senior wives) "stored and distributed the harvest… and coordinated work of women [especially juniors]" within their matrilineages (Waaijenberg 1993: 24). Indeed, as Mwanatumu's example shows, women collaborated in cultivation activities and maintained their own granaries as kinswomen.

Of significance, however, is to show that agriculture was not simply a bounded space for the male exercise of authority. The dynamics involved, especially because of trade and prevailing domestic relations between different persons, revolved around gender relations and women also exercised authority in various ways and accessed resources. Additionally, when we turn to intensification of agriculture, the fact that *chirimo* remained the province of women, still very much the case among the Digo today (although in a relatively small scale largely due to effects of colonialism on land and a perceived Islamic influence on ideologies of work discussed below), suggests that matrilineality was more than the assumption of descent and male authority over women. The *Chifudu* ritual provides further illumination.

Chifudu

Kaya's reproductive potential was vested with women as its custodians, who ensured continuity of matrilineages through the women's fertility ritual, *chifudu*. *Chifudu* was the only women's society and matrilineal women's affair managed by women (Udvardy 1990, 1992; Wamahiu 1988). Each matriclan had a *chifudu*. Container-like ritual objects in the form of clay pots were

used in *chifudu* rituals. The pots, referred to as *vifudu* (sing. *chifudu*) symbolized ancestresses (*mikoma*), and just as is the case for a similar cult among the Giriama, they were believed to "safeguard fertility or to be the source of reproductive problems" (Udvardy 1992: 297). Special *chifudu* shrines or huts (*rungu*) were specially constructed in the *kaya* for storage of *vifudu* and provided spaces for *chifudu* ritual. "As custodians of fertility-awarding powers of ancestresses, … women [were] perceived to have the greatest control … over the reproductive potential of [their] people" (Udvardy 1992: 290). Furthermore, *chifudu* was not only a metaphor and expression of health and fertility, but also an expression of wholeness of the kaya society, whose survival was importantly attached to women (Udvardy 1992: 297).

Because this role was vital to the perceived perpetuation of the kaya and its peoples, it remained a source of female authority and prestige. Today, the practice of *chifudu* is still very much alive in Msambweni as a matrilineal ritual practice, and *chifudu* 'houses' are a tangible manifestation of matrilineality (*fuko* relations) (Gerlach 1960; Gillette 1978; Udvardy 1990: 149). I was repeatedly told that women associated with such authoritative rituals were/are respected within their matriclans and beyond. I vividly remember that one of my informants explained that her mother's persistent illness during pregnancy was associated with a particular ancestress, and as part of the healing practices she had to be 'nice' to both the ancestress and the woman who performed the ritual. To be 'nice' involved providing gifts to the ancestress (I was told she asked for gifts) during ritual performances. Being a matrilineal affair, the gifts were provided by her matrikin, especially by men (see also Gomm 1975) and received by the woman custodian of the *chifudu* in the matrilineage. The practice of male matrikin financing women's exorcism activities in order to retain their relations with women is not new. Roger Gomm has described how gendered exorcism and gift-giving performances complexly sustained and broke marital and kin relations in the 1970s (Gomm 1975).

It seems clear, then, that *kaya* and matrilineage affairs (political, social and economic) were as much about women as about men. Sustenance/survival of *kaya* and male statuses depended on gendered relations which provided women considerable scope for authority, autonomy and centrality on kinship matters. However, much transformation took place in the later part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to two phenomena: expansion of trade and dispersion from *makaya*. I argue that as much as this transformation affected organization of matrilineal spheres

and its expressions, this did not wipe out the position occupied by women but rather transformed the relations of men and women and their expressions of matrilineality.

The Matrilineal landscape after kaya villages

First, the expansion of the East African economy in the early nineteenth century due to a growing regional and international demand for trading goods supplied from the hinterland such as ivory, grain, gum copal and slaves, led to an "economic invasion" by the Arabs and Swahili traders "who were no longer content simply to receive trade goods from rural peoples [such as the Digo] as in the past, but sought to increase their supply, and profit" (Sperling 2000: 277). Consequently, Digo men lost their place in the coastal trade as middlemen due to the emergent direct contact between the Arabs and Swahili living in Mombasa and the hinterland peoples. Furthermore, the long-distance caravan trade which *kaya* elders powerfully controlled ended with the completion of the Mombasa-Nairobi railway in 1901. This further expanded regional trade, and attention shifted to the coastal Island of Mombasa (Sperling 1988, 2000; Waaijenberg 1993).

Second, dispersion of people from the main *kaya* residence due to "the expansion of the regional trade, increase in population, and decline of attacks by the Galla [pastoralists]" led to formation of "sub-kayas and then individual homesteads in the coastal plains" (Ng'weno 1997: 62; Spear 1978; Waaijenberg 1993: 3). This, eventually, led to formation of new neighbourhoods and villages, with development of sub-clans from matrilineages, and sub-clans becoming clans (Gerlach 1960; Ng'weno 1997; Spear 1978; Waaijenberg 1993).

These two phenomena changed the importance of *kaya* and the centrality of male *kaya* institutions such as *ngambi* and *rika* rituals as they became less central to the everyday lives of the Digo. Since *kaya* changed from a residential village to a "place for final dispute settlement and religious and ceremonial" purposes (Ng'weno 1997:63), members of *ngambi* became limited in the ways they exercised their authority in the everyday life of the new domestic arrangements (notably an increasing virilocal phenomenon). Even when they continued to control clearing of new land and its occupancy, *ngambi* centralized authority could not cope as such with the new domestic arrangements nor with an emerging considerable autonomy among young men who found an opportunity to participate in trade caravans, established their own individual homesteads

and married women even beyond their lineages including slave wives, with less control by elders and senior male matrikin (Oendo 1988:25). Indeed, *ngambi* struggled to concentrate much of their energies on positioning themselves in the new phenomenon including trade and political activities with the coastal peoples in a quest to maintain their status both as elders and heads of lineages and homesteads. As such, the close surveillance and domination by male matrikin over everyday affairs of kinswomen and young men, as was the case in the *kaya*, was generally put to the test.

In the light of this, the emergent state of affairs offered women the chance to explore new opportunities. For example, "people became accustomed to living in the fields they [cleared and] cultivated", and women did not hesitate to clear, cultivate and acquire their own fields and trees, and establish their own homesteads (Waaijenberg 1993:3; see also Ng'weno 1997). This is keenly captured in colonial records which show that Digo women owned huts when the British colonialists first arrived in the Kenya South Coast[16], and scholarship indicates that women cleared land and planted coconut trees, which they later kept as self-acquired property and passed it on to their children, especially daughters (Ng'weno 1997:63). My fieldwork gathered that several of my informants were third or fourth generation in the line of inheritance of land and trees, and traced inheritance to their great grandmothers who, according to my informants, cleared bushes and established their own households in the olden days (*zamani*).[17] These were later kept as self-acquired property (See figure 2.2). I was several times told that, in the past, women also capitalized on *mwerya* to clear and cultivate fields, which facilitated self-acquisition and maintaining of land for themselves. Often, *mwerya* comprised female matrikin.

This sort of land and property acquisition is demonstrated today by the way the Digo differentiate between *shamba la fuko* (matrilineage land) and self-owned land acquired through clearing of bushes or purchase by individual men and women, known distinctively as *dzumbe* (father's land) and *konho* (mother's land) (See figure 2.2).[18]

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[16] See for example KNA/ADM/112/3/2/30

[17] People used *zamani* to refer to the past. However, the past referred to did not have a specific time, but often conceived as the time before Islam and colonialism. Others also talked of *zamani* when referring to the colonial period and the early post-independent period. However, as noted by others, *zamani* is "a reference that is temporally ambiguous, but refers to the context being spoken about" (Ng'weno 1997:62).

[18] See also Ng'weno (1997 and 2001) for a similar discussion.
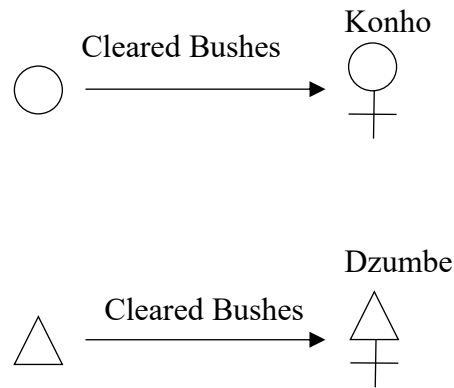
Figure 2.2 Konho vs Dzumbe

Konho was passed on to a woman's children, especially daughters, and *dzumbe* to sister's sons and daughters. Whereas transmission of *konho* took a matrilineal nature especially when land remained in the hands of women, or when transferred maternally from mother's brothers to mother's sister or to sister's children, in some instances, *dzumbe* seemingly took a patrilineal form when fathers/mother's brothers gave a share of land to their sons and daughters on Islamic grounds. Transmission of *dzumbe* to sons led to what is known today as *shamba la mbari* (patrilineal land) (Ng'weno 1997:63; see Figures 2.3 and 2.4 for examples of transmission of *konho* and *dzumbe*).

However, "[*mbari*] form of inheritance was *not* a *continuous* inheritance but rather lasted about three generations…then [*mbari* land] returns to the *fuko* instead of going onto the great grandchildren" – especially because, as I show below, Islam became complexly incorporated into Digo practices and not only complicated inheritance practices, but also provided a fertile ground to amplify matrilineal relations (Ng'weno 2001:116-117, 127; emphasis added). In fact, as Figure 2.4 shows, transmission of *dzumbe* land would take somewhat of a matrilineal/matrifocal nature even when fathers transferred land to their sons. Some of my female informants explained that they obtained land (*dzumbe*) from their fathers, after which it was transmitted through women. In cases where sons obtained *dzumbe* land, they would share it with their sisters and it would then pass on to sister's children (see Figure 2.4). Nevertheless, ownership and transmission of *fuko* land

continued to be central to expression of gendered matrilineal relations and continuation of matrilineal clans (Ng'weno 2001, 1997; Oendo 1988), a point to which I will return below.

i.

ii.

iii.

*Shades indicate recipients of land
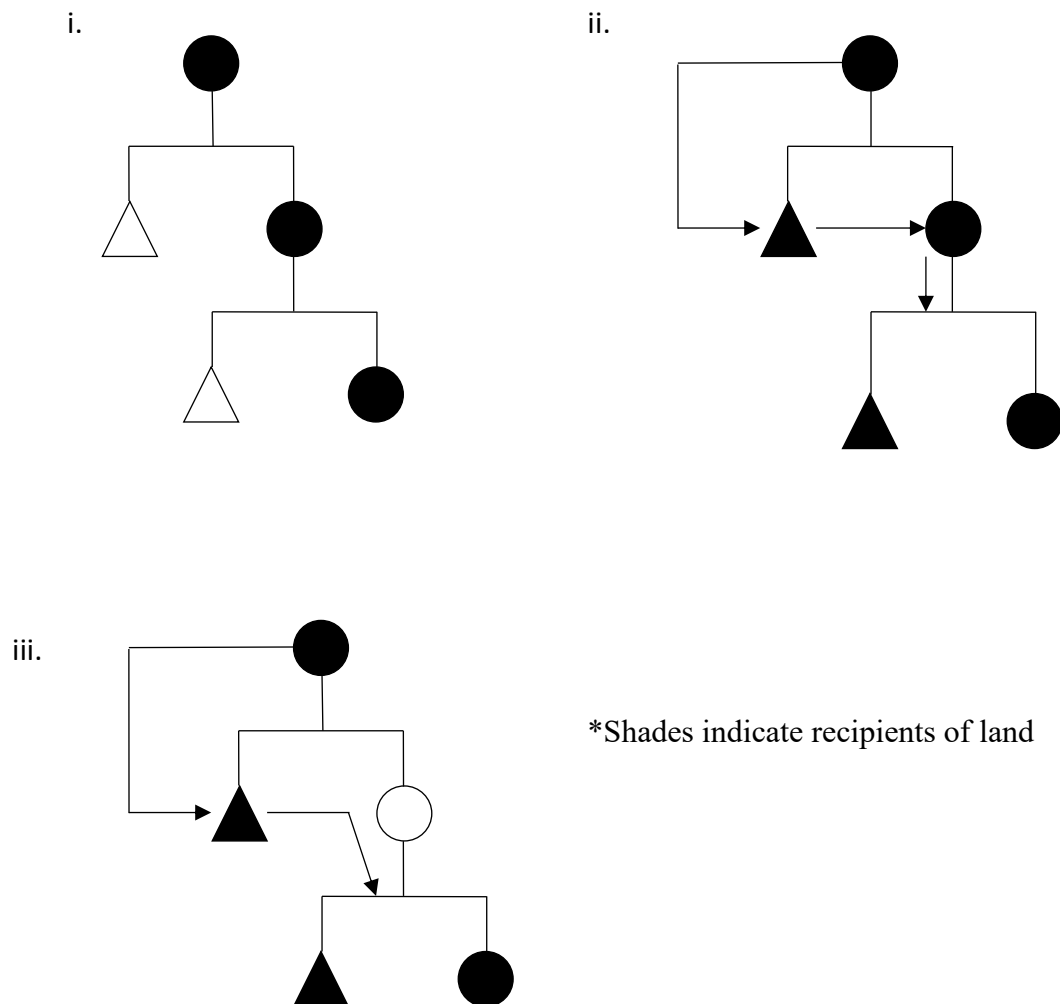
Figure 2.3 Transmission of *konho* land

i.

ii.

iii.

*Shades indicate recipients of land
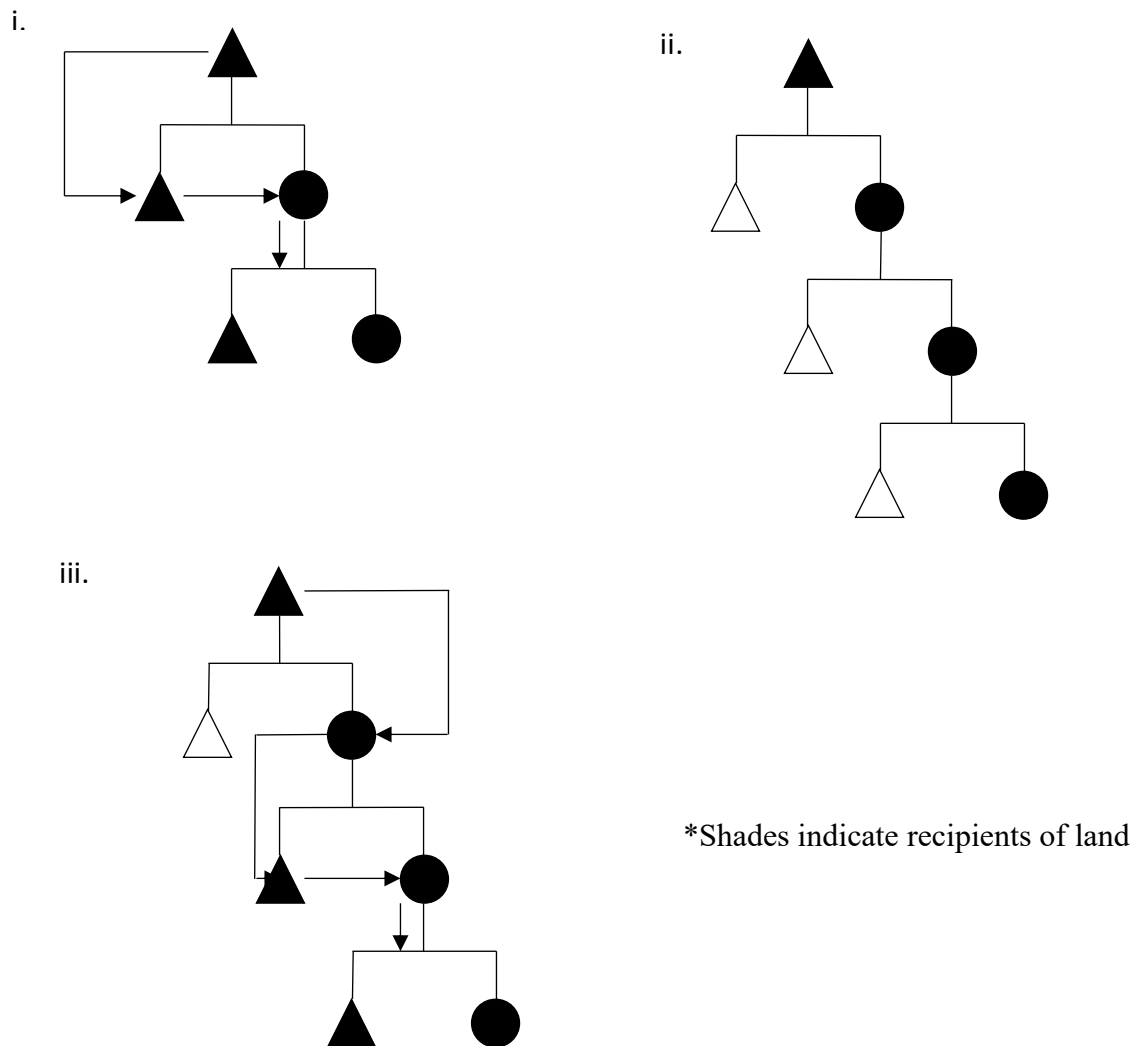
Figure 2.4 Transmission of *dzumbe* - taking on a matrilineal form

What is interesting, however, is that, during the pre-colonial time, "land had no commercial value" in itself and was considered a "gift of nature" (Oendo 1988:25,42). Of course, studies on pre-colonial Africa hold that "Africans were concerned to use land, not to hold it" (Colson 1971:199). Shifting cultivation was one reason that led to this argument, in addition to communal ownership of land. Nevertheless, among the Digo, land was not perceived as collectively or individually owned. People believed that land belonged to God and was available to everyone to

use (Oendo 1988). Significant were the relations between people with regard to land and property. Ostensibly, the actual trees (Ng'weno 1997:63) and structures on the land (Oendo 1988:42) were more important because they were treated as heritable property for matrilineages, and acted as the medium through which matrilineal relations were expressed by men and women. Thus, it may be correct to argue that men controlled movement to and clearing of new land, for both men and women, as an expression of kin relations. As such, allocation of land to women by their mother's brothers in the pre-colonial time expressed social and kinship relations rather than simply male authority. In other words, passing on land and other resources to women was a symbol of matrilineal relations rather than mere power relations. This is still the case today. Women seek land from their brothers and mother's brothers as a way of expressing matrikin relations, the very essence of matrilineality. Indeed, during fieldwork, it was not uncommon to capture statements such as, "my brother gave me this land for cultivation just like a sister", or "he just helped me like a brother [or mother's brother]."

However, the conception of ownership of land changed significantly over time, especially during the colonial period when land progressively became more important than trees or structures (Ng'weno 1997). Before I delve into discussion of changes during the colonial period, I will first explore the effects of Islam on kinship and gender relations in the period preceding colonialism.

Islam, matrilineality and women in the pre-colonial period

Although Islam has been present in the Kenya coastal area as early as the ninth century, the Digo had limited contact with the coastal Muslims prior to the nineteenth century (Askew 1999: 67; Herlehy 1984; Kyung Park 2012; Sperling 1988). In addition to prolonged trade between Muslims and the Digo, the expansion of Muslim commercial activity, especially commercial agriculture, to the hinterland in the 1830s forced migration of Muslims (mostly Mazrui, Swahili and their slaves) to settle near Mijikenda villages such as Gasi and Mtongwe, south of Mombasa. This facilitated closer relations and engagements between Muslims and the Digo. This was particularly possible for men because in spite of their constrained status as middlemen in the coastal trade, they still acted as the point of contact in their villages. Furthermore, the Digo continued to be important suppliers of grain and sesame for the expanded regional and international trade (Kyung Park 2012; Sperling 1988, 2000). Just as was the case with trade while in the *kaya*, women did not participate

in commercial engagements with coastal Muslims as men did, but women continued with their agricultural activities in the villages. Due to this, Islamization in Kenya South Coast was male centred (Sperling 2000).

Although a largely male phenomenon, the spread of Islam was slow and took two different forms (Sperling 1988, 2000). First, the early spread of Islam was urban based, what Sperling terms "urban Islamization", because conversions were associated with those with close contact with Muslim towns such as elders and young men who were migrants and engaged in diverse activities as porters, plantation workers and slaves (Sperling 1988: 65-66; 2000:276)[19]. However, converts did not practice 'pure' but a "negotiated Islam" (Levtzion and Pouwels 2000: 3) revealed by the fact that they continued to "participate in Digo religious ceremonies and sacrifices at home, and observed the communal practices of Islam away from home", usually in the towns of Mombasa and Tanganyika (Sperling 1988:103). Actually, scholarly accounts hold that early conversion was inspired by "commercial expedience" rather than "religious conviction" (Gerlach 1963: 43; Oendo 1988: 20).

Second, "rural Islamization" took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century when influential elders converted, remained in the villages and built several mosques where men worshipped, and Koran schools (*madrasa*) where boys were taught. Girls were educated within the households, and just as Muslims (Arabs and Swahili) did not proselytize the Digo (their engagements were focused on trade), Digo men did not attempt to convert their women (Kyung Park 2012:160; Sperling 1988:173; 2000:283). Archival materials on the Digo during the colonial period show that in 1915 the Kwale District Commissioner, C. Dundas, declared that Digo husbands and male kin did not consider women's conversion as necessary[20]. In addition, scholarship on pre-colonial Islam among the Digo holds that women were "resistant to conversion" (Ng'weno 1997:67; Sperling 1988, 2000), and were painted as 'pagans' who lived "side by side with Mohamedan practices" (Sperling 2000:282) and "*continued* to protect *their* cultural "tradition"" (McDougall 2008: 514 ; emphasis added).

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[19] Although Digo men were reluctant to work in Muslim commercial plantations, a phenomenon which changed somehow during the colonial period as a way of men 'running away' from pressure for recruitment to work in European estates and commercial firms (Willis 1993).
[20] KNA/PC/COAST/1/3/94 Digo laws and custom (1915-1916).

The assertion about traditions as a significant factor in women's resistance to conversion remains unclear. However, as E. Ann McDougall (2008) argues, Islam and its converts were located and understood outside the household, a space portrayed as women's domain. Men were out there as traders and clerics, praying in the mosques and attending *madrasa* teachings, while women were fossilized within the household and village life where, it was perceived, Islam was absent and traditions were present (Ng'weno 1997:67; Sperling 1988; 2000:282). But the fact that Islam teachings promoted patrilocality, a male project believed to have begun after dispersion from the *makaya* (before closer engagement with Islam), and probably one which did not favour the status of women as such, men might have found a soft spot on Islam with regard to this, hence the perceived reluctance of women to convert during the initial stages of Islamization.

However, it is quite striking that Islam displaced none of the Digo practices by the end of the nineteenth century (Sperling 2000:282). This is probably a confirmation of the observation that men engaged with Islam and converted simply as traders and within the realm of trade, but not as kinsmen - elders, lineage and homestead heads, whose power and authority rested on the premise of matrilineality. Furthermore, male matrikin relations (*udzomba*) facilitated cultivation of the different positions held by men, and despite the perceived male patrilocality project, Islam's promotion of the father's authority was a potential threat to *udzomba* status. But more importantly, this is suggestive that matrilineal relations were actually performances that had greatly more to do with women.

Moreover, patrilocality and *udzomba* relations were not simply about men and their status, but also about women. According to conversations with many old women, *udzomba* relations provided women with considerable autonomy and freedom before Islam teachings came to Digoland and taught about the father as the head and provider of the household. While narrating her mother's marital history, Mwanasiti, a woman in her late seventies, explained that "in the past, before Islam, a woman would, for example, choose to leave a marriage when it did not work, and seek out support from *adzomba* to establish her own household." But "when Islam came your father (*baba)* would sometimes insist that you stay in the marriage even when you did not want to stay." However, she added that even with the invasion of Islam women still had the option to "run to your *adzomba*" and negotiate "divorce (*talaka)* according to Islamic law (*kisharia*)."

Similarly, a village elder explained that "in the olden days, *adzomba* were everything. They discussed issues as clan or *ngambi*...women did not have many problems and they knew where to go." In the village elder's view, women's lack of problems could be understood by the fact that matrilineality centred on women including kinsmen looking after them. Islam allowed *talaka* and when this happened, a woman could not go to other kin such as father's brothers at least as patrilineality would have it, but she moved back to her matrikin. Historical evidence also shows that during the Islamization period, Digo peoples attended to their affairs entirely according to Digo custom, even when they claimed to be "Mohammedans". For example, writing in 1915, Kwale District Commissioner, C. Dundas observed that Digo elders claimed to be "Mohamedans" yet conducted rituals and offered sacrifices inside *kaya* forests, and that their "councils are constituted in the original model...They judge entirely according to Digo custom...[and] every ngambi of the Mohamedan communities...wished to be governed by their own laws only."[21] Of course, *ngambi* was in itself a male matrilineal affair, and on the advent of Islam, it included association with Islam, but pursued Digo custom/laws that were matrilineally constructed, including those concerning marriage, inheritance and women.

Digo men, therefore, sandwiched "both their identity as Mijikenda and their religion as Islam" (Willis 1993:197), so that Islamic and Digo ideologies and practices continued to co-exist. Thus, Islam mythology and practices got absorbed in Digo traditions and practices, painting Islam in "an indigenous character" (Oendo 1988:21). Of course, studies on Islam in pre-colonial Africa hold that the dynamics of Islam in the continent involved 'Africanization' of the religion by local traditions (Levtzion and Pouwels 2000). Yet, Digo ideologies and practices mattered more than Islam. For example, in one colonial document, the Kwale Commissioner, Dundas, claimed that men would take off a *kanzu* (a male Islamic dress), for a blanket (implying Digo dress)[22], and according to Gerlach (1960:88), although critical about the survival of matrilineality, the "mother's side (*kuchetuni*) was still stronger by far than father's side (*kulumeni*) during his fieldwork."

The prevalence of matrilineality and the role of matrilineal relations generally continued to be crucial, hence, women were not simply against conversion. When viewed against the backdrop of their relations with men, just as is observed of Islam in pre-colonial northern

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[21] KNA/PC/COAST/1/3/94 Digo laws and custom (1915-1916), pg. 3-5
[22] KNA/PC/COAST/1/3/94 Digo laws and custom (1915-1916), pg. 3

Mozambique, it is the status of women that remained unchallenged to a greater degree compared with that of men (Bonate 2006: 143). Furthermore, since the matrilineal ideology prevailed, Islam just formed a new avenue for women to access resources such as land and support from kin when need arose. For example, one of my elderly woman informants explained that:

> Your father (*baba*) could not be like your mother's brother (*mdzomba*) or your brother (*mwenehu*), each of them occupied his own position. So you would get help from either of them, when you don't get help from one, you go look for it from another. You see this land I was given by my mother. But initially it was not hers, she was given by *adzomba* because it was their responsibility to take care of her when my mother's mother died.

Another woman argued: "when you just knew your father exists but he is like not there, you just feel ok with your mother (*mayo*) and siblings (*enehu*)." This woman's assertion was based on the fact that her father did not have land of his own and they lived on piece of land 'borrowed' from her mother's brother. Indeed, as Bonate (2006) holds for Mozambique, matrilineality remained one of the main features of Islam among the Digo, with a gendered component. Relations between men and women informed the particular kinship performances embraced by men and women. It is within this context that colonial administration was established.

Islam and the Colonial era: gender and kinship dynamics/fluidity

Islam is believed to have spread widely and taken 'proper shape' among the Digo during the colonial time, with numbers increasing steadily for both men and women in the early decades of the twentieth century (Sperling 1988, 2000). Scholars argue that colonialism provided the incentive to convert: on the one hand, Digo people disliked colonial education provided through Christian missionary schools, on the other, as I show below, colonial promotion of Islamic laws and the general recognition they accorded Arabs by conferring them social and economic benefits as well as political and educational privileges attracted Digo to Islam (Askew 1999; Mazrui & Shariff 1994; Strobel 1979).

Localization of Islam included a steady increase in construction of Islamic structures such as mosques and *madrasa*, and people embracing everyday aspects of Islamic code such as mode of dress, eating habits, wedding and funeral practices. Overall, the daily existence of Islam became

part of everyday life in Digo households for both men and women through some of its structures, practices and Digo converts (Ng'weno 1997; Sperling 2000).

However, the interaction between Digo custom, Islam and colonial policies shaped relations and experiences within households, between men and women, and the pattern of household life generally in several fundamental ways at the time. As Phiri (1983) and Peters (1997b) argue for Malawi, British colonial policies and Islamic ideologies favoured patrilineal principles of organization against the native custom based on matrilineal organization. But this did not 'kill' matrilineal organization nor women's status in Africa's matrilineal societies. As I show in the following discussion, the colonial attempts to control both Islamic and Digo aspects of life contributed to the survival of matrilineal relations in complex ways as they provided space for women to continue accessing resources and assume responsibilities conceived as male. Of significance here are colonial policies with regard to land and inheritance, the introduction of hut tax and the abolition of the slave trade.

'Stealing kin-land': the colonial land project and shoring up matrilineality

The complexities of kin-land relations between men and women can be traced to the Anglo-Germany agreement of 1886, which led to the creation of *Mwambao* (the ten mile strip of coastal land extending from Kipini in the north to the Ruvuma river in the south). The creation of *Mwambao* contradicted the flexible structure under which access and use of land previously occurred, especially in the matrilineal sense. Notably, this colonial project pushed many people in the interior of the coastal hinterland out of their land, deprived them of rights to their land, and gave the British and the Sultan of Zanzibar rights to control the coastal strip (Kanyinga 2000; Okoth-Ogendo 1991). The Digo speak of *Mwambao* as their "stolen" ancestral land (often spoken of interchangeably as *kaya* and *fuko* land) by the colonial (*m'beberu*) government, and many people were neither happy nor comfortable to speak about it. Of course, tension and emotive expression of matters concerning Mwambao, and land generally, have prevailed in the coastal region of Kenya since the colonial period and have been widely documented (see for example Cooper 1980; Kanyinga 2000; Okoth-Ogendo 1991). Today, people charge post-independence governments with the 'stealing' of Mwambao since, they argue, the post-independence state has never taken up the responsibility to fully settle the issues of land in the coastal part of Kenya.

Actually, land disputes in the coast of Kenya have since become a political tool that politicians, including presidential candidates usually use to woo votes in the Kenya coast (Kanyinga 2000).

Yet the tension concerning Mwambao in Kenya South Coast is not simply about the 'stolen' land *per se*, but also about, to use Peters' words in her analysis of matrilineality in Malawi, "the play between matrilineality and gender relations" (1997b: 191). For the Digo, 'stealing' of land was/is concerned with reverence toward ancestors, and with the conception that Digo land traditionally belonged to God (*Mlungu*), and everyone (both Digo men and women) was free to use or share it as was the case during the pre-colonial period when land was perceived as neither held individually nor communally - it just lay there for the ancestors to use, it was ancestral land for every Digo. Just as McIntosh argues of the Giriama, "the implication is that the [Digo] (and other Mijikenda) are the proper owners of coastal lands by virtue of precedent and, … God's will. God is said to have intended the coastal land for the Mijikenda" (McIntosh 2009a: 65).

This land ideology not only made agricultural practices such as shifting cultivation possible, but was also one through which matrilineality was exercised through relations of men and women. As I have noted, kinship was about activities and performances of men and women especially with regards to dynamics of land use and agricultural activities. Indeed, ownership and commercial value of land was a foreign concept among the Digo and obstructed their relational aspect of life.

Ultimately, the establishment of colonial laws to regulate appropriation of land by the British and allocation of freehold titles to Arabs and Swahili and European settlers in order to litigate land use and ownership further complicated the Digo ideologies of kin-land relations and its use. These laws, for example, the Lands Regulations of 1897 and later the East Africa (Lands) Order-in-Council of 1901 and the Crown Ordinance of 1902 assumed that "the relations of local communities to land did not carry the notion of individual title and that their rights to land were confined only to occupation, cultivation and grazing" (Kanyinga 2000: 36; Sorrenson 1968). Any land that the natives had "vacated" or "deserted" – as far as the British administration was concerned - was considered "waste" and "unoccupied", and was therefore "appropriated for the Crown by the virtue of the Crown's right to the protectorate" (Kanyinga 2000:36). The Crown gave the "waste" and "unoccupied" land to settlers (Kanyinga 2000:37).

This was followed by yet another Ordinance that further 'stole' Digo ancestral land, the Crowns Lands Ordinance of 1915. This Ordinance increased demand for more land as it "gave the settlers leases of nine hundred and ninety-nine years and some form of autonomy from the state", and "redefined Crown Lands to include land occupied by the natives and all that had been "reserved" by the governor for their use" (Kanyinga 2000:37). It is within this context that the Digo reserve was setup in 1914-15 and Digo peoples were not allowed to seek ownership of any land outside the Digo reserve. Certainly, these regulations took away the rights of the Digo to access land and vested them in the Crown, creating a phenomenon where Digo became, to use Okoth-Ogendo (1991) phrase, "tenants of the Crown".

Clearly, the colonial regulation of land set the stage for major consequences for the Digo with regard to access and the structure of access to land, land-use and the associated relations. For instance, the assumption of 'waste' and 'unoccupied' land ignored the fact that according to the natives, "all land was occupied" (Kanyinga 2000:38) in spite of "exigencies of situations such as warfare and temporary abandonments due to land use systems" (Mbithi and Barnes 1975 cited in Kanyinga 2000:38). For the case of the Digo, much of their cultivation land which was usually left fallow during shifting cultivation and some of their *makaya* formed part of the "waste" and "unoccupied" land and were distributed to settlers for "capitalist development" (Cooper 1992: 217)[23]. As such, the Ordinances generally created squatters and landless natives (Cooper 1980; Kanyinga 2000), and "limited the availability of land with a secure tenure, preventing acquisition of land through clearance" (Ng'weno 1997:65) which in turn affected kin relations among men and women.

For example, considering the growing significance of agriculture especially for cultivation of cash crops to provide means with which to enter the market economy, to purchase essential necessities and support the growing population, the demand for land grew among men and women. As land became an even more coveted resource, land disputes became inevitable. To make matters worse, colonial distinction between "natives" and "non-natives" complicated the way Digo accessed or related to the available land (Ng'weno 2001: 121). For instance, laws concerning land

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[23] Today, these are still a focal point for disputes between Digo, and the post-independence government and the present occupiers who include large corporations such as KISCOL (Kwale International Sugar Company Limited) and Base Titanium.

and property were distinguished as native custom (performed under local native councils of elders), Mohammedan/Muslim laws (under the jurisdiction of Islamic governors, that is, *Liwali* and *Mudir*) and colonial state laws (under the colonial state courts). In the light of this, the Digo were subjected to the local native councils of elders and the District Court, while the Muslims of the coastal belt were under the *Liwali* and *Mudir* (Ng'weno 2001: 121). Indeed, this distinction discriminated against the Digo, but as I show shortly, matrilineally informed performances of elders and the fluid nature of identities amongst the Digo complicated the whole land story.

Actually, the "native" ideology triggered retaining of *ngambi* in the second decade of the twentieth century in order to assist with local administration of the villages, including managing Digo matters such as land, inheritance and marriage, and collection of taxes as shown below[24]. On consultation with the elders, the British agreed that Digo native custom (customary law) should be followed on all matters concerning the Digo including marriage, inheritance and burials.[25] Importantly, engaging elders was specifically crucial for continuity of matrilineality since, as I have argued above, *ngambi* members acted not simply as elders, but also as heads of matrilineages and homesteads, especially in their positions as mother's brothers. Based on this, their application of Digo native custom was largely informed by matrilineal ideologies and practices. For instance, some archival documents I obtained from the Kenya National Archives showed a particular marriage case on payment of bride-wealth where elders upheld bride-wealth to be paid or returned by mother's brother. Matrilineal-based ruling applied to burials and initiation rituals as well[26]. On matters of land, *ngambi* acted not simply as 'agents' of the colonial administration, but occupied their proper roles as the managers of land within their lineages and homesteads, albeit with limited options - clearing of land was already curtailed by colonial land policies, and reserves complicated the structure of access to land because the underlying British goal was "individual families rather than kinship…as an important medium of acquiring land" (Okoth-Ogendo 1976 cited in Kanyinga 2000:38). As noted earlier, dispersion from the *kaya* had already set pace for complexities in the way *ngambi* exercised its authority over people's movement to and occupation of land.

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[24] See KNA/PC/COAST/1/3/94, Digo laws and custom, 1915-1916
[25] Ibid.
[26] KNA/PC/COAST/1/13/26, People taken by Mwakuojala of Sirira, 1914; KNA/PC/COAST/1/1/99, Political Record Book, 1915-1925

Nevertheless, as kinsmen, elders facilitated the kinship terms through which land was accessed and transmitted among women and men.

However, the fluid identity of the Digo as both Muslims and Digo made the colonial native ideology a basis for endless negotiation and contestations over land and property inheritance for the rest of the colonial period, and contributed to the conditions that were to shape the future kinship performances of men and women in Kenya South Coast. For instance, ideas surrounding *fuko* land could not be settled locally by elders because there were those Digo who claimed to be Muslims and demanded that land should be shared on Islamic grounds, against the matrilineal inheritance custom. Contestations were cushioned with contradictions of who the native actually was, as men and women struggled over who could inherit or not. The complexity of this situation is evident in the ensuing drama of cases that moved from the native councils of elders to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, with varied rulings at each level - some courts favoured Digo matrilineal inheritance (sister's sons and daughters inheritance) while others upheld Islam's patrilineal inheritance (specifically by sons) (see for example Ng'weno 1997 and 2001). In one particular case, for example, a man contested inheritance by his father's sister's children by challenging in court "whether the estate of a deceased member of the Wa-Digo tribe, who was a Mahommedan, descends in accordance with Mahommedan law or in accordance with the customary law of the Wa-Digo tribe" (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya 1931:30 cited in Ng'weno 2001:119). In the native court (council of elders) and the Court of Appeal, the case was ruled in favour of matrilineal inheritance according to Digo native custom where both sister's sons and daughters inherited from their mother's brothers. Dissatisfied by the ruling of the council of elders and the Court of Appeal, the man moved to the Supreme Court where Islamic law was applied and the court upheld patrilineal inheritance through fathers (Ng'weno 1997; 2001)[27].

While many land disputes at the time were of this nature due to the ambiguities of legal pluralism, it may also be correct to suggest that gender relations and ideologies closely related to matrilineality formed a significant part of the cause of legal pluralism. Gendered matrilineal relations and ideologies actually shaped the whole drama, since the colonial native ideology privileged males and obscured women and their agency, and rulings that favoured patrilineal

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[27] See Ng'weno 2001 for a detailed analysis of land disputes and the dynamics of the different court rulings.

inheritance were based on such patriarchal assumptions. As one of my informants described the situation, "men [who] were interested in living Islam as men" found a potential environment to exercise their patriarchal mandate of assuming that only men but not women needed to keep and pass on land. Although this was a patrifocal project and not necessarily a complete shift to patrilineality, the persistent scope for the survival of matrilineal relations through gendered ideologies and performances of inheritance must not be underestimated.

This scope is also demonstrated by the continued relationship with mother's side (*kuchetuni*) in other instances such as position of eldership held by the appellant's grandfather mentioned above, a position which he inherited from his mother's side and which remained hereditary by *fuko* (Ng'weno 2001:120). Such examples suggest that the ambiguity and flexibility of Digo kinship was significantly based on the importance of gender relations tied to kinswomen. Colonialism and Islam rather amplified this phenomenon, with matrilineality taking on a centre-stage role rather than a marginal one, especially because of gender implications propagated by patriarchal colonial policies.

Unable to fix the ensuing disputes over land and inheritance, the colonial government chose to implement policies they believed would "regularize inheritance" and address land disputes (Ng'weno 2001:122), for example, the Swynnerton Plan of 1954 effected by the colonial government through the Native Land Tenure Rules of 1956 and the Native Lands Registration Ordinance of 1959 (Ng'weno 2001:121). The logic behind the Swynnerton Plan was to privatize property rights in land through "consolidating of individual holdings and then registering them as freeholds" in order to "allow every owner freehold title" (Kanyinga 2000:8, 44; Ng'weno 2001:121; Okoth-Ogendo 1991:69). The process turned native reserves including those classified as Digo reserves into private and trust lands. Unfortunately, as I show below, these policies favoured privatization of land by men over women, and amplified the ideology of stealing *fuko* land. However, they triggered the formation of strategies by women to acquire or access land and other resources through different relationships as daughters, as sisters, as spouses, as mothers and as individuals (Ng'weno 2001; 1997; see also Chapters 3 and 5). More so, colonial engagements with the Digo through Eurocentric patriarchal policies, spiced up with Islamic patriarchal ideologies and practices, did not tarnish or destroy matrilineality. Rather, this set forth a stage for

a complex socio-economic landscape that informed the way women performed their everyday lives, at least in matrilineal ways.

Men, Women and the patriarchal ideals of colonialism and Islam

Alongside the introduction of land policies was hut-tax policies. These policies were based on assumptions of a nuclear family (in the Western sense) headed by a man. Therefore, the imposition of hut tax was intended to compel African men to work in European estates and commercial firms. Among the Digo, elders were mandated to collect taxes from the heads of households, as well as recruitment of men in the villages to work in the plantations or as porters in the European commercial firms. This forced people to organize themselves as households rather than homesteads, probably because the charges were too high to be afforded by one homestead head (the mother's brother). However, unlike many parts of the country, and in Africa more broadly where colonial administrations seem to have succeeded in obtaining male labour this way, Digo men resisted working for the Europeans, and many of them escaped through client-patronage networks (especially those of *adzomba*) to Mombasa or Muslim commercial plantations where they squatted or worked for the Swahili and Arabs. Others capitalized on credit from *tajiri*s (wealthy Muslim men especially of Arab and Swahili ethnicities) to pay taxes. There were also those men who remained in the villages and survived under provisions by women (Willis 1993). In his brilliant account on Mijikenda identities at Kenya Coast, Justin Willis writes on "why the natives would not work" and argues that the colonial government was troubled by the unsuccessful attempts to mobilize male labour because thousands of men depended on women, who despite "scratching the soil with a tiny hoe or digging stick."[28], produced enough to feed their households and exercised considerable autonomy (Willis 1993:82; see also Gerlach 1960, Gillette 1978).

Indeed, the latter observation was at odds with the colonial and Islam ideologies of the patriarchal household: nuclear male-headed family ideology with a male provider and women dependents. In Islamic terms, the conception of *uungwana*[29], borrowed from the coastal Swahili

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[28] KNA/PC/COAST/1/1/96, Letter by Mr. Hobley, Provincial Commissioner to District Commissioner, Nyika on 17/01/1916.

[29] *Uungwana* was used to refer to, rather loosely, 'civilization', specifically when relating Digo and Swahili cultures. The conception of *uungwana* is "based on the establishment of high social status by demonstrating free birth [not slave] and adherence to Islam" (Oendo 1987:47).

Islamic culture, implied men taking charge of their women's needs and responsibility for their children. Thus men who did not provide or take up responsibilities as men or heads of households would be viewed as non-Islamic and treating their wives as slaves (*atumwa*, singular. *mtumwa*). For instance, kinsmen were "obliged to support and help a woman secure a divorce" when their husbands mistreated them, that is, treated them as *atumwa* (Oendo 1987:58, 1988). For women, *uungwana* meant freedom from work, for example, doing less hard chores such as cultivation and having leisure time for oneself to attend to looks/beauty (*urembo*), and for other activities such as attendance to weddings, depending meanwhile on husbands for sustenance and for financing women's affairs such as new clothes for attending weddings, funerals and village women dance groups (*ngoma*) (Ng'weno 1997:68; Oendo 1988). Thus a woman engaging in activities considered hard work to support the household of a man was extremely against *uungwana*.

Clearly, therefore, *uungwana* was largely a patriarchal ideology of 'maintaining' women in a perceived Islamic way of life. It is on this basis that some scholars hold that *uungwana* formed part of the push factors for women's conversion to Islam (especially during the colonial period when Islamic laws of inheritance were promoted by the British administration), and fostered the development of women's economic dependence on men (Ng'weno 1997; Wamahiu 1988). Yet the conundrums of declining trade and forced labour under the colonial administration posed a challenge to sustaining *uungwana* status by men, especially due to economic constraints.

It is not surprising, then, that women assumed household provisioning roles and other responsibilities that were considered 'male'; hence the colonialists' questions about men who would not work and depended on women. Women also continued to participate in women's dance groups despite lack of male financing (Oendo 1988). Thus, it seems *uungwana* did not inform women's dependency on men. Rather it provided them space to assume those responsibilities largely perceived as male such as household provisioning (see Chapter 3). Although, looking back to pre-colonial history, these responsibilities were not new to women - women supported the *kaya* society through their agricultural and health activities. As I argue here - and as we shall see in the rest of the dissertation – the undertaking of everyday household responsibilities by women, including providing for households, were/are performances of kin relationship.

The male-centred conception of households also formed the colonial discourses on whether women would be allowed to 'keep' and own huts, which suggests (as highlighted earlier) that women already maintained their own households[30]. While there exists no clear information on how taxes were collected from women's huts, colonial records indicate that consultation with elders (who were the heads of lineages and homesteads at the same time) upheld that women could not have 'absolute ownership of huts[31]. This was interpreted by colonial administration through patriarchal eyes as lack of entitlement to own or manage a household. Of course even when Islamic laws of ownership and inheritance applied, the colonial administration generally interpreted this to mean men (sons) "at the expense of other Koranic sharers, including daughters" and women generally (Gerlach and Gerlach 1988:122). Thus, male-centric colonial interpretation of women's huts obscured what was actually happening with regards to women's huts and taxes. For example, colonialists paid little attention to the fact that kinsmen supported women, for example, by providing them land in the event of marital breakdown as members of matrikin groups. But this support did not mean that men took complete charge of women's households. As Peters (1997a: 134) comments in her discussion of matrilineality in Malawi, the history of matrilineality especially with regards to women was largely "misconceived, misrepresented and derogated" by colonialists, especially because it was perceived as "unnatural" (ibid). Indeed, British colonial administrators were 'puzzled' by the autonomy enjoyed by Digo women due to matrilineal organization, and considered it 'harmful' to progressive development (Gillette 1978) hence the assumption applied to women's huts – that men must have been the owners and in charge. Therefore, to understand the relationship between huts and women would only be possible if, as Peters argues, "set against a plethora of other acts, practices and interpretations that are situated in particular time-space relations" (Peters 1997a:140). Hence, at least for the elders, it is very likely that their proposition about ownership of huts by women was informed by the prevailing matrilineal ideology of women's support by matrikin, which did not simply mean lack of ownership *per se* of huts by women as the colonial administration's interpretation implies.

Actually, as the colonial government extended its influence, women's bargaining power to access resources increased. For instance, within the context of *talaka* (Islamic divorce law),

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[30] See KNA/ADM/112/3/2/30
[31] Ibid

women could divorce on grounds of lack of support or *uungwana* from their husbands, and seek support from their fathers and mothers to set up their own households (in the Islamic sense of parent-child relations) - in addition to support from their kinsmen and women (in the matrilineal sense). Gerlach (1960) points out that both Islam and colonial administration provided a fertile ground for both father's side (*kulumeni*) and mother's side (*kuchetuni*) to exist as mutual networks of support and social security, especially for women (Gerlach and Gerlach 1988). In other words, patriarchal colonial policies and Islamic ideals broadened avenues for gendered forms of kinship performances. This was also true for the abolition of slave trade and pawning as discussed below.

The Abolition of the slave trade and pawning

The British colonial government abolished the slave trade and outlawed pawning in the first decade of the twentieth century. This brought to an end the practice of indenturing of children and women by male matrikin to settle debts, handing them over in times of famine for exchange with food, or as compensation for murder (blood-money, *kore*). This happened at a time when the British were also seeking soldiers among the Digo to fight against the Germans in neighbouring Tanzania. Contrary to matrilineal arrangements of authority, the colonial government required fathers and not mother's brothers to send their sons to participate in war (Ng'weno 1997:69). Scholars argue that this colonial development not only challenged, but also ended *mdzomba*'s authority and matrilineal practices such as inheritance because, for instance, pawning and blood-money formed a significant basis for matrikin to claim inheritance from mother's brother. Therefore, the colonial administration's abolishing of pawning and blood-money cut off the relations that sustained matrilineal inheritance (Gerlach 1960:23). Consequently, we are told, father's authority replaced that of *mdzomba* (Ng'weno 1997), hence the shift toward patrifocality and patriliny (Gerlach 1960).

Inevitably, it cannot be denied that colonialism and Islam affected conceptions of the household and relations between kinsmen and kinswomen. However, to regard this as a complete shift towards patrifocality or patriliny is an overemphasis, because as focus shifted to fathers, what changed was not necessarily how people lived or performed their kinship but people's relations with regards to domestic affairs. Relations between men and women still remained the focal point through which matrilineality was expressed, with women the centre stage. For instance, in their

reflections on the events of the First World War, two elderly men in their late eighties, referred to fathers sending out sons to war as "the kind of problems brought by Islam in those times". According to one of these elderly men, "Islam confused people. A father would send his sons to war because of Islam, but not his *adzomba* (sister's sons) because the love between *adzomba* (collectively meaning mother's brother, sister's sons and sister's daughters) was very strong, even our traditions could not allow that and the colonialist (*m'beberu*) went by this tradition." In other words, children were still conceived as belonging to their mother's matrikin group and the colonial administration, as the example suggests, indirectly upheld matrilineal ideologies and practices rather than tampering with them. Furthermore, as I have shown above, Digo lives were imbued with both Islam and Digo ideologies, and interpretations and conceptions of Islam and Digo practices operated alongside each other in complex ways, sometimes in conflict and sometimes interconnected (Gerlach 1960; Ng'weno 2001).

In summary, colonialism and Islam complicated gender relations through their patriarchal ideals, hence the complexities and confusion where performances were kinship-based. Indeed, colonial policies and Islam ideologies foregrounded the notion that certain men (particularly fathers) should be the 'front'. And as gender relations and ideologies were defined and redrawn, such patriarchal ideals complicated the way kinship was performed setting a precedent for decades of contestation, negotiation and renegotiation of kinship. Yet these complexities safeguarded survival and continuity of the matrilineal ideology within gendered terms that clearly favoured women's position, still within patriarchal processes, and this is still the case today. As we shall see below, the immediate post-independence state addressed matters of land through patriarchal ideals clothed in a state's language of citizenship, with a gradual shift from the state's economic development focused on land to a specific focus on women as citizens in their households and the community. Before I discuss the post-colonial state and its conception of development through the lens of women and households, I begin the next section with a discussion on the colonial patriarchal ideals on land that were inherited by the post-independence state but effected by the state as a gendered 'citizenship project'.

Post-independence period and the question of gendered kin

When Kenya gained independence in 1963, it did not heal the wounds of the sharp contestations over land carved so deeply by the patriarchal colonial policies and Islam. Part of the colonial policies inherited by the independent state was the Swynnerton Plan that the state was keen to continue effecting in order to regularize inheritance. Yet key to this was the need for transformation of agricultural production to grow the country's economy. Indeed, land policies (for example, the Registration Act of 1963) underscored colonial patriarchal and agrarian ideals such as of Swynnerton – that private registration of title to land would improve agricultural productivity (Ng'weno 2001; Okoth-Ogendo 1991). But for the independence state, these were implemented as some sort of citizenship projects that it was hoped would help build the country's economy. For instance, during the first Jamhuri Day celebrations (the day that marks Kenya's independence from Britain) in 1964, President Jomo Kenyatta's speech, popularly known as "Back to the Land" called upon citizens to embrace land as the "greatest asset in Kenya" as well as "salvation and survival" of the country's economy. According to President Kenyatta and his associates, this was possible if citizens' land was consolidated, registered and put to "maximum production" (Mutongi 2007: 163–164). Of course, the language of citizenship used by the independent state and its politicians was intended to encourage people to labour on their lands voluntarily, since the state demonstrated that they were no longer subjects as they had been under British rule. However, this political rhetoric did not last for long as leaders did not keep their promises and progressively disenfranchised the citizens, especially women by allowing patriarchal factors to challenge land ownership (Mutongi 2007: 164, 166).

In Kenya South Coast, the process of land registration and adjudication happened in 1974-1975. Yet, just as in other parts of Kenya where these policies were rolled out (see for example Mutongi 2007; and Shipton 1992 for Western Kenya), land disputes continued especially because the already existing Digo notions of ownership of land and the associated relations still differed from privatization of land by individuals and the notion of citizenship ("land-subject relations") promoted by the independent state (Ng'weno 2001:124). Particularly, the newly implemented land policies favoured men rather than women in obtaining titles for land. As Kenda Mutongi (2007) demonstrates for widows in Western Kenya, the language of citizenship and production used in land consolidation and registration at the time deprived women of their rights of access and

ownership of land because men used patriarchal means such as bribes and position in the household or society to 'steal' land from women (by registering it under male names). According to my elderly informants who stressed that they "saw these government's policies/project with our own eyes", the state turned people against each other: "brothers against their brothers and sisters". Other informants remembered how men would challenge women on the basis that their national identification cards showed the names of their fathers or husbands, who, they said would look after them, and hence would pursue the 'stealing' of women's land through registration. This resonates with Ng'weno's observation that "brothers were able to register land under their own names, without their sisters' names" (2001:123).

However, since most land - especially *fuko* land - was held in common among the Digo, registration of land was a basis for controversy. During my fieldwork, many people still talked of *fuko* land as common property for the particular *fuko* and were hostile to the idea of individuals obtaining titles. Moreover, several conversations with men and women, village elders and some government officials confirmed that a considerable amount of land is still titled under the first registration of the 1970s and has not been demarcated. Any such attempt to demarcate or sell such land is always met with conflicts and protests from the people. For instance, a recent call during my fieldwork by the Kwale County Governor for people to obtain titles as a channel to ending land disputes did not succeed because it faced many objections from the people who held the call to be an attempt by the government and certain men to steal land from the people, especially women.

As interesting as these points may be, the sense of insecurity expressed by the people does not concern land *per se*, but the fact that Digo peoples express their kinship and social relations through gender relations including those relating to land. Important to note is that colonial period reinforced the way land had increasingly become one of the focal points through which kin relationships came to be understood, performed, experienced and maintained by relationships of men and women. As mentioned earlier, when people cleared land that later came to be classified as *fuko* vs *mbari* land, and *konho* vs *dzumbe*, it was the relationship expressed through these land categories, rather than land itself, that mattered most to the Digo, because it was in this way that access to resources (both material and immaterial) was assured and maintained, especially for women. Specifically, effects of Islam, colonial and post-colonial policies threatened these

relationships and reinforced them at the same time. For instance, the legal provision for registration of private property in the agrarian land laws inherited from the colonial government challenged notions of clan land, because, as I have mentioned, individual registration was conceived as stealing, especially by kinsmen from kinswomen (Ng'weno 2001). As a result, women pushed to obtain common titles for such land, which ensured they remained part of the landholders as they had been under the case with the matrilineal customary practice[32]. This is unlike the case in many parts of Kenya where for many decades women have had limited or no access to land under customary practices (see Kameri-Mbote 2006; Mitulla 2002; Mutongi 2007; Shipton 1992)[33].

Meanwhile, since women already owned their self-acquired land (*konho*), registration of *konho* by women remained as an addition to the land they already held in common. Both landholdings were understood and upheld more in matrilineal sense than as a state law requirement. According to Ng'weno (2001:130) 28 percent of people whose titles were issued in 1974-1975 in Tiwi of Kenya South Coast were women. At the time of writing, she also reported that Kenya South Coast had the highest percentage (30 per cent) of women under whose names land had been registered. The situation remains the same today, particularly because Digo women's access to land was further broadened by the amendment of the Succession Act of 1981 in 1991 that allowed application of Islamic law in Kadhi's courts on matters of inheritance among Muslims, hence provided a window for women to have further rights to land as daughters and as spouses. The Kenya Constitution of 2010 has also reinforced this picture by including a provision for women to own, inherit, manage and dispose of land and property. In Msambweni, women's articulation of legal statutes is not uncommon. In 2015 I overheard a conversation among some women during a wedding event I attended, in which one woman told her friends that she dismissed her father's brother's claim when he insulted her as a "restless woman" because she reported him to the village chairman for "interfering" with her land inherited from her father. The speaker's claims were informed by the legal standing that women seemed to enjoy: "it's better he just talked, if he did anything he would know the law is looking after women nowadays." One of her friends chimed in, "even *kisharia* (Islamic law) would shame him. He should swallow the bitter truth." Another woman added, "if I were the one, there is nothing he would tell me. Men need to know

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[32] Ng'weno (2001) observed that "80 percent of women … who … registered title to land hold it in common" (p.129).
[33] However, Digo women's access to land through matrilineal customary practices cannot obscure the fact that women are generally subordinate holders of land in Kenya (see Musangi 2017).

that women have their respect with their property, whether in *Chidigo* (Digo tradition), *kisharia* (Islamic law) or *kiserikali* (state law)." Further, the Matrimonial Property Act of 2013 also includes a stipulation for protection of women's rights to property in case of a divorce – although in practice rights to husband's property are problematic in Msambweni.

Therefore, as with the colonial policies, the post-independence patriarchal-based policies broadened the extent to which matrilineal ideologies and practices made women's access to resources through kin relations possible. This too happened regardless of the complex ways legal statutes continued to interact in the everyday politics of land and property relations. Oendo (1988) notes that brothers and sisters inherited land equally despite "the lesser percentage stipulated for women under Islamic law"; this is viewed by the Digo as informed by their matrilineal inheritance ideologies based on relations between kinsmen and kinswomen (see also Ng'weno 2001). Oral narratives from my fieldwork also indicate that distribution of resources (especially land) was largely conceived through matrilineal ideologies of kin relationships in gendered terms. One of my informants explained that she obtained her land from her mother who inherited from her mother's brother. Being clan land, the land was registered as common property and just as was the case for herself and her siblings, she held that all of her children (male and female) had equal access to and share of the land and the trees. It is important to note, however, that the understanding of 'equal' did not simply capture quantity, but also the reinforcement of the significance of kin relationships as clan members. Thus, access to matrilineal resources such as land was viewed in matrilineal terms as equal for both men and women. Apparently, the Islamic stipulation of a lesser share of property by women challenged this very notion, and, as I show in Chapter 3, provided a basis for women's strategies in making numerous claims over resources, including land and money as a form of kin-based support from matrikin and others. More revealing about the state, women and kin relations was the state's shift in development focus that targeted women through women's organisations and groups, and the emergent state's paternal conception about women and households.

Woman citizen, woman kin: state, women and matrikin relations

From the 1960s onwards, the state defined the idea of the country's development through the eyes of women in what they termed self-help projects through the popular state *harambee* ('pull

together') ideology. The state emphasized mutual support where cooperation among citizens (with emphasis on women), it was hoped, would help build the country's economy. As Sian Lazar (2004) observes in Bolivia, the paternalistic "citizenship projects" introduced by the Kenya post-independence state attempted to "modify the ways in which individuals [particularly women] act[ed] as economic agents" broadly for the sake of state development (Lazar 2004: 301). As a crucial 'citizenship project', organisation of and by women was emphasized as a state's "development fora" (Udvardy 1998: 1750). Women across the country were encouraged to organize themselves in solidarity groups (such as those under Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO, 'Progress for Women'))[34] which they would then register with the government, their provider. Yet through these groups, women set up activities such as making and selling of handcrafts as a means to contribute both to their households and to community projects such as the building of schools (Mutongi 2007:166). Of course, for the Kenya state, women's organizing was about doing what the government directed, that is taking charge of collaboration through which, to use Lazar words, women were made "active citizens who will take responsibility for their own and their families' welfare" (Lazar 2004:302) as well as contributing to state building projects within the spirit of *harambee*. It is not surprising then that MYWO was eventually co-opted by the political elite in order to control women's participation in the male political and economic space.

In the coastal part of Kenya, women's dance groups (*ngoma*) - which were traditionally ritual, recreational and solidarity groups - were subjected to registration as part of the state's women's self-help development project (McComark, Walsh and Nelson 1986). Because the government was keen to oversee and involve women in raising the living standards of their households and communities, grants were made available to women's groups by the state. In addition to women's *ngoma*, women increasingly formed numerous groups where they collaborated in different activities (including those not concerned with generation of income) ranging from agricultural to off-farm and household and political activities and with support from the state (Oendo 1988; Wipper 1975).

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[34] Established by the colonial government in 1952 to "advance women's education and consciousness" and raise their living standards including political participation (Nzomo 1997; Wipper 1971, 1975).

What must not be overlooked, however, is that despite the patriarchal and paternalistic lens through which the state perceived women and their participation in its development agenda and their households, this did facilitate ways and reasons for women to remain in the groups, even when resources for the groups, such as cash contributions became difficult to raise. For example, women turned to the state and non-governmental organizations for material/financial support (McCormack et al. 1986) and as members of solidarity groups, women constructed mutual support, which cemented social ties, as they collaborated on both financial and non-financial matters such as providing labour during weddings, agricultural activities and other important occasions (Oendo 1988). Additionally, others have observed that since *purdah* (the Islamic practice of keeping women from interacting with men or strangers, especially in public spaces) was not enforced at the time, women's groups provided women with an economic space with some considerable independence away from husbands and kinsmen (McCormack et al. 1986: 62–63).

Therefore, women's groups were not just a 'development forum', they were imbued with significant gender dimension and provided space for discussion and negotiation of kin relations and status. Furthermore, considering the patriarchal Islamic ideology of *uungwana* still alive among men and women at the time, women's groups affected relations between men and women in several fundamental ways (Eastman 1984; Strobel 1979). A good example is the spirit of economic contribution to the household openly promoted through women's groups. Men found this unappealing and would not agree to their wives or sisters joining such groups as they were perceived to take on "economic projects which are traditionally the preserve of men." Other men were concerned that they would be seen as treating women as slaves (*atumwa*) if women openly assumed household economic responsibilities (Oendo 1988:81). To make matters worse, because women's groups required financing to perform their activities, men's lack of funds to support women was a potential incentive for male distaste for women's groups, because these challenged their *uungwana* status and caused tensions within households (Oendo 1988). Yet for many women, these groups were not simply about the household or women, or who contributed to the household economy or not. I suggest that women's groups became a central environment for investing in matrilineality in different ways, whether in the form of a matrifocal centred membership, of material or immaterial support from/to matrikin or inheriting assets of a deceased kinswoman. Indeed, household responsibilities assumed by women were enacted as kin relations rather than

performance of socially defined roles for women, for example, as citizens or mothers, or for development's sake *per se*, or simply because women had found resources. For by bringing in women's labour to make dough for 'mandazi' (doughnuts) at a wedding of a kin member, a woman remained united with her kin, assured that she offered support to such occasions as a kinswoman.

Kinship was also reflected in the way group membership was constituted - members comprised mainly kinswomen and centred especially on matrifocality including women who managed their own households even as co-wives (McCormack et al. 1986; Oendo 1988). Moreover, distribution of a deceased woman's assets as a member of a particular group followed a matrilineal ideology. Thus, in the event of death, a woman's matrikin, especially her daughters, inherited a share of assets a woman had accrued during her membership period, and that women contested any attempt by 'improper' heirs such as husbands to seek a share of such assets (Oendo 1988:73).

Women's groups still exist today among the Digo women, although their form transformed especially after the 1980s' economic crisis that led to structural development programmes. Women groups began to operate, this time, informed by the development ideology focused on microcredit institutions, still aimed particularly at women. A similar phenomenon happened in many parts of the world (see for example Christensen 2008; Elyachar 2005; Lazar 2004; Mayoux 2001). But Digo women have continued to access grants and other forms of support for women offered by the government. There is dearth of literature on women's groups and micro-credit schemes (*miradi ya mikopo*) in Kenya South Coast. However, as observed elsewhere (e.g. Lazar 2004) and as with women's solidarity groups before introduction of *mikopo* (micro-loans, sing. *mkopo*), it is certain that women's groups operating under *mikopo* were embedded in social and kin relations, although the credit culture involved in *mikopo*-based women's groups under the NGOs' regulations also influenced the way people managed their webs of relations with kin and others. Take, for example, Amina, a woman in her late 60s. She remembered how she almost lost her land to a micro-credit bank when she was unable to repay her loan, and how the tension complicated her relations with her kin, those who were members of the women group and those concerned about the clan land:

> When I took the loan, I saw the money was very little to be unable to repay. But when things did
> not work as I earlier thought, it disturbed my heart a lot. They [the micro-credit bank] said they
> will come to fetch my things or if not that the land. Everyone here in the homestead was very

furious with me, even those who I had offered support with the money like my brother. I talked to one of my *mdzomba* and he didn't know what to say because he didn't have the money… You know here too you can't just sell land because it is for the clan. My sisters also lamented a lot that I put them and other group members in trouble and we disagreed a lot about it. They helped me pay the money in the end to protect the name of our clan… because they are my sisters and there was nothing for me to sell.

In Amina's narrative, *mikopo* based women groups were a potential context for dissent among kin members, but were also a fertile ground to enact and re-enact kin relations - especially those based on matrikin. By disagreeing with her kin members, for instance, Amina's case displays not just the conflicts involved in *mikopo* associations, but also performance of kin relations. Amina could not sell land because it was clan (*fuko*) land. Her sisters were able to offer her support in order to cement clan relations. Additionally, such problems afforded women the opportunity to contribute to household responsibilities as kinswomen, such as paying school fees and mobilizing support for a sister. They even acquired property as clan members: Amina told me that clan members later agreed to have each individual, including women, get a share of their own piece of land. According to Amina, this provided women a considerable scope for independence especially on decisions how to use and transmit land. She said:

I got my share [land] as required in *chidigo* (Digo traditions). But I do not have to ask my *adzomba* or *enehu* what to do with my land. I always wanted to take a loan (*mkopo*) to get a surveyor so that I can have it under my names. It still bears the names of our grandfather [maternal]. But everyone here knows their share. Nobody has problems with another. This one of mine I will pass it on to my children (*anangu*) as I want.

The essential linkage between the state, women and kin relations is also played out in Mariamu's story, but this time with a religious connotation. In her 70's, Mariamu has been a member of the MYWO and several other women solidarity groups for several years. She told me that being a member of these groups has earned her a lot of respect among her kin, both men and women, because in addition to opening avenues for her to access finances and other resources, she has a voice for her *fuko*. In her words, "the government (*serikali*) opened the way for women…I have earned respect for myself. When I tell my *enehu*, let us go this way, they listen to me and say "*mama* (mother), we hear you." Even in this house, my husband (*mlume*) knows I am a leader of my people." When I asked her about male leadership, she explained, "In *Kisharia* (Islamic

tradition), men should be in front. But a man alone cannot fatten. A man must walk here, and a woman here, side by side. When a family problem happens, like those requiring money, you will see my brother here to ask me for help. And we will come together to help one another as a family until we solve the problem. Nobody will say this is a kinswoman. Everyone helps as a family member, whether brother, sister, mother's sister."

Indeed, I observed that kin come together and assist on different matters such as weddings and funerals. But even so, women's participation in income-generating activities has overtime informed the way men and women relate on different matters. Describing her displeasure about her son in-law's behaviour, Asha told me that she suspected her son in-law waited until when he knew she had money from her womens' groups to start problems with Asha's daughter. According to Asha, this became a norm even when her daughter was unwell and her son in-law would ask her to go to her mother to be looked after. But Asha would ask him to help out with the situation. On one instance, I observed her asking him to contribute to her daughter's medical bill when she had complications with her pregnancy and was admitted to hospital. Later, Asha showed me a message on her phone showing that her son in-law sent her some mobile money. As I show in chapter 3, women describe this sort of mutual assistance as collaboration (*kusaidiana*), and conceive it as key to maintaining or breaking household relations between men and women. The notion of *kusaidiana* also displays women's authority and autonomy in their households because they are able to negotiate their position. Similarly, women like Mariamu found space in women groups where they cultivated status and authority.

It was striking that kinship issues were never omitted from the way women talked about their involvement with these groups. During a conversation about her participation in electoral politics, Mariamu told me that the state encouraged women to organize themselves, provided them with funds and asked banks to give money to women. Mariamu took up the opportunity when she joined the local MYWO and also became the organizations chairperson. But according to Mariamu, "the government (*serikali*) and the banks (*benki*) know they are giving us a voice to take responsibilities out there, they tell us they are 'empowering' us, but do not know how this has helped us women when it comes to family matters", that is as kinswomen. Women were able to come together and obtain funds, and they would mobilize other women, as she has been doing, to set up support for themselves, including nominating their fellow women for elective positions. For

Mariamu, such endeavours keep alive "the strengths of their great grandmothers in their respective *fuko*", and also obtain favours from the great grandmothers to reinforce the strength of matriclans. As she put it, "when the state saw it was good to give women the space (*nafasi)* to come together as women, you call your mother and sisters, and reach out to all women to join hands as one family and to give each other strength as one. Things like these make household/clan stand firm." Speaking about the woman they put forward and supported as a candidate, Mariamu said, "She was just a little girl. But we told her to stand firm because that was like standing for her mother and grandmother, and she received all the blessings from them… Although she later decided not to listen to us women (*kina mama*), her name stood well for her clan."

Amina and Mariamu's narratives underline the effects of the state and Islam on matrilineal kinship, particularly how women continue to be central to this. It is a culmination of the demonstration that state and non-state projects have impacted on kin relations between men and women and how women perform and live with matrilineality. Actually, attempts to target women through state and non-state development projects within the context of socio-economic crisis and effects of diseases such as HIV/AIDS have affected the way relations between men and women are perceived and performed, for example on matters of household provisioning and caregiving discussed in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Although some assumptions still persist, they continue to be challenged by the prevailing conditions. Additionally, interaction between Digo traditions and practices, and state and Islam patriarchal ideologies and projects still continue to inform relations of men and women kin, and matrilineal kin relations become located and relocated in women's lives. In short, matrilineal relations are revealed through performances of gendered economic projects of women. In subsequent chapters the ways women become central to matrilineal relations will come into greater focus. I argue that women maintain the liveliness of matrilineal relations in Msambweni through gendered economic performances, despite socio-economic constraints and historical social, religious and state patriarchal pressures on matrilineal organization, and that this provides a considerable range for women's authority and autonomy. To fully understand this, however, it is important first to explain more about the contemporary nature of matrilineal relations, especially with regards to women. For if Digo's past offered space for location and relocation of women in negotiation of kin relations, today women as heads of households capitalize on the complexities associated with matrilineal kin relations to constitute

and fend their households, and as an opportunity to forge access to resources such as land, off-farm income activities and *mradi* in order to survive. I turn now to the ways these complexities are played out in contemporary Msambweni.

Matrilineality and kinswomen in Msambweni today

We have already seen that matrilineal relations have historically been transformed as gender relations get defined and redefined by social, state and Islamic patriarchal projects. Such phenomena persists in the postcolonial era. The contradictions and complexities of matrilineal relations endure, and the significance of matrilineality is reckoned with performances of women in everyday gendered relations and ideologies.

Like other matrilineal communities in Africa (see for example Peters 1997b), the Digo differentiate themselves from people in the neighbouring communities and the rest of Kenya by declaring the different ways they reckon marriage and descent. Digo people say that they emphasise *kuchetuni* (mother's side) and *fuko* (matrilineal clans), and that cross-cousin marriage is allowed, and women can bring men as husbands and lovers (as *ajeni,* sing. *Mjeni,* in-married men) to live with them in their villages or houses if they so wish. One village elder put it that, "our Digo life/matters lean towards women a lot. We are not like other communities. We have *mafuko* (matriclans, sing. *fuko*) which have to do with our *adzomba*, but mostly is about women, the mother's side (*kuchetuni*)".

What is interesting, however, is that people were keen to differentiate the significance of *fuko* and the mother's side from that of the father's side (*kulumeni*) and patrilineal clans (*mbari*), and provided explanations on how important the different kinship ties were, with maternal clan ties perceived as the most important kinship ties (see also Ng'weno 2001). For example, it was not uncommon to hear people say that when you have problems or need support, you first 'run' to your mother or mother's side, or that the mother's side is accorded much respect, etc. The distinction and importance of these ties was described to me by one man as below:

> The side of your mother is a very respectable one. For example, you can marry anyone you
> like. But you cannot marry a person from your *fuko*. That is a person with whom you share
> the same uterus/stomach (*tumbo*). Children of the same mother's line cannot marry or

engage in any sexual relationship. It is still the case for father's line. But it would be more serious if it happened where your mothers are sisters or children belong to the same *fuko*. That is calling problems for people in the mothers' clan because it is like a curse. You must undergo a ritual to cleanse yourselves and the clan. We call it *mapingane*. *Mapingane* is a very serious thing and very shameful to the clan. Because of that, people speak to their children a lot about their relations so that they may know relatives very well and avoid those mistakes.

In another example, the distinction between matrilineal and patrilineal kin ties and the perception about matrilineal ties are revealed in crisis situations. Take, for instance, Bakari, who has been living with his mother and his deceased sister's daughters in a permanent house with corrugated iron roof and electricity. Bakari sometimes travels abroad through networks he made with tourists when he worked along the nearby beach as a beach-boy. I knew Bakari when I visited his mother, and he eagerly chatted with me about the socio-economic transformations happening in Msambweni. One morning, I found Bakari very furious. His mother was sitting very quietly at the verandah. His wife and one of his sister's daughters were watching television inside the house. Bakari spoke to the other of her sister's daughters who emerged from the house. He looked at her and said, "go wherever you like, but today you will bring that child back." I asked Bakari what the matter was and he desperately explained:

> Can you imagine she told me the mother of that boyfriend of her breastfed her child. What's that? How could that happen? It is unbelievable. She goes to local dances all night, leaves the old woman with the child. Now she comes here to tell me that she [the old woman (the boyfriend's mother)] breastfed the child. In *Chidigo*, that is very unacceptable. If it was *mayo* or my sister who did that, it would be better. Maybe we would say they are very close kin.

Although some kin ties in Msambweni are neatly defined and distinguished as the example provided above implies, in practice, many aspects of kin relations become complex and contradictory. I gathered various occasions when clear distinctions and importance became contradictory, and other times collapsed. For example, I would be told that children of sons do not belong to their father's *fuko*, so they had no inheritance entitlement on matrilineal clan land. Yet I encountered several instances where land was transmitted in that manner. People would sometimes

describe *mahunda* (bridewealth) as a responsibility of the father's side, but I gathered several cases where women and their mothers' brothers contributed to *mahunda*.

Of course, the permeability of the various social and legal practices (customary, state, and Islamic) that operate in Msambweni continue to provide context for negotiation of kin relations and responsibilities. Ng'weno (2001:127) has shown that in matters of inheritance, for instance, Islamic practices in both "moral and legal structures" operate alongside and "at odds with Digo notions of clan land", and this defines and redefines the way matters of land and associated relations are performed. She holds that, for example, when land is conceived as self-acquired (either by purchase or clearing of bushes), then it "take[s] on the more individual form of Islamic property holdings that included the possibility of patrilineal inheritance." Yet Digo ideologies of matrilineal inheritance and discourses associated with it equally inform the way such land is distributed, regardless of who acquired it first. For example, just as noted by Oendo (1987:61), brothers view sharing of land equally with their sisters as a way that "allows some property to go to their sister's children, as it would by Digo tradition." Land inherited by sisters is then transferred to their children, especially their daughters, and in that way, land remains in the same fuko. Again, by doing this, land still goes to sister's children as Digo traditions would have it, although through mother's sister (Ng'weno 2001:128).

Similarly, transmission of land in matrilineal terms is further evident in the fact that women are able to acquire land by purchase or clearing too. According to my fieldwork, women transmit this sort of land to their children, both sons and daughters. But in many instances, as is usually the case when they inherited, the preference is usually to transmit land to daughters. Take for example the case of Fatuma.

> Fatuma's mother inherited her land from her mother's brother. She later passed on the land
> to Fatuma and her brothers. Fatuma allocated some part of her land to her daughter where
> she has constructed a house. Her daughter lives with her husband (*mjeni*, in-married man).
> According to Fatuma, her daughter will pass on her land to her children. Fatuma's daughter
> also expects to get a share from her father's land, which her father's father inherited from
> his mother. Fatuma's brothers have planned to allocate their share of land to their children.

When I asked Fatuma why she did not inherit from her father, she said, "my father was a man of many issues (meaning he had many children). He could not give a share to everyone. But even without that, the land belongs to his mother's clan and in *Chidigo*, it is not supposed to work like that." But when I asked why her brothers and daughter's father plan to distribute their mother's land to their children, she explained this as *kisharia* (Islamic tradition): "It is not our mother (*mayo*) who will give land to my brother's children. They [Fatuma's brothers] will give even their girls. As parents, we are allowed in *kisharia* to give our children land. If I wanted and did not have a place, I would have insisted to my father to give me a share. He gave some of my *enehu* (siblings) who were lucky."

But even in situations where land relations are likely to follow a patrilineal nature, that is, by becoming *mashamba ya mbari* (patrilineal clan land), this form is not a continuous one and lasts only a few generations (see Figure 2.4 above and also Ng'weno 1997, 2001). In contemporary Digo society, what would be termed patrilineal inheritance may quickly change its form to some sort of matrilineal/matrifocal inheritance when land passes to women and remains in their hands. The same is true where transmission is from mothers to their children, or mother's brothers to sister's children.

However, the fluidity of land-kin relations forms ground for many disputes. According to the households I watched and the many family histories I collected, disputes over land ensued as generations were born and people needed more fields. According to a government official in the office of lands, disputes over matrilineal clan land became rampant when "land ownership had to be endorsed through registration" as required by the post-colonial governments. This is so because for many people, matrilineal land belongs to *fuko*, and every member of *fuko* has access to *fuko* land. In short, people understand *fuko* land as a collective property and people express their relations through such notion of ownership. Individual claims on such land are not encouraged and as earlier noted, registration of land was perceived as a way of stealing not simply land, but people's relational existence. In the case of women, land registration changes the way women relate to land and the process of transferring land to them. Additionally, given the existence of other legal practices such as customary and Islamic laws, the ideologies of land with regard to women have changed. For instance, women can access or own land as clan members, as sisters or sister's children, as daughters, and even as spouses.

The competing fluid perceptions of kinship ties are also revealed in marriage discourses and practices. According to many people, a woman belongs to her mother's group even after marriage. Of course, it is held that children belong to their mother's groups and not their fathers. Common words to express this were, "a child belongs to its mother". However, it is expected that both parents contribute to the upbringing of the child, both socially and materially. In cases where a child's father does not contribute to its upbringing, he would be required to pay a fee known as *malezi* in order to access his children or seek paternal filiation. However, this becomes contradictory when fathers claim paternal filiation in Islamic terms. Yet the underlying assumption of children belonging to their mothers has not changed to a great extent. As I show in chapters 2 and 4, due to this matrilineal understanding of children's belonging, women find themselves taking up and looking after children in the event of death or divorce of parents or any other crisis such as illnesses. In Islamic terms children have the opportunity to choose where and who to live with when they grow up, but only a few children choose to move to their fathers or father's kin.

Nevertheless, children are perceived as a strength to matrilineages, and women often emphasised this notion when they talked about having many children around them to look after. After all, the continuity of *fuko* is vested with women and men are considered as potential 'threat' to continuity of *fuko*. As one of my informants, Mwanajuma, put it, "women continue *fuko*, but men bring it to an end." Although this assertion became very complex because, as mentioned earlier, by sharing land with their sisters, men would continue *fuko* since through their sisters land would transmit to sister's children.

Due to the value accorded to children, at least in the matrilineal sense, children's health and well-being, especially when they are young, is highly encouraged. Although it is the obligation of women to ensure good health and fertility of their matrilineages, moral infringements such as adultery are discouraged among both men and women when a woman is pregnant or a baby is still breastfeeding. Such acts are believed to cause harm to the health and generally the life of the child. The type of illness that is inflicted on a child in the event of moral infringement is known by the Digo as *chirwa*. As is the case for *mapingane* mentioned above, special rituals are used to treat this sort of illness. Thus a child's mother's and father's behaviour have a ritual effect on the life of their child. Women in the matrikin groups, however, take much of the responsibility of a child throughout its life. When it is nearly time to deliver, for instance, a woman moves to her mother,

and together with her child they stay in seclusion from her husband for forty days. During this time, a woman's mother and other matrikin women provide support to her and her child. The husband and his kin may visit to provide the 'new' mother with gifts. Although a father is expected to provide support to his children and their mother, as I show in this thesis, this is not always the case in the everyday life of the Digo. Socio-economic constraints, for example, and state projects that continue to target women such as cash transfers explored in the rest of the dissertation, have impacted in complex ways on the notions of care and support for children and women.

Returning to the notion of women and marriage, when a woman is getting married, it is expected that the groom's kin pay *mahunda* to the bride's family. I was told that *mahunda* is usually divided among the bride's father's and mother's kin depending on agreed ratios. But my conversations with people reveal that *mahunda* is also paid by maternal kin in some instances. This is likely to happen when a girl lives with her mother and mother's kin. I remember in one household where a dispute erupted because the mother's brother contributed to his sister's son's *mahunda*, but when the young man got what his *mdzomba* perceived as a fairly paying job and approached him to assist him with school fees for one of his children, his sister's son was unable to fully meet the demands of his *mdzomba*. The *mdzomba* got furious and told her mother's sister how mean her children were and that she forgot so soon that he paid *mahunda* for her son. When I spoke to the young man's mother about it, she told me that paying *mahunda* was the *mdzomba*'s responsibility and asking a lot of money from her son was like asking to be repaid rather than the usual assistance. When problems continued between the two households, the young man stopped coming to his matrikin's home. Although he rented a place at the place he worked, and where he lived with his wife, I later learnt that he would stay at his wife's paternal home whenever he was on holiday.

There is an element of choice of residence in this. In Digo society, the prevalence of matrilineality provides men and women flexibility of residence. A couple may choose to live with their matrikin or patrikin depending on the prevailing conditions. Particularly, women may live with their husbands in their maternal homes. In such cases, men may choose to become active in their wives' matrilineages and immerse themselves in the maternal household activities. Yet it was not uncommon to find men moving out to live with their mother's or other kin, for example when they became ill. In chapter 2, I describe the case of a man who lived with his wife and invested in

her maternal family, but when illness befell him, his mother and grandmother took him to their house to look after him. Nevertheless, I argue that this situation is a reflection of Digo matrilineal ideologies and gendered performances of care. It also provides scope for flexibility of residence, which is embedded in matrilineal matrices. For instance, women can move to live with their mother or other matrikin in the event of death of a husband or divorce, or simply by choice, and take in lovers and husbands (*ajeni*). Many female households that I observed were actually organised around such residential phenomena.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the history of matrilineality and gender relations in Msambweni. I argue that anthropological studies that contend matrilineality as weak or likely to 'die' in the face of a growing market economy and complexities of economic change have paid little attention to gendered performances of matrilineal kinship in their historical context. In the light of this, I have shown that different aspects of matrilineality change in different times and in different ways. By investigating historical changes in Msambweni from a gender relations perspective with regard to organization of pre-colonial activities such as trade, agriculture and health; Islam; colonial and post-colonial policies and development projects, I have shown that this provides a locus through which we may understand that matrilineality becomes important in gendered relations at different times and in different ways. More important to note, however, is the fact that in Msambweni, women are at the centre stage of matrilineal relations. This is revealed through the particular domains that men and women occupied during the pre-colonial period and before penetration of Islam in Digoland, and after Islam found its way into everyday life in Msambweni. Its interaction with the conundrums of the colonial and post-colonial states' patriarchal projects demonstrated underlying contradictions and complexities in gender and kin relations. The latter is particularly so due to permeability afforded by the interaction between the current socio-economic factors and customary, Islamic and state activities, ideologies and policies, which provide flexibility in pursuing certain gendered activities and kinship ties. I contend that these contradictions, complexities, permeability, etc. still exist to date and continue to provide a fertile ground for negotiation of relations of men and women kin, and that matrilineal kin relations become located and relocated in women's lives through such negotiations. I also hold that matrilineal relations and ideologies remain a significant part of relations between men and women even with historical

transformations and socio-economic change, for example, as is the case with land where relational existence rather than land itself is more important. Indeed, land relations are gendered and often operate within matrilineal matrices. It is through gendered relations that women are able to access resources including land, off-farm income activities and *mradi* in order to survive. Therefore, I suggest that gendered performances of women's economic projects are key to understanding the resilience of matrilineality and the present status of women in Msambweni. In sum, matrilineal relations have been historically transformed as gender relations have been defined and redefined by social, state and Islamic patriarchal projects. Such phenomena remain in the postcolonial era. As I have shown here, and as we shall see in the rest of the dissertation, contradictions and complexities within matrilineal relations endure, and the significance of matrilineality is reflected in the performances of women in everyday gendered relations and ideologies.

Chapter 2

Grandmothers and Mothers:
Women, Householding and *Tumbo* Narratives

Introduction

I first met Mwanajuma, an elderly woman in her eighties, in October 2014. Mwanajuma lived with her daughter, Mwanariamu, her three children, and three children of a deceased daughter in a mud-walled and makuti[35]-thatched three-bedroom house. Mwanariamu returned to her mother's house when her husband died some years back. She later engaged in a relationship with a lover (*rafiki*) with whom she had her third child. In early March 2015 her *rafiki* joined the household as a *mjeni* ('in-married' man)[36]. One afternoon towards the end of the same month, I sat on a *jamvi* (floor mat) under a jackfruit tree conversing with Mwanajuma and Mwanariamu when Mwanalima, Mwanajuma's eldest daughter, arrived with her two children on two motorcycles (*pikipiki,* the popular local means of transport). One *pikipiki* carried Mwanalima and her daughters, and the other was loaded with two large suitcases. We all exchanged greetings and soon a lot of excitement filled the compound as we all chatted and laughed. Mwanariamu helped her sister offload the suitcases from the *pikipiki* and pulled them to the house. Their mother instructed them to leave the suitcases in the living room and they would later arrange them in an orderly manner. Mwanalima joined us on the *jamvi* where we sat with our legs stretched straight before us. Mwanajuma could not hide her joy to have her daughter back to the household, "I am happy to see you my child. My heart has peace now." Mwanariamu too expressed her excitement and teased her sister, "you see how being born of one *tumbo* is such a good thing. I didn't even feel the weight of the bags." Mwanalima laughed and remarked, "your sister, one *tumbo* (uterus/belly), how would you even think of the weight of my bags? Could you get me some tea (*chai rangi*)? Even your girls have not eaten anything. Only *soda* [soft drink] is in their stomachs."

This was the first time I met Mwanalima. She talked softly just like her mother and sister. Although Mwanalima told me she had only visited her mother and that she would be back to her husband's

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[35] Thatching material made of palm leaves

[36] *Mjeni*, the term used to refer to an in-married man, does not always imply a formally married couple. Lovers (singular. *Rafiki*, Plural. *Marafiki*) are usually referred by the same term in cases where they live in their women lovers' houses.

home in a few days, months passed since Mwanalima told me of her departure plans. She even began selling doughnuts (*mahamri*) at the nearby local market. During a conversation one morning, I joked that her visit was taking a long time. Mwanalima scorned, "what's wrong with staying with my mother (*mayo*) for as long as I like? I am not in a hurry to leave. I am at home." In support of Mwanalima's response, Mwanajuma lamented, "my daughters have suffered a lot. As their mother, I feel a lot of pain when they suffer out there. I told Mwanalima to come home to get herself a life, just like I told her sister." She went on and declared, "they have come to their mother. This is their home. It is better when they stay here at home with me, they eat what I eat. If I lack, we all lack." Mwanalima never went back to her husband throughout the period of my fieldwork.

In September 2016, a year after my initial fieldwork, I visited Mwanajuma's household. Mwanajuma sat under a tree weaving *makuti* (thatching material). She expected some clients who had promised they would buy her *makuti* early that week. I quickly noticed improvements to her house. The walls had been smeared with whitewash and the roof showed recent thatch work. "I love the new wall artwork," I remarked. "Mwanalima helped me do it. She added [money] to the ones from *mradi* (the government subsidy programme) so I repaired the house. I will complete the work on the other side of the house when I have sold these *makuti*," Mwanajuma responded. Suddenly, she called out Mwanalima to spread a floor mat (*jamvi*) for me next to where she sat. Mwanalima still lived in the household and sold *mahamri* in the market. Meanwhile, Mwanariamu emerged from the house. She wrapped her faded *leso*[37] a little tighter, then sat next to me. It is about noon and the children were expected home for their lunch break. Mwanariamu told me she had already prepared a meal for the children, and fried fish and doughnuts for sale. All over of a sudden, she looked at me and said rather wistfully, "a lot has happened since you left, or you haven't heard the news?" I looked perplexed and quickly said I had not received any news yet. Mwanajuma wondered, "I thought you were told what happened?" Mwanariamu's 'husband' was no longer living in the household. He fell very ill and his grandmother asked him move in with her and his mother. The two women lived in a different village. Then I wondered why Mwanajuma let this 'son', as she fondly referred him, leave the household to be looked after by his grandmother and mother. In the heightened atmosphere of explanations why her 'son' left, she looked at me

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[37] Women's cloth wrapped around the waist. It is also used as a scarf.

with a very sorrowful face and said, "when he stayed here, I treated him like my 'son', as if I bore him. We did many things with him here as a family. I did everything to help him feel better." A cough interrupted her, her voice went low, then she continued, "When he was not getting better, his grandmother called him. I told myself, the pain of a child is felt by its mother. Going to his 'mothers' was honour/respect (*heshima*) to the *tumbo* that bore him. I could not say no." Mwanariamu's lover died under the care of his 'mothers'.

Mwanajuma's narrative captures the nature of everyday life in many women-headed households. Many of these houses are not only headed by women, they are also centred on women. Such households are not new in Msambweni. Others have observed the trend to households centred on women (highlighted mostly as grandmothers and mothers) living together and traced it to the 1920s, recording an increasing phenomenon of such households (Gerlach 1960; Gomm 1972; Oendo 1988, 1987). Around the world a rapid increase in such households has been noted and prompted renewed energy in the study of women-headed households, both within and outside anthropology. However, studies of women-headed households have often privileged a male-centric view where jural, conjugal and nuclear family (in Western sense) perspectives are emphasized in the analysis of woman headed households. Following this, the absence, marginality or segregation of men in the household as husbands and as heads and providers, what Evelyn Blackwood terms "the dominant heterosexual man", is cited as key to the formation of woman headed households (Blackwood 2005). Running through many studies has been the tendency to account for male absence emphasizing causes ranging from labour migration, polygamy, death and divorce to poor and unstable economic conditions. Consequently, women's positions and relationships in the household have been viewed primarily through the lens of absent men.

Due to assumptions about the nuclear family, a persistent tendency has been a focus on women in their roles as mothers (Blackwood 2005). For instance, in his study on the Afro-Carribbean family, Raymond Smith viewed women's position in the household simply "in [women's] role as mothers who come to be the focus of relationships" (Smith 1996:43), and also because he assumed "identity of interests and activities of women" can only be understood within the rubric of women's "principal role [which] is that of mothers" (Smith 1973:140 cited in Yanagisako 1977:217). Terms such as matrifocal (originally coined by Smith (1956) himself) have been used to capture and emphasize the centrality and power of women as mothers, and relationships derived in relation to

mothers (Blackwood 2005:8; Smith 1973:125). It is not surprising, then, that even recent studies of cash transfer schemes have assumed that those women who receive funds through the scheme world over are simply women in their roles 'naturally' as mothers (and grandmothers) living in households where men are simply absent (see for example Jackson 2014).

Feminists have critiqued the way overemphasis on conjugality and the Western nuclear family, with the increasing focus on what is absent in the household or kinship, contributes to the assumptions that mothers and matrifocality are a primary characteristic of households and relationships centred on women. The term itself has been debated on grounds of its usefulness in analysis, description and understanding the complexity of relationships in different contexts, including the particular Caribbean society it sought to describe (Blackwood 2005; Yanagisako 1977)[38]. Indeed, as Blackwood (2005) highlights, studies have noted the diversity of households shared by or centred on women (grandmothers, sisters, mothers, daughters) and their children (Blackwood 2000; Barrow 1986; Yanagisako 1977); kinswomen and women friends (Bolles 1996; Monagan 1985). These studies demonstrate how the above assumptions about women and households mask other types of household relations such as inter-generational and sibling relations, or those relations enacted between women as kinswomen (Blackwood 2005; Kea 2013; Peletz 1987; 1988; Peters 1997; Yanagisako 1977). Furthermore, household forms and the contexts in which woman headed households are found are varied and change due to various political, economic, social and cultural processes (Stack 1974; Yanagisako 1977). Women headed households in Msambweni provide a good ground to pursue this critique and help understand women centred relationships that are a characteristic of women's households. Indeed, as the case of Mwanajuma and her daughter cited above shows, conjugal factors such as marital breakdown and a simple assumption of matrifocality cannot fully account for household arrangements centred on women. Clearly, the interplay between discursive performances such as *mradi*, the cash

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[38] For further discussion on the meaning and usefulness of the matrifocal concept see Geertz 1961; Randolph 1964; Boyer 1964; Solien de Gonzalez 1965; Gonzalez 1970; Smith 1970,1973; Stack 1970; Tanner 1974 (cited in Yanagisako 1977).

transfer scheme, and narratives of *tumbo,* invites an interrogation on how social and cultural processes   inform the construction of female centred households.

What I set out to understand in this chapter, therefore, is the everyday conduct of domestic life in woman headed households by privileging the perspectives and experiences of women to understand how they constitute and manage their households, what I term 'householding'. I argue that the female focus that characterises woman headed households in Msambweni is embedded in discursive performances of mradi, which motivate matrilineal ideologies embraced in discourses of *tumbo*. By doing this, I show what enabled *tumbo* narratives to remain alive in the women's notions of households, how women constituted these households and their performances of household affairs and status ('householding'). I contend that householding in women's households is an expression of matrilineal kinship, and together with its associated discourses and performances, women's householding keeps matrilineal relations alive in Msambweni. I begin the chapter with an account of woman headed households in Msambweni to show how the conundrums of *Chidigo* (tradition), religious and state ideologies, and other socio-cultural factors created unintentional woman-centric household effects that are a significant characteristic of Msambweni's woman headed households, and how socio-economic constraints intensify these effects. Then I consider the concept of *tumbo* in the everyday life in Msambweni to provide a background on the linkage between idioms of eating and feeding and kinship. Next I will explore the interplay between narratives of *tumbo* and discursive performances of *mradi* money to illustrate the way women negotiate the constitution and reconstitution of households in female focal forms, and reinforce and sustain women's household status and relationships. I conclude that discourses of *tumbo* not only express the nature of women's householding performances as embedded with woman centred forms; *tumbo* narratives and householding performances also shore up gendered matrilineal relations in Msambweni.

Households of women and female centrality in Msambweni

Numerous studies of the Digo have noted their relatively high rate of marital breakdown, and the ease with which men and women can leave a marital relationship, with the rates increasing especially since the 1920s (Gomm 1972; Oendo 1987). For instance, in his study on marital instability in the 1960s, Roger Gomm recorded 30 separations out of 85 women aged 15 and 40

years, 33 second marriages 10 of which ended up in separation and 10 third marriages with two separations (Gomm 1972:95). In 2007, Mraja's study on the impact of Islam on marriage and divorce also noted increasing rates of divorce. During fieldwork, out of the 41 households where I collected women's marital histories, 34 per cent of women had separated for reasons other than deaths of husbands. Remarriage was also not uncommon (See Figure 3.1; see also chapter 3). However, marital separation and remarriage (and keeping lovers) have been common, possibly even in the pre-colonial period (Gerlach 1960; Gomm 1972). Today, the phenomenon has intensified such that marital fluidity (marital breakdown and remarriages) has come to be viewed as 'normal' (*kawaida*) in Msambweni (Chapter 3; see also Oendo 1987:58).

Figure 3.1 The nature of marital relationships
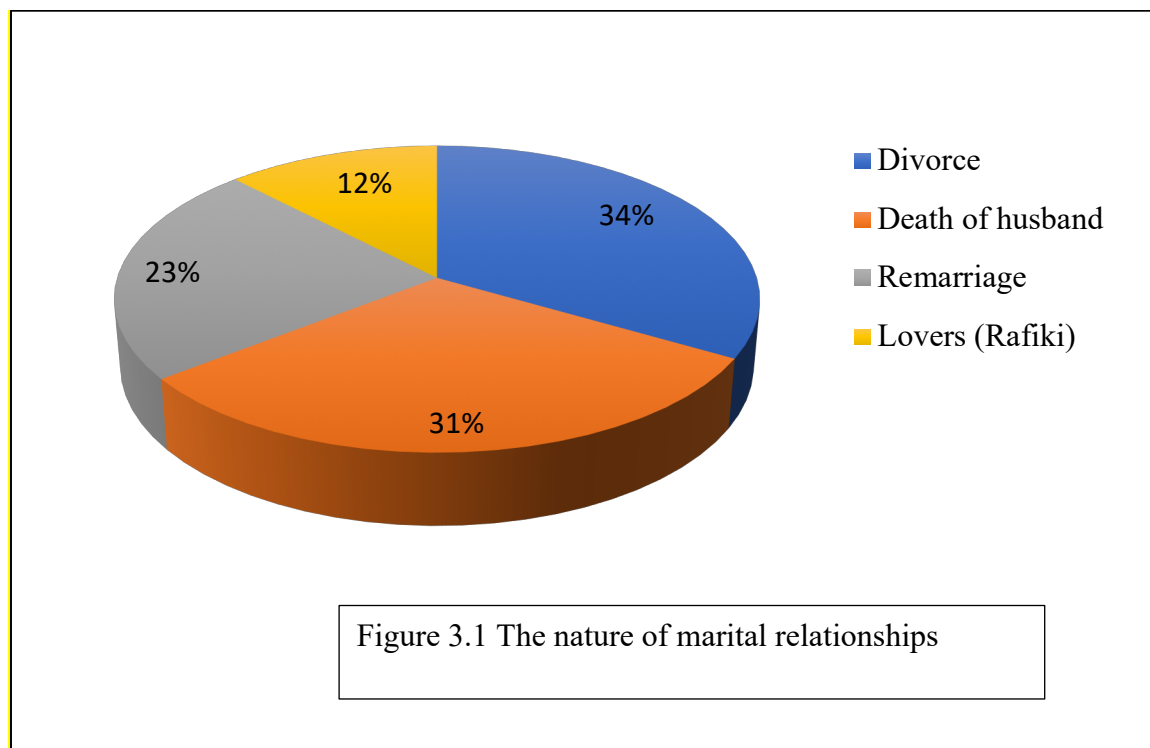
Within the realm of marital fluidity, studies have noted the trend for households to be constituted through women, a trend which has persisted and increased over the years (Gomm 1972, 1975; Oendo 1987). For instance, Gomm (1972) speaks of women living together as mothers and grandmothers. Yet instead of emphasising women's agency in the formation of woman centred households, the permeability and temporalities of marital and sexual relationships have been

understood as if women centred households are a "problem of social control" (Gomm 1972:95). Consequently, the perspective of passivity and moral degeneration leads to the view of these households simply as the end results of broken conjugal units.

Indeed, and as other studies suggest (for example Parkin 1980; Oendo 1987; Mraja 2007 and 2010) marital instability in Msambweni does not operate in isolation from other factors such as Digo traditions and religious and state patriarchal household discourses which have existed for many decades and still continue to interact in the everyday lives of men and women in the community, and in a changing socio-economic context. Of course, the nature of households constituted by and through women varies and has transformed over time. As noted in chapter 1, during the pre-colonial period, women exercised control over households and took up household responsibilities including economic and health matters. Yet this happened not simply because of broken conjugal units or that men were absent, for example, due to polygamy or extended periods of long distance trade; the matrilineally gendered spheres for men and women, such as the case of *chirimo* (agricultural work) and *chifudu* (female health cult) enforced gendered household practices and ideologies, and it is within the rubric of such discourses that women enacted their household position and status.

With the introduction of Islam and colonial administration, both of which promoted patriarchal ideologies based on conjugal family of a male head, women did not cease from exercising control and taking up household responsibilities for other kin persons. But unlike the pre-colonial period, Islamic and colonial discourses on households and access to resources transformed the way men and women enacted their positions within (and beyond) the household. On matters of inheritance, for instance, the lens of Islam and the colonial state viewed men as fathers and as husbands, and as key to transmission of land and property to children (sons). Women were given secondary and tertiary positions. Notably, the concept of *uungwana*[39] promoted through Islamic ideologies of marriage and household provisioning encouraged the view of men as heads and providers of households. In this sense, women were viewed as dependents of men and work, for women, was

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[39] Ideologies of 'civilization' understood in relation to Swahili culture as high status conceived in terms of stuff such as free birth and adherence to Islam.

conceived in the language of 'slavery' (*utumwa*) (Oendo 1987; 1988; see Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion).

But the complex Digo position in the coastal trade due to ethnic lines drawn between Europeans, Arabs, the Swahili and the Mijikenda, and tensions associated with Digo male labour force and the commercial plantations and other enterprises of the colonial state, Europeans and the Arabs informed performances and relations of men and women in the household. The ensuing phenomenon was of a challenged status of men with women providing for households even where men were present, and women owned their own huts (Willis 1993; see also Chapters 1 and 3). This phenomenon continued in the post-independence period and it is more prevalent and visible today.

Furthermore, patriarchal discourses on households, both by Islam and the state, interacted with Digo traditions, and not only provided a context for constitution and reconstitution of women's position in the households, but provided an avenue through which female centrality emerged. For example, Islam and Digo traditions on marriage offered grounds for flexible marital engagements. Whereas Islamic law on *talaka* (divorce) allowed women to seek divorce, it did not limit the number of times a woman may obtain divorce or remarry. On the other hand, Digo ideology on temporalities of marriage, understood within the context of *kuhala* (informal marriage) and *arusi* (formal Islamic marriage), and flexibility of residence arrangements, provided women the opportunity to enter into short and long term marital and sexual relationships with men, both as husbands and lovers, with a choice to live with husbands and lovers in women's households.

The interaction of Islamic discourses and Digo traditions on marriage complicated performances of marital and sexual relationships, while at the same time providing flexibility in the way women enacted their marital and sexual affairs. As I show in chapter 3, the complexities of marital discourses created space for the sort of dynamic and flexible marital journey for my woman informants; a journey characterised by numerous marital and sexual relationships in a woman's life. As one woman put it, it is 'normal' to have several marital and sexual relationship in a woman's life; what matters, and women are keen to observe this, is to avoid numerous relationships at any one time because "*kisharia* (Islamic law) a woman can marry and divorce many times, but you can only have one marriage (*ndoa*) at a time." Of course, extra-marital affairs and keeping of several lovers at one time do exist, and some women cited them as the cause of

their divorce or separation. What struck me, however, was that my informants emphasised that women who indulge in such seemingly 'polygamous' arrangements seldom stay in them for long.

Apparently, the state of marital fluidity and ambiguous marital discourses have enforced rather than destroyed female solidarity. In his study on marital instability, Gomm notes the phenomenon of women congregating in one household as many women returned to their mothers or sisters after divorce, separation or death of a husband (Gomm 1972). He even notes that "Digo [women] are not slow to exploit [marital] ambiguity to personal advantage" (Gomm 1972:101). Thus despite his portrayal of male absence emanating from broken relationships in his language of 'bachelors' and 'harlots' as a cause of the formation of such households, he clearly notes the opportunity ambiguous marital rules and discourses provide to women's agency in Digo society. During my fieldwork, many of my informants' households were centred on women (grandmothers, mothers, daughters, sisters) who had experienced either one or more situations of divorce, separation, deaths of husbands, and remarriage and keeping of lovers (see Fig. 1), and women's explanations of this phenomenon revolved around *kisharia* and *Chidigo* discourses on marriage. Take, for example, case 1, Hajuma's household:

Case 1: Hajuma's Household[40]

Hajuma was living with her husband when he died. After her husband's death, she decided to move back to her maternal kin. According to Hajuma, when a husband dies, it is usually the case that in Islamic law (*kisharia*), a woman should move back to her people (*jamaa*) because the marriage has ended. It is on this grounds that Hajuma said she chose to leave her husband's house to live with her maternal kin. But Hajuma also told me that she feared forceful eviction by her husband's kin, which she said sometimes happened to women. Since she did not want problems with her husband's kin, especially his brothers, she moved out. But a year or so after she left her husband's house, Hajuma went back. She told me that since her daughter inherited her father's land, they both agreed that Hajuma should move in with her daughter. Both Hajuma and her daughter told me that according to both *kisharia* and *chidigo,* women can inherit from their parents and that women can live with their children in their husband's house or home provided the children live there as well. Since Hajuma's daughter occupied her father's land, they felt it was proper for Hajuma to

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[40] Figure 5.1 shows Hajuma's household

live with her daughter in Hajuma's late husband house, citing both in *chidigo* and Islamic terms. Her daughter's children, including her eldest granddaughter and her children also lived in the household. Her daughter's children were born from three different marital relationships; the first relationship was an *arusi* (virilocal) with a deceased husband, while the second and third were *kuhala* with *ajeni* (in-married men) with whom they separated. The *kuhala* relationships happened after her daughter inherited her father's land and property where they lived. Hajuma's granddaughter has three children from three different relationships with lovers (*rafiki*). Two of her grandsons married and moved out to live with their wives in a piece of land outside the village (one of the two pieces of land inherited by Hajuma's daughter from her father).

As the above account shows, while some male-connected factors caused the various domestic movements in the women's lives, men are not necessarily the defining factor in the woman centred nature of Hajuma's household. Ideologies informed by Islam and Digo traditions informed the very nature of the household arrangements in Hajuma's case. Thus summarising such household arrangements under the umbrella of a conjugal situation provides an oversimplified account of households centred on women in Msambweni.

Furthermore, the Islamic ideology of parent-child relations, in Michael Peletz's terms "paternal provisioning and patrifiliative inheritance", have historically been promoted both by Islam and the colonial and post-colonial states. But rather than taking a paternal or patrifilial form, transmission of property among the Digo is broadly translated as passage from parents (mothers and fathers, sometimes including guardians) to children (both male and female) (Peletz 1988:6). Thus for the Digo people, inheritance is conceived as passing land and property from 'mothers' and 'fathers' to both sons and daughters. As I show in chapter 1, for example, *dzumbe* and *konho* are passed to both sons and daughters, with women preferring the passage of *konho* to their daughters (Ng'weno 1997). This form of inheritance is practiced in addition to *adzomba* (mother's brother's) inheritance practice whereby women can also inherit or access land as sister's daughters, and the introduction of land and marriage laws (for example the Succession Act of 1991, the Matrimonial Property Act of 2013, and the Kenya Constitution of 2010) that allow women to own, inherit and dispose land and property whether married or not, and in the event of divorce and the death of husbands. Indeed, just as is the case with complexities in marital rules and the understanding of marriage in Msambweni, land distribution ambiguities posed by Islam, state and Digo customary

statutes broadened the different ways women accessed crucial resources such as land. The women's life histories I collected demonstrate the numerous ways women access land, both in state-defined, Islamic and *Chidigo* terms (see chapter 3). This sort of land distribution encourages women's autonomy and some sort of 'independence' which allows women to negotiate their living together. For example, in the case of Hajuma cited above, the play between the different conceptions of land as stipulated by the state-Islam-Chidigo marriage privileged the women's act of moving in together.

In the post-colonial period, the state has progressively operated with a complex patriarchal ideology which has nonetheless privileged household relationships centred on women. This ranges from removing the requirement for women to use their husbands and fathers names in obtaining national identity cards (*chitambulisho*[41]) to the promotion of women's solidarity groups (*chama*) by the state since the early independence period and later by NGOs through microfinance programmes (*mikopo*, 'micro-loans'). A strong focus on mothers and children in welfare provision programmes by the state's health sector persists, for example the Malezi Bora ('good upbringing') Initiative, and the introduction of government subsidy programmes such as the cash transfer scheme for orphans and vulnerable children, 'mradi' which deliberately target woman headed households. Whereas women's *chama* were conceived within the realm of the state's economic development for the country by enhancing the economic 'capabilities' of women in order to contribute to the community and the household by adding to household's income, the state's conception of the government subsidy programme known by the Digo as *mradi* is based on assumptions about the vulnerabilities and insecurities of woman headed households. Of course the association of poverty and vulnerabilities with households centred on women is not new (see for example Chant 1997, 2003, 2008; Clark 1984; Moore 1988:63). And in the context of *mradi,* the programme is often painted as more of a paternal project where the state views itself as the 'provider' of its desperate woman citizens. Speaking about *mradi* to one government official he was of the view that "the government (*serikali*[42]) is looking after its women and children". Yet, in a context where old-age and diseases such as HIV/AIDS contribute to high rates of orphanhood due to deaths of parents and the need to care for infected and affected persons, and where socio-

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[41] The Digo equivalent of Swahili 'kitambulisho'.
[42] Swahili word

economic crisis constrains people's everyday lives, women find opportunities to group and regroup themselves in various ways including living together in households. Let us consider case 2 below:

Case 2: Fatuma's household

Fatuma divorced her husband due to disagreements over providing for the household, "we could not agree on many things…He left the household for me to look after. He took all his money (*pesa*) to *mnazi* (local brew) and the women he saw as more beautiful. So I decided to come here and live my own life and take care of my children the best way I can." Fatuma's mother died several years back, so she moved to live with her brother on land their mother had obtained from her mother's brother. Two of Fatuma's younger sisters moved in too following a husband's death and a separation. "We decided by ourselves to leave," they explained. The three sisters told me that they were "okay" and "happy" living together because that was 'normal' for women among the Digo. Although they mentioned *chidigo* and *kisharia* during our conversations, they also explained that engaging in activities such as women's groups (*chama*) and weaving *makuti* for sale was a significant way of financing their household together. Fatuma also told me that when *mradi* 'came' to the village, she registered the household and they were selected as beneficiaries. Fatuma reiterated *mradi* helped to make the household "stand firm". For instance, one of Fatuma's sisters, who was physically challenged, moved to the household. She explained that since the household received support through *mradi*, when her sister joined the household, the sisters planned for her sick child's medication and helped take her to the hospital, which was not possible when she lived far from them. I was told her physical condition contributed to her separation with her husband. Speaking about her 'eviction' from her husband's home following her husband's death because of *ugonjwa*[43], Fatuma's other sister added that probably she would have died if she had not moved in with her sisters to obtain assistance. The household also used some *mradi* funds to build a house and bought some goats. Fatuma told me they agreed amongst themselves to buy each child in the household a goat as a form of 'insurance'. They sold one of the goats when Fatuma's son was very ill to finance his medication.

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[43] People rarely talked openly about HIV/AIDS infections or those who were affected by the disease. This could be explained partly by the fact that a lot of stigma is attached to HIV/AIDS. Many people used words such as 'ugonjwa' (a disease) and 'homa' (loosely translated as a cold or fever) to mean HIV/AIDS infection.

Fatuma's household demonstrates how links between women as kinswomen endure when marriages do not. When interrogated from the women's perspective, the phenomenon of marital fluidity conveys a sense of women's initiative, who take advantage of the opportunity offered not only by crises, but also by factors such as women's *chama* and *mradi,* to establish their own households as kinswomen. This is captured in the women's language of, for example, "independence", "collaboration" and "care" for each other and their children. Indeed, within the "broader sweep of social change", factors such as development policies including microfinance programmes and cash transfers targeting women have contributed to intensification of female centred forms in the past few decades (Jackson 2014). And as the narrative on Fatuma's household shows, and for many of the women's households I worked with, the tendency for residential arrangements centred on women has increased as it was also encouraged by the allocation of *mradi* funds to certain women households (see introduction). Moreover, as I show in chapters 4 and 5, cash transfers ('mradi') contributes to the way women cultivate survival strategies in their everyday socio-economic lives.

Yet within the realm of such state and non-state projects is also the recognition that "parenting has become more socialized [toward women] and public" (Jackson 2014:8). With such projects operating in a community where practices of care including child upbringing are conceived in gendered matrikin terms (chapter 4), maternal care, residential arrangements and relationships centred on women have become not only complex, but increasingly valorized in Msambweni (Jackson 2014:18). In this way, the practice of children's residence especially in the event of death or divorce and separation of parents, which is usually informed by matrikin ideologies of care and child upbringing, has been reinforced by *mradi*. In fact the phenomenon of maternal residence for children in the event of eventualities such as death, divorce or desertion has become increasingly maternal and centred on women (see chapter 4). Among the Digo, children are conceived as belonging to their mother (*mayo*), and by extension to the mother's side (*kuchetuni*).

Against this backdrop is a promotion of the bond or relationships between women, not merely as mothers (most of the women are parents and have children), but also as kinwomen (sisters, mothers, daughters, grandmothers, mother's sisters, etc) living together in households. In the context of *mradi*, I observed women as household members negotiate relationships and statuses amongst themselves and during conversations about mradi funds, like Fatuma and her sisters,

women talked about deciding how to spend *mradi* funds, agreeing who collected or took charge of *mradi* funds, and other associated *mradi* activities such as attending the local *mradi* meetings. I also heard women's stories about 'eating' *mradi* funds, *mradi* funds not 'feeding' households and 'growing' stomachs with mradi funds. Such narratives informed the way women grouped and regrouped themselves especially for continued access to the funds. I turn to this discussion below. First I discuss the concept of *tumbo* in the everyday life in Msambweni.

The concept of *tumbo*

In Msambweni, stomach and womb are expressed by the same word *tumbo*, which also closely relates to the term for matrilineages, *fuko*. When used to express relations with others, *tumbo* denotes relationships that have to do with women. For instance, during fieldwork, it was not uncommon to hear people describe their relationships as *tumbo mwenga* (one womb/belly) to mean siblings (*enehu,* sing. *mwenehu*) by the same mother[44], *tumbo langu* (my womb/belly) to imply one's children (*anangu*, sing. *mwanangu*). In this way, *tumbo* may be used to imply uterine relationships. However, relationships performed and described by reference to *tumbo* may not be simply understood as biological bond between a mother and child as some studies on uterine relationships in Africa imply (see for example Fortes 1965; James 1998). Furthermore, motherhood in Msambweni has varied meanings, and being a mother is usually conceived in varied ways beyond biology. For instance, I often heard friends and neighbours refer to each other as *mwenehu*. On further interrogation, I was told that such references expressed close relations between people who did not necessarily have to be children of one biological mother. One informant explained that "when people live together in houses or villages or work together in workplaces, they can become like siblings (*mwenehu*)", that is, as if they are of 'tumbo mwenga'. Additionally, to speak of *mayo* (mother) does not always mean one's biological mother. Mother's sisters and sometimes other women are also referred to by the same term .

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[44] *Mwenehu* was also used to refer to relationships that had nothing to do with biological relationship, that is, 'one *tumbo*'. For instance, I often heard friends and neighbours refer to each other as *mwenehu*. On further interrogation, I was told that such references expressed close relations between people who did not necessarily have kin ties. One informant explained, "when people live together in houses, villages or even at workplaces, they become like siblings. They live as if they are born of one uterus (*tumbo mwenga*)." However, the topic of siblingship is too broad to be explored in this chapter.

But people also used *tumbo* to express activities such as eating and feeding. For instance, people would talk of eating, just as among the Tabwa of Zaire, to claim that a person "has expended the usefulness of an object or has illegally diverted funds for his own benefit" (Davis-Roberts 1981:311). For example, it was common to hear stories about people "eating" money belonging to their spouses, for village projects or government departments, or persons "eating" other people's energies. This sort of eating idiom is an expression of "diversion of value from social circulation" (Apter 2012:37), and "brings an end another's efforts to retrieve it" (Davis-Roberts 1981:311).

Eating also takes varied meanings in the context of household and kin relations. For example, eating together, if understood in Janet Carsten's (1995) sense, is a way of making kin. When viewed through an individualistic lens, eating ruptures kin relations. For example, in Msambweni, eating a child's food is considered disruptive to a child's life, unlike eating together with the child. Due to this, expectant women are advised on what to eat or not eat because they are conceived as eating together with the child growing in the woman's womb, hence giving life to the child. However, eating with regard to children is also conceived with regard to certain items or associations. For instance, using what is perceived as a child's entitlement, for example, school fees, is considered 'eating', implying disruption of their lives not only in academic terms, but also in kinship sense. If children do not attain education, this has implications for their future performances as kinsmen in their kin groups, households and beyond. In sum, the conception of consumption is attached to ideologies about life-flow.

Life-flow, when conceived through the idiom of feeding, is also considered vulnerable to forces such as sorcery. People who are conceived as capable of 'eating', in the sense of disrupting life-flow, are capable of disrupting others from 'feeding' their kin or the intended persons by "diversion of value from social circulation" or from being invested to the intended persons (Apter 2012:37). For my woman informants, mradi money informed the way such idioms of eating and feeding played out in their household lives. As I show below, these were also embedded in matrilineal kinship matrices.

***Mradi* money and *tumbo* narratives**

The constitution of many of my informants' households revolved around the moral economy of *mradi*, often conceived in idioms of eating and feeding. Carsten has provided a brilliant account of how "living and consuming together in houses" constitutes kin and kin relationships among the Langkawi (Carsten 1995:224). In this way, strangers and outsiders can become kin through feeding. Conversely, if close kin migrate to places further from their kin members and cease to interact with them, "their kinship and that of their descendants effectively lapses", possibly because they no longer feed and live together with their kin (Carsten 1995:234).

Carsten's perspective is informative in understanding the different ways feeding informs performances of kinship, which she terms relatedness, in different contexts and with changing times (Carsten 2000; 1995). However, as I have shown above, and as the following narratives clearly demonstrate, the concept of eating and feeding in Msambweni informs performances of kinship because both eating and feeding are imbued with different meanings and their usage varies with context, the particular associations and time. Thus constitution, reconstitution and rupture of kin relations is performed through the idioms of eating and feeding. While consumption may constitute kin, it may equally distance kin members, although not always and simply in terms of the geographically defined mobility discussed by Carsten. For my informants, on the one hand, women consuming *mradi* money together with their children ensures the circulation of *mradi* money remains in the hands of women and their female kin (daughters, mothers, sisters, grandmothers, mother's sisters) - considered to be born from one *tumbo* - passing on life to their children or offspring (*uzao*) and assuring its continuity. On the other hand, if others such as estranged husbands 'eat' *mradi* money, this disrupts or may bring an end to the children's life-flow. In a similar vein, distancing or disengaging estranged husbands from *mradi* errands may help ensure *mradi* money 'feeds' the women's households, but this also provokes ideas about *mradi* money 'not feeding' the households. Such narratives are embedded in accusations of sorcery. To grasp the inner connection between women's householding, *mradi* money and consumption, I turn to specific narratives in Msambweni.

Case 3: Hajuma's household

Let us begin with the story of Hajuma's household which I have already mentioned above. Hajuma's household was among the first households to become beneficiaries of *mradi*. Although the programme began as a pilot programme in Kwale in 2004, Hajuma and her daughter told me that they joined the programme in 2006. At the time, Hajuma lived with her daughter and her daughter's children. When Hajuma's granddaughter, Hasiti, gave birth to her first child, Hajuma felt that the house they lived in was too small to accommodate all the members of the family. At the time, Hatuma had eight children from three different relationships. As earlier mentioned, Hajuma moved into the household on the grounds that Hatuma had inherited land from her father. However, Hajuma suggested she could move to her maternal home where she had a piece of land and construct a house, and she would also take Hasiti and her child with her. After several deliberations with her daughter Hatuma, they resolved that two of Hatuma's eldest sons would move out to live in another piece of land that she had inherited from her father, which was outside the village. The two women told me that their decision was related to considerations about *mradi*. First, Hasiti had recently given birth and she wanted her child to be included as a beneficiary of *mradi*, which would be assured by her staying in the household because it is a requirement that beneficiaries of *mradi* are resident in a specific household. Second, Hatuma told me that her mother was best suited to collect *mradi* funds for the household, not only because she had been recorded in the government's *mradi* database as the lead next of kin or caregiver; Hatuma was convinced that, just like herself, her mother would not 'eat' *mradi* funds. Hatuma was 'ever busy' and out and about with engagements for the small business which she had recently started (with a loan from a microfinance institution and some funds from *mradi*), whereas her mother would have time to collect *mradi* funds, look after the children and attend *mradi* meetings in the village. She was also of the view that since her mother began collecting the funds, the household had "seen much progress" because her mother knew how to plan for the funds, and she ensured "every coin was well spent". Bragging about her 'clean' children, she said her mother bought and cleaned clothes and ensured food was available for her children. More striking, she contemplated how her daughter's pregnancy and delivery were well managed, because her mother (Hajuma) 'managed' *mradi* funds well by saving some *mradi* funds for her daughter's pregnancy. Speaking to Hajuma about *mradi,* she told me that the money is helping her "give life" to her household.

We can see how narratives of 'eating' are intertwined with *mradi* in women's expressions of their to "give life" to their households. If viewed against the stories of women I provide here, this may resonate with the idea that development and policy experts have supported giving cash transfer funds to women on grounds that women do not 'waste' the money (Corboz 2013). Citing various cash transfer programmes such as the *Bolsa Escola* in Brazil (see de Janvry et al. 2005), the *Familias en Accion* in Colombia (see Attanasio et al. 2005; 2009), and the *Opportunades/Progressa* in Mexico (see Barrientos and DeJong 2004) studies have attributed the success of cash transfers to the 'responsible' women who spend cash transfers efficiently. Although studies have challenged such assumptions (see for example Corboz 2013), they have not investigated what actually drives women's ideas about spending in their everyday lives. As Hajuma's household clearly demonstrates, women's beliefs about kin relations motivate the way they 'manage' their *mradi* funds. The constitution of women's household relationships rests partly on the moral economy of spending *mradi* money. In light of this, Hatuma's sons would rather move from the household to live elsewhere, than Hajuma and Hasiti who needed to remain in the household to be part of *mradi* and ensure their continued participation in *mradi* activities because they are key not only to its constitution, but also to the continuity of the household's life in matrilineal terms.

Case 4: Siti's Household

The second narrative shifts focus to women's centrality from the perspective of disruption of kin relations from 'outsiders', in this case patrikin. When Siti's daughter, Suma, died, Siti took in her children. Suma had two children, from two informal marital relationships (*kuhala*). The first husband died. When I visited Siti, she also lived with the children of another daughter (Siri) who moved into her household following a separation (see Figure 3.2). Siri had moved to 'Uarabuni' (Arab World) where she worked as a domestic worker. At the time of Suma's death, her household received *mradi* funds. Suma and her second husband were recorded as the next of kin in the government's *mradi* database. Following her death, the change of the children's residence and *rera* (caregiving) responsibility, Suma's last child had not been included in the *mradi* database. Siti was informed by the village *mradi* representative (Locational OVC Committee, LOC) that she

needed to have her included because the other child would soon be beyond the required age[45], hence would leave the programme and as a result the household would leave too. Consequently, Siti felt that the information on next of kin in the *mradi* database also needed to be updated to include her details as the first choice of next of kin. This would enable her to collect *mradi* funds instead of Suma's husband. But Siti also objected to having Suma's husband remaining in the database as the second next of kin. She preferred two of her daughters, Siri and Sudi. After Siri travelled to Uarabuni, Siti opted to have Sudi's details recorded instead. Although Siri lived in the household before her travel, Sudi did not. She lived with her husband and her children in a nearby local town.

Siti's concerns raised tensions with Suma's husband, who complained that he was the children's 'father' and needed to remain as the next of kin. When I asked Siti about it, she was very angry that Suma's husband was not caring for the children and she suspected that he had been collecting and 'eating' *mradi* money. According to Siti, only herself and her daughters would not 'eat' mradi money, which she insisted was given by the government (*serikali*) to assist with childcare needs. When the household did not receive funds for several months, she cited Suma's husband as the cause. Even after the village *mradi* representative and a government official explained the cause for the delay was Siti's delay to provide the required information to update the *mradi* database, Siti still argued that Suma's husband 'ate' the funds. In fact on learning that Suma's husband had a motorbike (*piki piki*) he recently rode as a casual job, Siti used this to justify and reinforce her claims of him 'eating' *mradi* funds. "I don't think the *piki piki* is for a casual job (*kibarua*) for *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi). Those are just lies. I know he has been 'eating' the *mradi* money."

One month since my first encounter with Siti's story, I brought it up again during a conversation. On this occasion, Siti complained that Suma's husband asked to have his own child move back to his house. Siti did not allow this to happen. She claimed that both children were "born from the same *tumbo*", and by living with them, she was just like their mother. She went on to say that she suspected Suma's husband's family might "do *chidigo* 'things'" on the children, meaning bewitching the children. Siti said, "they can get the money use it to do bad things to the children."

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[45] In Kenya, a child is considered to be below 18 years old. CT-OVC works with this definition when enrolling children and their households in the programme. Only when there are children below 18 years of age can a household continue to be a beneficiary of CT-OVC.

Because of this, Siti said she needed to 'keep' the children in her house and collect the money herself. This way, she would 'protect' the children from any harm that would arise from such evil acts. I also learnt that while her daughter, Siri, joined the household after a separation with her husband, which Siti described as 'temporary', "when *mradi* issues started", Siti agreed with Siri that she would stay on to help her solve the problem. They also planned to include her children in *mradi*. "Unfortunately", laments Siti, "she left before we solved anything. Sudi will help me now." From working on *mradi* issues with her daughters, Siti told me that she was very concerned about the growth of her *uzao* (offspring), and emphasized that she would not let anyone 'eat' the funds again. When I asked her about herself or her daughters 'eating' *mradi* money, Siti said that was like 'eating' the children's life (education, medication, clothing, nutrition etc.) and the women would not do that. Interestingly, when Siti bought food to eat with the children or invested in a small enterprise as a source of off-farm income using *mradi* funds, that was not considered 'eating' the funds. Rather as their 'mother' she invested in the children's lives, which she conceived as looking after her *uzao*, including their future. Unlike Suma's husband, she perceived her way of spending the funds or the related projects she would pursue as intended to ensure continued growth for her *uzao*. Through this she also 'pulled' her daughters back to her household, and reinforced the women's living together.

Siti's story is clearly embedded in the underlying tensions of matrilineal organization in Msambweni. Indeed, many women's narratives were structured by themes of matrilineal ideology current across the villages. Siti invited her daughters to be part of *mradi*, even asking them to live in the household, with an emphasis on preventing 'others', referring to the children's patrikin, from being part of mradi and accusing them of interfering with the children's lives through witchcraft accusations and 'eating' the funds. This illustrates how women as kinswomen reinforce the matrilineal ideology by conceiving themselves as an important "uterine location of the vital life-flow…that perpetuates the lineage", and as I show below present maternal kin, particularly kinswomen as the "life-giving bodies" for matrilineal reproduction and transformation (de Boeck 1994:262). Indeed, the language of spending and accumulation of *mradi* funds denoted in the metaphor of eating underscores the perception of the procreative powers of maternal women in matrilineal reproduction and the socially disruptive nature of patrikin to its social continuity. Thus Siti's activities in looking after her daughters' children, providing them with shelter, and

privileging spending *mradi* funds on their needs such as education and clothing, including buying food and eating together with the children, added value to the matrilineal lineage, whereas the view of Suma's husband as rather 'eating' the children's 'lives' disrupted ties between people who are considered to be "born from the same womb"[46]. The Digo perception of children's belonging to the matrikin, which in the context of *mradi*, privileges and valorizes matrikin women, may inform such contentions. That the account revolves around money that, on the one hand, binds, and on the other, breaks ties is interesting. Anthropological studies have shown the way money may inform the creation and/or rupture of relationships and the different metaphors linked with money (see for example Bohanann 1955, 1959; Parry and Bloch 1989; Hutchinson 1996; Masquelier 1999). In East Africa, and particularly Kenya, equations of money to lineage transactions have been noted. For example, McIntosh (2009a) talks about the *jini* and money circulation at the coastal Kenya, Shipton (1989) gives an account of "bitter money" among the Luo in the Western Part of Kenya, while Hutchinson (1996) explores "shit money" among the Nuer. Although the sort of linkage between *mradi* money and the female economy pursued by the women's narratives demonstrates ideas about accumulation and spending, this is also about how women negotiate with everyday tensions and complexities as they constitute and reconstitute their households within the logic of matrilineal ideologies   in a context where patriarchal ideologies are also in play. What is striking, however, is that the tensions and complexities involved reveal the ways women keep matrilineality alive.

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[46] Even if Suma spent *mradi* funds on the children, this would not be perceived as contributing to the matrilineages per se, but rather performing his paternal obligations which were often conceived within the rubric of 'malezi' (paternal filiation fees), since the children were already resident with their matrikin and under their care. However, what is important here is how the conception of eating in the context of *mradi* informs women's networks as the householding practice of kinwomen.
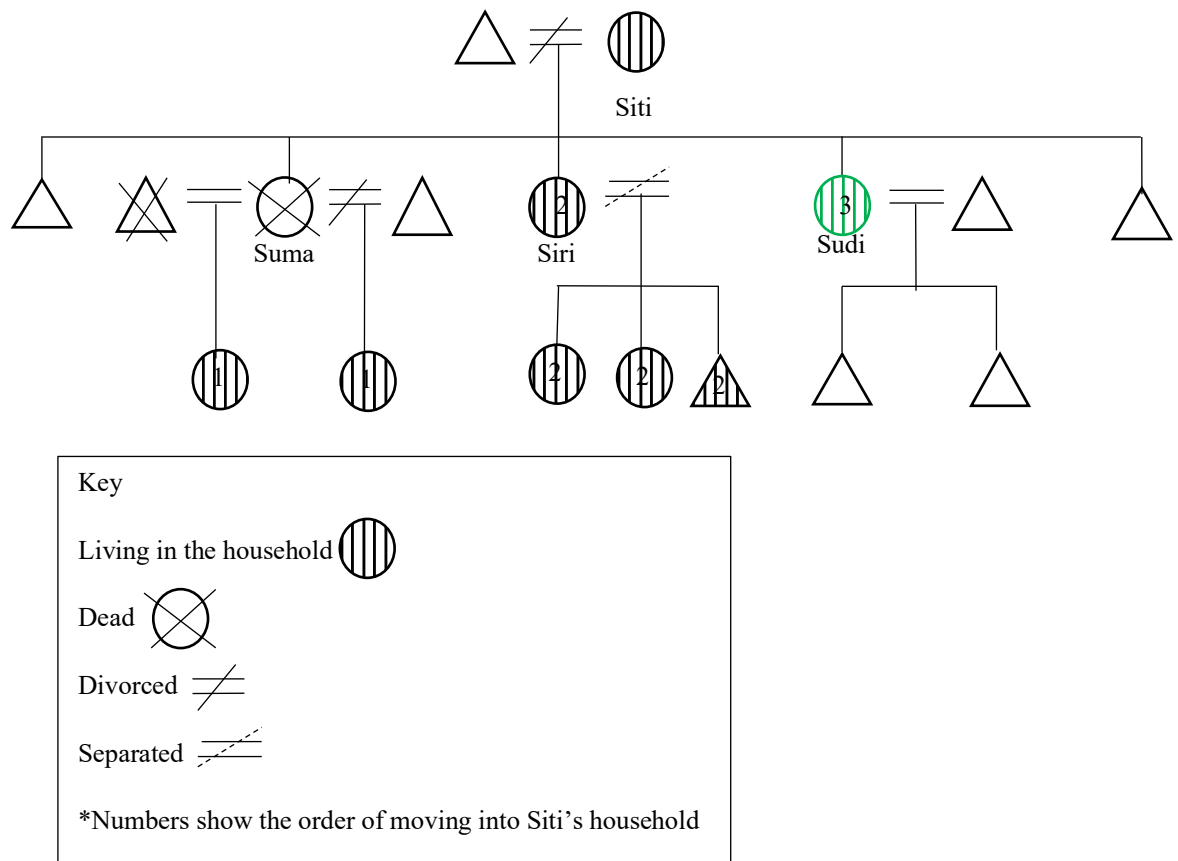
Figure 3.2 Siti's Household

Case 5: Hekima's and Mejuma's Households

The third narrative focuses on broader networks of kinswomen which include mother's sisters, and where not only husbands and lovers are in focus, but also mother's brothers. When Hekima learnt about her husband's secret extra-marital affair which was later formalized into a proper Islamic marriage, she painfully separated from her husband. This was Hekima's third marital relationship. After the separation, two of Hekima's children fell sick. Her last child, who she had with her third husband, fell sick very often, while her third child from her second relationship developed hearing problems. According to Hekima, the problems started when she asked her husband for the

separation and distanced him from *mradi* errands because she suspected that her husband collaborated with the other woman to "finish" her children by ensuring that *mradi* money would never 'feed' her household. "My son is ever sick, my daughter now has hearing problems, I am always in and out of the hospital. My eldest daughter cannot get a job after I struggled to give her all the education. How would you explain that?" lamented troubled Hekima. When her house's roof started leaking and some part of it bent during a heavy rainfall, Hekima was sure that it was her husband and the other woman who caused that by sending a bad charm to ensure *mradi* funds she had received the previous day would not 'feed' her household as she had planned. Hekima's mother's sister was the second next of kin. Hekima explained the situation to her and since Hekima lived in her own compound alone with her children (on land inherited from her mother), her mother's sister, whose piece of land was next to Hekima's, decided to build a house on the land, and move in to stay close to Hekima. Hekima also told me that her mother's sister even advised her to keep off any proposal of support by her estranged husband because if she received the money from him, it would cause more harm if this money mixed with that from *mradi* and they consumed stuff bought with the money.

The story about Hekima was not only told by herself. Her mother's sister's daughters (Hekima's parallel cousins (*akpwoi*, sing. *mkpwoi*)) who lived in the homestead (*mudzi*) next to Hekima's knew of Hekima's story, and like Hekima, believed that similar problems befell them. Mejuma, who is older than Hekima, returned to her mother's house to distance herself from her violent husband. They eventually divorced. Both Hekima and Mejuma told me the man never showed up in Mejuma's life despite the fact that Mejuma left him when she was pregnant and that he lived in a village not very far from their village. Mejuma told me that she sent a message to him when she delivered but he only sent her money once for child support. While his gesture angered Mejuma, she told me it was also helpful because she never got motivated to move back with him. But Mejuma got into another relationship with a *rafiki* (lover) with whom she bore two other children. Mejuma told me she never formalised the relationship with the *rafiki*, and the *rafiki* could not provide any financial support because he had "nothing" to give. When Mejuma began receiving *mradi* funds, she told me she also developed problems with her legs. Due to this, her sister helped her collect *mradi* funds, and sometimes Mejuma sent her brother to attend *mradi* meetings on her behalf. However, Mejuma was convinced that her two estranged husbands were responsible for

her illness because she did not 'make' them part of *mradi*. Although her first husband never pushed her to give him money like the second man often did, she believed his spirit might have contributed because "some men were just not happy to see women receive the funds". Indeed, the unhappy men were mostly the women's husbands, lovers and their children's fathers. Others such as brothers and mother's brothers formed a point of contact when women needed kin support. As I show in chapter 3, women strategically sought their mother's brothers' assistance including accessing and inheriting property and land from them. It is no surprise that Mejuma explained that such men as estranged husbands would do anything to ensure the *mradi* funds did not feed the women's household.

Pursuing the issue further, I learnt that Mejuma suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and the medical documents she had from the clinics confirmed this diagnosis. However, Mejuma told a very different story as narrated below.

> When I started feeling sick, with a lot of pain in my legs, I arranged to see the doctor with the balance from *mradi* money after paying my children's school fees. The doctor said I had problems with my bones and joints. I took the medicine I was given, but the pain kept increasing every day. It got worse when I took the medicine. I went to many hospitals and they were not able to help me. Then when I received *mradi* money again, I took some and went to a local 'doctor' [traditional healer] and he gave me another medicine in a bottle. The medicine worked for a short while and stopped. I went back to the hospital, spent all the money, but I could not find any help.
>
> Recently, I went to the local 'doctor', and he gave me another medicine. That one you see over there [she shows me while pointing at it]. I have to keep it in the sun. I have been taking it. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it does not. Also it is like when I take it, just like the other medicines, the pain starts coming back. I have started thinking, the problem is much deeper. When I think about it , and when I see what my sister [referring to Hekima] has been through, I remember this problem started with *mradi* funds. Now some people [referring to the former 'husbands' and possibly their kin and wives] know you are receiving the money and they are not happy. Then they go and do bad things of *chidigo* to make sure you will never remain even with one shilling from *mradi* to 'feed' your household. It is very bad. I am very stressed to think about it.

One time my mother's sister came here to see me with her friend, her friend looked at me and said the bone disease is a very stubborn one to cure. She said her mother had it. But I know that is what has been happening. People have been telling me that it is not normal to have a disease like this. To be sincere, if it was a normal disease, it would be healed by the many medicines I have taken. The doctors are known very well as good doctors. Now my body is full of medicine, I still go through a lot of pain and walking is a problem. I am just like a disabled person. And then you hear many stories, even the other day I overheard that the second man [*mlume*] said the money will not help me, can I think otherwise? When *mradi* money came, I paid school fees and for the exam for my son. Now my son has been doing very well but now he has failed the exam. I am thinking very hard.

My brother approached that *mlume* and asked him to leave me and my household alone. He showed me kindness and gave me money to pay my son's fees at the computer college. Soon he will complete his education and he will get a lot of money. I may not 'feed' my household properly now, but come what may, I will keep receiving *mradi* money to help me in the small ways even if almost everything goes to buy medicine. I am happy my sister is staying with me and she helps collect the money when my legs put me down. Myself and my sister are born from one *tumbo* and she knows my pain. One day, these problems will whirl like a wind, Mejuma's household will stand and be praised in our village. Those people will come to be ashamed. Alhamdulillah!

These narratives demonstrate the everyday life experiences of women who head households in Msambweni. While the alleged witchcraft accusations related to *mradi* may not be substantiated they provide an opportunity to reflect about women who privilege female centred relationships over the conjugal bond, and uncover the centrality of female focus in the way these women constitute their households. Hekima and Mejuma had to keep close ties with their mother's sisters even having them join and remain in the households to 'protect' and 'contain' the handling of *mradi* funds as a way to address the problems of 'feeding' their households emanating through these funds. Of course, their ideas were informed by the emphasis on maternal relations which often informed the basis for matrikin support in times of need. As I have noted, it was not uncommon that women turned to their kinswomen in the event of crises such as divorce, separation, deaths of husbands etc. Kinswomen also confided among themselves about sensitive matters such as infertility problems, for example, barrenness which was stigmatised and formed

grounds for divorce. I have also argued that *chifudu* ritual reinforces the view of fertility as a woman's sphere. Mejuma's sister was *tasa* (barren) and she moved in with Mejuma following a painful divorce when she could not bear a child. Their mother's sister who Hekima looked up to had one child and was not able to have another child when she contracted her second marriage.

The women's narratives and performances echo the broader everyday tensions on gender and household discourses informed not only by state, Islam and Digo ideologies that operate in this context, sometimes in conflict, but also in a context where socio-economic crisis and diseases, including HIV/AIDS prevail and create demand for cash and kin support. As observed among other communities in the coastal part of Kenya, "cash is so elusive for most [people in Msambweni] that expenses of a reasonable life are terribly hard to cover with the pittance most households actually bring in" (McIntosh 2009a:99). Even when people grow maize and cassava, and sell stuff such as coconuts and *makuti* to meet the everyday necessities of the households such as salt, sugar and kerosene, there is usually a need for money to meet other household necessities such as medical care, education, weddings, funerals, and building houses (see also McIntosh 2009a). With so many living expenses and the limited sources of off-farm income available to many people in Msambweni, *mradi* funds are a significant contribution to many households, especially because it is a regular source of income. In the case of men, for instance, the tourist industry at the coast which many men have depended on for centuries has been in decline for several years due to the recent terror crisis in the country, and the fishing industry has not been very productive recently due to the depletion of fish stocks associated with over-exploitation and the effects of climate change (Ochiewo 2004). This has implications for gender relations, especially when other factors are in play such as *uungwana* ideologies and, as I show in chapter 3, women's perception of *kusaidiana* (collaboration) which gave women substantial autonomy and opportunity to cultivate survival strategies. Others have shown how Digo women in the past have used spirit possession performances to extract economic support from husbands and male matrikin (see Gomm 1975; Gerlach 1961). Whereas the performances described in these studies reflect a way of 'fixing' the conjugal bond between men and women, and affines, they do not clearly reflect the sort of female networking that is evident in the performances and narratives in the context of *mradi*.

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Conclusion

Studies of woman headed households have often privileged conjugality and Western nuclear family perspectives to understand the formation and relationships in such households. It has often been assumed that since men are absent, women in their roles as mothers take up responsibilities in such households. Relationships in woman headed households have also been understood as deriving from women as mothers, hence the assumption of matrifocality as a characteristic of woman headed households. This chapter explores the lives and experiences of woman headed households in Msambweni by using their perspectives to uncover the everyday lives of woman headed households, to show how these households and the associated woman centred relationships are constituted and reconstituted. I have shown that woman headed households and female centred relationships have been influenced by historical, social and cultural processes, but women have also strategically negotiated, installed and reinstalled them in specific times and in various ways. Anthropological scholarship has shown that kin relationships are not fixed; that "people can deactivate [or activate] kin relationships" depending on how they regard them, either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Nuttal 2000:34). However, to understand how this happens, Marshall Sahlins (2011) invites a view of kinship as performative. By exploring the interplay between the discursive performances of *mradi* money and the female economy, I have shown how the constitution of women's households in Msambweni revolves around networks of women as kinswomen, rather than simply as mothers. Indeed, women's householding performances were motivated in this way, but also due to their gendered matrilineal ideologies and performances, including *tumbo* narratives that revolved around eating and feeding, women's householding also shores up matrilineality in Msambweni. In the next chapter, I explore women's household provisioning practices to show how this informs the way women perform and keep alive matrilineal relations in Msambweni.

Chapter 3

Finding *Riziki*:
Household Provisioning and Economies of Woman-heads

Introduction

About noon one day in March 2015, outside Hajuma's four-roomed *makuti* (a form of thatching material made of dried palm leaves) thatched house, with mud walls, was Hajuma's granddaughter, Hasiti , washing a heap of clothes that lay in front of her. Hasiti's baby lies on a *jamvi* (a floor mat made of raffia) just beside her. He is asleep. Hasiti looks up and sees me standing by the verandah. '*Ukasindadze*? *Karibu!* (How's your day? Welcome!)' She greets me wearing a big smile on her face and gets back to her washing up basin. Suddenly, the baby wakes up; she picks him up, ties him on her back with a *leso* (a type of printed piece of cloth wrap worn by women over other clothes or as a scarf), and continues washing.

Hajuma is in the house, and she knew I was the person speaking to Hasiti. She had been waiting for me because I had informed her that I would visit that morning. She shouts from the house, "I'm here. Come inside." I quickly walk through the narrow corridor, past the two bedrooms facing each other, to the last room where Hajuma sits by the fireplace. The house is dark and very hot, filled with smoke and smells of the cakes she is baking. The walls are worn out and dusty. The earthen floor is well sprinkled with water to keep down dust. Some seemingly unfinished rolls for making *jamvi* are packed in a corner. A large box full of cakes lies by her side. Her *leso* is all dusted with flour. She offers me a wooden stool and a plate of cakes. I pick one piece and she looks at me as if expecting a word. "So tasty! Are you expecting some *ajeni*, visitors, today?" I asked because it was very unusual to find Hajuma baking cakes, instead of weaving *jamvi* or *makuti*. She looks at me with a shaky smile and disputes, "*Ajeni?* Life has become very hard my child! I have realized that my household, *nyumba*, is slowly inviting a life of *ndzala ndzoo! ndzala ndzoo!* (hunger come! hunger come!)". Hajuma lamented that it was very shameful for her to "sit and see this happen" at this era as if she was a "woman without a heart! God has blessed me with *shamba* (land) and rains, but that is not enough!" She continued, while adding that her 'children'[47]

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[47] Among the Digo, there is usually no explicit distinction (in the ordinary usage) between children in the classificatory order of daughters and sons, especially for grandchildren. They are all termed children, and in this case all

would soon be home from school to eat, but they also needed to be clothed, taken to the hospital when ill, and have their school fees paid. Hajuma is staying on her husband's land with her daughter, Hatuma (mother to Hasiti and the heir to her father's land). Hatuma has ten children from three different marital relationships; one with the first husband who had died, three with the second who she had divorced, and six with the third who she told me was a *mjeni*[48], visitor, and with whom she had a temporary relationship. Six of the children (two sons and four daughters including Hasiti) are living in the household; two sons are married and staying on the other plot of land she inherited from her father; and her two daughters are married and staying with their husbands just a few miles from their home. Living in the household also are Hasiti's three sons born from two different sexual relationships that never resulted in formal marriages.

Hajuma was confident about her household headship role and the responsibility this bestows on her for its needs. I asked her why she felt this when the children she claimed responsibility for had their mothers living in the household. Hajuma was shocked by my question. She looked straight into my eyes and exclaimed, "you can't understand! We, Digo women have a heart! Things have really changed for us. It is no longer about sit, I feed you! Those times are no longer with us! You must seek *riziki* (subsistence) for your household."

At this stage of my fieldwork, I had encountered many other similar and complex cases of women heading households in Msambweni. Actually, just before I went to visit Hajuma, I had passed by her neighbour Halima's house. Halima was still mourning her dead mother who had passed on in February 2015. Her mother had been ill even before I started my fieldwork in the village in October 2014. Halima had been caring for her ill mother before she died, in addition to the three children she bore from two different relationships. She looked withdrawn and devastated. She told me that while her mother did not do much to provide for the family, her *jamvi* weaving business meant a lot to the household. This is because she likened her mother's business activity and contribution to that of her brother. She explained that her brother only did casual jobs but she didn't expect him

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grandchildren, and any other children may be daughters and/or sons to their grandparents. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

[48] An in-marrying man in the wife's maternal home is usually know an visitor, *mjeni*. Although the use of this term is in relation to the ordinary understanding of a person who is a visitor in the households, the reason and practice of visitation are differentiated in practice. Such that the expectations and treatment of the different forms a visitation takes may not be contradicted with that of another in different instances.

to assist her because "he cooks alone. His little money is just for himself", thus she has to "find *riziki* for [her] children."

Hajuma's and Halima's cases, and those of many of my informants present a window through which we may understand what is actually happening to women and household relations in Msambweni. These women seem to chart a way of negotiating their position in their households and beyond amidst historical changes that have occurred (and continue to happen) in their society. It emerges that women pursue these as opportunities through which their status and position are formed and transformed, and become central to the operations of the household, and beyond. This happens within a complex web of household relations that are produced and reproduced, and at the same time sustained as women who head households in Msambweni imagine, strategize and perform their assumed social roles and strategic economic activities that such opportunities provide room for.

The changing nature of household relations in matrilineal societies has been noted by anthropologists, and has formed a subject of much debate for many decades. These debates have been informed historically by what anthropologists have considered the 'puzzling' nature of matrilineal households. This can be attributed especially to overemphasis on relations associated with descent and lineage groups in relation to historical processes, for instance, colonialism, religion, emerging modern market forces, and postcolonial government structures. Following this, most scholars have suggested that matriliny has been highly challenged, since they see it as unable to cope with such forces, and so giving way to patrilineal or bilateral systems, consequently reinforcing the production and reproduction of domestic male authority and domination over women. Hence, the position of women in matrilineal societies and their economic contributions have been viewed as threatened or undermined by such forces (see for example, Boserup 1970; Goody 1976).

On the other hand, some scholars have suggested that such forces have actually provided space for reinforcement of female autonomy and social control in various aspects of social life in matrilineal societies. Michael Peletz, for example, has provided an insightful account of how both colonial and post-colonial states, religious, and modern market forces, together with ideologies on relations between men and women have provided space for change and continuity of the social organization

of the Malays, especially female autonomy and social control in property and inheritance relations (Peletz 1987, 1988, 1996). Peletz's work suggests that understanding social relations in matrilineal societies cannot be achieved by using a generalized or universalized lens that assumes and/or is silent as to how practices and ideologies may be used by the people themselves to provide an account of the everyday realities of their lives, especially lives of women in matrilineal societies. An understanding of the realities of social and economic processes and organization in these societies is not possible in isolation from particular ideologies and practices that may be prerequisite to its constitution and practice, and that are specific to any given society (Moore 1992). Following Michael Peletz, I suggest that the existing historical and anthropological literature that presents matrilineal societies as doomed or vanishing has paid little attention to loci, such as *riziki,* which provide context for visibility of the social continuity of matrilineal relations, with socio-economic, political and religious change or forces acting as the apparatus propelling spaces for the processes and practices associated with *riziki*.

In this chapter, therefore, I will explore how *riziki* emerges as an important aspect of understanding changing household relations with regard to women heading households in the Kenya South Coast. I suggest that *riziki* and the practices and processes associated with it are gendered, and form a significant aspect around which the lives of woman-household heads in the Kenya South Coast are organized. As a result, these form a crucial locus for understanding the nature of relationships that are forged and sustained as these women perform and strategize to meet their perceived household roles and responsibilities associated with household provisioning. I will show that such endeavor, in turn, contributes to reproducing and sustaining gender ideologies, roles and matrilineal relations in very complex ways.

To do this, I will first consider the concept of *riziki* and the discourses associated with it. We will then proceed to examine the social and historical contexts of household relations with regard to women and household provisioning prior to and after introduction of Islam and British colonial administration, through to the post-independence period. This will be an attempt to show how ideas of finding riziki became associated with women-heads' roles as providers. An exploration of the nature of strategized economic practices that women-household heads engage in as survival strategies - conceived as ways of finding *riziki* - to ensuring sustained household provisioning will follow. I will specifically discuss women's marital lives and landholding practices. Analyses of

these practices will show how woman-heads become central to their household economy and demonstrate the crucial space this provides for cultivating relationships that reinforce these women's household headship status and their roles and position in the household and everyday realities of life in Msambweni. This will also demonstrate the complex ways the practice of finding *riziki* contributes to sustaining gender roles and matrilineal relations in the Kenya South Coast.

Riziki and everyday life

In Kenya, the word *riziki* covers a wide semantic field including subsistence, a blessing, or a portion. As such, it is widely used in various discourses and everyday life practices to convey and express different meanings. Many artists have used this concept in their performances to express the economic hardships many people in the country go through in their attempts to meet their everyday basic needs. For instance, a popular artist in Kenya, Awillo Mike, sang about the relentless struggles people in the country's capital engage in pursuit of *riziki* (subsistence)[49]. Like many other performances on *riziki*, he presents *riziki* as a means of 'preaching' resilience and persuasion for embracing hope to the country's population, especially those considered poor and engaged in a relentless search for means to survive in their everyday life economic struggles. This kind of 'preaching' and persuasion is influenced by the fact that many people popularly conceive *riziki* as the necessities of life that, in order to acquire them, you must engage in economic endeavour.

The understanding of *riziki* also includes acquisition of a thing or anything non-human or human, material or immaterial, that is considered 'rightful'. This form of ownership is usually understood in relation to time and space conceived in a form that is considered non-artificial (not of humans' making), and often associated either closely or fully with supernatural endowment. Such a form of ownership is often termed a 'blessing' (*baraka*), or a 'portion' whose limits are associated with supernatural powers. In this sense, *riziki* becomes a space through which people imagine their own lives in relation to self, others or things, and the supernatural world.

In both cases, that is, *riziki* as life's necessities, and as a 'blessing', it is imperative to note that *riziki* may not be available to everyone, not available every time, or everywhere. But it may be sought, found and owned in time and space. While *riziki* may define a present state of a people, it

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[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef-HPNiT2pg

may not be possible to fully predict the form of *riziki* available to a people at a future time. Hence acquisition or ownership in this sense may be spoken of in two forms: the form of present availability – in a form which has already been owned or acquired and is still available; and in the form of a predictive future acquisition or ownership, which is yet to be seen or known. Therefore, I may suggest, as a blessing, *riziki* has to be waited upon, while as necessities of life, *riziki* should be sought in order to make a person's life bearable.

The conception of *riziki* as discussed above, and its deployment in everyday life, informs the forging and breaking of relationships among people. This happens, especially, because the relationships that *riziki* opens up are imbued with differentials and inequalities. In Msambweni, *riziki* among women heading households revolved around making and remaking kin and household relationships that defined the women's position and status within their households and beyond. Many of these women, as in the cases of Hatuma and Halima at the beginning of this chapter, expressed *riziki* not just as necessities of life, but important to household subsistence, which forms a very crucial part of women heads' lives in their households. Therefore, these women engaged in persistent efforts to find *riziki*. Finding *riziki* for these women involved performances that aimed at household provisioning whose major objective was ensuring household sustenance and continuity. Additionally, *riziki* is also perceived as a blessing or a portion. For instance, to have a lasting marriage, the parties need to be *riziki* (blessing) to one another, or the person in reference. If the marriage breaks, the marriage or both or either of the parties may not be considered *riziki*. If a person (or something) is your *riziki*, he or she will definitely 'come' and belong to you. If someone gives you money and you suddenly lose it, it will be considered not your riziki. The funds were not intended for you. Such conceptions are used to justify people's performances or practices in their everyday lives. This chapter explores the economic performances that women engage in as ways to finding *riziki,* a form associated with household provisioning, or as *riziki* (blessing) (or not) in themselves. Before I delve into the economic performances, I first explore the historical and social contexts for household provisioning in relation to women, which may help understand the unfolding of finding *riziki* in relation to women heads in Msambweni.

Women and household provisioning: a historical perspective

The economic world of the Digo living in the Kenya South Coast faced tremendous change from the mid-19th century with increased conversion to Islam, and later introduction of colonial administration in the early 20th century. This period fostered a nexus of economic relations that appeared quite different from those prior to their interaction with Islam and colonial administration, and which form a focal point to forging household relations experienced by men and women in the Kenya South Coast today. Prior to the 19th century (that is, since their settlement in the Kenya South Coast in the 17th century) the economic affairs of the Digo were organized around agriculture that was largely based on slash and burn shifting cultivation, and trade with the neighboring communities in the hinterland. These economic activities fit well with their household organization, which was based on the *kaya* system (fortified villages surrounded by dense forests) (see Chapter 1). The organization of the *kaya* system ensured provision of security and food to members of the different clans residing in the *kaya*. This was mostly done through matrilineal networks and collaboration within the *kaya*. For instance, the fact that land was neither exclusively communally nor individually owned made it possible for cultivation to be done communally and organized around matrilineal relations (Ng'weno 1997:64; Spear 1978:118; See Chapter 1). Men of the same matrilineage (*fuko*) cleared land, while women did the rest of the cultivation work (Gerlach 1960; Ng'weno 1997). Cultivation was not only for subsistence use (grains such as maize, millet and sorghum, and other food crops such as cassava, and cash crops such as sesame and coconut palms were planted), but produce from the farms was also traded for exchange of items such as cloth and beads (Gerlach 1965:247; Spear 1978:4). Trade was largely a male activity, while women were responsible for agricultural production, and producing most of the staple foods. Therefore, women's agricultural labour was very significant as it provided the means both of subsistence and trade. They also produced artefacts such as mats and baskets that were exchanged within the *kaya* (Spear 1978:4).

Increased participation in trade in the later part of the 18th century provided space for increased dispersion of people from kayas[50] and establishment of new homesteads (*midzi*) outside, but

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[50] The Digo moved out of their main *kaya* by the 18th century and established other sub-kayas (small-fortified villages) along the coast. These kayas were organized on the basis of clans and but were not used for ritual activities, which were carried out in the main *kaya* (Spear 1978:85; See also Chapter 1).

around the kayas. People increasingly cleared more land for cultivation to aid trade and provide food. Being a male activity, trade provided space for men to cultivate and maintain their status both within and outside the homestead (*mudzi*). Many men aspired to become outstanding traders in the community. The desire to establish such status led to the production of two phenomena: 1) to ensure continued centrality of their status and monopoly in trading affairs, men married numerous women who provided the required agricultural labour in the fields (Spear 1978:112); 2) male homestead heads (mostly *adzomba* (mother's brothers))[51] controlled homestead resources, such as land use and its production for household use and agricultural products used to initiate and manage trade, and distribution of items obtained from trade. For example, the best cloth and ivory ornaments were stipulated as items for male elders (Spear 1978:106).

At the same time, young men found space to venture into trade, gained economic success, and over time assumed roles of establishing and heading their own *midzi*. Stories are told, for instance, of a famous wealthy man in the community, Ngonyo, who was introduced into trade at a young age by his father, and established his own *mudzi* in order to sustain trade: Ngonyo largely succeeded in trade from the exploitation of agricultural labour of the many wives he married - from whose labour he obtained large amounts of grains and cassava for trading with the Swahili and other neighbouring communities (Spear 1978:116). Ngonyo, and other famous men in this community are popularly remembered for their economic success through domination over trade within the community, and in relation to other households, and for control over land through women and their labour. Yet, from another perspective, this reflected the economic value of women in the community, which is recognized even by existing scholarship. However, many people in this community largely acknowledge this value today. A village elder once told me that the community's existence has heavily depended on women. By this he meant the vital women's economic contribution to the households. He reinforced this centrality by explaining that three stones, signifying cooking space, were placed on a woman's grave in the past[52]. While some scholars may view this as symbolizing the place of women as the 'kitchen' domain of the private

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[51] Also known as *aphu.*
[52] See also Kenya National Archives KNA/DC/MSA 3/4

sphere, as will be shown as the chapter progresses, it rather laid the ground for women's centrality to the household economy.

The growing control and domination of trade and *midzi* by men (of course through women and their labour) survived to the 19th century and created the basis for women to become increasingly isolated from trading affairs and relegated to *midzi* spaces, but increasingly labouring on the land to ensure its continued production, both for homestead consumption and trade. Again, this reflected the value of women in this community. Women became increasingly associated with agricultural activities and, by extension, 'keeping' of land. This trend was also reinforced by the decline of the corporate matrilineal solidarity of people in agricultural production after dispersion from kayas, since each mudzi depended on its own resources, especially women's supply of agricultural labour (Spear 1978:112). But male control over homestead errands was also amplified by the situation. One of my informants expressed the view that "*zamani* (in the past) *adzomba* were everything with regard to kin (*jamii*) issues. But women cultivated all the land." Thus, men, especially those from the matrilineal side, managed and controlled the undertakings of the homesteads including women's contribution to the survival of homesteads which they were heavily dependent on. This was true even for women who separated from their husbands or whose husbands died[53]. They mainly remained under the care and control of their brothers or mother's brothers who, for example, managed access to the women's children[54] through *malezi* payments (child maintenance or upbringing fee)[55] (Gomm 1972: Oendo 1987, 1988; More discussion in Chapter 4).

Through this arrangement women continued to be part of their matrikin homesteads, and accessed land through their matrilineal relations, from which line they inherited and were able to cultivate[56]. I also gathered from conversations with my informants that some of the women were bold enough to clear forests (especially with the help of their *enehu* (brothers and sisters)) and later owned the

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[53] After the death of her husband, a woman had the choice to be inherited by one of the brothers of the deceased or remarry (KNA/DC/MSA 3/4; 'Extract from notes on Wanyika by Marchant in Native tribes and their customs', KNA/GPS72 KEN). However, women rarely acceded to this choice or remained under the care of their husband's brothers (let alone being inherited by them). In most cases, women remarried.
[54] In this community, children are members of their mother's matrilineal groups (Gomm 1972:104).
[55] This is a form of payment made by a child's father (in case of his separation with the child's mother) to matrikin for child rearing, and gives him paternal filiation rights.
[56] See for example KNA/No. 116/ADM. 16/1

pieces of cleared land (see Chapter 1). Like other women in the community, therefore, these women kept fields that were large enough to produce not only for homesteads but also surplus for trade (Spear 1978:95). But considering the nature of homestead and agricultural arrangements at the time, agricultural produce for women who divorced or separated with their husbands, or whose husbands died, formed part of the pool of agricultural produce from women's farm labour that was used for trade under male control. Thus these women did not participate in trade themselves nor decision-making for the proceedings from such trade.

With the onset of colonial administration and increasing conversion to Islam in the early 20th century, the conception, practices and relations surrounding homesteads largely changed. First, colonial administration introduced payment of taxes through a 'hut' system (taxation per hut as a household unit[57]), which forced people to organize themselves in households (*nyumba*) rather than homesteads (*mudzi*) in order to manage payment of taxes. This happened at a time when declining trade constrained male trading affairs due to the introduction of commercial plantation farming by colonial administrators (Cooper 1980). Second, colonial officials were in need for land and male labour for commercial plantation. They restricted African use of land and forced people out of land they perceived good enough for commercial production. This led to serious loss of the land that aided subsistence economy for male entry to the market and stable food provision, hence a rising desire for cash. Men in this community opted for casual labour, mainly available in the nearby town of Mombasa, rather than providing waged labour to colonial government projects. These men were able to access casual labour through kin networks of *adzomba* who had already secured some casual jobs with *tajiri* (wealthy men) in Mombasa[58], and got into debts due to the frequent loans they obtained from the *tajiri* (Gerlach 1960; Willis 1993).

At the same time colonial administration favoured and promoted Islamic traditions that promoted practice of patrilineal kinship arrangements (Gerlach and Gerlach 1988; Gerlach 1960; Spear 1978). The most significant of these was inheritance of land and property from father (*ise, baba*) to children (*ana*) rather than mother's brother (*mdzomba*) to sister's children (*adzomba*)[59]. Colonial administrators capitalized on these Islamic ideologies to reinforce land registration and 'kill' their

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[57] For a critical overview of the household concept, see Chapter 3
[58] These were mostly of Arab and Swahili origin.
[59] Mother's brother and sister's children are both known as *mdzomba* when referring to their relations.

perceived problematic matrilineal relations. In addition to the 'hut' system, these activities changed the perception, organization and management of homestead affairs in various ways. For instance, the status of the homestead head was at risk with the increasing shift to household-based organization with fathers and husbands (*bwana,* also *mlume*) becoming the new icons associated with household (*nyumba*) headship.

With loss of land on which women depended , the new ideals provided an incentive for women to become dependent on men. This was not surprising because Islam had already propagated the idea of the male household provider role. Over the succeeding decades, a conception of what amounted a 'good' husband emerged (and has persisted to date as it will be shown later). Indeed, women viewed a 'good' husband (*bwana*) as one who should strive to provide for the household. *Bwana* was also conceived in the broader context of a master (the head). As a 'good' master, therefore, a husband was expected to head the household, and not treat women as slaves[60] by ensuring his economic contribution to the household.

The ideology of a husband's economic role in the household was not only about 'good' husbands, it also included the notion of what it meant to be a wife married to a 'good' Muslim husband. For example, women married to Muslim men were expected to do 'light' work, which excluded farm work[61], and their manner of dress was expected to show some sense of 'modernity', a concept associated with Arab culture (*ustaarabu*) and coastal culture (*uungwana*) popularly associated with the Swahili (Oendo 1988:47; 1988:19; Pouwels 1979:187, 432). Husbands were also expected to supply women with means to finance festivities such as weddings (Oendo 1988:57). It has also been noted that women persuaded their husbands to purchase 'high' status foods such as fresh fish since other forms of fish such as smoked fish or sauces prepared from weeds were associated with low status and slavery in the villages (Gerlach 1963:38). This phenomenon challenged the position of the new male household heads both within the household, and beyond, and particularly in the lives of the women because they could not freely engage women's farm labour, nor challenge their 'wife' status, otherwise they risked challenging their own position as a 'good' Muslim husband.

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[60] Slavery at the Kenya coast is remembered as a painful experience, historically associated with low status, and nobody would like to be associated with it.
[61] Farm work also came to be associated with slavery (Gerlach and Gerlach 1960, 1988; Oendo 1988)

While men seem to have been put in a difficult or complex situation, the interesting question here may not be how men, but how women managed this 'new' way of life.

In the post-independence period, the challenged financial situations of men could not meet the desires of many women. For instance, the overwhelming numbers of people from up-country challenged the migrant labour of many Digo men: many employers preferred hiring the former (Willis 1993). Due to this, the promises of Islam to women had failed. In order to survive this storm, women devised survival mechanisms such as spirit possessions. Exorcism ceremonies for possessions provided space through which women could attain material providence from men. For instance, husbands, brothers, fathers and mother's brothers were expected to finance exorcism ceremonies for the afflicted women. This included providing gifts such as *leso* (a type of cloth worn by women) or money (*pesa*) to the afflicted woman in order to drive the possessing spirit away (Gomm 1975; Gerlach and Gerlach 1988). Yet while women seem to have succeeded with such strategies, this does not seem to have lasted for long. For example, increasing land inheritance disputes, and deteriorating perceived male activities such as fishing and tourism, weakened the position of men as 'good' Muslim husbands.

Additionally, over the course of 1990s and beyond, the HIV/AIDS scourge heavily affected many households. Women and men lost a huge population of husbands, fathers, daughters and mothers. As explored in chapters 2 and 4, women who lost their husbands (who were fathers to their children), were forced to go back to their mothers. Over time, the community was flooded with many households headed by grandmothers living with their daughters (now mothers), and their children (chapter 2). Thus women had to get back to the 'drawing board' and revise their ways of provisioning the households, away from the 'good' Muslim man ideology. The economic crisis faced by these households in the 21st century has overwhelmingly intensified involvement in various strategies that aid household provisioning. Many of my informants acknowledged that this crisis could not allow any woman to "sit any more" for the household "turned its mouth" to her. The outcome of these is 'economies of women' and the associated understandings of *riziki* that I explore in the sections that follow.

The everyday women's marital economy

The 'normal' woman's 'marital'[62] journey

Woman-heads stress on the marital and sexual relationships they establish during the course of their lives. Just as in Hajuma's and Halima's cases, many households had women who contracted and dissolved numerous marital and/or sexual relationships during their lifetime, and during the period of my fieldwork. Out of the 41 households where I carried out a survey on marital histories, 23 households had cases of divorce, separation and remarriage (women who were either in their second, third or fourth marital relationships), and 13 households had women who had lovers (*rafiki*) either after numerous broken marital relationships or sexual ones. As highlighted in Chapter 2, this practice is not a new phenomenon in this community (see also Gomm 1972; Oendo 1987). Separation or divorce and remarriage were very common in the past (*zamani*), but the rates and some patterns of these practices seem to have increased and changed very significantly in the post-independence period to the extent that they have become seemingly "normal" (Gomm 1972; 1975; Oendo 1987:58).

The extent to which these relationships may be considered 'normal' (but not normative) for women forms part of the women's marital and sexual lives as a journey, as was constantly demonstrated during my fieldwork. For instance, women spoke rather freely and openly about the number of marital or sexual relationships they had entered or dissolved (or planned to enter or break). For these women (as will be explored further below), any marital or sexual relationship with a man was portrayed as an enterprise in which not only production and reproduction, but also more importantly distribution of resources, should be made possible. Such an enterprise, as my informants put it, did not have to be hidden from the 'public', because it was not about men, but women collaborating with men for a certain endeavor (in this case household provisioning). The word 'kawaida' (normal) was often used to describe such relationships. This informed the way woman-heads felt about these relationships and why they practiced them.

To further endorse 'kawaida' when describing their marital or sexual lives, women-head informants included conceptions of Digo traditions and kin members' involvement as forming part

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[62] I use women's marital journey/relationships to refer to both sexual and marital relationships.

of their marital journeys, which suggests that the normality of these relationships was not a construction by women alone, but involved a network of ideas and people. I heard several stories (and also observed) that Digo traditions and kin members encouraged a woman to remarry or divorce if she so wished, and at times kin members even exerted pressure on a woman to take such moves. Take, for example, Mwashaha, a forty four-year-old woman who has 10 children from three different relationships. I asked her why she got into the three relationships and she explained:

> My parents did not take us (girls) to school. They did not see the need for our education because we were to get married, after all. They decided to struggle with our brothers. At that time, I used to go to visit my friend at my neighbor's place. There I met my first man. I was about fifteen. My brother (*mwenehu*) also knew this man. When he and my mother (*mayo*) learnt that he liked me, they encouraged me to marry him. His wife (*bibi*) had died some years back. But things didn't go well between us because his deceased wife's children (*ana*) didn't like me. They felt I married their father to get *riziki*. Of course he had to contribute to the economic life of my household. I was very unhappy with them, and I decided to ask the man to leave me alone. We had already conducted *arusi* (wedding), and he had already paid everything. But why would I live with a man whose other wife's children didn't like me? I then divorced him. At that time I had four children with him. After a year or so, I met this other man just around the village vicinities (*mtaani*). As a tradition of the Digo (*chidigo*) and Islam (*kisharia*) I decided to marry him to continue life together because I had divorced. This is *kawaida* (normal) for us women here. You know I already had children to look after and needed someone to assist me. Unfortunately, things didn't work out between us because he wanted to marry another woman. I already had three other children with him. My mother had died at that time, my sister (*mwenehu*) had married, and my brother was pushing me to get in a man. He was not wrong, because, here, a woman is allowed to get a man after she 'loses' another. So I asked myself, "what do I do?" Then I got a *rafiki* (just a friend, a lover). I have three children with him, but I left him because he only came here just to 'eat'. It can't be like that. Now I don't want a man.

Mwashaha's narrative reveals that the form marital and sexual relationships take is a journey imbued with involvement of kin members, and ideologies of Digo and Islam traditions, which form part of the normalization of women's marital journey. While her case involved her own kin, in other cases, the husband's kin form part of this process. Hekima's story portrays this perspective:

I remember when my husband died, his brothers and father's brothers came to me and asked me when I was planning to go back to my parents. My children were still young and I wanted to have someone assist me look after them. I knew very well that they wouldn't let me get a man while staying in their home. As it is required of a woman by *kisharia*, I moved back to my mother. My father (*ise*) had already died, so my mother was staying with her sister on our father's land. She had come back as well because our father's kin didn't want her to stay there. That's what always happens here because it's a tradition and *kawaida*. You remember my sister told you she also came when her husband died. When I came back I decided to build this house. I got in a *rafiki* in the process of searching a 'good' man to make my life with. By the time I realized he was not [a 'good' man], he had "given" me my fourth child. I felt very bad because we had agreed to assist each other (*kusaidiyana*). Later on I got another man. We had *arusi* but I divorced him when I discovered he had another wife. I didn't want him to start depending on me. I have three children with him. It's life anyways.

While these narratives reveal the view of 'normal' of a woman's marital journey, with the role of kin and the prevailing practices and ideologies well demonstrated, it also suggests the decisive nature of women as far as these relationships are concerned. This normalization offers woman-heads space to feel obliged to 'move on' after disintegration of their relationships for the sake of providing for their children. A woman needs to get a "good man" not a 'bad' one, a man who would contribute to the economic life of the household, which informs both continuity and discontinuity of a marital journey. As will be demonstrated below, finding a 'good' man for these women was both a means to an end and the end itself. A 'good' man meant finding *riziki* as household providence and as a blessing to the household. This underlined the economic importance of woman-man relationships, and evidently the driving force for women to enter such relationships was therefore not so much companionship as the anticipated gains for her household. Women are demonstrated to have been keen on a man's potential for material support (*kusaidiyana*). Before I investigate the economic centrality of these relations, I will briefly discuss the various forms of contracting or dissolving marital or sexual relationships in Msambweni to demonstrate their economic contribution to the complexities of a woman's marital journey.

Practically, among the Digo, there are two different ways of contracting marital or sexual relationships, and one formal way of terminating them. The most popular way of contracting a

relationship is through *Arusi*, a high status formal wedding ceremony that comprises observance of both Digo and Islamic traditions and rituals. The ceremonies are characterized by a lot of celebrations and high bridewealth payments (*mahunda*). It is the desire of every Digo woman for her first marriage to be an *arusi* ceremony since it accords status to the woman and her kin members. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4,   women usually seek to marry men who they feel are 'good' and able to not only finance the flamboyant occasions and provide them with their desired *mahari*[63], but also finance their everyday   material needs after *arusi*. Failure to meet such expectations often forms the basis for   disintegration of a marriage. For instance, in many of the wedding ceremonies I attended, women often talked about the ability of the grooms to provide for the brides, with particular emphasis on prediction of future provision. They rated, for instance, the tents used, quality of music played, the bride's wedding gown and the décor, and more importantly the food prepared, in assessing how 'good' the groom would be to his bride, and how likely it was the relationship would last[64]. Women acknowledged that the man's fulfillment of anticipated economic advantage in any marital affair would determine the survival of a marriage. Thus, the challenge had much to do with a man's cooperation in the economic life of a household. In one of the weddings, a bride told me, "I have no problem myself. It's men who bring these problems."

Uhala is another form of contracting relationships. Unlike *arusi*, *uhala* is a less formal way of contracting a relationship, and in most cases it does not involve 'big' ceremonies. Relationships contracted in this form may be formalized through Islamic ritual or customarily by payment of *mahunda*. Many of my informants had contracted their subsequent marriages after the first through *uhala,* with some of them formalized by registration in Islamic Law. They told me that this form of contracting a relationship did not require a lot of involvement or attention from kin members, hence offered women opportunity to remarry as they pleased. Thus, a domain that traditionally belonged to men who arranged and negotiated women's marriages took a 'new' form. It is also this form of contracting relationships that allows women to keep lovers. While Islam encourages payment of *mahunda* before formalization of any union through Islamic law, some of my informants acknowledged that *mahunda* payments were not made although at times their kin

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[63] Among the Digo, part of bridewealth (*mahunda*) comprises a portion known as *mahari* given by the groom to the bride. The bride decides what to be given, and the amount in case of money.

[64] It is the obligation of the groom and his kin to meet the costs of wedding ceremonies and all other events and preparations involved during marriage ceremonies.

members, especially their fathers (*baba*[65]) or *adzomba* demanded the payment of *mahunda*. But most of their husbands were reluctant to honor such payments. Nevertheless, the failure to make such payment offered women an easy route to termination of relationships[66].

Talaka is the formal way through which formal marital relationships are dissolved. In its most ordinary usage, *talaka* is used to refer to divorce carried out through observance of Islamic rituals. For instance, a husband is expected to make some payment to his wife at the time of divorce. Many people refer to this as '*kumupha talaka*' (to give someone divorce). In most cases, women do not receive any payment from their husbands after divorce. The most common payment that women are keen on is *malezi* (childcare funds)[67] since most of the relationships end up with children born during the period of the relationships, and after termination of a relationship, it is the woman who has the right to custody of the children (according to Digo tradition). As discussed in Chapter 4, women may bear many children from different relationships. Considering the economic status of many of the households headed by these women, there is usually a need for a helping hand to economically support the household.

'This is not promiscuity!': The 'collaboration' business

Scholarship on woman-man relationships and material exchanges in Africa often presents women as promiscuous (Cole 2009:111). Such a perception emanates from the long standing assertion that African sexual relations have been largely "individualized, commodified and casualized" by "forces of modernity" (Hunter 2009:135), which has also contributed to the view that any spending associated with such relationships is instrumental (see for example Caldwell, Cadwell, and Quiggin 1989; Dinan 1983). Such instrumentalism is associated with the basic assumption that women simply use men to finance their affairs (Cole 2009; Hunter 2009; Masquelier 2009; Smith 2009; Ferguson 1999), often in the form of gifts (Hunter 2009:135). Roger Gomm's account of marital instabilities among the Digo opens up with a claim of a community continuously breeding "harlots and bachelors" rather than "husbands and wives" (Gomm 1972:95). Among the harlots

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[65] Father's brother is also referred to as *baba.*
[66] Once divorce or separation has occurred, the woman's kin are expected to return bridewealth payments to the divorced husband. However, I have never encountered or heard of any case where *mahunda* payments were returned. This may be, perhaps, because such payments are not usually made as expected in most *uhala* relationships, and in cases where they were made, only a small token was given to warrant a return payment.
[67] This is a form of payment made by a child's father to matrikin for child rearing, and gives him paternal filiation rights.

and bachelors is a project by women 'milking' material provisioning through exorcism ceremonies financed by men for the afflicted women (Gerlach and Gerlach 1988; Gomm 1972, 1975). However, the narratives of Mwashaha and Hekima provided above reveal that marital relationships at the Kenya South Coast are projects that women enter with men in order to 'build a home' together (Hunter 2009). The word *kusaidiyana* (literally, 'to assist one another') was often used in many conversations to describe the reasons for remaining or not remaining in relationships. Many of my informants disputed that these relationships had anything to do with promiscuity. For instance, Mariamu, a 52-year-old woman living with her old and ailing mother, her children and her deceased sister's children observed, "You get into these relationships to assist one another (*kusaidiyana*). It's about finding *riziki*. Even in *Sharia*, a man should provide, but us women we only want *kusaidiyana* because life is difficult. If this does not happen, then you will have to leave it!" She recounted the following story:

> When I married my first husband, we agreed to support each other. But over time, he changed. He left the household to me. Even a *leso* (women's cloth) was hard for him to buy. I just kept quiet and took care of my children. I always gave him food. But this did not last for long. A man should be able to contribute as agreed from the beginning. I couldn't put up with this. I talked to him about it, but he didn't seem to listen to me. If you see such a behavior, you just know a man is helping (*anasaidiya*) elsewhere. I decided to divorce him, but I needed to find *riziki* for my children. That's how I ended up in another relationship. It was not promiscuity! This one too broke up for the same reasons. Fortunately, it was not by *arusi*. When my sister died, I took in her children. If it were you, what would you have done? My small business could not feed all of us. My mother is old and she falls sick very often. Then I found a man who agreed we push life together. I bring flour, he brings salt. And life continues. His other wife divorced him. But he is a 'good' man. He is now a *mjeni* here (literally a visitor, but used to mean an in-married man).

Mariamu's story reveals how woman-heads treasure observance to the agreed collaboration for financing a household. Failure to honour such agreements leads women to getting into other relationships (with 'good' men), because they need to provision their households. They consider the 'collaboration business' as the driving force to contract or terminate relationships, and dispute that this is promiscuous. Another interesting feature in Mariamu's narrative is recognition of the religious contribution to the ideology of male provisioning roles. Mohammed Mraja (2010) noted

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the impact of Islam to the ideologies surrounding male household provision, and its contribution to marital reforms and conflicts among the Digo (see also Mraja 2007). However, as Mariamu's narrative shows, women are keen to emphasize their perception of a woman's continued household provisioning role as embodying the marital arrangements they practice. Additionally, it clearly challenges the representation of Digo women as promiscuous from the view of my informants. Mwanalima, in her late thirties, explained that:

> I married this *mzee* (old man) after the death of my husband. We agreed to assist each other to raise our children. He brought his children from his first marriage here because his wife sent them to him. When they were staying with his other wife, he was not contributing as she expected and she was always complaining. When he came to live with me here, we built this house. I was not staying in this house before. We both pay school fees. When my business went down, he encouraged me. You know *mzee* has his own business as a broker. And in *sharia* law, men should provide for their households. But because I knew he couldn't make it alone, I secured a loan with Kenya Women Finance Trust [a micro-credit bank]. This is what every woman will do. *Mzee* saw I was hardworking. It's not because I was promiscuous! A Woman should be in charge of her household.

Mwanalima's narrative suggests that gendered household provisioning by woman-heads through marital arrangements that take the form described in this chapter encourage contribution from either party involved, and a symbiotic behavior may not be encouraged. This too may challenge anthropological studies on reciprocity and marital exchanges (see for example Comaroff 1980), gifts and commodities (see for example Parry and Bloch 1989), and marriage, material exchanges and love (Cole and Thomas 2009). However, the economic hardships and change experienced in these households may contribute to the nature of marital relations practiced by women, and present materiality and marital relations not as two "hostile worlds", but "deeply intertwined" (Cole 2009:111). But it would be unfair to suggest that these are the sole factors as they have often been associated with promiscuity, and obscure the agency of women. As Moore (1994) suggests, it is not the sole contribution of economic hardships or change to the nature of conjugal or marital relations practiced by people in a particular context, but many times, "the changing [and competing] nature of expectation, self-worth and agency" of the persons involved. Indeed, my informants' narratives reveal their collaborative expectations, agentive aspirations, and desire to

fulfill their household roles as their status accords them. In many conversations, women also aspired to forms of marital relations that would amount to a blessing.

'Why I didn't stay with him': Marital relationships as a 'survival blessing'

During my fieldwork, I gathered that purchasing clothing for themselves and preparation of 'decent' food for the household was highly valued by women. Women in Msambweni accord status to the type of food they prepare in their households (especially on special occasions such as *Eid ul fitr* celebrations) and the clothing they wear, and there were many discussions and debates that revolve around this, especially when women gathered together in spaces like women *chama*[68] meetings and wedding ceremonies. Men were subject to endless gossip by their wives and other women if they didn't contribute to financing the expected or desired household foods and clothing for such occasions. Most of this gossip revolved around why such men were not a 'blessing' (*riziki*) to the women and could be divorced.

Women were also subject to gossip. I observed that women changed their dresses for up to three times a day during such events, and other women gossiped about those who did not. They also talked about the cost and rated the fashion of the dresses. For example, women differentiated between those dresses bought from Tanzania (a neighbouring country) or Mombasa, and those obtained locally. Women applauded the decision to live without a husband (*bwana*) who could not afford such items. Such a woman had not yet found her 'blessing'. I remember one of my informants told me that she had recently divorced her husband barely two years after they had entered into their marriage, and one of the reasons she cited was that he could not afford a *leso* from Mombasa. She then bragged of later getting a *rafiki* who had contributed overwhelmingly to the household's *Eid ul fitr* celebrations that had just passed. She told me that perhaps the second man was her 'blessing'.

These accounts   reveal that women are driven by concerns of consumption in their ideas of who is or is not a blessing in their analysis of male economic contribution to their lives. This in turn motivates them to engage with men who they feel are their 'blessings'. Their household consumption desires embody the relationship between household provisioning and blessings; the

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[68] Women *chama* is a form of women association.

two seem to be intertwined. To be a blessing, a man is expected to contribute to the household economy.

It is important to note, however, that male provisioning performances, as blessings, are vital to maintaining women's household status and their relations with kin members. Women demonstrated keenness in ensuring they were not deprived of this status by continuing to relate to their kin. For example, during the early days of my fieldwork in October 2014, I visited Mejuma. Mejuma is an old woman in her 70s. She has two sons. One lives in the same compound with her and the other works in a nearby town, where he stays. She also lives with her deceased daughter's son. At the time of my visit, Mejuma sat on her house verandah with two women. Some children were playing at one corner of the verandah. Mejuma was busy weaving some mats while conversing with the two women. I joined them and Mejuma introduced me to the two women. One of the women was wife to her son who lives in the compound. The other had separated from the son who works and lives in the nearby town. Mejuma explained of the woman:

> You know that everyone has her own *riziki*. If he is her *riziki*, they will be back together again. If not she will get another one [a man]. But I am still her mother. She hasn't wronged me. It's my son who is the problem. He gives her nothing. All the money helps others. Even husband to this one [pointing to the other woman], has no problem with her. He understands how these things work.

What struck me is how she expressed the continued relationship with her daughter in-law (*mkaza mwana*). Her separation with Mejuma's son did not end their relationship with her, not even with her brother in-law and his wife. This was because, as Mejuma's narrative show, the perception of *riziki* is a gendered ideology based on understandings of contribution to the economy of households. Household provisioning defined blessings. This was evident when I visited Mejuma over the summer in 2016. I found she had moved to a new house, and she explained that she had left the other house to her son who was working in the nearby town, and his wife. I enquired to know which son's wife she was talking about, and she recounted, "the other time I told you if he was her *riziki*, they will get back together. They are there now [pointing to the house] assisting one another. I left them that house."

Woman-heads should get all the land: land and forms of woman 'heirship'

Mwanamkuu is a woman in her late 70s. She divorced her two husbands and returned to her parents' home. She never married again. Mwanamkuu told me that she was old enough to get into another marital relationship when she abandoned her last husband. She also added that she would not worry much because her children would still go back to their fathers and get their inheritance (some had already done so), or inherit her land, which she had inherited from her father. Her two daughters (both divorced) live with her, and their children. Two of the daughter's sons are already married and staying in the same compound. However, when I visited them in August 2015, her eldest daughter expressed displeasure that their mother's brother's son (*mkpwoi*) had sold some part of the land and did not want them to claim a share of the money. When I visited them a year later, they expressed the same displeasure that "all the land will soon be gone". Their *mkpwoi* had sold yet another portion of the land. This time their mother demanded some share of the money. Out of 300,000 KES (£2,217.29), he gave her 60,000 KES (£443.46)[69]. Mwanamkuu and her daughters were very unhappy. I asked them whether the land was registered under their names. Mwanamkuu told me the land is registered under her names and those of her brother. Then I asked why they did not push him to give an equal share, and her daughters responded:

> If something is not your *riziki,* you just leave it. You don't have to provoke problems when you have children to look after. It is unfair but we just have to put up with it. Perhaps it was not our *riziki*. If he wants, he can sell all the land and 'eat' all the money. This is our *mkpwoi* (mother's brother's son). He does not respect brotherhood. We have our fathers' land. We can go cultivate and live there. But he should also know this is our mother's land, and we have right to cultivate, live here and inherit. But one wonders why he has to do that because it's we [referring to themselves] who need all the land here!

Mwanamkuu's narrative echoes the prevailing observation in existing scholarship that land disputes are very common in the Kenya South Coast (see for example Ng'weno 1997 and 2001). Such disputes are associated with inheritance due to struggles with kinship patterns and orientations that have prevailed since the introduction of Islam and colonial administration in the Kenya South coast. Notably, there have been changes to ownership and inheritance of land

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[69] Exchange rate as at 23 May 2018 (I GBP equivalent to 135.30 KES)

considered clan (*fuko*) land. Traditionally, *fuko* land was passed on from mother's brother (*mdzomba*) to sister's children (*adzomba*). And children inherited generally from grandmothers and mothers, mother's brothers and one's *fuko* (Ng'weno 1997). With the endorsement of father-child inheritance and demands for registration of land in the 20th century, existing scholarship suggests that while this fuelled the many land disputes experienced in this region, concerns about Digo membership and social continuity should be recognized as the foundation of such disputes (Ng'weno 1997, 2001). While on the one hand this assertion may be true, on the other, the dynamics of land use, rather than just social identity and belonging contestations, form yet another story. Mwanamkuu's account opens up the story of living with land disputes that result from land use and associated *riziki* ideologies. The narrative reveals that women find themselves in difficult situations when they have to confront their kin for a share of proceeds from the land, especially when land is sold or rented out. In an extended conversation, Mwanamkuu told me that sometimes one has to keep asking for a share because she is in need of *riziki* for her household. Thus, as we demonstrated in the case for marital arrangements, woman-heads' perceived household roles as providers and the ideology of *riziki* provide them space either to choose to keep off or confront the demand for a share from land sale proceeds.

Nonetheless, what is striking in the above narrative is the way women view themselves as holders of numerous pieces of land in different forms of holding or access which they can capitalize on. The various forms of landholding practices available to women are widely exploited by woman-heads in this community (see Figure 4.1). Indeed, the importance of land to women in many matrilineal communities has been widely noted (Hirschmann and Vaughan 1983; Kajoba 2002; Peters 2010; Moore and Vaughan 1994; Peletz 1988). This association has reinforced the historical feminization of subsistence agriculture, which underscores Mwanamkuu's daughters' claim that "women need all the land", hence as one informant put it, women feel they "should get all the land" because they mainly do the cultivation work. The gender bias in this assertion is thus not a surprising one. Many of my informants demonstrated dependence on their agricultural produce for household consumption. Many women tilled land where they planted mostly maize and cassava, the staples for household subsistence. While such produce was never in large quantities, it formed a significant part of the annual household food. The overwhelming majority of the households I visited during meal times mainly fed on meals either made from cassava or maize, although

coconut and bananas were also common. Additionally, the amount of land available to many of these women is not big enough to produce food for their households. I gathered cases of land sales and rentals, such as Mwanamkuu's, and sometimes women exercised little or no control over this. Nevertheless, with the heavy childcare responsibilities, availability of land formed a basis for woman-heads to explore landholding options available to them as an agricultural strategy. For instance, some woman-heads held land by inheritance from their parents, others were gifted by or borrowed from relatives such as mother's brothers or their brothers, or friends, or stayed on husband's land (see Figure 4.1 below). What is most intriguing about the forms of women 'landholding'[70] is land relations between women and some of their male kin. For instance, women staying on husband's land, brother's or mother's brother's land.
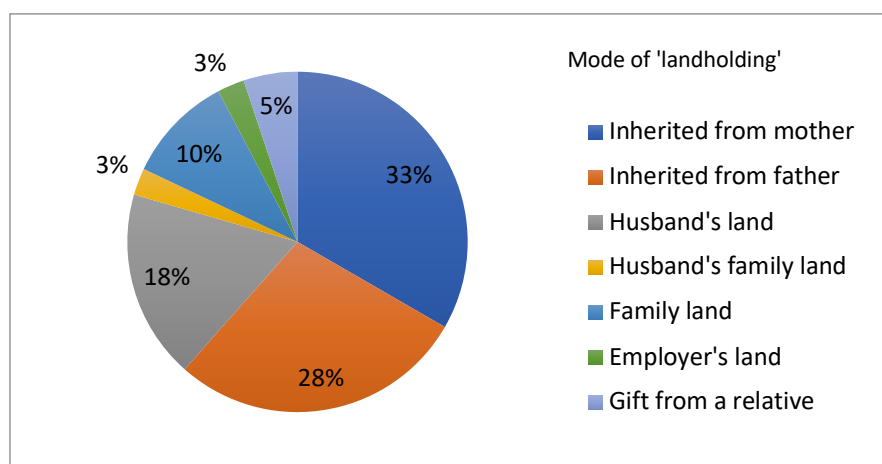
Figure 4.1 Different forms of 'landholding' for woman-heads in Msambweni

Women's 'Squatting' behaviours

Traditionally, women do not inherit from their husbands. In case of a divorce or death of a husband, women may move to live at their parents' home. This happens when a woman married virilocally. It is not uncommon, however, for women to live with their deceased husband's kin. However, I

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[70] Women held land that they did not own. For instance, temporary arrangements with kin or friends to cultivate or build a house, while other women had inherited land but not yet issued with land title deeds. While holding land by registration would seem to be an assurance for land ownership, many of women were of the view that once a person gifts or allows another to use his or her land, it would not be in order to bring up disputes or 'chase' them away. Perhaps this notion has been informed by historical understanding of the Digo that land belonged to no one but God.

encountered many cases of women who were forced out by their deceased husband's kin, especially because, as mentioned earlier, the husband's kin would not allow a woman to bring in a man if they felt they were young and have the potential to remarry: women usually remarry uxorilocally in their subsequent marriages after the first. Others feared the burden of raising their brother's or son's children and his wife when he died. Yet this formed yet another avenue for women to access their husband's land. This happened through their children. I observed cases of women who lived on their husband's land because their children had inherited from their fathers, for instance, or still in the name of children who were still young. Such 'squatting' behavior, as many of my informants termed it, did not accord women ownership and assurance of continued stay as other forms of 'landholding' did, but access to their husbands' land provided more space for subsistence agricultural production. As interesting as this may be, what struck me was the enormous sense of desire to ensure provision for their children that motivated women to engage in such practices. Take, for example, Amina, a woman in her 80s (now deceased). Amina married another man after the death of her first husband. Although she inherited land from her mother, she never lived there when her second husband died because her brothers and sisters, and close maternal kin had died. She cultivated the land for some time and later sold it. She remarked:

> When my second husband died, I didn't wait for his children or kin to ask me to leave because I already knew it was expected of me. I didn't bear any children with him, so there was nothing to make me stay on. I didn't want to move back to my land (inherited from her mother) since everyone there had died. I couldn't stay alone. More so, my children (from her first marriage) still needed me. They were already at their father's home. He had died at the time. I decided to go and live with them and cultivated that land.

Amina asserted that her children 'needed' her because, as their mother, she felt obliged to participate in their economic lives, hence her decision to move to live with them and cultivate her former husband's land. Like most women of her age, she emphasized access to her husband's land through her children as a material resource that embodies a woman's household economic role. While the notion of woman household provider role reinforced such conceptions and undertakings, it cannot be disputed that many women chose to move in with their children (mostly after their last marital affair) for old age security as well. They chose to live with their children, whom they felt would care for them as well at old age. For instance, Amina acknowledged that she also wanted to

stay with her children because she was old enough to live alone. She remarked, "At my age, I need someone to send to the shops." Indeed, she referred to her children.

Furthermore, it may be worth stating that residential arrangements that have emerged in this community over time have also reinforced the forms of parent-child relationships practiced today, especially during a parent's old age. This is evident among women who do not have or live with husbands during their old age. Their immediate, and most available form of material support is usually from their children first, and then, their matrilineal kin. Times of illness are crucial moments when this form of support is demonstrated. For instance, when I visited Asha in September 2016, she was very ill. Asha lives on land inherited from her mother with her daughter who divorced twice, and remarried a *mjeni* (in-married man). At the time of my visit, two of her sisters had come to stay with them to provide care to their ailing sister (Asha). When I asked her daughter why they had not taken her mother to the hospital for specialized medical attention, she explained that they waited a 'word' from their mother's brothers. She also lamented that illness had "put her mother down" that she could not even go to cultivate her father's land (who was Asha's husband, they divorced). Asha's other children lived at their father's home. Asha's daughter moved in with her mother, she felt her economic contribution to the household was very significant.

Squatting on a husband's land does not, however, change the relationship between a woman and her husband's kin. A woman's identity remains defined by membership to her *fuko* (matrilineage), whether or not she squats on her husband's land. Yet many people in the community view this as a strategic means of reinforcing women's access to land in order to meet their overwhelming household provisioning roles. For instance, a community leader was of the view that "the women will not be allowed by her husband's brothers to keep title deeds for his land or property, since it is not what we practice here (referring to women inheriting from husbands), but, honestly, this land helps many women here feed their households when their husbands die." When I asked Amina how her husband's brothers and other kin reacted to her moving in with her children after her second marriage, she said that it did not cause any alarm because she was old enough to 'get in' another man (to remarry), something that forms the basis for husband's kin to ask a young woman to leave. Amina also explained that she didn't ask them for a share to inherit. She asserted they knew she moved only because she needed to look after her children. Amina took care of her

deceased daughter's children. They lived with her in the same house. Many women gave similar stories. In many conversations, it was common to hear "I don't know anything about my husband's land title deeds", and "I am here for my children's provision."

Women's access to husband's land through the form described here may not be overstated, for women who bore children with lovers emphasized obtaining portions of land from their brothers and mother's brothers. In fact, during my fieldwork I encountered several women who lived in land and houses they claimed to have been given by their uterine brothers (*mwenehu mlume wa tumbo mwenga*) and their mother's brothers. However, what struck me about these 'landholdings' was their temporary nature, yet many of my informants lived on land held in such manner. For instance, Mwanasiti lives with her daughters (one had an in-married man (*mjeni*) who died in July 2016, and the other had separated), and grandchildren. She told me that the land on which she built her house and cultivated belongs to the deceased mother's brother to her mother. She expressed fears that she would lose the land if her mother's *mkpwoi* demanded to have their father's land. Her daughter was, however, quick to respond that the land was issued because her mother needed to feed her household, hence it would be unfortunate for anything of the sort to happen. She added that it would only happen if it was not their *riziki* (blessing). Such narratives were very common among women who held land or property in this form. It implied another form of 'squatting' behavior, or constructed woman 'heirship' whose favor was bestowed with woman-heads household provider roles. In fact, many women and their kin justified this behavior/form of 'heirship' with reference to women's need to provide for their households (find *riziki*).

In doing so, it does not mean that women left land or property held in this form. It actually gave them an avenue through which their perceived roles could be realized and   reinforced. I never encountered any eviction case from land or property held through 'gifting' by brothers or mother's brothers, but for husband's land. Reasons for eviction from a husband's land have already been stated. For brother's land, Oendo (1988) observed that brothers allocated land or any property to their sisters in order to provide them and their children a home in case of divorce or death of their husbands, and to ease the economic burden that would have otherwise been born by their brothers (Oendo 1988:43). Indeed, by brothers allocating land or property to their sisters, these women found a 'shoulder to lean on' mainly because of ideals associated with their household provision roles, which may have otherwise burdened their brothers. We may, for instance, consider the case

of two sisters, Bahati and Mishi. When I knew them in 2014, Bahati lived in their brother's house, while Mishi lived in a rental house in the same town. Both had divorced their husbands. Bahati had children from three marital relationships, while Mishi from two. They both ran small businesses of selling *mahamri* (doughnuts). When I visited them in September 2016, Mishi had moved in to stay with her sister, and their children. They were still running their mahamri businesses. Bahati explained to me, when I first met her, that their brother gave her his house to have space in which to raise her children, although she would leave and build her own if he asked her to. Considering this, I asked whether that was likely to happen now that Mishi had also moved in. They explained that, in fact, their brother asked Mishi to move to the house to ease the burden of rent payments since her lover had stopped his material support to her household. I also gathered that their brother was keen that she would seek his financial support to put up her rent.

What is important to note here is that woman-heads do not only find favor on land-use, but also in other property such as trees and houses. Importantly, trees such as coconut palms are accorded value and status in this community. Traditionally, coconut palms and structures on a particular land accorded value to it, since land had no commercial value, as it was considered a gift from God (Ng'weno 1997, 2001; Oendo 1988:42). As such, a person may own land but not the trees or structures on it. Woman-heads have the privilege to use trees and houses when they ask of them from their kin. Coconut palms, for instance, have enabled these women to engage in other income generating activities, which offer them the opportunity to move outside their home, in the name of search for *riziki*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to illustrate the notion of *riziki* and its contribution to the particular economic performances of woman-heads in the Kenya South Coast. I have showed that such perceptions reinforce the woman-heads household provider role, and place them as the pillars of their household economy. Historical overview of women's household provisioning role has provided possible reasons why woman-heads have gained economic power, and on the other hand, how this forms part of their everyday life today. The chapter has also attempted to demonstrate that matrilineal societies have undergone political and socio-economic changes that may not be viewed simply as erasing or breaking down the matrilineal organization of these societies in favour

of patrilineal systems, but rather the complexities involved may be a way of understanding the avenues provided by historical changes, especially for women household heads to assert their perceived central positions in the households and beyond. For instance, marital and land economic relations provide spaces that make and reinforce the women's positions in their households and the practice of everyday life. Such performances have also contributed to the patterns of matrilineal relations experienced in this context. In the next chapter, I explore caregiving performances to show the kind of relationships forged, maintained or broken in the context of *mradi,* the government funded households subsidy programme, the Cash Transfer Scheme, which targets woman-heads in Msambweni.

Chapter 4

"A share of my children":
Caregiving and 'new' household relationships

Introduction

One afternoon in January 2015, I sat next to some women outside the Children's Department Offices in Msambweni waiting for my appointment with one of the government officers working in the department. An interesting conversation picked up when one woman told another that she would not let her 'new' husband (*bwana*) know of the money (*pesa*) she gets from *mradi*. The women laughed and one of them stressed that indeed the new husband should not know anything concerning the funds, and he shouldn't even ask for any of the cash transfer monies, "why would he want the money? These are *mradi* funds!" she wondered. According to these women, they take care of their children[71] (*rera*), that is, they feed, provide clothing, school fees and shelter, and even emotional support for their children, regardless of whether their husbands and lovers participate in these provisions or not. Thus these women considered it inappropriate for husbands and lovers to seek information regarding the CT-OVC funds (*pesa za mradi*) or get a share of these funds.

This was not the first time I heard women express such sentiments about the money they obtained through the CT-OVC scheme, especially in relation to their new and old husbands and lovers, and children's paternal kin. During the early periods of my fieldwork, in the same office, a woman complained to an officer that her former husband had been asking her mother to give him a share of *pesa za mradi*, and suggested he would demand custody of the children if the money was not given. She told me how the child's father and his kin attempted to take the child from her grandmother (the woman's mother). When I later spoke to the officer, he told me they are 'used' to such 'problems' because the Digo have "complicated marital and household arrangements. You will never understand their stories. Women come here every other day with such complaints, and they have children from different men. But the problem is *pesa za mradi*. "

Complaints about *mradi* funds are not always confined to the office space. Homesteads (*midzi*), wedding (*arusi*) events, women's group meetings (*chama*), streets and pathways, market spaces,

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[71] These include their own biological children and those they foster as grandmothers.

all provide room for discussions concerning these funds. For instance, one afternoon in April 2015, Mariamu, a woman in her late twenties, stopped me on the streets while going to visit Mwashaha who lives in the same neighborhood as Mariamu. Mariamu said to me that she was facing some difficulties. At first, I thought Mariamu's difficulties were related to her pregnancy which she often told me was making her very ill, and she could not perform her household chores properly. She later suffered a miscarriage. Mariamu had separated from her second husband due to misunderstanding based on this, and the fact that she had learnt that her husband was 'seeing' another woman. She had moved with her three children (one child from her first marriage (the husband was deceased), and two from her second marriage) to stay with her two divorced elder sisters (*enehu achetu*) who lived on a piece of land they obtained from their eldest brother (*mwenehu mlume*)[72]. Mariamu quickly pointed out that the difficulty wasn't related to either of the issues she had raised with me before, that is, her pregnancy and separation. "It's about *mradi* money," she said. "Please, if my husband approaches you and asks about it (*mradi* money), tell him you don't know anything of the sort." Although Mariamu and her husband had separated, she said her husband often visited her and her family to negotiate for a reunification. But Mariamu was reluctant. She felt her husband had not changed his behavior, and he wanted her back because she was receiving *mradi* funds. "He keeps coming here and asking me to get back with him. He's not even so much concerned about bringing up the children (*rera*). But I know the reason, it's just the [*mradi*] money."

A week later, I decided to follow up the issue with Mariamu. At the time of my visit to their *mudzi*, Mariamu and her sisters had attended a funeral in the neighbouring village. Their children were playing in the compound. They ran towards me as they welcomed me to their home. They greeted me and explained their mothers had attended a funeral. A man sat on a bicycle under the tree where Mariamu and her sisters always sat when weaving mats. I greeted the man. He explained he was Mariamu's husband. This was the first time I met him. He said he had heard about me, knew his wife was my friend, and she talked to me often. Suddenly, Mariamu's brother (*mwenehu mlume*) emerged from one of the houses (*nyumba*) in the compound. He greeted us and explained that his

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[72] *Mwenehu* is a brother or sister from the same biological mother and father. The Digo may use the same term to refer to different relations, but they emphasize the relations to differentiate the persons they refer to. For instance, in case of a maternal half sister (that is, born of the same mother but different fathers), she referred to as *mwenehu wana mayo.*

sisters (*enehu achetu*) had attended a funeral, and he was not sure when they would arrive. I excused myself and asked him to let them know I passed by, and would go back another day. When I began walking away, Mariamu's husband came after me, and said in a low tone as if whispering, "sorry to ask this, I know it may not be right, but I just want to know whether Mariamu gets 4000 KES (£29.56) or 8000 KES (£59.12)[73] from *mradi* every month. I don't know, but I heard she is getting some *mradi* money." I felt very uncomfortable because Mariamu had already said her husband might approach me to ask about the funds. I suggested it was good if he asked his wife about it. He got furious and lamented, "you know the enrolled child is not my own." Mariamu's household became a beneficiary of *mradi* when her first husband died, and before she entered her second marital relationship.

As discussed in the previous chapter, women were very clear about the kind of men they 'kept' in their lives (see also Oendo 1987; 1988). The notion of *riziki* and the performances and processes associated with it facilitated cultivation of relationships that enabled negotiation, affirmation and reaffirmation of women's headship status and centrality within their households, and beyond. While *mradi* offers room for negotiating relations between men and women, what I found intriguing are the relationships that were forged, maintained and broken in the process of *mradi* related discourses and performances. The above conversations were not simply about women's unwillingness to give or share *mradi* monies with husbands or lovers, or concerns about women bearing many children from different marital arrangements, but also the value attached to caregiving (*rera*) relationships due to gendered and kinship ideologies of caregiving. A child's paternity, and being or becoming a woman's husband or lover, did not simply amount to accessing *mradi* funds or children. The narratives illustrate the negotiation of perceived women's responsibility and obligation for providing for children under their care, an issue that, as I will later show, legitimated the very practices of care in the context of *mradi*. This, in turn, impacted the nature of kin relationships between women and men.

As the chapter shows below, the process of negotiating such care for children even in the context of *mradi* adhered to principles of matrilineal affiliation and hence provided an opportunity for reinforcing matrikin networks of care for children, which favoured woman-heads. Interestingly,

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[73] Exchange rate as at 23 May 2018 (1 GBP equivalent to 135.30 KES).

this happened at a time when the effects of HIV/AIDS and other factors such as divorce and separation challenged the same matrikin-based care networks. Indeed, a recent work, *Give a man a fish* by James Ferguson (2015) warns against romanticizing traditional forms of kin support that, he suggests, have been overwhelmed (and perhaps broken down) due to an overdependence crisis that is widespread in many African countries. This observation is not new. Various studies have already noted this trend, especially with the alarming effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in many parts of Africa, with specific focus on affected kin-based caregiving practices (see for example Blerk and Ansell (2007) for southern Africa; Cheney (2016) for Uganda; Grant and Yeatman (2014) for Malawi; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2007 and Nyambedha 2004 for Western part of Kenya). Such discourses of vanishing kin-based support have continued to be cited as reasons for establishing forms of social assistance such as cash transfers that target women and children (Corboz 2013; Ferguson 2015; Nyambedha 2011), to support care for children within households. Yet the effects of cash transfers on the construction of kinship, and the implications for gender relations, have been given less ethnographic attention. As the narratives about *mradi* in the beginning of this chapter show, cash transfers are embedded in household relations and form part of the everyday relations between women and men. Further, they echo Moore's assertion that systems of (re)distribution link households to kinship performances (Moore 1992), but also contribute to their construction.

In her argument for "feminization of kinship", Cecile Jackson (2014) suggests that programmes of social assistance contribute to the construction of different forms of relatedness. But Jackson is keen to stress forms of matrifocality to challenge relatedness that has to do with matrilineality or patrilineality in relation to what she terms "modern kinship and relatedness" (Jackson 2014:1). While her work is not ethnographic, I take up her challenge to suggest that the realities of *mradi* in the everyday lives of women heading households in Msambweni demonstrate how cash transfers have contributed to the reinforcement of matrilineal relations and woman-headship embroidered with gendered caregiving roles and responsibilities that women have to continuously undertake due to underlying complex kinship ideologies of caregiving practices.

Therefore, this chapter rests on understanding what happens when women have to navigate and negotiate their roles as mothers, grandmothers and household-heads within the rubric of gendered ideologies of caregiving and kinship practices when *mradi* funds are involved. Primarily, the

chapter explores the everyday realities of *mradi* in the lives of woman household-heads who are caring for and nurturing their biological and fostered children, and how this offers space for reinforcing women's headship status and matrilineal relations. I argue that by providing space for women's negotiation power over care for children, *mradi* has mediated production of 'new' gendered ideologies and relations of reproduction and distribution that operate within the rubric of kinship as men and women negotiate 'a share of children'. This, in turn, has reinforced unequal claim-making relations between men and women and recharged caregiving as women's responsibility.

To do this, I begin this chapter with an overview of how *mradi* (the CT-OVC scheme) as a form of state social assistance operates in the everyday lives of woman-heads in Msambweni. This will be followed by an examination of caring practices, with particular interest in *rera* (care for children) to show how care for children in Msambweni is constitutive of matrikin relations and ideologies, and a highly gendered practice. Next I show how *mradi* endorses a new way of valuing children's kin affiliation. The process of negotiating this form of affiliation is not a straightforward one; it is carved from conflicting relationships and practices associated with claims for responsibilities for children and their care. This will also be a challenge to classic anthropological studies on the social construction of kinship tied to circulation of children in Africa that assumes this is an harmonious process (see for example, Goody and Goody 1969). Finally, I will consider discourses on 'sharing' *mradi* funds within the households, where spending is charged with women's decision-making as household heads, and in turn, forging and recharging caregiving responsibility as a women's domain.

Living with *mradi* in Msambweni

For many of my informants, *mradi* funds were a timely contribution to the household, especially given the recent kin-based fosterage crisis that emerged from the effects of HIV/AIDS, and increasing divorce and separation rates (see chapter 3). Regardless of the composition of their households and its contribution to the household, mradi remained very popular among my informants. This was demonstrated during most of our conversations. For instance, it was not uncommon to hear women claim "I really thank Almighty God for *pesa za mradi*", "*pesa za mradi* have helped me solve many problems", "if it were not for *pesa za mradi*, my child (*mwana*) would

not have sat for the examination". This was evident especially when women received the payments. For example, I easily recognized changes in women's budgets and narratives: many conversations would suddenly change from complaints of leaking roofs to making repairs, 'sleeping' businesses (*biashara*) to 'awakened' and 'reawakened' ones, missed out weddings (*arusi*) to making up for the concerned households and plans to attend and contribute to other weddings, unpaid debts (*madeni*) to settled debts and making new ones, unpaid school fees (*pesa za skuli*) to ensured school attendance, etcetera. As one old man once put it, *mradi* gave 'life' to women (*achetu*) in Msambweni.

However, as I mentioned in the introduction, for most of my female informants, *mradi* was just an additional contribution to income obtained from other sources such as sales of *makuti* (roofing materials), *jamvi* (floor mats), food and grocery kiosks, and other forms of support that women pursued. Yet mradi contributed to the establishment of some of these off-farm income activities. Some examples are the food and grocery kiosks that were operated by several of my informants in the local market centres and within their home compounds. For instance, Fatemu, a woman in her late 30s, operated two grocery kiosks in two different market centres with the help of her deceased sister's son. One afternoon I drove her to collect her funds. On our way, she told me how she had planned to 'boost' her business with the help of mradi funds. She explained that she would get a loan from a local bank, and mradi would help make the repayments. Fatemu went ahead and did exactly that. The funds helped her open her second grocery shop.

The instrumental aspect of *mradi* contributed to the way my women informants were viewed and treated by others in the community. One of my informant's sisters once told me that her sister and those who received mradi funds were of better status than her, which she attributed to receiving the payments. She described how she envied her sister and a friend (both of who received *mradi* funds) while shopping in the market:

> Eid was approaching and we needed to buy stuff for the celebrations. My sister (*mwenehu mchetu*) and our friend had just received their mradi funds and we arranged to go to the market (*soko*) to do some shopping. When we got to the market, they bought everything they wanted: all the best spices, wheat flour, rice, and nice clothes, for themselves and their children. As for me, I could not afford everything. So I just bought a few items. I cannot lie to you, I was

envious. You cannot compare me with women who are receiving mradi funds. They are much better than me. We cannot be the same.

Indeed, events and occasions such as weddings and Eid celebrations formed platforms for performances that coined women's status. Women who received mradi funds were able to participate in such performances, especially when they happened at a time when they had just received their funds. However, this status was not always revealed in such events alone. Maliza, a woman in her 40s, narrated how she felt privileged because of school items for her two daughters:

> It was embarrassing when they [her daughters] were sent home. When I collected *pesa za mradi*, I went straight to my daughters' school to pay for their fees. I had bought them new uniform and shoes. When we walked down to school, we met some friends. They said my daughters looked very smart and beautiful. They even commented that their dresses looked expensive. But I bought them in a local shop in our market. I felt very nice. After school, they went to *madrasa* (Islamic classes). I had bought them new *madrasa* uniform as well. When I later met their teacher, she said my daughters looked very neat. If it were you, you would also feel happy. You see when I get *pesa za mradi*, I make sure I spend them on important stuff. I can't afford to have people laugh at my children or me. I feel better off than other women.

On other occasions, women performed other 'important' projects with mradi funds because their friends who lent them money could rest assured that they would pay back when they received mradi funds. For example, when Hatuma received her delayed four months payment of about £59.12 (8000 KES), she talked to a friend who lent her some more funds and paid a land surveyor to demarcate her share of land inherited from her late father, which her father's brother contested. Hatuma told me her friend gave her the funds because she would refund when she received her next payment. By doing so, she told me she was able to obtain a title deed and calm the land dispute, but also preserved an otherwise 'decaying' relationship with her father's brother. During one conversation with me, she said:

> My father's brother (*baba mdide*)[74] has disturbed me for long. I have always wondered how I would help myself. He knew I could not afford to pay the surveyors. My mother got worried. She even thought he would exercise sorcery on us. I hoped mradi would help me because my

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[74] *Baba mdide* is used to refer to younger father's brother. *Baba mvyere* refers to elder father's brother.

business was not doing well. But the payments delayed for four months. I was very desperate. Little did I know they would pay us all the months at once. Alhamdulilah! It saved my situation. After I got the title deed, he (father's brother) began talking to us nicely. My friend was also happy that I saved my land and paid back her money.

While *mradi* seems to be doing 'good' to women in the above discussion, perhaps its contribution to the lives of woman-heads is best captured in mradi's relationship with caregiving (*rera*) and kinship performances. Before we consider this, we will first examine in the next section how caregiving is practised in Msambweni.

Doing *rera*: caregiving and kinship in practice

In Msambweni, the notion of care is generally captured in the Digo words *tundza* (care for humans or non-humans). *Tundza* captures a binding relation between persons, or between persons, animals and things. It refers to a long-standing cultural practice that treats performances of care as treasurable acts constitutive of the performers. Thus giving care to persons, animals or things is not simply an act of caring, but a good act or performance that is imbued with a binding, treasured relation between the caregiver and the care receiver. It also instils a sense of responsibility and claim making.

While the nature of care relationships is, in most cases, dependent on the existing relations between the person who gave or provided care and the care receiver, care was, of course, given when needed (Madhavan 2004). Thus reasons for care needs prescribed the perceived appropriate caregiver in Msambweni. In light of this, I observed that care for persons was mainly a kin-based and gendered practice. Traditionally, matrikin were charged with different forms of care and support for kin members, for example, during old-age, at times of illness and death, during bride's seclusion period in preparation for wedding (*arusi*), and care for divorced or widowed daughters and their children (Oendo 1988).

This practice continues to date. Kin members provide care, for instance, through contribution of goods and services, hospitality and labour, and emotional support. However, during my fieldwork, I observed that women, especially grandmothers, mothers and sometimes mother's sisters provided

most care[75]. For instance, they prepared and provided food for secluded brides, and helped them attend to other personal effects such as preparing water for a bath. Several of my informants suffered various illnesses and were looked after by their mothers, daughters and sisters. Such performances of care provision capture significant gendered kin relations. Actually, my women informants assumed caring as their responsibility. One of them caring for her ill mother explained, "if as a woman of this household I don't look after (*tundza*) *mayo* (my mother), whom else should I expect to come here and do it? May be *enehu achetu* (my sisters or her sisters)."

While visibility of gendered care is evident in caregiving practices cited above, it is more pronounced in the case of *rera. Rera* is translated as 'care for children', which, in practice, includes all aspects of bringing up a child on a daily basis, for instance, from changing their nappies to feeding them, paying their school fees, giving them away in marriage, to embracing them after a divorce or death of a spouse, especially for women. *Rera* has a stronger "connotation of proximity" (Hunter 2015:1286) than do other caring practices. Others considered *rera* as a lifetime practice that may only be ended by events that are beyond one's control such as death. As one of my informants stressed, "you care for your children until you die."

Sometimes *tundza* may be used interchangeably with *rera,* but in such cases, *tundza* is used to express a particular aspect of care for children, which, in many cases may be of particular concern, for example, child maltreatment, neglect or other insecurities. It was not uncommon to hear stories that some people are not able to *tundza* children, implying lack of proper or intimate care, or maltreatment. In relation to *rera*, exceptional care is inclusive: *rera* denotes child caring practised on the basis of and beyond an intimate (kin-based) relationship with children, or because it is considered proper, or culturally accepted. Thus, as an everyday practice of providing care, no one *rera'*s a child without some sense of *tundza*. In this chapter, I use caregiving to mean *rera*.

Like many caring practices in Msambweni, *rera* is associated with women, especially those from the maternal side (grandmothers, mothers and mother's sisters). A similar observation on the role of maternal kin for persons was long ago made by Meyer Fortes' thesis on kinship among the

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[75] I came across very few men who provided care, and in such cases the presence of women was very visible.

Tallensi (1949)[76], and it has continued to flourish in other African contexts, especially in the era of AIDS (see for example Adato *et al.* 2005 for South Africa; Alber 2004 for Benin; Block 2014 for Lesotho; Nyambedha 2003, 2004, 2008 for Western Kenya; Oleke, Blystad and Rekdal 2005 for Uganda).

However, unlike patrilineal contexts presented in existing scholarship, the form of maternal care for children practiced in Msambweni is predefined by a child's primary filiation to matrikin. Although mutual interests based on resource constraints may not be overlooked, they are usually not the primary basis. During fieldwork, I observed that *rera* became a responsibility for matrikin especially when a mother died, divorced or separated, or when a child was born out of wedlock. Often, mothers and grandmothers (and sometimes mother's sisters) lived with the children, in many cases matrilocally (see Chapter 2). However, many of my informants *rera* both their biological and fostered children[77]. This arrangement went beyond "willingness to care" (Block 2014:712) or "processes of voluntary affiliation" (Borneman 2001) since kinship and gendered ideologies of care played a primary role in *rera* arrangements. Take for example Mishi's case:

When Mishi's husband died, the husband's kin asked her to leave their *mudzi*. She had two children (one-year and three-year olds) at the time, which she bore with her husband. Mishi asked her husband's kin to give her some more time to stay with them until the children got a little older, and also because her parents died. Her husband's kin did not listen to her. Mishi moved out with her children and was offered a house by her brother (*mwenehu mlume*). When I asked Mishi why she did not leave the children with her husband's kin, she explained:

> Things are different here, not like where you come from. When something like that happens (referring to husband's death), you are expected to go back to your people (*jamaa*). That's where nobody will send you away. If you have children, you can't leave them behind. Leave them with who? They are your children. Only your people can help (*kusaidiya*) you to look after them (*rera*).

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[76] Although Fortes overestimated the role of mother's brothers over other maternal kin such as women.
[77] Fosterage is used here to mean the practice of care for socially biological children. Children born of the same *fuko* as the woman are considered 'biological' children due to *fuko*'s association with the womb (uterus). It is common to hear people say they are born of the same 'uterus' (as the term *fuko* itself implies) (see chapter 2).

Mishi's question about whom to leave children with in situations like her own is not a simple assertion of lack of persons from the patrikin side to look after children. But an emphasis of the maternal bond between women, children and their kin, with whom are believed to have shared the uterus (*tumbo mwenga*) (literally means descent from the same matrilineage (*fuko*)[78]). This was also constantly demonstrated in many other conversations. For instance, a year after Mishi left her husband's home, her sister (*mwenehu mchetu*) died. She had two children. Mishi, being the eldest sister, took them into her household. I asked her why the children's father, or paternal kin, could not stay with them since their father was still alive. She said that, "nobody wants to care for (*rera*) another's burden. These are my children too, my *fuko* (matrilineage)." In another conversation with Fatuma, an old woman in her early 70s, she wondered why she would leave her granddaughter with her paternal kin after her mother (Fatuma's daughter) died, not only because she claimed the child was young (three months old) at the time of the death, but more importantly she held that it was "like throwing away [her] *fuko*." "You don't leave your *tumbo* (uterus, womb) behind." she reiterated.

Indeed, kin ideologies about *rera* and the gendered effect of 'uterus' as a way of practicing relatedness reinforced the practice of *rera* by maternal kin, especially women. Children were continuously associated with their mothers and their kin through the notion of 'uterus', and hence the form of caregiving practiced. However, such caregiving practice does not only happen in times of crisis such as divorce, death, or out of wedlock cases. As explored in Chapter 2, it is a common practice among the Digo for women to move in with their matrilineal kin, especially their mothers and grandmothers, when about to give birth. In case of uxorilocal living arrangements, a woman moves (together with any other young children) to her mother's house (or mother's sister). After birth, the woman stays with her kin for 40 days (a seclusion period when she stays indoors (out of public sight) not going outside the house), after which she may move back to her husband's house. During this period, kin members send their gifts to her. Her husband or lover may visit her and the newborn child (and other children) and pay respect to the household.

However, I gathered that in their roles as kinswomen, mothers and grandmothers continue to take the responsibility of looking after both their daughters and the newborn child(ren), and any other

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[78] Actually, *fuko* could also be translated to mean belly/womb (see Chapter 2).

child who may have accompanied their mother during this period. For instance, when I first visited Hajuma (an old woman in her late 60s) in October 2014, she was caring for her daughter's daughter (Hasiti) who had just given birth. Hajuma moved into the household because her daughter (Hatuma) inherited the land and house from her father. Under Hajuma's *rera,* also*,* were Hasiti's two children and Hatuma's other five children (see Figure 5.1). Although Hajuma's daughter (Hatuma) operated a food kiosk (a business that later collapsed), Hajuma told me it was her responsibility to *rera* her 'children' (referring to her daughter, grandchildren, and the great grandchildren): "This is my *uzao* (offspring, descendants). Do you know *fuko* (matrilineage)? Then, they are my children, and I will take care of them." Interestingly, Hajuma cared for her *uzao* throughout my fieldwork. When I visited them again in 2016, she still lived with and cared for them.

Key

Children of different fathers

Members of the household
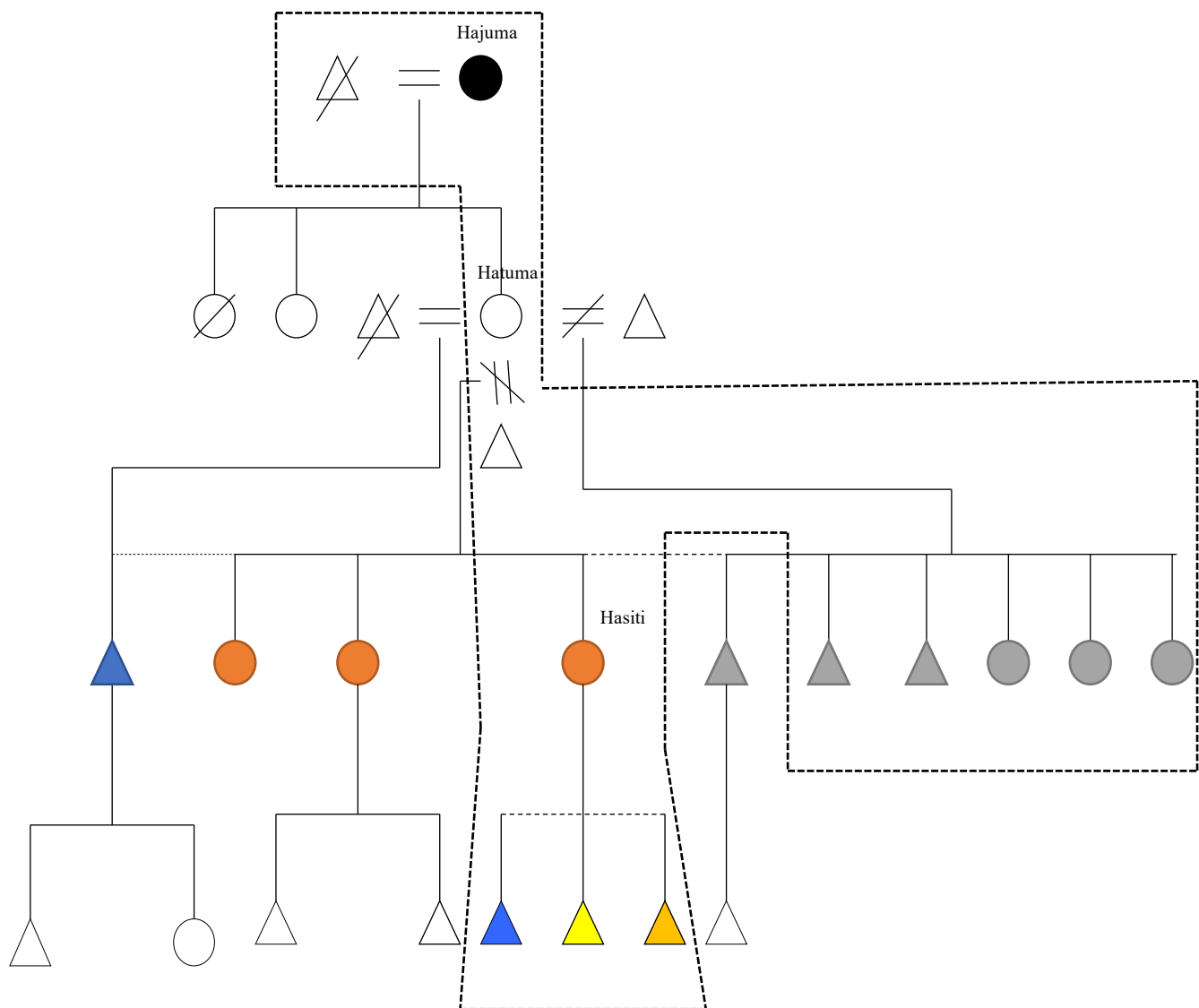
Figure 5.1 Hajuma's Household

Caregiving, affection and matrilineal performance

Embodied in *fuko* ideologies of *rera* is consideration of children within the matrikin circle as a share of women's affection for *fuko*. Women did not only care for children because of kin filiation, but caregiving also offered them space to exercise their affection for *fuko* itself. The stories of Mishi, Fatuma and Hajuma provided above suggest the form of *fuko* affection present in *rera* practices. However, I gathered that the economic sense that accompanied caregiving facilitated cultivation of this affection. For instance, children needed to be fed, they needed clothing, healthcare, school and *madrasa* (Islamic classes) fees, transport to visit their mother's sisters and brothers living in other villages or towns, and other forms of emotional and social care. Considering the economic status of many of my informants, caregiving was not an easy undertaking economically. I heard several women assert that caregiving was an economic challenge that, as Mishi put it, "nobody wants to care for (*rera*) another's burden." But women took up this burden as it "centrally positioned them in relations of (kinship) affect" (Jackson 2014:10). Caregiving offered women the potential to command emotional relationships in the household spaces (ibid).

However, the form of affection cultivated within the burden of care may also not be simply viewed as 'emotional burden', but as one of my informants once put it, affection for "children as members of a 'growing' fuko." By caring for children, kinship was nurtured within the households by women because they 'treasured' their *uzao* (offspring, descendants). For instance, Hekima, a woman in mid-40s said that:

> When my mother divorced, she moved in with her sister. Their parents had died. Although I was the only child, looking after me was not easy for my mother. My father never bothered to look for me, even when I grew up. Neither did his kin. I know he got other children with another woman, but I didn't even know them, until when he died and I attended the funeral. But you know here people are mainly affectionate towards their *jamaa* (kin). Unlike my father, my mother's sister looked after me even after my mother died. Even now, she asks whether I am ok, and I already have my children.

When I asked Hekima whether her mother's sister contributed toward raising her children since she had divorced and did not have a stable source of income, she said:

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Sometimes the father of my last three children sends school fees. Sometimes he does not because he would say he does not have money. But when he sends, he will tell me the money is for school fees of the three. He feels he will be wasting money on the others because he is not their father. But when my mother's sister buys clothes, she buys for all of them because she knows she is doing it for her *uzao*. I also provide for all my children without considering whose father gives or not, including the child of my deceased sister.

The likening of mother's sisters and children's fathers contribution to *rera* suggests that women and men experience caregiving and kinship differently. Of course, women give more priority to caregiving than men do. Discussing this, Hekima's sister (daughter to mother's sister, *mwenehu*) told me that she bore her first child (who is in a training college in a nearby town) from her first relationship (which disintegrated), but the child's father never bothered to look after (*rera*) him. She lamented that many years have passed since her son was born, and his father has never "stretched his hand" to help her bring up the child. His son once told me that his mother and mother's sister (who lives in the same household) always asked him if he needed anything, but his father had never done that. For example, he remembered how they once spent a sleepless night weaving *makuti* (thatching material made of dried palm leaves) for sale to raise his school fees. He expressed doubt that his father would do that.

To further explain this form of reluctance to engage in caregiving, Hekima's sister joked that men would rather waste money to assist (*kusaidiya*) other women than their children. Just like her sister, and as many women told me, Hekima's sister continued to emphasize the emotional aspect women accord caregiving, "women have got a heart for their offspring." In light of this, the different experiences of caregiving by women and men are embedded in kinship experiences that have to do with "emotional entailments" (Block 2014:6) and the different ways kinship bestows responsibilities on persons. I look below at how kinship and caregiving work when a particular cultural practice 'invites' men's contribution to *rera*.

Involving men in rera?: The story of malezi

Although caregiving practices and discourses are vividly informed by matrikin ideologies of care such as matrilineal filiation, discourses on establishing paternal filiation were not completely

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absent. This was demonstrated by a popular exercise of what many people in the community refer to as *Malezi*[79] (paternal childcare fees)*.

The contemporary understanding of *malezi* in Kenya is upbringing. In ordinary usage in everyday life it includes, for instance, health[80] and religious[81] projects in the country. In the context of health, for instance, the 'malezi bora' ('good upbringing') initiative was established by the Kenya government in 2007 to promote 'good' and 'proper' upbringing of children by targeting women across the country. The project provides localized healthcare and nutrition services to women and children. The forms of 'upbringing' promoted by *malezi bora* are very gendered, and particularly capture the need for child survival which, as the project aspires, can only be realized when the state and other non-governmental organizations shared 'good' healthcare services and 'good' nutrition information with women. In this sense, *malezi bora* is conceived by its practitioners as support for women to provide 'proper' upbringing for their children once they are equipped with the relevant knowledge and services.

Malezi bora operates in Msambweni   under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and other partners such as UNICEF. During Malezi Bora weeks that happen every year in May, women gather in health centres to receive lectures on 'proper' upbringing[82]. Men are noticeably absent in this project. This could be explained partly by the contemporary practice of *malezi* in the country, which assumes men's economic role in children's upbringing. Yet, in reality, there have been cases that challenge this assumption. For instance, a very recent court case that involved the country's Deputy President over allegations of neglecting a child he fathered in an extra-marital relationship[83]. While *malezi* is assumed to be a mere economic contribution to caregiving in contemporary Kenya to demonstrate an assumed 'proper' fatherhood, in Msambweni, *Malezi* is a specific cultural practice that involves a payment by a child's father or his kin in order to establish 'access' to the child. Once paid, paternal filiation and rights are established. For example, rights

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[79] For purposes of this chapter, I use 'Malezi' with a capitalized initial to refer to the Digo's cultural practice and 'malezi' without the capitalization for the contemporary upbringing in Kenya.
[80] See for example (Mwabe 2008)
[81] See for example https://www.africaredemptorists.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/1-MALEZI-KENYA.pdf
[82] See https://mediaaboutdevelopment.wordpress.com/2013/05/22/malezi-bora-event-opposes-malnutrition-and-child-mortality-in-kwale-region/
[83] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo5aXz15PsE

over a child's marriage and bridewealth negotiations, a child's inheritance from the father, and choice to live with one's father, especially at some advanced age in life. Thus in addition to recognition of "biological paternity", as Hunter (2015) similarly observes of a certain form of child payment, *inhlawulo*, in a South Africa township, *Malezi* facilitates "social fatherhood" (Hunter 2015:1298).

Traditionally, a woman's brothers (*enehu alume*) and/or mother's brothers (*adzomba*) received *Malezi*. However, my fieldwork shows that, in practice, mothers (*mayo*) and grandmothers (*wawa*) living with and caring for children receive these payments (see also Chapter 2). Additionally, in its traditional sense, *Malezi* was probably easy to carry out: it is likely that it was undertaken once (Oendo 1987:54, 1988; Gomm 1972:99-100). By contrast, *Malezi* is perceived today as a process rather than an event. As the term itself suggests, my informants considered upbringing as an endeavour that continues through a child's life course, hence was involved in *rera*. Take, for example, the case of Hajuma, the woman mentioned above.

One evening we were taking tea (*chai rangi*) under Hajuma's house verandah when her newborn grandchild's father visited. Hajuma had earlier explained to me that the child's father had not brought *Malezi*. She asked him where he had been for several days. He explained he had been engaged with "other errands". Hajuma looked at him with a stern face and exclaimed, "Other errands! So what have you brought from those other errands?" The young man (in his late 20's) handed a shopping bag with a packet of maize flour and some money (*pesa*) to Hajuma. When he entered the house to see Hajuma's granddaughter, Hajuma whispered to me, "this is now meant to last for all the days!" I looked at Hajuma and asked, "Is that *Malezi*? I thought he would still visit again?" Hajuma whispered again, "He has brought these [showing the bag with flour and money (*pesa*)], and *basi* (that's all)!"

Hajuma's narrative suggests the shifting understanding of *Malezi* from a one-off payment, whose main objective was endorsing certain rights, to experience of *Malezi* as an everyday practice of *rera*. Hajuma raising concerns about the whereabouts of her 'son in-law' and how long his *Malezi* contribution would last implies her expectation for continued *Malezi* contribution, not just the mere purpose of rights establishment but as part of *rera*. Many women told me that men (and their kin) knew they were expected to contribute to *rera* by giving *Malezi* but in many cases *Malezi* did not

take the expected form. Sometimes men would claim to have no money, or, for the case of lovers, men would choose to remain 'silent'. On other occasions, they would provide as they felt their means allowed. I was once told by one young man that he would very much love to take up 'big' *rera* responsibilities but the present times have brought a lot of challenges to him. He sadly remembered how his relationship with his 'wife' disintegrated because, among other reasons, she felt he was not assisting (*kusaidiya*) enough in their children's 'proper' upbringing. He felt that women have a privileged caregiving status because they would get help from their matrikin, which he felt also contributed to male reluctance to contribute to *rera* activities.

In Chapter 3 I showed how economic crisis has impacted on the ideologies of household provisioning, and the formation of women's uptake of the various opportunities provided. The challenged economic status of men, which has over time challenged the notion of the male breadwinner status that once prevailed in Msambweni, has by extension contradicted the position of men in *rera* errands. However, women continue to engage in calls for men to collaborate (*kusaidiyana*) with them in caring for children, especially through *Malezi*. But this has become a difficult task at times since, despite their economic constraints, men may be able to affiliate with their children through other means such as Islamic ideologies of parent-child bond. Once a marital relationship has been formalized through Islamic traditions, men are assured of paternal filiation.

However, in cases of divorce and a woman returns to her kin, *Malezi* payment may be sought. Marital breakdown was undoubtedly used by many women to challenge male child upbringing status by invoking *Malezi*. During a conversation with one of my informants, she wondered how she would consider her child's father a 'father' since he never sent her "even a shilling to buy just one nappy for her child." In another case, a woman said it would not be easy to have her children associate themselves with a father who had "never bothered about their lives." Yet women's care provisioning status was challenged by men's paternal filiation claims when caregiving benefited from *mradi*.

Woman-heads, children, fathers: m*radi* and the making of 'biological' relations of care

Deciding the proper 'home' for children

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At first glance, caregiving in Msambweni appeared to me a straightforward undertaking. However, when *mradi* entered a household's life and became part of it, I discovered kinship and caregiving became constrained and entangled engagements that were constantly negotiated by women and men in complex ways. One way I observed such entanglements played out was the way woman heads negotiated what was conceived to be the proper 'home' for children under their care, in which case mradi acted as both the mediation and expression of both caregiving and kinship arrangements that continuously favoured women. Take, for example, the following encounter with Siti, a woman in her mid-60s, when I first visited her in 2015:

Siti told Manga (a Local OVC Committee member (LOC) who accompanied me) she suspected her household had been exited from *mradi* since they had not received funds for about six months and things were not adding up. She looked very worried. Manga tried to evade the conversation. But Siti insisted that Manga should provide help quickly because things were not ok. Manga told her he had received the news about the problem and challenged Siti that she knew very well the cause of the problem. Siti frowned and asked Manga, "Are you blaming me?" When I explained my interest in investigating *mradi*, Siti suddenly interrupted:

> "Please, I'm no longer in *mradi*. My daughter (*msichana wangu*) died. The two children she left are not even here at home (*nyumbani*) now. They went to visit their mother's younger sister (*mama mdide*, Sudi). And *mradi* stuff has brought up 'pull-me-I-pull-you' (*vuta nikuvute*) things in this home. Please I'm not interested in *mradi* issues anymore."

Before I said anything, Manga picked up, "*Mama*, did you just tell me you were looking for me to assist with *mradi* issue? Now you are saying you don't want anything to do with *mradi*?" Siti lamented:

> That's not the issue my brother (*ndugu*). Do you know the trouble this *mradi* is breeding in this household? Suma's husband now thinks I am receiving the money and not telling the truth. He even approached Sudi to find out why the children went to her house. Sudi's household has nothing to do with this mradi. Suma's children live here with me. This is their home. Sudi is very unhappy. You can't understand Manga!

I did not know how best to respond to the 'trouble' that Siti explained. I could read the pain on her face as she continued to explain:

> I don't know. Those mradi people (referring to the local Children's Department officials) keep asking me to provide names and have photos taken, but I have already had a photo taken. They asked who is living with the children. I told them I am living with my children. But Suma's husband is giving me a lot of trouble. Isn't this their home (*nyumbani*)?

I suggested to Siti that she could visit the offices again to find out if they could offer further assistance. She nodded her head as if agreeing with me and said, "I have nothing new to tell those *mradi* people. They already know I am living with the children here at home (*nyumbani*) and I am the one caring for them."

When we left Siti's *mudzi*, I did not hesitate to ask Manga what was going on with Siti's household and their enrolment with *mradi.* Manga responded:

> I don't want to complicate the story. What I know is that they (Siti's household) have been debating whose name should be recorded as next of kin. And not everyone can be included. Only two names are usually required. I know it's also about where the children live. Such problems are now becoming a big issue with many households. Everyone now wants to be part of *mradi*! But *mradi* can recognize only one home, where the children live. If the children are living at their mother's place, that's what *mradi* will take too!

As mentioned earlier, the mradi database records information about particular kin members: primarily the child's parents or the person living with the children under their roof, and another close kin member, especially for purposes of registration and making payments. This requirement activated problems among kin as they negotiated who could be considered in Mradi performances, especially when children's fathers or their paternal kin demanded to be included formally. For instance, when Siti's deceased daughter (Suma, the children's mother) died, Siti took in her grandchildren. Suma had two children, the first from a *rafiki* (lover) who died and the second from her second marriage. At the time of her death, her household was receiving *mradi* funds. Suma and her second husband were recorded as next of kin in the *mradi* database. Following her death and the change of the children's residence and *rera* responsibility, their *mradi* database information needed to be updated.

At first, Siti and another of her daughters (Siri) details were to be recorded. However, after Siri travelled to *Uarabuni* (literally Arab world/countries) to look for a job, Siti's preference was for

Sudi or one of her sisters. But Suma's husband wanted to remain in the database as well, because, according to him he was the children's 'father' and was of the view that no other person could be given priority over him. Siti did not agree with Suma's husband because she claimed that the children were under their matrikin's care as expected in the community, and that it was the child whose father had died that gave the household the opportunity to be enrolled in mradi. But Suma's husband became furious and asked to have his child back to his *mudzi*. Siti never acceded to his claims and this brought up the 'trouble' Siti reported.

Sometime later during my fieldwork, I asked Siti why Suma's child never moved to Suma's husband's house. Siti told me that the children were already 'home', and they needed not to be tossed around as if "they did not have a home". She held that although Suma's husband was the biological father of one of the children, she was now their 'mother' and the care provider. Her household also 'won' inclusion in the *mradi* database on this ground. "Even mradi knows the women taking care of children just like me. If they did not consider here as their home, they would not have chosen me," she added while describing Suma's husband's behaviour as unacceptable. "When a child's mother dies, their *jamaa* (referring to matrikin) take over *rera*. But nowadays *mradi* is giving our 'heads'[84] many challenges. If anything, Suma's husband should be sending me *Malezi,* but see now, it's just trouble he has been causing here," she said sadly. One of Siti's sons once commented that *mradi* 'complicated' caregiving issues since its "entrance" to their community. "*Mradi* has mixed up many people. Even stuff that people are very well aware of, they complicate it. Now, how are the children to leave their mother's house (*nyumba ya mayo*) to go to Suma's husband?" he wondered.

The encounter with Siti echoes many similar narratives and performances I heard and observed during my fieldwork. *Mradi* formed a space through which *rera* and kinship were constructed, practised and experienced differently by both women and men. Indeed, anthropological studies have shown kinship or relatedness is constructed in households through everyday enactments of, for example, sharing different forms of substances with children such as food (Carsten 1991; 1995, 2000, 2004; Nyambedha 2008) and intimacy (Jackson 2014; Notermans 2008), and as people care for others within domestic spaces. In his account of matrilineal relations, Michael Peletz holds

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[84] Literally mind, intelligence.

that "siblingship and kinship" among the Malay women of Rembau are constructed through "claims to a share of the harvest of their own labours." (1988:12).

However, performances of care and kinship may not always be straightforward undertakings. Siti's story demonstrates mradi as an everyday practice of household life embroiled with ideologies of care and kinship where harmony is challenged. In other words, social construction of kinship through caring practices for children is not as straightforward as early anthropological studies suggest (see for example Goody and Goody 1969). Perhaps this is not surprising given recent anthropological observations that the long established perception of an absence of crises in African kinship, especially in relation to caregiving, was based on an overemphasis on "bonds of solidarity, mutual help and harmony in the African family" (Cheney 2016; Notermans 2008:357). Yet both solidarities and crises may inform each other in practices of relatedness.

Viewing such solidarities and crises together, rather than in contrast to each other (Ferguson 2015:107) may help unpack the realities of care-kinship projects and associated performances. For instance, the contestations of kin representation in mradi databases present caregiving as a complex experience, revolving around cultivation of matrikin bonds on the one hand, and parenthood on the other. The contention was not simply about who would be recorded in the database, but what could be considered the proper 'home' for children: in other words, the proper kin to receive the funds. While *mradi* regularities simply considered the children's physical living space (which provoked the crisis), invoking claims for a proper 'home' for the children by Siti and others reveals yet another understanding of the home in Msambweni that moves beyond the space itself to include kin relationships and caregiving ideologies. Siti successfully retaining the children's home in her claims for *mradi* may be charged with adherence to cultural ideals of matrikin care which associated Siti with the proper 'home' both in kinship and caregiving terms, but also shows how through *mradi* women navigate caregiving statuses in their different kinship and household statuses.

Associating Siti with the perceived proper 'home' for the children may have also benefited from the fact that, in Msambweni, women have embraced centrality in households' life and sustenance (see chapter 3). It was not uncommon during fieldwork to hear assertions that 'a woman is the household', a conception that associated household matters with women, including caregiving

practices, and this comprised a very significant aspect of woman headship. I also gathered there were additional claims to this arrangement as far as mradi was concerned. Women spoke about *mradi* not only in kinship terms, but also in (re)distributive sense. I often heard conversations about *mradi* referring to women as 'good' persons for redistribution of care. Consider, for example, Mwashaha, a forty-four--year-old woman, who lives in her natal home with her eleven children born from different relationships. Mwashaha told me that she moved out of her third marital relationship with Bakari because she was concerned about Bakari's contribution to *rera* errands. She claimed that Bakari had a secret extra-marital affair on which he spent all his money. At the time, life was difficult for her because she had a young child and she could not engage in her *mahamri* (doughnuts) business as much because the cooking fire affected her. But she was glad to have moved out because she felt Bakari's home did not offer a 'good' space for bringing up her children.

Things began looking up for Mwashaha later when she began receiving mradi funds. She used some of the funds to build a house (*nyumba*) in her father's compound where she now lives with her children. Whenever she received mradi funds, just like many of my informants, Mwashaha bought her children clothing, paid their school fees, and spent money on other household items including her own clothing. She also used some funds to start a *leso*[85] selling business which she conducted from her home. Women would come to Mwashaha's house to purchase the *leso*s. Her brother's wife once joked that when she lived with Bakari, her children stayed very 'dirty' and were thin, and that she could be easily identified in a crowd because she wore a particular *dera* (a type of women's cloth). During one conversation Mwashaha remarked:

> When I was living with Bakari, things were very different. He spent his money in a secret relationship and he could not buy anything for me. Small things like buying soap for washing clothes for the children were a burden to him. I wondered whether he saw them as his children. I moved out and got my children a 'good' life. You see this house [she pointed at it] I built it when I started receiving *pesa za mradi*. My children are very happy to live here. When I get the money, I buy them what they want. Even mradi people of NHIF[86] came here some days ago and I told them this is my children's home [she brags]. When Bakari asked me about

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[85] A type of cloth worn by women around their waist, or used as a scarf.
[86] Abbreviation for National Health Insurance Fund

mradi, I told him the money is for the children, to bring them up while here. Mradi does not know anything about his place, but here. If he received the money, I know my children wouldn't 'see' anything. I thank God those mradi people consider us women staying with children because they know where the children are brought up and eat is their home.

The house built by Mwashaha was a traditional one made of mud and thatch. It was not uncommon for women to own such houses. Owning a house gave women a strong foothold, and afforded them strong claims for domestic living space for themselves and their children. However, for Mwashaha, the house formed part of her perceived 'home' where her practice of giving 'good' care to her children took place, which she felt Bakari and his home space were unable to offer. However, perceptions associating women and their domestic spaces with 'good' distribution of care were not a sole women's construction. During a conversation with one village chairman, he explained that *mradi* found a 'home' for children in women because men would only spend on themselves not the household or the children. He gave the following example:

If a grandfather gets the funds, he would rush to buy himself fish. But a grandmother would say to herself, my grandchild went to school without tea (*chai*) yesterday, let me take this 400 [KES] to buy sugar. Then let me take this 200 [KES] to buy an accompaniment for the tea so that the child may have something for breakfast before leaving for school; because she knows she is their 'mother'. … When a child wakes up to ask for chai, the man will have already left home. The problems don't follow men, but those women!

While the above stories charge women with home as a place for proper redistribution of material resources, care and children, they also suggest a move beyond the simple association of domestic spaces with women's productive and reproductive roles such as care - which in many cases negate both the domestic space and the associated activities (see Yanagisako and Collier 1987, Moore 1988 and Rosaldo 1974 for critical overviews) to suggest valuation rather than devaluation of household status for women. Conceptions of a proper home and distribution of care where children needed not to be "tossed around", meaning sending them back to their 'fathers', illustrates how practices and relations of household redistribution are usually heavily gendered (Ferguson 2015; Moore 1992), but the domestic spaces in which they operate do not always devalue or undermine the spaces themselves or the people associated with them. In other words, *Mradi* afforded women such as Siti and Mwashaha an opportunity to affirm as their priceless business to take charge of

child rearing activities and giving children 'home' in both spatial and kinship sense, as well as redistributive care terms. Through this endeavour, women's kinship and caregiving statuses were privileged. While *mradi* privileged women in the sense discussed above, its materiality was also instrumental in expressing and maintaining perceived 'biological' bonds, for instance, when for various reasons, children resided away from their 'proper' maternal caregivers.

"A share of my children": maintaining kin relationships through mradi

Although in many cases women did not allow 'fathers' or paternal kin to 'invade' or pursue mradi by denying them children, the funds, or inclusion in databases, Mwanaisha's case took a different route. Mwanaisha is in her late 70s. Her daughter received mradi funds before she died. Mwanaisha took over mradi and *rera* activities for her deceased daughter's children. Her daughter had children from two different relationships. Her first man had died, while the second was still alive although they had separated. Mwanaisha told me she was overwhelmed by *rera* responsibilities because she did not have *nguvu* (literally meaning financial strength or means) to look after all the five children.

Although she operated a small business of selling cakes within her *mudzi*, she was too old to engage in farm work that would produce enough for the household's consumption and other caregiving expenditures such as school fees. She also felt her two-bedroom mud house did not have enough space to accommodate all the children including another daughter who was not married. When her daughter's second 'husband' (Ali) asked to give his two children a place to sleep in his small mud house, Mwanaisha agreed to the request because she felt it would help ease some sleeping 'burden'. However, the arrangement was based on agreement that the children would visit their grandmother during weekend days, and more importantly, Mwanaisha's continued share of mradi funds. Nevertheless, their father's house was not far from Mwanaisha's residence, so the children visited often. When I asked Mwanaisha why she shared the funds, she explained:

> It is not *kawaida* (usual, normal) for women to do what I did. But I don't have any chicken, goats, cows, or *nguvu*[87] to cultivate and feed all these children. When they are staying with their father, it is not because I am not taking care of them. Their father is also struggling to

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[87]In these conversations, *nguvu* means both lack of finances or body strength.

make ends meet. He gives them a place to sleep, and I have a share in the responsibility. When I receive mradi funds, I share between the children according to their needs. I cannot forget that they are my offspring. When I do this, they also feel they are a share of my children just like these ones staying here…Mradi came as a blessing (*riziki*). I cannot 'lose' my daughter's children.

The dynamics in the notion of caregiving in relation to *mradi* demonstrate the enmeshing of notions of social and biological kin relations (Hunter 2015), with the latter gaining more prominence, especially with the establishment of mradi in the households. Mwanaisha believed that continuing to care for her daughter's children through sharing mradi funds - regardless of them residing with their father - clothed them with the form of matrikin care status they were entitled to, and more so a way of cushioning 'biological' relatedness that Mwanaisha argues she "cannot forget" or "lose": the children are her offspring, a bond she is keen to maintain through continued *rera* provisioning. *Mradi*, as a blessing that ensured continued provision of care endorses sustenance of these bond.

To further endorse her claim for *rera* responsibility and maintaining strong bonds, I saw Mwanaisha give one of Ali's children some funds one afternoon when the boy was sent to collect school fees. Instead of going to Ali, he came to Mwanaisha. Mwanaisha had received mradi funds some two days earlier. She jokingly told me the boy had come for his share of the funds. The boy also told me he came to get lunch from *mama* (mother), Mwanaisha. Mwanaisha remarked the children often came for meals, although she bought enough food stocks when she received mradi funds and shared the food stocks between the two households because she "never wanted the children to sleep hungry as if [she] was absent in [their] lives."

While resident arrangements in Mwanaisha's case were with the child's father (paternal side), in other cases such as Rehema's it was with mother's sister. Rehema, a 51-year-old, told me she shared *mradi* funds among the six children she bore from three relationships, and her six sister's children (her sister died). Seven of the children lived with her and the other five lived temporarily with her mother's sister due to schooling arrangements; the school they attended was nearer their mother's sister residence than Rehema's house. Rehema explained that when children live elsewhere, they may feel 'distanced' from a parent, so whenever she received mradi funds, she

"bought each child something they needed to make them feel they had both a mother and a father in [her]". She remarked how sometimes she distributed the funds equally on the children's school fees. Additionally, just like Mwanaisha, Rehema told me she bought enough food for both households. When I asked Rehema of the distribution arrangements, she said although her food kiosk did not provide adequate income for the household, it enabled her to get by, somehow. And since she had little and sometimes no support from the children's fathers, mradi made it easy for her children to feel their 'mother' cared for them equally.

Although mradi funds were not always available to meet *rera* requirements of the children, when a woman shared mradi to meet the needs of the children, she retained a particular bond with the child. One of my informants once said, "if you eat mradi funds and your children sleep hungry, it's like cursing your own womb". Indeed, on many occasions, my informants imbued mradi with some ritual-like relationships. For instance, associating the funds with the dead, especially because many of the children they cared for were orphaned. I also heard children talk of this relationship when I spoke with them. For instance, one girl told me she felt strong attachment to her mother's mother and mother's sister because when they received mradi funds, they spent all the funds on her hospital bills and saved her life. She echoed their assertion that if the money was spent on other activities and she died, they would receive a curse, and by extension it would be dangerous for their offspring. Yet I wondered what would have happened if death occurred whether or not mradi funds were spent this way. The girl's mother's mother said it would have been "the will of the Almighty".

On another instance, a boy told me of her mother's choice to pay his exam fees when he obtained mradi funds rather than "taking her ailing leg" to the hospital. For this boy, the form of "sacrifice" demonstrated by his mother activated a strong affection between them. Interestingly, when the mother's leg healed after seeking medical help from a cheap local herbalist, they attributed her healing not to the herbalist, but to spending mradi on her son's fees: such form of spending was all for a good course, it restored her health to continue caring for her son. Yet these assertions were made regardless of the fact that mradi funds were actually given for the sake of the children's care.

While the above mradi performances could be viewed as forms of matrifocal relatedness (Jackson 2014), women were keener on sustaining matrilineal relationships and responsibilities in their

various statuses as 'mothers', care providers and heads of households' projects. This was evident in the way women made decisions on mradi spending patterns on other occasions.

"Women are in charge of mradi funds": mradi, the women's household-managing project

When I visited Amina one afternoon in February 2015, she was not in her home. Her son, Rabai, told me that Amina had gone to the farm and he did not know the time she would be back home. Rabai had just arrived from the nearby market centre where he had gone to collect the household's mradi funds. Rabai helped his mother collect the funds when she was not able to do so, as was the case at the time. Seeking help (*kusaidiya*) with collecting mradi funds was a common practice among my informants. The person recorded as the second next of kin helped with this undertaking.

The afternoon was extremely hot. Rabai asked me to shelter from the burning sun under a lime tree that grew in the compound. I pushed a nearby log and helped myself. I got my bottle of water from my bag and took a sip. Rabai asked whether I needed to eat anything. I asked him what he had prepared in the kitchen but he said he was just asking because he was hungry himself, he ate no food since morning. Rabai left home early to go to the payment centre because he was aware mradi payment days could be hectic at times. On some occasions, it took more than a day to get the payments. When I asked Rabai why he didn't buy himself food yet he got the funds, he laughed as if anything was funny about my question and told me that he "could not take a shilling" because he would have to first seek permission from his *mayo* (mother). He further went on to explain that he did not even know "anything" about the funds because his mother was "in charge of *mradi* funds." His task was "just to collect the funds and bring them to *mayo*. The rest is her own business."

My conversation with Rabai contains a number of different concerns, namely the fact that women called for help with some aspects of mradi and not others, for instance, Rabai helped collect the funds; which he could not use freely; and did not know "anything" about, by which Rabai meant he did not participate in planning or any decision making regarding how mradi funds were spent. Rabai collecting the funds and not spending even a shilling - despite of the fact that he was hungry - struck me because many cash transfer schemes, such as mradi, deliberately favour women on grounds that men may misuse the funds, meaning spending on the 'unintended' purposes

(Bradshaw 2008; Ferguson 2015; see also the village chairman's example provided above), while women "make 'strategic choices'" (Bradshaw 2008:195). In other contexts such as Latin America, men have been charged with draining women's household income by extracting monthly cash transfers from women (Corboz 2013). Yet seeking men's help such as Rabai's collection of mradi funds, while they remained faithful by not to spending it without permission from the women was not uncommon in Msambweni.

While one explanation for this trend may be about trust and relying on a person (*kuluphira*), as my informants demonstrated, another was about observance: many women, just like Amina, held and discharged instructions on how mradi funds were spent, an endeavour they expected adherence to both from themselves and others. In the realm of trust and reliance, it may then be argued that women's position as household heads facilitated the trustworthiness of others. But this does not imply that women dictated but managed mradi household activities including persons associated with it. The story told to me by Subira, a woman in her late 50s portrays this perspective:

> I am very bitter with my daughter (*msichana wangu*). Just the other day we differed in a very heated quarrel. She wanted me to give her some mradi funds, but why would I give her? She is not helping pay the school fees…Why then should I give her the funds? To do what? Her own stuff? She said she will report me to the office [referring to the local Children's Department], but that is not a problem. The most important thing is I am providing for the children. Like now I have just paid their tuition fees. These are the receipts. [She shows me the payment receipts]. Her work is only 'getting' children [literally breeding] with those men and they don't provide any help after that. They make her pregnant and leave…Isn't that madness? I told her to assist me with my potato frying business so that she could also get some money for herself because she only knows how to roam around. I am taking care of the children. I give them food. She will wash their clothes. I will not give her any mradi funds.

Subira takes care of her daughter, her daughter's two children, and her ailing sister. Her daughter dropped out of school because she was pregnant. She had two children with two different lovers. Before the day we had the above conversation, Subira had earlier received mradi funds, hence the quarrel with her daughter. Although her daughter was one of the next of kin in the mradi database, Subira was recorded as the primary caregiver. But Subira could not ask her daughter to assist with collection of the funds not only because of mistrust, but also because she was keen to discharge

her household responsibilities properly. Subira likened mradi issues to her responsibilities for her daughter and the children: "the same way I care for and handle matters for the children and their mother, I care for and handle mradi. I cannot leave the responsibilities to my daughter, she is not the owner of this household."

To confirm this, Subira showed me her mradi collection card and likened her face image on the card with her mradi responsibility position: "You can also see this card has my photo and my name, if anything happens to the funds, if the children do not go to school, I am the one to give answers." In other words, as the head of the household, Subira takes charge of mradi as part of the household's caregiving project.

Indeed, gender scholarship on social assistance projects such as cash transfers has observed the potential of cash transfers to affect women's bargaining power within the households (Adato et al. 2000; Bradshaw 2008). However, the scholarship is critical that such projects reproduce dependencies (Corboz 2013) and inequalities (Cookson 2016) while at the same time they construct women as the sole bearers of responsibilities for "financial and social care for children and children needs" (Bradshaw 2008:194), what Sylvia Chant describes as "feminization of responsibility and/obligation" (Chant 2007:333, 2008:115). Yet my women informants monopolized and discharged mradi and the associated performances as their responsibility through which they cultivated both their household and kinship status. For many of these informants, mradi performances happened not only in their capacity as mothers or caregivers, but as household heads, a position they embraced because it earned them various forms of respect and privileged status within the households and beyond. For instance, Rabai applauded his mother for "raising the household with just the little cash" she obtained through mradi. He also admired a neighbour, an old lady who was my informant, for saving "little by little" of mradi funds until she had enough to build a 'big' house that Rabai felt was better than his. For Rabai, these women's acts were bound by kinship relationships. Describing how the old woman's house construction related to kinship, her son and his wife described her acts as "*fwaha kpwa anaye mwenehu mchetu*", literally "worthy for our sister's children [referring to the children the woman cares for]." When I visited her in September 2016, she told me she chose to pay her son to do the construction work, because it was an act of caring for him as well. Although the house was a traditional one made of mud and thatch, as earlier mentioned in Mwashaha's case, a woman's house constructed with mradi funds brought

a certain status for women, both in caregiving and headship terms. Nevertheless, caregiving still remains a responsibility in the 'hands' of women.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the ideologies surrounding the practice of *rera* in Msambweni with the primary aim of showing how these activities revolve around women in their different capacities as mothers, grandmothers, and household-heads. I have illustrated that the practice of *rera* is not only about women providing care, but also about women reinforcing matrilineal relationships. However, as shown in the chapter, with mradi becoming part of the everyday household caregiving project, it also became entangled with matrikin ideologies of care that have historically shaped *rera* performances. The kinship implications endorsed by mradi-caregiving transactions have prompted the formation of apparently new relationships between women, children and men, and sometimes other kin members. Perhaps this move may be partly explained by the fact that religious and state citizenship projects in Msambweni historically focused on deliberately 'raising' positions of men rather than women from a 'retrogressive' matrilineal organization. Many of these projects were structured from a patrilineal perspective, but as I showed in Chapter 3, women capitalized on the opportunities the same projects offered to cultivate their headship status and activate matrilineal relations. In light of this, in this chapter, I argue that mradi provides room for construction of and maintaining relationships that privilege women's negotiation power as they navigate through their perceived caregiving roles as mothers, grandmothers, and household heads. While the navigation is a rather complex process, it has in turn constructed caregiving performances and the associated responsibilities as a women's domain where women statuses are forged and flourish at the same time.

Chapter 5

"Women got the heart":
Pain, energy and the moral economy of claim-making

Introduction

"I look at the leaking roof, I look at unpaid school fees, I see the children, I see myself, and I think and keep thinking about our tomorrow." Mwanamkuu, an elderly woman in her late eighties, explained to me as she arranged bundles of *makuti* (thatching material) against the wall of her mud house. She continued to tell me how she 'forgot' her body pains as she attempted to meet the overwhelming needs of her household. At the time of our conversation, Mwanamkuu had planned to make some *makuti* thatch to repair her roof, in addition to making some bundles for sale. However, she was not able to make enough thatch both for roofing and for sale, so she hoped that since the rains were soon approaching, *mradi* funds would help purchase the remaining pieces she required for roofing. Unfortunately, the funds seemed insufficient to meet all the household needs at the time, including purchasing the extra pieces of thatch. Mwanamkuu entered into a state of apprehension: heavy clouds were about to fall and the house repairs were unfinished; children required school fees, school uniforms and food; fields needed preparation for the upcoming rains, etcetera. Her body was in pain and *mradi* funds and proceeds from the sale of *makuti* would not meet all the household's financial needs. Reflecting on these problems, Mwanamkuu told me her body 'forgot' pains (*maumivu*) and 'gained' energy (*nguvu*) as she immersed herself in making as many pieces of thatch as she could to repair her roof and sell the surplus.

Mwanamkuu's concerns related not only to the present household situation. She told me on several occasions about her aspirations for the future of her household, especially in relation to the children she cared for. I vividly remember how busy and engaged a woman she always seemed to be, and the energy she always demonstrated: when not weaving *makuti*, she tilled her fields or harvested cassava, or cooked and washed clothes for her children, or she was at the local bank agencies queueing for most of the day to collect *mradi* funds. Other times she attended parents' meetings at the children's schools, or participated in the funerals and weddings of relatives and friends, and visited sick kin members and others in the village and beyond. When I wondered how she managed to do all this while suffering the body pains which she often spoke about,

Mwanamkuu would always say "us women got the heart" ("*achetu ana mioyo*") and reiterated her concerns about 'tomorrow' (*muhondo,* also used to mean the future). On one occasion she said, "you see, a woman has a big heart (*moyo*). I have these body pains (*maumivu*), but I have many things to think (*kufikiriya*) about and to do. Not this pain. I have used all the *mradi* funds, the money is like wind, you get it now and the next moment it is all spent. The next *mradi* funds are coming in two months, I am not even sure of that, they may tell us the money is not there when the time comes and we will keep waiting. The children still want school fees and food to eat. Someone has died and I have to contribute, the fields are waiting for me, the village chairman has called a meeting. So, when will I get space (*nafasi*) to think anything about my body pains? I first think so much about these children and tomorrow."

The frequency with which women associated *mradi* with their everyday activities demonstrated that *mradi* formed the ground through which different emotions were activated and reactivated among my informants. Women celebrated their receipt of the funds and the significant contributions these made towards financing household needs, and they enjoyed the status they acquired as beneficiaries. Women often used the words 'raha' (lit. happiness), 'nafuu' (relief), and 'nashukuru' (lit. I am grateful), often in embodied ways: 'I have happiness in my heart after paying *chama* dues'; 'my mind is relieved because the children are now in school'; 'my heart is grateful I was able to purchase dresses for the wedding'. Women also lamented and experienced distress when *mradi* funds were delayed or when they felt the sums received were 'too little' to finance their household financial needs, or when dispute over *mradi* arose in everyday life (see chapters 2 and 4).

As I have shown in the previous chapters, *mradi* formed a significant contribution to women's household economy and informed the way women conceived and enacted their household responsibilities and relationships. Yet as Mwanamkuu's narrative shows, *mradi* was also a platform through which women negotiated and shaped both their imaginations of the future and their practices in the present. Indeed, as in Mwanamkuu's story, it was not uncommon for women to express their aspirations for a 'good' life and future during conversations about *mradi* and their different activities and relationships. To be sure, these narratives were told in households where ill health and scourges such as HIV/AIDS, deaths, old age, land disputes, marital fluidity, challenged networks of social support, and socio-economic constraints were part of women's everyday

experiences. What struck me, however, was the metaphorical role that women's bodies and ill health played in women's stories to express their performances, experiences, and imaginations. Particularly, women's descriptions of their ill health in their stories were not simply expressions of physical and social suffering, rather they reveal a distinct way in which women experienced, imagined and survived various challenges and complexities in their lives, and how these were significantly embedded in matrilineal kin relations and ideologies. Specifically, women's narratives of ill health in relation to *mradi* reveal women's negotiations in claim-making and performances of matrilineal relationships.

The focus of this chapter is on the ways in which matrilineal kinship was experienced, expressed and performed through women's narratives, descriptions and metaphors of ill health. I explore the complex ways women conceived *mradi* as a medium for energy production and the overcoming of pain to articulate their sense of survival. I suggest that women's discourses of bodily ills captured in the language of energy and pain reveal how women negotiated and enacted matrilineal relations of obligations and dependence as a way of surviving the difficulties created by social and economic change in Msambweni. I begin the chapter with a review of relevant anthropological scholarship on illness, pain and suffering as a way of contextualising my arguments. Next, I provide an examination of the centrality of women in health and illness in Msambweni. I then explore three case studies of women's ill health narratives. The first case is of Mwatuma, a woman in her fifties who lived with her mother and her deceased sister's children. In the second case, I look at Mwanasha, an elderly woman in her late eighties. Mwanasha lived with her daughter and the children of her deceased daughter who had died of 'ugonjwa'[88]. The third case focuses on Asha, a woman in her seventies whose mother died a 'mysterious' death. Asha lived with her two children and her sister whose illness she also described as 'mysterious'. I draw on the case studies to consider the ways ill health formed a primary site for women's construction of moral claims based on aspirations about investing in a 'good' life and the 'strength' of women's households. I focus on the notion of women's hearts to show that the aim to forget pain and to gain energy in women's imaginations is articulated through the virtue of women's hearts. This explains how

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[88] People rarely talked openly about HIV/AIDS infections or those who were affected by the disease. This could be explained partly by the fact that much stigma is attached to HIV/AIDS. Many people used words such as 'ugonjwa' (Swahili word for a disease) and 'homa' (loosely translated as a cold or fever) to mean HIV/AIDS infection.

claim-making relations are also about endurance, accommodation and persuasion especially in the context of difficulties, tensions and limitations in household situations. I conclude that women's discourses of embodied ill health and the virtue of women's hearts were about matrilineally informed moral relations of obligation and dependence and a persistent desire to invest in the continuity of matrilineal relations in complex and changing social and economic circumstances.

Illness, pain and suffering in anthropology

Anthropological scholarship on illness, pain and suffering defines these as fundamentally social experiences and social processes (see for example Farmer 1996, Kleinman 1980 and 1989; Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997). As such they are embedded in people's sociality. Of course this is not a new or surprising observation in anthropology. In the 1960s, Victor Turner (1961, 1969) showed that the Ndembu interpreted sickness, disease and healing as social - individual sick bodies were conceived "as a sign of disease and disorder of the wider social body" and "healing involved the realignment of the social" (Robins 2008:313).Various studies have taken up this argument and shown that people's narratives and experiences of ill health and suffering often reveal, among other things, how people make sense not only of their suffering, but also of their worlds (Coker 2004; Farmer 1996, 2004; Kugelmann 1997).

As social experience and process, therefore, sickness and suffering are, as Scheper-Hughes and Lock contend, "not just an isolated event or unfortunate brush with nature" (1987:31). They are a vital and inseparable part of people's experiences of the world and the broader environment. As many anthropologists have argued, social factors – social suffering, political and structural violence, and the broader social, political and economic structures and constraints - often "become embodied as individual experience" (Farmer 1996:262; Coker 2004; Farmer 2004; Kleinman and Kleinman 1994:710; Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997; Robins 2006; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Tapias 2006). In his account of patients in rural Haiti, for instance, Farmer writes about the embodiment of global structures of inequality and structural violence (Farmer 2004; 1996). Kleinman and Kleinman (1994) show the "interconnections between social relations, institutions and bodily processes" in their account of social suffering and embodiment among their Chinese informants. Like Farmer, they hold that social forces such as political and structural violence, hunger, racism

and poverty inform people's experiences of suffering and illness (Farmer 1996; Kleinman 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1992).

In the African context, scholars have written about embodied experiences of war and migration (Coker 2004 and Peltzer 1994), debility (Livingstone 2005) and diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Robins 2006). Coker's (2004) examination of the use of embodied metaphors among Southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo provides a glimpse of the experiences of the refugees, and an understanding of how they cope with traumatic experiences, both in the past and the present. Refugees used "metaphors such as "the heart", "blood", and "body constriction"" in their descriptions of "social and cultural loss" as a result of war (Coker 2004:15). Yet stories about suffering and ill health are not simply revelations of people's experiences of their circumstances, such as trauma, chaos, loss, and disruptions. As Linda Green argues, stories about suffering are also about how everyday forms of suffering inform people's imaginations and aspirations, and the everyday reality of social relations (1998). Of course, anthropologists have already argued for greater attention to human agency in understanding suffering and illness (Biehl, God and Kleinman 2007). For example, Robins' (2006) exploration of stories of experiences of illness and treatment among people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa unpacks how new forms of citizenship, what he terms "responsibilized citizenship" emerge and become lived experiences (Robins 2006:314). He emphasises the subjective realities of experiences of ill health among people despite the embeddedness of pain, illness and suffering with sociality: as active individuals, people creatively combined religious, communal and right-based responses, and interpretations of traumatic transitions from "near death" to "new life", which contributed to their constitution as "responsible citizens" (Robins 2006:321).

Within the realm of kinship, studies show that experiences of illnesses and suffering in situations of changing social and economic circumstances inform people's negotiations of kin relationships and social continuity (Block 2014; Geissler and Prince 2010; Nyambedha, Wandibba & Aagaard-Hansen 2003). For example, writing about the epidemic of HIV/AIDS and village life in a rural community in Western Kenya where experiences of economic constraints, scarcity of land and disputes between Christianity and 'Luo tradition' are engaged in everyday life, P. Wenzel Geissler and Ruth Prince (2010) hold that these, together with people's experiences of illness and death "give shape and meaning to people's present practices" and "imaginations of the future" they

desire (Geissler and Prince 2010:3-4). Geissler and Prince explore the concept of touch to show how "social relations are practised, and how these practices – which are fraught with tensions and often hard to live with – in turn make and remake persons" (2010:14).

Jessica Johnson (2012) provides an account of women's experiences of HIV/AIDS and stigma as embedded within matrilineal matrices in a village in Malawi. In women's narratives, stories of experiences of HIV revolve around entangled relationships with their matrilineal kin, including brothers, sisters and mothers. But women's stories also reveal matrilineal practices and ideologies about land inheritance, marital relations and the obligation to provide for their households, as opportunities through which women imagine, evaluate and invest in their future in relation to themselves and others (Johnson 2012). Having been able to access treatment through ARVs, HIV-positive women in Chiradzulu are able to cultivate and pursue "tentative hope" by pursuing the opportunities that matrilineality offers them: ARVs made their bodies strong, and since they accessed and owned land as kinswomen, they were able to once again engage in agricultural labour, participate in communal and religious activities and feasts, and negotiate their marital and sexual relationships as well as provide for their households as women. Overall, women and their households could survive because they have found an opportunity to sow a "seed of hope…for the future" (Johnson 2012:644). The interaction between bodies and ill health, ARVs and matrilineality provided women space to carve "a creative, hopeful approach to re-establishing themselves in their core relational roles, as mothers, grandmothers and productive members of their extended matrilineal family groups" (Johnson 2012:647). This way, they "reconstituted themselves as confident members of their village communities" (Johnson 2012:644).

Some of my informants suffered the effects of HIV/AIDS, either by being sick themselves or through the illness of their children and other close kin members, or after the death of close kin due to HIV/AIDS. However my focus in this chapter is not about women's experiences of HIV/AIDS. People rarely talked openly about HIV/AIDS infections or those who were affected by the disease, partly because much stigma was attached to HIV/AIDS. Many people used words such as 'ugonjwa' (Swahili word for a disease) and 'homa' (loosely translated as a cold or fever) even when they meant HIV/AIDS infection. Johnson's account captures a similar sense of women's conceptions and experiences of ill health and performances of matrilineality to that which I hope to document here. As Henrietta Moore recently pointed out, people's narratives and

experiences of suffering "inevitably involve stories about sharing", and, are of course, about performing kinship (Moore 2016:50). Furthermore, people as human subjects reflect upon "the dynamic matrix of relations in which they are embedded", hence actively work towards their imaginations of the future through experiences and practices in the present (ibid). Likewise, my woman informants' narratives about their ill health unpack the interconnection between suffering and kinship, and the women's active role in their experiences of illness and claim making. I argue that women's experiences and conceptions of health and illness are matrilineally informed, and in the context of *mradi* revolve around relationships of obligation and 'dependence'.

Women, health and illness in Msambweni

Women's ideas, experiences and performances related to health and illness are well-documented in Kenya (Nyambedha & Aagaard-Hansen (2007) for Western Kenya; Mwenesi, Harpham and Snow (1995) for Kilifi; and Amuyunzu (1998) for the Duruma in Kwale). The association of women, especially with child health and illness, is a common observation across these studies. Some studies have actually viewed child illness as a critical part of women's nurturing work (Amuyunzu 1998; Geissler and Prince 2010; Prince et al. 2002 (cited in Geissler and Prince 2010)). In the context of HIV/AIDS and socio-economic constraints, women are largely associated with the effects of disease and they take on the responsibility of care for children and those affected by the scourge, with matrikin care becoming a common phenomenon even in communities where patrilineal organization prevails (Nyambedha 2004; Nyambedha, Wandibba & Aagaard-Hansen 2003; cf. Block 2014). Women not only take on health responsibilities, including for children, but also 'own' and experience other's illness experiences through embodied performances of health care and support. Mary Amuyunzu contends that women actually maintain health not only for their children, but also for other kin members such as husbands, daughters and sisters: they schedule appointments, feed and medicate those who are ill, transport children to clinics, provide healthcare for sick or aged husbands, and unpaid caregiving to the elderly (Amuyunzu 1998:491; 1994). Also, among the Duruma, she observes that "women represent their [sick] children and identify the spirits responsible for illness" and take up roles as female folk practitioners and as traditional birth attendants (Amuyunzu 1998:490, 491). While in the latter women take charge of caring practices and delivery processes for expectant mothers, in the former, women participate in spiritual healing

sessions "on behalf of their ailing children." It is actually women's bodies on which the healing rituals are performed (Amuyunzu 1998:498, 499).

In Msambweni, women have traditionally been central to matters of health and fertility, both symbolically and in practice (see chapter 1). But what is remarkable about Msambweni is not only the gendered nature of matters of health and illness, but also their historical embeddedness in matrilineal ideologies. This is well demonstrated by *chifudu*, the women's health and fertility ritual, which historically gave women protection and enhanced their matriclan's reproductive potential (Gerlach 1960; Udvardy 1990; 1992; Wamahiu 1985). As I discuss in Chapter 1, each matriclan had a *chifudu* whose custodians were women, who looked after *chifudu* objects (*vifudu*, sing. *chifudu)*, container-like ritual objects in the form of clay pots, which symbolize ancestresses (*mikoma*) and *chifudu* shrines or huts (*rungu*) which were specially constructed for the storage of *vifudu* and to provide places for *chifudu* ritual. Through their care of these containers, women were believed to "safeguard fertility or to be the source of reproductive [and health] problems" (Udvardy 1992:297).

The practice of *chifudu* is still very much alive in Msambweni, largely a matrilineal practice, with *chifudu* 'houses' remaining a tangible manifestation of *fuko* (Udvardy 1990:149; Gerlach 1960; Gillette 1978). It is no coincidence that women are the custodians of *chifudu*, "the symbolic responsibility for the ancestresses" (Udvardy 1990:150). These women are usually the most senior females in the matriclans (Gillette 1978; Udvardy 1990; 1992; Wamahiu 1985), although in practice those women considered 'mature'[89] enough (in most cases elderly women) inherit *chifudu* custodianship. The pots, I was told, choose the best-suited female kin with the clan to inherit them as a custodian (see also Udvardy 1990; 1992).

In order to maintain the "fertility-awarding powers of the ancestresses" and by extension the health of their matrikin (Udvardy 1992:290), the custodians are expected to provide 'good' care to *vifudu,* a course performed through rituals. When neglected, it is believed that "the ancestral powers of the pots" will inflict illness to the skin or the belly/womb. The uterus, which shares the container-

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[89] Those women are considered to have in-depth knowledge about Digo customs and traditions (*Chidigo*/*tamanduni za kare*), and in most cases they are in the post-menopausal stage of life (see Udvardy 1992 for a discussion of the preference for post-menopausal women in Chifudu ritual. Although her case-study is the Giriama, the same applies to the Digo from whom the Giriama are believed to have 'borrowed' the ritual (cf. Udvardy 1990))

like shape of the pots, carries the illness inflicted by the neglected "female 'objects'" (Udvardy 1992:297). For this reason, problems such as stillbirths, miscarriages, problems with pregnancies and barrenness continue to be associated with *chifudu* and women are often held responsible for such illnesses. When such a condition befalls a woman, it is considered a potential health/fertility threat to her whole matriclan, and a *chifudu* custodian is sought to perform rituals believed to restore good health.

Women are also associated with ill health through accusations of witchcraft and sorcery, as a result of their role in care for the sick. Often, when I asked women about *chifudu*, they did not talk directly about seeking *chifudu* help for health issues. It was common for women to say, to use one of my informant's words, "I sought help in the traditional way (*kimila*)". However, whether they directly or indirectly participated in *chifudu* rituals, health issues remained central to women's everyday lives, especially within the domain of kinship and women's responsibilities. Speaking to one woman about *chifudu*, she explained the centrality of women in illness and health: "us women are very important for our clans. If something happens [illness], it is normal that every woman here gets worried. When it persists, then people will accuse women and they will say, we can try *kimila*. You know there are those particular women who are usually called to help."

In other instances, women acted as each other's 'keeper' and confided among themselves in the event of health complications such as infertility. For example, I encountered cases of women who had divorced or separated from their husbands to live with sisters or daughters who had been forced out of their marriage because of health complications such as barrenness (*utasa*). For instance, Mwanatumu told me how she painfully chose to leave her marriage to live with her ill sister who was *tasa,* and was divorced on that basis. She said:

> You know, my sister has a problem. She cannot bear children… and is not easy for a woman
> to be like that in our community. Her husband chased her. He called her all sorts of names. It
> was very difficult for her. The pain was too much... My husband could not allow me to bring
> her to stay with us. I had a difficult decision to make. I painfully decided to leave my marriage,
> came back home, built this house and stayed with her.

Even when women were themselves unwell, they took on the responsibility to look after their sick kin members. This was the case with Mesha who took in her ailing grandson when both his parents

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died. Mesha's grandson was diabetic and he required a lot of care, which was difficult for the household. As a result, the ailing and aging Mesha started a small business of selling *leso* (women's cloth) and coconut out of which she could afford some medication for her grandson. Mesha's youngest daughter suffered pregnancy complications and she often stayed with Mesha to receive care. Although her daughter was married, Mesha reiterated that it was her responsibility to provide health care support to all her 'children'. Therefore, despite her old age and pains in her legs, she remained 'strong' because the 'children' needed her very much. To demonstrate this further, Mesha would carry the ailing boy to the hospital on her back when he was very sick and unable to walk. Additionally, when Mesha broke her arm from an accident by a motorcycle (*piki piki*), she still looked after her ailing daughter when she was hospitalized following further complications with her pregnancy.

I recorded a similar situation with Melina who looked after her deceased sister's daughter when she gave birth. Although Melina had problems with her stomach and was on medication, this did not prevent her from looking after the 'new' mother and the new 'visitor' in the household.[90] Just a few days after Melina had undergone a surgical operation on her stomach, I visited the household and found her busy washing clothes. In her state of health I did not expect to find her immersed in a basin full of water washing the heap of clothes that lay beside her. Her sister's daughter lay on a *jamvi* in an adjacent veranda with her child warmly wrapped and lying next to her. Melina looked very excited as she told me about the arrival of their 'visitor'. Suddenly, her sister's daughter announced that she craved for *mahamri* (doughnuts) and asked if she could get some from a nearby restaurant. In response to this, Melina told her she was not due to "leave her nest" (the 40 days of seclusion immediately after delivery), and that she would soon complete the laundry task and prepare 'clean' doughnuts for her. Melina continued to tell her sister's daughter that her craving for restaurant food was 'improper' and that she acted as if Melina was unable to provide her the good care, as expected of matrikin women for a woman who had recently given birth (see Chapter 4).

Of course Melina's concern about her sister's daughter feeding on 'improper' food resonates with the prevailing prescriptions about women's feeding habits during pregnancy, within the 40 days

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[90] People usually announce the presence of a newborn child in the household by the term *mjeni* (visitor) to mean a new member in the household. *Mjeni* also refers to in-married man and visitors generally.

after delivery (the 'nesting period') and the entire breastfeeding period (see chapter 2 for a discussion on eating and feeding). But Melina's was also an expression of how matters of health and illness are central to women, especially in a matrilineal sense. It is within this context that *mradi* has operated since 2004. As I show below, women's stories of ill health highlight the interconnection between *mradi* and bodily ills and reveal both women's survival in the context of social and economic change and the associated complexities especially of illness and socio-economic constraints, religion, state and traditions .

Embodiment and Enactment

As discussed in the introduction, the Kenya cash transfer scheme for orphans and vulnerable children was established after a series of neoliberal and structural adjustment reforms in Kenya in the late 1980s. Through these reforms, the government promised to improve the country's economy and the living standards of its citizens by emphasizing market liberation, competitive markets and the development of the private sector (Rono 2002). About twenty years since their implementation, however, the pledges to alleviate poverty and unemployment and to improve the living standards of the citizens had not been met. Rather, by the turn of the twenty first century, in addition to skyrocketed rates of unemployment, inflationary pressures, and marginalization of the poor, HIV/AIDS swept across many parts of the country. As kinship support networks became constrained, many women were left as heads of households and many children under the care of their grandparents, relatives and older children (Nyambedha, Wandibba & Aagaard-Hansen 2003; Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2007). As I show in chapter 4, in Msambweni, care responsibilities were largely given to women, because of the matrilineal ideologies and practices surrounding care. Women have witnessed their kin members die (sometimes very helplessly in their own hands as I observed of two cases during fieldwork), divorce, and have experienced dramatic transformations in their own lives.

The introduction of *mradi* altered the landscape of women's conceptions and experiences of their everyday lives, as I show in this dissertation. Of particular interest in this chapter is that *mradi* played a role in the way women conceived and experienced their everyday forms of social suffering. I argue that this too has to do with the matrilineal ideologies pertaining to women's obligations and responsibility that continue to flourish in Msambweni. The metaphorical

expression of women's bodies as a platform for discourses about associated conceptions and enactments of health and illness is striking. Just as it is expected of women to provide proper care to *chifudu* containers, women continue to take seriously matters of health and illness for their kin members, as Sacks (1989:89) puts it, as "heart and soul". But women did not simply "take responsibility and initiative" (Amuyunzu 1998:491). As "locus of social practice" (Bourdieu 1977, 1984), women's bodies became vectors for various forms of matrilineal ideas and enactments. Women often told me how 'strong', yet ailing they were to articulate their centrality in performances of health and illness, but also as an expression of the role of embodiment in women's enactments such as those pertaining to matrilineal ideologies of obligations and responsibilities. The embodied concepts of *nguvu* and *maumivu* manifest how women coped with and endured social suffering, social and economic change and various complexities in their everyday lives through matrilineal performances. I now turn to three women's narratives to illustrate this.

Forgetting pain (*maumivu*) and gaining energy (*nguvu*): three women's narratives

Mwatuma

When we got acquainted in late November 2014, Mwatuma had been ill for about five years, and by the look of her swollen legs and feet and the pain she demonstrated when she tried to lift them off the ground, it was difficult to imagine how she managed to look after the children she lived with. Often, Mwatuma would cry, "my legs, my legs, I cannot walk far. I am like a disabled person." Beside her usually was her mother who lay on a *jamvi* (floor mat) whenever I visited the household. "*Mayo* (mother) has been suffering a lot. When she is badly off, I have to help her turn around. Sometimes her back and legs are like numb and she cannot make it to the toilet by herself. Then, I must help her up from the *jamvi*," Mwatuma said on one occasion. Yet, despite this state of affairs, Mwatuma described herself and her mother as 'strong' women. "My mother and I are ailing, but we are very strong women," she said. Indeed, Mwatuma would travel to Mombasa to get her fish for sale, go to the local market to purchase kerosene to sell, and attend women's *chama*. One afternoon I found her preparing green grams for a meal while lying on the *jamvi*, and she told me that the energy to do such chores "just came". I was puzzled and went on to ask how this happened. Mwatuma explained:

Every day I wake up, I look up to the Creator and thank him for these children. Their mother died, but the children are here with me. When I think about my sister, I remember I promised myself to give her children a life as she would have done it. They are my everyday project, whether my body pains or not… When I collect *mradi* funds, I feel very happy in my heart, it gives me energy to work for the sake of the children. When morning comes and I just feel too weak to leave the bed, but thinking about the children and knowing that I have used all the *mradi* funds pushes me out of the bed because I must look for ways to feed the household. The body gains energy and I quickly prepare them to go to school, then I rush to Ukunda, hop in a *matatu* (minibuses) and rush to Mombasa. Soon I am back and people want fish, another wants kerosene. Children will be back from school soon. They will need to eat. You see, when the [*mradi*] money is finished, I don't have time to keep thinking about my legs until I sit down and I am unable to stand again. But when the children get here, I forget about the pain. They are the ones I look up to. If I sit here and keep thinking about body pains, what will they eat? Who will help them? Who will make their future? Everybody is busy with their own. When you speak to people about anything, they say I have *mradi* funds. When I think about it, even the body itself cannot remember where it pained.

Mwatuma had recently renovated her house and installed electricity. When I asked her how she managed to do that, she said:

These children are our life. I think about their lives every day. If I stay in darkness, they are also in darkness. One day I sat here and said to myself, "I have *mradi* funds, the money goes to their school fees, clothes and we buy medicine. My small business of fish and kerosene gives us something for food. But then I keep taking small amounts of kerosene that I should be selling to light up the house because sometimes the children want to read at night." Because I want to make them a good life, I decided to get a *mkopo* (micro-loan). I approached my *chama,* they checked my records and they were 'clean', so I was given the loan and I called the people of Kenya Power who fixed everything in the house… When I get *mradi* money, I take some to repay the loan. But sometimes the money delays and it is also not much. When things are like this, I cannot sit here and say I have an aching leg because those people (money lenders) will not want to know that, if I don't repay they will come here and they will carry away everything. Actually this *mradi* money makes me think a lot about these children and I forget about my body.

Mwanasha

Mwanasha's son died in a road accident and her daughter died of 'ugonjwa'. Although Mwanasha's son's children lived with their mother in her maternal home, they visited her often especially during the weekends and school holidays. The children of Mwanasha's deceased daughter lived in the household. Living in the household also was Mwanasha's unmarried daughter, Mariamu, who had hearing problems and no formal education. Mariamu spent her days helping with household chores, including bathing and feeding the children and preparing cakes for her mother for sale. She recently began madrasa lessons. Elderly and ailing Mwanasha sat most of the time under a tree next to her house watching over her bucket of cakes and attending to customers who came to purchase the cakes. Some other times she attended to the small garden behind her house where she planted cassava and some vegetable crops. Mwanasha often prided herself for being 'strong' because she was able to count money despite her lack of formal education[91] and poor eye sight due to old age. One day I found her cultivating her garden and she was scornful when I said her daughter and another young woman, with whom she sat on a jamvi chatting and laughing, should be helping her in the garden. Mwanasha said, "bodies of us old women know how to gather/gain energy. We are not like you young people because we do it for you." Mwanasha repeated the same words during another conversation about her everyday routine of observing *salah*, the Islam daily prayers, and the observance of *Ramdhan*, the Islamic prayer and fasting period. The (re)generation of energies was at times a complex undertaking as the following narrative shows.

One Monday afternoon during the month of Ramadhan in July 2015, Mwanasha sat on a j*amvi* looking worried and exhausted. She told me Mariamu had been lying down for two days and she did not want to leave the bed. Because of this, Mwanasha did not ask her to go to collect *mradi* funds when she received information that the money was ready for collection at a local bank agency in their local market. Following this, Mwanasha said she felt some energy come to her body which had been weak for some days, and she walked to the market where she collected the money. When she got back to the house, it was at sunset and darkness was setting in very fast.

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[91] Many of my woman informants, especially the elderly women had attended madrasa lessons but received no other formal education. Very few had primary education. Illiteracy level among Digo women has remained significantly high for many decades, not only due to women's reluctance to send children to receive Western education, but also due to patriarchal Muslim cultural restrictions on women (Alidou 2013; Strobel 1979).

Mwanasha was tired after queueing the whole day collect the funds. Mwanasha explained that she took a stool, sat down, but she wondered until when she would continue to sit. The children wanted to eat and household chores needed to be done. Mariamu was still in bed. Mwanasha remembered she had some bananas in her bag, which she took out and gave them to the children to eat as they waited for her to prepare their evening meal. Mwanasha then called Mariamu and told her that she had collected the *mradi* money and she would give her some funds to go to the hospital. She remarked how Mariamu got out of the bed quickly and told her that she would boil some cassava (*muhogo*) for dinner. She continued to explain that Mariamu would not even listen to her when she told her she would cook. In response, Mariamu told her mother that her "body was gaining some strength." Looking unsurprised by Mariamu's response, Mwanasha commented, "*mradi* money usually works like magic" and said that even her own body too gained energy whenever she heard about the 'arrival' of *mradi* funds, and when she failed to get the money on the day of collection and was asked to come the following day, Mwanasha said, "I know my body is not well but I will not even think about it. I will wake up the next day and go."

Mwanasha conceived *mradi* money as *riziki* (blessings, provisioning)[92] for her household, but it was also apparent that she worried about Mariamu and the children. She often talked about the many challenges her household faced (death, sickness, financial problems, land disputes, old age) and her aspirations for Mariamu to be a 'strong woman'. At the same time she emphasized how she remained 'strong' herself despite her body pains and old age. To further demonstrate how strong a woman she remained, Mwanasha explained:

> Yesterday my body felt very strong and I did many things in the house. I don't know but I think it is because of the [*mradi*] money. I even cooked cakes myself, although not as good as Mariamu does, and people bought everything. To be sincere, life is very difficult, even this *mradi* money is not a lot. But I thank God the Creator for *mradi* money. Everyone has her own *riziki*. This *mradi* is *riziki* for me. You remember I told you about the land problem, this money gives me the energy to continue following up on the matter because when I look at the way things are, I am growing older every day and I have children here with me, thoughts about their future disturb me a lot because I do not want my household to fall, I want them to have a place to cultivate and live with peace. Even yourself when you look

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[92] Chapter 3 discusses *riziki* in more detail.

at this well, you can see *mradi* is giving me all the energy now and I pray the money continues to come at least I help my children before my time comes.

Asha

After going through a painful divorce due to an infertility condition, Asha's sister moved in with her. After about one year, Asha's sister began falling sick. Asha told me that her sister's body became mysteriously weak, her feet and eventually her whole body lost strength and she could not walk or sit without support. Asha sought treatment for her sister in different hospitals but she said the doctors could not establish the root cause of her sister's mysterious illness. She also tried traditional healing practices with no success. When I got to know Asha and her sister's illness in late January 2015, she still sought treatment for her sister. However, her sister's condition did not get any better. One morning in July 2015 I visited Asha and she told me she gave up on the hospitals and traditional 'doctors'. This time, she decided to try a Muslim diviner. On one occasion, the diviner came while Asha and I were having a conversation under a tree. Asha had already told me the diviner would visit. Her sister lay on a *jamvi* in the house. However, Asha did not allow me to attend the 'healing' session, because, according to Asha, only the diviner needed to be with her sister. As we sat under the tree, I could hear the diviner speaking in a chanting tone. Asha told me the healing process involved the diviner reading verses from the Quran to the patient.

As we sat waiting for completion of the healing session Asha narrated what she termed "mysterious things" that had been happening to the household. "My sister's disease is difficult to understand," she said as she reflected on how the illness made her heart lack peace. "My sister's body started being weak from nowhere, she could not walk nor sit without support," she explained. The illness continued for several years and Asha took it upon herself to do everything for her sister: "I bathe her, clothe her, put food in her mouth, clean after her, I do everything for her." Even when she knew people in the village spoke badly about her sister's situation and the household, Asha said she did not mind because she cared for her sister with whom were born from the same *tumbo* (belly/stomach). "I cannot leave her to suffer alone. People will say whatever they want. They say many things. You know when some things like these happen in our community, it is us women who suffer because we are accused of many things," she repeated. But Asha did not only worry about her sister's 'mysterious' illness. She also viewed her mother's (*mayo*) death as a mystery. "My mother just slept and died. She was not ill. She just died. Soon after, her house collapsed.

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There were no rains, no heavy wind, the house just fell down by itself," said Asha. At the time of her mother's death, Asha had just divorced and returned to her mother's house. After her mother's death, she heard many gossips in the neighbourhood that their household would "perish just like that." This pained Asha a lot, but it also prompted her to think how she could make her mother's household stand firm. She began by providing education for her two children, a course that left Asha with back pains due to prolonged periods of sitting as she weaved *jamvi* (mats) and *makuti* for sale to obtain school fees, as well as cultivating the fields to ensure food was available in the household. Asha's daughter was a teacher at a nearby school, and she aspired to pursuing further education in *Ulaya* (abroad/Europe). Her son worked at a local company in a nearby town. Yet, Asha still lived with a troubled heart due to her sister's illness, and her back still pained. Yet she said things changed a bit when she began receiving *mradi* funds. She explained:

> Even if people talk in whispers about the sickness, theirs is just bare talk. Their gossip now is about where I get the energy (*nguvu*) to go from hospital to another hospital and I get just little money from *mradi*. But for me, they can gossip and gossip as much as they want. So long as *mradi* money can help pay for transport and buy food and the medicines, this gives me enough energy. Even when the next [*mradi*] money I am expecting comes, it will give me energy to solve other problems. Like now I need to give something to this *mwalimu wa dini* (lit. Muslim diviner/teacher). I called him because I have been thinking my sister could be possessed by spirits and they may start causing problems to us. My last daughter is yet to have children and I do not want her to have problems too. I want her to have a good life. Now you see I have my own energies that God the Creator has given me, so I do not have time to waste feeling pain about gossips. I just forget the pain and concentrate on making life better for my household. People who just talk do not help me.

Good life, good future and women's hearts: women and the moral economy of claim-making

Numerous scholars in Africa have recently studied claim making relations in Africa (Englund 2008; Ferguson 2013, 2015; Livingston 2007; Schertz 2014; Swidler and Watkins 2007). A common assertion made by scholars resonates with Ferguson's argument that people make "declarations of dependence" to "those better off than themselves" in the hope of improving or sustaining their lives and those of others (Ferguson 2013; 2015:156). Similarly, people take on dependents even in situations with minimal or no resources (Schertz 2014; Swidler and Watkins

2007). What may not be overlooked, however, is that claim-making relations, whether in the form of patron-client relationships or wide networks of mutual support, are as complex as their application in the everyday live in different contexts. Livingston (2007), for instance, reveals the complexities in the everyday practices and notions of care held by the NGOs and the elderly people in Botswana. Whereas the NGOs foster cultivation of what they perceive as independence among the elderly people by encouraging them to take care of their personal bodily needs, the elderly people conceive their rights for care as embedded in the local tradition of care for the elderly, for example, "a right to rely on, and be coddled by, their children" (Cole and Durham 2007:21).

Similarly, China Scherz's (2014) *Having People, Having Heart* unpacks claim-making relations in Uganda in her ethnographic account of Kiganda practices of caregiving and gift giving and the development practices of two different non-governmental organizations. Scherz shows how notions of material exchanges in this context are shaped by and deeply intertwined with Ugandans' own ethics of kindness, care and exchange. In light of this, failure to give material "handouts" is understood as "failure to recognize the obligations of patronage", whereas giving is conceived as an act of kindness and "heart for helping others" (Schertz 2014:135).

In their work in Western Kenya, Shipton (2007) and Cooper (2012) demonstrate ideas about sharing and reciprocity as embedded in relationships of responsibility among the Luo. Such relationships, whether in the form of "entrustment" (Shipton 2007) or "standing for" (Cooper 2012), are associated with patronage practices whereby a "person accepts the dependency of the other" (Cooper 2012:441). But they are also embedded in and informed by the underlying situations in which they operate. For instance, despite socio-economic constraints the increasing rates of orphans and widows, especially due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, have shaped negotiations of care and upbringing of children, with matrikin responsibility becoming a common phenomenon. An ethos of sharing and reciprocity continues to be intertwined with relationships of obligation and responsibility within the realm of patrilineal and patrilocal social organization in the Luo community (Cooper 2012; Nyambedha 2004; Nyambedha, Wandibba & Aagaard-Hansen 2003). Apparently, a common phenomenon in Africa, then, is of people with even minimal resources taking on dependents because of the moral claims embedded in ideas about obligation and responsibility.

We might see, similarly, in the women's stories provided above that claim-making relationships were cultivated through women's moral imaginations and the enactments of their obligations and responsibilities which were both inspired by and interwoven within the web of matrilineal ideologies. Indeed, this could be easily read as women becoming patrons and taking on dependents or declaring other's dependence on themselves. Clearly, however, the process is not as straightforward as this may suggest: as patrons, women operate as providers to sustain their dependents by forgetting pain and gaining energy. But this was also about the moral conceptions of women's hearts. Metaphorically speaking, a woman could be a "feeder of people" (Bayart 1989), or a giver of good life, by forgetting pain and gaining energy because she "got a heart (*moyo*)". As Scherz (2014) argues for the idiom of heart in Uganda, such notion of heart was complexly embedded with moral ideals of obligations, responsibility and reciprocity.

However, my informants' conception of obligation is unlike that of the Ugandans where "obligations of patronage" were entered into by organizations "asking for villagers' labour and contributions" (Schertz 2014:135), or among the Luo where grandparents would take in orphans and in turn benefit from their labour (Olang'o, Nyamongo and Nyambedha 2012), or many other related examples of claim-making in Africa,. My informants' conception of obligations and responsibilities moves beyond mere assumptions that people make 'declarations of dependence' on others or take on dependents especially for certain gains such as "labour (Miller 1988) [or] knowledge (Guyer and Belinga 1995)" (cited in Scherz 2014:19) or other economic gains (see for example Swidler and Watkins 2007). As the women's narratives provided in this chapter demonstrate, moral imaginations and the enactment of obligations and responsibility, embodied in the language of pain, energy and *mradi*, and embedded in the virtue of women's hearts, are indeed about matrilineal relations. Considering that women are a central focus for their households, the notion of women's hearts was an expression of endurance, accommodation and persuasion especially because difficulties, tensions and limitations defined many household situations, where nonetheless positivity was expected. For example, despite the diseases, marital breakdowns and many other social and economic constraints and crises which afflicted many of the woman headed households I observed, women reiterated their concern for matters such as "a child needs to go school, a daughter has a wedding, a brother is in the hospital, your sister is knocking at the door". As a kinswoman and head of a household, the moral thing to do was to accommodate and

attend to all these. A woman's 'heart', therefore, captures the exemplary nature of women's resilience whose central concern was pursuing ways of 'giving' and enabling living a 'good' life. Furthermore, women's reflections, imaginations, aspirations and investment in a 'good' life and future for others, especially the children under their care, were both about their value in relations of obligation and responsibility and their fulfilment and also a creative investment on the growth and continuity of their matrilineages.

Conclusion

I have tried to show, in this chapter, how matrilineal kinship was experienced, expressed and performed through women's narratives, descriptions and metaphors of ill health. I have explored the complex ways women conceived *mradi* as a medium for energy production and forgetting pain to articulate their sense of survival and the moral conceptions of claim-making. I have proposed that women's discourses of bodily ills captured in the language of energy and pain reveal how women negotiated and enacted matrilineal relations of obligations and responsibility as a way of surviving the problems caused by social and economic change in Msambweni. Additionally, clothing claim-making enactments with the notion of women's hearts portrays relations of obligation and responsibility as a pursuit of endurance and accommodation that is central to women as kinswomen and as heads of households. This also resonates with Marshall Sahlin's recent argument about kinship as 'mutuality of being' whereby people come to be "intrinsic one to another's existence" (Sahlins 2011:2). In the context of women's hearts, ill health is about women accommodating pain and energy, or rather opening up their hearts for pain and energy, for the sake of other's existence. In light of this, it is striking how women's bodies become central to the enactment and embodiment of kin relationship.

Of course, in a context where women are considered central to issues of health, household provisioning, and the general care for others, especially in the broader matrilineal sense, it is not surprising that women immerse themselves in such ways of cultivating and sustaining their relations with others, and keep imagining the future of such household relations. Women's bodies become central sites for cultivating relationship by ways of giving or offering themselves to others (by forgetting pains and gaining energies) and inviting their 'dependence' on them (in the language of women's hearts). This invites a careful analysis of the way people's claim-making

relations and discourses of pain, suffering and the body are understood in different contexts. In numerous studies, for example, bodies are portrayed not only in the ways they accommodate pain, but also crucially how they feel pain as manifestations of suffering and violence (see for example Biehl and Eskerod 2005; and Fassin 2011). In this way, studies that focus on the heart have shown this as a site for revealing pain and/or suffering, even where the central focus may be on expressions of generosity or mercy (see for example Schertz 2014). Furthermore, as I have shown above, these are not simply relations of inequality as some studies of redistribution and accounts of claim-making may suggest. On the contrary, in Msambweni, a woman's heart is centred on ideals of accommodation, endurance and persuasion, in the language of forgotten pains and gained energies based on the moral imperatives of investing in the good life and future of the household. For women not to have a heart may risk being viewed as the moral failing of a household. Therefore, in a morally informed conception of claim-making relations in a context affected by both change and complexities, women must have a heart.

Conclusion

> Matrilineal systems are increasingly rare; thus, systematic study is necessary before their possible disappearance…Although matrilineal systems would seem to be on the verge of extinction, there is nothing precluding their reemergence if and when conditions make matriliny more desirable (Mattison 2016:5).

The above quotation from a recent scholarly review on matrilineality struck me because it shows the continued universality of the assumption of the demise of matrilineality. This continues to happen despite recent attempts by anthropologists to show the persistence of matrilineal relations and how a focus on gender relations and historical contexts helps unpack the assumptions underlying the 'death' of matrilineality (see for example Johnson 2013 and Peters 1997a and 1997b for Africa; Blackwood 2000 and Peletz 1988 for Southeast Asia). There is little doubt that different contexts have showed significant transformations in matrilineal organization and practices, including complexities in the way contemporary matrilineal relations and practices operate in particular contexts (Phiri 1983). However, to argue that these transformations signal the demise of matrilineality is to treat matrilineality as a "totality or 'system'" and to undermine both the particular historical contexts and the local realities in which matrilineal practices originate and operate (Peters 1997a:13). My task in this dissertation has been to show how matrilineal relations in Msambweni have remained alive through women's economic performances. It stands in opposition to a focus on matrilineality simply on the basis of rules, descent or alliance, and insists that viewing matrilineality as performative kinship unpacks the local realities of kinship as lived by the people in Msambweni and shows the considerable scope matrilineality provides for the exercise of women's authority and autonomy in this context.

In the Kenya South Coast, gender and matrilineal relations have been shaped by the complex interaction of historical processes such as patriarchal Islamic, colonial and post-colonial state projects and ideologies and Digo traditions as well as social and economic factors. This was clearly demonstrated in Chapter 1, where I traced the interrelationship between matrilineality and gender relations to the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial periods. With a specific focus on the organization of pre-colonial activities such as trade, agriculture and health, and Islamic ideologies, colonial and post-colonial policies and development projects, we saw that different aspects of matrilineality changed (for example, property and land inheritance relations, uxorilocal residence arrangements and marital relations) and became important in gendered relations at different times

and in different ways. A focus on history has also demonstrated that women were central to matrilineal relations and practices in the pre-colonial period, and this has remained so even after the subsequent complications of the interaction between Digo traditions, Islam and state (colonial and post-colonial) patriarchal projects and ideologies. Chapter 1 has shown that the emergent contradictions and complexities with matrilineality in Msambweni did not bring an end to Digo matrilineal practices and ideologies. Instead these provided a fertile ground for re-negotiation of the relations of men and women (both in gendered and kinship terms). Matrilineal kin relations became located and relocated in women's lives through such negotiations.

The idea of locating and relocating matrilineal relations in women's lives invited a focus on the notion of household. Writers on women-headed households have often privileged a male-centric view where jural, conjugal and nuclear family (in the Western sense); also emphasized in the analysis of women-headed households. Aided by this notion, assumptions of male 'absence' or 'marginality' of men as providers or heads of households often leads to analyses of women's positions and relationships in such households primarily through the lens of absent men. A popular and persistent tendency has then been a focus on women in their roles as mothers (Blackwood 2005). For writers on matrifocality, the point of departure is often captured and emphasized as centrality and power of women as mothers, and relationships are derived in relation to women as mothers (Blackwood 2005:8; Smith 1973:125). In Chapter 2, I have challenged this notion. Instead, we have seen that women-centred relationships are a characteristic of women's households and are embedded in discursive performances of *mradi* and matrilineal ideologies. I have suggested that householding, that is, constitution and reconstitution of women's households, and the reinforcement and sustenance of women's household status in Msambweni, revolve around negotiation and navigation of networks of women as kinswomen, rather than simply as mothers. The ongoing interplay between *mradi* and ideologies of uterine economy, conceived in the idioms of eating and feeding, express the nature of women's householding but also shore up gendered matrilineal relations in Msambweni.

The material presented here also invites a reassessment of the notion of male authority held by traditional anthropological orthodoxy on matrilineal societies, especially in the so-called "matrilineal puzzle". First described by Audrey Richards (1950) in her account of matrilineality in Central Africa, the "matrilineal puzzle" rested on concerns of the tensions between male

authority, that is male control over women and children, and men's dispersed roles as brothers/mother's brothers and as husbands/fathers in a context of descent through females and uxorilocal residence. Others such as Schneider (1961) agree with this idea of male control of women and children, with his observations of dilemmas in relationships between in-married men and the wife's kinsmen. Such tensions have been viewed as a threat to matrilineality. Indeed, matrilineal practices in Msambweni involve contestations and negotiations as I have shown in this dissertation. However, such tensions are not centred on male authority nor are they a threat to Digo matrilineality. Instead, following Peters' (1997a:141) notion of "gender puzzle", we have seen that the conundrums in matrilineal relations in Msambweni were actually a space for women's negotiation and navigation of status, and in this way, matrilineal practices and ideologies were maintained. Chapter 3, for example, spoke to the issue of household provisioning, looking at the ways matrilineal ideologies and practices interact with socio-economic factors and state and Islamic projects to reinforce women's position as household providers and place them as the pillars of their household economy. Challenging the perspective of male authority on land and marital practices held by scholars of matrilineality, we have seen that central to marital practices and land ownership ideologies is women's navigation of those aspects of Digo tradition and Islam that contradict and sometimes overlap each other, and which, together with state policies and ideologies of *mradi*, are strategically pursued by women through the language of *riziki* (as a blessing and as household provisioning) to activate and reactivate matrilineal relations and accord women a central position in their households.

Focusing on ethnographic material provided in Chapter 3, I would also question the anthropological orthodox view of marital relations and notions of reciprocity. In frequent cases, relationships associated with materiality have been questioned, often from Eurocentric perspectives which make them "appear sullied" (Johnson 2013:40). Numerous studies on sex and marriage transactions in Africa have challenged this view (see for example Cole 2010; Hunter 2010; Johnson 2013; Swidler and Watkins 2007), notably in a thought provoking volume *Love in Africa* (2009) edited by Cole and Thomas, fully dedicated to documenting these issues. The material provided in this dissertation is in broad agreement with these scholars. But, as Chapter 3 has demonstrated, while economic hardships and change experienced in my informants' households may contribute to the nature of marital relations practiced by women, and present

materiality and marital relations not as two "hostile worlds", but "deeply intertwined" (Cole 2009:111), it would be unfair to suggest that these are the sole factors, as they obscure the agency of women. Following Moore's (1994) focus on "the changing [and competing] nature of expectation, self-worth and agency" of the people, my informants' narratives revealed their collaborative expectations, agentive aspirations, and desire to fulfil their household roles as intertwined with marital transactions. I have also shown how this is not also simply about love as some scholars would have it (see for example Cole 2009). Instead, I have demonstrated how women aspired to forms of marital relations that would amount to a blessing.

Equally striking is the prevalence of women's authority and autonomy in kinship and marriage affairs in Msambweni. This is contrary to the thesis proposed by Lévi-Strauss, especially his generalized view of exchange of women and affinal alliance. A wide range of anthropological scholarship has critically assessed this contention and has stood in opposition to its stipulations including from a gender perspective (see for example Collier and Rosaldo 1981 and Peletz 1996). Indeed, feminist anthropologists have held that there are societies where marital exchanges are not about male authority and lack of women's autonomy as Lévi-Strauss' argument would have us believe. My dissertation stands in broad agreement with writers who insist upon women's authority and social control in various spheres in different societies, including in matters of kinship and marriage. As I have shown in Chapter 3, marital practices in Msambweni are very complex and these complexities work in favour of women and their statuses and considerably challenge male control of marital practices. I have shown, for example, how the notions of *riziki* and *uungwana,* which are intertwined with ideologies of *kusaidiana* (collaboration), challenge the position of men as husbands, providers and heads of households. Interestingly, such notions are used by women to harness autonomy and control of marital relations and the household economy and reveal the persistence of matrilineal practices such as uxorilocal marriages and inheritance through mother's brothers (*adzomba*).

The way the ideologies and practices of Islam, Digo traditions and the state intersected and became complex was also explored in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I focused on caregiving ideologies and practices and argued that the practice of caregiving (*rera*) is not only a project of women providing care, but also women reinforcing matrilineal relationships. I suggested that *mradi*-caregiving transactions privileged women's negotiation power as they navigated through their perceived

caregiving roles and the underlying complexities of care. Contrary to studies that have conceived cash transfers as simply reinforcing matrifocality (see for example Jackson 2014) rather than kinship practices and ideologies such as matrilineality, the ethnographic material presented here shows cash transfers as a platform for making, remaking and maintaining matrikin networks through women. I have shown that because women were able to negotiate with and manoeuvre the underlying ideologies of care provided by the different realms (Islam, *mradi* and *chidigo*), enactment of matrilineality such as membership to matrikin groups through women found space to remain alive in Msambweni.

An additional set of issues concerning matrilineality that have been a focus in this dissertation concern obligations, responsibility and claim making. In this dissertation, I have considered different ways in which women create and use networks to maintain their relationships and status, and how this is intertwined with matrilineal practices and ideologies. The argument in this dissertation is that cultivation of relationships is not simply about relations of inequality, as some studies on redistribution and relations of claim-making may suggest (see for example Scherz 2014; Smith 20014; Swidler and Watkins 2007). Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 spoke to the issues of cultivating relationships and status, where we have seen how moral imaginations and enactments of obligations and responsibility are embedded in women's centrality in their households and these are intertwined with matrilineal relations and ideologies. In Chapter 4, for example, I have demonstrated how claims for "a share of children" are more about matrikin practices of care than about reinforcing unequal or 'burdening' relations. As we have seen, the extent to which women make claims to live with and provide care for children involve navigation and negotiation of matrikin ideologies of care which operate alongside and are reinforced by *mradi* stipulations of caregiving and Islamic patriarchal notions of male breadwinners which were not favoured by the economic conditions present in Msambweni during the time of my fieldwork. This dissertation, then, suggests caution when analysing those domains that have often been considered as 'disempowering' for women. It is also a way of inviting a focus on people's aspects of lives (for both men and women) as lived, perceived and experienced in their local contexts.

Like Chapter 4, Chapter 5 has considered the moral economy of claim-making from the perspective of women's narratives of ill-health, showing how these, embodied in the language of pain, energy and *mradi*, and embedded in the virtue of women's hearts, are indeed about

matrilineal relations. I have proposed that women's discourses of bodily ills and their language of energy and pain reveal how women negotiated and enacted matrilineal relations of obligations and responsibility as a way of surviving the conundrums of social and economic change and complexities in Msambweni. I have shown that a central concern among women was pursuing ways of 'giving' and enabling living a 'good' life. Drawing on Sahlins (2011), I have emphasized how women's reflections, imaginations, aspirations and investment in a 'good' life and the future for others, especially the children under their care, were both about their valuation for relations of obligations and responsibility and their fulfilment and a creative investment on the growth and continuity of their matrilineages.

Furthermore, I have shown that by women's bodies becoming central sites for imagining and cultivating relationship by ways of giving or offering themselves to others (by forgetting pains and gaining energies) and inviting their 'dependence' on them (in the language of women's hearts), this invites a careful analysis both in the way people's claim-making relations and discourses of pain, suffering and the body are understood in different contexts. Following Moore's (2016:50) assertion that people's narratives and experiences of suffering including pain and ill-health "inevitably involve stories about sharing", and, are of course, about performing kinship, I have shown how in Msambweni, notions of ill-health and conceptions of a woman's heart are centred crucially on ideals of accommodation, endurance and persuasion, which in the language of forgotten pains and gained energies are based on moral imperatives of investing in good life and future of the household, and activated and reactivated by matrilineality. I have suggested that this amounts to a creative investment by women on the growth and continuity of their matrilineages.

In sum, in order to discern the resilience and continuity of matrilineality in the Kenya South Coast, and to understand the transformations in relation to earlier decades, this dissertation advises a focus on the diverse ways in which matrilineal practices and ideologies are maintained through experiences and performances of gender relations and ideologies. It also calls for caution on the assessment of matrilineality as ahistorical. This has been well demonstrated in the case for women in women-headed households, where the dynamics of matrilineality unfold. The arguments explored in this dissertation have also shown how matrilineality and gender relations merit far more attention than is provided by traditional anthropological orthodoxy that continues to influence many studies on gender and kinship.

As discussed in the introduction, the recent discourses of the Kwale cash transfer for orphans and vulnerable children that located women at the centre of its success inspired me to privilege women's perspectives and experiences in my analysis of matrilineality and gender relations. I was also inspired by the fact that earlier studies on Digo matrilineality (and also on marriage as an aspect of Digo matrilineality) were largely centred on male perspectives. In this dissertation, therefore, I have provided an evaluation of matrilineality and the CT-OVC in Kwale, and provided an ethnographic account of how women lived, experienced and engaged with Digo matrilineality and the cash transfer during the period of my fieldwork. For those interested in development and policy, especially on social welfare, 'empowerment' and gender inequalities, the arguments elucidated from such a focus may help to recognise those aspects of women and matrilineal practices that are often overlooked or ignored in development discourses. For the audience concerned with kinship and women and gender studies, I hope this dissertation has opened a space for a significant scope for future research on understanding the 'old' and 'new' forms of matrilineality in different contexts as well as engaging perspectives of men and women beyond the traditional assumptions about their position in different spheres of societal organization.

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