

# Rhizomatic Cartographies of Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability in Siaya, Kenya

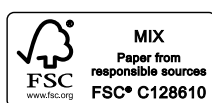
Elizabeth Mulewa Ngutuku

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# **Rhizomatic Cartographies of Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability in Siaya, Kenya**

Rizomatische cartografieën van armoede en kwetsbaarheid onder kinderen in Siaya, Kenia.

## **Thesis**

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
by command of the Rector Magnificus

Prof.dr. R.C.M.E. Engels

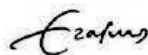
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### *Dedication*

I dedicate this research to Mumo, our fostered daughter who was taken away from us too soon, just before the research commenced. Her tenacity and hunger for education and accepting to go back to high school after four years, parallels that of the many children I encountered, that I also honour. The painful tears of a grieving 'Other mother' gave me the ears to hear, and to listen to the many caregivers I encountered through pain.



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## Acronyms

ART	Anti-Retroviral Therapy
ASAL	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
CHV	Community Health Volunteer
COA	Children of Africa
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child (United Nations)
CT-OVC	Cash Transfer programme for Orphans and Vulnerable Children
CWSK	Child Welfare Society of Kenya
DEB	District Education Board
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ERS	Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation
FDSE	Free Day Secondary Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPE	Free Primary Education
GOK	Government of Kenya
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV / AIDS	Acquired Auto Immune Deficiency syndrome
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JLICA	Joint Learning Initiative on Children
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
KDHS	Kenya Demographic Health Survey
KES	Kenya Shillings
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MDG's	Millennium Development Goals
MODA	Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis
MP	Mercy Project
NCPD	National Council for Population and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHIF	National Health Insurance Fund



OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OVC	Orphaned and Vulnerable Child
PEPFAR	US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief
PRSP's	Poverty Reduction Papers
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SAPS	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SID	Society for International Development
SO	Sponsorship Organization
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGASS	United National General Assembly Special Session
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollars
VSLA	Voluntary Saving and Loan Association
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization



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## Abstract

Rhizomatic Cartographies of Children's Lived Experience of Poverty and Vulnerability is an interdisciplinary research on children's complex lived experience in Kenya. It is based on a one-year ethnographic research in Siaya, a county characterized by some of the lowest indicators of child wellbeing in Kenya. The research was guided by the key cartographical question, how is it both to be, and to be constructed as, a poor and vulnerable child in Siaya, Kenya? I took the rhizome, a Deleuzian imaginary for complexity, fluidity and interconnectedness as the conceptual, methodological, and organizing principle for my study. I explored the children's experience as 'cartography', or a rhizomatic map from three interlinked every-day and symbolic spaces of children. These are: the household/home, and non-state and state programmes of support and schooling.

Based on four main observations I demonstrate that contradictions suffuse the lived experience of children. First, due to poverty and associated vulnerabilities, children encounter challenges in enjoying their rights as citizens. Second, in the different spaces, children are targets of diverse interpretations and constructions of their identity and needs and these constructions influence their experience. Third, children and their caregivers draw on concrete, cultural and discursive strategies to cope with these constraints and constructions of their identity, rights and needs. They lay claims to their citizenship rights, but also perceive these rights as due from the state and a range of others. Finally, these strategies and sensibilities – themselves rhizomatic, in turn influence or become part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

My research therefore reveals that children's lived experience is not linear. It is formed at sometimes enduring and/or shifting interstices of material lack and historically/politically located factors. It also forms at complex social relations, including community-individual and state-citizen relations and obligations. This experience coalesces at the context of representations and understanding of children's needs, rights and identity in programmes and the emergent agency of children.

These cartographical readings of children's experience were enabled by my theoretical intervention of 'listening softly to children's voice'. 'Listening softly' is a perspective that not only democratizes relations by giving children a voice but acknowledges children as knowing subjects. 'Listening softly' goes further to capture and draw implications for various dimensions of children's voice. Listening softly was enabled by my methodological orientation of a rhizome, and I therefore located children's voice as emergent in diverse contexts including locations of power. I also acknowledged that voice is multi-vocal and includes silence, the silenced and the unsaid. 'Listening softly' was supported by my diffractive reading of perspectives obtained through child-centred methods including narrative conversations, photo conversations, semi-autobiographical essays, creative drawing activities, Focus Group Discussions, children's diaries and my diffractive diaries.

From a policy and practice perspective, while it is clear that the findings of this contextual study are not necessarily applicable to other contexts, the mapping of the minutiae of children's experience provide useful perspectives on the entangled contextual nature of children's experience in general. However, I go beyond a perspective of simple contextual differences to an approach that reveals the entangled fluid and contingent differences and idiosyncrasies within the specific setting of Siaya. Read this way, the research does not offer a blue print, but signposts for similar analysis and approach in different settings. The analysis can assist policy design and implementation agencies and actors in connecting and addressing better the nodes and processes that have a bearing on children's experience. In bringing to the fore competing interpretations of children's needs, I also call for a need to re-think support to children with attention to how specific support may foster vulnerability and point to spaces for alternative ethical and just solidarities when supporting children.

The complexity of children's experience challenges the linear, homogenizing and categorizing tendencies of child poverty research. I show that a rhizomatic reading of children's experience, that goes beyond measurements and shows the entanglement of fluid and contingent factors, exceeds multidimensional approaches to child poverty and vulnerability. Such an approach also anticipates complex solutions, avoids analyses that are linear, apolitical and ahistorical, and valorizes the voice of children.

My research also contributes to a call for childhood studies to re-think the voice of children beyond what children say, decentre the subject of

childhood studies and re-imagine children's agency. It is presented at a time when there is a proliferation of research on deconstructing representations of children in policy and practice and especially the concept of an orphaned and vulnerable child. I engage in particular with the question, how can one deconstruct but still not lose focus on the wellbeing and rights of the child in critical, deconstructive research and studies?



## Samenvatting

Rizomatische cartografieën van armoede en kwetsbaarheid onder kinderen in Siaya, Kenia.

Elizabeth Mulewa Ngutuku

Dit proefschrift beschrijft een interdisciplinair onderzoek naar het complexe leven van kinderen in Kenia. Gedurende een jaar is etnografisch onderzoek gedaan in Siaya, een district waar de welzijnscoördinatoren voor kinderen tot de laagste behoren. De centrale cartografische onderzoeksvraag is: hoe is het om een arm en kwetsbaar kind te zijn in Siaya in Kenia en als zodanig bestempeld te worden? Het begrip rizoom, waarmee Deleuze complexiteit, fluiditeit en onderlinge verbondenheid verbeeldt, dient als conceptueel, methodologisch en ordeningsuitgangspunt van dit onderzoek. De ervaringen van de kinderen zijn onderzocht in de vorm van een 'cartografie', of rizomatische kaart van drie onderling verbonden alledaagse en symbolische ruimtes van kinderen. Dit zijn: het huishouden/thuis en non-gouvernementele en overheidsprogramma's voor ondersteuning en scholing.

Uit vier belangrijke observaties blijkt dat het leven van kinderen gekenmerkt wordt door tegenstrijdigheden. In de eerste plaats ondervinden kinderen door armoede en de daarmee samenhangende kwetsbaarheid problemen bij het uitoefenen van hun rechten als burgers. Ten tweede krijgen kinderen in de verschillende ruimtes te maken met uiteenlopende interpretaties en constructies van hun identiteit en behoeften en deze constructies beïnvloeden hun ervaringen. Ten derde maken kinderen en hun verzorgers gebruik van concrete, culturele en discursieve strategieën om met deze beperkingen en constructies van hun identiteit, rechten en behoeften om te gaan. Ze maken aanspraak op hun burgerrechten, maar zien deze rechten ook als iets wat de overheid en anderen hen verschuldigd zijn. Deze strategieën en gevoeligheden – die ook rizomatisch zijn – beïnvloeden ten slotte weer de cartografieën van armoede en kwetsbaarheid onder kinderen of worden er onderdeel van.

Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dus dat wat kinderen ervaren niet lineair is. Hun ervaringen worden gevormd tegen de achtergrond van een soms aanhoudende en/of verschuivende breuklijn van materieel gebrek en

historische/politieke factoren. Ze hebben ook te maken met complexe sociale relaties, waaronder die tussen de gemeenschap en het individu en tussen overheid en burger, en met de verplichtingen die dit met zich meebrengt. Deze ervaring komt samen in programma's binnen de context van representatie en begrip van de behoeften, rechten en identiteit van kinderen en in de opkomende beweging van kinderen.

De theoretische interventie 'zachtjes luisteren naar de stem van kinderen' heeft deze cartografische lezingen van de ervaringen van kinderen mogelijk gemaakt. 'Zachtjes luisteren' democratiseert niet alleen de relaties door kinderen een stem te geven, maar hiermee worden kinderen ook erkend als respondenten met kennis. Met 'zachtjes luisteren' worden verschillende dimensies van de stem van kinderen hoorbaar en ontstaat inzicht in de implicaties hiervan. 'Zachtjes luisteren' was mogelijk door een rizoom als methodologische oriëntatie en daarmee werd de stem van kinderen in verschillende contexten gevonden, waaronder machtslocaties. In dit onderzoek wordt ook onderkend dat de stem multi-vocaal is en stilte, opgelegd zwijgen en het on gezegde omvat. 'Zachtjes luisteren' werd ondersteund door een diffractieve lezing van perspectieven verkregen door middel van kindgerichte methoden, waaronder narratieve gesprekken, fotogesprekken, semi-autobiografische essays, creatieve tekenactiviteiten, focusgroepsdiscussies, kinderdagboeken en diffractieve dagboeken van de onderzoeker.

Hoewel de bevindingen van dit context-gebonden onderzoek mogelijk niet opgaan in een andere context, biedt het in kaart brengen van de details van de ervaringen van kinderen vanuit beleidsoogpunt en met het oog op de praktijk een bruikbaar inzicht in de verwevenheid van de ervaringen van kinderen in het algemeen. Dit onderzoek gaat echter verder dan een beschouwing van eenvoudige verschillen in context. Het belicht de verweven, fluïde en voorwaardelijke verschillen en eigenaardigheden binnen de specifieke setting van Siaya. Zo bezien biedt het onderzoek geen blauwdruk, maar wegwijzers voor een vergelijkbare analyse en aanpak in verschillende situaties. Deze studie kan beleidsmakers en -uitvoerders helpen om de knooppunten en processen die van invloed zijn op de ervaringen van kinderen beter met elkaar te verbinden en aan te pakken. Het naar voren brengen van verschillende interpretaties van de behoeften van kinderen is tevens een oproep tot een heroverweging van de ondersteuning van kinderen, waarbij aandacht moet worden besteed aan de wijze waarop specifieke ondersteuning kwetsbaarheid kan bevorderen. Bovendien

wordt hiermee gewezen op ruimte voor een alternatieve ethische en rechtvaardige solidariteit bij het ondersteunen van kinderen.

De complexiteit van de ervaringen van kinderen is in tegenspraak met de lineaire, homogeniserende en categoriserende aanpak van onderzoek naar armoede onder kinderen. Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat een rizomatische lezing van de ervaringen van kinderen die verder gaat dan metingen en de verwevenheid van fluïde en afhankelijke factoren laat zien, multidimensionale benaderingen van kinderarmoede en kwetsbaarheid overstijgt. Met een dergelijke benadering worden ook complexe oplossingen voorzien, lineaire, apolitieke en ahistorische analyses vermeden en wordt waarde toegekend aan de stem van kinderen.

Dit onderzoek draagt ook bij aan een oproep om de stem van kinderen in kinder- en jeugdstudies te heroverwegen en verder te kijken dan wat kinderen zeggen, het onderzoeksonderwerp niet meer centraal te stellen, en de agency van kinderen opnieuw te verbeelden. Het proefschrift verschijnt op een moment dat er steeds meer onderzoek wordt gedaan naar de deconstructie van de representaties van kinderen in beleid en in de praktijk, vooral met betrekking tot het concept van een ouderloos en kwetsbaar kind. In het licht van dit proefschrift is daarbij vooral de volgende vraag interessant: hoe kan je in kritisch deconstructivistisch onderzoek het welzijn en de rechten van het kind deconstrueren, maar niet uit beeld laten raken?



### 1.1 Encountering Ayo: Introducing the Research

It was a hot sunny afternoon, six months into my one-year field work in Siaya. I was going to see one of the caregivers who was fostering four children, whose mother had died a few months before my fieldwork. On the way, I encountered Ayo, not her real name, a 7-year-old girl whom I had seen the previous day in the Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) Centre, also called an Early Childhood Care and Education Centre (ECCE)<sup>1</sup>. She told me that her school uniform was bought by her biological mother. I learned that Ayo had two mothers, her biological mother who was dead, and her 'other mother' or her foster mother. The 'other mother' took her in together with her two brothers and her 18-month-old sister, Awino. Ayo had a 19-year-old brother, the first born, who was incarcerated in Nairobi. He reportedly got into conflict with the law after their mother's death. I learned from her 'other' mother that Ayo's mother had died of *Chiru*, the local word for HIV/AIDS. Ayo's other brother Ben (14 years) was a co-caregiver together with the 'other mother'. He was going to school but also sold *Togo* (straw for making mats) and burned charcoal for fuel to support their 'other mother,' who tilled people's farms for a living. He called his sisters and brother 'our children'. 'Our children', was a semantic kinship complex that denoted that he was a caregiver to his siblings after their mother died. The 'other mother' was a distant relative to Ayo's father and her home was a stone's throw from Ayo's former home. Their mother's house was still locked but Ben occasionally cleaned it out to connect with memories of their mother.

During our encounter, Ayo told me she was happy that she would be transiting to class one in 2017. Ayo was also taking *dawa* (Kiswahili word for medicine, also used as a euphemism for anti-retroviral drugs. Later in the year, Ayo did not graduate with the other children. The teacher said

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<sup>1</sup> I henceforth use Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

she had a fee balance of Kenya shillings 400 or 4 Euros by then and as I prepared to pay for it, the teacher again changed her story. She said Ayo was not good enough academically and would not transition to class one because she would fail the interview. According to the policy in Kenya, Ayo was not supposed to pay school fees for ECCE and was not supposed to sit for interviews before transitioning to class one.

Ayo had two aunts, but they could not take the children in because their husbands did not want to foster the children as noted by the 'other mother'. But I also learned that some children did not want to leave their parent's home or their parent's grave to become 'outsider children' in their relative's home, as I discuss in Chapter Six. Awino, Ben and Paul, all shared a bed made up of old pieces of clothes on the floor. They told me nobody else was supporting their 'other mother'. But I learned that their aunt was occasionally buying them food. I also learned that even though Ayo and her siblings were part of the 'other' mother's household, they also lived like two households, distinguishing between their property and that of the 'other mother'.

The state too was largely absent in their story. Ayo's mother was receiving the Cash Transfer for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) before she died. Ben said the grant used to cater for their needs, but they were no longer receiving the grant because biometrics in the form of their mother's finger prints were required. The 'other mother' could not follow-up on the grant because it was expensive and time consuming to commute to the children's office where decisions about the grant were made. Besides, she was herself a widow or literary referenced as *Chi liel*, a wife of the grave<sup>2</sup> and she was receiving the same grant for her own daughter. The 'other mother' was thus thinking of hiring a caregiver to indirectly receive the cash grant on the children's behalf, but she was a little worried she would not get somebody she could trust.<sup>3</sup> Ayo's ECCE centre was subsidized by a widow's caregiver group, and she was taking a midday meal each day in

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<sup>2</sup> As I later explain in Chapter five, there is no name for a widow among the Luo community, my research site. A woman whose husband has died is called a wife of the grave. This implies that the woman is committed to the grave of her husband.

<sup>3</sup> Hiring a caregiver would mean getting somebody to receive the grant for Ayo while pretending to be the caregiver. The hired caregiver would in return get some compensation for these services

school. This was sometimes the only meal for the day, and the teacher said children would not want to miss school because of this one cup of fortified porridge.

Ayo's story is not complete because it can never be<sup>4</sup>. Her story is like a rhizome, fluid, changing, a map with many connections, fragmented but still holding together and a multiplicity. Her story is the story of this thesis. It is a story of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability at the different spaces of their home, the school, as well as programmes that provide support to vulnerable children. It is a story that begins not by saying what is poverty and vulnerability for Ayo<sup>5</sup>, but instead it starts in the middle and shows how different issues connect in her life - like a rhizome. My research honours the voice of Ayo and other children who sometimes live their lives under the shadow of death and poverty but still negotiate it in a context of hope and resilience. It is the experience of children at school, with associated difficulties in participation but also hopes of school as a way out of poverty. It is the narrative of children within the context of programmes of support, some 'absenced' from state and other programmes of support and/or when included, being subjectified in diverse ways. Ayo's story also shows social relational challenges and emergent agency by such children. Sometimes belonging to their dead father's clan but still fostered, refusing to be fostered and sometimes using their parent's grave to negotiate their identity and rights. It is the story of some children who were fostered but referred to as 'outsider children', others were caregivers, taking care of their own biological children, and yet others were fostered to receive education while providing company and reciprocal care to their elderly relatives, or as children on the move, targeting organizations of support. The story of this thesis is about simultaneously orphaned children, fostered children, sick children, poor children, programme graduates, caregivers to siblings, childhoods that are on the move, all defying easy categorization.

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<sup>4</sup> I constructed the story of Ayo from diverse encounters with her, with her teachers, her caregivers as well as her siblings and neighbours.

<sup>5</sup> As I argue later in this chapter, I investigated children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in this thesis as it unfolded or under erasure. This way I avoided defining what child poverty and vulnerability means but rather use in the sense of the way differently located children experience it.

The thesis is also about innovative methodological choices that afford different knowledge. It is also about me, a researcher activist for over twenty years who wanted to go beyond linear methodologies and to do different science in understanding children's experience. To be reflexive and to hear, to listen, and to tell children's experience differently and to enable their story to produce different knowledge (Lather 2013:635). It demonstrates how I pieced together children's experience differently, not by visiting once but after being in the field for twelve months where I zigzagged, keeping with the flows of Ayo's story and that of other children or what I have called 'mapping'. I also kept engaged with the children's story for two years after the field research, listening to their voice, sometimes contradictory or contradicted by adults like in Ayo's case above. In other cases, their voice was silenced or absenced from policies, programmes and every day spaces. This is a map whose threshold can be exemplified by the one encounter with Ayo sketched earlier. Her pseudonym<sup>6</sup> is a nature of birth name which means 'one who was born on the way', indicative of my first encounter with her which was literally born on the way. Her story starts in the middle and is incomplete. It is rhizomatic cartography, or a map that the reader can enter or exit from anywhere (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:2). The contingent alleys of children's unfolding lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in this research, are placed within the context of Siaya, Kenya.

This research therefore, as I have earlier explained, investigated the complex children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Kenya. I explored this experience for the national context of Kenya and specifically for the context of Siaya in Western Kenya. In so doing, I utilized the rhizome, a Deleuzian imaginary for complexity, interconnectedness, fluidity, and non-linearity, as the central methodological, analytical and organizing principle, and as a cartography or a map. Mapping denotes both the process of doing the research and the outcome of the research, representing children's complex lived experience. Mapping the experience of children as a complexity and multiplicity enabled me to move beyond the linear conceptions of child poverty and vulnerability in the form of deprivations and lack, causes as well as effects. Instead, I was interested in different issues including how material lack, identity, social relations,

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<sup>6</sup> I use pseudonyms throughout the research to protect the identity of children and caregivers as I explain in Chapter four



discourses and representations, children's agency and politics and participation in programmes of support, connect. This was my starting point in conceptualizing children's experience of poverty and vulnerability. In so doing, I join a growing vanguard of researchers (albeit mostly outside Africa) who have used philosophy to investigate complexity in people's lives and specifically children's reality (see Bailey 2017, Gabi 2013, Honan 2007, Lather 2007, Leafgren 2007, Reddington 2014 and Sellers 2005).

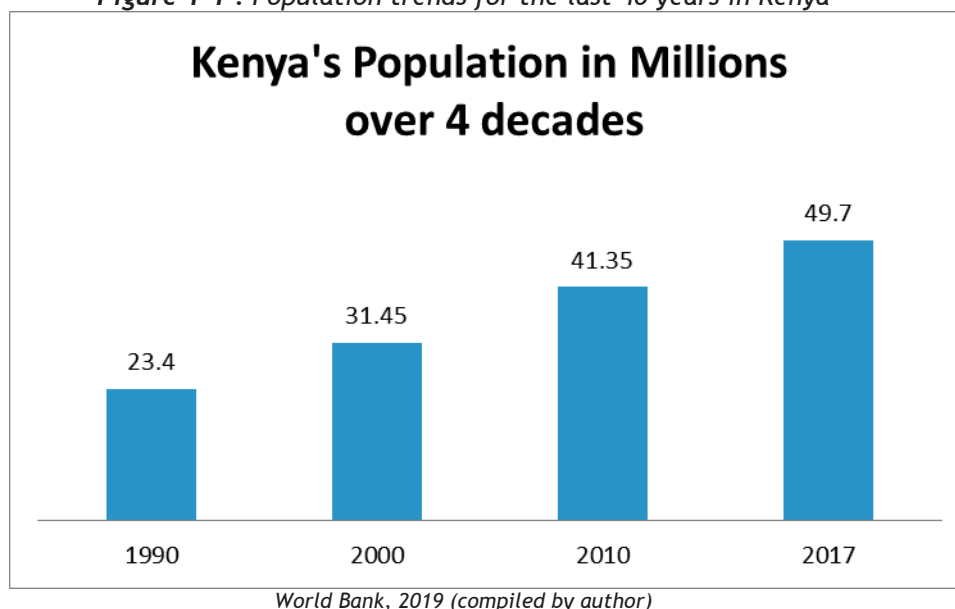
In recognition that experience, and identity do not operate a-spatially (Bondi and Rose 2003:232), I explored children's experience from inter-linked spaces that in my analysis, represent the everyday spaces of children in Siaya. These are households, non-state and state programmes of support and the everyday space of schooling. In writing and researching children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability at these different interlinked spaces as a rhizome and cartography, I was not looking for the true meaning of child poverty and vulnerability or a true experience. Instead, the research aimed at the production of different (Lather 2007) and more hopeful ways of understanding children's experience that engages with our common understanding and perceptions. It is an approach that is attentive to the complexity, interconnectedness, distinctiveness, and fluidity and contingency of experience.

## **1.2 Child Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya: What We Know**

Children and their wellbeing play an important role in Kenya. By the year 2017, Kenya's population was estimated at 45.8 million<sup>7</sup>. It was expected to reach 52 million in 2020 and about 65 million by 2030 (National Council for Population and Development 2018:10). 70 per cent of this population was below 24 years of age, with 28 per cent being youth, that is in the age range of 15–24 years (ibid). The 2016 estimates indicated that children aged 0–14 years and 0–19 years were 41 and 52 per cent respectively of the population (NCPD 2018:16).

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<sup>7</sup> By the time of submitting this thesis, a population census was going on in Kenya.

**Figure 1-1 : Population trends for the last 40 years in Kenya**

Child poverty and deprivation is an important lens through which children and childhood in Kenya is perceived. In 2014 an average child in Kenya was seen as a poor child with indications that 80 per cent of all children in Kenya were poor (UNICEF and Government of Kenya [GOK] 2014:8). The combined Third, Fourth and Fifth State Party Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) indicated that in Kenya, children 'are not only vulnerable to poverty [but also] poverty tends to affect children more than any other age group' (GOK 2012b:31). Indeed, due to the over-representation of children among those in poverty in Kenya, the National Social Protection Policy Kenya represents poverty as having a young face (GOK 2011:8).

According to the 2014 'Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Kenya' (GOK and UNICEF 2015: xvi), at that time, 7.8 million children were deprived of access to safe drinking water and 15.8 million children were deprived of access to improved sanitation. 13.1 million children had inadequate shelter while 5.3 million children aged 6–17 years were deprived of adequate education. The report also indicated that 20 to 30 per cent of Kenyan children were still not completing primary education, including 400,000 of them, who never enrolled even after more than ten years of the Free Primary Education Policy (FPE) (ibid: xx). The report

also noted that 1.1 million children who were less than 2 years old had not received all recommended vaccinations, while 2.1 million children were stunted.

In 2017, a poverty study carried out by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and UNICEF revealed that overall, child poverty in Kenya rated at 45 per cent. About 9.5 million children were 'deprived in at least 3 or more basic needs for their wellbeing' in the year 2014 (KNBS and UNICEF 2017:6). The report revealed stark differences between urban and rural areas with child poverty in urban areas being 19 per cent and 56 per cent in the rural areas, (ibid).

These statistics should also be understood within the context of state policies and funding. For example, while the government has made considerable investments in areas that affect and enhance child wellbeing and rights, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in its Concluding Observations on Kenya's 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> State Party Report, noted that 'increased budget allocations in critical areas such as education as well as social protection, still do not match the dire need in these sectors' (UNCRC 2016:3). It is therefore apparent that in many countries, Kenya included, child poverty remains a defining context for inability to implement the rights of children (see also Arts 2014). While these statistics are important in demonstrating the effects of poverty on wellbeing of children, they only provide a partial picture of the actual experience of poverty by children or about what poverty means for children experiencing it. Indeed Rose (1991:680) also noted that statistics can reduce a complex experience into single figures which then determine what needs to be done to address a particular issue.

Another dominant lens through which child deprivation, and vulnerability has been thought about is through the label 'Orphaned and Vulnerable Child' (OVC) as the quintessential experience of children in Kenya. According to the Kenya Social Protection Sector Review in 2012, 3.6 million children were orphaned or classified as vulnerable in Kenya (GOK 2012a:8). By 2015 estimates, 250,000 to 300,000 were classified as living and working in the streets (GOK et al. 2015:8), with several estimated to be engaged in child labour. HIV/AIDS ostensibly played a key role in increasing these numbers and in Kenya therefore, HIV/AIDS is often presented as another context in which child vulnerability and poverty is experienced. According to UNICEF's 2015 State of the World's Children Report (2014b: 56), in 2013, in Kenya, it was reported that there were

about 190,000 children living with HIV/AIDS, while 1.1 million were orphaned by AIDS and 2.5 million other children orphaned by other causes. Childhood and children's experience in Kenya is therefore predominantly lived and negotiated around the moral panic over HIV/AIDS with many organizations working with children to support their needs. These interventions themselves also become part of children's lived experience.

### 1.3 Research as a 'Social Critique'

The statistics above, discussions and my work with children characterized as poor and vulnerable in Siaya and Kenya for many years provide the context and the basis for my motivations for carrying out this research. I have encountered the experience of many children like Ayo, earlier discussed whose lives are lived under these contradictions of poverty and vulnerability. In locating research issues therefore, I did not take as the starting point what was the problem with child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya, even though this provided an important context of my analysis. Instead, this research should be read as a social critique. I was inspired by Foucault's (1988:154) characterization of critique when he said: 'Critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, [on] what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest'. In undertaking this research therefore, I wanted to interrogate the taken for granted perspectives in researching and understanding children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability and at the same time engage with other ways of understanding and modes of thought that we have not previously considered.

The motivation for this research while drawing on my personal location interacted with other practical, policy and methodological/theoretical motivations. I locate this social critique from four perspectives. First, drawing on Foucauldian perspective of theory (research) as a fragment of autobiography (Foucault 2000:458), I reflect on my location and personal resources as a major motivation. Secondly, I zoom out from this location and expound on how the research was justified by an observation of how children's voice was located in policies and programmes of support. Third, I connect again with my location with the observation that there was a huge presence of organizations and programmes of support for children in Siaya. I present my observation that various constructions of children's needs, rights and discourses (including the dominant category OVC)

inhabit these spaces of programmes. For example, I note that, while these discursive spaces have a bearing on the experience of children, they have not been problematized for the context of Kenya. I further note that even elsewhere where the category OVC has been problematized, research has largely focused on deconstructing the category OVC, with observed binaries between a suffering child and an agentic child occupying this deconstructive space. It is here that I locate another research lacuna by drawing on Deleuze and Guattarian's philosophy of reality as a rhizome and raise the following question: how can we go beyond deconstruction and engage creatively with the role of discourses and the OVC category in children's experience of poverty and vulnerability in Siaya, Kenya?

Related to these observations above, I end this justification by presenting my motivation to engage with the continued use of linear methods to do research on children's complex lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. I locate this research as an attempt to heed to the invitation to use multidisciplinary and non-linearity in researching the ambiguous and messy experience of children, including the experience of poverty and vulnerability (Law 2004, Nieuwenhuys 2013, and Prout 2005). Here I come full circle again and locate the need for this research within the context of the need to draw on my location, discursive and rhizomatic methods to understand children's lived experience, as a cartography or a map.

### **1.3.1 Research as a Fragment of my Autobiography: Identifying with Foucault**

Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience. This means that I theorized always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, or my relations with others, that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly a fragment of autobiography (Foucault 2000:458).

Identifying with Foucault above, this research was part of writing myself into the issue of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability and therefore it relates to some pieces of my autobiography. Such a perspective was also supported by Alldred and Burman (2005:176) who noted that researchers bring to their research various political, ethical, as well as

conceptual resources. These resources made a fertile ground for my theorizing and understanding children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. I choose three examples from my location in justifying this research.

First, as I have argued, I am positioned by over two-decades of doing projects and researching on child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya and elsewhere. This research topic germinated through my day-to-day reflexivity on how we were working and interacting with children who obtained support from different programmes, and who were characterized as poor. Over the years I have been puzzled by the way interventions, research, practice and policy for poor and vulnerable children was approached. My first encounter working with vulnerable children was in 1999, as a volunteer in a children's home in Kenya. As I listened to children's perspectives on their reasons for being in the home, sometimes their narratives and reasons would change. On probing further, they would inform me that different narratives were packaged for different people and that some stories and escapades in the streets were just 'jokes'. These jokes were sometimes meant to help them forget a difficult past. That was my first encounter with the need to reflect on what children say about their experience.

In 2005, I was at an international gathering in The Hague discussing the plight of OVC's and attention was on how to 'save' the children of Africa from the consequences of HIV/AIDS. I uncomfortably questioned the assumptions behind the work with children in Africa including the notions of rescuing children and the power relations embedded in these discourses. I lingered in that uncomfortable moment for some time, of being seen as distracting from a good cause and as a person trying to 'subvert and undermine all that [the meeting] was seeking to build' (hooks 1991:2)<sup>8</sup> I was relieved when the chair supported the need for questioning these representations. Out of this one instance and several other subsequent observations, the need to question assumptions embedded in programmes for children was therefore ignited in me.

More recently, in 2013, my research on rhizomatic cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability emerged out of my desire to explore children's voice in poverty research differently. A

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<sup>8</sup> bell hooks prefers using her name in lower case in publications and gender activism

particular experience of research is noteworthy<sup>9</sup>. In a multi-country research project on social protection for vulnerable children in three districts (including Siaya) in 2012, our research group in Kenya was on the brink of losing the contract. This was because in addition to the required quantitative data collection, we had also collected other perspectives from children and caregivers on their experience, and we presented these qualitative perspectives during the meeting. The funders noted that the data was interesting but dismissed the material as voices of children 'here and there'.

In this kind of 'failed' research, we had identified competing and contradictory voice by children and caregivers and had labelled this an 'amorphous voice'. This research had brought to the fore how children were subjectified through programmes of support. For example, one of the practices we identified was how children in our interaction were identifying themselves not through their names, but through codes given to them by different organizations of support. This 'interesting write-up' brought up perspectives of children and a voice that was uneasy to us. Such perspectives are sometimes dismissed in research and policy as anecdotal. This research therefore is my attempt to be introspective in an area of understanding children's voice which I (and others) may have taken for granted for many years. It is also an introspection on how our work with children (as adults) can influence their lived experience. Using my location to put to the test an approach that nuances children's voice would not only be a useful science that understands the ambiguity, contradictions and complexities of children's experience (Lather 2007:152) but is also a social justice issue.

In making my observations a ground for theorizing children's experience differently, I was also in solidarity with bell hooks who noted that she resorted to science as a solution for a personal hurt:

I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend — to grasp what was happening around and within me. [...] I saw in theory then, a location for healing (hooks 1991:1).

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<sup>9</sup> For ethical reasons, I will not reveal more details about this project involved in this research.



Contrary to bell hooks, this hurting for me was not emotional but a ‘pain’ geared towards questioning that which had been taken for granted. By making my past discomfort with work with children a location for my theorizing, I hoped that this research would not only liberate me, but that others would also adopt this same solidarity, not for our benefit but for the benefit of childhood studies and children.

On a personal note, this thesis was inspired by the story of my mother and by extension myself. The diary of her narratives that I have kept for years has influenced me. In her narratives, she characterized herself as a child of a blind, single mother, growing up in pre-independence Kenya. Despite this characterization, her biography is deeply personal and distinct, complex, sometimes contradictory and it is a biography that resonates with my research. Her stories are about stoicism, her grandmother’s tenacity in affording her a little education despite her grandfather’s refusal and her role as a de-facto family head, taking care of her five siblings and her blind, unmarried mother. Even though there were no programmes for needy children then, her agency and dealings with the colonial security guards stood out as she positioned herself as a needy child so as to access services from the colonial masters. This was coupled with her subjectivity of refusal to be appropriated as an ‘illegitimate or an outsider child’ (a category I explore in Chapter Six). Though placed within the context of historical Kenya, her agency was jarring. These puzzles (that Derrida [1993] termed as *aporia*’s) of a simultaneously vulnerable and agentic child pushed me to study children’s experience and agency using a different frame.

In connecting the above personal observations with my other personal diary on the children of Siaya in my research site, I note that I encountered the same narratives when I visited Siaya, my research site, for the first time on a project exchange in 2002. This was during the height of narratives of the ‘HIV/AIDS pandemic’ and its effects on children. The specific story of Atieno (not her real name) provided a similar impetus for a research that nuances experience of children. Atieno’s husband died of HIV/AIDS and she was herself infected and bringing up her two young twin boys. The biography of her children’s resilience amidst precarity, and her own narrative of the refusal of being inherited by her husband’s brother (a perspective I explore later in this thesis) was a useful point of introspection for me. Such an encounter with this caregiver in the then Siaya policy/practice context and my work in Siaya for over ten years, where



widows were referenced as victims of a tradition and through the trope of the 'HIV/AIDS pandemic' (e.g. see Nyambetha 2008), sowed the seeds for this research. I wanted to examine how caregivers may use diverse practical and discursive strategies within contexts of precarity, lack and discourses about them and how this positioning was related to children's experience.

These personal and shared fragments of my biography that are part of this research indicate difficulties of de-linking knowing from ethics and one's location as I explain in Chapter Four. They are sites where personal stories become political and small stories connect with larger stories, and in Deleuze and Guattari's, terms, stretching them until they wail, making them to stutter or to stammer (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:104). Interrogating my gaze this way, and being reflexive of my previous work, does not make this dissertation a personal and subjective research. Instead, it means that my reflections are part of the cartographies of children's experience. What I was as a child of my mother, a humanitarian worker and a trained preschool teacher has travelled with me and became resources in this doctoral research. I connect this personal biography with further observations in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

### **1.3.2 Problematizing Children's Voice Through Research**

This research was also motivated by the need for investigating the role of children's voice in understanding their lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. Such a perspective was not only necessitated by the observation that this voice was missing in child poverty programmes but was also a way of engaging with how this voice was understood and included. Researchers in the area of childhood and poverty studies have noted that the dominant understanding of child poverty experience and the attendant representations of children in policies and programmes pay inadequate attention to the voice and lived experience of children. For example, in their report on how children experience poverty in Kenya, Belarus, India and Bolivia, Boyden et al. (2003) noted that there was an absence of children's voice in programmes on child poverty. Similarly, Tafere (2012:2) noted that little attention had been given to children's perspectives of poverty. Interventions based on adult voice may sometimes be contrary to the lived reality of children and may occlude the subjective and relational experience of poverty and deny children's agency.

This same observation is true for policies and programmes in Kenya where children's voice is missing and where included, children's perspectives may be subsumed under those of adults. This supports the perspective of Huijsmans et al. (2014:163) that, 'the incorporation of the young people in theories and practices of development can [be] characterized as an absent presence' where young people are talked about, but their perspectives are not taken into consideration.

In the Kenyan context, children's voice was not only missing in poverty programmes but perspectives on child poverty, rights and wellbeing were also largely absent. An analysis of the Poverty Reduction Papers (PRSP's) process showed an inadequate inclusion of child participation and children rights issues.<sup>10</sup> For example, a review by Espey et al. (2010) revealed that issues of child rights were not given a lot of thrust in these processes and that the PRSP processes also included limited participation of children (ibid:4–5). For the Kenya case, the review showed that, while child rights organizations were given an opportunity to participate in the first PRSP process in 2003, they were largely absent in the second PRSP process (Heidel 2005:30). The 'Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation' (ERS), 2003 – 2007; the poverty reduction strategy that came after the PRSPs and the development of the Investment Plan 2004 (the blue print for implementing the ERS) did also not include children. Children's rights organizations were also not involved in its monitoring (Heidel 2005:32). The review also indicated that both the ERS and the investment plan did not mention the UNCRC even once and child rights issues were casually mentioned (ibid: 21). Indeed, the ERS was indicted for not making the issue of child poverty explicit by arguing that the strategy was benefitting all groups and only made cursory references to effects of child poverty but not to its causes (Heidel 2005:14). This is consistent with the argument by George (2006:9), when referring to the lack of focus on young children's issues in studies of international development) when she noted that such processes may seemingly not have space for 'baby talk' or 'kid stuff'. The same trend is reflected in the Vision 2030, which is currently Kenya's blue print for development. Despite the fact that the cash transfer programme for orphans and vulnerable children

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<sup>10</sup> Bilateral donors, the IMF and the World Bank made it a requirement that highly indebted countries including Kenya prepared poverty reduction strategy papers (PSRPS) as a precondition for receiving debt relief.

(CT-OVC) is one of the flagship social protection programmes, in this strategy children are still subsumed under the category vulnerable groups (GOK 2007:137).

These glaring omissions of children's voice were supported by the observations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (whose response to Kenya's combined 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> State Party Reports, noted that there was still an observed gap in including perspectives of children in laws and policies pertaining to them (CRC 2016:6). Hulshof's (2019) review of the extent to which evaluations of social protection programmes in Kenya, including the CT-OVC programme that included the substantive voice of children, revealed that this was largely missing. For example, Hulshof noted that the World Bank evaluation of the Kenya CT-OVC in 2016 and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) case study report 2014 on the impacts of CT-OVC both did not include perspectives of children and so its recommendations were skewed in favour of the adults (ibid:11).

These omissions, or at best instrumental inclusion of children's voice, and lack of attention to their rights support the perspective by Hulshof (2019:3) that:

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

Espey et al. (2010) argued that the lack of inclusion of children's voice in policies on poverty reduction may not be intentional but may be due to competing priorities within poverty policy circles. Other considerations, even by non-state actors, including competing priorities and assumptions about children's voice and also the needs of children may also play a role.

In locating my research further, my observation together with others was that even when the voice of children was included in policies and programmes, their accounts tended to rely only on what children said and failed to put into consideration other ways through which children may enact their voice. Indeed, Hart's ladder of participation that deconstructs children's participation and voice by exploring various phases of children's

participation has also been critiqued for the assumptions on voice as only what children say. P'Anson (2013:109) noted that the ladder does not include a 'phase of textual redaction' or a phase in which a child is given an opportunity to reflect or amend or withdraw what they said.

Other scholars have noted that there is a need to go beyond the spoken voice and to listen to voice (including children's voice) carefully and differently (see among others James 2007, George 2010; Mazzei and Jackson 2009, Murris 2013, Spyrou 2016). James (2007) noted that we should be wary of methodological pitfalls when invoking children's voice. He also noted that we should go beyond a *quantum* leap from adult to children's voice and the assumption that children's voice and participation is restricted to what they say. Murris (2013), drawing on Fricker's (2007) notion of epistemic justice, noted that children can be wronged when their knowledge and voice is disallowed. She however noted that, even when children speak, adults may silence children's perspectives by putting 'metaphorical sticks' (ibid: 245) in their ears. This type of silencing children voice she argued may be more accentuated if the child is black. However, my observations were that it might be more accentuated if the child is poor and or seen as a beneficiary of charity. This research was therefore an attempt to accord children and epistemic justice in generating knowledge about their lived experience.

In seeking and including the voice of children in understanding their lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, my research therefore also responded to a need to understand children's voice beyond what they speak or beyond 'ticking the voice box' (Cheney 2017:5; Kallio 2012).

### 1.3.3 The OVC as a Workhorse for Interventions on Child Poverty

Drawing from extensive experience, I observed that in the Kenyan context generally, and the Siaya context in particular, child poverty had been a target of various interventions both in policies and in programmes. For example, at the state level, Kenya's 3rd, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> combined State Party Reports<sup>11</sup> on the Convention of the Rights of the Child indicated that the

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<sup>11</sup> The states that ratified the UNCRC are required to do periodic monitoring and submit reports to the CRC Committee on the progress in realizing children's rights (see e.g. Arts 2010:21).

state had 'put in place legal regimes which protect and promote the rights of children from extreme forms of poverty' (CRC 2015:5). In addition, research carried out in 2012 revealed that there were almost 200 organizations providing social protection to children living in poverty in Siaya (Okwany and Ngutuku 2015:6).

In justifying this research and drawing on my work and experience in working with children, I was guided by the assumption that these programmes play a role not only in meeting the needs of children, but they are also a site where the experience of children is constructed as well as enacted. I was also guided by the thinking that these interventions, through the discourses of the poor and vulnerable child they employ, may further complicate the childhood space in Siaya in particular and Kenya in general. While discursive practices in policy and programmes may be disciplining, they may also include or exclude or confer entitlements and valorize specific forms of childhood, thereby influencing the everyday experience of children. As argued by Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012:301), the 'context and programme design and delivery methods can perpetuate rather than alleviate children's practical and strategic needs'.

In Kenya there was no scholarship problematizing such programmes and their role in the experience of children. On the African region in general, I noted that there was a prolific base of scholars (Ansel 2010, Cheney 2007, Fassin 2012, Meintjes and Giese 2006), who were already deconstructing the role of interventions in constructing children and their needs and deconstructing the OVC as an iconic category in programmes of support. However, most of their research focused on how such organizations may impose governmental power (Foucault 1980) and how these constructions strip children of agency and/or stigmatize them.

The motivation for this research therefore went beyond deconstruction and a causal approach that sees these representations as determining the experience of children. I imagined that the effects of these representations would be interactional. I was therefore more interested in the two questions, how such an encounter of children and representations of their needs, identity and personhood would re(de)fine the embodied experience of child poverty and vulnerability. Two, how the category of a poor and

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vulnerable child could be loosened from its dominant understandings, not only to deconstruct it, but to reveal perspectives on its fluidity.

This brings me to my second observation about the representation of the experience of children in programmes of support as well as in their everyday spaces. Children enact agency even within their contexts of precarity and are seen as meaning makers (Corsaro 2005, Kallio (2007 and 2008), McDonald 2009. Indeed, Kallio and Jouni (2011) further argued that children enact politics by engaging with the subject positions offered to them as minors but also through other acts of mundane resistance. While noting that children do not correspond to constructions of their experience and needs indeterminately, Macdonald (2009:247) argued that they construct their own identities and enact some specific forms of personhood within specific institutional contexts. Cheney (2017:7) also added voice to this debate by noting that those children resist the dominant constructions within the context of these representations and that sometimes they also incorporate strategically various representations of their experience.

My observation was however that children's agency in their everyday spaces and in programmes of support and how it connects to their experience of poverty and vulnerability has also been under-theorized. Indeed, Tisdall and Punch (2012:252) noted that such studies on children's agency have been 'overwhelming empirically by their sheer numbers but underwhelming theoretically'. When considered, children's agency is often seen as tactical and discussions rarely centre on how their agency and resistance can connect with larger struggles for recognition in the generation of poverty knowledge.

In locating children's representations within the framework of resistance, I heeded the call by scholars who have noted a need to theorize children's agency, within contexts of complex social phenomena (like child poverty) and relations (see Tisdall and Punch 2012). Through this research, I therefore set out to examine, from a theoretical standpoint, the notions of children's agency within the context of various constructions of their needs, rights, identity and lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

#### 1.3.4 Methodological Motivations: Identifying with Deleuze

There is an emerging consensus in the evolution of child poverty and measurements that child poverty is a complex social economic

phenomenon and measures should go beyond income (Abdu and Delamonica 2018:881). In this complexity, it is acknowledged that child poverty is characterized by the interdependence of various aspects like lack of food, shelter, health and education, care among others (Espey et al. 2010:3). There have thus been efforts to capture children's experience using multi-dimensional measures that go beyond income. For example, one of the current methods is Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) methodology, which 'identifies children as poor if they are deprived of basic goods and services that are crucial for them to survive, develop, and thrive' (UNICEF and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS] 2017:8). This measurement also focuses on the age-specific deprivations of children and on the processes of deprivation, rather than on monetary perspectives.

My observation, however, was that those measures do not adequately capture the complexity of children's lived experience. In some cases, perspectives of children's experience that cannot be aggregated and packaged ready for policy makers or indicators that are seen as affecting 'suitability, validity and reliability of the measurements' (Abdu and Delamonica 2018:888) may be left out. For example, analysis of poverty using the MODA approach has tended to use specific indicators like health, education and schooling status. In so doing, some aspects of children's experience like teenage pregnancy and child labour which are not seen as poverty themselves are left out (Abdu and Delamonica 2018:886–887, Urban 2016:110).

In justifying this research, I therefore observed a need to go beyond multi-dimensionality to a perspective on children's experience as a multiplicity. This is premised on children's lived experience being located in a web of complex relations and contexts. Such a complexity therefore should not only be perceived from the extent of their deprivations or dimensions. While not discrediting these existing measures, carrying out this research was therefore for me a search for different science, beyond linear descriptions of children's experience.

Several authors inspired me in this regard. Urban (2016:110) pointed to the power of discourse to frame what is seen as useful science in policy discussions. She noted that policy makers would want perspectives that articulate global impacts of a phenomenon and that providing solutions and justifications through good science are sometimes seen as secondary. I was also inspired by Law's (2004:2) perspective that simple descriptions



do not work if the reality that researchers are describing is messy or not coherent and that attempts to standardize may not be useful.

The argument by Hulshof (2019:1) that the economic vulnerability of children and especially in sub-Saharan Africa should also be understood within the context of their social vulnerability and ‘complex relationship with their caregivers and broader society’, also pointed to a need to go beyond multi-dimensionality. In this regard, the advice by Nieuwenhuys (2013:6) for the need to be open to ambiguity in knowledge production and open up the processes of research to experiences that may be seen as unimportant was also useful. Drawing on the concept of post-colonial eclecticism, Nieuwenhuys averred that ambiguity in knowledge production enables us to think about phenomena differently and provides a perspective on the contingent experience that may not be captured when using more systematized research methods. This argument has been made by other childhood researchers as well, observing a need for childhood studies to go beyond modernist agendas and examine contingent experience (Prout 2005:62 and 82). Similarly, Tisdall and Punch (2012:253) have argued that there is a need for childhood studies to cater for contexts and relationships that are changing and in transition rather than static.

This research was therefore a response to these observations and can be seen as a social experiment in researching the lived experience of children beyond the linear methods and approaches. In this regard, I found philosophy useful in enabling me to think about child poverty experience differently. I was inspired by Deleuzian ideas of perceiving reality as a rhizome and as interconnected (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The Deleuzian philosophy of a rhizome distinguishes between a tree that is linear with a root and trunk system, and a rhizome, a non-arboreal plant with numerous tubers connected in non-linear ways. Such a philosophy perceives reality not as linear or multi-dimensional but as a multiplicity and entangled. Within the rhizomatic philosophy, reality is also seen as a map or a cartography with multiple entry points and exits (ibid:21). This perspective on a rhizome, as a representative of complexity offered a possibility for re-thinking children’s lived experience of poverty and vulnerability from a methodological and ontological perspective. It provided the potential for apprehending the complexities in the experience of children and how different factors interact in entangled ways.

In coming full circle again and connecting my location to the research, I formulated research questions that I believe have enabled me to produce



different knowledge or engage in a different science on children's lived experience (St. Pierre, 1997). In the next section I link all these potential questions as I present the research questions that guided this investigation.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

Based on the above discussions, I asked myself several rhizomatic questions pertaining to the lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. How can we better understand the experience of children beyond material lack? How can we speak beyond the standard narratives of vulnerability and suffering and focus on children's agency differently? How can we listen differently to children's voice in understanding their complex experience? How can we account for both the ways in which our ways of knowing and programmes and interventions interact with children's experience? I condensed these into the following (both theoretical and practical) questions.

#### 1.5 Main Research Question

The research was guided by the following main cartographical question: how is it both to be, and to be located as a poor and vulnerable child in Siaya, Kenya? This question explores the complex children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. I conceptualised children's lived experience as complexly triple faced. This is because while children's experience is a material reality, it is also constructed and interpreted in diverse everyday spaces. Children also engage with these material and social realities, constructions and interpretations. Children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is therefore located within this shifting entangled complexity of their material and social reality, constructions and interpretations of their needs, rights and experience and children's complex interactions with the two. In going beyond children's lived experience as an essence therefore, this research question enabled me to research this complexity and interacting rhizomatic and fluid triad of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

##### *Specific Questions*

I formulated three questions and one that was methodological.

1. What are the complex interstices around which the experience of being a poor and vulnerable child is located in Siaya, Kenya?
2. How is children's voice located within the day-to-day representations of their identity and challenges in their context?

3. What subjectivities and productive entanglements emerge as children deal with their reality and negotiate constructions of their needs, rights and identity in their everyday interlinked spaces of school, home and interventions?
4. How does mapping children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability as a rhizome aid in production of new knowledge for re-thinking linear understandings of children's lived experience in general, and our understanding of children's encounters with representations on their experience of poverty and vulnerability in particular?

### 1.6 Locating Children's Experience in Siaya

In order to place children and their experience of poverty and vulnerability within a local context, I explored these matters in Siaya County, Kenya. Siaya is one of the forty-seven counties in Kenya situated in what was formerly known as Nyanza province<sup>12</sup>. It is located on the shores of Lake Victoria and it was one of the districts in Kenya before the devolved system of government came into place in 2013. Siaya is divided into six sub-counties: Gem, Ugunja, Ugenya, Alego-Usonga, Bondo and Rarieda (Government of Siaya 2018). My research was carried out in three of these sub counties: Ugunja, Rarieda and Alego-Usonga. In 2009, the population of the county was stated as 842,304 and was projected to increase to 1,027,795 in 2018 (County Government of Siaya 2018:9). In 2018, the population of children under one year was stated as being 34,905 (ibid:11) and these children were characterized as vulnerable to childhood diseases. There were stated to be 165,619 children of three to five years who reportedly accounted for 17 per cent of the population in 2018 (ibid:12). Children of primary school-going age (six to thirteen years) were said to account for 22.4 per cent of the entire population, while those of secondary school age (fourteen to seventeen) accounted for 10 per cent and young people (fifteen to thirty-five) made up 27 per cent of the population (ibid:12).

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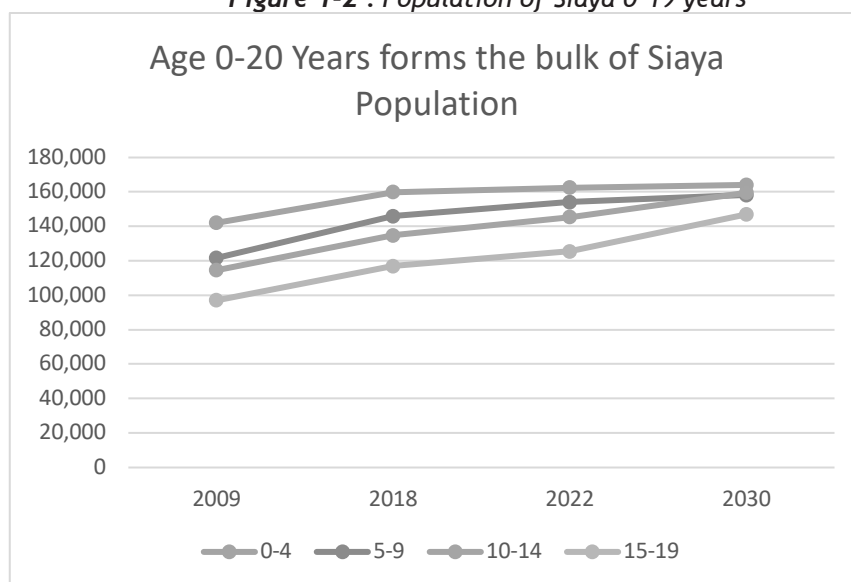
<sup>12</sup> Prior to devolved government in 2013, Siaya was one of the districts that formed a province. After the advent of devolved government some districts became counties automatically and other districts were merged to form counties.

The 2018–2022 Siaya County Integrated Development Plan indicated that children and young people below twenty years formed the bulk of the population in Siaya and the trend was projected to be the same up to year 2030. Table 1 and figure 2 show this trend in the youthful population of Siaya.

**Table 1-1 : Population of Siaya- 2009-2030**

Age cohort	Year			
	2009	2018	2022	2030
0-4	142,078	159,904	162,586	164,097
5-9	121,670	145,924	154,051	158,270
10-14	114,544	134,755	145,388	159,506
15-19	97,045	116,901	125,546	146,969
20-24	74,168	87,915	96,096	111,240
25-29	56,096	70,823	77,556	93,466
30-34	43,309	61,324	67,248	80,924
35-39	32,725	49,316	56,910	67,984
40-44	27,200	40,248	49,076	64,842
45-49	25,876	31,419	36,480	54,312
50-54	23,615	28,422	32,238	43,497
55-59	20,679	26,972	29,881	38,498
60-64	18,795	23,886	26,346	32,524
65-69	12,839	18,366	21,037	25,586
70-74	12,348	13,504	15,541	20,537
75-79	9,003	9,377	10,195	13,961
80+	10,314	8,739	8,561	9,758
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>842,304</b>	<b>1,027,795</b>	<b>1,114,736</b>	<b>1,285,971</b>

*Siaya County Integrated Development Plan 2018–2022 (GOK 2019:9-10)*

**Figure 1-2 : Population of Siaya 0-19 years**

*Own construction from Siaya County Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022*

The high number of children and youths in the population indicate a high youth dependency ratio, which is normally associated with poverty because the resources are shared with the less economically productive members of society and this is exacerbated by the specific peculiarities of poverty context of Siaya as I explain further in this section.

Lake Victoria, the second largest freshwater lake in the world is one of the key economic resources (GOK 2013, Government of Siaya 2018). Fishing is an economic mainstay for a large part of the population in Siaya, as well as rain-fed small-scale agricultural activities. Other resources include small-scale mining activities, ample fertile land and relatively literate human resources in the country (GOK 2013: xx). The livelihood practices have led to environmental degradation in the region by exerting pressure of land, water and forests. For example, the majority of the population in Siaya (82.5 per cent) depend on fuel wood for cooking (GOK 2013:13).

Siaya is one of the counties with high levels of poverty in Kenya and therefore has weak capacity to provide support to children (GOK 2013: xx, Okwany and Ngutuku 2018). High poverty levels in Siaya have for years also been attributed to opposition politics with indications that the

entire Nyanza region has been affected by years of opposition politics (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012). Indeed, Siaya has for years been seen as the fulcrum of opposition politics because the first leader of official opposition hailed from Siaya (Kanyiga 1995:86–87). Kanyiga further argued that politicians from Siaya who rose to power in the national government did not engage in meaningful development because their rise to power had not been enabled by the opposition, that the majority of people in Siaya supported (ibid:87). (See also Cifuentes 2012, Muhula 2009.) For example, according to UNDP 2010 cited in Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2012:68) the Human Development Index (HDI) for Nyanza province was 0.497 compared to the national level 0.561 (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012:67). Even within the context of the devolved system of government that was initiated in Kenya in 2013, and where counties have resources directly from the central government, it is as yet too early to tell whether the devolved government will change these perceptions and evidence of marginalization.

Other indicators in Siaya are also low. For example, in 2013, data also indicated that only 16 per cent of residents had attained secondary school education and above, with Bondo and Rarieda having the highest percentage of residents with secondary school education and above (at 18 per cent) (KNBS and SID 2013:12).

There are also high levels of incidence of HIV/AIDS. In 2016, Siaya ranked the fourth highest among the top ten counties with the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS nationally (GOK 2016:188). According to 2015 estimates, the HIV prevalence rate of 24.8 per cent was almost 4.2 times higher than the national HIV prevalence (of 5.8 per cent) (GOK, 2016:188). In 2015, it was estimated that 126,411 people were living with HIV in Siaya County and 22 per cent of these were young people (fifteen to twenty-four years) and 6 per cent were children under the age of fifteen years. In 2014, Siaya was ranked the third among counties with highest number of children living with HIV/AIDS (GOK 2014c:16) The HIV prevalence among women and men is (26.4 and 22.8 per cent respectively) (Ibid). It was also estimated that in 2014, out of the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in Siaya, only 58 per cent were benefitting from Anti-retroviral Therapy (ART) (Government of Siaya 2019: xi). There are therefore HIV related vulnerabilities and mortalities that affect children's well being in Siaya.

Research posits that there are high levels of children labelled as 'OVC' in Siaya with several organizations working to support children deemed to be orphaned and vulnerable. For example, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which was working directly with a local community-based organization, was supporting 11,000 OVC by the year 2014 in Siaya (USAID 2014). Data also indicated that there were about 5,000 children-headed households in Siaya in 2013 (GOK 2013:47).

My choice of Siaya as the location for my research is also due to practical and personal considerations. I have undertaken research and implemented projects for vulnerable children in this context since 2008 and this was an important basis for engaging in the kind of reflexive exercise undertaken in this research. I also understand the context of Siaya well and this capital was important in gaining entry as well as interacting with children.

### **1.7 Stuttering Concepts, Researching and Writing Under Erasure**

In this section, I introduce some of the concepts that I use in my research, in addition to the preliminary remarks made on how I am using the principle of rhizome. I also provide a preliminary perspective on how I am using the concepts of children, childhood, child poverty and vulnerability and lived experience. I continue using these contested terms while they are also the subject of my research and thus, I question them (Hall 1999, no page). In so doing, I drew on Derrida's (1997) notion of writing under erasure. According to Derrida, writing under erasure is to 'write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion' (ibid: xiv). I am also guided by Graham and Slee (2007:279), who noted the importance of writing under erasure compared to devising a new term. They also noted that the commonly used term signifies the meaning that is well known but putting it under erasure still brings out the critical message intended.

In a Deleuzean sense, continuing to use these terms while questioning them (Lather 2007) inspires hope and goes beyond Derrida's deconstruction. My continued use of these terms enables me to engage with them and gesture towards rethinking, re-imagining, complicating as well as exposing their limits and potential in understanding the lived experience of children. I therefore fuse my Derridian orientation of writing under erasure with Deleuzean perspectives 'stuttering' or 'stammering' these terms. Using them without recourse to alternative terms is like Deleuze and

Guattari's attempt to 'make [them] stammer, [...] stretch tensors through all of language [...] and draw from [their] cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:104). I therefore continued using these terms as I researched around them and, in some cases, as I suspended their obvious meanings in an endeavour to bring to the fore new perspectives.

### 1.7.1 Lived experience of Poverty and Vulnerability

In this section, as I continue writing under erasure, I explore perspectives on how I utilized concepts of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. As a caveat, I argue that even though I am holding the meaning under erasure, I am still burdened by the conventional meanings given to children's experience, the meanings that I was also investigating and problematizing.

The starting point for me was thus not to define my understanding of the experience of child poverty and vulnerability because the experience of poverty and the attendant representations of children's needs was the subject of my study. Defining it firmly in advance would defeat the intentions of my research of exploring and understanding prevailing constructions of child poverty experience.

Gray (2003:25) sees experience as the way people are placed in the world and how they position themselves in the world. According to her, experience is a 'discursive site of articulation whereby subjectivities and identities are shaped and constructed'. Experience can also be seen as a performance of identity. For example, in my study, in the process of narrating their experience to me, children in a way were enacting their experience. Experience is therefore real and describes the everyday, but also brings to the fore the relations that bring this experience about (ibid:28). Scott (1991:797), who averred that it is not actually the experience that one should explain but how that experience came about, also supported this perspective of discursive experience. Read this way, and leaning on Foucault, experience is not just something that children have (Foucault 1982:782) but it is an interpretation which in turn needs to be interpreted and might be contested.

Scott (1991:797) stretched this further and noted that the role of the researcher or historian is not to represent knowledge obtained through experience but to analyse the production of that knowledge itself. Such a perspective is also important in contextualizing the voice of children, often



used for understanding children's experience. Within rhizomatic thought, as I will explain in detail in Chapter Two, I view children's experience as contingent and fluid and a site where various forces interact with their material situation, rather than a fixed set of possibilities for agency within a set structure.

The terms poor and vulnerable children, orphaned, and vulnerable children are discursively loaded. Cheney (2017:30) noted that vulnerability as used in development can make people into objects of humanitarian assistance. Vulnerability has also been seen as a form of zeitgeist (K. Brown 2014:37) or something that is in vogue in welfare programmes. In their study of Zimbabwean unaccompanied minors in South Africa, Adefehinti and Arts (2018:2), further added that a vulnerability approach silences children's resilience in the face of challenges. A specific question that therefore confronted me when using the term poor and vulnerable child was whether one can speak about a 'poor child' or 'poor parents' without marshalling the discourses and negative signifiers associated with the category?

In getting around this dilemma, some have coined different terms deemed as less stigmatizing. For example, Ridge (2009:9) coined alternative terms like low-income parents, parents experiencing poverty, hardship or disadvantaged children and children living in poverty. However, these alternative terms do not resolve the tensions. Penn (2005:27) noted that using the term 'low income' is not less stigmatizing. She gave an example of how it has been used in the US context with connotations of 'poor parenting practices' or low intelligence for the children. After having investigated the lived experience of children labelled as OVC in Uganda, Seruwagi (2011:14), chose the following alternative term: 'Challenged but Hopeful and Resilient Children' while Cheney (2017) in her dilemma on whether to focus on child poverty or orphanhood in her research in Uganda, settled for the term orphaned child. She justified her choice by the need to engage with the problematic use of the term orphan by what she termed as the 'humanitarian industrial complex' (Cheney 2017:2–3). This is a situation where children (and especially those in the South) are commoditized and made targets of charity interventions. She also justified her use of the term orphan as a way of engaging with the way it has been misappropriated as well as how such misappropriations present contradictions for children.

Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012:292) noted further difficulties in defining vulnerable and poor children. They argue that 'children living in

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

While noting that poverty and vulnerability are interrelated, they further argued that children who are living in poverty encounter three types of vulnerability: physical/biological, dependence-related and institutionalized vulnerabilities (ibid). Physical vulnerabilities entail that children, by virtue of their age, are prone to development-oriented challenges including malnutrition and other diseases related to immunity. These vulnerabilities relate to physiological characteristics of children. Dependence related vulnerabilities refer to the fact that children in most cases are dependent on adults for their wellbeing. Even in cases where older children may be independent, Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler argued that unequal relations of power in society might make children vulnerable. They specifically pointed to the unequal distribution of resources in households and lack of or unequal access to resources by caregivers (including female caregivers) as exacerbating this inequality. Institutionalized vulnerability manifests in the way some populations in society—including children and their caregivers are devalued because of who they are. Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012:294–296) argued that such devaluation might manifest in voicelessness or other issues related to recognition and might exacerbate dependence as well as physical vulnerabilities.

Based on the discussions above, notions of vulnerability cannot be dissociated from discussions on child poverty. Because childhood poverty is also relational and placed within contexts of complex dynamics including gendered relations and including those that affect their caregivers. Most of the interventions in child poverty (social protection programmes) have complementary child protection programmes, which ensure an enabling environment for poverty programmes (UNICEF, 2011:6). UNICEF put into perspective the connectedness between child social protection and child protection and argued that child protection is: ‘measures aimed at preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse and unnecessary separation from family while social protection helps to build a protective environment for children by reducing the socio-economic barriers to child protection’ (UNICEF, 2011:6).

While these understandings of vulnerability cannot capture the complex issues that children in Siaya face in their day-to-day contexts and that

are the subject of this dissertation, these ideas were a starting point in contextualizing children's vulnerability.

In addition, exploring child poverty experience without explaining it up front has guided my rhizomatic methodology and enabled me to continue using the terms poor and vulnerable child without necessarily responding to the perspective that child poverty experience is discursive. Instead, I located these terms within their day-to-day uses in the research context. For example, in the study site Siaya, a child is referred to as *nyathi* and the word for children is *nyithindo*. An orphan is *kich* and *kiye* (plural). There is no one-to-one local term for a vulnerable or poor child. As a reflection of how global discourses of the poor child have permeated the local spaces, interactions with communities during my research indicated the term 'OVC' has also been adopted into local discourse to refer to these children. In an attempt to translate the term OVC into the local language, the term *Nyithindo machandore* was also used to represent children who are suffering. They were also called children who are receiving *kony* (assistance) from organizations that give support through traditional forms of fostering by relatives to needy children. These children were distinguished for example from those that were receiving support by being fostered by relatives. In addition, several local interlocutors pointed to the locally embedded meaning of the term by revealing that these were 'children whom we know by how they live', as an imaginary for difficulty and complexity and pointing to children living in hardship. Claiming that they 'know' these children wrestled the power from outsiders like me and repositioned the needs of children and rights as locally defined and embedded (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013). Living well (*dak maber*) alluded to well being (as opposed to ill-being) in the sense of receiving proper care, affection and nourishment and protection and thus goes beyond material wellbeing only. Writing and researching this way under erasure endeavoured to cultivate a different type of validity for my research too since this also located the research in the context of children's lives. This is in line with Lather's argument (1993:686) who noted that in rhizomatic validity the inquiry 'generates new locally-determined norms of understanding' and transports the reader into the local situations.

### 1.7.2 Children and Childhood under Erasure

The term child or children can be seen as a social construction since the understanding of who is a child varies across different cultures and over

time (James et al. 1998; Mayal 2000). According to Mayal (2000:250), childhood is a generational and relational category structured by adult norms as well as the society. Based on the UNCRC, the terms child or children are widely used to represent those who are below eighteen years of age. However, some authors have argued that the term can also be used to represent powerlessness. Gittins (2009:37) noted that in some contexts the term child may denote physical immaturity and dependency or inferiority. Hartung (2011:16) noted that putting the cohort of children and youth together and calling them children can 'reinforce linear deterministic and a generational view of generation' because such categorization invites specific views about those that are included in the category. Calling all of them children may also infantilize those that are in the higher age cohorts who may not see themselves as children. Disassociating children and youth would indeed look like a better choice to show how the needs of each category may vary. In some cases, however, the term young people might be preferable to indicate commonality of experience of dependency. Further quandaries would still emerge in such a conceptualization. For example, those in the lower cohorts might not want to be called young people because they might want to be seen as more dependent than those in the higher cohorts.

James (2010:487) followed the footsteps of Qvortrup, (2005) and warned us to ensure that, in our quest to present the multiplicity of childhood, we should move beyond the dualities between children and adults. But, importantly, we should be careful not to lose the political import of speaking about childhood as a 'single social category' which is different from adulthood. Aware of these contestations, in my study I continue calling them children for practical, methodological and analytical purposes, but also as a way of interrogating the representations of childhood and examining how children may work within and against this category in locating their experience.

## 1.8 A Note on Space

My approach to understanding children's experience of poverty is cartographic where I explore the lived experience of children by locating it spatially. I was inspired by Rosi and Bondi (2003:232) who noted that, identity does not operate a-spatially but is located within relations and places that people inhabit. Mohanty (2003) also called for attention to the spaces where experience is enacted. In grounding experience within a spatial

perspective, I see space as both physical and symbolic. In arguing for a need to locate experience in contexts, Marker (2003:372) stated that truth 'must be experienced in actual places on the landscapes' and larger dimensions of history and power. As I explored the experience of children, I therefore placed children's experience in these actual and symbolic sites of not only power, history and discourses but also agency by children.

In delimiting my research for the context of Siaya, I choose to explore how the experience of poverty and vulnerability played out in the daily spaces of home, support programmes and school. I conceptualized these spaces as concrete physical spaces where children spent most of their time in the context of Siaya, as is further explained below.

### **The home**

This is the focus on the household where some children in this research spent most of their time. At the household, different social and gendered norms as well as forms of entitlement thrive and interact with their material situation (Chhachhi 2004). The household is also a site where children and their caregivers might contest and encounter specific norms on vulnerability and poverty and prevailing tropes on orphans, poor and vulnerable children (Chhachhi and Truong 2009).

The notion of household in the context of this research is also fluid. In Chapter Six, I will explain how children move between different households, but also how children living in the same household may have different notions of belonging to the household.

### **School**

School is a space where most children spend most of their childhood. School is also seen as a site and a path for getting out of poverty. School is a site where different human and non-human things interact, including the material situation of children, the expectation of paying school fees and levies, the school buildings and infrastructure, the school uniform, among other things. There are also discourses of poor children circulating at the space of the school and all these mediate, but also interact with the experience of children.

### **The Support Programmes**

I also conceptualised support programmes as symbolic spaces. These programmes are implemented both by state and non-state actors as well as

informal networks of care and support for vulnerable children. In the space of these programmes, children's needs and rights are simultaneously met and constructed. Thereby the programmes also construct children's experience (McDonald 2009, Saukko 2003:7). This space is also a context where children enact their agency as well as politics and these contestations become part of their day-to-day experience of poverty and vulnerability. This space is local and global simultaneously and therefore cartographic and interactive.

### **The Researcher as Part of the Cartography**

Approaching children's experience as a rhizome (and therefore entangled) also enabled me to write myself into the research as part of the shifting territories/space in the cartography involved (St. Pierre 1997, Van Staple 2014, Reynolds 2014b, Willemse 2007). Reynolds (2014b:137) argued that:

Messy mapping invites the person doing the inquiry to show up, not disappear, in the decision-making process of deciding what will be attended to, what resonates and what is of use. From this lovely mess of responses, a more ordered or understandable story of the experience can be told.

In locating myself as part of the spaces in children's experience, I argue that my specific interaction with children in these different spaces enabled both children and caregivers to stage and enact and even appropriate the experience of being poor and/or vulnerable.

Based on the foregoing outlooks on space, I take the perspective that children's experience, narratives and interpretations of their experience are located and travel, and that there are complex overflows between and across these interlinked spaces. Space is therefore simultaneously lived, discursive, local, global and social, and therefore an assemblage (Saukko 2003:12). In addition, such a perspective on entangled spaces implies that the experience of children in each of the spaces cannot be told from a linear perspective but should be connected to the experience in other spaces as well as to my role as a researcher. There are implications for this crossing, overflow and entanglement for our understanding of the experience of children differently. For me as a researcher, this also had implications in terms of being reflexive on the space I occupied in the research and for representing the experience of children in each of the spaces not

as discrete but as entangled. This also has implications for the reader, whom I indulge to perceive and read these spaces as non-linear. Each of the spaces of the school, the home and the programmes should be seen and read as interlinked. Together these spaces make up a field of forces that demonstrate and define the experience of poor and vulnerable children in Siaya.

### 1.9 Writing a Thesis like a Rhizome: Order of Chapters

Researching like a rhizome requires that I represent the data as a rhizome as well, with no beginning and no end. However, for the purposes of a PhD thesis these chapters must begin from somewhere and end at some point. The empirical chapters can be seen as distinct, but all relate in demonstrating the interlinked lived experience of children, or a cartography.

Even though my presentation of findings involved fitting various data across the experience of children in the specific spaces of schools, home and support programmes, such a separation should be seen as indicative at most. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987:24) argued that: 'lines leave one plateau and proceed to another' in a rhizomatic way. The arguments in these chapters of my study are held together conceptually by the metaphor of a rhizome, where I draw connections and interactions between different perspectives of children's experience and nodes in the diverse spaces. Such an endeavour to cohere however sometimes fails. In such cases, I leave it to the reader to take their own 'lines of flight' or escape from the dominant way of reading as they think about the experience of children, which is a messy reality.

Section one of this thesis consists of four chapters. In Chapter One, I introduced the key research issues and provided a perspective on why a research on children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is important for theoretical, conceptual and policy reasons. I also provided a preliminary introduction to some of the conceptual issues for the research. Chapter Two builds on the conceptual issues identified in Chapter One and explains how I utilized a methodological dialogue in researching within the theoretical orientation of a rhizome. I also explore other frameworks such as Foucauldian discourse and governmentality, subjectivity, children's voice, and children's rights including the notion of living rights. I also located these discussions within perspectives of gendered vulnerability



In Chapter Three I focus on the representations and constructions of the needs and rights of children, child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya from a rhizo-genealogical perspective. I organise this review around key periods but in a non-linear, historical manner. I distinguish the late colonial period and early independence (1952–1970), the period beginning in 1990 when care for children affected by HIV/AIDS was the dominant discourse, and the contemporary period after the year 2000 when the term Orphaned and Vulnerable Child became (and continues to be) the vernacular of interventions and imagination of children. This non-exhaustive genealogy provides a context for understanding the experience of children as material, historically embedded, as located in political economy and as discursively imagined. I also provide a perspective on the moral and discursive registers through which child poverty has been perceived in Kenya, necessitating specific interventions and with specific repercussions for children's experience.

Chapter Four provides a perspective on 'doing the cartographies' of child poverty and vulnerability. I present my methodological reflection on how I approached the field tentatively to research an entangled experience of children and how I revisited my earlier assumptions and research plans. I also present my research methodology that I have called 'listening softly' to children's voice and reflect on how I used emergent child-centred methods to capture the multiplicity of children's experience and voice. I also present examples of ethical dilemmas that, following Pillow (2003), I have called 'reflexivities of discomfort'. In representing the role of my emotions as productive (Procter 2013:80), I demonstrate how I travelled between the pleasure of listening to children softly and with a caring heart, and the pain of listening to suffering and encountering death.

Section two of this thesis (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) offers perspectives on the lived experience of children in the spaces of the home and school. In Chapter Five, I explore the experience of caregivers with caregiving and how they negotiate the day-to-day realities of caregiving in situations and contexts of precarity and lack, and normative issues in their locales. I argue that the rhizomatic interactions within this context, and how caregivers negotiate within this space, influence how childcare is provided.

In Chapter Six, I engage with the question of 'who are the poor and the vulnerable children in Siaya?' Traditionally, this chapter could have sat in Chapter Four of the methodology, explaining the children I worked



with. However, this chapter is not methodological but part of the cartographies of children's experience that I am sketching in this dissertation. I thus present a perspective on 'leaking', 'porous', ambiguous, contingent and itinerant categories of children living in poverty and vulnerability. By providing fleeting accounts and glimpses of how children may occupy specific categories, I draw implications for revisiting our categorical practices in policy as well as research.

The lines in Chapter Seven come from Chapters Five and Six (experience of children in the household). The chapter explores the lived experience of children with schooling as one of the nodes and spaces in the rhizome of a poor and a vulnerable child in the context of Siaya. By mapping this site, I explore how children negotiate and lay claims to their right to education and negotiate their substantive rights to education as enshrined in the Constitution. I also point to the need to go beyond the formal right to education to a perspective on living rights or how children redefine their rights to education and also lay claims to their right to education from a range of actors as they engage with challenges in schooling.

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

In Chapter Nine, I continue presenting the embodied and embedded experience of children and their agency and creativity in responding to, or navigating, the dominant representations of their needs and rights, their

identity and experience in support programmes. I centre my arguments around selected practices and provide a perspective on how the identity of the poor child is articulated in day-to-day discourses and interactions. I argue that, while children and their caregivers may take the subject positions offered to them in programmes and therefore become subjectified, they may also engage with, negotiate, resist or subvert these subject positioning's. However, these rhizomatic cartographies in support programmes also overflow and are linked to other sites of the home and school. Here I therefore also engage the reader to disrupt his/her linear reading sensibilities and to activate the rhizomatic ones and make connections between discussions in Chapters Eight and Nine with the earlier chapters on children's experience in the household.

In Chapter Ten, I (re)turn to the encounter with Ayo and revisit the research issues. I demonstrate how the experience of being a poor and/or a vulnerable child is gendered, unfinished and incomplete. The cartographies I built through this thesis imply that I offer policy, research and practical 'signposts' for working with and researching around the poor and vulnerable children.

## 2

## Piecing the Research through Theory

### 2.1 Introduction

In investigating children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, I took a philosophical orientation. In so doing, I employed an inter-disciplinary and a theoretical dialogue (Saukko 2003) where I read several theoretical frameworks through each other. These theoretical perspectives enabled nuances on the fragments of the interlinked experience of children. In this chapter I present these perspectives which include; the rhizome and cartographical thought; Foucauldian thinking on discourse, subjectivity and governmentality; a child rights-focused thinking on child poverty and vulnerability experience and reading of children's experience through a gender lens. I conclude by expounding on how I read and interpreted children's contingent experience of poverty and vulnerability across different and interlinked spaces by diffracting these theories.

### 2.2 Rhizomatic Thinking and Cartography

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy of the image of a rhizome guided both my understanding of children's experience as well as the methodology for the research. A rhizome is a non-arboreal plant that grows laterally and unpredictably, and its different lines proliferate in the ground. Deleuze and Guattari contrasted a rhizome with a tree which is linear and hierarchical, with a root and trunk system of growth (ibid:5). Examples of rhizomes include ginger, potato and crab grass. A rhizome represents a reality that is complex, non-linear, and heterogeneous.

I utilized the rhizome as a way of knowing (ontology), a methodology, and in some cases as a heuristic device or a metaphor for organizing my thoughts and ideas in the research. A rhizome offers a possibility for both capturing and representing the complexities in the experience of children. These complexities include how different factors and discourses interact and connect in entangled ways to influence their experience. They also include the fluidity and contingency of experience of children and their

agency as they engage with various realities in their context. A rhizome offers a better perspective of apprehending how in turn, this emergent agency is located within the experience of children. I was inspired by Osgood (2016:160) who suggested that, Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts provide space for thinking about children differently and for understanding how they may resist, appropriate or even circumvent everyday realities.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), a rhizome is governed by several principles that can be used in analysing diverse realities. I utilized several of those principles to enable a perspective on children's complex lived experience of poverty and vulnerability.

A rhizome is composed of lines which are connected with each other in non-hierarchical, non-linear and complex ways. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987:7) noted:

any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be [...] A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.

Seeing things rhizomatically by drawing on the principles of connectivity and heterogeneity thus means focusing on the connections between and within issues that are normally seen as distinct (Martin and Kamberelis 2013:676, Sellers and Honan 2007). Guided by these principles, I explored the interconnected and relational nature of children's experience, where heterogeneous factors play out. Thus, I went beyond the perspective of causes and effects of poverty by exploring how children's experience was formed around diverse interconnected processes and factors, including material lack, gaps in policies, social relations and norms, children's agency, child participation in support programmes and other aspects. Rhizomatic thinking through the principles of connectivity and heterogeneity emphasizes entanglements in experience and it is these entanglements that I sought to bring to the fore.

The principle of multiplicity flows from the principles of connectivity and heterogeneity. This means that an increase in connections in a rhizome does not only lead to increase in dimensions, but it also leads to an increase and difference in the whole and to the formation of a multiplicity or an assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:8) noted that: 'a multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and

dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature’.

Several authors have noted that a multiplicity should not be seen as fragmentation but as representative of complexity, plurality and different modes of thinking (see Law 2004:61). Based on this thinking therefore, I see the interaction of different factors and issues in children’s everyday spaces as forming a multiplicity in experience and not different experiences. My continued use of experience instead of experiences is to show this dimension of children’s reality which is a unit but not singular, is entangled and not fragmented. In thinking this way, I am guided by the perspective that a rhizome is not one and it’s not many but a multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:23).

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:3 and 9), a rhizome is composed of two types of lines or vectors: the ‘lines of articulation’ and the ‘lines of flight’. Lines of flight represent the ability of the lines in a rhizome to recreate themselves even after being detached or wounded. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987:9) noted: ‘A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines’. This is the principle of asignifying rupture which was important in exploring the agency and resilience of children and caregivers within the context of the precarious circumstances of their context. It was also important in analysing their resistance within the context of marginalizing discourses and representations. However, Deleuze and Guattari also noted that a rhizome has lines of segmentality/articulation, understood as lines that stratify or organize the rhizome or territorialize it (ibid). Such lines I read as material and non-material constraints, as well as discourses in children’s every day spaces. Read this way, resistance can be equated to fleeing from, or engaging with the status quo (of these lines of segmentarity) or what Deleuze and Guattari (1987:7) called ‘deteritorialisation’. The constraints can be equated to lines that always endeavour to bring back the lines to the structure or ‘reterritorialize’ them (ibid.).

In exploring children’s agency as rhizomatic and not based on agency-structure dialectics, I was guided by the perspective that agency for children is not just what we give children or enable them to acquire, but agency also obtains from, is part of, and tells us more about the structural challenges within their context. According to Deleuze and Guattari, even though a rhizome is ruptured when segmentary lines become lines of

flight, these new lines are still part of the rhizome and there is no duality in terms of good or bad lines (1987:9).

The breaks with the hierarchical structures and taking lines of flight are also related to minority politics or resistance and I apply this as such in this thesis. These politics and resistance represent creativity by children and caregivers when faced with difficult conditions and other constraining forces that limit their wellbeing as well as attainment of their rights. The experience of being constrained, which Deleuze called ‘choked passages’, triggers creativity within these spaces (1995:133). In understanding agency and experience this way, I also explored what these potential contradictions, complexities, ambiguities and ambivalences in children’s politics portend for our understanding of children’s experience and their agency (Tisdall and Punch 2012:259). Agency is therefore dependent on the emergent context of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization, as I perceived it in this research. In revisiting the perspective that there is no duality in the lines of flight and segmentarity, what has traditionally been called ambiguous agency<sup>13</sup> (see Johnson et al. (2018:577) by children within specific contexts should not necessarily be evaluated in terms of good or bad agency. Instead, agency by children should be used to tell us more about the constraints in experience and context.

Taking lines of flight from the perspective of theorizing or researching childhood implicates both researchers and readers. The creativity by children, or taking lines of flight, engage or stutter (Dalberg and Moss 2005:15, Rose 2004:20) linear perspectives on children’s experience as well as representations of children capacities. I also perceive this research that approaches children’s experience from a non-linear perspective as my taking lines of flight from the linear methods of understanding this experience by children. This is a sensibility I seek to activate in my readers too. In representing children’s experience as interconnected and in a non-normative manner, I engage the reader to flee from linear and ordered ways of imagining as well as reading the experience of children.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Johnson et al. (2018:577) ambiguous agency refers to the way children behave in ways that challenge traditional notions of how they should behave, and it is often seen as disobedience. It is also used for those who challenge the traditional norms of vulnerability or victimhood. Normally, in programmes of support by state and non-state actors, this agency is seen as disobedience and is refocused into ‘responsible agency’.

The principle of cartography guides the overall arguments in this research and combines the various principles I have presented above. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) made comparisons between a map (as opposed to tracing or what they called *delcacolmania*) and a rhizome. A rhizome has multiple entryways and exits, and both a map and a rhizome can accommodate different changes, so they are fluid. As these authors noted: 'the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits' (Ibid 1987:21). Semetsky (2008 cited in Masny 2013:3), in this same thinking, perceived cartographies or mappings as co-constitutive and representing an unpredictable movement when she argued that: 'cartographies relate to mappings and mappings relate to the rhizome. Cartographies are captured through the rhizome'. Cartographies also denote multi-directional movements that are sometimes unpredictable (ibid).

I apply the principle of cartography in two ways. First, as an instrument to map the experience of children including the entangled connections in this experience. This was not physical mapping, but rhizomatic mapping, where one makes connections with diverse and entangled phenomena in children's experience. As noted by Martin and Kamberelis (2013:671):

In drawing maps, the researcher works at the surface, creating possible realities by producing new articulations of disparate phenomena and connecting the exteriority of objects to whatever forces or directions that seem potentially related to them.

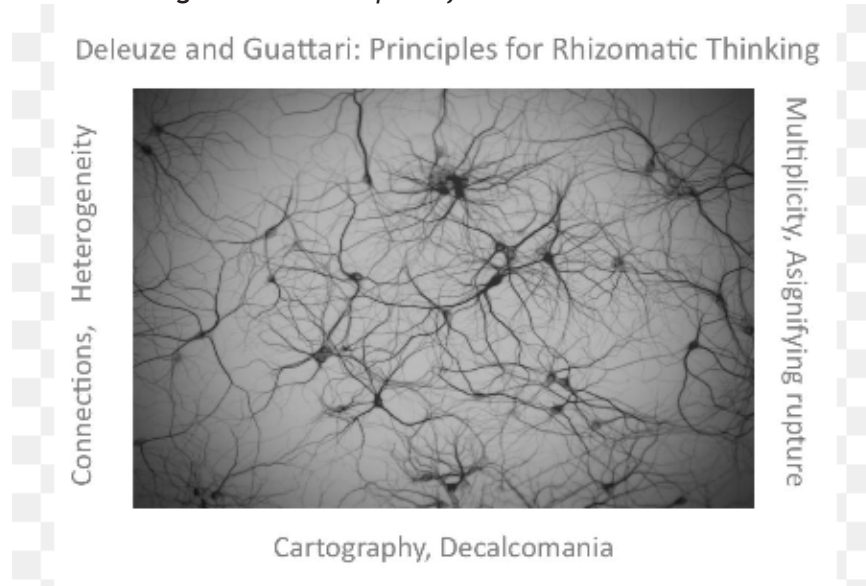
I also used cartography as an ontological tool (how I perceive the reality of children's lived experience). From an ontological perspective, as a map, I see the experience of children as constituted by fluid, and sometimes enduring and entangled perspectives. Children's experience seen as a rhizomatic cartography is thereby an assemblage. Such a relational perspective not only enabled me to place the experience of children in a relational and spatial context, but also one that goes beyond linear notions of context, often seen as static. Context in this cartographical and rhizomatic thought is not linear but emergent, entangled and fluid. In analysing and representing children's experience in this way, I therefore focused on the connections instead of separations in children's experience, heterogeneity

rather than sameness, and the fluidity of their experience as opposed to rigid categorization (Strom and Martin 2013:220).

Seeing the experience of children as a map and not a fixed identity or a category also brings material and other relational forces at play in influencing children's experience into view. Such readings also have implications for the type of conclusions that can be drawn from experience that is incomplete, as I will demonstrate in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Focusing on both the discursive and the material through mapping has been supported by Taguchi (2016:39) who argued that a rhizomatic mapping is a double science since it critiques and also innovates. She argued that this double science of mapping involves a critical tracing of the normative practices, discourses, and representations in a particular field of thinking while at the same time this mapping helps us to narrate a 'reality we are exploring differently' (ibid). It is through mapping, as I explore in Chapter Four, that I was able to listen to children's voice using an assemblage of methods that enabled me to apprehend the complexity and nuances of children's experience.

Lastly, mapping the reality of children as an assemblage enabled me to fold myself and my voice into the research (St Pierre 1997, Willemse 2007) as a researcher including my voice. The way I framed the research and my interactions in the field with the children and the caregivers are all part of the assemblage and cartographies of children's experience.



**Figure 2-1 : Principles of a Rhizome**

Source <https://jennymackness.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/slide-5.png>

### 2.3 Discourse, Subjectification and Governmentality

I utilized Foucauldian ideas on power, discourse, and subjectification and governmentality to investigate the representations of children's experience in support programmes as well as in their everyday spaces. I used post-structural discourse to explore how children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is understood and how poor children are positioned in everyday spaces. Foucault (1972:49) saw discourse as practice and described discourse as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. According to him, discourses are 'not about objects; they constitute these objects and in doing so [they may] conceal their own intervention' (ibid). Drawing on Foucault, I utilized discourse as power to frame or to represent children, their identity as well as their needs and rights. Important to note is that, in this framing, the voice of children and their rights to participate as well as the voice of their caregivers is usually excluded. This supports Foucault's assertion that discourses are not neutral, but that they are about power, and that dominant discourse excludes alternative ways of knowing (Foucault 1980).

Drawing on Foucauldian thinking, Maia Green (2006:1110) presented poverty as a discursive category because it can be determined and known

by different actors. However, according to her, what qualifies for the label poverty is not necessarily determined by those who are poor. For the case of my research this extends to children themselves. Through an investigation into framing and representation of the needs and rights of children and their identity, I was concerned with the assumptions through which child poverty and vulnerability are understood as an issue requiring intervention, as well as the practices of the interventions that emerge out of these constructions. I took the view that discourses and representations of children and their needs and rights were taking place in the spaces of the home, the school and the programmes of support presented in Chapter One. Children were also self-representing themselves and recasting their needs and rights differently.

However, I did not see discourse as determining and all-powerful. My perspective drew on Foucault's later theorizing of knowledge and power as relational and revealed through specific practices. Foucault also argued that one must read resistance to reveal how power works (Foucault 1982:780). Foucauldian power analysis and discourse was therefore useful in exploring the different ways in which the experience of children was constructed through discourse and how children and their caregivers engaged with this power. Concurring with Jackson and Mazzei (2012:50), I see this power as relational and therefore explored the interactions and confrontations within these power relations.

### 2.3.1 Subjectification and Governmentality

Discourse is also about subjectivation/subjectification or 'the process through which one becomes a subject' (Davies 2006:425). Foucault (1980) noted that subjectification is about formation of subjects through power. He averred that power:

applies itself to immediate everyday life, [categorizes] the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects (Foucault 1982:789).

I took subjectification as the power to represent poor and vulnerable children, their rights and needs in a particular way and the practices that emerge from these representations. I also explored how children's

experience emerges in the context of these power relations. Subjectification is also about power to label that may produce specific effects, often stigmatizing.

Fraser and Gordon (1997:122) argued that terms that are used to describe social life also shape it and therefore people so labelled may start experiencing themselves in specific ways. Such a perspective provided me with an analytical frame for understanding how children interacted with constructions of their identity in support programmes and other everyday spaces and how this influenced their lived experience.

In connecting discourse to experience and subjectification, I also worked with the framework of governmentality. I drew on Foucault's thinking of governmentality as 'conduct of conduct' or the way in which various strategies are used to govern or control behaviour of people towards the desired outcomes (Foucault 1991b:100). In reference to the way needs and rights of children are understood, I also drew on perspectives on needs of children as a problematization. Rose and Miller (2010:279), drawing on Foucault, noted that governmentality or 'problematics of government' is based on the thinking that reality or problems are not a given but a problematization. Problematization (as the process in which the real state of affairs is measured against the ideal state of affairs and found wanting) is done by those with the power to do so. The latter may include professionals, policy makers, media or others. In my research, I used this perspective to explore the different representations of the needs and rights of children and how particular problematizations may lead to specific programmes.

Problematization occurs at two levels: 'political rationalities' and 'governmental technologies' (Rose and Miller 2010:273). Political rationalities involve the moral justifications offered for exercising such power and what is seen as appropriate action in addressing what has been problematized (Rose and Miller 2010:273). In my research, I see political rationalities as evident in the exercise of power by various actors in decisions and discussions around the needs and rights of children. Political rationalities have a moral character because specific justifications are provided for certain actions (ibid). For example, interventions may be implemented as a way of fulfilling the rights of children or for other more instrumental perspectives. Political rationalities are based on knowledge about the area to be governed or what Rose and Miller (2010:274) called an 'epistemological character' of governmental programmes and are articulated through

discourse (ibid: 276-277). This thinking lends itself well to the examination of how knowledge on needs and rights of children is often marshalled to frame them and their needs.

After an area has been problematized, governmental technologies (programmes that are designed as a result of specific moral justifications or specific understandings of a particular phenomenon) are then implemented to respond to the identified gaps (Rose and Miller 2010:183). In addition to these programmes responding to the way the issue has been problematized (Escobar called them 'administrative measures'), they are also aimed at maintaining the discursive universe (Escobar 1991:267). Following the thinking of Huxley (2007:189) and drawing from my rhizomatic approach, I heeded the caution that political rationalities and governmental technologies should not be seen as separate since they influence each other. I therefore demonstrated how these two are entangled, how different justifications of needs and rights of children may influence policies and practices, and at the same time how policies and practices may influence the justifications for interpreting children's needs and rights. In demonstrating how these two co-constitute each other, I was guided by the cartographic approach and Foucault's core theorization that discourses, and practices are not separate but mutually constitute each other (Foucault 1991a).

Hill (2000:182) cautioned that the governmentality framework does not fully explain how technologies shape experience for example since children are not homogenous or a monolithic category. She also noted the complex issues in any one site and that the technologies themselves are multiple. This critique has been well taken in my research and I have added another perspective to this theorizing that in my view has been invisible in theorizing on governmentality. I argue that it is not only rationalities and technologies interacting in these cartographies to affect children's experience, but that agency and politics by children may affect both rationalities and technologies as well. For example, in Chapter Eight, I demonstrate how governmental programmes may subjectify children and how the subjectivities that develop as a result of the governmental technologies may in the process become objects of intervention if the processes of subjectification through the interventions are kept invisible. In stretching my thinking further, I do not see the interactions between rationalities and technologies as dialectical or as mediated by children's agency. I see them as rhizomatic and therefore entangled.

There has been a trenchant critique by feminists that Foucault did not provide tools for resistance (Habermas 1987, Fraser 1989, Mayes 2015, Sawicki 1991). Without minimizing the theoretical importance of such critique, I am nevertheless guided by Foucault's argument on power and resistance. Foucault argued that, in theorizing power relations, we should use resistance as a catalyst to understand those relations (Foucault 1982:780). I agree with Jackson and Mazzei (2012:50) that, while this power may position children, it is not determining but relational with interactions and confrontations within these power relations. Children too can reverse these relations in their favour even if only temporarily. In terms of what resistance to power means for children, another point of critique of Foucault's notion of power, I am also indebted to Willemse (2007:475) who noted that:

resistance should [not only] be read as an act 'against' something or someone, nor as a strategy only used by subordinate subjects. [It also implicates us] and should be read as resistance 'for': as a means to claim space for alternative subject positions.

This points to the need to transform the way we think about others in discourse or seek to transform these relations of power. Reading children's resistance beyond Foucault and through Deleuzian perspectives on becoming minoritarian with children also enables us to see the import of children's resistance differently. It encourages us to re-imagine their needs and rights, as I demonstrate throughout the analysis and draws for a need for different solidarities where we identify with the experience of children, think about their needs and rights differently, as I explore in the concluding chapter.

## 2.4 Children's Experience, Rights and Rights as Living

In this section, I take some broad strokes to locate my research and children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability within the context of children's rights. A starting point in this thesis is that living in specific contexts may deprive children of various rights as citizens as embedded in the bill of rights in the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which Kenya is a party. The UNCRC (1989) provides in article 27(1) that children should enjoy a standard of living that is adequate for their mental, spiritual, moral and

social development. An adequate standard of living is therefore not just material but covers a child's living conditions in their totality. This article thus is a wide net that captures all other rights including the rights to health and social protection, survival and health. The Constitution of Kenya (2010) in article 53, guarantees rights to all children, including children living in poverty. Rights of children are also embedded in Kenya's Children's Act (2001).

Drawing on notions of child poverty as a child rights issue, it has been acknowledged that poverty affects children differently from adults, is based on life-stage specific needs and is a deprivation of child rights Abdu and Delamonica 2018, Kenya National Bureau of Standards (KNBS) and UNICEF 2017, Arts 2019). KNBS and UNICEF (2017:16) defined child poverty in Kenya as 'non-fulfilment of children's rights in the Constitution of Kenya, 2010; the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Resolution on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the 'Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies' (OHCHR 2006: iii), poverty is not just an issue of lack of income but co-determines whether an individual is able to live a life of dignity, while enjoying basic human rights and freedoms.

Scholars have provided further nuances pertaining to rights in general and how they interface with analysis of poverty. For example, Abdu and Delamonica (2018: 884-885) argued that there are general human rights deprivations and other rights whose deprivation constitutes poverty. In their thinking, 'the deprivation of a right that constitutes poverty is what makes the person poor' (ibid: 885). Rights are seen to have a constitutive relevance to poverty if 'a person's lack of command over economic resources plays a role in causing their non-realization' (OHCHR 2006:2). On the other hand, some rights have instrumental relevance to poverty if their realization helps to realize other rights that have constitutive relevance for poverty (Abdu and Delamonica 2018). This perspective was key for my research because the rights of caregivers is tied to the rights and therefore wellbeing of their children and thereby a part of children's experience of poverty. For example, as I will present in more details in Chapter Five, a caregiver's right to a livelihood has a bearing on how children's other rights including their right to food or education are realized. This also



shows that child poverty and vulnerability cannot be divorced from the wider contexts of poverty in Siaya and Kenya in general.

My research also goes further to argue that the rights of children are interdependent and indivisible. This means that it is not just the material poverty of children at stake but other sets of rights as embedded in other articles of the UNCRC. For example, article 26 provides for the child right to benefit from social security from the state, taking into account the 'resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child'. Other rights in the Convention that have a bearing on the situation of poor children include rights to education (article 28), health care (article 24), special care for children deprived of a family environment (article 20) and to good care for children who are fostered or adopted (article 21). Poverty interacts with children rights in mutual ways. Accordingly, poverty may also interfere with the children's right to be heard and it can be both a cause and effect of rights violations which in turn lead to social exclusion and poverty (European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018:7; see also Khan (2009) for a perspective on poverty as ultimate denial of Human Rights).

Various other vulnerabilities that have a relationship to child poverty and vulnerability as I approach them in my research are also addressed in various other human rights instruments other than the UNCRC. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 24.1 indicates that 'every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State'. I see such protection as also implying protection from economic deprivation.

I also hold the view that duty bearers should be guided by these notions of rights and accountability to children and should strive to meet integrated and indivisible needs and rights of children. For example, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004, no page) supported this view and argued that child-sensitive social protection systems include measures for the protection of children's rights and ensuring their voice and agency within families, schools as well as communities without discrimination.

From another angle, duty-bearers such as the state as well as other organizations providing support to children experiencing deprivation (including the ones I worked with in my research) often draw their legitimacy

from the language of children's rights. This confirms that children living in poverty do not only have needs but rights as well. Various duty bearers therefore have obligations to meet these entitlements (OHCHR 2012:4). Seeing child poverty as a child rights issue also implies that supporting children living in poverty should be guided by the general principles of the UNCRC, including participation for all and non-discrimination (Arts 2017). Indeed Arts (2019:542) has argued, the principles of children rights as embedded in UNCRC do not just embed child rights but they provide a framework that can be used in analysis of any sustainable development issue (including child poverty and vulnerability) in a child rights-based way. She cites these principles as survival and development of the child as embedded in Article 6, non-discrimination as embedded in Article 2, best interests of the child as embedded in Article 3, and participation as embedded in Article 12). More recently in 2015, ending poverty has been embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), with goal number one being ending extreme poverty in all its forms including as it affects children. However, I concur with Arts (2019:545) that for exploring children's poverty as I have used it in this research, we need to go beyond notions of extreme poverty anchored in poverty lines to perspectives on how poverty affects 'the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development'.

While framing child deprivation within a human rights language, I was also concerned with processes through which children access these rights. I therefore also mapped how children lay claims to, and/or interpret their rights, even some that may not be embedded in the UNCRC or the Constitution. This is the notion of children's rights as living rights (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013). Seen as living, rights go beyond the essentialist perspectives of rights as constitutional or official declarations.

The notion of living rights is useful in analysing the rights of children in various spaces and how they influence the experience of children (Hanson and Nieuwenhuijs 2013:6). While many actors providing for the needs of children are guided by notions of children's rights, Sanghera and others (2018) already noted that there could be discrepancies between the claims children make and those that are made by others who work (or for that matter live) with them. In my analysis, I also see children rights as an interpretation, and I am of the view that duty-bearers may have different interpretations of rights of poor children and at the same time contest



some of the rights of children. Anchored in this perspective, I also explored the way various interventions and policies may translate and interpret children's rights and how children may contest specific interpretations and launch counter claims. I also perceived children's living rights as contextual and relational and enacted in reference to a specific social reality that young people may find themselves in (van Daalen et al. 2016:818, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013:10, Sanghera et al. 2018:541). Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) pointed to this social embeddedness of rights when they argued that children rights preceded the UNCRC. In seeing rights as living, my analysis was also embedded in the notions of protecting the children's rights embedded in the day-to-day living and interactions of the communities I worked with. In my research with Okwany (Okwany and Ngutuku 2018) on social protection of vulnerable children carried out in western Kenya, we found that even communities that are deprived acknowledge the rights of children. Further, earlier research we did in the same communities (Okwany and others 2011) revealed that childcare and protection of the rights of children was embedded in people's local knowledge including the use of proverbs. For example, the authors drew on a local proverb from the Luhya community of western Kenya that states *Owomukali akhinia yesi owekhatiti yesi akhinia*. This loosely translates as every mother dances her baby, including those with fat babies or small babies. This implied that caregivers value care as a right and drew from the perspective that traditionally, 'dancing babies' usually by gently shaking them was a preferred way of stimulation and nurturance and therefore seen as right and a mother was not limited by the size of the baby. These authors also drew on another proverb from the Luo community (where I did my research) that states that '*nyathi ok ma ng'etane*' or 'a child should not be denied his play seed'. According to the Luo community, a play seed represents a bundle of rights that should be accorded to children including care, protection, guidance, security, name, to be heard, play and identity (Okwany et al. 2011:96; Okwany 2016:6).

In bringing these notions of rights as living together with the dominant notions of children rights, I follow a perspective of rights as practiced and as 'all of the many ways in which social actors across the range talk about, advocate for or criticize, study, legally enact, vernacularise [human rights] in different forms' (Goodale and Merry 2007:24). Drawing on the notions of rights as practiced, I see citizenship for children as not only referring to their right as legal citizens as embedded in the Constitution of Kenya, but

also as the strategies for enacting claims within the context of poverty and marginalization. While this thinking should not erase the role of the state as the ultimate guarantor of citizenship for children, it moves children's rights beyond the individual-state dyad. This implies a need for exploring the relational processes through which children's experience of poverty and vulnerability is located in their everyday spaces (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017:855). In locating children's experience and their citizenship in diverse spaces and their quotidian interactions as a site for citizenship, I have been guided by Isin (2009:370) who argued that, 'sites of citizenship are fields of contestation around which certain interests, stakes as well as themes, concepts and objects assemble'. He added that, through acts of citizenship, actors (including children) are able to constitute themselves a subject of rights (Isin 2009:371). Sanghera and others (2018:545) also argued that the mundane everyday practices can be sites for claiming rights as a citizen. However, these practices that define children's experience sometimes tend to be invisible to support programmes and actors who advocate for children's rights. As I will later substantiate in Chapter Nine, children's claims-making strategies may sometimes be constructed to mean disobedience or failure to comply with the criteria set for support.

## 2.5 Conceptualizing Children's Voice

In deepening the perspectives of children's voice discussed in Chapter One, I now further engage with how I utilized notions of children's voice. Researchers have responded to observed exclusion of children's voice in policies and programmes by calling for use of different methodologies to pluralize voice (I'Anson 2013:109). I'Anson has argued that, while pluralizing voice is important, such a move does not question the assumptions that the spoken voice is still seen as the real and authentic.

Others have noted that there is a need to question this voice, seen as metaphysical voice (I'Anson 2013:109; also Lather 2009:19). Jackson and Mazzei (2009:4) noted that in traditional qualitative research there is always an assumption that voice represents experience and it is this voice that is heard, recorded, coded, and categorized as data. Different authors have noted that there is a need also to attend to different perspectives of voice. For example, Mazzei (2007b) called for attention to the voices that we hear but also to how we hear them. She noted that silence is voice and that silence is not just an omission, but it plays a role in research (see also Murris 2013, Syrou 2016).

There is an emerging scholarship that problematizes voice and advocates for capturing and representing multiple voices and perspectives (e.g. see Creamer 2005:530). For example, the use of feminist ethnography methods and representation (like narrative voice from data, drama, photo voice, as well as presenting the raw scripts and journals) are also seen as steps towards approximating a different type of voice or a voice seen as raw and 'more innocent' because it is represented the way it was said by the research participants (Lather 2007:36-37). However, Lather (2007) for example drawing on Judith Stacey (1988) noted that such feminist endeavours are still not free from power relations that accompany generation of this data. Some scholars have engaged further with these perspectives and argued that such methods still take spoken voice or the metaphysical voice as the reference (see e.g. Lather 2009). Such a perspective still misses the fact that this voice is still entangled with that of others and the researcher's voice (James 2007, Jackson and Mazzei 2009:2, Lather 2009:21). In Chapter Four I explain how I still used these methods of representation of voice but went beyond spoken voice in theorizing both the methods of accessing voice as well as the data itself.

I was also attentive to the diverse perspectives on children's voice, including the present, absent or silenced voice as well as various processes of silencing children's voice in diverse contexts. Britzman and Elden (2000:28) noted that a silenced voice points to things that 'cannot be said in what is said'. Children may fail to speak because particular issues are seen as falling out of the realm of what can be said or perhaps because their voice has been silenced in the past. Devault, (1999:177) noted that 'silencing' may mean 'quieting, censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion, ghettoization, and other forms of discounting'. Such perspectives on silencing are even more important for children because of their positioning in generational relations.

## 2.6 Gendered Poverty and Vulnerability Beyond Intersectionality

The perspectives of gender, gender relations and how these interact with poverty and vulnerability are also important in the analysis in this thesis. Childhood itself is a gendered category with differently located men and women, boys and girls facing different vulnerabilities. The intersectional theory avers that 'subjects are situated in frameworks of multiple, interacting forms of oppression and privilege through socially constructed

categories such as gender and 'race'/ethnicity' (Geerts and van der Tuin 2017:171, See also Crenshaw 1989). In relationship to notions of poverty and vulnerability, through an intersectional lens, I borrow from Unterhalter (2009) who sees gender beyond men and women or boys and girls but as the 'gendered social relations between them'. Unterhalter therefore sees poverty as a net (ibid:16) and argues that there are entangled structures that exclude on the basis of race, class, age, location among others

Other factors for my research that interact are location, birth order, relations at the household, sexuality, norms. These axes determine access to resources, knowledge, opportunities as well as various powers including political power and they converge in the situation of differently located men and women, boys and girls (Unterhalter 2009:16)

While there is almost a universal agreement that women and girls would be more affected by poverty because they face the biggest traffic in these intersectional marginalizations (Crenshaw 1989:145), I however see a need also to go beyond intersectionality in understanding how these different axes of identity work together in influencing the experience of children. In arguing this way, I heed to the critique that intersectionality does not cater for the dynamism and contingencies of experience and for my research, the contingent gendered experience of children in my research. For example, Garneau (2018:324) noted that one of the critiques of intersectionality is that it 'stabilizes relations in fixed positions'. Guided by rhizomatic thinking, I was interested in how these relations change in different moments and in complex ways. Lather (2013:642) noted that 'we need methods that are in excess of intersectionality because of complex relationships in diverse reality'. Others have taken an issue with the methodological difficulties embedded in intersectionality by noting that it is difficult to establish the number of intersections, or how to pay attention to them (Chang and Culp 2002:485). In looking at the role of gendered marginalization and poverty, I take these critiques of intersectionality as a point of departure in calling for a need to understand the complexity of gendered challenges and poverty. Doing so does not mean that gender is not important in analysing marginalization of children and by extension their caregivers too. In so doing, I aim to bring to the fore various entanglements in how gender influences and/or interacts with the experience of children in complex and contingent ways. I am guided by Scot (2010:14)

who argued that while gender is an important category for social analysis, it should remain like an open question in different contexts.

Geerts and van der Tuin (2013:171), drawing on Barad's (2007) perspective of diffraction which is both a theory and framework for assessing how differences are entangled suggest a move from intersectionality to interference by arguing that:

A fully worked out 'interference theory' would [allow] gender researchers from many disciplines to produce precise case studies that demonstrate how power[...]is intrinsically out of phase with itself, and how, therefore, the production of the most surprising interference patterns is inherent to its working (ibid 2013:172).

I therefore remain open in my analysis to bring to the fore the different ways in which gender takes salience in different contexts for different men and women and for different boys and girls in the context of my research.

## 2.7 Concluding: Reading Children's Experience as Messy

In reading children's experience, I note the importance of Saukko's (2003:7) admonition that we need to build dialogue between different views so as to provide a complex nuance of experience. I therefore read these different theoretical perspectives together or what Barad (2007) calls diffraction. By bringing them together, I was interested in how different theoretical perspectives complement or exceed one another, or sometimes constitute a new perspective in reading the experience of children in a non-eclectical way.

Within rhizomatic thought, I see this experience as contingent and fluid and a site where various forces interact. Such a perspective on lived experience of children can help to dislodge prevailing notions that see experience of children living in poverty and vulnerability as an essence and therefore categorize it. My perspectives on children's experience are therefore guided by the view that such experience is both lived, constructed, enacted, performed and influenced by the material reality of the children involved. It is also influenced by different social, generational and other relations of power.

Bringing these perspectives together enabled me to work with a perspective of children's experience that is rhizomatic, complex, messy, and a cartography. In this multiplicity, various material, human and non-human

factors including social relations, policies, identities, schooling systems, participation in support programmes, discourses, children's politics, their rights and claims-making, among others interact like a rhizome. Such a reading is only possible when using methods attuned to such messiness (Law 2004:70). I demonstrate how I went about doing this in Chapter Four by presenting the cartographical approach I used. But first, I present a perspective of children's experience within the Kenyan context from a genealogical perspective.

# 3

## Representations of Child Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya: A Rhizo-Discursive Genealogy

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the welfare, representations and constructions of needs and rights of children, child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya from a genealogical perspective.<sup>14</sup> A Foucauldian genealogy draws upon history to problematize and critically engage the present. A genealogy begins with ‘questions posed in the present’, to trace and understand how they came to be this way and to engage with that which has been taken as a given and for granted (Garland 2014; Schmid 2010:2104). This genealogy therefore is aimed at questioning the taken for granted in representing children’s lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Siaya, Kenya.

This genealogy does not assume the linear, progressive or chronological development of general historical studies (Foucault in Rabinow 2010, Schmid (2010:2104) but is rhizo-discursive. As Khoja-Moolji (2018:17) noted:

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

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<sup>14</sup> Some of the texts/sources that I have used in doing this genealogy especially in the first part are materials written by other scholars in Kenya. I visited the Kenya National Archives twice to make an appointment to scrutinize the archived materials that were written during the colonial times. However, the curator informed me to rely on the materials written by others because most of the materials in the archives were written and censored by the colonialists.



This genealogy therefore provides the changing representations of experience of child poverty and vulnerability. I explore the context and situation in Kenya where the discourse of a poor and vulnerable child emerged and continues to thrive, with specific implications for children's experience.

Since it is difficult to present a genealogy without anchoring it in time, I structure it in three periods. Within rhizomatic thinking, these periods should be seen as signposts for understanding the discourses and representations of children and they do not represent distinct or discreet discourses. The time periods are the late colonial and early independence period (1952-1970) and the period beginning in the 1990s when what I call an 'HIV/AIDS afraid' national and political psyche influenced representations and interventions for poor and vulnerable children. I complete the analysis by merging these two time periods into the contemporary moment starting in the year 2000 in which the term Orphaned and Vulnerable Child (OVC) became the dominant way of thinking about poor and vulnerable children.

I map how various discourses connect with one another in different moments and when a specific discourse may draw from historical or prevailing global discourse. In doing this, like Honan (2007:147), I map the 'discursive lines, following pathways, identifying the intersections and connections, finding the moments where the assemblages of discourses merge to make plausible and reason(able) sense to the reader'.

In doing this genealogy, I was guided by a set of interrelated questions: Is there a discernible ontology of a poor and vulnerable child in these constructions and discourses? Who has power to define the needs of children and whose voice is missing? What perspectives on the structural inequalities may be silenced? What present and future subjectivities for children are imagined in these discourses? Who is the preferred child in these representations? How are these discourses entangled with others, in the past or in the present? What do these discourses mean for rights and citizenship entitlements and generally for children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability?

### 3.2 Destitute, Vagrants and Terrorists: Colonial and Early Independence Imaginaries of (Poor) Children

In this section, I place the representations of child poverty and vulnerability in Kenya in their colonial and early post-colonial context and antecedents. I explore the 'key words' and constructions of children that were



assembled by the colonial and early post-colonial state in describing, locating or representing children and youth, and poverty and vulnerability. These 'key words' have power and can influence the experience of children. In arguing this way, I am indebted to Fraser and Gordon (1997:122) who have argued that 'keywords typically carry unspoken assumptions and connotations that can powerfully influence the discourses they permeate in part by constituting a body of doxa or taken-for-granted common sense belief that escapes critical scrutiny'. I also explore the role of the colonial government in creating a cadre of specific vulnerable and poor children and youth and demonstrate how welfare to children and young people was linked to control and governance.

### **3.2.1 Creating Vulnerable Children and Youth: The Villagization Policy and Operation Anvil**

The late colonial period, especially during the fight for independence (starting from the year 1952), created vulnerabilities for many children. As a way of controlling the fight for independence in the colony conducted by the freedom fighter's movement known as the Mau Mau [1952-1960] (Anderson, 2006, Maloba 2005),<sup>15</sup> Kenya's colonial authorities declared a state of emergency which would last from 1952 to 1956. As a result of these circumstances, many children and young people were rendered vulnerable because their parents were detained (Kinyua 2009, Mbugua 2012, and Lewis 2000).

The villagization policy, one of the strategies used in responding to the 'rebellion' marks an important departure point in this analysis. This policy, that was also effected in other British colonies, forced especially people from the Kikuyu community in central Kenya (who played a big role in

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<sup>15</sup> Mau Mau (1952-1960) was a freedom fighter movement that agitated for an end to British colonialism in Kenya. While several communities participated in the armed struggle involved, the Kikuyu community from central Kenya was over-represented in this struggle. At the time, the authorities labelled this movement as 'rebellion' and 'terrorism' and ruthlessly countered the Mau Mau through detention, hanging and similar measures. While the struggle targeted the white colonialists, it also had a semblance of a civil war because in some cases Africans who were loyal to the colonial powers were attacked by fellow Africans.

the rebellion) to move into 'protected' villages. Initially the policy was couched in the language of protection, but its actual intent was part of a colonial governmentality because Africans were corralled in these villages against their will. Their traditional villages were destroyed to ensure that they would not be used by the Mau Mau activists and as a general way of curbing support to freedom fighters. In some villages several families were cramped in one house, surrounded by barbed wire and ditches and continuous surveillance and excessive discipline was imposed on them (Alam 2007:188, Sandgren 2012). Children were also separated from their mothers and their vulnerability was enhanced by the fact that food was limited in these villages. Sandgren (2012:27) argued that life in the 'protected' villages was cramped, with children suffering from disease and hunger. This was accentuated by the fact that the colonial government ordered the destruction of food crops, which exposed children and families to food shortages/scarcity as well. Education for the children of Mau Mau fighters and for the colony in general was also scarce since most independent schools were destroyed by the British colonialists because they were seen as Mau Mau sympathisers (Kinyua 2009).

Wilkinson (2017) explored how the colonial government relied on the research by the British psychologist Carothers to justify and give scientific weight to this villagization policy. This is a classic example of how the needs of communities, and by extension children, may be 'psychologized' (Rose 2009), without attention to the structural causes. Carothers, a member of the British Sociological Committee, was commissioned by the colonial government to inquire into the causes of and remedies for the Mau Mau uprising. In his book *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Carothers (1955) studied the 'personality and mentality' of the Kikuyu, and he made shocking claims about the Kikuyu in general and Black people in particular. For example, while ignoring the effects of the dislocation of the Kikuyu people by the colonial authorities, Carothers argued that the Kikuyu were suffering from the effects of transition from traditional ways to modernity (Carothers 1955:22, Alam 2007:188). Carothers (1955:22) recommended that continuation of villagization policy would stop young men from going to the villages and coming back to the city:

One can envisage health centres, schools and clubs and developing opportunities for employment of young men who too often now drift off to townships and return with strange and often false ideas

with which to reinfect their credulous country cousins [...] It would help the problem of family disruption and flatten out cultural diversity between men and women which seems to have played such a part in giving rise to Mau Mau.

This buttressed the need for continued sanitization of the cities from the black youth and ensured ultimate control by the colonialists. Wilkinson (2017:31) also argued that such a recommendation was not only paternalistic but also infantilized the local men and women by projecting the British ideals and gender norms on the colony. Authorizing or supporting specific representations and interventions (like villagization) through reliance on questionable research is an apt example of governmental rationalities (Rose and Miller 2010:274, 276–277).

Another practice that affected the wellbeing of children and youth at the same time was ‘Operation Anvil’. This was a strategy employed by the colonialists in 1954, according to which perceived Mau Mau loyalists in Nairobi were rounded up to be screened and then sent to detention camps and others repatriated to the reserves as a way of clearing them from the streets of Nairobi. Their wives and children were sent to separate detention camps. Indeed, there was an Operation Anvil for children albeit one that was supposed to soften women who were seen as hard-core Mau Mau and was therefore geared towards making them lose their loyalty to Mau Mau through concern with the welfare of their children (Ojiambo 2018).

As a result of these developments, many children were left without care and many of them were orphaned (Droz 2006, Hilton 2016:239, Maloba 1994, Ojiambo 2007 and 2017 and Wilkinson 2017:26). These practices of the colonial government and their role in child vulnerability is what Lind (2019:338) has called the process of ‘vulnerabilization’. By this he means the different ways in which the State creates the conditions that bring about vulnerability.

### **3.2.2 Conflating Child Welfare, Discipline, Child Protection, Colony and the Nation**

Child welfare and interventions relating to young people in the late colonial period can to a large extent be termed as a specific imperial undertaking and a statecraft aimed at ensuring the smooth running of the colonial empire. In addition, concerns about an empire that was teetering on the brink of collapse, or what Ocobock (2018) has called an elder state (to

represent the concern with generational relations),<sup>16</sup> fuelled control and attention on children and young people. Youth and children, especially the poor and vulnerable among them, can thus be seen as a site where race, gender, poverty, vulnerability, generation/age, colony, and later nation were constructed.

In 1954, the colonial government established the Ministry of Community Development, which was in charge of providing social services such as education, probation and community development (Mbugua 2012:11). In 1955, the Prevention of Cruelty and Neglect of Children Ordinance was enacted. This Ordinance can be seen as a part of a social and biopolitical project (Foucault 2008) because, in addition to protecting the wellbeing of vulnerable children and youth labelled 'destitute', it was supposed to address the increasing cases of juvenile crime. The rise in crime was attributed to young people who had moved to the urban centres as a result of forced migration or because of the death of their parents (Hilton 2016, Kinyua 2009). Through this ordinance that was protective and correctional simultaneously, one can trace a genesis of the failure of the state to distinguish between child discipline and child protection. This is because delinquent children were lumped together with those who were poor and/or made vulnerable by these colonial actions. No distinction was made between poor and vulnerable children who needed protection and those accused of breaking the law.

This intervention model is still applied in Kenya, for example in addressing the issue of street children who in some cases are rounded off to rehabilitation centres and treated as criminals (see Droz 2006, Okwany 2004).

The first non-state organization in the country, the Child Welfare Society of Kenya (CWSK), was formed in 1955 to provide support to children who were deemed neglected, facing cruelty and thus in need of being 'rescued' (CWSK 2015, no page). After this, a host of other organizations emerged to provide support to children and vulnerable populations. Such actions and especially the rise of voluntary organizations have been seen

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<sup>16</sup> Ocobock used the notion of an elder state to show how the colonial state in Kenya, that was already 'maturing' and faced with uncertainties, used youth and specifically male youth for control. The notion of an elder state also applies to the process of decolonization where young people, and in particular male youth, were used as weapons in the decolonizing and post-colonial project.

as a form of social engineering (see Escobar 1995) which were supposed to steer society towards the right behaviour (Lewis 2000).

In further demonstrating how the colonial government collapsed delinquency, poverty and vulnerability, Hilton (2016) provided an example of one late colonial and early independence institution, the Starehe Boys School and Centre. This Centre for rehabilitating boys deemed 'destitute' was widely seen as a symbol of the nation's future and was funded by international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The role of two international NGOs, Save the Children and Oxfam GB, in funding the centre, points at the genesis of the involvement of non-state actors in the welfare of children and youth in Kenya (Hilton 2016). Hilton argued that, even after independence, a post-colonial state that was not willing to provide for the needs of its children still relegated this role to non-state actors. One still sees these continuities in the minimalist state role where interventions into children have been left to non-state actors.

The boys who were rehabilitated through the Starehe Centre were seen as 'desperately poor boys, many of whom were homeless, orphaned and embarking upon a life of crime' (Ibid: 235). Askwith (1995:117) argued that the Centre was for the 'vagrants and orphans'. On the other hand, Griffins, the founder of the Centre, framed the needs of the boys who were affected by forced detention and death of their parents as psychological and in need of rehabilitation (Hilton 2016:250).

Labelling boys and young men who had been made vulnerable by the practices of colonialism as vagrants was not without a precedent and connects with the global history of sanitizing urban spaces by clearing away the poor (Ocobock 2006:40). In England, Ocobock (Ibid.) referred to the anxieties shown by authors like Alfred Marshalls about the presence of juveniles in the urban space, who were conflated with criminals. Such anxieties then diffused to the colonies as well, including Kenya. In late colonial Kenya, such people were governed by the Vagrancy Act. When found 'loitering' in the city they were arrested and taken back to the villages.

I argue that the colonialists by disguising their governmental role in the empire, marshalled and circulated discourses of destitute children that were discursively divorced from the actions of the colonialists. For instance, the role of the colonial government in creating a cadre of disobedient or criminal and 'destitute' youth (the narrative of a 'youth in crisis' meta narrative) was glossed over (Hilton 2016:240). Instead, in Carother's style, their situation was attributed to a 'breakdown of tribal responsibility

caused by the social changes from subsistence to cash economy in the rural area, and the rapid urban development' (Hilton 2016:240). The issue of the pressure on land, due to annexation of African's land by the colonial authorities was also left unquestioned. The hut tax that the colonial government imposed drove people from the rural to urban areas in search of work (Tarus 2004) and most of them, including their children and youth joined the urban underclass. Repatriating such youth can also be read as a 'low hanging fruit' in solving issues of urban youth. For example, Ocobock (2006:59) noted that rounding up youth from the streets of Nairobi in colonial Kenya was less costly than urban reforms or other programmes of welfare for these youths. Van Stapele (2015) provided a similar analysis of how poverty in the rural areas drove people into urban slum areas like Mathare in Nairobi and how these processes of ethnic marginalization and poverty in rural areas are rarely problematized in discussions about the formation of youth gangs in Kenya. Such actions are similar to practices by non-state actors working with children that for example fail to consider the role of structural issues like unequal development or lack of services and how they affect the rights and well being of children (see Okwany 2004).

Not only was the poverty of children and youth in the streets problematized, but poverty and vulnerability were also conflated with poor parenting. For example, in casting images of incompetent [black] caregiving, several authors have noted that parents were criticized by the colonial government for failing to bring up their children in proper ways. The colonial state could therefore be seen as the ideal parent figure, exerting parental authority over these young people (Ocobock 2006, Ojiambo 2007:199). Such narratives of conflating poverty and poor parenting are still evident in some contemporary programmes of support. The framings involved correspond to Fraser's (1989:165) perspectives where various discourses of needs position the people to whom they are addressed as specific subjects and in this case parents who were seen as inadequate caregivers.

In drawing rhizo-discursive lines between the discourse of clearing streets in colonial Kenya and later discourses and practices, similar ideas of 'sanitization' of streets would become evident again in the year 2002, after President Mwai Kibaki came to power. Droz noted that in 2002 children were separated from their families and taken to separate camps for rehabilitation, and he documented how scores of children were crying for



their parents as they were separated (Droz 2013:128). Droz (2006:358) also documented how the Kibaki government focused on the rehabilitation of street children to present itself as a better regime compared to the former regime of President Moi, which was cast as uncaring. This was not just about disciplining children in a literal sense but about disciplining populations because Kibaki who had just declared Kenya a 'working nation' was concerned with clearing the streets of 'lazy people' and disciplining everybody (including the street children and their families) into a work ethic (Droz 2006:360, Droz 2013:128).

The actions and discourses around clearing children and young people from the streets during the colonial and Kibaki eras had something in common: they were both guided by nationalist concerns, and children's rights and wellbeing were not a central concern. Second, in their concern with their image as well as the aesthetics of the city, both did not interrogate the role of structural issues in the experience of street children. Such an analysis for both the colonial and the contemporary context should also not be lost to the perspective that these rural areas, where most of these poor were expected to live had few livelihood opportunities for young people. These policies therefore were also both silent to the alienating education system that pushes young people to move to cities upon completion of schooling.

### **Gendered Vulnerability: Hypervisibility of Black Male-Youth**

The discourse of a destitute quintessential male and often deviant or potentially rebellious youth or child circulated in the colony. This discourse thrived on the exclusion of the girl child. For example, Griffin, the founder of Starehe Boys Centre, reportedly argued against starting a similar centre for 'rehabilitating' and providing education for girls affected by the Second World War, poverty and late colonial insurrections and control. This denied the evidence that indeed girls too were affected by the Second World War and its aftermath, as well as by the Mau Mau uprising (Kinyua 2009).

One can also argue that within the prevailing discourse of the black, male and homeless youth as a threat, the corresponding docile, female youth was the opposite, a symbol of loyalty that did not warrant much attention (see also Ocobock 2006). These gendered binaries did not serve the youth in question but the colonial project of control, as was evident in the provision of education. For example, afraid of the role of young men in colonial resistance, Wilkinson (2017) noted that young educated men were seen by the colonialists as the greatest problem to the empire because

they did not have jobs. Askwith, a community development officer, in his rather polemic memoirs used this nationalist and empiricist discourse of 'youth in crisis' and poor (male) youth as a threat (Askwith 1995). In his accounts, the youth in crisis narrative in the colony was initially placed within the context of youth defined as boys who were leaving primary school without the skills to enable them to get a job. He argued that this was because their uneducated parents could not provide them this opportunity (Askwith 1995:62). His perspectives were that due to lack of education, boys joined political parties that were seen as enemies of the colonial state. He provided a perspective on three kinds of boys who had different needs but were closely tied to the needs of the colony. These were boys without education, boys with little education and boys with much education (Ibid).

Boys who had little education were seen as more needy than those who had not gone to school because, as Askwith argued, for the former 'no particular aspirations had been awakened in their souls' (ibid: 147). These boys with little education were seen as willing to take up any jobs but also as having a higher likelihood of becoming disgruntled and as more violent and in need of rehabilitation (Askwith 1995:31). Askwith was less subtle on the social engineering roles of this type of rehabilitation when he argued that later (after the Mau Mau uprising), the youth involved in the resistance movement, whom he referred to as 'terrorists', had similar characteristics as the youth who had little education.

Thus, I argue that collapsing the category of youth who were not involved in the Mau Mau uprising and those who did not have livelihood skills with those from central Kenya who were perceived to be actual or potential 'terrorists' by the colonialists, was geared towards surveillance and control of their behaviour. Education for youth through vocational schools was therefore justified by colonialists in these terms of controlling delinquency and resistance to colonial power. The newly independent government continued this narrative of justifying education to the youth to control them and quell dissent.

In these representations of male youth, the needs or welfare and rights of these youths were not the primary concern of the colonialists. In linking education, the needs of the colony, these concerns had parallels with current programmes and policies for vulnerable children for example in the sense that concerns about the future of the country might override concerns with the rights and wellbeing of poor children. A good example is



the focus on the needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS as an archetypical category in child welfare in Kenya that I turn to next.

### **3.3 Needs of Children as a Dis-ease: OVCs as Iconic Welfare Subjects**

Another important 'key word' in the field of child poverty and vulnerability is the category Orphaned and Vulnerable Child (OVC). Green (2007:147) argued that the term OVC is an 'an emotionally compelling category and a dominant tool kit for child poverty'. In most of the literature, and within the context of Kenya, an OVC generally has been seen as quintessentially a poor child.

Undertaking a genealogy of the term OVC is important because as Fraser and Gordon (1997) argued, the politics of categorization are sometimes cruel acts and can shape people's experience. The emergence of the term OVC as a key word in the child policy and practice terrain in Kenya provides an important context for understanding the representations of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability in policies and programmes in the country. A diverse range of both state and non-state actors have popularized the term OVC.

#### **3.3.1 Debate the Creation of a National Orphan Support Fund: Shock Through Statistics and Orphans as a Spectre**

In this section, I focus on the Parliamentary debate on children affected by HIV/AIDS in Kenya in 1995. This specific debate enables the reader to see rhizo-discursive lines between the discourse in this debate and other discourses on orphaned and vulnerable children. The debate can also be seen as an example of the moral tenor of the OVC discourse that prevailed (locally and globally) in that period.

In this motion, an orphan was defined as a child between one and eighteen years who had lost a mother, and not both parents. The understanding was that the father would eventually also die due to HIV/AIDS (GOK 1995:2041). In the debate, the issue of children affected by HIV/AIDS was represented through statistics that were supposed to shock people into supporting these children. The mover of the motion sketched the context by noting the then current figure of one million people affected by HIV/AIDS in Kenya, including a considerable number of young people who were infected by HIV/AIDS. One of the debaters projected that the number of Kenyans infected by HIV and the number of children

orphaned due to HIV/AIDS would rise to 1.9 million and 2 million respectively by the year 2000. In this case, the discourse of such a possibility as a 'catastrophe' was marshalled (GOK 1995: 2040, 2042). To amplify shock on the issue of HIV/AIDS and children, the Minister in charge of children's issues emphasized that it was not just that children were orphaned due to HIV/AIDS but that they would also die in large numbers. The seconder of the motion castigated the members of Parliament for not being outraged by the statistics of HIV/AIDS orphans and by what he called 'statistics of chaos'. He noted that 'there is something numbing about leaders who are not shocked by statistics of chaos, leaders who see numbers as some distant fleeting illusion which does not touch them personally' (GOK 1995:2043).

These projections, including the imagined future catastrophe, were not without contemporaries. This same narrative circulated in other African countries where HIV/AIDS was said to be 'ravaging' millions. Meintjes and Giese (2006:1) referred to these projections on HIV/AIDS in South Africa as 'spinning the epidemic' and noted how there was a disproportionate focus on orphanhood at the expense of other children's needs, rights and vulnerabilities. The authors argued that this discursive construct of an OVC set the parameters for policy and programming.

The first parliamentary debate in Kenya took another turn when a Member of Parliament referred to the effects of orphanhood on children as a 'spectre' when noting that there was an existing 'spectre of households being led by 10-12-year olds' (GOK 1995:2043). He re-membered<sup>17</sup> an imaginary romantic past where orphanhood was not a problem because parents died of old age leaving orphans whom the community adequately catered for. In this re-membering, a keen listener would observe here that parents who die of old age do not necessarily leave orphaned children behind and the MP was using his power to frame a non-existent reality. During the debate, anxiety about orphaned children becoming street children in the future was also expressed (ibid:2042).

Referencing the moral discourse and the statistics that were expected to 'shock' the people and act as the authority in these discussions, was consistent with the assertion by Fraser (1989:173) that conflicts over needs

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<sup>17</sup> I use re-member as a double coded word to indicate his act of bringing to memory but also trying to recoup a past he thought had been lost to HIV/AIDS

(and I add rights) may be resolved through referencing scientific expertise. While such statistics as such are not the problem, I argue that using statistics to shock could lead to interventions that do not fit the context or the articulated needs of children. For example, the Joint Learning Initiative on Children (JLICA)<sup>18</sup> studies have shown how, despite millions of dollars targeting AIDS Orphans and drawing largely on the moral panic caused by 'shocking numbers', only 10 per cent of children affected were in fact reached by both state and non-state interventions at this time and the rest were being cared for within families (JLICA 2009:9).

Notions of deservedness versus non-deservedness, as are still common in current interventions on poverty and vulnerability, were also strongly present throughout the first parliamentary debate in Kenya. HIV-related orphans were widely seen as the neediest and needs and rights of other vulnerable children like street children were minimized. For example, there was a complaint during this debate that while the government at the time had set aside KES 12 million for a rehabilitation centre for street children, the state had only made a provision of KES 300,000 (USD 6200 at this time) for 'destitute' children, alternatively called orphaned children in this motion. One can argue that the 'undeserving' street children were contrasted with orphans who were seen as more (legitimately) deserving. In casting the orphaned children as more needy, the 'privileged' begging childhood of street children was also emphasized, since street children were represented as having parents (compared to orphans) using them to beg (GOK 1995:2104). In examining this discourse, one sees that references to deservedness reveal the assumptions about the identity of caregivers (who were represented as sending their children to beg). The binaries in the discourse were also made apparent when sentiments digressed to the negative possibility of the orphan fund entrenching negative morals by supporting the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, seen as a disease of poor morals. Indeed, Green (2007:147) argued that HIV/AIDS was seen as a disease whose social legacy was the creation of orphans. Such assumptions are part of the cartography of representations that the beneficiaries of welfare support, including children, encounter. It is at these discursive

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<sup>18</sup> JLICA was an international learning initiative initiated by donors, policy makers and researchers, activists and people suffering from HIV/AIDS for collective learning around issues of HIV/AIDS and it brought together actors from the global North and South.

sites where children and their caregivers negotiate their experience of poverty and vulnerability.

These discourses of HIV orphans and other HIV affected children as more deserving, while still categorical in nature, also illustrate how specific lines in the assemblage of needs and rights discourses may change at different moments when other needs emerge or even mutate to something new altogether (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:15). For example, in contextualizing this rhizo-discursive ‘mutation’ for the case of vulnerable street children, one needs to remember that, only a few years earlier, before issues of HIV/AIDS ‘struck’, the issue of street children had occupied discussions on vulnerable children. During this time, there was the prevailing discourse of children and mainly street children as ‘children in debt’, or children that had been affected by impacts of Structural Adjustment Programmes of the World Bank and IMF (see Kilbride et al. 2001, Jolly 2012). Structural Adjustment Programmes were imposed by multilateral lenders like the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s. These SAPs included lending conditions that required trade liberalisation, privatization of state enterprises, devaluation of local currency as well as reduction of public spending on key services including health, education etc. As a result, key sectors came to lack funds and local populations were deprived of these key services. Children were one of the most affected categories.

In contemporary programmes, one can still observe the same exclusionary, as well as normative, frames that lay a disproportionate focus on some categories of children.

### 3.3.2 Debate on the Creation of a National Orphan Support Fund Continued: Children as Markers of a Nation

The debate on the Orphan Fund also had functionalist orientations and this support was imagined as a boundary to ‘good’ versus a ‘bad’ government, where a good government was framed as the one that fulfilled the responsibility of ‘looking after its orphans’ (GOK 1995: 2042). The ‘children as the future of the nation’ trope emerged again when the mover of the motion was thanked for bringing a motion that was concerned with the future of the nation, which was represented as ‘its young people’ and the state as a maternal figure nurturing its citizens (GOK 1995:2044–2045). One of the lawmakers referenced the fact that Kenya was a signatory to the UNCRC, hence it should support the wellbeing of children. Referencing the rights of children whilst being guided by functionalist

perspectives of concern with the future of the country and not the interest of children's rights in and of itself involved contradictory discourses.

While noting the importance of children in the future, the Minister in charge of children's affairs connected the orphaned children in the then present Kenya with orphaned children in the future. While stating that 'this nation is going to be a nation of children and grandparents' (GOK 1995:2044), he represented orphaned children as bad for the country in the present but also because they were harbingers of poverty for the nation in the future (ibid). Semiotically, the notion of 'this nation' (a contrastive opposite to 'that nation'), was the boundary that distinguished Kenya from others as a great nation, albeit one that was threatened by orphans and grandparents. Children therefore had a symbolic value as embodiments of the future of a nation (Carter 2011, Sriprakash and Hopkins 2016:194).

In addition, within the context of this debate, children would not only be symbolic markers of a good state but also a pointer to a good politician. Child poverty and vulnerability were thus represented as moral issues and lawmakers who did not support children were represented as potentially losing their relevance in future. Children were also presented as immanent citizens and the dis-ease<sup>19</sup> causing the rise of OVCs was represented through the image of a sick state that could not fulfil its obligations to its citizens (GOK 1995:1985). One can connect this to the post-colonial development sensibility in Kenya that was built on eliminating poverty, disease and lack of education (GOK 1965). One can argue that HIV/AIDS was seen as the debris of a sick state that had haunted the newly independent Kenya.

One can draw a few conclusions from examining this parliamentary debate as well as other discourses connected to it. While the intentions for supporting children as discussed in this debate are not in doubt, the debate also served other political intentions. It also responded to the global pre-occupation with supporting children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, seen as a global catastrophe, within the context of children's needs and rights. In making such an interpretation, I am indebted to the argument by Foucault (1979:26) that 'need is a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated and used'. I also conclude that in this debate childhood for Kenya's children was represented in terms of what it was not. One could also argue

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<sup>19</sup> Dis-ease here has a double code. As a sickness but also discomfort with the reality of HIV/AIDS

that these children were the ‘other’ and therefore their otherness was necessary to normative childhood as it was imagined then in Kenya.

In the next section, I continue drawing inter-discursive connections, as I explore how discourses of catastrophe were reflected in the early global agenda-setting and especially around the OVC category, mapping how the local and global were entangled.

### 3.4 Global Discourses: Continuities in Discourses of Catastrophe

In Kenya, the needs of children have to a large extent been influenced by the perspectives of international organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s). Their constructions of child poverty have not been benign and may represent implicit and tacit assumptions about vulnerable children and knowledge positions among ‘dominant players.’ Bislev et al. (2002:209) noted that these organizations ‘map out what can be said, thought and done about different aspects of life [...] and by normalising and naturalising specific ways of thinking and acting [...] often with a claim of scientific or other expertise, discourses produce ‘effects of power’. The constructions of poor and vulnerable have shifted in different moments in global history. I provide a perspective on such representations and their potential implications for children’s experience, and policies and programmes for these children.

The entry of the ‘key word’ OVC into the development realm and its association with child vulnerability in Kenya was evidently a by-product of the global processes around HIV/AIDS as a disease that was affecting considerable parts of Africa. This was specifically relevant for the East and Southern Africa region broadly and Kenya in particular. Some of these processes included the drafting of the 1994 Lusaka Declaration,<sup>20</sup> the 1998 UN Discussion on Children Living in a World with AIDS,<sup>21</sup> the

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<sup>20</sup> This declaration was adopted in a workshop in Lusaka, Zambia in 1994. It laid down a framework for supporting orphans, among others by examining the role of institutional care, the extent of the problem, as well as the options for provision of support.

<sup>21</sup> In this conference, discussions stressed the importance of going beyond HIV/AIDS as a medical problem to a perspective on the rights of children to care and prevention as embedded in the UNCRC. Countries present were expected to make commitments to support children affected by HIV/AIDS by



2001 United National General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS<sup>22</sup> and the 2002 UN Declaration on A World Fit for Children (where the special session emphasized the goals as set in UNGASS 2001, among others (Institute of Medicine 2007:213).

The publication of various documents showing the magnitude of HIV/AIDS and its effects on children was key in these processes. During the period 1994–2004, a series of various publications on ‘Children on the Brink’ echoed the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS problem and its effects on children and poverty. Examples includes the United States Agency for International Development and others (2003) and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS et al. (2004). In the publication ‘Africa’s Orphaned Generations’ (UNICEF 2003), HIV/AIDS was said to have created a generation of ‘Africa’s orphans’, and the world was admonished to avert this ‘grave’ matter to prevent ‘orphaning generations of children’ (UNICEF 2003:4). A sequel to this publication in 2006, ‘Africa’s Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations’ (UNICEF 2006), continued with the narrative on the need to come to the aid of Africa to avert a generational catastrophe. These publications provided a perspective on the number of orphaned children. They also argued against institutional support and in favour of providing community-based support for children affected by HIV/AIDS, who were often seen as the poorest.

Elsewhere too, UNICEF was setting the agenda in a similar tone: emphasizing the need for averting a catastrophe of monumental proportions and worried about the silence around it. In 2002, UNICEF’s Executive Director (Bellamy 2003 no page) was bold in marshalling sympathy for shock on the OVC statistics. When addressing the nations, which she endearingly called ‘friends’, she saw the silence on HIV/AIDS as a ‘monster’. She referenced the rights of children for survival but also laid emphasis on the ‘right’ to political survival for nations that were being threatened by HIV/AIDS orphans. HIV/AIDS was not only affecting bodies but also

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putting in place strategic plans. Kenya committed to the goal of giving priority to addressing issues faced by children affected by and living with HIV by developing and implementing national policies and strategies.

<sup>22</sup> This special session discussed HIV in all its aspects. It also aimed at securing global commitments to coordination in addressing HIV/AIDS. There was also a special action for orphaned and vulnerable children.

economies and Bellamy noted that the OVC statistics would logically lead to a physical battlefield as evidenced in the discourse below:

The silence that surrounds children affected by HIV/AIDS and the inaction that results is morally reprehensible and unacceptable. If this situation is [...] not addressed now with increased urgency, millions of children will continue to die, and tens of millions more will be further marginalized, stigmatized, malnourished, uneducated, and psychologically damaged. The implications of this are monstrous. The profound trauma of losing a mother or both parents has devastating long-term implications, not only for a child's survival, wellbeing and development, but also for the stability of communities and, ultimately, nations themselves. And by creating millions of orphans as it kills the very men and women vital to the functioning of society, HIV/AIDS sows the kind of political instability that can lead to strife and outright war (Ibid).

In Kenya at the time, a human rights report appropriating the metaphor of death in its title, 'Kenya in the Shadow of Death', fanned the discourses of catastrophe but now from a human rights perspective. It noted that HIV/AIDS not only impoverished households but made children end up in the streets, affected their schooling and thereby their right to survival and development (Human Rights Watch, 2001:3).

The 'key word' OVC continued its presence in the child poverty and vulnerability intervention terrain in Kenya and became the ubiquitous lens through which children deemed as deprived and vulnerable were (and continue to be) viewed. For example, in response to the UNGASS requirements, in 2001 an intervention termed 'Orphan Competent Community' was implemented in thirty-nine communities in thirteen farming districts in Kenya. The communities were trained and wrote social action plans on how to support orphaned children in their localities. A grant of 4,000 euros was given to each participating community (Skovdal et al. 2010:234).

Other initiatives were the OVC Strategic Plans that were developed to deal with the 'orphan crisis'. These plans drew on the global definition of the term OVC. For example, in the Kenya OVC Plan 2007–2010, an orphaned and vulnerable child was defined as a child 'whose vulnerability is due to parent's mortality or morbidity or household poverty or other social economic factors that make it hard for children's needs to be met'



(GOK 2008:13). In this Strategic Plan, the justification for an OVC intervention was positioned within a frame that viewed the vulnerability of children whose parents were suffering from HIV as beginning even before the death of their parents. This was because of the increased responsibilities for many of these children. Other problems identified were potential exposure to abuse, lack of education, vulnerability to commercial sex work, psychosocial trauma on losing parents, and disinheritance. A range of interventions were implemented to address these identified needs (ibid).

It is important to note that these discourses about OVCs were shifting and that they had implications for the local practice of support to children in Kenya and elsewhere. Countries had to adapt to these shifts. For example, the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR),<sup>23</sup> has been one of the key interventions in support of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. A closer examination of the PEPFAR Strategy on Vulnerable Children showed a shifting conceptualization of the needs of vulnerable children and others affected by HIV/AIDS. Initially, the needs of children were presented as a package. The 2006 PEPFAR Guidelines defined an OVC as 'a child, 0–17 years old, who is either orphaned or made more vulnerable because of HIV/AIDS' (PEPFAR 2006:2). Reynolds (2014b:7) noted that this was against the programming guidance in some other countries, such as South Africa, that did not allow programming on children that referenced the causes of their vulnerability.

Because of these concerns, the Guidelines were reviewed. According to the 2012 revised PEPFAR Guidelines (PEPFAR 2012:20), the intended beneficiaries of PEPFAR programmes included 'children who have lost a parent to HIV/AIDS, who are otherwise directly affected by the disease, or who live in areas of high HIV prevalence and may be vulnerable to the disease or its socioeconomic effects'. The Guidance Note also indicated that PEPFAR programmes should be guided by analysis of the factors making children vulnerable to HIV and vulnerabilities that are caused by

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<sup>23</sup> PEPFAR is a global strategy by the US government established in 2003 and is geared towards alleviating HIV/AIDS. The strategy has a component on working with orphans and vulnerable children because in 2005 a new law came into effect in the US that stipulated that 10 per cent of PEPFAR funds must be channelled to children affected by HIV/AIDS or other vulnerable children (Reynolds 2014b:3).

HIV/AIDS. Reynolds (2014a:116) argued that such a categorization restricted the PEPFAR funds available for children in these HIV prevalence areas whose vulnerability was not HIV-related. According to Reynolds, this was against the prevailing strategies at the time, primarily developed by UNICEF and others, who had argued against exclusion and stigmatization of children affected by HIV (*ibid.*).

While PEPFAR's Strategy was seen as combating the disease, it was also framed as a Strategy that responded to socio-economic issues. Such a perspective provided important connections with issues of child poverty and vulnerability:

For people infected and affected by the epidemic, HIV is not only a medical experience. It is also a social and emotional experience that profoundly affects their lives and their future programming for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS contributes to the achievement of an AIDS-free generation by responding to the social (including economic) and emotional consequences of the disease on children, their families, and communities that support them (PEPFAR 2012: 5).

The contradictory nature of the PEPFAR Guidelines was evident where the 2012 Guidance Note acknowledged that the needs of children were multiple and could not be boxed into a 'package', but nevertheless children in need were framed as a package. This packaging, though not desired, was framed as necessary to ensure effectiveness in service delivery (PEPFAR 2012:12). Conflating the vulnerability of children and HIV/AIDS can influence representations but also interventions for children. I support Fassin's ideas (2012) that such conflation configures children's citizenship in biological terms whereby qualification for support is seen by and large from the angle of association with the disease. While ignoring the rights of children in their own right, this cartography of belonging and citizenship through HIV/AIDS (that I explore more fully in Chapter Eight), connects rhizomatically with the earlier discourses explored in this chapter, that represent a dis-ease with the presence of an OVC as a marker of a dis-eased future.

Meeting the needs of children through association with HIV/AIDS supports the claim by Fraser (1989:166) that needs identification and construction is a contested terrain where 'groups with unequal discursive (and

non-discursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs'. While according to Fraser (1989), expert needs discourses may be accepted without contestation at face value, they may also be contested at various nodes.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The foregoing genealogy illuminates the discourses of child poverty and vulnerability, and the poor and vulnerable child. Earlier, I argued for a non-linear reading of this genealogy. In this matter I was guided by Deleuze and Guattari's statement (1987:7) that 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be'. Without arguing that the present discursive system and non-discursive system in relation to the welfare of poor and vulnerable children in Kenya are a product of the past, I have explored how they map into each other, including the ruptures, continuities and discontinuities.

The discourses and representations analysed in this chapter indicate that child poverty and vulnerability experiences have been constructed variously by diverse actors through often-times contradictory understandings and practices. The discussions revealed that there is no fixed ontology of a poor and vulnerable child and that discourses by different policy actors are shifting. However, the interstices around which this shifting occurs are visible. For example, I have explored the interaction of local, imperial, gendered, global and state concerns and their interplay on the bodies and concerns of children in general, and specifically poor children. While not eliding the material aspects of poverty, the key argument in this chapter is that these representations provide certain versions of poverty in different historical and conjunctural contexts. In this discursive terrain, some voices are privileged and others, especially those of children, are disallowed or their experience occluded.

In addition, specific discourses may invite specific acts of paternalism in relation to children and caregivers, or they may render meaningful specific interventions. These discourses and representations also imagine certain citizens and invite certain subjectivities for children and their caregivers, and thereby act as nodes in the cartography of children's lived experience. I have given an example of how concern about children affected by HIV/AIDS silenced concerns about other children may have, including street children.

Such discourses may also occlude other ways of being a child and thereby influence children's experience (Saukko 2003:7). By reading this genealogy, the reader hopefully already starts imagining alternative ways of thinking about children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. However, I do not imagine a discursive determinism in these discourses (Gigengack 2008:264). I argue that children may fail to take up the narrow subject positions allotted to them by the dominant (Willemse 2007: 474) or that their experience may stutter these representations. It is these possibilities at the level of everyday spaces, policy prescriptions, the technologies in programmes of care and the contestations around poor child subjectivities that I set out to explore in the subsequent chapters. It is also in locating these shifting interstices and children's experience in their day-to-day contexts that I build the rhizome and do the cartographies of children's lived experience. To start this off, in the next chapter I provide a perspective on the methodology I used in exploring the lived experience of children in various everyday spaces.

## 4

## Listening Softly to Children's Voice: Generating Cartographies of Children's Experience

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the two-pronged methodological approach that I utilized in researching children's lived experience through the lens of representations and how this experience is enacted in the different spaces of the home, the school as well as in programmes of support. I also present my methodological research posture of 'listening softly' to children's voice. Listening softly goes beyond listening as a sensory event or hearing, to listening as a sensibility. Listening softly provides a perspective on the rhizomatic cartographic approach I used as well as part of my emergent research methods for accessing children's lived experience, voice and their messy reality. Within the framework of rhizomatic thinking, research does not perceive ethics as separate from the research methodology but as entangled (Barad 2007). Based on the fact that ethics were woven throughout the research, in my presentation I weave them this way. Additionally, in the last section of the chapter, I also provide a window of two other entangled ethical issues that emerged in my research.

### 4.2 Ethnography: A Site for Mapping Children's Entangled Experience

I characterize this research as an ethnographic study. I carried out fieldwork between April 2016 and March 2017. In studying children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, as also noted by Smith and Greene (2015:205), I wanted 'to meet children in their experience', through an engaged interaction with them. My continued community engagement included working with organizations supporting children and visiting children at home, at school and in different community spaces. I also participated in child-focused meetings including a holiday camp for children receiving support from one of the organizations. The fact that I was interested in both the lived experience of children and how it is represented in diverse spaces meant that I also divided my time between being

in Siaya, where the children were located, and in Nairobi, to interact with policy makers.

Being in Siaya meant that I took walks in the community from time to time taking note of the key livelihood activities in the area, including farming, fishing, charcoal burning and brick laying, extraction of sand and other construction materials. Through taking walks with my research assistants or some caregivers, specific features acted as prompts in enabling a deeper understanding for example of the context of caregiving. I occasionally sat by the village kiosks, shops and market places to observe and access the latest updates on child vulnerability in the research site and people's way of life. I also had numerous encounters with children when I visited them in their homes, the organizations of support, in their schools as well as in other community spaces. My being in the field for almost a year was my way of encountering the voice of children and enabled me to be intimate with the experience of children. Like was the case for Marker (2003:371), this enabled me to listen to the 'spirits of the stories' of child poverty and vulnerability by encountering children who enacted their everyday experience in the 'soul' of Siaya.

While in the field, I initially rented a hotel room in Siaya town from where I commuted daily to the field using public transport. However, a few weeks after the beginning of my research I fell ill and had to be hospitalized for some days. I was also involved in a major road accident as a result of which I could no longer use public transport. I had to use a private car and park it at a distance from the communities I would be meeting that particular day. This was my way of ensuring that I did not present privilege to the communities I was researching and at the same time ensure also self-care.

However, sometimes it became apparent that the car parked at a particular corner was mine and some caregivers thought I had brought help to them. In one case, when my driver was waiting for me in the car, village youth wielding machetes approached my driver and demanded to know his mission in the community. They 'arrested' him and only released him when I appeared with my research assistant who was well known to them.<sup>51</sup> To circumvent these challenges, I started staying with a host

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<sup>51</sup> This issue was brought about by a spate of child protection issues in one of the research sites where children were being abducted. We were therefore mistaken for child abductors

family. This helped me to get a yet better perspective of what was happening in the community.

**Figure 4-1 : Ethnographic research**



*Own photos*

### **Ethnography as an Entanglement of Spaces**

My research addresses children's lived experience and therefore can be seen as localized in nature. However, even though my study was located in Siaya, and therefore 'small' and local in imagination, children's experience as represented in this ethnography surpasses the local space. For example, the space that Siaya occupies in the social, political and contemporary imagination is monumental. As earlier argued in Chapter One from a national perspective, the political economy of Siaya as an opposition stronghold and a centre of shifting political realignments is also worth mentioning (Avidar 2018).<sup>52</sup> This connects Siaya, a local space in

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<sup>52</sup> The first leader of the opposition in Kenya, Oginga Odinga came from Kenya and his son Raila Odinga is currently the official leader of opposition in the country. However, over the years, there has been political realignment with these two leaders embracing the ruling party and so influencing masses in the country. Therefore, the politics of patronage that characterize the Kenyan context have been played out in Siaya.



ethnographic imaginary, to the national concerns, which provide another context for understanding children's lived experience.

Siaya is also placed in a global imaginary in terms of children's experience of poverty. For example, I have argued in Chapter One that due to the limited outreach of the state in meeting the needs of children, and due to effects of HIV/AIDS, there is a convergence of interests among many local, national and global organizations. The presence of these organizations complicates childhood space in Siaya and makes Siaya a fruitful site for mapping the entanglements of global, local and national perspectives in the lived experience of vulnerable children. In addition, the methodology of a rhizome that I adopted in my research meant that I was able to entangle the local, the national the global and also the historical though rhizomatic mapping of children's experience. While Marcus (1998) would term such an ethnography that focuses on diverse spaces as multi-sited, I do not see it this way because the scales of this ethnography are not nestled (Isin 2009:370) but they are entangled. In addition, I was not tracing the experience of children through these spaces, as is the case in multi-sited ethnography, but mapping how the children's experience is entangled.

### 4.3 Community Entry and Research Authorization

I obtained research clearance from the Ministry of Science and Technology in Nairobi (see Appendix 1). Since I was planning to work with schools and children in the communities, I also introduced myself to the Director of Education in Siaya County, and obtained a letter allowing me to interact with head teachers and children in schools (see Appendix 2). As part of the process of field entry, I had discussions with the children's County Coordinator, who was in charge of all child related issues. This was important for obtaining clearance to interact with children and he introduced me to the five Children's Officers in the sub-counties.

I also obtained research permission from the local administration through a letter that was addressed to five sub-county administrators in Siaya. In addition, I engaged the local administrators, known as the chiefs, who were in charge of smaller administrative units called a 'location'. The chiefs have more proximate relations with children and their families. In addition to community entry, the introductory meetings involved in obtaining permission also served as a space of inquiring about the preliminary perspectives on children's experience.



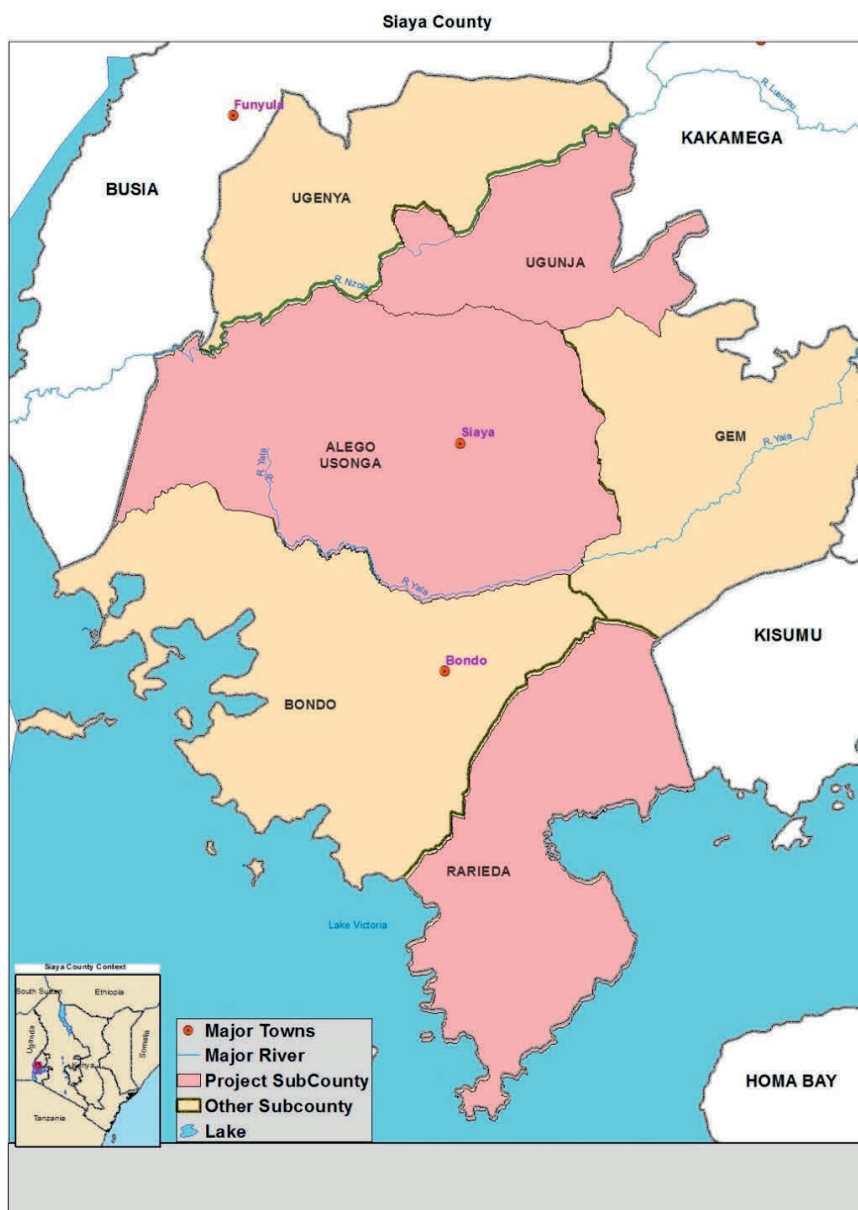
#### 4.4 Research Sites

In Siaya, I chose to work in three of the five sub-counties so as to have a better perspective of the lived experience of children than would be the case when studying one sub-county. The three sub-counties were Rarieda, Alego-Usonga and Ugunja. My selection of these sites was influenced by the fact that some of the organizations that were of interest for the research were located in these counties. Two organizations were located in Ugunja, one in Alego-Usonga and another one in Rarieda. However, in Ugunja I also elected to work in one location where children were not receiving any support from the non-state organizations that were also a focus of my research. While Rarieda is dry, Ugunja and Alego-Usonga have relatively adequate rainfall. Aspects like these were important in my research on children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. In addition, before the devolved system of government where Kenya operated with districts as administrative units other than counties, Rarieda was characterized as the poorest district.<sup>53</sup> Rarieda was also one of the districts benefiting from the Unconditional Cash Transfer Programme implemented by an NGO, GiveDirectly. This organization targeted communities with the greatest number of thatched houses and then selected beneficiaries randomly to receive a cash grant of 1000 US Dollars through their mobile phone (Haushofer and Shapiro 2016).

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<sup>53</sup> This is based on personal discussion with some research participants. Indeed, for some participants, the knowledge that I come from one of the driest counties in Kenya made them sometimes say that Rarieda is as poor as my district.

**Figure 4-2 : Map of Siaya, showing the research sites**



*Constructed by Margret Mwangi, GIS Expert Nairobi*

## 4.5 Selecting Organizations

To understand the lived experience of children, the NGOs that I continue calling organizations working with children in different sites provided one of the entry points for my research. I selected four main organizations, whose characteristics and identity I detail in Chapter Six of this thesis. The main criteria were that they were working with children and had been in existence for two years. I also sought to work with at least one organization in each of the three sub-counties I had selected for the research. The first one was the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Project (OVC Project),<sup>54</sup> a community-based organization that provided direct support to children in the form of school uniforms, school fees and other supplies, as well as strengthening caregiver's livelihood activities. The second organization, Children of Africa (COA), provided support to children in some sites but had phased out in the research sites. I worked with COA nevertheless, since comparability of findings was not a focus of my research and including the work of COA would enable me to have access to the unique perspectives and experience of children who had previously received support through COA's programmes. I also worked with Sponsorship Organization (SO) that worked with children mainly through a sponsorship model. In the course of interacting with SO, I discovered that another similar sponsorship organization (Mercy Project) was working within the same radius and supported children from the same community. In some cases, therefore, caregivers of children supported by SO were also taking care of children supported by the Mercy Project (MP). Children and caregivers also referred to both these organizations. Due to these overlaps, I choose to explore the discourse of MP as well.

As explained in Chapter One, the aim of working with these organizations was to get a perspective on their discourse on children's needs and rights and constructions of children's experience as well as children's agency.

## 4.6 The Research Team

The research team consisted of me and five research assistants from the research sites. In two of the sites, I worked with three Community Health

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<sup>54</sup> The names of the organizations are pseudonyms and they are meant to protect the identity of the organizations during the research.

Volunteers (CHVs) who were working with three of the NGOs selected for the research. After the first meeting with each of these assistants, I was conflicted about working with them because their role was to assist the organizations in the day-to-day monitoring and running of the projects and so they were in direct contact with children. CHV's therefore were likely to be seen as working for the organizations whose norms and practices I was also investigating. However, after further reflection during the initial encounters and the community visits, I decided that, overall, working with the CHVs would add value because they knew the children and the communities well and would make interacting with children easier. There were also more pragmatic reasons for working with CHVs. While investigating the discourse of interventions, I had earlier assumed that I would be having intensive interactions with project staff in the NGOs I had selected. These organizations work through volunteers and these volunteers delivered the organization's discourse (Green 2007).

In one site in Ugunja (around Mercy Project), I worked with a community informant who was not affiliated to any organization but whom I had met during one of the Focus Group Discussions. The informant had a child supported by the Mercy Project. In the second site in Ugunja, where I worked with children who were not receiving support from key organizations, I worked with a research assistant who was living with a foster family. His semi-biographical lived experience therefore also became part of the research.

The research assistants were actively engaged in the research through constantly informing me about the wellbeing of the children when I was back in Nairobi or when I was working in another site. They also provided me with important information about the culture in the research site. In addition, since I did not speak the Luo language largely spoken in the research sites, the assistants also worked as my translators. This was necessary for my interactions with people who could not speak Kiswahili, the national language in Kenya. These research assistants also enabled me to circumvent the power of the selected NGOs that I worked with, including their gatekeeping roles in communities. For example, initially I had relied on the staff of the organizations to help me book appointments with schools and beneficiary caregivers. In some cases, I would go to the field and find that people had not been mobilized.

## 4.7 Listening Softly to Children's Voice

In this section, I explain how I apprehended the voice of children by listening to it differently. Willemse (2007:23–24) called this type of listening 'listening against the grain'. This is listening that goes beyond hearing what one says, to being aware of the power differences between the researcher and the narrator and the discourses around which the narration is embedded. It also means listening to what is said, including the silences as well as listening to the subtexts. Listening against the grain also means acknowledging that knowledge is co-constructed during the process of a research encounter (ibid). Mitchell (2009:77–96) called this different type of listening 'hearing and listening with soft ears'. This means listening to nuances of voice and going beyond interpretation as well as listening to voice that is entangled with discourses. Lather (2007:89) called it 'priming one's ears differently' to hear even the unheard voice. Murris (2013:245) referred to 'removing metaphorical sticks from our ears' to hear the voice of children. Biehl & Locke (2010:318), when talking about the need to capture complicated experience, referred to it as 'in-depth listening and long-term engagement'.

While referencing these scholars and at the same time transcending them, I wanted to devise a language of my own while drawing on what had 'already been said' about listening to children differently (Foucault 1972:27). I call this nuanced listening to children's voice, 'listening softly'. In so doing, I bring to the discussion orientations that are not traditionally seen as listening but nevertheless help in apprehending the voice of children in its multiplicity. Such listening therefore goes beyond listening as a sensory event and becomes an orientation of the research that perceived voice as multiplicity and as emergent. I elaborate on this listening through various interlinked perspectives as detailed below.

First, listening softly was about the various ways of listening through which I obtained the subtle nuances of children's voice including 'whole body listening' (Kuntz and Presnall 2012:740). This meant that I was not only attentive to what children said but I was attentive to silence, body language and hesitations. I was also attentive to the way I listened to children, what I heard, and was introspective about what influenced what I heard from children. This included my own and other adult discourses and various processes of subjectivation. I was therefore aware that children's voice was often entangled with the voice of others, including my own voice as a researcher, as well as other discourses prevailing in the children's

contexts (James 2007, Spyrou 2011). I was also aware that children's voice is usually silenced by day-to-day representations, power and reality. Listening softly therefore also included apprehending a voice that emerged and was formed during the research encounter. This is because children also used the different encounters as sites for enacting their experience and thereby their voice.

Secondly, listening softly represents the specific rhizomatic methodological approach of different, slow, phased and emergent methods that enabled me to capture children's voice and reality. In listening softly through such methods, I was attentive to children's voice that manifested and unfolded in specific encounters with children, one encounter guiding the subsequent encounter. Such a sensibility was not aimed at triangulating voice but was an orientation and posture that acknowledged that voice is not just plural, but that it is a multiplicity and that voice does not always mean truth or represent experience (Mazzei and Jackson 2009:4).

Third, in terms of representation and in turning attention to the reader, listening softly is also about enabling the reader to hear this voice in its multiplicity and extends to the way I present this voice in this thesis including the use of diverse methods in my writing. These include the use of whole narratives, speech markers in conversations and laying emphasis on some words or pronouns as they were stressed during conversation, use of photos, my journals and diaries. It also includes my interpretations including my voice as a researcher as part of the multiplicity of children's voice, and cartographies of their experience. This is what Fels (2012:55) has also called 'performative writing'. Such a writing enables the reader to become part of the 'telling as it unfolds' as a co-performer, to hear the voice in its rawness and enables them to stop and listen softly.

Lastly, listening softly included not being too quick to hear (Law 2004:10) by developing a special relationship with the field, rethinking my assumptions and methods and moving tentatively in the field. This was about what I have called, after Deleuze and Guattari (1987:272–291), 'becoming minoritarian' with the field as I explain in Section 4.9.

In the following sections of this chapter, I do not provide a blue print on 'how to' or how I listened softly. Instead I confound the process of listening in research (Leafgren 2007:13) and offer signposts (Sellers and Honan 2007:152) on how I went about listening softly to children. To start us off, I explore how I went about positioning myself in the field differently and rethinking my earlier plans or became minoritarian with the field.

#### 4.8 Approaching the Field like a Rhizome: Becoming Minoritarian

In this section, I present my perspectives on how my prior planned research methodologies became vulnerable in the face of the reality of the lived poverty and vulnerability experience of children, dictating that I approach the field differently. Becoming minoritarian is a Deleuze and Guattarian concept that indicates a need to rethink one's position, previously held as dear, and to adopt new perspectives. It is an escape from the taken-for-granted and normalised thinking, leading to thinking otherwise and escaping from one's normalised thoughts and ideas (1987:272–291). Becoming minoritarian therefore represents the way I allowed myself to not only re-imagine the reality of children that I encountered and as it unfolded, but also to re-think my methods.

Even though I had worked on a research design to guide my research, I had started off my research with the assumption that I would use a series of methods and strategies that were criticized during the presentation of my research design for being too linear and incompatible with my rhizomatic approach. I had begun the research with coding and thematization as the end product and I was thinking of possible themes which were not apparent from my initial data. Moreover, during earlier research encounters, the diverse and disjointed realities of children that I encountered, were not lending themselves to thematization. Thus, in the first few weeks of being in the field, I felt insecure because it seemed like my methods were not producing new knowledge.

I therefore started reflecting on how to creatively use methods to enable me to grasp the contradictions and contingency of children's experience. (Re)-thinking these methods meant that I could still use the same methods but complicate them by being attuned to the specificities of each encounter with children (T'Anson 2013:110). What initially looked like insecurity became a pleasurable way of understanding the contradictions in children's lives. These complicating strategies meant that I worked with several encounters with each participating child and moved slowly or what Law (2004:10) called 'moving tentatively' in the field. In presenting an analogy of how to move tentatively in the field, Law (2004:10) appropriated Appelbaum's (1995) metaphor of a blind man who gropes around as he encounters novelty, but this means he takes longer in his walking. However, in this stopping and tentative movement, he is able to gain some sensibilities that a sighted person cannot have.



Becoming minoritarian with the field also meant re-thinking the way I was using cartography and the notions of spaces of children's lived experience. My research had two co-constituted perspectives, the representations or the discourses on children's experience on the one hand, and how this reality was enacted in everyday spaces on the other hand. Initially I had imagined that these two were separate dimensions of children's experience with representations 'contained' in the spaces of the local, global and the state, and the lived reality as lived separately by children in their everyday spaces. I had also initially hoped to phase these two aspects of my research and undertake a discourse analysis and then follow-up with an ethnographic research. In addition, I imagined that there would be a symbolic space, an interstice where the discourse and the lived experience meet. Finally, I expected that the lived experience would counter the representations.

While still imagining that there could be flows between spaces, I had initially approached cartography from a linear perspective. Further engagement with cartographic thinking from a Deleuzian perspective of rhizomatic mapping enabled me instead to map the experience of children as a rhizome and therefore entangled. I therefore took the orientation that representations of children's experience were happening in each of the spaces, the interventions, the state and the global spaces and that indeed children themselves and the caregivers in their day-to-day interactions were representing themselves and re-positioning themselves as well as others. In effect, I decided to explore the lived experience as an entanglement between discourses and other factors in children's immediate and broader contexts.

Becoming minoritarian with the field also meant rethinking my perspectives on differences between children who were receiving support and those who were not receiving support. In the Siaya context, where many organizations were providing support to vulnerable children, I discovered in my initial encounters that the distinctions between a supported and a non-supported child were not clear-cut. While some children were not enrolled in formal programmes of support, others were receiving a Cash Transfer for the Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) or school bursaries from the government and other stakeholders. These were not seen as mainstream charity support and so children receiving only this support but not from NGO's would characterize themselves as 'non sponsored', but for the objectives of this research, this was a kind of support. Some children



were therefore simultaneously supported by different NGO's benefitting from the cash transfer programme and/or receiving school bursaries from the government.

Some of the children whom I had assumed were not receiving support were either receiving support from an organization that was working in another sub-county, were getting school bursaries or had been placed on the waiting list by an organization supporting vulnerable children. The boundaries of supported and non-supported children even collapsed further because some children were receiving support from caregivers' self-help groups (informal social protection) or they were in a school that was receiving support in the form of a feeding programme from a well-wisher.

#### 4.9 Beyond Selecting Children to Encountering Children

Due to the cartographic nature of this research, I now present how I encountered children in the research site instead of calling this 'selection'. In some cases, I had thought about these encounters in advance but in other cases, I worked with children after learning about their experience from other people or after encountering them because of my being in the community.

The first category of children I worked with was children participating in child support organizations. These children were already externally defined as poor and vulnerable and therefore fitted the criteria for participating in my research. This is because one of the aims of the research was to understand the representations as well as the experience of children participating in programmes of support. Children in programmes were defined in different ways, including in terms of age but also in terms of criteria for child support. The legal age limit for a child in Kenya is eighteen. However, in the child support programmes there were 'children' up to twenty-four years because they were still enrolled in school as I will explain further in Chapter Eight. I worked with all these children as earlier stated in Chapter One. In the process of interacting with these children, I also encountered other children, for example through the households where children participating in organizations of support were located.

For the cash transfer programme for vulnerable children (CT-OVC) run by the government and that I explain elaborately in Chapter Eight, I had planned to select children from a site where none of the NGOs that participated in the research were working. This is because I wanted to explore the experience of children who were not affected by NGO

programmes. However, as earlier explained, the boundaries between children who were supported and those not supported were fleeting. Caregivers with children in programmes of support therefore also referred me to other children who were benefitting from the cash transfer programme in their neighbourhoods. Children in the cash transfer programme benefitted through their household and all children in the household below eighteen years were beneficiaries. Therefore, in several cases, all children in a specific household benefitting from the CT-OVC became part of the research encounters.

In addition, the NGOs that participated in the research supported children in various schools. For each of the organizations, I selected two schools where I interacted with the children. This was aimed at enabling me to get preliminary insights into the experience of the children and to identify children for in-depth encounters.

In this chapter, I do not explain the characteristics of the children that participated in my research, to avoid fixing their experience in advance and as an essence. Describing these children is part of their experience and is therefore data. I present this in Chapter Six.

I encountered many children directly and indirectly through their caregivers. In terms of tentative numbers, I worked with ninety children in depth by visiting and interacting with them several times throughout the research and with more than 200 children altogether in my various research encounters. For a perspective on the indicative numbers and preliminary characteristics of children who participated in the study, see Appendix Four.

#### 4.9.1 Consent, Privacy and Confidentiality

In line with accepted research practices, I sought consent from the caregivers first before I approached the children. Children indeed reported that the caregivers had already told them about the research. In each encounter I only proceeded after the child or the group of children had indicated verbally and before each session, I would explain to children the purpose of my research and ask them if they were willing to participate. I also encouraged children to opt out of the exercise when they felt uncomfortable or tired. I also explained that I would protect the information from children by using pseudonyms and that their photos would not be used without their permission and when used I would cover their faces.

In almost all cases children gave consent. In one instance, children participating in a programme of one of the NGOs refused to have their photo taken by me. This was because these were sponsored children, used to having their photos taken to give to donors. Such a refusal haunted me throughout the research, and I became more ethical with my camera. In some cases, even when I felt that I needed to take images of children to support my ideas, my camera sort of 'refused too' and I joined children through my own refusal to present their pain insensitively (Tuck and Yang 2014).

I have given each of the children who participated in this research a pseudonym to protect their identity. This was guided by the fact that these were children that I had judged as vulnerable and some of them were dependent on the caregivers as well as NGO's for support. Revealing their identity could therefore jeopardise them including their rights to privacy. In addition, some of the narratives and experience children shared were in my assessment deep (for example stories of the death of their parents, treatment by relatives as well as by NGO's). Keeping their identity concealed, including the areas they come from was therefore important. I however note that there could still be some ethnographic details that may reveal the identity of some of the participants and anonymizing may not have completely concealed identity. In response to this, in some cases I have tried to minimize the information I have given about the context of some of these children including concealing the names of the some of the local sites and also concealing the identity of the organizations some of them were working with as well as the schools they attended (see Surmiak 2018).

Initially I wanted to involve the children in selecting their own pseudonyms. However, this proved difficult and I selected the names myself. Initially I had used names I could remember in line with Luo cultural naming norms (according to time of birth, place of birth, or circumstance of birth and gender, or protective functions). In some cases, I have changed to use Western/Christian pseudonyms, because some of the children introduced themselves to me using their English names, even though in their day-to-day lives they used their Luo names. In addition, I was also aware of the argument by Fashina (2008:73) that, in the African context, names play a bigger role and 'they have souls' that can even intercede for the bearer. I therefore did not want to impose names that would not be meaningful to the children.

My use of pseudonyms to protect children was not without personal tensions. Children would always start by giving their name in the essay even though they had already written it at the top of the script. In my quest for protecting their identity, I have grappled with but not resolved the fact that their experience and narratives which are real, have been anonymized. At the end of the day, my judgements in terms of what is in the best interest of children have guided me.

#### 4.9.2 Caregivers as Research Participants

For children with whom I had in-depth interaction throughout the research, their caregivers— mostly women— automatically became part of the research too. Researching women mainly among caregivers was not blindness to gendered notions of care but because it was mostly women who were at home and are the ones that provide day to day care to children. It was also mainly women who were participating in child support organizations. I interacted with other caregivers through income-generating activities organized by different NGOs or self-help groups. In total, I interacted with fifty caregivers by visiting them recurrently and fifty others through one-off Focus Group Discussions. I obtained verbal consent from caregivers as I interacted with them. For caregivers who were supported by various organizations, I was careful not to look like I was using the power of the organizations to interact with the caregivers and so I introduced myself independently from the organizations.

#### 4.9.3 Teachers as Key Informants

Teachers participated in the research because they interact on a day-to-day basis with vulnerable children, especially in schools. I held discussions and had continuous interactions with eleven teachers from eight schools in the project sites. I also talked with two teachers from an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centre where I carried out research with very young children (aged five to eight years).

#### 4.9.4 Government and Project Leaders as Informants

In the four NGOs, I had discussions, shadowed or observed programme staff or community health workers. I worked with fifteen programme leaders at the local level. In addition to the main organizations that I selected, I also engaged with three programme leaders from other organizations

that were providing support to orphaned and vulnerable children in the neighbourhood. Thus, I encountered ten project staff from other organizations providing support to vulnerable children. To conceal the identity of these organizations too, which is also connected to the identity of the children, I have given them pseudonyms in the presentation of the data. I however note that in some cases, it is impossible to anonymize these organizations because I am still using information that may be revealing such as their reports (where I have also anonymised the author), information on their websites among others. I could not conceal every identifying and it would in some cases still be obvious which organization has the characteristics I describe in the thesis. I did not perceive the information that I share in this thesis as overly sensitive; nevertheless, I still decided to anonymize these organizations. This is because I am not able to predict future repercussions of exposing the identity of these organizations (see Saunders et al. 2015) for a discussion on challenges in anonymity)

I also had discussions with local leaders within the research sites. These were five Children Officers and two locational Administration Officers, known as Chiefs. Issues under discussion included the welfare of orphaned and vulnerable children, actions the government was taking to address poverty and other issues relevant to my research.

To get a perspective on how children's needs and rights were understood and interpreted at the state level, I had interactions with a range of people working at the state level on issues of social and child protection in Nairobi. These included:

- An official from the Social Protection Secretariat in Kenya
- An official working in the Cash Transfer Programme
- UNICEF staff in charge of child poverty
- A child poverty specialist in Save the Children, Kenya Office
- Staff from African Forum for Social Protection
- Staff from Plan Kenya
- Staff from the Sponsorship Project
- Staff from OVC Project (Head Office)

In addition, I am a member of *Utafiti Sera* – a community of practice on social protection in Kenya. During a meeting held in May 2016, I met several leaders of organizations working on issues of social protection in the

country. I also participated in a video documentary that was being filmed on social protection in Kenya where I shared some findings of my research.

#### 4.10 Methods as Messy and as an Assemblage

Drawing on Law (2004) and Lather (2010), I characterize the methods I used in investigating children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability as messy. Law (2004:2) saw messy reality as composed of realities that are multiple, slippery, changeable, and temporary. He argued that social science does not engage much with messy realities. Elden (2013:70) added that the lived experience is itself a messy reality and 'needs to be captured in ways that allow "messiness" and multidimensionality to enter into research practice'.

Initially I faced a methodological dilemma in analysing the lived experience of children, which was formed in part by the same discourses that I was investigating. Another dilemma and messiness emerged because this experience is predominantly captured through the voice of these children which in turn itself is messy too. This voice can draw on children's competence, agency, vulnerability, and dependence. It is located within adult relations of power (see also Elden 2013:78) and within a context of widespread poverty and vulnerability. Responding to these dilemmas meant that I came to use my methods differently and creatively. In capturing the messiness of children's voice, I was of the view that we should go beyond triangulation of perspectives and instead seek to reveal the nuances of such reality (Elden 2013). Pluralizing voice was therefore not enough and looking for voices that speak for themselves would not be enough either (Spyrou 2011). My methods also did not aim at testing the truth or veracity of the accounts by children. Instead, using diverse phased methods was a way of listening with 'soft ears' that could apprehend the subtle nuances and dimensions of children's voice (Lather 2007:8). These nuances also included contradictions and the way one voice was entangled with others including my own (Jackson 2003:706).

In addition, entering into the conceptual and ontological messiness of children's lived experience meant that I used methods that enabled children to tell about themselves without necessarily framing themselves as poor. For example, children did not see their experience as linear in our initial encounters. I had started by asking them to tell me about their experience. However, to demonstrate the messiness of their experience,

most of them wanted to know where to start. I allowed them to start anywhere and from any perspective, not just suffering and lack. Some children decided to start before they were born to show how their parents had expectations of a good life. Others shared about their then present circumstances. An example of the messiness of the experience of poverty came up in my first encounter with children when I asked Gabriel, who was living with his elderly grandmother, to tell me about his life. He described it through the metaphor: 'we are just like this' (discussion with Gabriel, 25 July 2016). Capturing his perspective of 'we are just like this' required methods that could capture these complex perspectives on poverty and vulnerability.

Based on the above, I applied these methods not just as simple steps in data collection but, guided by my rhizomatic approach, perceived these methods as an assemblage. According to Law (2004:14), method assemblage does not produce 'neat, definite, and well-tailored accounts'. Each successive encounter with participating children was therefore guided by previous encounters and a need for understanding the complex perspectives in their experience as they unfolded and without fixing it in advance. I now explain how this method assemblage enabled me to listen softly.

#### 4.10.1 Narrative Conversation Methods

I utilized narrative conversation methods with a range of research participants including children, caregivers, leaders of various programmes and government officials. The conversations were organized around the lived experience of poor and vulnerable children. Even though I had prepared conversation guidelines, I generally left the conversations unstructured to avoid imposing my own perspectives on children's experience. I therefore obtained cues from the responses provided by the research participants. Aware that 'children's experiences cannot be found on the surface' (Greene and Hill (2005:4) I also undertook repeated go-along discussions with prior identified children as they walked their way from school to their homes for lunch. Kusenbach (2003:463) noted that 'when undertaking go-along interviews [or what I have called conversations], the researcher accompanies the research participants in their natural contexts, and they ask questions and make observations about the experiences of the research participants'. This is also called a 'systematic hanging out'. I also engaged in go-along conversations with my research assistants and informants,



each day clarifying impressions about the community as well as observed practices.

**Figure 4-3 : Encountering Ayo**



*Maurice's photos*

#### 4.10.2 Photo Narratives

Photo narratives were useful in enabling me to capture the realities of children that could not be accessed using other methods. Johnsen et al. (2008:196) have noted that 'photographs act as tangible resources helping research participants tell a narrative about themselves and their everyday geographies'. A total of six children aged between twelve and seventeen years were involved in the photo narrative conversations and two of these were student mothers. I gave each one of them a camera for a period of one to two weeks. The photos were taken largely at home because cameras



were not allowed in school. Photos were sometimes a collaborative effort between members of the entire household.

The children took photos of everyday assets like a cow, a bicycle, a house, farming activities, each representing a different reality for children. The photographs also tended to depict key people providing care to the children. Examples included a picture of the grandmother, other children who were helping the grandmother, a friend to the foster mother, and other children who helped in undertaking diverse livelihood activities.

I discussed the photos with the children to ensure that the interpretation was theirs. I also followed up on other children mentioned in the photos or other insights as they emerged. For example, Ben (sixteen years old) represented the house where he was staying with his adoptive mother and the spatial arrangement of only a few old pieces of furniture, indicating his desire to have a better house. Purple's spatial depiction of her aunt's otherwise well-off house pointed to the good life in the adopted family where she had her own bedroom, in contrast to her own home where she did not have a separate bedroom. She also had a picture of a toilet and bathroom in the compound because in her mother's home, there was no toilet and they used a river as their bathroom.

The photo narratives helped me move beyond my own interpretation as the children gave different meanings to their photos than the ones I had imagined. For example, Cecilia (seventeen years old) who had taken a picture of her family's old house with two doors, said that the extra door enabled her to escape from being sexually abused by her cousin. I had been following up on Cecilia's experience of vulnerability under the hands of this cousin and the step-father as detailed in Chapter Six, but this revelation jolted my assumptions about what an old house would mean for a vulnerable and poor child beyond showing a degree of poverty. This also gave me 'other ways of looking[...] that may move beyond the mundane and the habitual' (Grosz 2006 in Garoian 2010:179). It opened my eyes to children's different ways of speaking and their voice as well as something in excess of my knowing about child poverty and vulnerability (Garoian 2010:181).

**Figure 4-4 : Cecilia's house with two doors***Cecilia's photos*

Ben on the other hand depicted the old abandoned house in which he used to live with his (now dead) mother and siblings. He wanted to represent it as a place of solace where he could reconnect with the memories. The house as depicted through the photo narrative was therefore not just a representation of poverty and vulnerability but also of agency.

These and other ways through which children challenged my assumptions is what Garoian (2010:184) called the 'prosthetic visuality' in art or research— and in this case the use of photos — where children's ways of seeing and representing their experience challenged stereotypical interpretations of their reality. The photos also sometimes depicted aspirations of children, and a sense of conviviality and hope in contrast to perspectives on the suffering of children. For example, three girls who participated took photos of themselves in a school uniform and also when donning their sports kits. They noted that they took the photos because they never thought they would be in school one day.

#### 4.10.3 Semi-Autobiographic Essays

My initial observations were that some children were not willing to talk face-to-face about their situation and especially about issues that were more personal such as the death of their caregivers. I therefore used essays because I perceived that, since I was not there during the essay-writing, they would be more free. I provided selected children with books or fools-caps and asked them to represent their experience in writing. I chose not to discuss individual essays but, in some cases, revisited some issues emerging from the essays in follow-up encounters instead. The essays also enabled children to perform their experience, communicate issues of the death of their parents relatively more comfortably, and/or to obtain a sense of catharsis from a painful experience.

In listening softly, the essays also provided an avenue for filling the silences that I observed in other methods like narrative conversations. I took up silences in essays in subsequent household observations as well, whatever direction the 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) took in the rhizomatic assemblage. Essays also enabled me to get a perspective on the silenced elements in children's voice as well as on the different processes of silencing.

For example, Otieno (eleven years old) noted in his essay that he and his brother slept in a house with a leaky roof. A few days earlier I had visited his grandmother and found out that she had a good house. During a subsequent narrative conversation with him, we discussed his perspectives on the leaky house within the context of his grandmother's good house and he was quiet about it. I later learned that children who were prepubescent or pubescent were not allowed to sleep in the same house with their caregivers if the caregivers were sexually active. This practice was further nuanced through the context of poverty where houses were small and did not have sleeping spaces for different family members. My research assistant had presented this practice as unquestionable and a given in Luo culture and had therefore told me that children could not talk about it. I only accessed the silenced perspectives through discussions with other informants. This practice emerged as a key source of vulnerability for many children and especially for girls in the research site. In Chapter Six I explain this practice in further detail.

#### 4.10.4 Creative Drawings

I carried out creative drawing activities with younger children who could not write essays, or others who felt that this method would help them talk about their issues better. Drawing also enabled children to say the ‘unsayable’ even on issues that young people were not allowed to speak about in normal conversations (Spyrou 2011:153). I took up the perspectives emerging from the drawings in follow-up discussions with children and other research participants. Children also spoke about themselves in the third person, thereby enabling them to share their experience without necessarily identifying themselves. For example, one of the young boys drew a picture of a boy all alone, gave the boy a name and noted that the problem was that the boy was living alone without his parents even though the mother was alive. This brought to the fore the issue of children labelled as ‘outsiders’, made vulnerable by cultural norms, that I had not thought about and that I discuss in depth in Chapter Six.

#### 4.10.5 Participant Diaries

In two research sites I asked some children who were part of the in-depth research encounters to volunteer to keep a diary about their day-to-day experience. The diaries were kept during the school time as well as during school holidays. A total of nine children kept a diary and I carried out participant checks through face-to-face conversations with the children involved. In the first round, these participants indicated routine activities like waking up in the morning, going to school, and what they did (moment by moment) without reflecting on these experiences. With time, the participants became more introspective though, and they included the types of food they ate, what they felt about the times they did not have food, going to the farm, looking after cows or participation in activities to eke a living.

#### 4.10.6 Bringing the ‘Outside World’ as Data

In going beyond the linear knowledge production in research and in line with my rhizomatic approach, I brought data that was not traditional to the analysis. I was inspired by St. Pierre (1997:184) that we need to bring the ‘outside into our research projects’ or what she called ‘seeking the Other’ because such inquiry may enable a different mapping of issues under investigation. Therefore, I have used data that I obtained from people

outside my research in my analysis and the writing process. For example, I have used is what St. Pierre called 'response data' (ibid) or data obtained from others. In giving my data a contextual account, the rhizo-analysis involved checking some of my findings with different research participants and informants as well as crosschecking my interpretations of the local language. For example, I checked various terms used in English, such as 'wife inheritance', for their local equivalents. I discovered that, in some cases, this term had been misappropriated as wife inheritance but there were local variants of this term and how it has evolved over time. In this way I avoided fixing meanings through the dominant language or appropriating local knowledge. I also brought in data obtained from cultural historians and linguistic insiders as I clarified several issues that emerged during my research.

I have also utilized perspectives that I obtained from peer reviewers during the processes of publication of the research outcomes as well as during the conferences and seminars where I presented my work during the process of writing this dissertation. I also obtained valuable feedback when I engaged with others through my blogs about the research or through what I have called 'emotional activism' for support to children that I worked with. Such response data was not a form of weakness or insecurity, nor is it aimed at self-lauding. As St Pierre (1997:184) argued, it was a way of avoiding a partial representation of the experience of children and could also be seen as enhancing the rhizomatic rigour of the research (Lather 1993:680).

#### 4.10.7 Diffractive Journals/Diaries

My writing after each day was a site of further engagement with the data. I kept a journal record of my impressions during the day and the journal emerged from my reading of the data collected each day. In addition to helping me recount the events of that particular day, the journals helped me to focus on future thoughts pertaining to the research.

The diaries were also a way of mapping how I was connected with each of the children and the realities I encountered in the field and were a way of bringing my reflections on the margins to the centre of the analysis (Dalglish 2016:94, Reynolds 2014b:137). In 'listening softly', my journals provided spaces for recording my thoughts and impressions, which I also exposed to further scrutiny in subsequent encounters or visits. For example, my diary about Pius (thirteen years old) who was HIV positive and

who refused to grant me an interview, indicates how I went about listening softly through my diffractive diary:

We have been waiting at Pius' home for almost an hour and he did not show up even after his father and mother sent for him. We met him on the way and as we stopped to greet him, he walked on. My research assistant said that the mother thought Pius was unhappy with his HIV status. I remembered our conversation earlier in the month where the mother and the research assistant had said that Pius goes for ARV drugs on his own and was living positively. The research assistant had a feeling that Pius refused (refused ... the first refusal in my research I should note) the interview because he thought we would talk about his HIV status. A few days before this, he had asked his mother to explain to him how he got the disease and why he was not told earlier. Did something escape me as the research assistant and his mother talked in low tones earlier in Luo, when I felt abandoned on the uncomfortable wooden bench? Or was there a discordance between what adults say and what children say? Could it be possible that his mother's story of Pius 'being at home with HIV' was just a reaction to my presence as a researcher? Beyond interpretation, how can I apprehend this 'messy voice' that includes Pius' refusal and the silence and the mumbled conversation between his mother and the research assistant earlier. Why were they sighing and avoiding eye contact with me? Is this even silence or a 'noiseless voice' (Mazzei 2009:49)? As a non-Luo speaker, an outsider in this instance, an adult, and an ethical researcher who does not want to ask sensitive questions, could this then be a 'voice in the crack' that I should just let to escape me (Mazzei, 2009:48)? Should I visit the mother again or Pius to 'probe for deep-seated meaning' (ibid:49) of this refusal or should I 'redefine what it means to hear and [...] listen' (ibid:49) or children's right to be heard? And also to accept refusal, body language, exclusion through local language and others not as silence but voice? (Personal diffractive musings, 8 November 2016).

Diffractive diaries were also important aspects of preliminary analysis. Through my personal dialogue and by reading diverse data and journaling about it, I was able to start seeing lines of flight in the form of children's



agency as and their living rights as well as lines of articulation in the form of the challenges that children faced each day (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

My diaries sometimes had a larger political role and were part of my research activism where I blogged about the plight of children in Siaya. Through such activism, I was also inviting just solidarities for children of Kenya and Siaya in particular, by inviting others to come together to uphold the rights of children. In doing this, I shared Reynolds' (2014:131) perspectives that 'theorizing is not a neutral practice and can be part of "justice doing"'. Therefore, I was not just interested in the truth about child poverty and vulnerability by listening to children and in giving them a platform to exercise their right to participation, but in justice too.

#### 4.11 Documentation and Transcription

In each meeting with participants, as well as during my observations and my general observations *in situ*, I also took notes about what was happening. Personal notes were my first step towards a diffractive reading and analysis of data. My personal notes, for example, were opportunities for 'listening softly' through 'whole body listening' (Presnall 2012:740), where I noted the silences, the absences in the voice as well as in the composites of the research participants and body language as the conversations went along. For example, I took note of the laughter, jokes and metaphors that children and caregivers employed in our interactions, and of the sighing by caregivers when they spoke about the experience of children in these sites. I took note of how caregivers talked about the death of their children or relatives, experience of trauma and the silences around it. I also took notes of the in-situ discussions as well as impressions as I traversed the communities and interacted with children and caregivers. My notes, like my diaries, were also a site for noting what more needed to be researched.

After obtaining explicit verbal permission from participants, including children and their caregivers, I recorded a considerable number of conversations with children and caregivers as well as other participants involved in the support programmes. I then listened to the recordings each evening or within a few days where possible. This was to ensure that I was still engaged with the research experience but also to enable me to remember the feelings, my embodiment as well as interactions during these encounters. Listening softly meant that I had side impressions on how I was feeling when I listened to the recordings. In this way, my feelings and embodiment became part of theorizing children's experience. Sometimes I

noted my fears, together with the children, about an uncertain future. Sometimes it was their positive feelings about a better future, sometimes I wrote about my anger about the children's situation, placed within the context of their rights. Listening softly while I transcribed was therefore a way of bringing myself into the research as well.

Data transcription was also a method of analysing the data and identifying areas for future research. In listening softly, I established the silences in the conversations as well as any diacritical markers (like hesitations, sighing, breaks, tonal variations) all of which had specific meanings in specific contexts of the conversations. These conversational aspects also proved useful in helping me grasp diverse voice by not only interpreting the silences but also researching silences during subsequent encounters.

#### 4.12 Data Analysis Beyond Coding

As I explained earlier and in keeping with the rhizomatic approach, data analysis was a continuous process that started as soon as the research process commenced. Deleuze and Guattari (1987:9) noted that rhizo-analysis takes place throughout. This was confirmed by Sellers (2015:10) who argued that, in rhizo-analysis 'there remains an on-going intermingling of data, methodology and analysis in processes of theorizing the literature and practicing the theory.' Indeed, data collection did not end because I reached a saturation point since the perspectives of children were dynamic. Even in the process of writing up the research, my connections in the field indicated that the experience of children was changing with unpredictable mobilities in the circumstances of children. I incorporated these perspectives in representing the experience of children. This is in line with my cartographic thinking that emphasizes the fluidity and incompleteness of children's accounts of lived experience.

I did not code the data to reveal emergent themes. Instead I did a diffractive analysis (Barad 2007, Mazzei 2014:743, Tanguchi 2012). According to Barad (2007:25), diffraction implies reading insights through each other to obtain nuances and see differences. Thus, instead of analysing my data against the theoretical frameworks, I read the data through the theory and the theory through the data. This analysis was meant to diffract or open up more diverse perspectives (Jackson and Mazzei 2012: ix). This is what Mazzei (2014:743), following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), called the process of 'plugging in'. This meant that data pushed me to work through theory to explain it and that theory also enabled me to look up data and



examine how both were related. The analysis was therefore fluid and, without layering different perspectives, I was attentive to how each theoretical framework would enable me to bring out new perspectives in the experience of children. This was consistent with the point made by authors such as St. Pierre and Jackson (2014:717) and Mazzei (2014:743) that diffractive analysis is not linear but rhizomatic and that diffractive analysis leads to new knowledge. This is also what in my analysis I refer to as using a different theory to bring to the fore perspectives that 'exceed' those brought about by another theory. This does not mean that the perspectives and analysis through the earlier theory are not valid. What it means is that theories complement each other in complex ways, or what Barad (2007) has termed as bringing to the fore entangled and quantum differences in perspectives and in the end producing findings and reality as diffracted.

Seen this way, in my presentation, in some cases, several scenarios are offered as possible cartographies of children's experience. In each account, and in line with cartographic thinking, I also made connections about the entangled and multiplicity of factors and social relational perspectives in their lived reality. Thus, instead of aggregating children's experience around specific themes I identified aspects around which data and theory cohered. Like Mazzei and Jackson (2012), this was enabled by my asking diffractive questions instead of condensing the experience of children. For example, in my analysis I asked myself the following questions: What is children's experience in this text/encounter? Does this experience relate to other children? Which children are being talked about or talking, and what is their voice? How do these discourses connect to other discourse? Do these subjectivities, experience and realities cohere around anything or are they contingent for each child?

As part of the continuous diffractive analysis, I also participated in an embodied encounter where my thoughts and emotions acted as data and points of analysis throughout the research process. For example, I took note of diverse metaphors as I traversed the field and thought about them in the writing of my journals and used them to guide the process of data analysis. Phrases and metaphors used by children and caregivers like 'sponsors as pen pals' and referring to writing letters to sponsors as 'court-ning them', or 'departing children' from programmes instead of exiting or graduating, all provided preliminary points of analysis for the research. In reflecting on these metaphors, my thoughts started cohering around specific experience of children. In the end, such analysis produced a messy

text and data (Fels 2009, Lather 2007, Law 2004) that loosely cohered around specific ideas of children's lived experience as well as specific plateaus and spaces that are important for the research.

### 4.13 Reflexivity as Ontological: Ethics as Diffracted and Rhizomatic

Reflexivity is seen as a continuous awareness during research that interrogates the process of knowledge production and makes it visible to scrutiny. It is geared towards ensuring validity of research (Pillow 2003). In recent years, there has been a critique of reflexivity though. Some authors have argued that reflexivity does not engage with power and that it is too introspective. Reflexivity has been critiqued for the assumption that a researcher can see the world from far or can be detached from the reality (s)he is studying and see the objects of study as fixed rather than related (Barad 2007:30, Davies 2014:734). Reflexivity has also been critiqued for perceiving the spoken voice as representing the truth (see Haraway 1997).

Pillow (2003:192) argued that we need a reflexivity of discomfort. This is a reflexivity that goes beyond a confession of our innocent practices or honesty in research to a reflexivity that disrupts and questions our research practices—including failure of our research practices. Uncomfortable reflexivity goes beyond the use of better methods in research to perspectives on how we can be more accountable to people as we do our research (ibid:193). In presenting a small window into some of these reflexivities, I embed them in Deleuzo Guattarian thinking by presenting my entanglement in the research. Barlot and others (2017:531) argued that: 'conceptualizing the researcher as embedded within the rhizomatic assemblage, enables an analysis of the ethical complexities of research that go beyond reflexivity'. Such reflexivity that questions what we know and how we know, is not just about the researcher but also engages the readers to question the ways of knowing and assumptions that accompany the reading of a text. In the next sections, I present two examples of how I encountered expectations by children as well as pain, suffering and death to demonstrate these uncomfortable reflexivities. I also demonstrate how I was already folded in the research (Reynolds 2014).

#### 4.13.1 Vernaculars of Expectation as Data

The research into children's lived experience, even though in some cases pleasant, was also an entanglement with suffering by children and their

families. Many times, I felt helpless in the face of the needs of these children and often times this was emotionally draining. While perceiving myself as an insider, the community and children still expected me to provide support to them. I was careful not to label this as raised expectations and instead saw it as part of the cartographies of children's experience. There were times when I had to buy food for the children and families who were evidently hungry, even during our discussions. When I did not buy food, the guilt of getting the stories of vulnerable children with nothing to give at least in the immediate moment was palpable in most encounters with children and their families.

Even though my research was anchored in repeated encounters, sometimes I sensed that in some cases the caregivers and the children might have thought I was coming back because I wanted to support them. I therefore engaged in the labour of explaining whilst at the same time being sensitive to the needs of the children. This presented further quandaries because I sometimes failed to do important follow-up for fear of raising expectations and because I sensed children thought I was out to support them. I did not dismiss this data as lacking integrity and instead, I produced several readings of these expectations. For example, the fact that there were several organizations providing support may indicate that these children had been subjectified to present a 'suffering experience' so as to gain material support.

Cheney (2007:69), who followed Ennew (1990), noted that 'the gaunt and the fly covered face' (meaning the suffering of African children) acts as a basis for fundraising for programmes. She also added that 'children have to conform to these international symbols of want and deprivation'. While such a perception was indeed plausible, resting at the interpretation that these children were just tapping into discourses of vulnerability (Cheney 2017:6), or conforming to the language of humanitarian organizations (Cheney 2017:39), would fail to go far enough in my analysis. Instead, such encounters with expectations activated a different 'line of flight' in my thoughts as I sensed together with the children and their families the suffering within the context of a lack of alternative support as well as the absence of the state.

By analysing their suffering narratives differently, I assessed the children as genuinely needy and as claiming their rights to a good life just like everyone else. Indeed, in some cases, children placed their expectations in terms of possible reciprocity in the future. Aoko's essay about her

experience was indicative: 'I don't have a uniform, shoes, sweater and I have a sickness called Asthma. So, buy for me if you can and if you help me, when I grow up, I will remember you and your helper [my research assistant]' (Aoko's essay). These vernaculars of expectations cannot just be dismissed as performance as it has been argued in dominant literature that critiques appeals for help from children in humanitarian organizations (See Chouliaraki (2016) and Fassin (2012) for a perspective on suffering as a performance).

#### 4.13.2 Diffracted Intimacies with Pain as Data

In this section, I provide a perspective on how I engaged with the pain and suffering that was represented by children. I go beyond reporting on pain and provide a perspective on how pain and suffering became data. The narratives by children were emotionally difficult. For example, the thought of children saying that they sleep without food and smile about it because they hoped this would one day pass after they finish school was painful and numbing to my imagination. I also diffracted these thoughts with their everyday narrated experiences within an education system that in my view accentuated their poverty and vulnerability and did not provide a promise for their imagined 'one day'. Children tended to use various expressive descriptors for the pain of being orphaned or a needy child. These are some of the relevant narratives by children, as extracted from their essays:

Joash (nine years old): At midnight that was the day that my father died all of us cried and people came out to see what was going on, we buried our father near our house.

Naomi (twelve years old): My father died on 27 April 2015. He left my mother with a young baby. He left her without anything that she can use to pay for my school fees.

Evans (twelve years old): When I was in class two, my mother started feeling unwell until she died. My mother's sister took me because my two parents had kicked the bucket (died).

Caregiver (22 July 2016): My grandchildren told their neighbour's children, one day your father will die like our father died and you

will sleep hungry like us. I wish I had something (food) to give them so they would not say such things.

Through these metaphors and expressions, children were inviting me to connect with their pain. I also encountered the death of two children who were part of the field research. In the first case, I took Rod (a seventeen-year-old boy who was supported by the Sponsorship Project) to hospital and he died two days later. This was after I had already been mobilizing people to donate blood for him through social media. As an embodied researcher, I reflected on how I was told over and over again by the social worker that his death could have been averted and how my appeal for support for Rod might have come too late. It also revealed how those accountable for children's rights might also come too late for them.

His death, however, was not just an emotional encounter but was part of what I call 'uncomfortable data' and the cartographies of children's experience that I was interested in. The assemblage of issues that emerged through Rod's death included among others: his material situation and lack, his 'refusal' to seek health care due to his religion that forbade seeking secular treatment, and social relations of lack of support by his extended family. Other elements were subjectivation through the support he was receiving from the project, with the social worker saying that Rod was not obeying programmes rules. In addition, at the time of his death, the doctors were on strike in public hospitals in Kenya and so he could not get emergency care and he had to be moved to different hospitals. Another node was the systems of accountability within the organization that supported him because even hiring a car to take him to the hospital for emergency care just before he died had to be authorized from the head office of the organization in Nairobi, thereby losing valuable time.

Talking and writing about the death of Rod in my research has a rationale. It makes us aware that the death of poor and vulnerable children does not just take the hours it took between the time I met Rod in his deathbed and the span of forty-eight hours when he died. Death can instead take 'months, years and generations' (Page 2017:21). Rod's death and the pain it brought even to me went beyond my wailing when I was told 'he has gone' (conversation with project leader Sponsorship Project, 13 December 2016).

Ben's (sixteen years old) cartography of his mother's death, recorded in his essay, similarly chronicled in a zig-zag way the pain of being an

orphaned child and encountering the death of a parent. He narrated how they moved to town after the death of their father and the way his mother became weaker and weaker. Ben even held an imaginary dialogue with me through his essay: 'surely, can you put your hope in such a person' (Ben's essay). This was a phrase loaded with issues that I may never comprehend. He continued to explain how he eventually heard people wailing, announcing the death of his mother. The essay enabled him to enact his experience and perform not only his grief, long bottled, but also his childhood. Ben completed the mourning through his essay by saying 'alas! my lovely mother had died' (Ben's essay).

In the Luo culture, when somebody dies, people send a signal by wailing to alert others in the community. As they wail, they also talk endearingly about the person and hold a dialogue as if the person were alive. In most cases, children do not mourn this way. These are the stories we rarely hear because we do not want to sensationalise pain or to be seen to be addicted to the wound or suffering of children (W. Brown 1996).

As a way of connecting to children's experience, I could not move away from sharing in their pain as I imagined what they went through each day. This 'emotional data', like that of St. Pierre (1997:180) was sometimes overwhelming and almost threatened my research. My anger towards the pain of children inadvertently made me start shaking my head and affected me for long even when I wrote up this research. On many days I took breaks in between research to debrief. These ways of 'avoiding being pricked' by the pain of children and at the same time allowing myself to be 'pricked' (Page 2017:23) have existed side by side during this research. Like St. Pierre (1997:181), I found my own validity as I simultaneously cried, shook my head, theorized and engaged in social media activism on children's experience. Such activism was my way of enabling children's pain and situation to enter politics and get people to reflect on the needs and rights of children. Ahmed (2004:122) claimed that 'what claims of pain are doing must be linked in some way to what pain does to bodies that experience pain'.

Like Page (2017:22) however, I sometimes experienced a failure to comprehend or even to know how to respond or react and I continued researching and writing vulnerably. I also located this emotional engagement with pain of children within my own biography. I listened and reacted as a fellow woman to caregivers or as a mother. The pain of my growing up in a perpetually drought-stricken and one of the poorest

districts in Kenya, were all important elements in my activism and anger against children's poverty and suffering.

Ahmed (2004) engaged with W. Brown's (1996) argument of the wounded attachments to pain where Brown's meant that we should not use suffering to legitimize social justice causes like feminism (and in my case solidarity with children). However, in addition she argued that we should not also forget the historical injustices that are implicated in this wounding. Instead, she averred that we should strive to know how wounding happens in the first place (Ahmed 2004:173–174). In the next chapter I start off the process of finding this out by providing perspectives on the cramped spaces of caregiving.





# 5

## Caring for Children in Cramped Spaces

### 5.1 Introduction

*Since adults are poor, children are also poor* (FGD with caregivers, 16 June 2016).

In this chapter I start presenting the findings of the ethnographic component of the research. I offer a perspective on the context and the lived experience of caregivers of children in Siaya, and on how they negotiate the day-to-day realities of child caregiving. These include caring in the context of insecure livelihoods, food insecurity and the gendered relations and norms around childcare. I also explore how caregiving is located within discourses in community, non-state and state protection systems.

I characterize caring for children under these difficult circumstances, as caregiving in ‘cramped spaces’ and through ‘choked passages’ (Biehl and Locke 2010:323, Rose 2004:280). Deleuze argued that creation takes place at the difficult places of choked passages:

We have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities [...] Creation takes place in choked passages. [...] A creator who isn’t grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator is someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities (Deleuze 1995:133)

Rose (2004:280) characterized cramped/choked spaces as an assemblage of difficult contexts where ‘relations [are] intolerable, where movement is impossible, where change is blocked, and voice is strangled’. However, he argued that these choked passages enable people (and caregivers in this case), to be creative and to devise strategies to overcome them. I therefore use the notion of cramped space to explore how caregivers faced with difficult living conditions struggle against odds to overcome day-to-day

challenges in caregiving. This account will offer an important context for understanding children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Siaya, that will be presented in subsequent chapters.

While these kinds of strategies have been referred to as coping strategies in the dominant poverty literature, I see them as part of the 'sense of becoming' that was characterized by Deleuze (1995:170) as 'individual and collective struggles that people undertake to come to terms with events and intolerable conditions and to shake loose, to whatever degree possible, from determinants and definitions'. In engaging with and making sense of these impossibilities, people are also enacting minority politics and creating spaces for action (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, Rose 2004:280). I argue that both the rhizomatic interactions within this context and how caregivers negotiate within this space influence their experience of childcare.

## 5.2 HIV/AIDS and Death as a defining Context of Caregiving in Siaya

*There is a lot of death in this community, leaving children without support and this is poverty* (FGD with caregivers, 8 August 2016).

As earlier noted, Siaya shows a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, most of the caregivers I encountered were taking care of children who had been orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and some of them were suffering from HIV/AIDS. There were also cases of death of parents of the children I worked with that were not related to HIV/AIDS. Many houses were left abandoned after the death of a parent and the landscape was dotted by graves. For example, when I asked Cecilia's grandmother (sixty-two years) about the whereabouts of her children she told me 'they are out there' (pointing to the nearby graveyard), 'the disease [HIV/AIDS] killed them' (conversation with caregiver, 22 September 2016).

In some cases, children constantly discussed death, as something normal. For example, in one short discussion Oketch (twenty years old) mentioned death nine times when talking about family members who were important to him and who would have provided him support after the death of his parents (conversation with Oketch, 20 July 2016). In my day-to-day encounters in Siaya I learned that, because death was so pervasive in the communities involved, there was also a fatalistic acceptance of its inevitability. This was demonstrated in common phrase after the death of a loved one '*tho en dalaji*' or 'death is the (ancestral) home of everybody

that we must all return to'. Children also described themselves as orphans and attributed the difficulties they experienced to the death of their parents as exemplified by the narrative of Pretty (twelve years old): 'To make matters worse, my father and mother died the following year. My second last brother died when I was four. Luckily enough we were taken in by my grandmother who was a slave [farm hand] to a peasant farmer' (Pretty's essay).

Many of the children I worked with were cared for by widows. Being a widow emerged as one of the cramped spaces of caregiving. The women involved were struggling to provide for the children, with little support from the state or from community structures. For example, Achieng (who was fifty-six years old and suffering from HIV/AIDS) was taking care of three children who were orphaned. She noted that she was doing it alone, even though one time the community helped construct a house for her older son. Her older children were also not providing her with support which she noted as follows: 'I have never worn a dress bought by any of my children' (discussion with caregiver, 27 July 2016).

Within the context of constrained social service provisioning including lack of support to the elderly in the form of a social pension scheme, people invest in children's education and care in the expectation that they would reciprocate the care and support once they start working. This is part of the informal safety nets in contexts where there is state incapacity. Older children support their parents by way of reciprocity for the support the caregivers provided to these children. However, this did not happen for Achieng because her daughter was working as a domestic worker and her older son did not have a stable livelihood. This was the same for Gabriel's caregiver who did not receive any support from the community or from the state. For example, when I asked her who else was helping her in supporting Gabriel, she threw her hands up in despair and said that nobody helped them and even the state was absent. Indeed, during one of my visits to her homestead just before Christmas, she noted that she did not have anybody to support her to celebrate Christmas because she did not have children of her own: 'When I saw you, I saw my help from God, [or an angel], you are the daughter I never had' (conversation with Gabriel's caregiver, 13 December 2016).

Anybody who showed interest in such caregivers therefore became an 'angel'. The language of angel in this case, within the context of the death of relatives who could have helped, was redemptive. One could also see

this as a yearning for emancipation from the difficult present and I also read this as referring to the utopian arrival of help for caregivers. These semiotics of faith and hope emerged as part of the cartographies of caregiver-experience, within the context of death through HIV/AIDS. Indeed, in several other instances, the caregivers noted that in the context of their poverty they were waiting for God to see them through their different circumstances. The angel discourse also indicted the state, the ultimate duty bearer who in these cases seemed to have reneged on its responsibility

### 5.3 Insecure Livelihoods as the Context of Caregiving

For many people in Siaya the context of livelihoods can be characterized as insecure. One of the most common livelihoods of the caregivers I interacted with was selling charcoal to other community members, as fuel for cooking. Those involved in this trade explained that it was a precarious form of livelihood since it did not bring in a secure income. Discussions with a widowed caregiver who was taking care of her six grandchildren revealed this as follows:

I burn charcoal and I get the trees from that hill. [Points to a container full of charcoal at the corner and says they are like sticks]. Selling that has taken me two weeks because we only sell when it rains and when people cook indoor. It becomes hard to sell over school holidays because then many caregivers sell charcoal with their children (conversation with a caregiver, 14 December 2018).

Her neighbour, another widowed caregiver who also sold charcoal to support her children, noted that in a week she could sell charcoal worth 500 shilling (about 5 Euros). Burning charcoal as a mainstay should also be understood from the perspective that most of houses in the research site were small and cooking was carried out outdoors using wood fuel. During the rainy season it was not possible to cook outside and cooking with charcoal was done inside the house. However, when I visited, I noted in some cases that caregivers who could not afford charcoal were cooking inside their main house with the smoke from firewood posing a danger to their children. A World Health Organization report (2018:1) revealed that in 2016, it was estimated that air pollution caused '4.2 million premature deaths; of these, almost 300 000 were children under the age of 5 years'

The report also revealed that exposure to air pollution is correlated with poverty within families that are poor and unable to maintain clean air for themselves and households due to their reliance on polluting agents for fuel among others (ibid:11).

Within the context of deforestation and environmental degradation, some of the caregivers reported challenges with the livelihood strategy of selling charcoal and were forced to use very small trees to make charcoal: 'we can use anything for charcoal, even this tree (pointing to a small stump) can be charcoal' (conversation with caregiver, 25 July 2016). When I asked the caregivers about the possibility of diminishing forest cover through charcoal burning, their reaction demonstrated the entanglement between poverty, apathy and environmental destruction because they noted that God would provide them with a way out of their situation (FGD with caregivers, 25 July 2016).

Other caregivers engaged in small-scale activities like selling vegetables by the roadside and/or other basic commodities like milk. The grandmother to Mary and Aaron (nine and eleven years old respectively), who was disabled, sold sim-sim (sesame) seeds in the local market and described the difficulties of this task. She bought the sim-sim on credit from a shopkeeper and paid back after selling. Aaron helped in selling the sim-sim after school on market days but the daily profit of 40-euro cents each day was not enough to sustain the three of them. His diaries showed the difficulties of looking for buyers, something he said affected his schooling.

Blessing's aunt sold *mandazi* (buns) by the roadside and with the proceeds she supported her three young children plus Blessing (five years old), whom she was fostering. She noted: 'I have seven children of my own. My smaller children are four. I sell *mandazi* by the roadside. With that small trade, I take care of my children' (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016). Each bun cost about 5 shillings (5-euro cents) and the children reported that they would eat a *mandazi* bought from the roadside as lunch or dinner. Selling these buns by the roadside was common in this community because some caregivers could not afford three meals a day. Other wares that caregivers sold by the roadside included mats, ropes, sugarcane and the like. These formed quite insecure livelihood strategies for them though.

Selling sugarcane was the main income earning activity for Cecilia's grandmother (sixty-seven years old) and other caregivers. This involved travelling for approximately three hours to a farm where she bought the

sugarcane and then to the small market to sell. Because she was poorly, sometimes she was assisted by Cecilia (sixteen years old) in procuring as well as selling the sugarcane. Cecilia attested to the vulnerability and difficulties of such a livelihood in the diaries that she kept for a month over the school holiday. Cecilia sometimes referenced selling sugarcane as ‘our usual situation’ because that was what preoccupied her most of her time when schools were closed. She noted that she shared the difficulties, or what she called ‘hardship’, of selling sugarcane with her *dani* (grandmother) when they sometimes went to sell together. Some days she noted that they had to bring the sugarcane home because there were no customers. In connecting the vulnerable livelihood of sugarcane to poverty in the community, in her diaries Cecilia noted her conversations with other market vendors on how the community members were buying on credit but not paying back. Within the context of such a vulnerable livelihood, Cecilia and her grandmother, like many other caregivers, did not have assets that could be sold for their children’s upkeep. They owned only one cow to which Cecilia referred as ‘our lovely cow’ in her diaries.

It was not only Cecilia’s grandmother who had to rely on her foster child to eke out a living. Several other caregivers, including Allister’s mother (who was blind and whose livelihood was selling paraffin) were in the same situation. She said she could not deal with money due to her blindness and so Allister sold paraffin in the evening after school each day (conversation with caregiver, 13 September 2016). Selling only in the evening should be understood from the context that, because livelihoods for many other people in the community were also vulnerable, household items were bought in small quantities and on a daily basis. Several children revealed this through their diaries as well when describing the daily motions of going to the market to buy food or vegetables or other items each day after school.

The sensibility of buying small portions of commodities depending on how much cash one has, commonly termed as *kadogo* (small) economy,<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The *kadogo* economy as a survivalist approach was popularized in Kenya in the 1990s when prices of most commodities became unaffordable to the masses and the sellers started buying and repackaging commodities in smaller quantities for sale, especially in urban slums. With time, the *kadogo* economy has permeated every marginal space in Kenya, including the opportunity to buy essential items

is a strategy that traders and consumers employ to come to terms with the constraints in the economy. But most importantly, it is the way the poor get by (Mukeni 2018:28). Indeed, in some cases when I stopped by the village shops to buy sugar for caregivers, I had to specify the quantity and not take for granted that the sugar was packed in kilograms.

Yet other caregivers engaged in small-scale livelihood activities like making bricks for construction to sell within the community. However, they noted that such a livelihood was demand-driven and so there were often no opportunities to sell the bricks. When there was nothing for the caregivers to sell, most of them reported that they turned to their labour as their main asset, working on farms in exchange for money or food. However, Nyasimi et al. (2007:56) noted that, while the Luo community may be relying on their labour on other people's farms to earn a living within the context of poverty, that form of survival is reliant on the availability of rural wage work which is not a sustainable resource. It was even more unsustainable in my research communities because most of the wage activities on the farms were hampered by the seasonality of food crop farming and unreliable rainfall. Working in agricultural labour is also associated with poverty because those working on other people's farms tend to neglect their own farms (World Food Programme 2016:6).

These wage and non-waged livelihood strategies of caregivers were intricately entangled with the wellbeing of their children and in many cases introducing further vulnerabilities for children. This was not only because of their meagre returns, but also because they relied largely on children's labour. Through their diaries and essays children also noted how they went about helping their caregivers as farm hands. Sometimes, however, children noted that the caregivers were not paid for their services. For example, twelve-year-old Naomi revealed through her essay that: 'after doing that contract, that person refuses to give you money and tells you that you are poor and that is why he can't give you money. Sometimes you and your family even stay hungry for two days' (Naomi's essay). Other children also noted that some of their caregivers worked as domestic servants. In Rarieda, a considerable group of children noted that their caregivers mined gold dust, a very vulnerable type of livelihood in terms of health for the

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like sugar and cooking oil by the spoonful especially in rural areas and urban slums.



miners also due to its unprotected nature (FGDs with children, 29 June 2016).

Within the context of youth unemployment, another vulnerable livelihood strategy was operating bicycle or motorbike taxis commonly known as the *boda bodas*. This involved ferrying people within the community for an average fee of 50 Kenya shillings (50 euro-cent). The *boda boda* industry in Siaya was listed as one of the major sources of employment for youth in the Kenya National Adolescent and Youth Survey of 2015 (National Council for Population and Development 2017:21). The gendered nature of this sector is important to note, with mainly male youth participating. The motorcycles were usually rented from others and the operators were expected to remit a constant amount of money each day to the owner, even if no profit was made. It was not uncommon to see about a dozen *boda boda* riders at each small motorcycle stage in the community. Among them were also youth who had not completed their primary school but were attracted to the trade, often without any training or licenses.

For example, one of the caregivers noted that her teenage grandchild used to rent a *boda boda* and pay 300 hundred Kenya shillings (about 3 euros) each day to the owner. She told me that: 'If the road is dry [i.e. there are no customers], they get the bike from him and then he gets back to selling charcoal. That's how we live' (conversation with caregiver, 14 December 2016). Her assertion that that is how they lived was a commonly used metaphor for poverty in this community where the caregivers' livelihoods could only be described as vulnerable.

These metaphors of complicated living should be connected rhizomatically to the lack of support for livelihood enhancements or income support through social protection for these caregivers. Only a handful of them were receiving the Cash Transfer for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC), even though Siaya is one of the counties where the programme was piloted some years ago. For example, Aoko (a seven-year-old child with a disability) and her six siblings and cousins were not supported by any state or non-state programme. Her mother had informed me that she had spent years petitioning to be enrolled in the CT-OVC programme. She noted that 'they [i.e. the government] keep on coming around and writing our names [i.e. registering their names] but they don't give us feedback. They say your name did not come back [meaning, you were not selected]' (discussions with caregiver, 27 June 2016). Within that context, Aoko's elder sister who had completed high school was working as a domestic worker.



The rest of the children were struggling through primary school. To accentuate her vulnerability, Aoko's mother had already sold the few goats she had to seek medical care for Aoko who had a muscle degenerative disease.

Indeed, in my analysis of Aoko's case, I draw further lines between insecure livelihoods and access to health care for the children under the care of these caregivers.<sup>56</sup> Within the context of Kenya, where most of the services in hospitals are paid for out of pocket, some caregivers reported that, if they would become sick they would pray and just hope to be well. One can argue that praying away the state-citizen contract is part of the cartographies of children's and caregiver's experience in such contexts (Ngutuku 2018:24).

**Figure 5-1 : Some of the livelihood Strategies: charcoal and brick making**



Photo 1- Ben; Photo 2- Own photo

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<sup>56</sup> In Kenya, there is a contributory public medical insurance known as National Hospital Fund which enables one to access services in public hospitals. By the time of the research, the Fund was only catering for outpatient charges and most of the caregivers I interacted with had not signed up for it.

#### 5.4 The Ocean has become a Desert: Challenges to Fishing

Due to their proximity to Lake Victoria, several communities in Siaya rely on the lake for fishing as an economic mainstay. It is noteworthy that proximity to the lake means that fish is a staple food and protein source for the Luo people and a historical livelihood source. However, in recent years, Lake Victoria has been infested with the rhizomatic water hyacinth. This makes fishing difficult since the fishing boats cannot go through the lake or land at the beaches easily anymore (see e.g. Wawire and Ochiel 2004). My diary below is illustrative of this state of affairs:

Today, I took a trip down the lake (Victoria) and I noticed how the once beautiful lake is choking with the water hyacinth. There were a few women fishmongers seated by the small beach, waiting for the fishermen. It seemed like they had been waiting for some time. The water hyacinth is a rhizome, but it is also dangerous. A rhizome is beautiful for organizing my thoughts in this research, but it can also be a weed like couch grass, or a pest like the rat which is a rhizome too (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:9), or the rhizomatic hyacinth which has affected thousands of livelihoods in the Nyanza region (diffractive research diary, 13 September 2016).

**Figure 5-2 :** A view of the hyacinth covered Lake Victoria from a beach in Rarieda



Own photo

Lake Victoria, referred to as *bahari*<sup>57</sup> (or literally ocean meaning a large expanse of water) by the communities living around the lake in Rarieda, was metaphorically rendered a desert by one of the secondary school youth supported by the OVC project during a Focus Group Discussion. When I asked the boy what his father did for a living, he noted that his father was no longer fishing because the *bahari* had become a desert due to the water hyacinth. Such a metaphorical rendering of the ocean, an icon of plenty, turning into a desert was indicative of the physical emptiness of the lake, which could no longer produce fish for the communities that

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<sup>57</sup> *Bahari* literally means ocean in Swahili. Discussions with one of my supervisors who is from the community revealed that in Luoland the word is used in reference to a large expanse of water rather than to the ocean per se and that the Luo word for both lake and ocean is *Nam*: a large expanse of water with the distinction being made for *Nam chumbi* (salty water). In this chapter however, I use the word ocean to demonstrate the ironic conflation of expansive waters of the ocean and the desert-like livelihoods of the communities in Siaya.

once relied on it. This can also be read as indicative of abandonment by the state, in terms of failure to control the water hyacinth.

Alidi's twenty-year-old brother relied on the lake for fishing. However, he noted that he could not pay the rent of 500 Kenya shillings (about 5 euros) per month for his small house by the lake. During one of my visits to the lakeside it had rained the previous night and the fishermen noted that the strong winds had carried away the fishing boats. Due to his limited income, Alidi's caregiver then had to hire the fishing route as well as the fishing equipment from other (more established) fishermen (see also Medad 2015 for a perspective on the politics of fishing in Lake Victoria). As a result, he only made about 100 Kenya shillings (about one euro) each day because he shared the profit with the owners of the fishing route and the fishing equipment. This was the only money available for food for the family of four including his wife, his sister (sixteen years old) and Alidi (seven years old), and for monthly rent. At the time of my research, Alidi's caregiver was threatened with eviction by the landlord because he had not paid rent for four months (conversation with Alidi's caregiver, 3 August 2016).

Other caregivers who relied on the fish stocks for their livelihood were also affected by the dwindling fortunes of the *bahari*. For example, Pius' mother sold silver fish in the community. During our first visit to her home she was preparing fish for sale in the community. She informed us that people buy small quantities, starting from as little as 10 Kenya shillings (ten-euro cents). However, during my second visit, she noted that it was difficult to get fish because the cost had gone up due to limited supply and she had instead gone to help a neighbour to harvest cassava on her farm, in exchange for a few tubers for her children's food. This day her children were evidently hungry because the cassava tubers would only be cooked in the evening for dinner.

As mentioned earlier, water hyacinth and its threat to livelihoods has also been explained in terms of failure by the state to control it. One local member of parliament was quoted in the press castigating the government for failure to deal with the menace: 'it is unfortunate that the noxious weed has spread to unprecedented proportions, yet the governments are not doing enough to salvage the situation' (Alal 2017 no page). In 2017, leaders in the counties affected by the water hyacinth filed a case in the high court and accused the government of economic sabotage of the counties benefitting from Lake Victoria (Opana 2016).

## 5.5 Food Insecurity and Hunger as a Context for Caregiving

*We are supporting communities that are living from hand to mouth, but sometimes there may be nothing to put in the mouth* (conversation with a leader in a participating NGO, 27 October 2016).

In this section, I explore the context of food insecurity in the research sites and how food insecurity is located within children's lived experience. As expressed, in the above quote and as discussed in the previous section, food insecurity is linked to insecure livelihoods in the Siaya context. Runguma (2014:149) noted that 'Siaya is a perennially food insecure county whose inhabitants rely heavily on the market for food supply'. The government of Siaya's Integrated Plan 2013–2017 indicated that Siaya produced food that could only cover the food needs of the population for nine months in a year (GOK 2013). This was connected to the poor performance of agriculture as the chief cause of poverty in Siaya, since agriculture is the mainstay of the county's economy (Runguma 2014:149). Data from the 2014 Demographic Health Survey (DHS), and the World Food programme (WFP) report (2016:4) indicated that, Siaya was one of the most food insecure counties and in this respect occupied the eighth lowest position of the forty-seven counties in Kenya. Coupled with inadequate rainfall and the prevalence of small farms, these factors make caregiving precarious in Siaya.

Caregivers that I interacted with corroborated this when reporting that, due to inadequate rainfall and poor farming methods, they did not produce enough food. For example, crop failure was evident in the two planting seasons during which I was in the field. At the time, I noted the following when I visited one of the research sites: 'One season after I was in the field, farmers are preparing the land again. It is a pity that last season they did not get a good crop. I am hoping this season is not going to be the same' (field notes, 8 November 2016).

Some of the caregivers noted that they had only small subsistence farms and did not utilize good farming techniques. As a result, several organizations were offering support to farmers, among others in the form of loans. However, caregivers noted they were expected to repay the loans after selling the proceeds, mainly maize from the farms. During the season when I was in the field, due to crop failure, some farmers could not repay the loan and they were facing pressure to pay from these supporting organizations. The conversation with Barak's mother was revealing:

We have a big farm but do not have support for farming. We got a loan from one organization, but we have to pay it back. There is another organization that gives seeds and fertilizers. For half an acre we have to pay 6200 Kenya shillings (approximately 62 euros) and this is a problem (conversation with caregiver, 25 July 2016).

Another caregiver noted how the food security organizations supporting them in farming sometimes created more vulnerabilities for caregivers by demanding loan repayment even when the crops had failed, making the vulnerability of caregivers an entangled phenomenon:

What is making us poor is these food security organizations. They gave us loans, but we do not have food now. If you don't pay, they come to sell your maize but there is no maize now. There is no cow that they can possess as collateral. They even force you to pay for a member of the group if you guaranteed the loan for them (conversation with caregiver, 27 July 2016).

During some of the visits, I observed caregivers with only a little food harvested from their farms. For example, when I asked Pascaline's mother (a widowed young caregiver) how much maize harvest she got in the previous season, she pointed to a small quantity of food in a corner and laughingly said 'that's all' (conversation with caregiver, 4 August 2016). Humouring away her hardships should also be read within the context of her monthly salary of Kenya shillings 2000 (about 20 euros), which was barely enough for her children's food needs. Earlier she had shared with me that her children, for a second season in a row, would be forced to go to school without breakfast or might take black tea for lunch for a couple of months more.

These challenges of food insecurity occurred within the context of a lack of state cushioning to farmers. For example, the state supports a Food Security Safety Net programme in Kenya, including a fertilizer subsidy programme as well as crop insurance schemes (Development Initiatives Authority 2018:17–19). These interventions are aimed at achieving the elimination of hunger in Kenya. However, none of the caregivers I interacted with were benefitting from any of these schemes. Within the context



of a lack of state support, the alternative funding programmes operated by NGOs thus were the only opportunity for support for caregivers.

Within the context of their poverty, some of the caregivers had leased out their farmland to road construction companies to scoop out murram for road construction. This was the case for Mary and Aaron's grandmother who had given out her small piece of land to a road construction company near Siaya town. When I asked Mary whether they had another piece of land, she said that their land was small. However, discussions with her grandmother revealed that she had hived off part of her farm and rented it out to get extra income (discussions with caregiver, 24 August 2016).

I also observed this practice in Rarieda, where road construction was ongoing as well, and some of the farmers had leased out their land to construction companies. I witnessed the bare land involved but also saw children and caregivers fetch water from the quarries. I was informed that, a week before one of my visits to Rarieda one of the children had drowned in these holes. This reveals other vulnerabilities of caregivers than the ones mentioned thus far. These unsustainable livelihood endeavours therefore can be said to have further fuelled food insecurity in the area, 'cramping' and 'choking' the caregiving spaces.

Children reported staying without food and being bothered because their caregivers could not afford to provide a meal. For example, when I asked children in a Focus Group Discussion about the things that made them unhappy at home, one of the children noted that she was unhappy when she saw her grandmother worrying about food (FGD with children, 27 July 2016). Caregivers supported this perspective and noted that they did not have enough food to give their children: 'Sometimes we don't get enough food in the house. Sometimes we cook late because affording three meals is hard' (conversation with caregiver, 25 July 2016). Other caregivers reported other strategies of 'becoming' in relation to food insecurity. These included cooking only one meal a day and sometimes cooking lunch later in the day so that it was not necessary to cook supper. Such narratives support the WFP (2016:6) report mentioned earlier that, when faced with food insecurity, households may cut down on the amount of food they consume. In this report, Siaya was quoted as one of the counties which was affected by these vulnerable methods of coping with lack of food.



Other strategies used by caregivers included inculcating into their children notions of resilience in the face of hunger. For example, in a Focus Group Discussion, caregivers noted how they impressed on their children that food is obtained through hard work, and notions of resilience within the context of lack of food, as the following quotes reveal:

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

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

Caregiver 3: Be open with them [fostered children]. Tell them that, even if their parents were alive things could still be hard and sometimes there would be no food. Let them know that there are even children with parents who lack food (FGD with caregivers, 22 July 2016).

It is also no wonder that, during my interactions with children, their perspectives and their voices indicated that they knew that going without food was normal and they should not bother the caregivers. Brigid's essay (eleven years) revealed this as follows:

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

Diffraction these strategies of becoming and notions of children's participation rights, one sees three levels of ironies of poor childhood in the context of Siaya from a theoretical and practical level. First, these specific notions of child participation stuttered, in a Deleuzian sense, my usual understanding of child participation and ruptured my imagination since it seems that children of poor caregivers were provided information and thereby were aware why they were not eating and thereby participating in a decision affecting their lives. While such a sense of participation may look like it is in the best interests of children and may to some extent enhance their resilience to hunger, it is ironical because lack of food in itself has negative repercussions on the well being and rights of children. Further ironies and complexities of the childhoods of these children obtained from the perspective that, when other children were participating in other things that pertain to their lives as per UNCRC Article 12, these children were supposed to participate in knowing that there was no food. These complexities may not be resolved through my research.

The caregiver's narratives of refusal to borrow for food, makes me draw some rhizomatic lines between those narratives and the role of the State. Even if they borrowed money, very few caregivers had a way of repaying the loans since only a few were benefitting from the Cash Transfer for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) and they did not otherwise have secure livelihoods otherwise. Vowing not to borrow for their children's food was therefore both a discursive and a pragmatic move. The children's right to food is silenced in these expectations of coping. The Kenya Constitution too, in Article 43(1 c) provides that every Kenyan, irrespective of their circumstance has a right 'to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality'.

My analysis of children's diaries and essays revealed that children had developed sensibilities of subverting or downplaying hunger. These included arguments like 'one cannot die of hunger' or 'we do not like cold food in the morning'. Even the mundane everyday religious practice among Christians and most communities of thanking God before eating food was used as a site of making claims for food. Instead of thanking God for food, in their dairies and essays several children noted that also when there was no food, they would thank God for the day in the future when they will have food after working hard in school. This finding supports the perspective of Sanghera and others' (2018:545) that even the

mundane every-day practices, such as prayer for food, can be sites for claiming living rights and this was their form of agency.

While being without food was seen as normal, the way in which it affected children's growth and development was silenced. For example, Ayo's sister Awino (two years old) evidently was malnourished as her distended stomach showed. In one of the photos taken by her brother, Awino was crying over an empty flask of porridge. She had also been forced to comply with the sensibilities of eating only once a day. For example, when I asked her caregiver whether she stayed hungry like the rest of the children, she noted: 'She has to wait and eat in the evening with the rest of the children, there is no other option' (discussion with caregiver, 21 September 2016). Even though Awino was supposed to be hunger resilient, her body and that of other children showed signs of stress and disease, confirming the argument that hunger has tremendous effects on children's wellbeing (see also Ngutuku 2018:21)

Other caregivers saw me as part of the solution to their challenges of hunger. On knowing that I now lived in a county in western Kenya that is considered the breadbasket of the country, they would call on me requesting food. In the next section, I offer a yet more specific perspective of the cramped space of social and economic relations and experience, within the context of the identity of widowed caregivers.

## 5.6 Caregiving as a Chi Liel: Gendered Caregiving as Widows

In this section, I explore how gender relations and other norms affect or influence how widowed caregivers provide care to their children within the context of precarity. I explore various representations of and expectations on these caregivers and how their status is located within their context of caregiving. I also explore how these caregivers, in their sense of becoming one, engage with the gendered challenges of their context. In exploring this rhizome of caregiving as a widow, I deepen my analysis of the complexities of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability beyond material lack.

### 5.6.1 Being a Chi Liel: Contestations around Child Protective Functions

*Being a widow has its challenges but being a widowed caregiver is hard too* (FGD with caregivers, 22 July 2016).

Among the Luo, a widow is known as a *Chi liel* or a 'wife of the grave'. The plural for this term is *Mondliete*, wives of graves. However, I will continue to use this term in its singular sense, not as a way of misappropriating a people's language and culture but as a political gesture aimed at demonstrating the singularity of the experience of widow caregivers.

Caring for children as a widowed caregiver emerged as difficult within the context of the economic hardships surrounding caregiving. Diverse gender relations influenced caregiving as well. *Chi liel* refers to a woman whose husband has died and who chooses to stay in her matrimonial home without seeking remarriage. In Siaya it is widely believed that, after the death of her husband a woman should not remarry because marriage is not dissolved by death. Nyarwath (2012:104) argued that, in the traditional Luo universe there is no widow and one is either married or not. He also added that 'despite the death of her husband, the woman remains a wife (*Chi liel*, the wife of the grave) of the deceased, and by extension, of the clan into which she married; and so long as she remains a wife, she cannot be married again' (ibid.).

Discussions with caregivers indicated that the appellation 'wife of the grave' indicated that the woman was committed to the grave of her husband. The complexities of the situation of a *Chi liel* in terms of caregiving were multiple. To begin with, being a *Chi liel* was governed by rituals. For example, traditionally after the death of her husband, the wife was seen as unclean or having *chola* (taboo) and was supposed to wear a dry bark cloth (*okola*) around her waist, indicating a state of mourning (Nyarwath 2012:98). The cutting of the bark cloth (*chodo okola*) to signal the end of the mourning period was a cleansing ritual and was over time corrupted to involve sexual relations with a designated male (ibid.). A man in the community, and often the husband's brother or a cousin, was often the designated male. While the practice has evolved and waned overtime, during my research it was still present as one of the nodes in the vulnerability of widowed caregivers.

Nyajuom (2006:7) noted that, traditionally the name *Chi liel* indicated an honorary man. In this regard, some caregivers noted that the period of wearing the deceased husband's clothes was also protective in an economic sense. This might still be the case in some Luo communities in Siaya because one of my research assistants explained that the appellation *Chi liel* signalled expected behaviour towards widows in the sense of an entitlement to rights and support. As one caregiver noted: 'I used to see my

*dani* (grandmother) wearing my grandfather's clothes to identify with him. When wearing these clothes, she was exempted from queuing at the river and excused from paying for meat or fish in the market. People would buy for her or make way for her' (conversation with female caregiver, 27 July 2016).

After the death of the husband, a brother or a close relative to the deceased continues performing care duties to the *Chi liel*. This person, who takes over the duties of the husband, is called a *Jater*. The institution of assuming responsibilities of care over the wife of a deceased brother is called *lako* or *ter*, or wife inheritance in modern parlance.

The perspective of being inherited has been a subject of commentary from diverse sources, mainly from gender and human rights advocates who see the practice as flouting the human rights of the *Chi liel* (see e.g. Nyajuom 2006). Other scholars, who analysed the practice as an important aspect of the Luo tradition, argued that the levirate union provides security and smooth continuity to the widow after her husband's death (Miruka et al. 2015). Nyarwath (2012:100) argued that '*Lako* as an institution of care is conceptually, and in principle and practice, different from wife (widow) inheritance'. He further argued that to reference *Lako* as widow inheritance is to disregard Luo customs. Others argued that *Lako* was supposed to be protective of children left behind and to ensure that children are retained within the clan. It was also supposed to be a substitute or a surrogate for the dead husband and to provide the continuation of the husband's roles, and thereby meant to alleviate the suffering of the wife and her children (Miruka et al. 2015:244, Nyajuom 2006, Prince 2011:111). Some authors, however, noted that the institution is sexually exploitative (Perry et al. 2014). I did not delve into these contestations and only concerned myself with the way caregivers located themselves or were located within this practice, and the implications thereof for the care and support for their children.

The *Chi liel* I interacted with were taking care of a range of children, including their own children, fostered children, orphaned and vulnerable children. My research revealed that, within the context where the community capital that accorded the associated rights was waning, widows who laid claim to the title *Chi liel* for getting material support might be seen as belittling themselves and as dependents. Being a *Chi liel* therefore signalled vulnerability and by extension difficulties in caregiving.

Various interactions in the community revealed that younger widows were often accused of having killed their husbands for sexual escapades with men in the community, or to be inherited. For example, one caregiver reported a case of a neighbour who was accused of killing her own husband. This was referred to as ‘eating Ugali’<sup>58</sup> with one’s husband (conversation with caregiver; 27 July 2019). A head-teacher in one of the schools supported this narrative when he argued that: ‘We have more widows than widowers. This is because the women are stressing men until they die. [points to my research assistant] She is a widow’ (conversation with head teacher, 30 June 2016).

In mapping the cartography of these negative discourses, they should not just be analysed as rumours that women might have killed their husbands. It should be noted that these discourses had a role in regulating relations in the community. In the spirit of rhizo-analysis where several meanings are plausible, one can bring the rumours back to the assemblage of the institution of *Lako* itself where men one can bring the rumours back to the assemblage of the institution of *Lako* itself where men have to take care of widows and most of the time stay with them and eat from their households. In the context of poverty in Siaya, some of the *Jater* were themselves poor men who could not afford to take care of their own families. Moving in with a widow meant that they also had to abandon their own children and these men would normally be fed by the widow. The rumours about the widows having killed their husbands thus could have been spread to deter men. Read from this entry-point in the map of the narratives involved, being a *Chi liel* was therefore not only seen as a problem to the widow but also to the other women and their children in the community, and respectively their husbands and fathers.

In the following section, I provide a context of how widowed caregivers located themselves within these norms and their material situation earlier presented, not only as widows but as widowed caregivers. In so doing, I draw attention to the individual and collective ways in which these women constitute themselves as subjects in their daily lives (Honan 2007:745). Exploring their sense-making enables me to ‘draw attention to the minor politics of the cramped spaces of the everyday’ that has so often

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<sup>58</sup> Ugali is a local maize staple dish eaten in most households in this region. The term ‘eating Ugali with one’s husband’ meant killing one’s husband.

been ignored in discussions about the challenges of widow caregivers (Rose 2004:279–280).

### 5.6.2 Bargaining Through the After World: Our Husbands Have Become Angels

In getting to terms with the difficulties of caregiving as *Chi liel* and the associated gendered norms, the caregivers I interacted with were using their situation to represent themselves as deserving of their status as widowed caregivers. I characterize this as making ‘patriarchal bargains’ within gender relations (Kandiyoti 1988:275), even after the death of their spouses. In so doing, the *Chi liel* transgressed the governing power of tradition.

In examining the everyday experience of these caregivers, I was also listening to the subtexts in the way they talked about their experience. Martin and Kamberelis (2013:671) noted that subtexts may come in the way of ‘glib comments that index surpluses of meaning’. For example, in their glib comments during Focus Group Discussions, the widows downplayed the hardships that accompanied the status of *Chi liel*, and instead casted their dead husbands as angels. Drawing on the biblical notion of after-life, they joked that the husbands had gone to prepare a place in heaven for them and they would be reunited. Other widows noted that their husbands had ‘travelled up there’. Others sarcastically presented the men as better angels compared to women who were bothered with caregiving: ‘If a man is left behind, he will remarry and if the mother goes (dies), she will be so worried about what is happening to her children on earth and will not prepare a good place in heaven for her family. [Laughter]’ (FGD with caregivers, 14 December 2016).

Listening softly to such a gendered but religious and jocular assertion, one hears another unspoken voice: that of male privilege. This voice had both discursive and practical implications for caregiving. I placed the joke within the context of the absent appellation of a husband of the grave because men tend to re-marry immediately. One of the *Chi liel* noted: ‘I have fostered my brother’s children and they used to say of their father before he died: ‘it would have been better if it was our father who died so that we won’t be sleeping hungry. I am a *Chi liel* and my children have not slept hungry’ (FGD with caregivers, 14 December 2016).

In using satire to represent their role as ‘non-angels’ or potentially ‘bad angels’, and in bargaining this way, these caregivers were also pointing to



a need to democratize the cultural relations that allow men to marry soon after the death of their wives but regulate women, by tying them to the grave or their matrimonial home. Such a grave, as earlier observed, was no longer fulfilling its traditional role of social protection for the children left behind. The perspective that the widower's children would suffer when left with the father also indicted men who were seen as irresponsible. Indeed, various discussions with children revealed that some who lived with stepmothers complained of being mistreated as well. As noted by children during a Focus Group Discussion: 'some stepmothers only like their own children' (FGD with children, 22/ July 2016).

In enhancing their role and citizenship in the husband's community through such caregiving agency where they saw themselves as better caregivers and casting their husbands as 'better citizens of heaven', the women were also participating in the construction of women as quintessential caregivers. Despite gendering care in such patriarchal terms, they still engaged culture on its own terms. Their agency in this instance was a rhizome and could be described as simultaneously subversion, consent and transgression of dominant gender norms about the male as the breadwinner, and norms that label widows as *Chi liel*. The rhizomatic nature of the agency also obtained from the way these caregivers were able to use non-human agents (Barad 2007) such as the grave as well as beliefs in the after-world. This gendered and maternalist agency, the subject positions and the sense of becoming involved also provided hope to these carers and enabled them to get through the day-to-day challenges. Valorizing the identity and discourse of a '*Chi liel* caregiver' compared to widower caregiving is a rhizo-discourse that must also be 'plugged in' (Mazzei 2014:743) to representations of children's needs in various spaces, including programmes of support. This is because, as I reveal in later chapters, arguing that paternal orphans were better off because their mothers provide better care is a recapitulation of the dominant discursive practices in various spaces. For example, I later reveal how paternal orphans were given more preference in programmes of support and in school in meeting their needs.

We now take another entry into the map of this 'angel' discourse and caregiving. Casting husbands or fathers to the children they had fostered as angels, when inculcated into children had another function in the children's sense of becoming. Discussions with children who were orphaned revealed that they often took solace in the fact that their deceased fathers were like angels watching over them when in difficulty. The following

narrative from Naomi's (12 years old) essay is a fitting example: 'When people mistreat us because we are poor, I remember where my father is (in heaven)'.

In locating myself and the research as part of the rhizome in the caregiver's experience of a *Chi liel*, I also became one of the nodes in that experience since their identity was not just lived but also performed in our day-to-day encounters. In some of these encounters, being a *Chi liel* was reproduced differently and re-worked as a positive identity that enabled caregivers to take good care of their children. For example, when I asked one of the caregivers who was taking care of seven young children about the children under her care, she noted: 'I am taking care of seven children, and I started when they were very young. We were born to take care of orphans' (FGD with caregivers, 14 December 2016). Another caregiver also referred to herself as a good caregiver, taking care of her three grandchildren who had walked for more than fifteen kilometres from their paternal relative's home after the death of their mother (ibid).

These caregivers were therefore enacting their position as caregivers not as one to be pitied but one to be respected. Roy (2003:77) noted that, according to Deleuze, 'becoming is the transformation of life through the refusal of closed structures within which difference can be confined'. He further added that the becoming reveals the origin of these structures themselves. In presenting their reasons for their being as taking care of vulnerable children, the women refused to be constricted within the choked passages of want as well as difficulties in caregiving. They were also engaging the dominant discourses that have presented caregiving in these spaces only through the lenses of suffering.

### 5.6.3 Refusing to be Inherited: Subverting the Governing Power of Tradition

Against expectations, some of the caregivers in our interactions contested the tradition of wife inheritance. During our interactions some caregivers set themselves apart as better carers than the men who might inherit them. Some of the caregivers justified their position as happy and not inherited, but still a *Chi liel*, taking good care of their children. They portrayed men who inherit the widows as giving them stress and 'milking' what was left behind by the deceased husband. Discussions with a young *Chi liel* revealed this as follows: 'There is no man in this home, my husband died when I

was still young. I don't need a man' (interview with a caregiver, 10 October 2016). An elderly caregiver, noted the following:

When my husband died, I did not think of getting a man. For what? I am busy with my children and family. A man comes to give you stress and wants to live in luxury. He comes to vandalize all the wealth and milk everything (interview with caregiver, 20 September 2016).

These examples reveal denigration of the practice of *Lako* in that the man who was supposed to provide care and socio-cultural protection to the widow was now cast as a 'vandal'. This occurred both in the material and sexual sense. Constructing these men as 'fleecers' speaks to the appropriation and problematic evolution of the practice of *Lako* into an exploitative sexual and economic unions, where some men used it as an avenue for sex or economic gain whilst failing to acknowledge or adhere to its protective intentions. Nyarwath (2012:108) made a commentary on such men whom he argued had entered into *Lako* for material benefits and were 'only seen at home during mealtimes and bedtimes. Such sexualization is not without effects. I observed some of the widows with younger children borne out of such unions, which exacerbated the vulnerability of both the widows and their children. Indeed, Nyambetha (2004) noted that this practice leads to children who lack support of both the kin as well as their biological fathers. In addition, such a practice is also implicated in the high cases of HIV/AIDS, especially in cases where the husbands died of HIV/AIDS, or the Jater was HIV positive.

Women could be said to take 'lines of flight' or exercised agency (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) through such discursive politics of refusing to be inherited by men who do not act in their best interests and those of their children. However, the practical and discursive challenges of being a *Chi liel* can also be seen as 'lines of articulation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that still placed limits on women's politics. Some other structural constraints were expectations like moving to a new house that required a man to be present or required sexual relations. For example, among the Luo, it is common for sons who have their own families to move from the father's homestead. This is called *golo dala* or literally 'shifting homes' because he is moving away to set up his own homestead or *kutoa boma* in Kiswahili as it was referred to in our discussions. In case a husband dies

before shifting homes, the widow is expected to shift homes at some point. Traditionally, it was the duty of the *Jater* to stand in for the deceased husband and ‘move’ her, which has progressively included ‘performing sexual relations’. Discussions with other interlocutors also revealed that a *Chi liel* could only refuse to be inherited if she took refuge in church teachings. Some of the *Chi liel* that I interacted with explained that they moved houses through the church and in that way were free from the traditional expectations of being inherited by a man. See also Okwany et al. (2011:101) for a perspective on these protective functions of the church. Given the difficulties of living in a place where the social safety nets in aid of these caregivers are no longer strong, the church not only provided economic support but was also a refuge against social relations deemed oppressive (Nyambedha 2004:146).

Even within such contexts, challenges that require further research in terms of effects on caregiving may still linger. Here, I come full circle again in this cartography, as I remind the reader about the events surrounding Achieng around whom I framed my research in chapter one. She refused to be inherited early in the millennium, even though she needed labour for repairing her thatched roof that could only be provided in exchange for sexual relations with her husband’s brother. In asserting that she did not want to die and leave her young twin children, her agency was redemptive on the one hand, but caused suffering on the other hand.

Faced with these impossibilities and ‘choked passages’ (Deleuze 1995) imposed by tradition (including perceptions of being unclean), some women were reportedly inherited discreetly for the convenience of adhering to norms but disengaged and chose to bring up their children on their own. For example, when I inquired with one of the *Chi liel* caregivers whether widow inheritance was still practiced in the community, (in what Mazzei (2007:77b) has called veiled silence<sup>59</sup>) she responded past my question and argued that only those willing were inherited. I later learned that she was inherited at some point but disengaged. Such veiled silence was her way of protecting herself from my scrutiny of her actions and morals.

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<sup>59</sup> In this type of silence participants speak past the questions asked and respond to a different question. It is way of protecting themselves against an unpleasant reality and also a way of refusing to answer questions they deem personal.

Further discussions with other interlocutors in the community revealed that some *Chi liel* had circumvented the governing perspectives of the tradition by putting on a façade of being inherited. They did this by arranging for a *Jater* to disguise ‘inheriting’ them, moving to a new home accompanied by him and after that going on with their normal lives as if they were inherited. In this way, they were duping the gatekeepers of tradition. The bargaining position of the caregivers played a bigger role in the decision to stay single after the death of the husband. For one caregiver, who was an administrator, her relatively well-paying job enabled her to take care of her two children and two fostered ones. Women without such a fallback position (Agarwal 1997:4), which was the bulk of the study participants, did not have much room for manoeuvre. For example, a caregiver who was earlier inherited and later disengaged during my research was selling wares in the market and was receiving a grant through the Cash Transfer Programme for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC). Thus, her economic situation had improved, and she could now take care of her children on her own. Another caregiver, a widow taking care of her three-year-old grandson, was already receiving support from her son who was working. She was not inherited by the time of our encounter. Social class therefore to a large extent mediates the ability to resist this practice. However, as I have argued earlier, the effects of class must be seen within the context of other complex social relations as I have sketched here again.

These perspectives and burdens of widowed caregiving therefore point to a need to strengthen caregiving in these cramped spaces of material lack as well as chocked spaces of social relations that define the identity of a *Chi liel* caregiver. In the next section, I explore caregiving by a widower caregiver, to reveal another cramped location in the cartography of children’s experience of poverty and vulnerability.

### 5.7 Assembling a Chuor Liel: Cartographies of a Widower Caregiver

In this section, I present the lived experience of caregiving of a widower or what I render through a neology as a ‘husband of the grave’. A husband of the grave is both a cultural and a lexical impossibility and a transgressive identity among the Luo. There is no word for a widower in the Luo language because men are expected to marry soon after they are bereaved and men who do not marry are seen as outliers (Okwany et al. 2011). Majstorovi and Lassen (2011:65) argued that the lexical gap occasioned by

the lack of the expression ‘husband of the grave’ in the Luo linguistic repertoire is discriminatory and indicative of skewed gender relations. However, I demonstrate that in listening softly to the perspectives of a widower caregiver, it is not just a lexical absence, but there are real implications of this absence for social protection for needy widower caregivers and their children.

Being appellated as a husband of the grave in a literal sense would be a ‘God forbid’ kind of a term in the Luo culture. The term I have used *Chuor liel* or ‘the husband of the grave’ can thus be seen as a ‘shocking word’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994:7-8). Deleuze and Guattari argued that, in inventing concepts in philosophy: ‘some concepts must be indicated by an extraordinary and sometimes even barbarous or shocking word [...]. Some concepts call for archaisms, and others for neologisms[...].’ (ibid). My settling for a term that is absent in this culture, and a concept that can be seen as what Deleuze and Guattari (1994:77) would call as a ‘disgusting’ concept in the local culture, is my kind of politics as a researcher, intended to produce similar politics in my readers. It is at the heart of creating or even imagining this shocking term ‘husband of the grave’, that we begin to re-imagine the needs of widower caregivers in Siaya. This concept enabled me to explore the challenges faced by such caregivers within the context of competing discourses and representations about who is a good caregiver and/or deserving, and non-deserving caregivers.

Here, I present the narrative of one caregiver whose wife had died nine years before the research. This caregiver had been taking care of his five children and had not re-married. Within the context of child caregiving, I explored the experience of a widower caregiver as an assemblage. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987:90), an assemblage connects rather than divides a field of reality. I explored how this caregiver was assembled as a good and a bad caregiver simultaneously, and how the factors and norms that interacted rhizomatically produced the cartography of a ‘husband of the grave’, an oxymoron in this community. In doing this, I was guided by this question: what does it look like to be a vulnerable widower caregiver and what does this mean for children under his care?

### 5.7.1 Contradictory Representations of a Widower Father

I encountered Philip's father,<sup>60</sup> during one of the visits to the primary school that Philip (fifteen years old) attended. During this visit, his father had been summoned to come to the school because Philip had occasionally missed classes. The teacher I interacted with represented the father through a narrative of a hero father who had not remarried after the death of his wife ten years ago and was seen as an unusual case of a widower caregiver devoted to his children. The teacher hoped that I could assemble such an exemplary father for my readers by approaching him to narrate his lived experience.

Philip too represented his father as caring and a father who was concerned about the welfare of his children. As he noted in his essay: 'After my mother was buried, we were left with my father. My father cooked food for us every day. He woke up very early in the morning and cooked porridge' (Philip's essay).

Closer interactions with other people in Philip's father's circle indicated that he had multiple and contradictory identities: that of a hero and a villain. He was often assembled as a hands-off and lazy father, who could not provide for the needs of his children, including paying for their school fees. His parenting skills were assessed by societal norms and the teachers judged him to be a father who could not provide guidance to his children because Philip's school attendance was not regular. He was also assembled through changes in his material context, as having been once rich (owning three cars). Several people also represented the vestiges of his earlier good life. These included his 'good English', indicative of having been schooled in Europe. Speaking 'good English' and failing to educate one's children was a narrative present among teachers in Philip's school. His son Philip also shared this same 'riches nostalgia' when, during my interview with him, he started our conversation by noting that his father was once a rich

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<sup>60</sup> In my research, he is referenced as Philip's father and not by his name. I mostly identify the parents through their children (who participated in the research) as opposed to through their names. This is also the cultural way of referencing parents in many African contexts and is indeed another identity of a parent/caregiver. The link with the child also helps to focus attention on their caregiving identity and role.



man and that at his birth, he was carried from hospital in his father's car (conversation with Philip, 14 September 2016).

Despite the above-mentioned construction as an inadequate and a poor father, during my interactions with him he came across as an emotionally burdened and vulnerable father. He was assembled through tears, because he broke down several times during the interview, but re-assembled himself by drawing on his strength to overcome obstacles in parenting. Hence his sense of becoming.

### 5.7.2 Complex Living for a Vulnerable Widower Caregiver

A visit to Philip's home revealed the complicated living for the widower caregiver. My imagination wandered as I hoped to see a fireplace inside or outside the house or another sign of cooking. Philip's father told me that he shared a small room and a bed shielded by a split curtain with his three sons. His small farm had some maize that was overdue for harvest and he narrated how he couldn't do intensive farming. This was not because he was lazy, as some community members imagined, but because he was poorly. He had been involved in a road accident several years ago for which a senior government officer was responsible. However, even though the court ruled in his favour he did not get compensation, as he noted (discussion with Philip's father, 4 August 2016).

In his essay, diary and our discussions, Philip revealed a complicated living for the family, where some days they did not have food to eat. Philip's narrative also filled the silences in his father's account because he narrated that for some years his father placed them in a children's home but withdrew them back to the village when the conditions in the children's home deteriorated (Philip's essay). Despite the fact that his father had earlier noted that he shared the bed with the three of them, listening softly through Philip's diary that he kept for weeks indicated that he had to 'borrow' a sleeping space from a friend's house each evening. The notions of borrowing space were explained earlier in the methodology chapter and connected to notions of sexuality<sup>61</sup>.

Philip's diary also revealed that in most cases the family survived on burning charcoal for income. In his nostalgic account of his father's riches,

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<sup>61</sup> I did not dwell on the question whether Philip's father had sexual partners even though he was not married.

he noted that they did not have new clothes apart from the ones I had noticed stored in gunny bags and secured on the roof of their house, which they had outgrown by the time of research. In listening softly, Philip also filled the silences in his father's accounts of food insecurity. He noted that the farm was small and hard to till because they didn't use a plough. Tradition also emerged as another line, in relation to the size of the land. According to tradition, parents could only give land to their adult children if the children had shifted homes. Philip's father had not shifted home from the main homestead before his wife died, he had not remarried and the land on which they lived therefore in principle belonged to Philip's grandmother. Although I did not ask Philip's father for his perspectives on why he did not move home, the fact that (as earlier noted) this process required the performance of some rites might have been silenced in Philip's explanation of his father's failure to shift home (*golo dala*). As Nyarwath (2012:100) noted: 'the presence of a couple, at least during such a rite, is symbolically significant. It represents the minimum condition necessary for procreation, hence sharing in the sacred mission of passing on the gift of life'. In addition, this failure was also linked to his vulnerability because shifting homes requires a significant amount of money, which he could not afford.

On my last visit to the school, and as we discussed with Philip the possibility of buying him a lunch container for carrying his food to school, I met another teacher who recounted to me the riches to rags story of Philip's father. As opposed to the first teacher that I encountered in this school, this teacher did not assemble him as a resilient father but as a victim of circumstances. He noted: 'The turn of events is too much for this man (Philip's father) [...] it tickles our ears to imagine how one can fall from riches to poverty' (conversation with teacher, 14 September 2016). To give strength to the teacher's words, in my last encounter with Philip he informed me that his father was doing well but that he was still poorly and that his bicycle had been stolen. The fact that his bicycle was stolen was a new line in his experience of vulnerability. He was using this bicycle to move around, to go to the shopping centre as well as to ferry charcoal to the market. As I noted in my diffractive diary:

Becoming a poor *Chuur liel* caregiver is a rhizomatic process with movement through different nodes. It is not just a representation but a cartography (Deleuze 1995), a process, where new nodes and

lines emerge, and others may die. I am part of this cartography, even as I reflect on how helpless I feel within the context of his request earlier ('I need to be helped') and within the context of his many 'blocked passages' and interstices in his becoming a caregiver (diffractive diary, 14 September 2016).

### 5.7.3 Self-Representation as an Able Widower Caregiver

Philip's father represented himself differently, as a good father who was a victim of diverse circumstances. He noted that his wife died in 2008, due to complications related to childbirth. He narrated how they had walked for almost a whole night to reach the nearest hospital, not because he was poor but because (according to him) the childbirth 'came at the wrong time, when he had no money to hire a car' (conversation with Philip's father, 4 August 2016). He also indicted the health care system in his account of rhizomatic factors of his vulnerability and accused doctors of negligence as he noted:

We left our home here. She reached hospital and never came back. She was just okay during pregnancy; she was very strong. We are really a very strong people. We knocked the hospital door for thirty minutes and the nurse was asleep (discussion with Philip's father, 4 August 2016).

When I asked him about the child left behind by the mother, he said that the child had died after having been mishandled by the nurses. He also referred to the norms that vilified him as a bad father with his wife's family assuming that he couldn't provide good care to the child: 'They thought I would not have coped with the baby. I would have coped. What is it that I can't cope with? I can cope with anything' (ibid).

His resilience and representation as a good caregiver, despite the challenges of his context, support the assertion by Deleuze and Guattari (1987:9) about the resilience of a rhizome: 'A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines'. In seeing further cartographic lines in resisting the common representation as an inadequate father, he argued that he wanted to work but since he was sixty-two years old nobody was willing to employ him. He also argued that he did not want a job that kept him away from

his children. This was a fact echoed by Philip in his diary who noted that his father supported him in doing his homework. As I noted in my diffractive diary on 5 August 2016:

‘What options are there for an ageing, sick husband of the grave, restricted from working by a labour market that is biased against the aged, and one who does not want to work far away from his children? He is exercising a maternalist agency that has been reserved for women caregivers only’.

#### 5.7.4 Contested Deservedness in support to Chuor liel

My research revealed that the lexical gap in the absence of the husband of the grave was not the only problem. Social protection by state and non-state actors was also fashioned in the manner of this gap. A widower caregiver was mostly absent in the vernaculars of state and non-state support and was assembled as non-deserving in the social protection imaginary.

For example, while the *Chi liel* revealed that they were in self-help groups, some of them mobilized by NGOs, Philip’s father was not in any of the support groups because he was not aware of such care groups for men. Further discussions with him revealed that he was struggling to bring up his children on his own, sometimes with only occasional support from the District Commissioner. This support from the District Commissioner was not structured but more of a patronage relationship as a friend but not as a deserving caregiver. The only support he got from the community safety net was from his friend, who had accepted to live with his older daughter. His children were also not receiving the cash transfer for vulnerable children as he noted:

Did I mention the relatives were very bad? One of them was identifying the needy for cash transfer. We [his household] were not selected. When I asked the District Commissioner he told me that they relied on the report from the local leaders and this *mama* [lady] is the one who did not identify us as ‘needy orphans’ [...] When I asked her, she told me ‘I forgot that your wife died’ (conversation with Philip’s father, 4 August 2016).

The ‘forgetting’ by the local leaders may not just be discriminatory but it indexes the wider marginalization of widower caregivers from social

protection services, by norms that represent caregiving as a female role and the absence of the widowers from discourse. It can also be connected rhizomatically to forgetting by the state and other structures, pertaining to the plight of such fathers.

Discussions with Philip and his father revealed that the family safety nets were also not supportive. He narrated how in his more prosperous days he supported his widowed sister-in-law to educate her children, but the children had not reciprocated even though they were well off. When I asked Philip if anybody in the family supported them, he noted that the network of support from the extended family was absent and instead they expected his father to support them: ‘Support! [I am surprised by his retort] Nobody helps us, it is only when somebody dies in our clan that they call my dad to help them’ (interview with Philip, 14 September 2016). The school was also implicated in these norms about widower caregivers. While later discussions will reveal that teachers exempted some needy children from paying school levies, this was not the case for this *Chnor liel*. Instead, his children were sent home frequently to collect levies.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the assemblage of a *Chnor liel* was mobilized and composed of various human and non-human actors, representations, material, non-material and other (social) relations. Some of these elements included the culture that determined which parent is deserving support after losing a spouse, the non-state actors that may mobilize widows into groups whilst putting less emphasis on the widowers, the normative expectation to remarry as a widower, and the normative expectations of being a good parent. Norms about childcare as a quintessentially female activity are also implicated in this assemblage. This was coupled with legal processes that made it hard for the widower caregiver to get compensation for his accident and a weak health care system that was not responsive during the birth of his child. Other elements in this cartography were lack of support from the community, and lack of employment and passages (in the Deleuzian sense) that may be blocked affected his becoming a good father.

Implicated in this assemblage and cartography was my role as a researcher, in bringing to the fore his lived experience that sometimes made him feel more vulnerable and inadequate. Indeed, my own initial evaluation of his narrative as ‘curious’ was also part of this ‘machinic assemblage’ (Bansel and Davies 2014:43, Deleuze 1987:99) and the cartography of the experience of being a husband of the grave. As Gerlach (2014: 24) noted,

‘to question how a map performs is to ask the same question of what it is’. I follow up on the implications of these cartographies in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

## 5.8 Alive but Dead Fathers/Husbands

In exploring the lived experience of caregivers, I noted that some of the children living with both parents were also characterized in the community and in programmes of support as poor and vulnerable. Therefore, child vulnerability cannot be explained ‘just’ in terms of being orphaned. In this section, I explore other complexities of children and caregiver experience as revealed through representations of fatherhood. Besides through lack, poverty was also constructed through the behaviour of the parents. I explored a category of fathers labelled through another neologism as ‘alive but dead’ to demonstrate how poverty and vulnerability among their children was understood.

‘Alive but dead’ was a category of fathers who were not providing for the needs of their children and so their children were said to live like orphans and their wives like widows. For example, Gabriel (sixteen years old), though not an orphan, in our first encounter said that his father was ‘not there’ (conversation with Gabriel, 25 July 2016). I took this to mean his father was dead because that is often how death is expressed by many in the studied community. In my listening softly through his grandmother, I learned that his father was alive but not providing for his needs. As she noted:

‘Gabriel doesn’t have a dad. The father went away. He left when Gabriel was three years old and lives in Nairobi. The man has not helped my child in any way [resigned look]. Gabriel has to burn charcoal and sell it himself (conversation with Gabriel’s caregiver, 4 August 2016).

My interactions in the community revealed that consuming cheap illicit liquor was common in the community. It was not uncommon to see some men in the village drunk as early as 10 am, especially in Rarieda. In locating himself as a caregiver to his siblings, Donald (twenty) for example described his father this way: ‘He is addicted to alcohol and I was told he burned all our property. I was affected because I am the one who bought some of the stuff’ (conversation with Donald, 27 February 2017).

Donald's case compared with that of Allister who mentioned that his father was not taking care of their school-related needs because he was drinking. This was a voice that his mother, in playing a good wife, had intentionally been silent about (Mazzei 2007a: 632) during our earlier discussions with her. Instead she had represented her husband as a supportive father who provided for the needs of the family: 'If my husband gets a contract, we support each other. I don't depend on my husband a lot' (conversation with Allister's mother, 13 September 2016).

My research assistant, who was well acquainted with the family, also participated in this silence and did not reveal more about the abdication of responsibilities by Allister's father during the research encounter. She also chose to protect the dignity of Allister's mother in being a good wife and a good mother. The research assistant later told me that Allister's father had engaged in the wife inheritance practice six times and was drinking.

Brigid's aunt, who had fostered her, also described Brigid's father as 'alive but dead' when she noted: 'Brigid's father has a job but drinks a lot. My sister is widowed. It is better the husbands who are dead' (discussion with Brigid's caregiver, 20 September 2016).

I observed that the discourse of 'alive and dead' was a lateral discourse and was positioned within the discourse of widowed caregivers as needy. This discourse of 'alive but dead' was caught up with and was part of the cartography of discourses that also circulated in support organizations in Siaya', as I discuss in subsequent chapters. The assertion that the wives whose husbands were dead were better off can be read through the practice where *Chi liel* usually benefit from the support accorded to needy widow caregivers by NGO's. Another line in the cartography is that, having a dead husband would set the wife free to fend for their children as a *Chi liel*. For example, Nyar Ugenya (one of the caregivers in a widow caregiver group) was not a *Chi liel*. However, she was admitted into the group because the other women reasoned that even though she was married, she was as badly off (if not worse than the *Chi liel*) and her husband was declared 'alive but dead' (discussions with caregivers, 2 February 2017).

During our Focus Group Discussions, it was also not uncommon for children to state that they lived with their mothers, even though both their parents were alive. In my initial encounters with children, I had characterized such children as orphaned and later as 'cheating'. It is only in listening softly and after several interactions that I discovered the fathers were not



providing. In another more dominant and patronizing language, including my initial assessment, they would be seen as cheating about the death or absence of their fathers to benefit from interventions fraudulently. However, mapping these complex subjectivities of appropriating the status of widowed or orphaned, as I did, revealed a lot more and differently in terms of caregiver's and children's experience.

For other fathers and mothers as well, some of whom had given out their children to be fostered by their relatives, being 'alive but dead' could be explained by precarious livelihoods (Okwany et al. 2011:56) and 'blocked passages' (Biehl and Locke 2010:323) where opportunities for livelihoods were missing and parents who might even want to be alive for their children were symbolically killed by the economic system and lost face. For example, Akinyi (nine and fostered by her grandmother) had both of her parents alive but they were not supporting her. When I asked the grandmother whether the mother was sending support, she exclaimed and noted: 'The mother does not send any support. We also support her. She does not know what Akinyi eats. We live like this' (discussion with caregiver, 25 July 2016).

Agnes, a sixty-two-year-old grandmother fostering her daughter's children, also explained that the daughter and her husband could not provide for the needs of her children because they did not have a regular source of income: 'She only comes to ask help from us. She relies on us. [Exclaims and laughs]. She thinks we live in Nairobi while she lives in Siaya' (interview with caregiver, 14 December 2016). The assertion that the daughter thought that her mother lived in Nairobi was imbued with meaning and was indicative of the poverty divide in Kenya where the rural areas, including Siaya in this case, tended to be ignored in development efforts. This makes people living in the rural areas rely mostly on those in the urban areas, where they may also be competing for opportunities with others.

Given the foregoing, it was apparent that within the context of poverty and other vulnerability, men who could not perform their bread-winning roles were (in a symbolic sense) seen as emasculated or 'zombie' fathers. I have argued that this was not just a discursive manoeuvre but placed it within the assemblage of factors including caregiver agency, the cartography of subjectivities occasioned by programmes of care, and insecure livelihoods. All these converge at the threshold where fathers cannot perform their breadwinning roles. One can therefore argue that, within the

cartography of these entangled factors, in some cases, the notion of the father as a bread-winner can also be seen as a 'zombie category' (Meer and Modhood 2014),<sup>62</sup> in both a symbolic, theoretical and literal sense.

### 5.9 Reworking Care: Community Capital for Vulnerable Children

In this section, I explore how the caregivers were reworking a sense of community and togetherness as a way of coping with the exigencies of their everyday realities by participating in self-help groups. Most of the caregivers I interacted with were in self-help groups, ostensibly established to provide moral and economic support. These groups were engaged in diverse economic and social activities, providing safety nets within a context of limited support by the state. For example, one of the women's groups I interacted with was supporting children who were orphaned. This group, that referenced itself as a group of widowed caregivers and members, noted that the group accorded them an avenue for sharing experiences and providing support to each other for care of their children. The members were contributing 100 Kenya shillings (1 euro) each month and were providing small loans to each other (FGD with group members, 28 June 2016). Another caregiver group was supplying needy children with items like school uniforms, food items as well as other supplies for school.

Despite the difficulties of caregiving in these cramped spaces, caregivers went beyond the discourse of burdened caregiving and emphasized the status and symbolic capital that such caregiving conferred to them (Llobet and Milanich 2018: 176). Caregivers in these groups encouraged each other to keep strong and support the children under their care. As one caregiver noted: 'We have to bring up our children, it is everybody, what do you do?' (FGD with caregivers, 14 December 2016). The groups also acted as spaces for dealing with stigma and other challenges that accompanied caregiving as one of the caregivers noted:

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<sup>62</sup> A zombie concept/theory are concepts and theories popularized by Urlick Beck that appear alive and important to supporters but in fact fail when matched with available evidence and current scholarship (see Meer & Tariq Modood. 2014).

When you are kind to those who discriminate against you as a *Chi liel* you will be trampled upon and they take your land. But we encourage each other to go to report them or take them before an assembly. Sometimes we tell them, tomorrow you will die, and your children will become orphans and your wife, a widow, may be exposed to the same (FGD with caregivers, 14 December 2016).

Dangling the threat of death into the face of the wrongdoer would at least in this case offer a reprieve for the widowed caregivers. In placing this discourse lateral to the ‘zombie husbands’ discourse, some caregivers remarked that the group was a better husband to them because they were able to get loans and build their houses or borrow money for school fees for their children. Priest’s foster caregiver was one such a caregiver who, though a widow, the group had supported in putting up a decent house. As she noted: ‘I did not have a house, we did table banking and I took a loan and now I have a house. My house was not thatched, I used to sleep at my neighbour’s house but now I have this house’ (conversation with Priest’s caregiver, 12 August 2016).

Another caregiver group, whose objective was ‘brooding over vulnerable children’ was composed of a heterogeneous group of caregivers (FGD with caregivers, 12 August 2016). Even though the group was established with the aim of meeting the needs of widowed caregivers, at the time of the research it was composed of a range of caregivers including elderly *Chi liel* some of whom had fostered children, younger *Chi liel* and other vulnerable caregivers. The women were supporting an ECCE Centre and had put in place alternative forms of ECCE provision where needy caregivers could pay school fees through alternative methods, for example by bringing firewood, food or labour in the form of cooking for the children, instead of money.

These alternatives acknowledged the difficulties of caregiving and demonstrated how the groups enabled their members to circumvent both practical and discursive challenges in their caregiving and reworked the sense of community in according social protection to children whom they referenced as ‘our children’ (discussion with caregivers, 12 August 2016). The discourses of referencing these children ‘our children’ were a parody to the dominant narratives of deficiency. These discourses have characterized parenting in such circumstances as negative and deficient at worst

(Ice et al. 2010, Ngutuku 2018:27, Nyambedha et al. 2003). These strategies by caregivers and using social capital to rework themselves as able caregivers stuttered the fluency of the dominant discourse of inadequacy of such caregivers (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:105, Rose 2004:280). While for Deleuze (1998:6) to write is to 'become something other than a writer', for these women, to tell their stories was to become something other than a vulnerable caregiver.

### 5.10 Concluding Discussions: Constrained Contexts of Caregiving

The discussions in this chapter have revealed that being a caregiver for poor and vulnerable children was not just material but was fraught with contradictions, challenges, despair, blockages as well as hope and dreams. It is these contradictions and agency that my research and writing hoped to pull from the places where they have been relegated by the dominant tales of suffering, despondency and aggregated linear accounts. Listening softly has enabled a perspective on the rhizomatic interconnections and the assemblage of the caregiving context. For example, even though the community safety nets for childcare are strained, they still come to the aid of vulnerable children. I have explored the various ways through which caregivers are engaging in the 'philanthropy of the poor' as shown not only in the way they mobilize financial resources but also in other non-material exchanges like emotional support and advice (Okwany et al. 2011:75)

I have also noted that the sense of becoming is sometimes not an even process. It has challenges and may have embedded inequalities. This is consistent with the assertion by Roy (2003:78) that 'the slopes of becoming [...] have steep gradients with considerable uncertainties and variations in relations'. I have explored some of these challenges through the experience of a widower caregiver. I have revealed that he is an emergent identity and process, a multiplicity and a performance and this presents challenges to his caregiving (Gerlach 2013:22).

Taken together, these accounts acknowledge that there is a potential in being lucid in the way we represent the caregivers' accounts of caregiving. The context of care sketched in this chapter sets the stage for deepening our understanding of the lived experience of children, as I explore in subsequent chapters in this thesis. In the immediately following chapter, I connect these discussions in order to respond to the question: who are the 'poor and vulnerable' children in Siaya?

## 6

### Who are the Poor and Vulnerable Children in Siaya? 'Rhizomatic Categories'

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I continue from the previous chapter presenting the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty. While the entry point is the home, this experience rhizomatically connects children's experience in support programmes and in the space of schooling. I now engage with the important question of who these children are and how they are known. Such a question, which is double-sided, is aimed at understanding the lived experience of these children at home as well as constructions and representations of their experience. In responding to these questions, I take heuristic entry points of specifically known categories.<sup>63</sup> Since these categories are already constituted, I approach them with ambiguity, and with a perspective of 'not knowing' their experience. This creates room for ambiguity and complexity (Goethals et al. 2015:89) in each category.

In representing the experience of these children and in Deleuzian tradition, instead of presenting the actual characteristics of children in these categories, I palpate or feel them out (May 2005:20). I accomplish this by exploring the intensities of children's experience in each category, providing finer textures and exploring the processes at play.<sup>64</sup> The aim of such an analysis is not to claim new truths but to explore the 'new vistas for thinking and living' and imagining the children's experience that such

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<sup>63</sup> I use the term category here under erasure because in this chapter I engage with categorizing practices to deconstruct and problematize them, but also to demonstrate their ambiguity.

<sup>64</sup> May (2005:20) used the analogy of palpating (how doctors identify lesions that they cannot see). This they accomplish by creating 'zones of touch' using their fingers to identify the intensities. He argued that palpation 'gives voice to the lesion'. In the same way, I explored the textures of experience of children (or what I am calling its intensities) in each category without necessarily fixing their essential characteristics.

knowledge opens for us (May 2005:22). By presenting the rhizomatic entanglements in the experience of children, I argue that the experience of children cannot be tidied up because children occupy several categories simultaneously. Other categories also emerged during the research as children's voice, unheard or not previously well heard, emerged through the interstices (Brighenti 2013: xviii).

In each of the categories I illustrate, I use the experience of selected children. This should not be read as exceptionalism. Where possible, I also draw lines and connect the experience of these children to that of others whom I also encountered.

## 6.2 The Fluid Category of Children 'Staying on Their Own'

I present the experience of children 'staying on their own' through the lens of two families. Instead of calling these 'child-headed households', I call them children that were 'staying on their own'. Avoiding the category 'child-headed household' and settling for 'children staying on their own' under erasure, enabled a better perspective on the fluid, complex and dynamic experience of these children. This also enabled me to explore the processes as well as the relations and structures that influenced or played out in this categorization.

### 6.2.1 Nobody Knows We Are Orphans: Oluoch's Household

Oluoch, twenty-four years at the time of the research, was living with his three young siblings of secondary and primary school going age. The family had been 'staying on their own' since the time Oluoch was seventeen years old, following the death of their mother. When we met, Oluoch did not start narrating his experience from the event of the death of his mother but from his mother's accident and sickness that wiped out family resources. He spoke about the support he received from a well-wisher when he said, 'a well-wisher gave me a bicycle worth 5000 shillings (50 Euros) and the pastor in the church gave me a school uniform and this is the day my help came' (conversation with Oluoch, 15 June 2016).

Oluoch and his siblings stayed in their grandmother's house for some time, but their paternal uncle relocated to the village from the city and forced them out of their grandmother's house. While Foster and others (1997:166) noted that these households were transient based on the ability of the extended family to organize themselves to take care of the children, in this case several factors came into play to determine whether children

were taken in by relatives or not. Beyond the role of the extended family, other social relations played a part as well.

The fluidities in Oluoch's experience were further evident when a well-wisher who was supporting him in school became widowed and Oluoch dropped out of school again. Another node to the status and experience of Oluoch's family was added when he was employed as a domestic worker and, together with his three siblings, moved in to live with the employer. Oluoch eventually received school fees support from an NGO and started combining schooling with working as a domestic worker. However, this support brought with it a new set of vulnerabilities. Without attention to his caregiving roles, this organization recruited him as a volunteer and so he lost his job as a domestic worker and consequently his accommodation. The family was then forced to rent a small house in the market.

Within the context of struggling to survive and sometimes stigma in the community, Oluoch had instructed his siblings not to disclose their orphan status. As he stated: 'We are very strong, and nobody knows my brothers are orphans' (conversation with Oluoch, 25 June 2016). While such 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) enabled them to claim a space of 'normal' children and liberated them from relations of stigma, it had material repercussions. This is because, as I discuss further in Chapter Seven, as a consequence his siblings could not get reprieve from paying school fees or get other special consideration on account of being orphaned. His refusal also disrupts the iconography in some literature that orphaned children cash in on the status of an orphan for material support (e.g. see Ansell 2016, Cheney 2017).

### **6.2.2 Oketch and Stella's Narrative: Itinerant Childhoods**

Oketch (twenty years old) described himself as 'living on his own' from an early age after his four maternal aunts, his father, mother, and grandmother died in that order (Oketch's essay). He then left school for several years to work. Death and 'being alone' were therefore the vernaculars of his narrative as revealed through his semi-autobiographical essay, conversations in situ and observations at home and at school. A close reading of his narrative, however, revealed the need to nuance the sensibility of being alone because, as I elaborate in Chapter Seven, the head teacher in his school and the cook were acting as his surrogate parents. They were



supporting him with food and school fees, applying for fee bursaries and approaching funding organizations on his behalf.

Though describing himself as alone, there was also another node: he was a caregiver to his stepsister Stella (twelve years old), whose mother had also died. Stella, had earlier been placed in a children's home but was later withdrawn by Oketch's cousin as Oketch noted during our conversation in his school:

I was staying with my grandmother and my sister. After a few minutes [means short period] she went [died]. By bad luck too, my mother, they were four sisters [hesitates] all had died. Then the project people [children's home] came, they took my sister. This forced me to just stay alone in that home (conversation with Oketch, 2 August 2016).

Another node in the complexity of these children's experience emerged because four months after fostering Stella, their cousin died in a road accident. Stella was therefore left with the twenty-one-year-old cousin's wife, a mother of two. The whole family including Stella then moved to stay with the mother to their cousin's wife. This placed the burden of care on their forty-two-year-old grandmother by marriage, who was also taking care of another daughter and her child. To demonstrate the mobilities of the experience and status of these children, a later encounter with Oketch revealed that Stella had moved to stay with him because their cousin's wife had left home to look for a job. She had told Oketch that they were no longer related. Indeed, the cousin's wife had earlier on asked me: 'who will pay Stella's school fees? The one who was supporting her died' (conversation with caregiver, 23 August 2016).

Further encounters with the family on a different date revealed that Oketch had approached the former children's home to accept Stella back. His reasons sounded pragmatic and revealed the constrained contexts under which poor children had to make choices. Putting his sister in the children's home was an option he had considered because of the difficulties of their lives. There was no food at home most of the time and Oketch would eat from school. I made a comment to myself as I listened to them negotiating care. In a traditional sense of the household, this would not qualify as a household where 'members eat from the same pot' since Oketch would be eating from school and Stella would have to struggle to

look for food or go without (Pillay 2016:2). Oketch had also hoped that, after completing class eight, the children's home would pay for Stella's secondary school fees.

I observed, and in some cases provided guidance that Stella, in negotiating care with her brother, exercised her agency and made claims for a different type of care. She argued that the situation in the children's home was not good:

Oketch please do not allow me to go back to that place (children's home). The fee levies they used to pay for me was so little. In fact, they do not pay for children after class eight, they dump you back into your parent's home. We can afford to pay for ourselves in another school. My uncle can support me. I can also stay at my grandmother's place. There are other people in my grandmother's village who can take care of me (field notes, 9 November 2016).

Stella might not have presented her arguments from the perspective of Article 12 of the UNCRC. However, from a substantive perspective, she claimed her right to be heard and her brother gave her voice the weight that it deserved according to UNCRC Article 12(1) by not sending her back to the children's home.<sup>65</sup> In deciding on her own care, she challenged assumptions about what type of care she was entitled to (Landsdown 2005:1, CRC General Comment No. 20, para. 19). Her agency and that of her brother behoves us to move our analysis of such households beyond vulnerability or resilience (Cheney 2010a and b, Meintjes and Giese 2006) and analyse these two as co-constitutive (see also Adefehinti and Arts 2018) In mapping her voice further, Stella could also be seen as simultaneously resilient and vulnerable and assertive by pointing to the problem with the care provided at the children's home (Pillay 2016). Eventually, in

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<sup>65</sup> This article states that 'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. While this article is directed at states, it has become a widely referred to standard for child participation and is also pursued and/or practised by many civil society organizations and individuals. Thus, Oketch can be seen as having handled the situation in the spirit of Article 12.

2017 Stella started living with her great aunt (grandmother's sister) in another community.

Honing in on such agency without looking at the entangled factors in such agency would not reveal a lot. For example, despite Stella's agency prevailing this way, living with an elderly and economically constrained grandmother could introduce new vulnerabilities and her death could signal another practical, material or status-transit and mobility. This mobility was evident in relation to her brother Oketch because two years after my research, when I visited in 2018, he was no longer 'staying on his own' but had moved in with a well-wisher in the community. While he was silent when I asked him why he had moved, a staff member in his school told me that Oketch was frequently calling in sick. Teachers thought he was a victim of witchcraft in his home (conversation with staff, 15 August 2018). This fear of witchcraft was obviously a new node in understanding his experience of status mobility.

Further interactions with his narrative in 2019 revealed that, after the results of the secondary school final exams were released, Oketch, whom earlier during the research had been touted to pass and join university, had only obtained a D+. <sup>66</sup> The teacher explained to me that this was because 'the boy had faced many challenges' (conversation with Head teacher, 4 September 2019). These challenges were his deteriorating eyesight, having to relocate from his home and belief in witchcraft. Therefore, at twenty-one years of age, Oketch was planning to go back to high school, while his contemporaries were completing university. His experience and that of other children 'living on their own' can therefore be simultaneously described as an orphaned child, a child caregiver, a fostered child and a poor child in status transit. All of these were loosely appended to the status of being orphaned or alone and/or a child heading or living in a child-headed household.

### 6.3 The Fluidities of Being an 'Outsider' Child

In this section I explore the experience of an 'outsider' child. This would be a child traditionally deemed an 'illegitimate child' or born outside marriage or wedlock. However, as I continue in the Deleuzian spirit of

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<sup>66</sup> A grade of C enables a student to secure admission into a diploma course and a grade C+ and above enrolment in University.

creativity and proliferating concepts (Hendricks and Koro-Ljungberg 2015), I utilize the term 'outsider child' to connect experience to notions of identity, belonging as well as material context. Doing so also enables me to bring to the fore other entangled processes that were at play in the experience of these children. This was also my way of making this experience visible because it tends to be made or left invisible in more dominant categorical methods in research.

In the Luo community, children are seen as 'illegitimate', when fathered by a man other than the husband to the mother. However, my analysis revealed that a more appropriate term to refer to these children is 'outsider children' because the label is tied to notions of identity and belonging in this community.

The various notions of 'outsider children' were fluid in the research sites and existed as a range. A child born to an unmarried mother was referred to as being born through *Ich simba*. *Simba* is the traditional Luo bachelor hut, constructed for each boy when they reach puberty as a marker of attaining manhood. Traditionally, young men were allowed to interact in groups with girlfriends in these huts, but they were not allowed to have sexual intercourse. Thus, a child from such liaisons, conceived outside wedlock and considered a product of a bachelor hut pregnancy, was 'illegitimate' in the cultural sense even if a marriage occurred later.

Other notions of children seen as 'outsiders' that emerged in the research sites were not tied to the condition of parentage. These included children from other marriages. For example, a child could be legitimate or an insider while in the father's household but an outsider if the mother later remarried and took the child to her new matrimonial home. In some cases, a child whose parents had died would be taken in by the maternal relatives and in some cases, such a child would be seen as an outsider by the maternal relatives. The outsider status was also ambivalent since one could be a child born out of wedlock or an outsider child, an orphaned and fostered child simultaneously. Each of these statuses obtain different salience in terms of vulnerability, depending on the context.

In the following sections, I offer a perspective on the experience of 'outsider' children by taking the experience of specific children as entry points. While their experience is not representative of all children seen as outsiders, I argue that it provides a window for understanding the vulnerabilities faced by children as well as how they enact their living rights by negotiating within such constrained contexts.

### 6.3.1 An Orphaned 'Outsider' Child

Lina (fifteen years old) was born to a teen mother who was fifteen years old at the time. Her mother re-married and took Lina with her and she bore more children before her husband passed away. Lina's mother then married into another home and left her children with their paternal relatives who neglected the children further, as Lina's caregiver noted. Culturally, since the father had paid a bride price for the mother, the children belonged to the father's household (conversation with caregiver, 10 October 2016). The caregiver noted how Lina's mother defied tradition by 'screaming' her way into getting her children. She took the children to her new matrimonial home and they started living with their new stepfather.

The stepfather eventually disowned them, and Lina and her three siblings moved in with the brother to their biological father in a small house. Lina and her siblings yet again were taken by their mother's sister who was also struggling without a secure livelihood. Eventually, Lina was fostered by another well-wisher in the community. The arrangement was that Lina could benefit from education after providing childcare services to her guardian. Lina also signed an agreement with her caregiver that a condition for continued support would be that she would not go home until she completed high school (conversation with Lina's caregiver, 10 October 2016). Listening to Lina later, however, also revealed that such a conditionality was couched in terms of helping her avoid bad company, a voice she herself appropriated: 'I do not even want to visit my home over the holidays. Girls there are just getting married, they might influence me' (photo narrative with Lina, 15 December 2016).

Otieno and Ochieng (eleven and thirteen years respectively) and their two siblings were paternal orphans and were living with their maternal grandmother after their mother remarried. In their new home, the mother had four other children. During the various Focus Group Discussions with children in primary schools this emerged as the case for several other children in primary schools. While the older children might have been aware of the reasons for staying with maternal relatives, the younger children were given various reasons for this situation. Some were informed that they were staying with maternal grandparents to provide them company or to benefit from better schools and they appropriated the same voice in our discussions. However, reading and listening softly through their diaries, essays and drawings, revealed that even the young children named this practice as unjust.

For example, during our one-on-one conversations, Otieno looked dejected with unkempt clothes. This observation rhymed with the neglect he reflected in his essay. He noted that he was staying with his grandmother to provide her with company. Listening softly through his creative drawing, however, revealed that he represented himself as a child 'struggling on his own'. Through his creative drawing, while sometimes referencing himself as the person in the drawing and sometimes attributing the drawing to somebody else, he said: 'this boy's mother [gives the name] does not help me. He is struggling alone. Our father died, and we live with our grandmother who is sick. We do not have clothes and we do not get enough food' (Otieno's creative drawing, 22 July 2016).

Struggling on their own, even though fostered by their grandmother, for Otieno and his brother was a descriptor entangled with living with a grandmother who was not only widowed but also had suffered a stroke and was suffering from HIV/AIDs complications. The boys also lived with a twenty-year-old wife to their uncle, whom the boys described in their diaries as 'not wanting to cook for them' (Otieno and Ochieng's diaries). The boys also expressed a desire to visit their mother, but they were told there was no bus fare. Later discussions with my research assistant revealed that the children were not allowed to visit their mother in their new home because culturally, the man had not adopted them.

### 6.3.2 A 'Double Outsider' Child: Cecilia

Cecilia was fifteen years old by the time I encountered her. She was born outside wedlock and her mother got married later, when Cecilia was four years old. The new husband adopted Cecilia and she even used her stepfather's name. Eventually, when she was in class seven, her parents' marriage encountered some difficulties and Cecilia reported:

My father called home and told my mother that he wanted my mother to surrender his four children to him and remain with her fifth child. I asked my mother, who is this fifth child? I learned that I was not his child. My parents separated and divided the children between themselves while I went to stay with my grandmother (conversation with Cecilia, 22 September 2016).

While such a move could be seen as bringing some reprieve to her suffering, other nodes on Cecilia's outsider status emerged. She faced stigma

and bullying from her late uncle's twenty-four-year-old son who lived with her grandmother and taunted her to look for her real father and her home. Cecilia also reported that, on several occasions, her cousin had tried to harm her and in one case even tried to sexually assault her. She also reported that her stepfather had been telling her to pay for his name or 'return it' (conversation with Cecilia, 22 September 2016, and Cecilia's Diary). Such was the struggle that Cecilia as an 'outsider child' in her stepfather's home, and an 'outsider' in her maternal grandmother's home encountered. This was in the context of having a biological father who was not known to any of the members of the family.

However, priming my ears differently (Lather 2007), I listened to Cecilia's account of vulnerability occasioned by her cousin's taunting. This revealed the silenced experience of another young child in the family. Her 'troublesome' cousin had a four-year-old son whom I only got to learn about when Cecilia complained that her cousin mistreated her and yet she was the one taking care of his child. This boy was born outside wedlock and the cousin to Cecilia was given custody of the child. It emerged from discussions that the child was sometimes left in the house unattended. Even though Cecilia's grandmother endearingly talked about Cecilia as 'her joy', she never referred to the boy even once in our discussions. This 'insider' child was therefore an 'outsider' child in his father's home because his father was the villain 'other'. After some time, during her photo interviews Cecilia revealed that the boy was taken away by his mother, perhaps to become an 'outsider child' in his maternal parent's home or in his stepfather's home.

By the end of 2016, Cecilia's cousin passed away. Her grandmother reportedly was happy because Cecilia was finally safe. Further lines of vulnerability emerged because her grandmother had to sell her small piece of land to transport the cousin's body home and she was reportedly stressed and sick because of this. The lines in the cartography of Cecilia's experience therefore seemed to multiply even as some were mutating (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:15).

### 6.3.3 'Outsider Children': Children's Relational Rights, and Living Law and Practice

The stories shared earlier in this chapter make it apparent that the children involved faced several vulnerabilities and that their needs and their rights were not well looked after or protected. However, these children also



exercised their living rights as they positioned themselves within these care contexts. Article 24(1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that 'every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State'. This therefore behoves duty bearers, including communities, to take action to protect children facing these vulnerabilities.

However, children's vulnerabilities were a complex cartography and require a nuanced analysis when seeking alternative care and protection. Some grandmother carers noted that, while their daughters or daughters-in-law would have wanted to take the children with them, the fact that they were also struggling economically and depending on their maternal households for support made it difficult. One grandmother caregiver revealed the following: 'my daughter is like a vagabond, she does not have anything, and she relies on us for food. This child [fostered by the grandmother] was not going to school when I visited her, she was taking care of other smaller children' (conversation with caregiver, 25 July 2016). Such children were sometimes imagined in the local repertoires as 'taking away the luck' of the legitimate children, translated as benefitting from resources that belong to the bona-fide heirs.

It is apparent that social relations, including notions of identity, had a bearing on whether and how these children were protected, and their needs met. For example, discussions with cultural interlocutors revealed that children were usually identified by their father's place of origin. For a woman that would be done by using *nyar* – daughter of, for a man *wuod* or *ja* (son of) – which denotes belonging to and is always patrilineal. One would be a daughter of the father and a daughter of the village/community involved. An ancestral name further roots the person in her/his community. Taking these children to a new context away from their clan, for example to their stepfather's home, was seen to interfere with these notions of identity. These notions of identity and belonging were also malleable and gendered in that sometimes girls may be taken in by the stepfather. There was an assumption that girls would get married and move out of the home and also bring benefits in the form of bride wealth. For boys, however, the issue of land to construct their bachelor hut and eventually moving their own homes further exacerbated the notions of being an outsider child. For example, among the Luo, a father would show the son

where to construct a bachelor hut within his home based on the birth order. In such cases, a stepson (an outsider) who was a first born of the mother would not construct his bachelor hut on the immediate right but on the left thus revealing that he was not born of the stepfather.

These notions of identity were also tied to poverty because, in some cases, parents who had resources would circumvent this cultural requirement by buying land for their sons outside the home. For children like Donald (twenty), an 'outsider child', education through university provided a way out of these constraining cultural relations. For many other children I interacted with, however, being a poor and an outsider child further constrained them.

Some children exercised their relational rights (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017:855) by refusing to leave the home of their paternal relatives even in the face of difficulties. For seven-year-old Brigid's cousin, when his other siblings were taken in by their maternal grandmother because of ill treatment by the stepmother and father, this boy claimed his right to belong, and to be treated well in his father's household. He was reported to be occasionally crying on his mother's grave when mistreated and the stepmother stopped mistreating him (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016). Evidently, his right to be heard (in line with UNCRC Article 12, as explained earlier) did not need to be exercised through speaking directly, but this could be done through an alternative performance of his agency. The boy's actions denoted 'voice as a doing' (Mazzei and Jackson 2017:1095) as the focus of the voice shifted to the outcomes of his action.

Discussions with children indicated that, a desire to be close to the grave of the parents in some cases influenced whether orphaned children moved into their maternal grandparent's households even when they were facing neglect in their paternal relative's home. While culture is not static and evolves, as I have argued above, these unwritten cultural laws pertaining to identity cannot be solely addressed by the interventions through resort to legal enforcements of the rights of the child. Instead, their citizenship and belonging were claimed, lived and enacted through these institutional cultures and not necessarily between citizen and state (Nguyen et al. 2007:34).

**Figure 6-1 : Ben’s photo of his mother’s grave and old house**



*Ben’s photos*

The relations with their caregivers also influenced the protection rights of the children that I encountered. For example, Cecilia’s grandmother wished that her granddaughter would be supported financially to become a boarder in high school so as to avoid the challenges in their home. Cecilia herself in our first encounter also wished she could get support for education in a boarding school. However, on listening closely, I discovered that Cecilia’s voice was appropriated from the community mobilizer who had been working with the organization that was paying fees for her. Even after I had intervened by securing an organization that could move her to a safe house for protection, she refused to leave her grandmother who was poor.

The experience of outsider children should also be connected to the state laws and social and legal provisions, which may not adequately cater for such children in practice. Among others, Article 10 on ‘National Values’ and Articles 27 and 53(2) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 guarantee the right to non-discrimination and inherent dignity and worth for all (thus including children seen as outsiders) as well as protection of the marginalized. The Children’s Act 2001 provides in Article 24(3) – that, for children born out of wedlock, in the first instance the mother should have parental responsibility. Kenya’s Constitution (2010), however, provides that a father should assume parental responsibility whether married to the mother or not, and even provide for support and care of stepchildren.

It is important to note that, while there are constitutional provisions and rulings<sup>67</sup> relevant to the wellbeing of outsider children, the way the rights involved are claimed or practiced in day-to-day encounters, or their living rights and law (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013:10), need further attention. Gabriella (who was herself an outsider child) was forced to use the name of her paternal grandfather because she was born to a single mother and her biological father refused to endorse her as his child. Further, when she got her own child as a teenager, the father of her child did not accept responsibility and so she named her child after herself.

Further, bringing the law into the perspective provides another node of the cramped contexts of caregiving, as well as gendered norms that may absolve some men from caregiving. For example, when I engaged the local government leader on why some men did not provide support for their children born out of wedlock or after separating from the wives, he noted that the men themselves were poor (conversation with administrator, 14 December 2016). Such an argument from the local administrator was telling, because before a caregiver could present a case for the maintenance of the child in a children's office the local administrator must have a dialogue with both parents to verify the case. If the administrator did not see the need for committing some parents to providing care, then how could justice be done to the children involved?

Such a discourse of poor fathers who could not provide maintenance brings to memory the debates on the Kenya Affiliation Act that was abolished in 1969 (Thomas 2005). The Act provided for the man to support the children he fathered out of wedlock. Some fathers filed mitigation to the effect that they could not afford to provide support to their children. Discussions with the local government leader and other staff in the organizations that I consulted for my research revealed further nodes in this discourse and rhizomatic connections with the discourse in the Affiliation Act. In my research, women who sought child support from their husbands were framed as 'gold diggers' and were seen as cashing in on the wealth of men (conversation with project leader, 27 October 2016). This connected to similar discourses circulating on the Affiliation Act, where

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<sup>67</sup> See Constitutional Petitions 193 (2011) and 484 (2014). These challenged the Children's Act 2001 respectively on parental responsibility for children born out of wedlock, and the right to have their father's name included in the birth certificate for children born out of wedlock.

women who sought support for children born out of wedlock were seen as conniving to defraud men (Ngutuku 2006, Thomas 2008)

It emerged that these masculinist concerns about the children were entangled with nationalist concerns. When I engaged an officer in the OVC secretariat on the possibility of the government giving a grant to children of single mothers, he responded by noting: 'This should not be allowed because people take advantage of this fund. Picture this, a fifteen-year-old may become pregnant and her daughter pregnant too and the child of her daughter and they all depend on the government' (conversation with government leader, 8 June 2016). According to this official, three generations of mother's dependent on the state would represent Kenya in bad light. It is clear that struggles over childcare in Siaya and in Kenya in general were not just linked to economic needs but also to struggles for reproduction and fertility. In all these, the best interests of the children may be ignored.

In concluding this section, I note that the case of outsider children has demonstrated that child deprivation is not just material but also socio-cultural (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2010 in Hulshof 2019:3). A perspective on the factors entangled in their experience is therefore important.

#### 6.4 Children on the Move after Projects

In this section, I provide a perspective on children who were 'following after projects' or 'scouting for good Samaritans'. This was one of the emergent characteristics of children that may not be captured using conventional methods. Within the Kenyan landscape of child support, as noted earlier, there is limited support by the state giving rise to several non-governmental organizations that are working in support of children in poverty. Children interacted with these programmes leading to specific subjectivities of chasing after projects of support or what I call in this research 'itinerant childhoods'. This is consistent with Macdonald (2009:247) who argued that specific institutional arrangements, like support programmes in this case, may influence the experience of children or constitute their experience. However, contrary to Macdonald's perspective, this process is not just dialectical, it is rhizomatic.

This was the experience of Musa (twenty years old). He was born to a teenage mother and eventually his mother got married, leaving him with his maternal grandmother. By the time of the research he was staying with his aunt in another community while his grandmother was still the primary caregiver. This is because he argued that there were more opportunities

for earning a living in his aunt's place compared to his grandmother's place. However, in exercising his agency, he hung by his grandmother's home as well because he was earlier enrolled in the OVC project from which he was 'exited' after he completed high school. The decision to exit him was not communicated to him and he still hoped that he would be supported with college fees. This meant he had to travel occasionally to the project and stop working as a *boda boda* rider. Indeed, when he heard that I was in the community interacting with children, he moved in again with his grandmother and even gave me his school reports. He hoped a donor could start supporting him (field notes, 30 June 2016).

I also encountered other claim-making strategies where children were seeking out support from projects by themselves. I have characterized this as 'sensibilities of survival' by looking for good Samaritans to support them and especially their education. For example, Shauri (fifteen years old) was orphaned and had been out of school for a year due to lack of school fees. After her mother's death, she was fostered by her aunt who also died in 2014. Shauri then started living with her brother who struggled to educate her. Shauri was also sometimes living with her other aunt in Kisumu. She moved from the home of this aunt back to the community when she heard that her friends were 'recruited' by an education project. Her younger brother was also said to be moving around looking for *wazungu* (foreigners) to support his education (conversation with Shauri, 23 September 2016). Later in 2017, my research assistant informed me that Shauri had moved from the brother's place, to stay with another relative looking for another project to support her.

Purple and Gabriella were also children that I characterized as 'adopted' for projects in the research sites. Purple started living with her aunt in 2015 after a project started supporting girl's education in the research community. To meet the targets, communities in this project site were encouraged to bring girls who were not going to school, even those living in different parts of the country. Purple's aunt narrated the decision to live with her as follows:

I approached the project and told them I had a needy child and the mobilizers allowed her into the bridge centre. Girls who had been out of school were doing accelerated learning in the hope that their education would be sponsored (conversation with Purple's aunt, 11 October 2016).



On the other hand, Gabriella (eighteen years) and a mother of one was 'imported' for projects and was fostered by a local administrator who had earlier fostered Lina. Gabriella's parents passed away and she had been staying with her grandmother who was very old. The foster caregiver presented this support to her kin as she drew distinctions between fostering Lina and Gabriella this way: 'I heard that a project was helping needy children and I asked myself why I was supporting a stranger [Lina] while my own blood [Gabriella] was suffering, so then I called her'.

Discussions with other informants in this project indicated that several of the children benefitting from fees support in this project had migrated from other parts of the district and came to be 'adopted' this way. In cases where children were not enrolled directly in projects, a head teacher in one of the participating secondary schools noted that children would come by the gate of the school to seek opportunities and to leave their details in case an organization that was supporting children showed up.

Within the context where the government had limited outreach and could not afford its citizens' education and within the context of widespread child poverty, citizenship for children was therefore negotiated at two levels: through kin-based relations where some caregivers 'imported' their relatives from other neighbourhoods; and through organizations providing support to the children. This importing was not a problem per se but other vulnerabilities that accompanied partial rights as a child adopted for project were. For example, Purple's caregiver was categorical in the position that she was not responsible for meeting Purple's needs including paying other school-related levies. According to the caregiver, her responsibility only went as far as bringing her on board (conversation with Purple's caregiver, 11 October 2016). As a result, Purple, who had imagined that she was fostered by her aunt, reported many days when she was frustrated and was accused of cashing in on her aunt's wealth. As a result, when this arrangement failed, she moved again for some time to her original home and left school.

However, the layered complexities in the experience of a child moving after projects need to be carefully understood. It would be easy to vilify caregivers who import relatives for projects, or projects that work with these targets. For example, I discovered that it might not be easy to identify such cases of children moving from other regions. In one case, when I interviewed Linda's caregiver who was benefitting from one of the



projects, she said that Linda was an orphan. However, I noticed that there was a muffled exchange in the local language between the caregiver and my research assistant who was well acquainted with the family. The caregiver later said that her parents were alive but needy. In a follow up discussion with my research assistant, I discovered that Linda was registered in one of the projects as an orphaned child even though both her parents were alive.

Beyond listening softly to identify ‘untruth’, it would be more useful to listen to identify the reasons for these children and caregiver’s subjectivities. First, in the absence of state support and where the market had not ensured support for the needy children, the kin-based notions of entitlement as well as the non-governmental support organizations are the spaces where these children negotiate their living rights and thus perform acts of citizenship (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013, Isin 2009). Second, another line in the cartography of these subjectivities is the exceptionalism in provision of non-state support to children where most of the organizations provide support based on their core competencies and their ability to negotiate with donors. Regions that may not have such competitive advantage may be forced to ‘export’ their children elsewhere, where projects are active. Lastly, the social and generational relations as well as implications of such movement also need to be engaged with. In the next section, I get into the lines of categories again, to disrupt them further and to present further nuances on the entanglements in the ‘fostered child category’ in Siaya.

### 6.5 Further Ambiguities in the Fostered Child Category

In general, I can argue that most of the children I encountered in my research or those that were described as poor and vulnerable were fostered children. While the characteristics of this category seem obvious, my research revealed that it connected experience of rather different children. In this section, I demonstrate the complexity and entanglement in these children’s experience by italicising the crosscutting experience. This is not just a heuristic exercise but demonstrates the complexity of their experience. Some of the children were already orphaned, some were outsider children, and others still were searching for projects among other such characteristics. In describing the features of these children under such a broad category, I also bring to the fore the different entangled challenges

in their context as well as the diverse ways in which they claimed their rights and exercised agency (see also Cheney, 2016).

Fostering children in the research sites could be said to be one of the ways in which caregivers exercise a sense of becoming (May 2005, Biehl and Locke 2010). However, fostering children in the research contexts where conditions were 'choked' did not necessarily presuppose that the foster family was well off. In most cases, fostering was guided by notions of 'blood' (Cheney 2016) and a need to support kin relations.

For example, Lizzy (sixteen years) was fostered by different relatives over the years. Her elder brother Donald argued that Lizzy had been fostered for 'tea', implying that she was fostered for provision of her material needs. He noted that:

My sister stayed with several sets of relatives and she suffered. If a relative said, I want to go with her, my parents would agree. This was difficult but at least it gave her an opportunity to take a cup of tea [breakfast] in the morning (discussion with Donald, 27 February 2016).

I also read the precarity for this family by connecting it rhizomatically to diverse biographic factors ranging from Donald's uneducated parents who did not have a sustainable livelihood strategy, and his father having been fostered but seen as an 'outsider' as discussed earlier in this chapter. Adding to this chequered biography was the breakdown of the social contract these children had with the state, which was not providing adequate support to these children (Okwany and Ngutuku 2018).

Similar but slightly different circumstances played out in the case of Sharon (fourteen years old). She described her orphaned status as the reason for being fostered by her aunt but also emphasized her material and emotional lack. This was revealed in the following section of her essay:

My parents died when I was five-years-old. My mother died through a road accident and my father due to typhoid. When my parents died, I was left alone at home. I was struggling to look for food and I was walking bare footed. I had only two pairs of clothes and they were tonned [worn out] and my hair was shaggy. There was nobody to take me to school. I was in need and there was nobody to take care of me.

Priest (seven years) was taken in by his aunt because his material needs were not being met:

Priest is the last-born son to my late brother. They are four siblings (two boys and two girls). The second girl died. My brother's wife does not do any meaningful work [says with finality]. She works on people's farms. That's why I took Priest. He was very thin and was missing food (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016).

Children who were not necessarily fostered also moved in between relatives in search of material and psychological support. This I have called fluid fostering. For example, Philip (fifteen years) was orphaned as earlier discussed. In his diary, he revealed that he sometimes stayed in his father's home, sometimes at his grandmother's home and sometimes at his friend's home. Such a strategy had earned him the label truant. However, a close reading of his experience (through his essay, diaries and conversations) revealed that it was his way of coming to terms with the challenges he faced. For example, he noted that he sometimes found it difficult to return home because his home was very far from school. He therefore stayed with his friend who lived next to the school. Staying with his friend while addressing the challenges of the distance to school, however did not address his other material needs like food. As he noted: 'When I go to Brian's place, I do not go to the main house. We sleep in a separate old house. I do not want people to think I go there because I want their food' (conversation with Philip, 4 September 2016).

Lizzy on the other hand was serially fostered because on some occasions she was mistreated in the foster home. When this happened, some children would exercise agency and return home, as Lizzy noted after having been mistreated by her foster caregiver: 'I borrowed a phone from my neighbour and told my mother to come and get me. All along I had thought being mistreated was part of growing up' (Lizzy's essay). However, such agency was still structured around conditions of material lack because Lizzy noted that, after she was withdrawn from the stressful fostering relationship, she was later fostered by her uncle. Eventually she became *pregnant* and dropped out of school (ibid). The fact that some of these children even when facing difficulties had to make trade-offs between

their wellbeing and 'ability to take tea' revealed vulnerabilities within the context of fostering. It also shows the complexities of children and care-giver agency.

Movement by children to avoid being mistreated was sometimes misrepresented as indiscipline. As one of the caregivers noted: 'These orphans are very stupid. They like running from one family to another. My niece runs back to my mother when she misbehaves' (conversation with caregiver, 13 September 2016). Shauri (fifteen years old) moved between relatives when she perceived that her grandmother was hard on her, but she did not totally sever ties with her grandmother. Instead, she would occasionally go back, especially when she heard there was a project to be exploited. Philip's father also noted that Philip went to his grandmother when he perceived that his father was hard on him.

Folding children's agency in this case through Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) arguments reveals that agency for these children is the way they exercised their living rights and made choices to stay with specific relatives at specific moments. Additionally, folding it again through Foucault shows that such agency was located within generational relations of power where it was represented as disobedience. In unfolding this analysis through Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the agency by children was entangled, with children taking 'lines of flight' but still sometimes limited by 'lines of articulation' (structural constraints). These two lines were not dialectical but a multiplicity.

#### 6.5.1 Fostering for Reciprocity: This is the Child that God Brought Us

Fostering children was also done for purposes of reciprocity with the expectation that the children would provide companionship and support with day-to-day activities to the caregivers too. One of the caregivers living with a young adult who had been fostered noted the following: 'This is the child that God brought to us, he takes good care of us' (discussions with a caregiver, 22 July 2016). Such a voice should be understood by the fact that, he reciprocated the family's support in paying his high school fees by watching over their home and supporting the elderly caregivers. A narrative by another caregiver fostering a twelve-year-old girl shows that this need for reciprocity was both entangled with the need for supporting children and the need for child-protection. As she noted: 'The mother to Winny [twelve years old] was needy and was working for me. When she

was leaving, I asked the mother to allow Winny to stay so she could help me at night' (conversation with caregiver, 22 July 2016). In going beyond categories, one can take a different line in reading Winny's narrative to explore her entangled experience. She straddled the identity of an outsider child that I earlier explored, because she was not the biological child of the mother's husband. Earlier her caregiver had reported that Winny's stepfather who had a drinking problem had physically assaulted her, and that she had been staying with relatives before she accompanied the mother to work.

My research also revealed that some children who do not reciprocate were vilified and were taken back to their original home. Abebe (2010:466) argued that the nature of the relationship between the foster parent and the deceased relative determines how well children will be treated. However, my careful reading of perspectives and encounters through each other as embedded in my rhizomatic diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007) also enabled me to learn to listen without judging but to instead focus on the complexities and perspectives we may erase by focusing on the narrow perspective of maltreatment. For example, biological children to these caregivers supported the fostered children with the expectation that these children would be kind towards their parents. Caregivers may also receive advice from their biological children to return the 'problematic' children to their households.

The choice to foster based on the utility of the child should not be understood simplistically as self-serving interests of the caregivers (e.g. see Cheney 2007). Rather, this should be seen within the context of the changing family in the research contexts, where most of the elderly caregivers are often living on their own and fostering children is mutually beneficial and supports both the children and the elderly caregivers. In a situation where these children do not deliver therefore, being returned was always a possibility.

The narratives discussed in this section clearly indicate that the experience of fostered children is a complexity and there are idiosyncrasies for each child. They also reveal that we should focus on the dynamics of the process of fostering and seek to understand how this practice has metamorphosed within specific contexts of generalized economic insecurity and poverty, as well as agency by children in such care arrangements. We should also seek to understand the specific vulnerabilities of different

children within such a category. Following Carsten (2007), the everyday practices of people in fostering thus are important.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter have revealed that, poor children do occupy simultaneous, fluid and contingent categories of orphaned children, fostered children, children on status transit and itinerant trajectories, children that move in search of other support, children that are fostered as well as de-facto heads of families, among other characteristics. These contingencies of status had implications for the way support was provided and how their needs were constructed. They also engaged the categorical criteria often used in the classification of children in programmes and policies.

While there may be key nodes around which a particular experience is formed, one cannot standardize the experience of these children. I call for the need to go beyond categories of children living in poverty and vulnerability and underline the need to be attuned to the intricacies, indeterminacies and contingencies of the experience of children. I take up the implications of these contingencies and incomplete experience later, in the concluding chapters of this thesis. In the next chapter, I first continue mapping how the experience of a poor and vulnerable child is located or enacted within the education system.

# 7

## Cartographies of Children's Schooling Experience

### 7.1 Introduction

Participating in education within contexts of material lack is part of the cartographies of children's experience in Siaya. Education influences and shapes children's experience as well as their future imaginaries. In this chapter, I explore schooling as a site and one of the nodes in the assemblage of a poor and a vulnerable child in Siaya in particular, and in the Kenyan context in general. Studies have explored challenges in schooling as well as education outcomes for poor children from a cause and effect perspective and a demand and supply angle (e.g. Mariara and Kirii 2006). Such studies disproportionately focused on institutional failures and household factors. For example, low enrolment among the poorest students has been explained in terms of:

lack of supply, the opportunity cost of attending school, the perceived low returns from schooling in the labour market or other factors such as the distance to school, and for girls, the existence of female teachers and separate toilets (Oketch and Rolleston 2007:156-157).

Understanding the experience of schooling for poor children may require other parameters beyond the demand and supply dialectics because the latter perspective may not capture the finer textures, intricacies and contingencies of the schooling experience for children who are poor. The demand and supply narrative is also not attuned to the processes of negotiation by children and how they enact specific politics and lay claims to their right to education.



Here, I borrow a neologism from Richerme (2013:257) and 'complexificate'<sup>80</sup> this experience of children with schooling, recasting it as a complexity and an assemblage of factors that interact in rhizomatic ways. This act, of complexifying from a Deleuzo Guattarian perspective of 'how things connect rather than how they are' (Tamsin 2010:147), opens up new perspectives that may not be easily accessible through the traditional analyses of children's experience of poverty and schooling. I also present how children position their right to education from a range of actors including global actors, the state, non-state actors including the relevant community, relatives and well-wishers. These rights-claiming strategies in turn also become part of the cartographies of children's experience of schooling and essentially the experience of being a poor and a vulnerable child.

In the rhizome frame that guides the overall arguments in the thesis, the arguments in this chapter run from Chapter Five on the context of caregiving. They also connect with Chapter Six that presented the intensities of children's experience through a non-categorical perspective. They also connect with lines in the next chapter (Chapter Eight), that examine how children re-work the interpretation of their rights to education, in their everyday experience of programmes of support. But first, I foreground the education policy in Kenya.

## 7.2 Foregrounding Education Policy in Kenya

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 provides for states to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all'. Kenya is a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and therefore bound by Article 28 (1) which commits states to protect the rights of children to education equitably. Article 53(1) of the Kenyan Constitution (2010) provides for a right to 'free and compulsory basic education' for all children. The Constitution in Article 21(1) also states that 'it is the fundamental duty of the state and every state organ to observe, respect, protect, and fulfil the rights and fundamental freedoms in the bill of rights'.

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<sup>80</sup> I find 'complexified' a better expression than 'complicated' since it connects better to rhizomatic perspectives.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) has a long history in Kenya (see CISP 2017). It is provided for under the County Early Childhood Education Bill (2014) where schedule 5(1) states that ‘every child has the right to Free and Compulsory Early Childhood Development and Education’. Schedule 5(2) of this bill provides that this right shall be enjoyed without discrimination on various grounds, including economic ability. Some aspects of Preschool and Early Childhood Education are also covered under the Basic Education Act (2013), under the 26<sup>th</sup> schedule which requires the county government to provide funds for developing infrastructure for training in pre-primary education and childcare.

The right to basic education<sup>81</sup> has been codified through the Kenya Basic Education Act (2013). Its Article 28(1) states that ‘the Cabinet Secretary shall implement the right of every child to free and compulsory basic education’. Article 39(a) clarifies that it is the duty of the government to ‘provide free and compulsory basic education to every child’. This obligation includes that of protecting marginalized or vulnerable children from discrimination in accessing or participating in basic education.

In Kenya, Free Primary Education (FPE) has a long history. It was already embedded in the Kenya sessional paper number 10 of 1965 (GOK 1965:1) where the newly independent government made a commitment to eliminate ‘lack of education, poverty and disease’ because it was keen on abolishing the inequalities and segregations embedded in the colonial education system (see also Cifuentes 2012). These new values pertaining to education, coupled with the introduction of Harambee schools,<sup>82</sup> played a

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<sup>81</sup> Primary Education is eight years (for six to thirteen-year-old children) who exit after sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations. Secondary education lasts four years (for fourteen to seventeen-year olds) and children exit after sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations

<sup>82</sup> Harambee is the national motto in Kenya that means pulling together for the common good (self-help). It was promoted widely by the post-independent state and was instrumental in expanding education and health infrastructure in Kenya. Harambee Schools were schools supported by parents and communities through collective efforts. Parents and communities did Harambees (organized collective fundraising) for establishing the schools and for supporting in hiring teachers and organizing various other activities.

part in the rise of the gross enrolment in primary education to 79 per cent (from 60 per cent in 1964) (Cifuentes 2012:55). In 1974, FPE for classes one to four was implemented by the government of the first president. This was extended to classes five to seven in 1978 by the second president (Abuya et al. 2015:5, Cifuentes 2012, Lelei and Weidman 2012, Somerset 2009, UNESCO 2005). However, as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes popularized and imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, in 1985 cost-sharing was introduced in the education sector. Parents were expected to contribute to the costs of education with the exception of salaries for teachers and other staff. This affected many children, especially those from poor households.

Guided largely by political expediency, the Mwai Kibaki government (2003-2013) used the promise of FPE as a way of setting itself apart from the former ruling party led by President Moi. FPE was re-introduced in 2003 by the then new government and tuition fees were abolished (Abuya et al. 2015:5, Cifuentes 2012, Somerset 2009, UNESCO 2005). Despite its perceived populist inclinations, the re-introduction of FPE in Kenya saw enrolment levels rise and it was estimated that the enrolment increased by 35 per cent from 0.969 million in 2002 to 1.312 million in 2009 (Somerset 2009:244).

In 2008, Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) was introduced and covered tuition fees for secondary school students by awarding an annual capitation grant of KES 10,265 (about 100 euros) to each student (Nicolai and Hine 2014:23). Parents would only need to pay the cost of provision of school materials, food, uniform and boarding facilities and other school development related expenses. As a result of this policy, Nicolai and Hine (2014:3-4) noted that the 'gross enrolment ratio (GER) for secondary school increased from 40% in the early 2000s to 60% in 2009'. In 2012 it was clear that the secondary school transition rate had even increased more, from '46.4% in 2002 to 75% in 2009' (ibid).

A host of other provisions sought to facilitate schooling for children from poor backgrounds. These included (as was still the case at the moment of writing): a state-funded Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children, bursary programmes for school fees administered by the national and county governments, and non-state actor education programmes for marginalized children. For girls, in recognition of the challenges that girls encounter compared to boys, bursary allocation at secondary level has been enhanced. In assessment for bursaries which is

point based, girls affirmatively receive an additional point and an extra 5 per cent allocation (Wango et al. 2012:10).

Despite such policy and programmatic efforts, many children from poor households in Kenya still encounter challenges in attaining their legal right to education. This fact supports the perspective that education is not free in Kenya after all (Somerset 2009). These matters are further explored in this chapter. Some preliminary caveats are due though. This chapter is not aimed at assessing the education policy and its strengths or weaknesses in Kenya. In seeing the schooling experience as part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability, I do not see the policy as a context around which children enact their schooling experience. Rather, I see it as part of the assemblage of schooling experience and thereby a site where their lived experience of poverty and vulnerability is enacted and/or performed. I therefore read the policy diffractively with children's experience and their rights claims not only to education per se, but to good education as well. In the next section, I provide a perspective on children's experience in Early Childhood Education.

### 7.3 Excluded Before They Start School

My discussions with children, caregivers and other key informants revealed that exclusion from schooling and problematic inclusion starts in early childhood.<sup>83</sup> The opening narrative of Ayo in this thesis demonstrated how children are excluded due to different and interacting factors. Ayo was excluded from participating in ECCE due to lack of money for school fees. This happened despite the fact that the Kenya County Early Childhood Education Bill of 2014 stipulates that children in public institutions should pay no fees. According to Sessional Paper Number 14

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<sup>83</sup> I am well aware that Early Childhood Care and Education is a broad notion that, as noted by Okwany and Ebrahim (2018) spans a range of interwoven and mutually reinforcing activities around care (health, nutrition, hygiene) and education (stimulation, learning) for pre-schoolers from birth to eight years. In Kenya, ECCE covers early childhood care for children from birth to three and pre-primary for children of four and five years old. However, in this section, I focus on the schooling related aspects of ECCE while connecting it with other care related aspects like health and nutrition. This is important because these centres are not supposed to be only for preparation for schooling but also for providing holistic care for children.

(2012), the state is supposed to provide capitation grants to the ECCE centres to cater for special needs cases like that of Ayo (GOK 2012c:91). However, at the time of my research, the ECCE centres were underfunded, and caregivers had to pay money for teachers' salaries as well as for midday meals.

The other exclusionary process was the requirement to do exams before a child can transition to class one. Sitting for exams before transiting to class one is a problem because the Basic Education Act (2013) in article 34(4) provides that:

no public school shall administer any test related to admission of a child to a public school or cause a person to administer such test unless such a test is for purposes of placing the child at an appropriate level of education.

Sessional paper number 14 of 2012 also stipulates that children should transition automatically to primary school (GOK 2012c:35).

The global practices of testing for school readiness, where children have to take an exam as applied in ECCE discourses can also explain issues of forcing young children to take exams before they transition to primary school. As Dahlberg and Moss (2005:10) noted, such practices for controlling for quality in preschools, standardize experience. They do not take into consideration the trajectories of children like Ayo, who was expected to take an exam before transitioning. Ayo was not only sick, but she also was orphaned. In addition, in the meritocratic school system in Kenya, exams are used to cover the problems of lack of spaces in primary schools and so children are sorted quite early in the education ladder. Further, the denial of the children's right to education also points to the fact that, as in Ayo's case that we encountered in Chapter One, exams are used as a bait to make the caregivers pay school fees.

Other perspectives on Ayo's life showed an entanglement of other factors like lack of food at home (as I observed in the days I visited), as well as lack of support from the state. In addition, despite her HIV-sick body, Ayo (being a girl) was sometimes expected to take care of her two-year-old sister, which truncated her schooling experience. Her narrative and those of others give life to the statistics on net enrolment that capture the number of children who have joined school and fail to account for the

quotidian experiences of those out of the system, or for children who are included but in a problematic way.

Ayo, and her five peers that I interacted with in the ECCE centre were excited about going to school. However, their views were rarely taken into consideration in making decisions about retaining them in school due to lack of fees. Indeed, when I visited Brigid's caregiver, she informed me that Brigid (five years old) went to enrol herself in the ECCE centre even before her caregiver paid school fees. She noted that 'she just took her bag and went to school when she saw our neighbour's children going to school. I told her, I have not paid school fees and she would hear none of it' (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016).

Ayo's experience and that of other children in the ECCE centre involved, were similar to Gabriel's, who shared his remembered experience of childhood and whose narrative pointed to the complex challenges relating to participation in education by young children. He noted that he was only able to go to the ECCE centre when a well-wisher<sup>84</sup> supported him. However, his problem was not just the lack of money for school fees. As his essay revealed, this interacted with his jigger-infested feet, lack of food, being abandoned by his biological father (as was explained in Chapter Six) and other factors that defined his claim and access to early childhood education:

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

Discussions with a teacher in one of the ECCE centres also revealed that half of the children had not paid fees for the term. This meant that the

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<sup>84</sup> Well-wishers are philanthropic people in the community who support vulnerable children and especially those that are not related to them. The support includes paying school fees, buying school uniforms and other educational related support. This perspective is also connected to the angel discourse that I explored in Chapter Five.

teachers would not be paid their salaries, and this affected the quality of early childhood education accorded to children. From a policy perspective, it was an issue that the county government, which was tasked with supporting these ECCE centres, was not paying the teacher's salary. The only visible intervention that I observed in my interactions with several schools was that, in some schools, the county government had constructed some ECCE classes. Like in Gabriel's case, many children in Siaya were reliant on/waiting for well-wishers to fund their education. These cartographies of invoking education as charity from well-wishers pointed to the weakness in the social contract these young children as citizens have with the state (Ngutuku 2018:25). This contract seemed to have broken down since the state was largely absent in funding ECCE programmes. This occurred despite the fact that some international organizations have referred to early childhood education as a compensatory mechanism for children living in poverty (Serpell and Nsamenang 2014).

#### 7.4 Basic Education: 'This Education is Not Free'

The children I interacted with noted that primary and secondary education was still not affordable because of the many levies that had to be paid by households. In this section, I explore the narratives and experience of children within the context of 'free' primary education. The narrative of Gabriel (already presented in part earlier in this chapter) who sat his national primary school examinations in 2016, revealed the challenges of schooling. His rhizo-narrative of stoicism and suffering through the education system was sutured through the various narrative worlds of his biographic essay, diaries and in conversations. His narrative was told and obtained as we walked from his swampy dilapidated school or were seated in the house where he lived with his grandmother. He self-represented as a strong young man who saw the sky as the limit and wanted to be an engineer. This narrative of wanting to become an engineer was constructed against the fear that he might not even complete his primary education. As Gabriel said, 'if God does not help us, I won't make it because we are just like this (poor)' (discussion with Gabriel, 25 July 2016).

Like Gabriel, most children missed school from time to time because they were sent home to collect levies and costs of schooling that were not covered by the Free Education Policy. For primary school children, these direct costs ranged from Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fees that were used among other things for employing extra staff (those not on the



government payroll) or paying security and District Education Board (DEB) levies. The Kenya National Education for All report revealed that other costs included examination fees, uniforms and school supplies, transport services to and from school, and private extra-tuition were charged (GOK 2014e).

In our various encounters, children termed these as ‘small things here and there’. For example, Naomi (twelve years old) noted in her autobiographical essay that her older sister and brother left school and could not complete their secondary education because of these ‘small things’ (Naomi’s essay). In another school, children noted during a Focus Group Discussion that the extra money required amounted to 450 Kenya shillings (under 5 euros) per term. This ‘small things’ perspective was dire for poor children because they could not afford them.

Teachers justified these costs because the government was not catering for all school-related needs. As one teacher noted:

DEB funds help in co-curricular activities. 50 per cent of ‘our’ children have not paid [I took note of the use of the words ‘our children’ to mean poor children]. Children also pay exam fees because we have to administer exams from other schools and counties to enhance competitiveness (conversation with a teacher, 28 June 2016).

### 7.5 Poverty as Having Nothing to Give to the Teacher

Within the context of education, child poverty was intricately linked with their experience of schooling. Children and caregivers employed specific discourses in describing this education system. For example, they located poverty in terms of ‘lacking something to give to the teacher’ in the form of school fees and other levies. For example, Brigid’s father was described as follows by the foster caregiver: ‘Her father drinks a lot. He has nothing and can’t promise a teacher anything like a goat, chicken, or even a salary’ (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016). As the discussions revealed, such semiotics drew from the fact that, when children were sent home for school levies, caregivers would sometimes promise the teacher that they would bring the levies at a later date after liquidating some of their assets. Teachers reported that the caregivers who participated in a

cash transfer would promise the teacher that they would pay after receiving the next cash transfer.

Children whose caregivers had no assets or other meaningful livelihoods stayed at home for a considerable part of the school time. For example, Ben (sixteen years old) who was the eldest in a fostered family of four noted that their foster caregiver faced difficulties paying school-related dues as he stated:

Mama pays our school fees and buys uniforms. We are sent home because of school fees. Sometimes we stay home if she does not have money. This term I was sent home twice to bring money (conversation with Ben, 10 October 2016).

The education system was given material agency (Barad 2007) by children who labelled it as 'bring this and that'. Priest's caregiver's assertions provided another window into these lexicons: 'I am very annoyed with the school system, it has become go and bring money, go and bring this and that. This education is not free' (conversation with caregiver, 20 September 2016).

Lavender, a primary school girl in class seven, noted that being sent home to collect fees or levies every time was affecting her learning: 'It is hard for my grandmother to pay school fees in time because she doesn't have money and I don't like to be sent away for school fees since I miss on learning' (Lavender's essay). Like in the case of ECCE, this problem was accentuated because sometimes children were sent home while others were doing exams. This was designed to compel parents to pay because they would not want their children to fail to transition to the next class. Sending children home during exams also points to another line in the cartography of the 'this and that' education system: that of construction of the identity of the caregivers. The caregivers involved were represented as unwilling to pay school levies and sending their children home during exams was meant to push them into paying. As one of the teachers explained: 'these parents have to be compelled to pay for their children. Their priorities are sometimes misplaced' (conversation with teacher, 10 October 2016).

In addition to paying school levies, the school uniform was an issue as well. In all public and most private schools in Kenya the students are expected to be wear school uniform. In some cases, I observed children

wearing tattered clothes or a home dress underneath their torn school uniforms. This also came up in the narrative of a child shared during an FGD in one of the schools:

Sometimes when I ask her (grandmother) about the uniform she says there are other priorities. She pays fees and so a uniform is not a priority. But one feels out of place if one doesn't have a uniform (FGD with primary school children, 27 July 2016).

Negotiating within the 'free' but expensive education system also meant that, in some cases, older children took over the responsibilities of taking care of their young siblings and paying for their levies by combining schooling and work. While literature has tended to represent girls as taking the bigger burden of this care, my research indicates that both boys and girls were implicated and affected differently in this practice. It emerged that poor children do not always think about the opportunity-cost of going to school. Oketch (twenty years old) noted that, even though he worked and was getting good money to support himself and his grandmother, he did not see work as more important than his education:

I got work but my mind was not there, I was thinking about school. One day a certain lady came as I washed her car and she encouraged me to go back to school [...] Even though I was the breadwinner, my grandmother was very happy about my decision (Oketch essay).

Gabriel (sixteen years old), who doubled as his elderly grandmother's caregiver, noted that sometimes he had to do casual jobs in the community to get money to pay for school-related expenses. This involved sometimes working for 250 Kenya shillings (2.5 Euros) to earn an income. He noted that: 'teachers need money, so I have to work, and I have to buy paraffin oil for reading in the evening' (conversation with Gabriel, 25 June 2016.)

On the other hand, Donald, a twenty-year old male youth, completed high school after receiving support from well-wishers. His narrative revealed that birth order (being a first-born child from a poor household) in some cases can be more useful analytically in terms of gendered exclusion from education than being a male or a female. He represented himself as

not only the *de facto* bread winner in his family, but also as having to pay school fees and levies for his siblings:

As the elder son I was a caregiver to my siblings. Other children depend on me, so I used to take small jobs to support them. I used to even sell my back-to-school shopping [given by a sponsor] to buy them books and other school supplies (discussion with Donald, 27 February 2017).

By the time we met, Donald was already working to pay for the education expenses of his siblings and even though he had passed well in his KSCE exams, he was conflicted about joining university because he was not sure who would take over his caregiving roles.

Kim on the other hand, a young adult taking care of his three siblings, dropped out of school to engage in livelihood activities and to take care of his siblings after the death of his parents. Despite this, he noted that he did not leave school but was going to the farm and school on alternate days: 'I would take to the bursar something like KES 500 (5 Euros) and I would be allowed to stay in school for two days and then would be sent away again' (conversation with Kim, 15 June 2016).

Listening softly to the voice of children revealed that the experience of combining work and school was complex both from a gender and age perspective. For example, while opportunities to combine work and school were available for the older children, girls mostly reported engaging in piecework in other people's farms or helping in selling wares in the market. Such jobs were not bringing enough money for paying school levies but were supporting in meeting day-to-day subsistence needs. For example, in revisiting the story of Ayo, when I visited two years after the research, I found that, at nine years in 2018, Ayo had still not transited to primary school. However, her brother Ben, drawing on his dividend as an older (more mature) male, had already joined high school. I learned that he had already been fostered by a family to tend their farms, in exchange for paying his school fees (conversation with caregiver, 12 August 2018). While I do not valorize the option of combining school and work, Ben's gender seemingly afforded him benefits compared to his sister. His agency revealed the need to go beyond simple arguments about 'good' and 'bad' agency (Tisdal and Punch 2012). Instead we should be more concerned with what that agency reveals about the needs and rights of these children

in question, as well as gendered complexities and vulnerabilities of childhood within contexts of poverty.

These examples of the way gender obtains differential salience in influencing schooling experience for poor children does not mean that gender itself is not an important marker, and especially for girls. In going beyond intersectionality and borrowing Deleuzian perspectives on reality as an entanglement and leaning on Baradian ideas of reality as interference or diffracted, one would be keen to identify such cases where the waves of gender intensity are cancelled or checked by other characteristics like birth order in specific contexts (see also Geertz and van der Tuin 2013:172 ). Drawing the implications of such interferences for children's right to participation and their actual participation in education will also be important.

## 7.6 Assembling a Radio Without Cells: Hunger and Schooling

I am in one of the schools supported by one of the organizations, Children of Africa (COA). I observe teachers eating at lunchtime, some children are in school while others have gone home. I start a conversation with the head-teacher about school lunch. He says they do not eat because most of them 'find nothing at home'. Then he creates a joke out of this situation and, while pointing to his head, says: 'a radio without cells is dead, brain minus food is dead, these children cannot perform well on an empty stomach' (field notes, 28 June 2016).

Here, I examine the interaction between hunger and schooling experience and how this experience is positioned within the larger experience of being a poor and vulnerable child in Siaya. The scenario above describes the experience of most of the children, within the context of hunger and lack of food. The metaphor of a radio being assembled, albeit one that does not have cells, points to the need to interrogate the discourse of the merit-oriented education system in Kenya. This education does not take into consideration the situation of children and in this case, the particular context of hunger.

In several schools, I observed children who would stay in school over lunchtime. I also carried out go-along conversations with children as they walked home during lunchtime, only to find no food at home. For example, when I asked Ayo and her five peers during an FGD what they each

ate for breakfast, they replied '*onge*' [nothing] (FGD with children, 16 September 2016).

Most secondary schools had a lunch programme. For some children, this lunch programme was providing the only meal for the day. For example, Peter (fifteen years old) noted that, sometimes he did not eat at home because in some cases there was no food, or he allowed his grandmother to eat the little food available at home. Children used specific descriptors of hunger as indicators of how hunger structured their schooling experience. These included 'going to school with butterflies in the stomach' and 'going to school just like that'. Some children, in playing the images of good and hardy children, also noted that they did not complain when they did not find food at home and went back to school. Some children noted that they wore a happy face even when there was no food.

While such a sense of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), of going without food and not complaining was key in children's politics; children also noted that hunger affected their schooling. This is because the brains of these children could not concentrate in class as the head-teacher in one of the primary schools told me (conversation with teacher, 28 June 2016). Children supported this when in one Focus Group Discussion one of the children noted: 'sometimes when you come to school and you have not eaten, you do not understand what the teacher is saying' (FGD with children, 25 June 2016). This supported the assertion by Biehl and Locke (2010) that there are limits to a sense of becoming.

Kenya has a long history of feeding programmes in schools and especially in the arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) dry areas. These programmes have been supported by the World Food Programme and were officially handed over to the government in 2018 (WFP 2018, Langer 2011). In places where such programmes have been implemented, the 'magnet effect' (Langer 2011:32) has been reported where the meal acts as an incentive for children to enrol and stay in school. Such programmes are also said to have spiral effects because they enhance savings by poor parents who can use their income for meeting other needs (ibid).

However, Siaya is not classified as an ASAL area and so it was not benefitting from these feeding programmes. Instead, a host of non-governmental actors provided school-feeding as one of their services, but none of the six schools I interacted with had such a programme, and children were going home over lunchtime. Listening softly to children's and other relational voice provided various entry points. Several caregivers

noted that there was no food for children to carry to school. This was supported by the teacher who noted: 'When children go home, they do not eat. They say, I did not find my grandmother, or I only got porridge, or I found *onge* [nothing]' (conversation with head-teacher, 28 June 2016). The discourse on, and the reality of, finding *onge* for lunch was a veritable reality for the children in the research sites and affected their learning.

For example, Gabriel's aspirations of becoming an engineer in the future looked utopian because in most cases he stayed in school without lunch. In one instance where I walked home with him for lunch, and we found there was no food and his grandmother was not around, he exclaimed: 'there is *onge* for lunch I will just stay like that' (field notes, 25 July 2016).

In one primary school there was a school-feeding programme that I later learned was supported by a *mzungu* (white) donor. This programme was benefitting children from ECCE to class six. The rest of the children (in classes seven and eight) would each bring grains from home and food was collectively prepared for them. The head-teacher described this programme this way: 'They [children] are very healthy; I wish you were here during lunchtime. They don't just eat regular food. They eat a balanced diet' (conversation with head-teacher, 10 October 2016). The teacher's assertion that children ate a balanced diet draws rhizomatic lines between home and school where children may not have the privilege of eating good food, let alone food that was rich in nutrients. The feeding programme also pointed to racialized relations of support because, as I walked in the community, there was a constant reference to the fact that the school was being supported by a lady *mzungu*.

Characteristic of exclusion of the poorest, those who could not afford to make partial contributions in the form of beans, maize or money for paying the cook were left out of this feeding programme. This was the case for Michael, Ayo's brother, who was eleven years old at the time. His 'other mother' informed me that he was not eating at school because his mother's sister had not brought the maize and beans that were required for him to benefit from the programme. This was a different voice from the one the head-teacher had expressed earlier in our conversation. When I asked him whether all children were benefitting from the donor funded programme, he had responded past my question and noted that:



in Africa you don't refuse people food when it is cooked [pauses and looks at me to emphasize the incontrovertible moral perspective of his assertion]. You do not chase away somebody when others are eating (conversation with head-teacher, 10 October 2016).

His responding past the question was part of what Mazzei (2007b:77) called a veiled silence, but it was also a privileged silence. Mazzei noted that speakers may respond to questions not asked and avoid those that are asked. She argued that this may be done through intellectualizing or deflecting. In the above case, however, the teacher could be said to have indigenized his response. This was through his narrative that drew power from tradition and that was imbued with African morality, presenting his voice as truth. By drawing on the notion of African generosity common among the Luo community, the veracity of his account could not be questioned.

However, in my listening softly between the teacher's narrative and that of Michael's brother Ben (sixteen years old) something else came up. Ben mentioned that he sometimes went home over lunchtime to cook for his siblings. I then asked the caregiver why Michael was not eating at school. I again listened to the recorded conversation with the teacher to reveal his veiled silence.

It is contradictory that children in higher levels of schooling (secondary school) benefit from school meals while those in the lower classes mostly do not. Such exclusionary tendencies could be addressed by introducing universal programmes of school-feeding that address the needs of all children in Kenya, including Siaya.

## 7.7 Children of 'Small Schools'

The school system in Kenya is tiered like a pyramid, with a tiny minority of prestigious national schools at the top of the pyramid, a larger minority of provincial schools (now called County schools) in the middle tier, and a substantial majority of district schools forming the base of the pyramid (Otieno et al. 2016:17). The national schools tend to recruit the best performing students in the national exams countrywide, while provincial and county schools have the next best group to choose from within the provinces. District schools draw from those who are left over from this selection process (Oketch and Somerset 2010:15, Muhangi 2016:17). The district schools face infrastructural and funding issues as well. This structures

the experience of poor and vulnerable children with schooling because most of them attend these small district schools. Kenya's admission policy fosters inequality because some children are constricted to education in underfunded schools or small schools (Chege et al. 2011:187) as I explore in this section.

The quality of infrastructure in a school can have a signalling effect, communicating the worth placed on the students attending a particular school and the quality of education offered (Branham 2004:1124, Okwany 2014:43). Okwany (2014), who examined an educational project that was offering support in the construction of schools in Kenya, noted that 'poor schools often suffer from having fewer and poor-quality resources, due to budgetary constraints and inequitable resource allocation among schools' (ibid:17). When the school's infrastructure was improved and the buildings well resourced, the students reported that their self-esteem improved, and they felt that they were important. She also reported that many more teachers were applying to work in the schools because the improved infrastructure had a 'signalling' effect as an important aspect of education quality (ibid).

In my research, my observations revealed dilapidated buildings and poor facilities and a perspective that children of the poor should attend low quality schools, often known as 'small schools' in the research sites. This perspective was expressed by various teachers as well as staff working with vulnerable children:

The government boarding schools nearby are not for our children (conversation with a teacher, 16 June 2016); We take [our] children to these two 'small' schools (conversation with a leader of the Sponsorship Project, 16 June 2016); This school [pointing to a national school] is not for our children in this village (conversation with organization leader, 21 September 2016).

The above narratives reveal a discourse on there being an education for children of the poor and another one for other children. The metaphor of 'our school' and a 'small school' was therefore not only an infrastructural issue but was also a symbolic way of representing the low-quality education reserved for these children and perceptions of their identity as noted by one of the teachers:

Generally, we admit fair achievers and others below average, and we don't use the central system of selection. We only select those who come to ask for vacancies. Our students have scored very low marks and if we do not offer them an opportunity, then they are condemned. [Points to the wall] Only one child had the pass mark of 252 in class eight [out of the total of 500] (conversation with teacher, 10 October 2016).

Placing children in small schools was also guided by other factors (beyond performance). Fees in the other (well-off) schools were high which made many resort to the small schools. For example, when I met Gabriel two years after my field research, he had scored marks that would have enabled him to join a better school, but he was enrolled in a small school near his home. In our earlier discussions, he had indicated that he was studying hard to join a better boarding school.<sup>85</sup> I had listened to his ambition and imagined his future against the community leader's voice who termed his ambitions as lofty and who had advised him to revise his ambitions (field notes, 11 October 2016). During our encounter two years later, he was still hoping that somebody could pay for him to join a nice boarding school.

While small schools are seen as enhancing transition rates for children, the perceptions have been mixed. There are arguments that such schools offer low quality education, that they enrol children who have very low marks to enhance their numbers, and that they tend to employ teachers who are not qualified (Anyuor 2012, no page).

While school and education in general are supposed to enable children to move out of poverty, relegating poor children to small schools accentuates inequalities that have persisted within the Kenyan education system since the colonial era. Adala and Okwany (2009:283) noted that, in late colonial Africa, schools reproduced inequalities and restricted Africans to jobs that were less skilled. Students in small schools still have to compete with their counterparts in the better-resourced government schools. This supports Adala and Okwany's (2009:284) argument that: 'the expansion of formal schooling has not translated into equal opportunities for all. Instead affluent families are better positioned to reap most of the

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<sup>85</sup> Most of the good government schools are boarding schools but in 2019 the government started piloting some national schools as day-schools.

educational benefits.’ For example, in one of the secondary schools that I interacted with there was no substantive science laboratory. The only structure available that the deputy head-teacher called ‘a make shift lab’ was used for biology, physics and chemistry experiments and doubled up as an office. This school did not have a physics teacher either because the government had not posted one. The head-teacher did not want to employ one on a temporary basis because he feared that in the future that teacher might be employed by the government and would then transfer to a well-endowed school.

While these infrastructural issues would affect all children regardless of their poverty status, in contesting this education offered in small schools and claiming better education for their children, a few parents who could afford took their children to better but more expensive schools, often times boarding schools. For many children in Siaya, such options were not available, and the parents continued taking their children to ‘small schools’.

The marginalization of schools in Siaya can also be understood from the political economy of marginalization where Siaya is perceived to be an opposition stronghold as earlier argued. In any case, the schooling experience of children is affected by such regional and political disparities. Indeed, the 2014 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) review report indicated that regional disparities negatively impact on access, retention and participation of pupils (GOK 2014a).

The challenges of participating in a ‘small school’ were even more accentuated for poor children with disabilities. This was the case for Aluoch, aged seven years. Her experience showed the impact of the interaction of a disabled body, poverty and an absent state. She had what her widowed mother called ‘a strange disease’, each day manifesting in a specific muscular problem that profoundly affected her quality of life. Taking a walk with her back to school one day revealed the difficulties of navigating the distance on foot and the poorly resourced education system for someone with a disabled body. It is important to note that the government was giving an extra KES 2000 (approximately 20 euros) capitation per child in a special needs school. However, such a capitation was not available in Aluoch’s school because it was a regular school. Other factors entangled in Aluoch’s schooling experience included the fact that her mother had to fend for seven other children, including four fostered ones. Evidently, being a female, poor and vulnerable child was a problem in Siaya. However,

being a female, poor, disabled child studying in a small school and living in rural Siaya, with a mother who had to take care of seven other children became a multiplicity and complexity of experience.

Accessing the right to education through 'small schools' for differently located children points to a need to re-think what the substantive right to education means for these children. The structuring of 'big' versus 'small' schools itself is against the values embedded in the Kenya Basic Education Act (2013), where schedule 4(f) extends the right of every child in a public school to equal standards of education.

### 7.8 School as a Surrogate Caregiver: Subsidizing for Needy Children

Within the context of poverty, education occupied an important role in granting rights to children and in enabling them to lay claims to their rights. In presenting their rights as living, children and caregivers in some cases appropriated their status as needy and/or orphaned children to enhance their participation in schooling, and school emerged as an alternative or a surrogate caregiver. I explore this relationship of 'surrogacy', as a relationship that not only subsidizes the needs of these children but structures the experience of other children in these schools and communities as well. The following narrative by Oketch (twenty years old) starts off this exploration:

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

My research assistant reported a similar experience. The school principal gave him pocket money and mobilized other people to help in stocking his rented house.

Acting as caregivers to vulnerable children was not easy for teachers because they too were struggling financially. One of the teachers explained this by using the semiotics of ‘having to dig into his pocket’ as he noted: ‘it is not easy to have these needy children in my school. Sometimes I have to dig into my pocket [emphasizes digging into the pocket to show difficulty and struggle]’ (discussion with teacher, 10 October 2016).

For some needy children, being (labelled as) an orphaned or a needy child was accompanied by some privileges that were not enjoyed by other children. These included retaining them in school when others were sent home for fees or sending them away and calling them back even when they did not have money. One teacher described this as follows: ‘Other children are very poor, when you send these children home for even 100 shillings (1 Euro) they won’t come back. You have to go and call them back to school’ (conversation with teacher, 10 October 2016). Peter (fifteen years old), an ‘outsider’ child, revealed that the head-teacher sent him away with the rest of the students but called him back. Peter compared this with his community, that knew he was needy but had not provided for him. Peter’s rights, therefore, that the state and the community could not guarantee were therefore being guaranteed by the school.

The agency of the school as a surrogate for needy children was a gendered assemblage as well and all these cartographies connect with those discussed in Chapter Five. Discussions revealed that being a maternal orphan (whether a girl or boy) attracted more privileges than being a paternal orphan. Within the context of gendered notions of men as bread-winners, as I have argued in Chapter Five, fathers who were widowed were expected to cope better with their loss than women who were widowed.

Supporting needy children this way and providing for their relational rights showed social solidarity on the part of teachers and the school. However, I also draw other lines based on this experience of children pointing to how this kind of support can exacerbate problems, not only for the children supported but also for others learning in these schools. It can strain the already stretched resources of these small schools that can hardly afford to subsidize their pupils. The pain of this ‘surrogacy’ was entangled with the free education policy, which gives a standard capitation grant based on the number of children. Parents are expected to meet some of the costs and there is no extra money for poor children. This is despite the fact that Sessional Paper no 14 (2012) provided for ‘needs-based capitation grants’ for learners (from ECCE to secondary schools) to meet

their extra needs (GOK 2012c:77). However, it seems that special needs grants only exist for children with disabilities, and not for some other poor and vulnerable children that I encountered in Siaya. Depending on the numbers involved, support for needy children by the schools by waiving payments due from them can therefore affect the quality of education provided to the children in that particular school as whole. This is because the schools will be forced to stretch their resources further than they had expected.

To play their 'surrogate' role, teachers also solicited support on the children's behalf. This was sometimes guided by problematic norms about the identity of poor children. As one of the teachers noted:

I have been going everywhere looking for support for the school because I do not want them [poor children] to be fostered out of the community. They might forget their poor background [meaning they might be fostered in well-off homes and stop working hard in school].

I also became part of the cartographies of this surrogacy as teachers enlisted my support for the children and as indeed, I started supporting some of the children.

Another strategy that teachers used to enable them to play their caregiving role was what I have called 'scrambling' for the many bursary fees schemes available for children in Siaya. Within this context of competition for bursaries, the experience of the specific children who have the school as their surrogate stretched its lines to other children, both outside these schools and within these schools. Such children who were poor but did not receive the backing of teachers, or for whom the school was not a surrogate would miss out on the bursaries. As a local administrator noted:

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



teachers don't even apply because they think they won't benefit (conversation with chief, 14 December 2016)<sup>86</sup>.

Bursaries and scholarships are seen as important in Sustainable Development Goal Number 4. However, in the above case, counting the number of scholarships issued to children from poor backgrounds is not enough. Looking at the experience of such children and others affected by bursaries will reveal more in terms of what it really means for no children to be left behind (Arts 2017:60)

## 7.9 Breaking the Habitus of a Poor Child in Education

In this section, I continue exploring how children, through their everyday practices of education, practiced their living rights even as they laid claims to their right to education and as they represented themselves as different from the way they had been understood. Thinking about 'citizenship through acts', according to Isin (2009:384) 'means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen is to make claims to justice, to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses'. In breaking this habitus and by laying claims to their right to education, children oscillated between self-representations as able and agentic and vulnerable and dependent. These positions are not dialectical but co-constitute each other in the assemblage of children's agency.

### 7.9.1 Being in School as a Personal Effort

Some of the children I interacted with represented their being in school against the odds as a personal effort. For example, Oketch represented himself as a hard-working youth who had defied odds to stay in school despite being an orphaned child:

I stayed at home in 2011 and 2012. In 2013, I told my grandmother I wanted to go back to school. I got a job in a car wash and I worked for two years. My grandmother started getting sick and I

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<sup>86</sup> Another factor identified during discussions regarding the challenges in provision of bursaries was the politics of patronage where politicians used bursaries as baits for amassing votes. However, de Witt and Berner (2009:932) averred that 'not all poor people can have access to patronage as a resource'.

used the money to support her. I then decided in 2014 to stop working and repeated class eight. By then my grandmother was very sick and I did not have anything [school fees]. Then I came to this school to ask for a vacancy. I talked to the teacher who told me to come to school the following day (Oketch's essay).

Diffractioning this narrative as obtained through his essay with his other narratives obtained through the go-along conversations, he told his story of how, when he could not afford school fees, he sat 'dreaming' of going to school one day. When he heard from a friend that the school fees in the neighbouring high school were affordable, he decided to go there and ask for a vacancy. The perspective of a child who enrolls himself in school despite having nothing and who at the same time represents the school fees as 'affordable' were his ways of explaining and representing himself differently. In locating himself as a hard-working student, and his participation in education as a personal effort, he also laid claims to a right to support and by extension, right to education through relatives:

When my mother died, it was my grandmother who took care of me but when she died [...] [exclaims] [...] Those that were left [sighs], everybody minds their business. In 2014 when I went back to school, they said I was wasting time in school and I should take a job [...] [sighs]. They wanted me to be like them. I did not listen to them (conversation with Oketch, 5 August 2016).

His claiming of the right to education, as evident in the above narrative, was paradoxical. In locating himself as a strong-willed person, he still constructed his relatives as the 'other' because they were not educated. In doing so, he failed to consider other constraining circumstances on the part of his family. Isin and Nielsen (2008:18) pointed to these othering tendencies in claims of citizenship where one instantiates oneself from others who are not seen as having legitimate claims to the same citizenship. In representing himself as hard working compared to his relatives, through these discursive politics Oketch redefined notions of childhood agency. In representing going to school as a personal effort, Oketch should not be seen as distancing himself from the relational and interdependent location as a child but as one whose rights should be protected by others (Abebe 2019). It is precisely these relational rights to education, through his

paternal relatives, that he was laying claim to by pointing out how they did not come through for him. Other cases of children hanging by the school gate looking for sponsors or hanging by support organizations were other ways in which children represented their learning as a personal effort. These narratives present the 'poor childhood' as innovative and hardworking. One can also argue that in enacting themselves this way, children can be seen as repositioning their identity and personhood.

### 7.9.2 Claiming Relational Rights through Creative Drawings: The Narrative of Moses

Children, and especially young ones, used the forum for the creative drawing exercise accorded to them during the research to lay claims to their right to participate in education. Here I present the outcomes of one creative drawing activity carried out by a group of boys in one primary school. I had advised the children to represent the experience of vulnerable children in the community through a drawing. The boys depicted their 'dailiness' of schooling through an image of a boy they named Moses and we held a discussion around it as represented below (creative drawing activity, 14 September 2016)

Researcher: Explain to us about Moses

Children: Moses lives with his grandmother. He left school in standard (class) three.  
He lost parents when young (died).  
His cousins were not paying his fees.  
Grandmother took him to help but she did not have anything to protect his life. Moses left school again because he didn't have anything to wear.  
He does not take tea (breakfast).

Researcher: Are there children like that in the community?

Children: There are children like this who do not take tea in the morning. Sometimes the grandmother struggles for them, they miss school, they do not have a school uniform, they need to be taken to school.

This creative activity provided an opportunity for me to enter the world of these particular children (Swadener 2005:140) and their perspectives on poverty experience. In this activity, children referenced the struggles by

their caregivers in putting them through school, as well as the multiplicity of relations and factors that influenced the context of the children's daily schooling experience. The voice expressed in the above creative activity brought into assemblage other actors not in the immediate school environment, including those in the community and the state, that could not 'protect' Moses by supporting his grandmother. It also brought to the fore the role of policies and practices concerning the school uniform, and denial of children's rights through the non-human agent; and the death of his parents.

This was also supported by other children who, in their drawings in different schools, represented other children who could not go to school due to various reasons (for example because they were orphaned or were living with step-mothers or girls who could not afford sanitary towels or school uniform). Reading their voice this way, children were claiming their rights from a spectrum of others. This supports the ideas of Isin and Nielsen that citizenship acts are 'moments when subjects constitute themselves as citizens [...] or to whom the right to have rights is due' (2008:18).

### 7.9.3 Claiming the Right to Education Reserved for Girls

Here, I take the example of Peter, who explained the challenges of joining high school because his grandmother could not afford school fees. He defied the odds by joining a bridge centre for girls that was run by a local non-governmental organization (NGO). This centre was providing accelerated learning for girls who had been out of school and aimed to prepare them for school re-entry:

When I finished class eight in 2014, I did not have school fees and the whole of 2015 I went to the bridge centre. I was the only boy. I kept hoping that one day I would join high school. People discouraged me and asked why I was schooling with girls, but I ignored them (discussion with Peter, 21 September 2016).

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

Similar perspectives of boys appropriating 'girl's education' were revealed through other research in Siaya. For example, the evaluation of the project run by the organization supporting girl's education indicated that some boys like Peter joined these bridge schools. However, a close reading revealed a cartography of discourses explaining or contesting such agency. For example, in the evaluation of that project, this agency was explained as an 'unintended effect' of the project. On the other hand, the community said that, allowing boys to come to the centre would stop them from preying sexually on girls in the future (Muhangi 2016:38).

I engage with these two discourses obtaining from the findings of my research as well as the evaluation of a girls' project where boys sought out education reserved for girls. The first one is the organization's discourse of needs and rights as exemplified in giving priority to girls' education and leaving out equally vulnerable boys. The organization might have been guided by the intersectional perspective that, indeed, girls face more vulnerabilities compared to boys. I acknowledge that in most cases, the starting point for most of the girls in the study sites was weaker than that of the boys. For example, my interactions with children during the research revealed cases of teenage pregnancy and where girls were missing out on schooling on the basis of pregnancy as well as other gendered norms about education of girls. However, I also encountered boys that were equally or even more vulnerable than girls in the study sites.

Related to the organization's discourse, the community might have appropriated the voice of the NGO that it was girls who were more needy than boys. Taking another line in this rhizo discourse, the community might have discursively positioned the boys as deserving education for the sake of protecting girls, seen as prey for *boda boda* riders [boys]. Explaining the participation of boys in education reserved for girls in gendered terms silences the perspectives of some of the young *boda boda* riders that I encountered (as explained in Chapter Five). Because of lack of education and other employment opportunities, these boys resort to these insecure livelihoods. In going beyond intersectionality to a perspective on entangled factors in schooling for poor children, and in correcting gendered vulnerabilities, interventions must therefore locate vulnerability of boys and girls in their contexts. For example, in first instance, one can say that Peter, an outsider living with an elderly grandmother demonstrates heavy traffic of intersecting marginalizing factors (Crenshaw 1989). However, in going beyond intersectionality to a perspective of interference patterns (Geertz and

van der Tuin 2017), in Peter's case compared to that of girls (who in this case are entitled to participation in the project), then one sees privilege as non-linear. I borrow from Verloo (2009 cited in Geertz and van der Tuin 2017:172) that, while gender ordinarily privileges boys in most cases, indeed there are 'places where the waves [of gender privilege] cancel each other or are weakened' like the case of Peter and other vulnerable and poor boys. Actions by Peter in claiming the right to education reserved for girls therefore indicate that we must be attentive to locate these possibilities of gender power as an interference pattern (Barad 2007).

#### 7.9.4 Imagined Citizenship through Education

I now explore an example of a relational and non-dyadic claim by children of their right to education, through analysis of a portion of Naomi's essay. In doing so, I analyse the performance of her citizenship and rights claim through her writing (Isin 2012, Sanghera et al. 2018). I treated her essay as a site of citizenship that performs both intentional and non-intentional functions in claiming her right to education. In imagining a different future, Naomi (twelve years old) saw working hard in school as a guarantee to a future where her problems would cease. This was also a future when, together with her mother, she would take breakfast. She wrote:

I am working very hard so that my mother will one day take breakfast. Sometimes we do not have paraffin for the lamp in the evening and I have a lot of homework. Sometimes the teacher wants to grade and does not want excuses. In all this my mother encourages me that one day we shall be like the others. Because we do not take breakfast [they] take breakfast as we watch. I am working very hard so that one day myself and my mother could take breakfast and live in a big house [...] One day I will be like their children (essay by Naomi).

Like many other children in the research sites, Naomi saw education as a guarantee to a better future life. As noted above, she gave education the agency of 'future breakfast'. Her voice connected with that of Gabriel whose embodied agency was anchored in his intransigent hope and in divine possibilities. Gabriel occasionally rose beyond the human possibilities in imagining his right through education: 'God knows. I hope my life would turn out for the better after I finish education' (Gabriel's essay, 25

July 2016). Similarly, Donald banked on education to save them from the current problems as well as he noted: 'I know our life, it is only education that will save us' (conversation with Gabriel, 25 July 2016).

Such aspirations by Naomi and other children, that imagined the best of life through education, may look utopian within the context of the challenges these children faced. However, Isin (2008:4) argued that such future citizenship, which is yet to come, while it is imagined, is not fictitious. It points to the need to transform current circumstances in their schooling. While these politics were seemingly targeted at me who read the essay, Naomi's performance exceeded the boundaries of my research and her voice confirmed that living rights are relational and that there is sociality in claims-making (Sanghera et al. 2018:545).

For example, Naomi's unheard voice and agency, that got an audience through the medium of the essay and hopefully through writing it up in my research, was not only liberating to her at the moment it was voiced because it was a promise of a better future and release from a difficult present. Her voice however also indicted a range of other people. These were those who gave their children food as other children watched, and those who taunted her that she would soon drop out of school, as other portions of her essay as well as her diaries revealed. In referencing and laying claims to responsibility from a range of audiences, some of which she only referenced as 'they', she was claiming her relational rights. Bloemraad (2018:5) supported this perspective when he argued that 'citizenship as claims making requires a relational approach and that people make claims on others, including state officials or government institutions'. She further argued that, though the state has final responsibility, these relations are not just dyads (state-individual) and can involve multiple groups including neighbours as in Naomi's case (*ibid*).

Reading Naomi's voice further, she argued that she was working hard to become a help to her clan. Her voice could also be targeting the clan or the community that may have reneged in its responsibility to help needy children like her. A map has multiple entry points (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:12-13, Kamberelis 2013:671) and in taking a different entry in the cartography of her discourse and agency, Naomi could be said to be aspiring towards a different future through education where she would help the community. Reading this rhizo-discourse further through the cramped contexts of caregiving, her belonging to the local community and clan which was challenged economically, implied that she was also expected to



provide support to the parents and the clan in future. Through education, Naomi's redemption from her then state of poverty and vulnerability would in turn be a redemption to her poor community in the future.

In further seeing the proliferating lines in her discourse, asking for accountability from a community which itself was vulnerable, behoves us to question the role of the state in enabling communities to play a role in providing for the needs of their children. The reader might recall the discussions in Chapter Five that explained that the community safety nets that Naomi referenced as 'they', although still thriving, were often stretched beyond their limit. They were not only safety nets, but safety nets with outstretched holes (Okwany and Ngutuku 2018:66)

Ultimately, Naomi finished her essay by going beyond claiming the right to education, to laying claims to humanity, speaking to a larger audience and writing herself into the future. With a philosophical hindsight, she wrote: 'I will help the rich and the poor like "us" because nobody is poor or rich. All people are poor and rich' (Naomi's essay). In so doing she went beyond simplistic notions of education as creating a learner citizen (Arnot 2006, Lister 2007). She also contested the interpretations of education for capital development and pointed to education that fosters justice and concern for one another. Naomi also drew on a different kind of ethics and citizenship when thinking about the situation of poor children. Her ethics made claim to global humanity and were claims to 'equality, dignity, and inclusion' (Bloemraad 2018:19). In inviting us to a different solidarity through the agency of her voice, she imagined a future type of world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991:188) where people co-existed as equals.

Her narrative ruptured our perspective on children's voice and knowledge production. Naomi could be seen as not only possessing a voice but also a voice that touched on issues of social justice and adjured us to imagine a philosophical voice by children that demands us to act on their behalf. Both in a literal sense and from the perspective of knowledge production, one can say (with Deleuze and Guattari 1991:109) that:

Becoming is always double, and it is this double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth. The philosopher must become non-philosopher so that non-philosophy becomes the earth and people of philosophy.

As I folded myself (St. Pierre 1997) into Naomi's narrative through similar encounters with other children, I continually reflect on how I can be 'present [with Naomi and other children] in thought and not through pity?' (Deleuze 1991:109). How can I invite others, who work with children to do the same? To ascend to a space of accountability and responsibility for children and in according rights to education for children living in poverty and vulnerability? These are perspectives I explore in the concluding chapter.

### 7.10 In Conclusion: Assembling a Poor Child Experience Through Schooling

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

Within the assemblage of participation in education, poverty has interacted in a rhizomatic way with various other hyphens of gender (that I have read as differently located boys and girls), locality, orphanhood and birth order, among other such hyphens. These interact with factors including material, human and non-human factors, social relations, embodiment, infrastructure, and policies. In the concluding chapter I engage with the implications of these findings.

## 8

## The Politics of Needs Interpretation in Support Programmes

### 8.1 Introduction

As discussed in the preceding chapters, in the context of Siaya interventions to meet the needs of children are one of the spaces in which the experience of poor and vulnerable children is located. In this chapter, I explore how different support programmes construct the needs, rights and identity of children. As a starting point, this is not intended as an evaluation of the programmes in terms of the extent to which they are meeting the needs (or rights) of children. Instead, I am interested in unpacking the way in which children's needs and rights are represented and in the possible interaction of these representations with the identity, self-hood and material situation of children. In doing this, I was inspired by Fraser's argument that, while the experience of children is material, 'needs are culturally constructed and discursively interpreted' (Fraser 1989:81).

I approach the construction of the needs and rights of children as a site of power where groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish as powerful their interpretations. Seen this way, it is not just what children need or for my research what rights need to be protected, but also whose voice is authoritative in deciding what is seen as legitimate needs (Fraser 1987:108, Fraser 1989:166). I see these interpretations of needs and rights as rhizo-discursive, since they draw from, are contested and are formed across diverse discursive sites (Fraser 2013). These sites range from the state, local and international non-governmental actors, schools, the household and local communities. Children and caregivers are positioned, and (re)position themselves, as specific subjects in these interpretations. As a researcher involved in intersubjective knowledge production (Willemse 2007), I was part of the cartography of these discourses of needs and rights interpretation. In arguing this, I was guided by the assertion by Moss (2006:37) that a researcher 'cannot escape the need to interpret, construct and, if necessary, evaluate'.

In the first section of this chapter, I present the four organizations that I engaged with during the research. This serves as context for my analysis of, and arguments on the discourses emerging from these programmes. I subsequently present four examples of needs definition and rights interpretations to demonstrate the politics embedded, as well as how children and their caregivers are subjectified. These examples are: the quintessential category of the OVC, education as a need, the discourse on and practice of Voluntary Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and the State Cash Transfer Programme for OVCs (CT-OVC). I end the chapter by presenting forms of therapeutic citizenship and negotiation of children's and caregiver's needs and rights through the biography and biology of being an HIV/AIDS patient.

## 8.2 The Orphans and Vulnerable Children Project

The Orphans and Vulnerable Children Project (OVC Project) was implemented as part of a larger programme by a consortium of local and international organizations. The project ran from 2011 until 2016. It was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (OVC Project 2018, Settergren et al. 2018). The larger programme was described as the 'largest integrated health care project in Eastern Africa' and addressed a range of health needs including HIV, child social protection and maternal health (Path 2016a: no page). It also meant to address the effects of diseases like HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. The programme worked through small community-based programmes whose main agenda was to enhance access to services to deal with the impacts of these diseases. The larger programme had a component of working with vulnerable children that was supported by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). It was working with seventy-six local partners, reaching about 100,000 households with OVC services (Path 2016b:7).

The OVC Project was one of the community-based organizations in Siaya that I targeted for my research. The OVC Project started working with vulnerable children in the year 2008 (OVC Project 2018). At the time of my research, the Project was working with 900 households and 1100 children, sixty of whom were HIV positive (conversation with the OVC Project manager, 25 July 2016). The Project worked towards care for orphaned and vulnerable children. This was done by addressing social determinants of health, working within existing community structures, and

utilizing a household approach to address poverty and vulnerability. The determinants of health included food and nutrition, protection, education, shelter, health, household economic strengthening and coordination of activities with other partners and the government (ibid).

In aligning Project programming with the government structure of providing health care support through Primary Health Care Committees, the services were delivered and coordinated by Community Home Volunteers (CHVs). The Project targeted children and young people between two and twenty-three years old and provided families with productive assets and training on agri-business. It also supported VSLAs and also provided educational material to children in primary and secondary school and fees for those deemed to be most vulnerable (conversations with OVC Project director, 25 July 2016).

In principle children left the project when they reached the age of eighteen or when they completed secondary education. In that case, according to the PEPFAR criteria: 'A young person who turns 18 while receiving OVC assistance should not be terminated from receiving assistance. Rather, from the outset, programs should plan for appropriate transition strategies and be prepared to cover a buffer period for seamless transition' (PEPFAR 2012:21). As part of the monitoring process, children were expected to provide regular updates to the Project, mainly their education reports. Children were also expected to stay in the community so that the CHVs could regularly visit them. Their caregivers were expected to be members of the savings groups Voluntary Savings and Loan Associations [VSLAs] supported by the Project.

### 8.3 Sponsorship Organization

Sponsorship Organization (hereafter SO) is an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that supports vulnerable children and works through small community-based organizations. I worked with one of the community-based organizations supported by the Sponsorship Organization in Siaya, that I call the Sponsorship Project. SO worked with children described as 'deprived, excluded and vulnerable' (discussions and observations with Project leaders, 6 June 2016). The mission of the Sponsorship Organization was to 'help deprived, excluded and vulnerable children have the capacity to improve their lives and the opportunity to become young adults, parents and leaders who bring lasting and positive change in their communities' (Sponsorship Organization 2016, no page).

SO's programming focused on three life stages. Stage one (birth to five years) focused on early childhood care, nutrition and health of the young children. Poverty was seen as interfering with the optimal development of children, denying them shelter as well as nutrition. Life stage two (six to fourteen years) focused on child protection, education and schooling related support including uniforms and school fees as well as general protection of the rights of children. Life Stage three (fifteen to twenty-four years), supported children through life skills, livelihood, training skills and reproductive health (SO 2017, no page).

The activities in the sponsorship stage formed the bulk of my interactions with children. In this stage, children were selected when they were between zero and five years old and then matched with a willing 'sponsor'. The sponsor gave money regularly to support the various needs of the children including education, food and other needs. The money from sponsors was mostly put in a pool to support several children. There are some situations where, based on the needs and wishes of the sponsor, the support was given directly to individual children. The Sponsorship Project targeted children from within the neighbourhood to a maximum of a 5km radius from the community-based organization.

While the activities were not strictly labelled as poverty alleviation projects, the staff revealed that poverty interacted with vulnerability making it difficult for children to achieve their potential and wellbeing (conversation with Project leaders, 6 June 2016). Programmes for this intervention were geared towards enhancing the wellbeing of families and communities too. The Project also provided vocational employment start-up kits for children who did not proceed to high school (Sponsorship Organization 2013, no page).

Children participated in this programme up to twenty-two years of age after which they were exited from the system. In addition to this upper age limit, there was another mechanism for exit called 'the teen purge'. This was explained as getting out those children who were in the system but had not yet received any sponsor by the time they reached the age of thirteen. Children were also expected to write letters to the sponsors to communicate their progress and appreciate the gifts they received from their sponsor. Children were required to stay in the community as well because a sponsor could send a gift and children were supposed to have their photo taken when they received their gift (discussions with project leaders, 16 June 2016; field notes, 13 December 2016).

## 8.4 Children of Africa

Children of Africa, henceforth COA, was founded in 2003 and targeted people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs), and elderly guardians. In Siaya, this non-governmental organization worked in four sub-counties (personal discussions with staff, 26 May 2016). COA worked on child development and community health and livelihoods. The organization identified schools for children who were seen as most vulnerable and worked through school-based child-to-child clubs as an entry to the community. In these clubs, children were provided with guidance and counselling, and skills in agriculture and nutrition, hygiene and other life skills including education and awareness creation on child rights. In each school involved there was a community garden supported by COA to provide for the food needs of the schools as well as to support the schools in generating income (discussions with project staff, 26 May 2016). By the time of my research, COA was working with 174 primary schools in Kenya (COA 2013: no page). It was also providing school fees bursaries for children but this programme was phasing out by the end of 2016 (discussions with project staff, 26 May 2016). Children were exited from the organization's support when they attained the age of eighteen years or after having completed high school. Caregivers were also supported through income-generating activities including poultry farming, rearing goats, and connecting them with various community groups for support in income-generation (ibid).

## 8.5 Mercy for Children International

The project by Mercy for Children International (henceforth Mercy Project), another international NGO, was implemented through a small community and church-based organization in Siaya running what usually was called a Child Development Centre. Mercy Project was a child sponsorship organization described as the 'the world's third-largest child sponsorship program' (Wydict et al. 2013:401). Its stated goal is to 'release children from spiritual, economic, social, and physical poverty' (ibid:401). The mission of the Mercy Project (as observed from one of the posters on the walls of the Child Development Centre) was 'releasing a child from poverty in Jesus name' (field notes, 16 June 2016). At the time of my research, all money for the project activities was obtained from private sponsorship. The particular project that I worked with was hosted in an Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) church in one of the villages in Siaya. Mercy



Project implemented various programmes that benefitted children at various life stages, including a child survival programme (for zero to four-year olds), a sponsorship programme and a youth leadership programme.

The child sponsorship programme (for four to twenty-two-year olds) was the core of the Mercy Project's work. The programme connected one child with one sponsor and was aimed at affecting the life of the child in spiritual, physical, education and social aspects (Gichobi 2009:8–9, Mercy Project 2018, no page). This sponsorship was aimed at reducing the burden of poverty on the family because the sponsor gave gifts that were supposed to benefit the whole family. Child sponsors contributed \$38 per month and this was for school levies, uniforms, food and healthcare (Lundy 2016:2). The criteria for selection involved the following: children seen as the neediest, children who were orphaned or staying with a widowed parent, and who had not been sponsored by another organization. The core of the project's activities and mission were Christian-based (field notes, 23 August 2016; field notes, 24 August 2016).

Mercy Project's programme model in Kenya worked in such a way that sponsored children gathered on Saturdays and holidays to participate in structured programmes that included academic tutoring, bible teachings, health care, food and nutrition, and games (Gichobi 2009). Children also received school fee bursaries and school uniforms (Wydict et al. 2013:402). Children who were sponsored exchanged letters with sponsors. In some cases, the sponsors travelled to see their sponsored children (Wydict et al. 2013:403). Another component of the Mercy Project was the Leadership Development Programme that worked with youth who had completed the sponsorship programme and supported them with university education as well as with other mentorship opportunities (Mercy 2018, no page).

In the Child Development Centre where I did my research, hosted in a church, children were selected from a radius of about five kilometres from the centre. Thus, the Project's area of focus intersected with the area of coverage by the programme implemented by the Sponsorship Organization earlier explained. In this site, the main activity undertaken by the project indeed was sponsorship for children described as needy. Also along the lines of what was described in general terms earlier, the Project supported a Saturday and holiday programme where children were provided with life skills, study skills, extra tuition for children who were seen as poor performers, as well as support with physical activities like sport

(conversation with the project director, 23 August 2016). The Centre also supported a livelihood programme for caregivers and encouraged them to join a Community Saving and Loan Association. In these Associations, caregivers contributed money, loaned it among themselves and shared interest accrued at the end of the year. Caregivers could also take loans to buy fertilizers to enhance their farming.

Caregivers whose children were enrolled in the programme were required to contribute 10 per cent of the support they received from the project to cater for issues like costs of paying cooks and security staff among other Centre-related needs. Caregivers and their children were also enrolled in the government supported National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and were supported in paying their monthly insurance premiums. Children participated in the programme up to the age of twenty-two years, or when they completed high school and university. Children were also supposed to comply with other rules including writing letters to the sponsors, attending weekend and holiday activities including obedience to Christian perspectives on morality, for example on sexual relationships (discussions with the Child Development Centre director, 2 August 2016). By the time of my research, the Centre was supporting 341 children (*ibid*).

## **8.6 The Government's Cash Programme for Vulnerable Children**

In response to the various challenges that children living in poverty and vulnerability faced, including lack of shelter, health care, food, as well as education (Bryant 2009:66), the government of Kenya has been implementing a 'Cash Transfer Programme for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children' (CT-OVC Programme). The CT-OVC Programme was first piloted in 2004 in three districts of Garissa, Kwale and Nairobi. Initially it covered 500 households with each household receiving Kenya Shillings (KES) 500 (6.5 \$ by 2004). The Programme was scaled up to thirty-seven districts by 2008 (Alviar and Pearson 2009:1).

At the time of my research, each household enrolled in the CT-OVC Programme was receiving a cash grant of KES 2000 (approximately 20 Euros) disbursed every two months. The objective of the Programme was to ensure social protection for vulnerable children by delivering cash to households. This was also meant to be an incentive for households to take care of children through fostering and to ensure that children were retained in families. The cash was aimed at enabling households to break

free from poverty by creating human capital (Interreligious Council of Kenya 2011:10). Caregivers could use the money for buying food, clothes and services like education or health care (ibid: 67). The cash transfer was delivered through households and the selection criteria was that the household should be taking care of vulnerable children who were under the age of eighteen. In Siaya, there was an expectation that the money from the cash transfer would be used for enhancing the wellbeing of children in terms of health and education (discussion with district children's coordinator, 14 June 2016). A conversation held with an official in the OVC Secretariat indicated that the transfer was meant to be a bridge between the food poverty gap and the poverty line (conversation with official from OVC Secretariat, 8 June 2016). However, those on cash transfer were not supposed to be accessing similar services from other providers because this was seen as benefitting multiple times (discussion with staff from the Social Protection Secretariat, 3 June 2016). The household was exited from the CT-OVC as soon as it was no longer taking care of a child who was below eighteen years (discussions with caregivers, 13 December 2016).

The programmes introduced in this Chapter provide the context for my analysis of the local discourse on the needs and rights of children and their caregivers, as well as contestations around satisfying those needs and rights. They also provide the context for my analysis on the subjectification of caregivers and children in support programmes. In the following sections of this Chapter, I explore how these organizations represented the needs, rights and identity of children and the implications of these representations for children's experience of poverty and vulnerability.

### 8.7 We Are All Serving Vulnerable Children

All the organizations that I studied in my research conceptualized the children they were working with as orphaned and vulnerable (OVC), a status seen as accentuated by HIV/AIDS. An interview with a project leader of an organization that was not part of my in-depth research further revealed the conflation of the needs of children, being orphaned as well as being HIV/AIDS infected. She averred that the activities of the project were responding to the overwhelming number of orphans cared for by grandmothers as well as in child headed households (discussion with Project leader, 27 October 2016).

Discussions with the OVC project leader revealed that caregivers were recruited into groups on the basis of the OVCs they were supporting.

Showing how the power of the international global discourse of ‘OVCs’ and its conflation with HIV/AIDS has permeated the local programme spaces, the project leader qualified that the criteria for selecting the OVCs was prescribed by PEPFAR:

The child or household must have a person infected by HIV and must be taking care of orphans or the parents died as a result of HIV. They can be orphans, partial orphans or vulnerable children. Remember this is a PEPFAR project and it is HIV focused (conversation with OVC Project leader, 16 June 2016).

He also noted that some needy children could not be supported directly with PEPFAR funds if they were not affected by HIV. The caregivers were integrated into groups to benefit from economic strengthening activities. This way, some of the households or children who may be poor but lacked the disease that could qualify them for the programme, could only benefit peripherally.

Relying on the category OVC in implementing the project indexed the dominant discourse and an interpretation of the needs of children that conflated child poverty and vulnerability with HIV/AIDS. PEPFAR’s criteria for working with OVCs in that instance interacted with the general country context of the prevailing imagination that children affected by HIV/AIDS were the most vulnerable. I also connected such a discourse with the then used PEPFAR factsheet:

Programs addressing orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are central to achieving an AIDS-free generation and preventing child deaths and vulnerability. Worldwide, over 13.4 million children are living without one or both parents due to AIDS. Millions more are increasingly vulnerable because their families suffer from the social and economic effects of living in high HIV prevalence communities. These children are at greater risk of infection (PEPFAR 2017:no page).

In supporting this discourse of addressing HIV/AIDS as a child’s need, discussions with Friends of Orphans (another small community-based organization implementing a PEPFAR supported project) in a Focus Group Discussion revealed the following: ‘There are no other needs apart from

those that fit within PEPFAR criteria. We use PEPFAR's prioritization of needs. It is the wishes of the donor that we are doing' (FGD, 27 October 2016). On the walls of both the OVC Project and Friends of Orphans, there was information highlighting the prominence of the categorization of the needs of children, referenced as '6+1', meaning seven needs. These needs were education, health, shelter and care, economic strengthening, psychosocial support and coordination of care as the seventh need.

During our discussions, needs of children were casually referred to as '6+1' as if this was a given to me and to everybody. I characterized this as a 'donorlect' that was represented as unquestionable. The donor in this case had the power to set the parameters of what was seen as the legitimate needs of children (Fraser 2013). Packaging the needs of children this way positioned the needs of children as homogenous but did not consider the contexts and contingency of children's experience. While such a representation of these (seven) needs of HIV/AIDS affected children seemingly acknowledged the integrated nature of the needs of children, there are subtexts embedded in this discourse of 6+1 needs and the voice of children, caregivers as well as the local implementing organizations was not put into consideration. PEPFAR's discourse that framed these needs as universal was contradictory because the PEPFAR guidance note (2012) explicitly provided that implementations should consider the context of the intervention in meeting the needs and rights of children. (PEPFAR 2012)

The needs of children supported by the Mercy and Sponsorship Projects were not represented within the prism of HIV/AIDS even though the Sponsorship Project had earlier worked with a PEPFAR supported grant. As an interview with the Programme officer from Sponsorship Project revealed, poverty and vulnerability were the main entry points for child sponsorship: 'Our entry point is not just vulnerability but how they [i.e. children] interact with poverty. Some of these vulnerabilities include being exposed to retrogressive cultural practices, being born into families with weak family support structures' (discussion with Project officer, 3 December 2016).

## 8.8 Programmes as Surrogate Caregivers

In responding to and appropriating the discourse of OVCs, children participating in the support organizations involved represented themselves as vulnerable children. This they did by appropriating the status of an

orphaned child as a ticket for receiving support. For example, children supported by the Sponsorship Project noted that they were receiving support because they were OVCs: 'the Sponsorship Project helps children like us: orphans' (FGD with children, 20 July 2016). In one of the participating schools, children identified others they perceived as vulnerable in their school. When I asked them about the criteria they had used to identify these children, they noted that these children did not have parents and that other parents had run away (ibid). Clarke (2013:40) argued that 'rhizome researchers search for research aspects that are sometimes ignored'. In becoming a rhizome researcher, such a revelation of parents running away opened a window into investigating the perspective of 'the outsider children' in my research, presented in Chapter Five. In lumping together all the children as OVCs, the experience of children who were not orphans but whose parents had 'run away' had therefore been earlier concealed. Importantly, by identifying that being a child affected by HIV/AIDS or being orphaned represented the single most important need, the interventions failed to acknowledge or address the needs of other children who were also needy. Okwany (2009:16) supported this perspective when she pointed to the need for interventions to focus on the rights of all children instead of focusing on the rights of the deserving needy. Such a responsibility however lies with the state that has the muscle and resources as well as the ultimate mandate to protect the needs and rights of children.

In appropriating the category OVC, children utilized several idioms in communicating their needs and laying claims to support. I obtained these discourses of their needs by listening softly to their accounts of what was not being done for them as OVCs. These narratives simultaneously contested and appropriated the dominant scripts of their needs. For example, in a Focus Group Discussion, two youth (Musa and Rafiki who were twenty and seventeen years old respectively) felt that since they were OVCs, they were supposed to receive school fees support. Their grandmother also had expected her 'vulnerable children' to receive support from the OVC Project: 'When the children were selected, I thought they would be given all support including food, but this has not happened. My children sometimes sleep hungry and they do not have blankets' (conversation with caregiver, 3 August 2016). During FGDs other children also shared the perspective that they expected support in the form of school fees, or school uniforms or books. While this was seen and observed as a need for most of the children I interacted with, it was troubling when they



presented this entitlement in relation to charitable organizations and did not see the state as the guarantor for example of their right to care and to an adequate living standard.

Besides children and caregivers appropriating this sense of entitlement of OVCs, schoolteachers shared this also, albeit in contradictory terms. For example, one teacher in a primary school complained that children who were selected by the OVC Project were disappointed because they were not supported as expected. He framed the support from the organization as an entitlement. In so doing he reminisced a romantic past in which the organization was supporting vulnerable children and noted:

I want to tell you the truth about the OVC Project. The school filled up [enrolment was maximum] after the Project came on board. The children thought they would be supported but they fell away when this was not done. The OVC Project used to pay school levies for supported children but now there is nothing (conversation with head teacher, 28 June 2016).

These claims for support from organizations erase the role of the state and can lead to ‘projectification’ of rights. Meinert and Whyte (2014:77) referred to the projectification of HIV/AIDS care in Uganda where the government was missing, and the non-state actors were the ones providing for the needs of those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Patients therefore entered into specific care relationships with these organizations. Meinert and Whyte noted that projects work in phases and that each phase interpreted needs differently and could exclude some needs (*ibid*). One can make similar arguments in relation to the teachers’ discourse about the OVC Project. Their conception of children’s needs and rights was ‘project based’. For example, discussions with the Project leader revealed that a different project by OVC Project that the teacher referenced was providing all the school-related provisions for the children. It was however not clear to the teacher that different projects interpreted needs differently.

These organizations playing a role in the lives of poor children in Siaya thus moved citizenship from the realm of the state to an entitlement to be realized by non-state actors. These sensibilities also connect to the subjectivities of children ‘moving after projects’ which was earlier discussed in Chapter Six. It was not uncommon to hear children who were enrolled in projects worry about what would happen once these projects phased out.



Further examples can be drawn from my research site, where the caregivers and teachers represented the organizations as ‘having taken their children’, meaning taking over the responsibilities of the caregivers as well as the state. This was further articulated by the teacher in one secondary school who noted that ‘these organizations come and take our children and change the face of this community’ (interview with teacher, 28 June 2016). This narrative, of ‘taking our children’ has connotations of being possessed or owned by the organization, and the organization serving as a surrogate (more well-off) caregiver. Children in Siaya and specifically the communities I worked with appropriated this discourse and were subjectified this way. See also Nyambedha (2008:774) for a perspective on children who claimed to be owned by the organizations.

A further structuring of children’s experience was evident in this discursive practice of having a surrogate caregiver (project) who was providing limited support. Caregivers supported by the Sponsorship Project noted that being ‘taken’ without receiving full benefits meant children were picked on by some teachers (FGD with caregivers, 21 July 2016). While other vulnerable children in some cases would have the school play the role of a surrogate caregiver, as earlier noted in Chapter Seven, some children adopted by projects in contrast were sent home frequently for fees and other school levies. Thus, the children involved did not only enter into relations with these organizations but also with teachers who policed and regulated the care provided to these children. The failure of the state to adequately meet the needs of children, the resulting adoption by non-governmental actors as well as attendant policing in various spaces for those receiving support from these organizations were some of the contradictions in the cartographies of childhood of the poor in Siaya.

## **8.9 School-Based Provisions and the Politics of Dependency**

Interactions with children and caregivers revealed that most of the organizations were only providing piecemeal educational support to child beneficiaries in the name of reducing dependency. Providing piecemeal support has been associated with limited funding, and my research established that this was also guided by the discourse of preventing dependency on the organizations by needy children and caregivers. The piecemeal support was also presented as a way of enabling caregivers to take an active role in caring for their children. One can therefore argue that in the interest of curtailing dependency by caregivers, the right to quality education for

these children was denied. One can therefore also see the role of these organizations in entrenching vulnerability of children instead of addressing it. Further, interactions with children and caregivers revealed that in this context, where they were only getting piecemeal support from these organizations, they were also seeking support from other organizations who had flooded the Siaya context. For example, in the sites where COA had phased out and was no longer providing fees bursaries, the caregivers had joined other organizations seeking support for their children. One head teacher from Alego-Usonga constituency noted that: ‘after the programme stopped giving education bursaries, another community-based organization came in to provide support. Other children in school are being supported by the Equity Foundation’ (conversation with a teacher, 28 June 2016). While it can be argued that they were displacing dependency elsewhere, my interactions with caregivers indicated that they were looking for ways of meeting their children’s needs and rights.

The practices of these programmes, where piecemeal support was given without a focus on the structural issues that impinged on child poverty and vulnerability, could explain these sensibilities of moving from one donor to another. Justifying the provision of piecemeal support in education on the basis of avoiding dependency itself is problematic and the term dependency according to (Fraser and Gordon 1997:122) would be a ‘key word’ that holds assumptions about the identity of children and their caregivers. It is not only patronizing but it can also stigmatize. In connecting this discourse to other discourses, one remembers that similar debates featured prominently when the government was mooting the idea of CT-OVC with arguments that it would lead to a ‘dependency syndrome’ (Ikiara 2009:21).

These technocratic narratives silenced the perspectives of caregivers and children. For example, in the Sponsorship Project, children in primary school contested the terms and presented their claims as legitimate. For example, they argued that the project only paid KES 850 (8 Euros) a year while they were expected to pay more than this (FGD with children, 24 August 2016). The use of silencing was also a power these organizations exercised in deciding what support to provide based on their core-competencies and project plans. This can also be associated with the fragmentation of support and interventions that was based on the resources that these organizations had, rather than based on the holistic needs and rights of the children involved (see Banks et al. 2015, Brown and Kalegaonkar

2002). Thus, children's needs were 'projectified'. Due to its inability to adequately address the needs of children, the state opened room for diverse non-governmental organizations to step in with these competing strategies and the state can therefore be seen as a silent player in these processes of child vulnerability.

For the organizations providing support, the limits of the 'free' primary education policy offered further quandaries even to their donors. For example, the programme officer working with the OVC Project in Nairobi was of the opinion that their donor was guided by the government's policy on education in providing only support for secondary school children and not primary school levies. He noted the following:

The donor is trying to align their policies with the government because primary education is free. Whether it is free or not [... hesitates], that is debatable, the policy to be honest [pauses], is not free and compulsory as it is supposed to be. But they [i.e. the donors] will not allow you to pay for a class four pupil but will allow you to pay for a secondary school child. They are trying to remain true to the policy (conversation with OVC Project leader, 3 December 2016).

However, the programme leader also expressed the limited options in denouncing donor prescription and in essence revealing power configurations as an important node in the discourse of piecemeal support:

These donors are well informed that children are not going to school in the primary sector because of levies but they don't want to step on the toes of the government. When you speak to them closely, [they] tell you they are aware that children are still sent home, but they use all sorts of explanations. We do not want to be blamed for doing it otherwise (Project leader OVC Project, 3 December 2016).

Embedded in these contestations around what the policy could accomplish or not was an insensitivity of both the state and the donors about the needs of primary school children who might not transit to secondary school as earlier discussed in Chapter Seven. As argued earlier in this section, providing for the education needs of children was also a site of

contestation around the identity of caregivers. For example, there was a prevalent discourse in the OVC Project that some caregivers enrolled their children in very expensive schools in anticipation of support. Staff and the CHVs working with OVC Project expressed this as follows: ‘Some parents took their children to boarding schools hoping that OVC Project would pay for them. How can a poor parent take their children to an expensive school if they cannot afford?’ (conversation with CHVs, 30 June 2016). One can see the connecting lines between this discourse and the discourse of ‘small school for poor children’ earlier explored in Chapter Seven.

The head teacher in one primary school supported by the OVC Project drew on different parameters of this discourse of an entitled subjectivity when he blamed the organization for raising hopes in the parents. He noted:

[OVC project] took some of the children from boarding to day school. [The Project] was not paying school fees on time. [The parents] felt it was better to take their children to day school. [This organization] is taking too many children and their resources are limited. They will have to ‘vomit’ them without chewing them [sic] (conversation with head teacher, 30 June 2016).

On the other hand, parents contested the argument that they took their children to better schools because they were targeting free donor funds. In placing children in the best schools, they noted that they wanted the best for their children (conversation with caregivers, 8 November 2016). In these dominant linear accounts, this was read as taking advantage of the organization. Children too contested these dominant explanations and capitalized on their ability and performance. As one youth noted in a Focus Group Discussion: ‘I had joined a boarding secondary school because I had scored good marks. I did not receive any fees support from OVC Project. I had to move to a day school instead’ (FGD with school youth, 8 November 2016). This child therefore questioned the limited interpretations of what children’s rights are (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013:6), in this case seen as the right to education but only in a small school that is not too expensive. Indeed, this supported the perspective that there could be discrepancies between the claims made respectively by children and those that work with/for them (Van Daalen et al. 2016:813).

Representing these children as having rights to education, but only through a small school is paradoxical because it depoliticizes these needs and rights by making provisions for low quality education for poor children. This is an example of how specific interpretations of the needs and rights of children may further entrench structural inequalities. Such an analysis is supported by Fraser (1987:114) who demonstrated how valid needs (and in this case the need and right to education) are contested across various discursive spaces. However, I argue that in the interstices of these contradictions and the assemblage of contestations in claiming rights, spaces emerge for seeing the rights and needs of children differently.

### 8.10 Cartographies of Entitlement Through the Sick Body

By the mosque, I meet the father to Rafiki, one of the beneficiaries of the OVC project. He is in his mid thirties, but he looks old and haggard. He does some farming around the *bahari* where he grows some tree seedlings. As we finish the conversation, he asks me what I could do for him. He wants a house. He apologises for asking and says it is because he is taking ARV (for being HIV positive) and cannot do hard work. I hand him some money for transport. As he leaves, I reflect on how his only claim to support is through his biology, his HIV status (field notes, 8 November 2016).

Rafiki's father, a father of four, was enrolled in the OVC Project. His first wife had died a few years prior to our encounter and he had remarried. Like other caregivers whom I encountered, he was interpellated (Althusser 1971)<sup>94</sup> as HIV positive and therefore engaged in what Nguyen et al. (2007:125) called 'confessional technologies'. These are processes employed by the global community in countering the spread of HIV, where

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<sup>94</sup> I use interpellation in the way it was used by Althusser (1971) to imply how people who are labelled in a particular way are socialized to behave in a particular way to respond to this label. The person so interpellated participates in the discourse that hails (or interpellates) him or her.

those who were suffering had to confess their status. In my research however, these confessional technologies were geared towards gaining a ticket to support from the organization and others like me who in that instance seemed likely to help. In our research encounters, caregivers who were HIV positive felt obligated to narrate their need for support through the prism of their sick body. This supported the argument of Underman and others (2017:549) that 'efforts to be recognized as worthy subjects within a given bio-political regime require rendering oneself and one's biosocial group as legible within such normative discourses. W. Brown (1996:192) added weight to this in terms of subjectification when she argued that the confessional may regulate the confessor and this confession may become established as the truth about a particular category, in this case caregivers and children suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Similarly, Alice was only fifty-six years old but looked much older. Her sister had died leaving behind three children in the care of different relatives and Alice was looking after one of the children. Her oldest daughter lived in Nairobi, while her other son was doing apprentice training in the shopping centre. Her other daughter had two children and was working in Nairobi as a domestic worker. Apart from the CT-OVC grant she was receiving she did not have any other meaningful means of livelihood. When I was preparing to leave after my visit to her home, she said: 'is there anything that can be done to those who are taking medicine [the local reference to ARVs]? People like us are weak but still have to take care of our children' (conversation with caregiver, 27 July 2016).

The narrative of Mama Pius, whose four children aged between two and thirteen years were enrolled in the OVC Project, did not necessarily cohere with that of Alice. However, in our sister talk that had become part of the sociabilities of our research encounter, she told me the following: 'I am now positive (sick with HIV/AIDS). My husband and my first-born child too are sick. I struggle to bring these children up. We have to take ARVs and sometimes it is very difficult to do so on an empty stomach' (conversation with Mama Pius, 8 November 2016).

These caregivers amplified their suffering and displayed their sick bodies to others, including me as a researcher, seen as a potential benefactor. However, one should go beyond a simplistic perspective on objectifying and see the contradictions. My encounters with them revealed the dire circumstances in which they were living, such as having to take anti-retroviral drugs on an empty stomach. On the other hand, while these

caregivers were expressing genuine needs for support, claiming support through their sick body also brought into focus the other factors including the role of interventions that have positioned themselves as guarantor of rights of caregivers and their children. In such circumstances, a sick body was a resource. In addition, these bio-political or 'therapeutic forms of citizenship' (Nguyen et al. 2007:31; Nguyen 2005:126) were exclusionary since rights were supposed to be guaranteed for all citizens. Researchers have termed this process 'AIDS exceptionalism' where a focus on HIV/AIDS occurs over and above issues such as poverty, violence, or food insecurity. These caregivers, even though obtaining support from a local community organization, had therefore become part of the global AIDS relief conversations aimed at creating 'biographical borders' (Mai 2014:189) between those that were seen as deserving and those that were not. Such confessions became clear also for children when during our interactions they directly or subtly made a petition for support. In listening softly, I noticed that the research assistants would sometimes tell the children (in the local language) to be lucid in explaining their needs to me. The voices of children were therefore entangled with those of the assistants.

Within the context of the enormous childcare needs that I witnessed in my day-to-day interactions, these contradictions and exclusions became intelligible when I drew connecting lines between the caregivers (and their children) and the social contract with the state. This contract only existed in an idealized imagination in the Constitution. In a situation where the 'hollowed-out state [could not] offer guarantees against the vicissitudes of life' (Nguyen 2007:143), the diseased body then was the currency for staking claims to support for both the children and their caregivers (Petryna 2004).

My research revealed that staking claims to support through telling oneself as HIV positive was not linear and that the research participants had shifting subjectivities. In some cases, the caregivers were able to momentarily wrestle themselves from the subject positions allotted to them in these 'choked passages' (Deleuze 1995:133) of the dominant discourses of constructing their needs and thereby 'un-telling'<sup>95</sup> themselves. For

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<sup>95</sup> I use this term to refer to a specific way in which the research participants narrated experiences contrary to the expectations we had about them or did so strategically, or the way they contradicted earlier perspectives told about themselves.



example, as our discussion with Mama Pius unfolded, she briefly estranged herself from her HIV/sick body and narrated herself differently. She noted that HIV/AIDS was a good disease because, compared to other sicknesses such as diabetes, one could live for long. Minimizing the effects of HIV/AIDS enabled her to get on with the disease. I was also placed within this context of intersubjective knowledge production (Willemse 2007 and 2014, Van Staple 2014) in this estranging because I also encouraged Mama Pius to live positively for the sake of her children, thereby aiding her un-telling because she perceived that I was a mother like her. The role of the CHV, who was also a community nurse, could not be delinked from the context of this narrative because the health workers inculcated norms of living positively to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. These shifting subjectivities where one 'tells' and 'un-tells' oneself from HIV/AIDS performed a cathartic role to the caregiver.

There were also other practices of refusal to tell oneself as HIV positive but through another disease. Mama Allister, who was HIV positive and partially blind was benefitting from the OVC Project together with her four children, narrated herself differently. She transcended her HIV status and presented her problem as one of chicken pox that affected her eyesight and made her unable to take good care of her children (conversation with caregiver, 13 September 2016). When I expressed disbelief that chicken pox could lead to loss of eyesight, Mama Allister replied that 'chicken pox is bad' (ibid). The CHV confirmed this by noting that 'it is a very bad disease' (conversation CHV, 13 September 2016).

Later discussions with the CHV revealed that Mama Allister was suffering from HIV/AIDS. In diffracting the encounter at Mama Allister's and the go-along conversations with the CHV, it emerged that representing HIV/AIDS as chicken pox may not be the 'untruth' (Marker 2003:373) that I initially imagined. In the conversation she had kept silent on the question of whether chicken pox could possibly be connected to the loss of her eyesight. While I initially thought that my research assistant was part of this seeming 'untruth', after listening softly to the recorded conversation I discovered that she did not support the caregiver's chicken pox thesis. Instead, using her power as a community health nurse, like Mama Allister, she had responded past my question and talked about chicken pox being a bad disease, which we could not contest (Mazzei 2007b:77). One can enter this discourse in various ways. One, by responding this way both Mama Allister and my research assistant were protecting her against the

stigma of being a HIV positive person. Second, her focus on the loss of her eyesight and therefore inability to provide good care for her children could also point out that this was her most important need and not her suffering with HIV per se, as the project imagined.

In further folding her narrative through notions of identity as a performance (Willemse 2012), I aver that her narrative of telling against what was known about her was a performance of herself. In folding her narrative through Deleuze and Guattari (1987) such a performance was contradictory and rhizomatic. This is because in describing herself in that way, and against the allotted subject position, she still participated in retelling herself as a deserving needy person within the context of her struggles to provide good care for her children due to the loss of her sight. She was therefore simultaneously responding to the interpellation by bio-politics (Donsbo and Jensen 2014:19) as a sick subject and contesting this appellation. In this way she still fitted herself into the organization's therapeutic belonging discourse by enacting herself as sick, albeit differently.

For children, telling themselves as sick was governed by generational relations of power between the researcher, the programme leaders, as well as the caregivers. Even though four of the child research participants were said to be suffering from HIV/AIDS, they themselves did not articulate this during our various encounters. I only got to know their status through their caregivers, community health workers, or the teachers. This was despite being told by the caregivers that the children were living positively.

Underman et al. (2007) talked of custodial citizenship when exploring how children's suffering is narrated by others to enable them to access some rights attainable to other legal citizens. They defined custodial citizenship as a 'process by which a legible subject appropriates the bodily suffering of the injured party in order to gain citizenship rights on behalf of that individual' (ibid: 545). This would be the case for children who lack the 'sovereignty of self' (ibid: 558) to speak for themselves as citizens. In my research however, I applied this concept not necessarily in terms of how children lack sovereignty vis-à-vis the claim-making process that made them not talk about their status. Instead I argued that children often lack the language of speaking as therapeutic citizens and so their caregivers choose to speak for them by appropriating their suffering.

In other cases, while disclosure and knowing one's status were seen as key in prevention of the disease (Settergren et al. 2018), and also in accessing support, it was not clear to me whether these children knew about

their status, even though their caregivers had given mixed indications that they had already told them. For the siblings of Ayo and Awino who were HIV positive, it was their 'other' mother who narrated how she kept on going to the hospital to seek medical care for them. For Alidi, who was also HIV positive, the CHV constantly brought up the issue of his suffering but he did not talk about it himself. This might have been a way of protecting himself against stigma. In Chapter Four I already presented the story of Pius about his refusal to talk to us because he feared we wanted to talk about his HIV status. For him too, silence and refusal was the way in which he protected himself.

I had also imagined that by giving children space to write about their experience through essays, they would share about their HIV status. One child reported suffering from asthma and caregivers talked about their children suffering from sickle cell anaemia which was very common among children in the research sites. As argued by W. Brown (1996:197): 'refusing to speak is a method of refusing colonization, refusing complicity in injurious interpellations or subjection through regulation'. In these situations where children may lack self-determination in making decisions to reveal their HIV status openly to everybody so as to gain support, we need to reconsider how such telling on their behalf may also affect their rights to privacy and protection as embedded in the UNCRC (1989) and Article 19 of Kenya Children's Act of (2001). However, in demonstrating the messiness of agency through silence, failure to confess this status may in some cases mean exit from support.

In bringing together the telling, the 'untelling' the 'retelling' and sometimes the 'not-telling' about children's experience as HIV-positive subjects within the context of support programmes, these emerged as part of the complex experience of poverty and vulnerability.

### 8.11 Income as Need: Runaway Success Story of Saving Schemes

Through another example, I now explore the multiple framing and silenced perspectives in interpreting and managing children and caregiver needs as read from the discourse of the Voluntary Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs). VSLAs have infiltrated the everyday of the caregivers in my research communities and were offered as a solution to the income needs of children and their families. The VSLA was popularized in Africa by CARE after it proved successful in Niger in 1992. In 2013, the model

was already estimated to have been implemented in 26 African countries (Care Uganda 2013:3).

In all the four organizations that were selected for this research, caregivers were expected to be in VSLAs so as to generate income for meeting their children's needs. In some cases, the caregivers were given seed money which they loaned each other and paid back with interest. The caregivers also made savings with the group and this determined the size of the loan. The VSLA was represented as an initiative of the caregivers. For the OVC Project, which was in the final stages of implementation and was labelled as a sustainability programme, the VSLA was meant to ensure that the gains realized over the years were cemented. For COA, which had already phased out in the research sites, VSLAs were supposed to be running as a sustainability measure.

The larger programme in the western region that funded the OVC Project represented the VSLAs as a runaway success. For example, in the first quarter of 2015, the progress report of the programme indicated that a 'total of 24,122,652 KSh (USD 241,226) was shared out among 240 VSLA groups in the fourth quarter of 2016' (Path 2016:39). It was also reported that caregivers were using these proceeds to purchase school uniforms and pay school levies and fees. In fanning the runaway success discourse, the VSLA was seen as producing competent caregivers by strengthening their livelihoods as was expressed by the program manager of the OVC Project:

[We] have seen that people who were not able to earn KES 50(Euro cents) per day are now able to earn KES 300(30-Euro cents). You can't believe it, in 6 months one group had over KES 200,000(2000 Euros). These are vulnerable people, who were not able to take their children to school. They were walking in tatters [worn out clothes] (conversation with Project leader OVC Project, 25 July 2016).

The above success narrative of the VSLA projected it as having material agency and as having the capacity to even perform miracles as the project leader added: 'It is unbelievable that a group that multiplied into 4 groups shared KES 1.05 million by the end of the year' (ibid).

While acknowledging that sometimes it was hard for the elderly caregivers to participate meaningfully in VSLAs, one of the CHVs working with the OVC Project presented the VSLA not as an economic activity

but a pastime and a requirement for integration of the caregivers supported by the project:

There are some women who are too old to work, but the VSLA helps them to save a little money so as to benefit when the rest are sharing interest by the end of the year. [We] tell them they can even borrow KES100 (1Euro) so that they are seen to be part of the group (conversation with a CHV, 3 August 2016).

A discussion held with a programme leader working with the Sponsorship Project in Nairobi revealed a contradictory discourse because she was of the opinion that a VSLA should not be imposed on caregivers (conversation with staff, 22 November 2016). This was supported by another staff member of an organization in Nairobi who faulted the homogenizing perspectives in organizations by using the metaphor of a tailor (field notes, 24 January 2017). She argued that interventions and the VSLA should be configured to each person and ‘we should behave like a tailor’ (conversation with programme officer 22 November 2016). In representing the support programmes as ‘we’, and simultaneously presenting a façade of space for manoeuvre, the sentiments by this staff were still paternalistic and imbued with power. Both staff expressed the views that the caregivers may not have the skills needed to manage the VSLA ‘wind fall’ and may use the money on useless items like making hair and buying cigarettes (field notes, 24 January 2017 and 22 November 2016). These perspectives still responded to the dominant misperceptions about the identity and motives of poor people. Such a perspective was not new but connected to the discursive formation earlier explored in Chapter Three that imputed a problematic identity on the caregivers. Such a discourse presented caregivers as having a predilection towards spending money on ‘useless’ things rather than on the welfare of their children. It was an ‘othering’ discourse that saw the poor as consuming differently and unethically. It was also aimed at production of moral boundaries between the implementers, other more well-off consumers, and the poor.

Some of the caregivers confirmed the success narrative because the loans and savings had helped them pay school fees for their children. For example, some caregivers noted that they took loans to cater for their children’s fees.) One caregiver was even reported to have graduated from the project after benefitting enough through the VSLA. However, according

to some other caregivers the VSLA was not a choice but part and parcel of the intervention logics. Discussions with caregivers revealed that it had exclusionary tendencies embedded in it, which might be silenced (Eze-menari et al. 2002). Some of the caregivers and children reported that they had left the groups because they could not afford to keep up with the required monthly savings. Briana (twelve years old) noted: 'my mother left the group because she could not keep up with the payments required for the group membership' (conversation with Briana, 4 August 2016).

Some of the caregivers were sometimes forced to incur debts so as to pay the loans. As one member noted: 'the VSLA is bothering us and especially if one has a loan. One does not have a voice in the group meetings because you are reminded you have a loan' (FGD with caregivers OVC Project, 13 September 2016). Children who did not have regular caregivers were also disadvantaged. For example, Alidi's twenty-year-old brother could not participate in the VSLA and even his uncle's wife who was running a small hair salon business could not because she did not have the time to participate in the meetings. She did not perceive herself as the caregiver to Alidi even though the CHV kept on prodding her to join the group. Such a situation is an example of an administrative definition of people's needs that is one-sided and one that does not take into consideration the perspectives of all the people affected (Fraser 1987:115). In Alidi's case this did not cater for different childhoods and different caregiving arrangements. Despite such positioning, however, earlier discussions in Chapter Five revealed that caregivers did appropriate the VSLA groups as places of conviviality, beyond the instrumental objectives of the interventions. In the next section, I explore the discourse of CT-OVC as a state-funded income remedy and the associated experiential politics embedded in this practice.

### **8.12 Contesting Needs and Rights Through the Cash Programme**

The state Cash Transfer Programme for vulnerable children in the research sites was one of the remedies to the income and other needs of children. It has been represented not as a poverty alleviation strategy but as a rights-based initiative that enables fostering orphans and other vulnerable children (Bryant 2009). The official in the Social Protection Secretariat had earlier indicated that caregivers gave them very positive reviews and appreciated that the 'little they give was helping them a lot' (conversation with staff Social Protection Secretariat, 2 June 2016). The



discourses of cash transfer reveal specific assumptions about the identity of caregivers and the children but the caregivers engaged with this subject-positioning in the official discourse of cash transfer. Their perspectives simultaneously contest and collude with the dominant representational discourses of identity of beneficiaries as well as needs and rights of children. These contestations characterize the experience of children benefiting from the Cash Transfer.

While there were requirements that caregivers should not use the Cash Transfer for purchasing only the necessary food items, caregivers positioned themselves as purchasing individuals and resisted the simplistic interpretations of their needs as a need to eat but as a right to eat well as discussions revealed:

[Laughing] The money helps us to eat meat or fish instead of *omena* [silver fish]. We diversify the menu and our children are happy [...]. See that basket, it is only used when we are going for the money. Children know when you are going for money (FGD with caregivers, 13 December 2016).

Indeed, children confirmed this when they said: ‘that day we eat fish and not *omena*. That day we are grateful to *Dana* [grandmother]’ (FGD with children, 16 December 2016). As Willemse (2007) averred, a discourse does not need to be uttered for it to be resisted. Discourses of eating well were positioned within the context of changing their diet from eating *omena* to eating meat once a month. *Omena* (understood through their very small size) could also point to discourses of being perceived as deserving only basic diet due to their material status and being labelled as poor. My interactions in the community revealed that *omena* has historically and for a long time been plentiful, affordable and even cheaper than vegetables. They were therefore seen in the food hierarchy as the most affordable or cheap protein and sometimes framed as a ‘poverty food’. This everyday meal thus could not be served to a guest for instance. The above perspectives by children and their caregivers were useful in deterritorializing the dominant scripts about the identity of the poor (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). These dominant scripts perceived their lives and childhoods as lived only at bare minimums as imagined in this social protection programme.

Using the money to buy meat instead of *omena* would be termed as ‘temptation goods’ or ‘public bads’ in the conventional governing



discourse of social protection. Such goods, in addition to cigarettes and beer, in some cases also include doughnuts and sugar (Banerjee and Mul-lainathan 2010, David and Popova 2014:2, Standing 2012:65), and in my research setting would include meat as well. The paternalistic and disingenuous nature of the 'rules' around this assumed that the poor are unable to make good choices. The silenced narrative was how childhood was structured in terms of good food for some children and not for others (seen as poor).

Some caregivers also acknowledged that the transfer value of the CT-OVC was not adequate for their children's needs. In positioning themselves within this inadequacy and in taking lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), caregivers receiving the CT-OVC were also in other programmes of support, for example receiving benefits from NGO programmes or receiving school fees bursary from the government. This happened despite the fact that CT-OVC required that the households should not be receiving support from any other organization (Bryant 2009:69). Indeed, the staff from the OVC Secretariat noted that the 'caregivers were eating before we came', meaning that the grant was adequate for their needs (discussion with official from OVC Secretariat, 8 June 2016).

### 8.12.1 Cash Transfer as Manna from Heaven

Despite the acknowledgement by some caregivers that the transfer value was not adequate, some other caregivers utilized idioms of 'better than nothing' and 'manna from heaven' as they argued: 'The support is not enough but it is free money. We did not know where it came from, it is like manna from heaven. You do not question what you have received by the mercies of God' (FGD with caregivers, 27 July 2016).

Taking this discourse as an example of a need to analyse beyond linear interpretations, I analysed the perspectives of 'manna from heaven' beyond a linear discourse of docility. I took multiple entry points as I mapped the forces and 'lines of flight' that might explain it (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:12–13, Kamberelis 2013:671). At first instance, even though the money was not much, it had helped caregivers to meet some of their needs, so for them it was a possibility they would not want to question. In connecting this rhizo-discourse with other discourses, this narrative therefore indexed the institutional position and discourse that the transfer was 'better than nothing', earlier discussed. One can connect contexts and draw from similar discourses of comparing cash transfers with manna that

have been reported elsewhere. Sellers and Honan argued: ‘discourses do not operate as straight lines through a text: rather, they (e)merge, connect, and cross over each other’ (2007:157). I connect this discourse with Chipiliro’s (2012) research on elite attitudes towards pro-poor policies in Malawi, where similar discourses of cash transfer as free cash and manna from heaven were marshalled. Finally, my presence as an outsider could have been interpreted to mean that I could give these reviews to the government with negative repercussions. Caregiver narratives of ‘better than nothing’ therefore could be part of the intersubjective knowledge production (Willemse 2007) and my location as part of the cartographies of children’s experience.

### 8.12.2 ‘Whitening’ the Cash Transfer

The perspective that the OVC cash transfer heightens inequalities and erodes social capital in the community has been a major discursive motif in perceptions of what works or not for the cash transfer. For example, Kirera (2012) explored the role of negative capital in cash transfer in Kenya. In deepening this literature and nuancing it further, I argue that we need to explore how caregivers engage with these discourses and perspectives. For example, one of the dominant discourses was that the caregivers receiving cash transfer were not working hard because they would still get free money (conversation with CHV, 27 July 2016). My interactions in the community showed that caregivers who were receiving support were still engaged in other livelihood activities like selling charcoal or keeping cattle. Such representations of caregivers as lazy were also fuelled by the notions that the caregivers who received transfers were not necessarily the poorest and perceptions that the selection process was not transparent. These perspectives indicted the state for having selected only a few caregivers to benefit, whilst leaving out others who were equally vulnerable. For example, the evaluation of the Cash Transfer Programme in Kenya 2009 revealed that ‘a significant fraction of less-poor households was being covered by the program’ (Bryant 2009:74). Such vilifying connects to similar discourses about vulnerable children in Lesotho as studied by Dahl (2014). She argued that, within the context where a few orphans had been selected to receive support from charitable organizations, the communities utilized specific ‘idioms of excess’ (ibid:627) as tools for controlling for apparent inequality. This they did by arguing that the orphans were over-indulging in the NGO ‘largesse’ and therefore becoming ‘fat’. In Siaya, it was at the

interstices of these negative discourses that childhood was experienced and negotiated on a day-to-day basis.

Children within other programmes in my study reported similar anxieties and similar idioms of control. In some cases, caregivers reported that their children were incited by the community to rebel. For example, in a Focus Group Discussion with caregivers and in listening to the silences and body language, one elderly caregiver was complaining in the local language that her son had been influenced by the neighbours to demand money from her. Other caregivers noted that the neighbours would tell the children to assert themselves because they were the ones sustaining the household through the transfer (FGD with caregivers, 22 July 2013).

Caregivers had devised racialized subjectivities of responding to these claims and enabling them to keep the relations between them and the community pacified. In so doing however, the role of the state as granter of rights of children was erased as the following quote reveals:

If we want people to keep quiet, we respond by telling them that this is *mzungu*'s [white person] money. If they also come asking us who had visited [myself] we will tell them it was a *mzungu* because people fear a *mzungu* and they will not bother asking us what happened (FGD with caregivers, 13 December 2016).

While at first instance, the narrative of a *mzungu* and 'whiteness' evokes notions of racial superiority, such a narrative produces several readings and is a rhizo-discourse. Whiteness in this case was not about colour but was a form of symbolic power (Blaagaard 2009:35). It was also an important node in the cartography of charitable giving and was given material agency, imbued with the power to provide for the needs of children. Read this way, as a researcher, I was also implicated in this *mzunguness* of charity where my status as a PhD researcher from abroad was fore-grounded.

Drawing on the context further revealed that these apparent racialized subjectivities should be understood within the context of material poverty, where an outsider who showed interest in the poverty experience of children and caregivers was allotted the subject position of 'whiteness'. Further, reading this narrative through the cartographies of projects of charity revealed that global sensibilities of support have infiltrated the local spaces through interventions and defined the experience of children. In the Siaya context, a *mzungu* was equated with charity because most of the

organizations working with children were supported by international donors. This hinted at global and local reconfigurations in the cartographies of power to provide. It was also not uncommon to hear caregivers referring to other people who were in a position to give support as ‘my *mzungu*’. In such cases, *whiteness*, charity (power to give), and by extension the fulfilment of the needs and rights of children, interacted to define the subjectivities of the caregivers and communities in Siaya in general. Due to Kenya’s colonial legacy, *whiteness* is also equal to being well off or living well. Within the cartographies of childcare support and granting rights of children, a *mzungu* was seen as a more appropriate rendering of income support than the state. The state on the other hand, though in close proximity and actually the one providing the cash transfer, was conveniently erased. In terms of relations of support and care, this supports the contention by Ansell (2009:201) that space is ‘discursive, imaginative and symbolic’. I stretch this to mean the imagined citizenship of children and caregivers through these global and local configurations of care and support.

These idiosyncratic experiential politics in the cash transfer and how this affects the wellbeing of children contribute to our understanding of cartographies of lived experience of child poverty and vulnerability within the context of the officially defined needs and interventions. The politics that caregivers enact within this context also further our understanding of agency by caregivers as they position themselves within specific discourses, and various senses of becoming (Deleuze 1995).

### 8.13 Conclusion

In exploring the different interpretations of the needs and rights of children and the politics around them, I have argued that children’s needs and rights of children are not a given, but an interpretation and contestation. I have also demonstrated that specific practices of fulfilling children’s needs are modes of creating subjects. While Youdell (2006:518) argued that through these subjectivating technologies, institutions may render children and their caregivers as subjects through relations of power, I have however rendered these interpretations as non-linear and rhizomatic. I have argued that the power to frame things, and in this case the needs and rights of children, in a particular way was not a preserve of those with power but occurred within a field of complex relations and was an assemblage. This does not mean that children, teachers and project leaders, donors or even the state have equal power in this framing. As noted by de Freitas

(2012: 562): 'Power is not distributed evenly across the surface of an assemblage, since there are joints or nodes where there is more traffic and affect than at others'. I have endeavoured to map these differential intensities of power in this chapter and what this means for children's experience.

# 9

## Subjectivating Practices in Programmes of Support

### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I continue to present the embodied and embedded experience of children and their agency and creativity in responding to, or navigating the dominant representations of their needs, rights, identity and experience in organizations or programmes of support. I offer a perspective on how the identity of the poor child is articulated in day-to-day discourse and interactions through specific practices. These practices, often seen as requirements for participation or conditionalities, offer specific ways of being a child generally, and a poor and vulnerable child in particular.

In drawing connecting lines between this chapter and Chapter Eight, I argue that, from a Foucauldian perspective, discursive practices position children as subjects with specific capacities and identities (Davies 2006:425, Fraser 1989:165). However, while children and their caregivers may take the subject positions offered to them and therefore become subjectified, they may engage with, negotiate, resist or subvert these subject positionings as well. In moving their resistance beyond Foucault to Deleuzian lines of flight and politics, I follow Martin and Kamberelis (2013:676) who argued that ‘anything that limits the totalizing effects of narratives is a line of flight’. These politics engage the assumptions in these discursive practices or ‘stutter’ the linear perspectives on children’s experience, their capacities and identity (see also Dalberg and Moss 2005, Rose 2004:277). Further, diffracting children’s perspectives and the performance of their identity through perspectives of living rights (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013), I explore how children claim and reposition their rights and enact their identity differently by breaking from the habitus in these programmes’ discourses of needs and rights (see also Isin 2012:110). Diffracted from these three perspectives, I argue that agency is not something that children have (and is not defined in advance), but that its potential lies in the fact that it is constituted through specific relations in

programmes. These subjectivating practices, and the associated politics and rights-claiming by children and caregivers present specific cartographies of a poor child's experience.

Even though there were several ways through which children were subjectified through programmes of support, I substantiate my arguments by examining four key practices. These are: observations on an exercise of reviewing rules by children in the Mercy Project, the discursive practice of children as poor performers, the regime of practice (Foucault 1991:81) of writing letters to donors, and I also present the cartographies of children's experience through the ubiquitous discourse and practice of 'exiting' children from programmes of support.

## 9.2 Subjectification Through Rules

The discussions in this section draw from observations in the Mercy Project's Centre. Children receiving support from the Mercy Project, including those from primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions, converged at the Centre each holiday and on Saturdays for different project activities. These included spiritual teachings, training in life skills or health, learning how to write letters, vocational skills and sometimes sports. I observed the activity of reviewing the rules of engagement in the Project Centre. These rules governed the conduct of children in the Centre including relations among children, reporting time, rules for wearing a school uniform, and time for reporting. The exercise was managed by two student leaders. I sought permission from the director and the children to be present in their meeting (field notes, 23 August 2016).

### 9.2.1 We do not want to come to this Place

When reviewing the rules of engagement, children contested the practice of going to the Centre every weekend and during the holidays and argued that they did 'not want to come to this place' (field notes, 23 August 2016). These spatialities, discourses and the narratives of contesting 'this place' revealed assumptions about the identity of children as well as their needs and rights. The space was seen as problematic to children in a number of ways. One of the issues under contestation was the training they received in social emotional development or what they just referenced as 'social emotional', as the following narrative revealed: 'Since we joined Mercy, it has been social-emotional and the bible until you are departed. [They] need to balance spiritual, socio-emotional and cognitive with some academic'



(children in the open session, 23 August 2016). Socio-emotional support, which also translated to religious teachings, was at the heart of Mercy Project's interventions. In this training, children were provided with Christian religious education as well as skills on how to relate with others. The practice of training children in social-emotional development was obtained from the Christian orientation of the organization as well as the constructions on the needs of children. One of the desired outcomes of the socio-emotional development pillar in the Mercy Project's work was that the child 'interacts with other people in a healthy and compassionate manner' (de Raad 2011:52). Without discounting the importance of psycho-social support, I read three potential implications of this training for the children involved. One, this training was used by the organization to articulate its Christian identity through needy children. Two, this approach homogenized the experience of children, eclipsed other childhoods that did not need socio-emotional care and intervened into a universal vulnerable child subject. In seeing further lines in the discursive map of children's experience, it can also be read as a thin definition of children's needs that depoliticizes their real needs (Fraser 1989:163).

In appropriating the discourses of 'this place' as unfavourable, children also faulted the rules that required that they go to the Centre every weekend and most of their school holidays. They noted that this was against their rights to childhood and also drew on their rights as human beings as the following narrative reveals:

[We] should not come here every day and we should not be staying here for long. Perhaps [they] think because some of us are orphaned and there are no caregivers at home, [they] should act as our surrogates by keeping us here. [We] are human beings and we want you (student leaders and project leaders) to reduce the activities for December holiday. [We] need to visit our relatives (voices of children, 23 August 2016).

The governing and disciplining practices by the organization generated the above rights claims by children and by extension what can be seen as 'disobedience' to rules. However, it is useful to look beyond discourses of disobedience, to a perspective on 'disobedience' to rules as political (Leafgren 2007) and as a process through which children reposition their rights within support programmes. Within the context of discourses and

practices that might frame them otherwise, the children in the Centre were locating themselves as citizen subjects with full rights. This is consistent with Fraser's argument (1987:111) that welfare programmes may fail to position their subjects as rights-bearers but position them as 'beneficiaries of governmental largesse or clients of public charity'. Their voice can be seen as a call to humanize interventions for children. By contesting the requirement to go to the Centre, children were also questioning these global rules of philanthropy that govern the Mercy Project.

Appropriating children's free time revealed an assemblage of discourses on the identity of children and caregivers. It was patronizing to the caregivers because it cast judgement on the parenting styles of caregivers that were deemed deficient. For example, discussions with the Project Director revealed how rights to protection of children were mobilized by the organization that said reasons for keeping children in the Centre was that children would be idle when school was out. The voice of caregivers was also entangled with that of the Project staff because some of the caregivers noted that they liked it when children were occupied in the Centre because they might engage in bad behaviour at home (FGD Mercy Project, 21 June 2016). Further contradictions arose from the fact that some caregivers had to forgo labour of the older children when they were engaged in the centre. On the other hand, to show how going to the Centre was entangled with their livelihoods, caregivers to the very young children, who were also time-poor, had to accompany children to the Centre every time there were no older siblings to go with them.

Children also appropriated the intervention space as discriminatory because of various rules that were applied selectively. For example, they noted that some children were not questioned when they went to the Centre late while others were punished. One of the children asked, 'are you serving God through discrimination?' (discussion in the open session, 23 August 2016). Serving God through discrimination was an indictment on the organization whose mission was to serve God through releasing children from poverty and therefore was not supposed to discriminate. Children could therefore be seen to be invoking their right to non-discrimination as embedded in article 2 of the UNCRC (1989). Further, by questioning the core of the organization's mission, and by introducing the lexicons of discrimination, children were laying a claim to their rights as living (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013) and laying claims to better support. These claims challenged various practices of support to vulnerable

and poor children that may have had inequalities embedded in them. Children also felt discriminated by teachers who were contracted to provide them with support in the Centre. They noted: ‘Some of the teachers want to show us that we are beneficiaries of charity. When they see our exam results, they say “they are sponsored, and they are underperforming?”’ (open session, 23 August 2016).

The representation of the Centre as a specific undesired place was not just a discursive performance, but it further made visible other needs and rights of children that were not addressed. For example, ‘this place’ was also performed as a space for wasting time and children noted that there were no books at the Centre. This hampered the academic programmes that were part of the activities in the Centre. Such contestations also bring to the fore other de-legitimized needs of children such as books which are important but were not provided.

Another organizational rule that children questioned was the practice of having their caregivers pay 10 per cent contribution for the services rendered to them. They argued that the money their caregivers contributed could have been used for buying books for the Centre (ibid). Evidently the requirement that caregivers pay 10 per cent was a top down decision and decided by the organization. Children therefore named this payment as a form of injustice. Their politics that focused on issues of money, an aspect that would be seen by the management as a responsibility of the caregivers, was their type of agency. Such agency also connected to events outside the local and immediate, including to what they perceived as their right to free support. In this way, children also questioned the core of the intervention logic itself that was built on cost-sharing between caregivers and the Project. As earlier argued, this was not just about questioning the payment but the fact that they noted the money was not being used to improve the Centre was significant.

### 9.2.2 Embodied Resistance Through the Uniform

Children at the Centre were expected to wear the uniform of their respective schools. Children resisted the rules around wearing school uniforms for non-mainstream school activities like the project activities. While the project staff perceived the school uniform as a form of identity, when used at the Centre, some children saw it as a form of control. While they positioned this ‘disobedience’ within the context of the fact that their school uniform would be worn out, listening softly revealed more political roles.

It tilted power to their side and enabled them to subvert the power of the organization by resisting its practices. One of the participants noted the following:

We are punished when we come to the centre in flip-flops. We do not want to use our good shoes in this place because there is nothing serious that takes place here. We have not done anything important since Monday. Why should we wear good shoes? They will just be spoilt (students in the Mercy Project Centre, 23 August 2016).

Failure to wear a school uniform and minimizing the need for being smart was resistance to control and surveillance. Exercising their agency this way by representing the Centre as a place that could possibly spoil their good shoes was jarring to the common imaginations of children's capacities and a rupture to the iconic thinking about children's agency. Such politics through what may be seen as disobedience to the rules seem antithetical to notions of dependent childhood. Indeed, the children indicated that the reason they had been given an opportunity to review the rules was because they were disobeying the rules and the Head of the Project had threatened to close the Centre (observations at Mercy Project, 23 August 2016). However, children in this exercise justified 'disobedience' by implicating the disciplining practices by the organization.

While I did not follow up on the outcome of the feedback to the management, it is possible that the children may have been constructed by the management as disobedient and therefore had to undergo further socio-emotional training. The cycle of entanglement between the practices and subjectivities of children would then continue and the powers of the programmes to govern children in the Centre may therefore be reinforced. This governance of children's conduct and their subjectivity, however, emerged as a dynamic and entangled process and a cartography and was influenced by prevailing power (Aranda 2018). The resistance generated by the governance in the Centre was neutralized by these same disciplining practices that created the resistance in the first place. This was because children who did not go to the Centre would be disciplined, as I reveal later in this chapter.

### 9.3 Our Children as Poor Performers

The research revealed that the discourse of poor children as poor performers in school was ubiquitous in some organizations. Discussions with the director of the Mercy Project confirmed this as follows: '[Our children] feel entitled to free support and therefore they do not work hard' (discussion with director, 2 August 2016).

These allotted subject positions of poor performers can be stigmatizing and as Green (2007) noted, discourses that define children in interventions may misrepresent them in specific ways and thereby cause them harm. In addition, children who were receiving support were also sometimes forced to repeat classes in their trajectory for example when they did not reach the cut-off points after the national exams. In all the four organizations studied, there was a cut-off point of 250 or 300 (out of the possible 500) marks, before a child could be supported in secondary school. If such children refused to repeat classes, their parents were expected to cater for their school fees until their school results improved.

Children located themselves ambivalently within this discourse. Some of them noted that making children repeat school was wrong. As David (seventeen years old and receiving cash transfer) noted: 'In class eight, I had 248 marks but when I joined secondary, my brain woke up. I realized that marks in class eight were not a good measure' (conversation with David, 14 December 2016). Jane (sixteen years old) similarly resisted the discourse that children on support are poor performers when she noted: 'I attained 254 marks and I am working hard to join university. If I had not scored 250 marks and above, I would have been taken to a polytechnic, those small vocational training centres' (conversation with Jane, 23 August 2016). Jane's narrative again connects to the discourse of small schools or small education for the children of the poor as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Similarly, Musa (nineteen years old and earlier supported by the OVC Project) shared the same sentiments that his inability to obtain the required cut-off points for secondary school meant he was exited from the project. He was supposed to repeat class eight or join a vocational training institute. While acknowledging that these children may have specific vulnerabilities that affect school performance, some project leaders justified this discursive practice by arguing that project resources were limited. Attributing the subject position of a poor performer was therefore a sorting mechanism as one leader noted:

You do not expect a child staying with a grandmother to perform well, they might be looking for food in the evening when others are reading. Our hands are however also tied because we do not have resources, we have to sort these children (FGD with organization leader, 27 October 2016).

Here we come full circle again and remember the case of Ayo in Chapter One, who was forced to repeat preschool, and the contradictory voice that accompanied this. Other reasons silenced in children's performance might include the poor starting point including the early childhood care and education experience, like Ayo's as was presented earlier in the research. In flowing with the rhizome, other factors like the quality of teaching/learning in the schools explored in Chapter Seven, and the difficulties in the caregiving environment to reinforce what is learned in school, as well as lack of provisions were part of the assemblage. This complexity cannot simply be reduced to grades.

A staff from the Sponsorship Project minimized their role in this discursive practice and projected the discourse on another organization that she had worked for previously. She noted that 'another organization I worked for, pulled out a lot of children because they kept on failing and I kept on thinking, how far are we going with these children who are not performing?' (conversation with programme staff 24 January 2017). For the Mercy Project, the discourse of exiting 'poor performers' into poorly resourced polytechnics was couched in terms of concern for children. The Director argued that they advised children who were slow in school to join polytechnics so that they would not exit the project without a skill when they reached the age of eighteen. This she argued was aimed at ensuring children did not come out 'empty handed' (conversation with project director, 2 August 2016).

Children however still engaged with such a discourse, subverted it while simultaneously appropriating it. For example, some argued that they chose the polytechnic track themselves since they did not want to wait for four years to graduate from high school with no possibility of getting a job thereafter (FGD with polytechnic students, 23 August 2016). Appropriating this alternative subject position was a form of resistance that accorded some of these children space for living their life the way they saw fit (Willemse 2007:475). Here we come full circle again in the loop of vulnerability and poverty and encounter Deleuze and Guattari (1987). I argue that such

a discourse was a rhizome that drew connections to the country-context where the unemployment rate for school leavers was high. The rhizo-discourse by children and their agentic moves were therefore responding to the lack of employment opportunities in the country context even for those with good academic skills.

#### 9.4 Courting Sponsors Through Letter Writing

In this section, I take another example and explore another subjectifying device: the practice of writing letters to donors or what was called by one of the caregivers 'courting the sponsors' (field notes, 4 August 2016). Children wrote letters to the sponsors to endear themselves and also update them on their progress. Children supported by the Sponsorship Project noted that the sponsors knew how they lived on a day-to-day basis because they updated them and appreciated the gifts from sponsors (FGD with children, 16 June 2016). Other children wrote letters to potential sponsors to request support. In this section, I focus on the latter category to demonstrate the subject positions this affords to children vis-a-vis their needs and rights.

Letter writing allocated children and caregivers' subject positions of petitioners because they had to position themselves as needy children. The story of Alloyce (eleven years old) was indicative of the subjectivating tendencies of letter writing. He was enrolled into the Sponsorship Project when he was only a few months old. By the time we met, his mother had been writing letters to potential donors on his behalf for over ten years. Alloyce occasionally went to make illustrations by drawing pictures to the potential sponsor because he could not write well. He had not yet received any support since his enrolment, and he told me that he was sometimes given biscuits and juice while others were receiving gifts like cows and sheep from their sponsors. He noted, 'I also go to write letters. The other day I saw my friend Kelvin, he was given a duck, but I was not' (conversation with Alloyce, 23 August 2016).

Similarly, Vicky (twelve years old) was also enrolled in the Sponsorship Organization. She had also been writing letters for many years, but no support had been forthcoming. During a Focus Group Discussion with other supported caregivers, her mother referred to these potential sponsors as 'pen pals', a satire for a relationship that was only virtual (diffractive diary, 21 July 2016). The subtexts in this humour parodied the relationship the donor or sponsor was supposed to have with the child. It also enabled



the women to 'humour away' the labour of writing letters to absent sponsors and was a form of agency. Such an everlasting 'courtship' was not only affecting the caregivers but also the children themselves who worried about why their 'courting' practices had not procured a sponsor.

While some of the caregivers like Vicky's mother took lines of flight and exercised agency by stopping to write letters (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), others such as Alloyce's mother kept the hope that help would come one day (conversation with caregiver, 24 August 2016). She said that doing so was her way of *chiro-osiep*, which loosely translates as 'marketing' herself for friendship or 'courting' the sponsors to make them like her child and start supporting him (ibid). This was supported by other caregivers during FGDs. The notion of 'marketing' children in this community was a sensibility I noted during my several years of work in Siaya, where caregivers would also give me photos of their children to 'market' them. This can be compared to situations in other programmes such as the OVC Project where children have to maintain a 'good' file so as to attract continuous support.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987:14) noted that it is not possible to totally destroy the tree-like perspectives in a map and replace them with rhizomatic ones. Instead, we need to find out how specific lines of flight (seen as resistance in this research) may be stifled by lines of articulation (seen as structural barriers in this research). Based on this observation, the donor requirements, within the context of a lack of a sustainable livelihood strategy for some of the caregivers who were waiting for the project, may produce this seeming cartography of docility by children and caregivers. However, it is more helpful to see this beyond the prism of resistance and docility, and as a rhizome. The complicit voice of caregivers and children was a hopeful investment for a time in future when they would need the money for their children to transition into secondary school. For example, Alloyce's mother kept the hope that in the future he would be supported to transition to secondary school. Diana's brother was enrolled with the Sponsorship Project but had not obtained any support. Diana argued that 'if you follow these people [Sponsorship Project] they would help in future' (conversation with Diana, 20 July 2016). Waiting by the project was also strategic since it enabled the caregivers to socialize with other caregivers whose children were supported, including engaging in VSLA activities and thus meeting their income needs on their own terms.

Continuing to wait by the project, questioning the practice but also drawing on it was not just contradictory. It supported the perspective that a rhizome might be wounded (like Alloyce's Mother was wounded because her child was not benefitting like the rest), but its 'severed sections will regenerate and continue to grow, forming new lines and pathways' (Leafgren 2007:97). Some of these lines were enabling like new networks, which offered useful possibilities for meeting the challenges in caregiving contexts.

In further 'plugging in' this agency into the vulnerability of children and caregivers, these cartographies of their seemingly problematic patience with support programmes can however be paralyzing or stunting. This is because children and caregivers spent considerable time hanging by the project (which meant they could not travel from the community for extended lengths of time), sending letters to donors and in keeping hope that help would come one day. This points to a need for a better approach that strengthens caregivers to support their children beyond writing letters to potential sponsors or waiting by the project.

Children were also writing letters to other children (in the Global North) who were sponsoring them. Within this context, the precarity of living at the interstices as a poor child located in Siaya but waiting for pocket money from a wealthy child in the Global North who had spare change can be seen as a contrast of sorts. It was a powerful rendering of the cartography of Global North-Global South relations of power. These relations have obtained a classed, generational perspective where it was not only of children 'courting' adults but also children from Siaya 'courting' other more privileged children located elsewhere. Indeed, some caregivers noted that, when their children stopped receiving sponsorship, they were told that it was because their sponsors were children who had graduated from school and were no longer able to support them (FGD with caregivers, 21 July 2016).

These forms of the subjectivation of needy children and of claiming their rights to support from sponsors or researchers like me put into question the role of the state in providing for the needs of children. It opened spaces for the possible articulation and visibilization of poverty and for making claims to the government instead of to others. Despite the fact that according to the UNCRC (1989) the state is the guarantor of the rights of children, the children of Siaya had to live their lives petitioning and 'marketing' themselves to sponsors or donors. In the next section, I

explore the process of ‘exiting’ children from support in projects, as another governing and subjectivating device.

## 9.5 Departing as a ‘Key Word’ in Programmes

In this section, I present the subjectification of children through the practice of ‘exiting’ children from support programmes. This practice was rendered in these organizations through the use of the intransitive verb ‘to be departed’. To be departed, applied as a way of discontinuing children from support, emerged as a material-discursive practice (Barad 2007) and structured the experience of children in support programmes. I explore the discourses of ‘exiting’ children, including the underlying assumptions about their identity and the sort of childhoods aspired in these practices. I also explore how children located themselves through this practice.

In most of the social protection literature, exiting programmes has been explained using different terms. One of these terms is graduating participants from social protection programmes. Cornwall (2007:471) argued that such a term is a buzzword. Graduation has been defined as ‘leaving a social protection programme after reaching a wellbeing threshold, once the participant has acquired a set of resources that is expected to equip them for a higher-income future livelihood’ (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2015:1). However, in my research ‘departing children’ was not just a model of ensuring that children were carefully exited from the project but a governing device in some cases. Used as an intransitive verb, to be ‘departed’ and its associated processes can mould behaviour, construct identity and thereby influence the experience of children. The term can also constitute a threat and has material agency (Barad 2007). Departing can also mean loosening oneself from specific subject positions and a claim to one’s rights. I continue using the term ‘departing’ (i.e. not ‘departure’) as a way of interrogating the discourses that feed this practice and what it means for children.

### 9.5.1 Ageing Children Out of Support

Interventions presented ‘departing’ children from the projects as positive especially when the circumstances of the children were deemed to have changed. Departing was also in some cases pegged on their age. For both the Sponsorship and Mercy Projects, it was reported that children were supported until they could support themselves or when the circumstances of the children and caregivers changed. These perspectives indicate how

children usually ‘age out of support’ even though their circumstances may remain unchanged.

When I inquired whether there were cases where children had departed from the programme after their circumstances improved, one staff from the national office of the Sponsorship Project not only reported in the negative but also attributed it to the identity of the caregivers. She noted: ‘[Sighs] ... ooh no honestly, um, honestly ... Honestly, if they do well, they do not want to say. They want to continue staying in the project’ (discussion with staff, 24 January 2017). In listening softly, I wondered whether her sighing was because of the utopian vision that the piecemeal support given to these children, as earlier explored, would lead to transformation. The absent-present (Derrida 1997: xviii) in the discourse was the identity of the dishonest caregiver who would not report changed circumstances.

In the Sponsorship Project, children were encouraged to complete education before they reached the age of twenty-four. After attaining this age, these young people could also request the sponsor to support their siblings as the following discussion revealed: ‘Sometimes they write a farewell letter to the sponsor and tell them there is another child in the family who needs to be supported’ (conversation with staff in the Sponsorship Project, 16 June 2016). This petitioning for fulfilment of their needs and rights was therefore the hallmark of cartographies of children’s problematic experience.

Departing children when circumstances had changed was tied to the notions of reducing dependency, another ‘key-word’ or ‘buzz word’ in social protection (Fraser and Gordon 1997:122). The following narrative from a Sponsorship Project staff member revealed this:

Giving is two-way, it can empower but can create dependency. One has to pull away sometimes so that you don’t create dependency [...] We want to support children and also ensure they do not become dependent. A vulnerable child can benefit but can also fall into an entitlement mode (discussion with organization staff, 24 January 2017).

It was not only the Sponsorship Project that used case management as a tool to ensure careful graduation of children, but programmes supported by PEPFAR were supposed to do this (Catholic Relief Services 2017). In these narratives, departure or termination was framed in terms of

strengthening the systems for enabling the children and caregivers to ‘stand on their feet’ (conversation with Project staff, 24 January 2017). However, my interactions with children and caregivers revealed that some children were exited before they could reach such an imagined threshold. I will discuss this further in the subsequent subsections of the chapter.

### 9.5.2 Departing as Punishment and as a Millstone

Discussions with children and caregivers indicated that they had to comply with the administrative criteria for receiving support. In the Sponsorship Project this was referred to as negative ‘departing’ when the child failed to comply with the rules for participation in the project activities. In the Mercy Project, one of the reasons for departing children was ‘when the child is deemed to engage in behaviour that is aggressive and that affects the wellbeing of the others’ (De Raad 2011:52). For the Mercy Project, a child could be departed if (s)he did not go to the Centre for a period of two months, unless the reason was known. This was placed within the context of ensuring financial integrity (De Raad 2011), because the sponsor was still sending support and the organization did not want to be perceived as exploiting the sponsor. These rules of global philanthropy and the attendant requirements therefore influenced the local space of how support was provided to poor and vulnerable children and thereby their experience.

In the OVC project, a child could exit the project if the caregiver relocated to another site in which case monitoring would be difficult. Some of the caregivers in an FGD supported by the Sponsorship Project noted that they sometimes did not up take livelihood opportunities outside the project site because this could be constructed to mean that they were no longer resident (FGD with caregivers, 21 July 2016). Such a sensibility should be connected to the earlier discussions in Chapter Six about children who were on the move with the projects and children who had to keep on moving so as to comply with the rules.

This had repercussions for the children’s wellbeing because some children explained that they were not willing to move in with more well-off relatives for fear of losing support. ‘We have to be around the home in case a sponsor brings a gift and one is supposed to receive while posing for a photo to send to the sponsor. If you are far away the project leaders recall you to the community’ (FGD with children, 24 August 2016). Staying in the community was a form of surveillance on the support the

sponsors were giving to the children and an aspect of accountability to donors. However, accountability to children, their rights and freedom was curtailed and was an affront to the principle of the best interests of children extended by Article 3(1) of the UNCRC. Children therefore lived in perpetual hope of support without guarantees and with the threat of being exited hanging over their heads.

One of the other requirements for staying in project support was that of high standards of morality. For example, girls who got pregnant were exited from the programmes because of the (mis)perception that they would influence others negatively. A discussion with the Director of the Mercy Project indicated that such girls were seen as immoral. If the pregnancy was between two sponsored children, both of them were departed from the programme. In so doing the Director revisited the organization's international global principle that children who were benefitting from support were not supposed to affect other participating children negatively with their behaviour (conversation with Project director, 2 August 2016). Such a discourse universalized the experience of all girls, who were seen as immoral and likely to infect others (see also Ngutuku 2006:32). While still standing on the moral high ground of protecting the sponsored children, the Director of the Mercy Project also averred that when a girl got a baby it was best to sponsor the small child instead of the girl (conversation with director, 2 August 2016). Focusing on the baby can be seen as a way of sanitizing the organization's moralistic discourse where the 'rebellious child' was excommunicated from the project but the 'young innocent one' was supported instead. This supports the perspective that governing rationalities have an 'epistemological character' where knowledge about the issue or person to be governed has to be presented discursively (Rose and Miller 2010:274).

These moralizing discourses on 'sponsored mothers' were not shared in the same way by the staff in the Sponsorship Project. They indicated that they did not send girls away (or 'terminate' them, in the parlance of this organization) after they became pregnant. A close reading of their discourse, however, revealed another veiled moralizing discourse on student pregnancy: 'We don't depart them when they are expectant. We do behavioural change training and she can be sponsored as long as she is in school' (conversation with Project staff, 16 June 2016). These notions of training for behaviour change are emblematic of the negative discourses on student mothers in Kenya (see Ngutuku 2006, Wekesa 2011) where



behaviour of student mothers is often seen through the prism of contagion. Since most of the girls would exit school because of stigma, their support essentially was not assured. A discussion with children supported by the Sponsorship Project revealed a need to understand this voice further when they noted: 'they terminate you and take you back to your parents where there is no support. They do not tell the sponsor' (FGD with supported children, 20 July 2016).

These perspectives were also confirmed by Alidi's twenty-one-year-old caregiver who was departed from a project of support and thus did not complete secondary school. When she became pregnant in form two, the project workers took a photo of her pregnant body and shared it with her sponsors, who withdrew support. It was not just support programmes that were punishing children through 'exits', but also the 'well-wishers' in the community. For example, Gabriella (sixteen years old) noted that, when she became pregnant the well-wisher who was supporting her education became 'cold'. 'He just stopped paying my school fees and after a few reminders, I gave up, you have to read from the silence' (FGD with schoolgirls, 22 September 2016).

The narrative of Donald (twenty years old) furthers our understanding of how children were exited from programmes due to perceived disobedience of programme rules. His mother explained that sponsors supported her son for three years in high school. However, the sponsors stopped paying school fees when Donald was in the final year of high school. Both Donald and his mother were intentionally silent on the reasons for this (Mazzei 2007a). While Donald argued that he was not sponsored in the first place, his mother explained away the reasons and argued that the boy was just told to stay at home by the sponsors (conversation with caregiver, 21 September 2016). Reading Donald's silence through his sister's narrative was revealing as she noted:

He used to hang out with a friend who was also sponsored and whose behaviour was not good. One day the friend got drunk and started fighting the teachers and the teachers implicated my brother in this. The teacher told the sponsors about this incident. That's how they left him 'hanging' with no support (conversation with Lizzy, 10 October 2016).



Lizzy's discourse of how the organization left her brother hanging or what she aptly rendered in sheng (a slang that is a mixture of English and Kiswahili) as *kuhang'isha*, could have two connotations: hanging by a tree without hope or a future, or being suspended without information about what was happening. This was indicative of the practices of departing children, which might leave children without options and in fact depart them into the brink. Such power by organizations over these vulnerable children and the uncertainty over continued support accentuated their precarity significantly.

The examples of these children who were exited from the programmes on the basis of pregnancy (girls) and violence (boys) demonstrate the gendered aspects of control through the programmes of support. In addition, the power of organizations to withdraw this already precarious support and excommunicate children points to a need to re-think support to children. It is important to note that these are not just rules that require children's compliance but, in the terms of Escobar (1991:267), they are administrative measures that were enacted to make people conform to the way their needs and rights were defined and at the same time maintain the discursive universe.

Departing children was also used as a threat to children and represented by some children as a 'thing'. One of the participants noted the following: 'this thing departing they hang it over our heads every time, even if one makes a small mistake. We are tired of the threat' (FGD with children, 23 August 2016). By naming the threat of being departed as a 'thing' hanging by the neck or a millstone, the children made visible how the right to support was still contested by the same organization that acknowledged the need for supporting children. Children named this as an injustice. In contesting the threat of exit dangled over their heads by the Project, children also positioned their stay in the Project as a right, arguing that they should not be threatened.

However, these perspectives on being departed as a threat emerged as contradictory during my various discussions with children. For example, while children in the rules reviewing session of the Mercy Project revealed that they did not like the threat, later discussions with children in the same Centre revealed that some children supported being departed if it enabled them to conform to the rules of charity as they noted: 'this is charity, one needs to adhere to the rules' (FGD with children, 24 August 2016).

One can see several lines in this discourse because in rhizo-analysis meanings expand into others and some meanings are important in some context and not in another.<sup>50</sup> In the first instance this narrative might look like complicity with unjust rules and therefore a form of subjectification. However, a further reading of the rules of the organization also requires supported children to enact themselves as deserving citizens. Children in this one context therefore have adopted these forms of being seen as belonging and as insiders (Isin 2009:371) and might not question the rules. Further, comparing the two discourses, one can say that both discourses are a performance of identity but in two different contexts (Van Stapele 2014, Willemse 2007). Here, I draw some inferences in this cartography of subjectivity—border-crossing in the performance of children's agency and identity. First, during the rule reviewing session where children demonstrated resistance, they had been informed by the management that they were free to air their perspectives without fear of being victimized. The 'recalcitrant', rule-questioning sponsored child performed during the exercise of rule questioning was therefore a response to this space accorded to children's voice. The 'rules session' context, held in a large and seemingly anonymous hall, was seen by children as a space where, as an adult, I was accepted by the children who were not afraid of being victimized. In the Focus Group context, where children seemed complicit with the rules, even though I had assured the children of confidentiality, their agency, like a rhizome, and voice connected to my power as an adult.

Children's voice therefore not only acquired different meanings in specific contexts, based on how children perceived me as a researcher engaged in the inter-subjective knowledge production (Willemse 2007:25), but also on how they perceived the outcomes of their voice. One can say that children are not always willing to trust adults even after being assured of confidentiality and that they may act in their own interests. In listening softly to this context and several other contexts where children opposed the rules and supported them simultaneously, I argue that this rhizomatic agency was therefore a temporary assemblage that dissolved based on context. Each assemblage may last for a while, but through further

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<sup>50</sup> See also Willemse (2007:29–40) for a perspective on how meanings and discourses change, based on the context. However, even though she located these multiple possibilities within relations of power, I see them as located also within the agency and politics of children.

possibilities and encounters it can change. One can argue, like Lee (2001:115), that agency by children in that context was an assemblage that could not be read in advance and that there were ‘many incomplete orderings that remain open to change’. The assemblage brought together space, generational power, material context and so on. Beyond this contingency of agency, we learn more about the needs and rights of children to care, and how they should be provided for, without fear of being departed.

### 9.5.3 Departing to Preserve One’s Dignity

Children and their caregivers engaged with the discourses and practices in programmes and sometimes walked out of their own will or what I call ‘selfdeparting’. However, such selfdeparting was not without material effects since children (and caregivers) who resisted this way were left without any support. For example, some caregivers and their children walked out of the project (both literally and symbolically) when they perceived they were not getting the support they had expected to receive. Interactions with children supported by the OVC Project revealed that they stopped making applications petitioning for school fees from the organization. Other caregivers stopped submitting progress reports for their children as the following narrative reveals: ‘One of the parents said since he paid school fees without support from the organization, he should not be forced to give his report. He was therefore exited from the programme’ (discussions with CHV, 30 June 2016).

While reporting to organizations was used as a form of local and global accountability to donors, children who were not receiving direct support reportedly stopped submitting progress reports. Their caregivers continued to be in the saving groups organized by the same organizations though. This is because they saw the groups as beneficial. Since caregivers and children were not expected to exercise this type of agency by walking out, in one of the organizations the project leaders vilified the CHVs for this. During one of the visits to the OVC Project, I overheard one of the Project leaders castigating the CHVs as follows: ‘Your parents are not serious, they don’t care. You should push them more to give you the reports’ (field note, 27 October 2016).

Other caregivers, such as Briana’s mother, previously supported by a community-based organization, walked out to preserve her dignity. She stopped going for project meetings because the CHVs taunted her. She noted that ‘My three children were part of the project and one day they

were given school uniforms. The CHV was not happy and started complaining that I was receiving support and she was not' (conversation with caregiver, 4 August 2016). My research assistant who had previously worked with COA was implicated in these narratives of subordinate caregiver subjectivity. This is because, after listening to the mother's narrative of 'departing' the programme, he had muffled her narrative and translated only parts of it. When I asked him what the mother had said, he instead told me that the mother had a 'tough head' (meaning she was stubborn and rebellious), like her older son who had also walked out of a project by COA. He then (in local language) told the mother that she should have a 'big heart' (meaning being obedient even to unjust rules) while participating in these projects. Having a 'big heart' in this case was contrasted with having a 'big/tough head'.

Possessing a 'big head' while participating in a charitable welfare programme where a subservient identity was the norm, was seen as a misnomer. From this context of poverty and participation in support programmes, an assertive beneficiary of charity can be said to be an impossibility and an 'excess'. Hall (1996:5) argued that identities have an 'excess' or the specification of what is usually seen as outside what is expected of that specific identity. Such an excess was seen as a problem and was regulated through being departed.

My research was also implicated in these notions of resistance where some caregivers and children refused to be involved. For example, the caregiver to Aaron and Mary noted that she would not participate in my research if I asked her to give me her national identity card. Such a refusal should be read from the context in which organizations tended to enlist children and caregivers into the programmes by asking for their identity card (field notes, 4 August 2016). Gabriel too had argued that he was tired of giving his name to NGOs and he thought my research was oriented towards such endeavours (field notes, 27 July 2016). Such refusal indexed the perception of organizations in Siaya where NGOs were often seen as appropriating the suffering of populations for their own benefits.<sup>51</sup> These actions were therefore ways of resisting patronage by NGOs and by extension by researchers.

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<sup>51</sup> See also Dahl (2014) for a perspective on how NGOs in Botswana were seen as feeding off orphans or financially exploiting them through their programmes of support.

Such a scenario, where caregivers and children who departed themselves were exited from the programmes of support, might look like it is pointing to an impossibility of agency by poor children and their caregivers. The potential political or transformative import of their politics of self-departing could also be questioned. However, I argue that it is at the interstices of such excesses and their acts of ‘disobedience’ to these demeaning practices of support where we could begin to imagine another possibility in representing poor children and their caregivers. It is also by encountering such agency that we begin to understand their rights as living, but also to re-imagine how to work differently with them.

#### 9.5.4 Departed by the Technological System: Discourses of Being Purged

Being departed was in some cases attributed to both human and non-human factors including the computer. For example, in the Sponsorship Project, children were exited by the system after twenty-four years. There was, however, ‘a teen purge’ where children who were in the computer system but had not yet received a sponsor by the time they reached the age of thirteen were terminated from the programme. This was seen as an automatic action and explained in terms of the needs of sponsors. It was, however, not explained in terms of the rights and needs of children. As noted by the Project leader: ‘The sponsors like it when the children are young’ (conversation with Project leader, 13 December 2016).

In giving a human face to the non-human agent (the computer), the social worker explained to me that in some cases when the system had purged the children, they could be reinstated or they could be given first priority when giving support to non-sponsored children.<sup>52</sup> Such children were told that they were not lucky and often continued writing letters and waiting. Vicky’s mother noted that:

There was a time [they] called us and told us if your child was thirteen years old and no sponsor was forthcoming, they would de-register them and take new ones because it shows they are not

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<sup>52</sup> Sponsorship organizations as earlier noted also give education grants to those children who are not directly sponsored.

lucky. How can a mother tell her child she is not lucky? (conversation with caregiver, 15 September 2016).

CHV's in the OVC Project also shared how children who were beyond the age of receiving support would indicate 'red' in the computerized database and the CHV's were supposed to explain the reason for that. This shows the precarious situation that some children had to endure while seeking support as needy children. Such practices exacerbated 'lived inequalities' (Donovan 2015:733) and demonstrated the fragility of children's entitlement to support. Marshalling these discourses that children were not lucky because the machine had purged them was not only demeaning to children but also pointed to a need to trouble this inappropriate way of intervening and tackling child vulnerability.

Rose, a grandmother receiving support through the CT-OVC Programme, also noted the agency given to non-human agents such as the computer in terminating her children from the support. She noted that 'the system' purged (or what she called 'removed') her from the cash transfer even though she still had small children who required support. She had to write a letter to petition the consequences of the non-human agent through the Children's Officer for a possible reinstatement (FGD, 16 December 2016). Bringing Ayo's narrative to picture here, we are reminded that it is the same technology in terms of her mother's digital fingerprints (after she died) that effectively exited her from the CT-OVC.

While the technological rules of disbursing support were not in question, these cases of being departed through a technological mediation provides us with nuances and reworks the dominant accounts in social protection debates. These debates often silence how children encounter such technology and their experience through the rules applied. Seeking accountability from a computer, in this instance, shows the precarity and emotional and physical labour that goes with such petitioning.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Donovan 2015:746 for a robust debate on how technology, while enhancing access to social protection may do so in a 'precarious, securitized, and thin manner'.

## 9.6 Subjectivation and Resistance as an Assemblage

Following on from the discussions in the previous chapter, the discussions in this chapter have illustrated how discursive interventions for children may bring out and make fresh discourses on the needs of children to become intelligible, or even to unsettle the existing ones. I have also demonstrated how children contest or appropriate the subject positions offered to them, but also contest the definitions of their needs and rights. Children's acts of citizenship move beyond the immediate scenario of rule questioning to a perspective of all the inequalities and discrimination embedded in the way care is provided by the interventions of child poverty and vulnerability. The identities that children and caregivers took within support programmes were therefore shifting and multiple (Chhachhi and Pittin 1995, Willemse 2012, and Van Staple 2014). These actions were a way of presenting their rights as living. I engage with the implications of such agency in the next (and concluding) Chapter.



# 10

## Conclusion: Tying Ideas Together

### 10.1 Introduction

This research investigated children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Siaya Kenya. I explored this experience as a cartography from three interlinked everyday spaces: the home, the school and support programmes. The key question that guided the research was: how is it both to be, and to be constructed as, a poor and vulnerable child in Siaya, Kenya? In mapping children's experience, I therefore set out to explore the context of their lived and constructed reality or the spaces of being 'choked' by overwhelming forces that Deleuze and Guattari (1988) have called interstices, and the creativity that takes place at these complex interstices. In this Chapter, I recapitulate the key arguments presented in my study and draw implications for policy, practice, research, childhood studies, as well as for activism for child rights and wellbeing. In holding the thought that these domains (that all have a bearing on the outcomes of my research) are interrelated, I simultaneously plug the conclusions and the implications into each other.

### 10.2 Researching Like a Rhizome: Listening Softly to Children's Voice

In following the Deleuzean tradition of pop philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:25; Deleuze and Guattari 1986:26-27),<sup>81</sup> I have utilized the

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<sup>81</sup> Deleuze admonished us to write with slogans and to practice pop philosophy or what he called 'word flight'. This is aimed at enabling a better perspective on some of the issues under investigation. I have created in this thesis various concepts including 'alive but dead', '*ouge* (nothing) future', 'listening softly', and 'husband of the grave'. I have used them to reveal perspectives that go beyond how the words/phrases would normally be used. In this way, I have been able to engage with the common uses associated with the terms.

innovative methodological approach of 'listening softly' to children's voice. Such innovation was also occasioned by my search for a different science (Harding 1991, St. Pierre 1997) in understanding children's lived experience. In rendering the term 'listening softly' philosophical, I have avoided defining what it means or how it works. I have instead asked myself, with Foucault and others, 'does it work? What new thoughts does [listening softly] make possible to think?' (St. Pierre, 2004:285). In explicating Deleuzian philosophy, May (2005:22) advised us that the 'destiny of philosophical concepts and philosophical positions lie not with truth or falsity of their claims but with the vistas for thinking and living they open up for us'. This was also led by the Deleuzian perspective that the creation of concepts is important in philosophy because it can enhance our understanding of our world differently and thereby shape a future that is different (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994:108).

Listening softly has gone beyond the sensibility of listening, to a specific posture about children's voice, and has even extended to the way I approached the field tentatively like a rhizome and the methods I used. Listening softly also reveals the way I captured a multiplicity of children's voice. This voice has emerged as philosophical, as prophetic, as silence, as silenced, as performed, as truth, and as re-imagined. In listening softly, I was able to hear not only the 'voice in the crack' (Mazzei 2009:48), that exposed the experience that may have been hidden. I also heard how children appropriated the language of adults in the different spaces explored for this research. It also meant listening to emotions as data and it enabled me to sometimes hear the voice of death as children enacted their experience about the death and dying of their caregivers, and once, through the voice of a dying child. This complicated telling, listening and hearing must be put into perspective when working with children and their caregivers. It reveals the vulnerabilities of relying only on the spoken voice or seeing voice as truth, a perspective utilized in more linear accounts.

Listening softly was also enabled by my diffractive methodology where I went beyond coding my data and organizing it into themes to reading different perspectives through each other. This also meant that I did not use the theoretical frameworks as the context of analysis but instead read the data through the theory and the theory through the data to reveal the entangled differences (Barad 2007). Researching this way does not mean that we need to abandon the existing methodologies in favour of new ones. Instead, guided by perspectives of Law (2004:4), it means that we

should be wary of the ‘normativities that are attached to [these methodologies] in discourses about method’. In putting to work this innovative methodology of listening softly, I see my research as important for childhood studies because it brings ethics, rights, citizenship, philosophy, justice and development together.

As a starting point, my conceptualization of the problem, the research ethics, my location and methods were co-constituted. I have for example demonstrated that the methods of research are also methods of intervening in the lives of children. In mobilizing a different research ethic in research with children, I have been guided by Whatmore’s perspectives (2006:601) that our theories as well as research methods influence the world. For example, in acknowledging my own entanglement with the research apparatus (Muris 2017:539), I have written myself into the research as part of the cartographies of children’s lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. Seen this way, my experience and biography became part of my research. I also showed contexts where children used the encounter with research for their own benefits but also how the research might have affected them. My presence in the field influenced the way children and caregivers told, performed and enacted their experience. Beyond illuminating my role as a researcher, this also implicates others and behoves us, as Law (2004:3) argued, ‘to think hard about our relations with whatever it is we know and ask how far the process of knowing it also brings it into being’. It also pushes us to think about methodologies differently and see them like interventions. As Hughes and Lury (2013:787) admonished us; we need to think about methodologies differently, not only as tools for investigating social realities but also think about how these methods also need to be ‘designed for capture and for care... [and], how they may be attentive to how the social world may be engaged’.

Reading and putting Deleuze to use in my own way and making rhizomatic methodology ‘to speak in my own tongue’ (Mbembe and Comaroff in Shipley 2010:655), I have explored children’s experience as a rhizome and as a cartography and not as an essence. I have been inspired by various authors as I explored this experience as an assemblage of entangled factors, processes and identities as well as experience as such. For example, Jackson and Mazzei (2012:1) noted that an assemblage ‘isn’t a thing—it is the process of making and unmaking the thing. It is the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together’. Barlott et al. (2017:530) noted that a rhizomatic cartography pursues ‘processes and flows rather

than structures and stable forms. Braidotti (2011:4) on the other hand took a cartography to mean a 'theoretically-based and politically informed reading of the present'.

As a cartography, children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability should be understood from the context of the structural forces of economic and social relational vulnerability at home. In addition, it is the experience of problematic schooling within a context where schooling is seen as a way out of poverty, but one that does not always fulfil this promise. It is also an experience located in being a supported child in programmes where the children encounter various representations of their needs and rights. In all these spaces, children enact specific politics as they claim their rights as living. These politics in turn, become part of the cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability in Siaya.

My starting point was that, in as much as child poverty is material, children and their experience are positioned and constructed through discourse as well. The voice of children is usually not heard, and adults may think and plan for them. In researching like a rhizome, I have gone beyond the perspective of child poverty and vulnerability as discursive and material. Instead I have further followed Taguchi (2010:177) in exploring 'what might be, might be possible, what emerges, and what can become' of children's experience when these discourses and material context come in contact, as well as when children navigate their everyday spaces where other entangled factors are at play.

Researching like a rhizome has therefore enabled a perspective on the experience that is fluid, dynamic, emergent contingent and a multiplicity. In favouring an approach that enables a perspective into the quotidian experience of children beyond numbers and multi-dimensionality, I have responded to the calls by several authors to understand children's experience differently.

### 10.3 The Choked Context of Child Caregiving

I explored the context of caregiving in Siaya as one of the interstices in children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. I have argued that caregiving is enacted in 'choked' or 'cramped spaces'. These are the contexts of economic lack, insecure livelihoods and food insecurity. These are also a context for parenthood, often structured by the death of children's biological parents, and I explain these below.

The context of insecure livelihoods and food insecurity is a defining context of constrained caregiving in Siaya. Caregivers struggled against the odds as they engaged in precarious livelihoods to do what Honwana (2005) has called 'getting by'. Without adequate income to provide care for their children, caregivers worked for instance in people's farms, engaged in making mats or bricks, or leased out their farming land among others. Within the contexts of these livelihoods, their labour and that of their children was an important resource. However, this also introduced additional vulnerabilities because it is not only a precarious form of labour, it was also labour intensive and compromised their schooling.

Food insecurity is another context of caregiving that not only affects children's right to adequate food but also affects their rights as children more generally. For example, within the context of hunger, specific 'resilient childhoods' were constructed as the ideal by caregivers and children were expected to minimize their food needs and hopefully wait to eat at a future day.

The other context of caregiving is the high morbidity and mortality occasioned by HIV/AIDS and other causes which introduce further vulnerabilities in children. Caregivers who are sick face various challenges in providing care to their children. On the other hand, children are also forced to grow up without adequate support after the death of their parents and this introduces further psychological vulnerabilities. While death is biological, my research also revealed a context where death in the research community was seen as social as well. In this case, fathers who could not provide for their children were seen as 'dead but alive' or zombie fathers. I also located such representation of fatherhood within a gendered social context of social protection where having lost a father is often seen as a ticket to social protection support.

This experience of caregiving converges at the threshold of the seemingly distant state as exemplified by the limited social protection support to children and caregivers generally. The context of Siaya also carries further challenges to caregiving because of its location as an opposition stronghold. Disparities in resource allocation over the years have not only influenced economic activities but neglect by the government relating to core economic activities like fishing, which is the people's mainstay, has affected livelihoods.

Skewed gender relations as well as gendered norms around care are another part of cramped space of caregiving that I explored in my

research, and that affects the ability to provide care and other relational issues in caregiving. I have engaged with these relations for the context of widow and widower caregivers. While these two examples are not typical of all constrained caregiving in the context of Siaya, I have argued that the assemblage of processes at play in the way they provide care under conditions of poverty is an important node in communicating the intensities of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability.

Widowed caregivers too are not only constrained materially but are also affected by other constraints (including skewed gender relations, assumptions and control of their sexuality, and norms about their parenting skills). These caregivers engage with these contexts through both discursive and practical strategies and engage the overcoded and dominant (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) notions of vulnerable widow caregivers. In engaging with the importance of the politics at play within these contexts as they engage with the dominant tales of widow inheritance, and how they re-define themselves as worthy caregivers, I have explored their politics beyond notions of subversion of gender power. Instead, in pushing these politics beyond Foucault, I have looked at these politics as 'taking lines of flight'. In a Deleuzian sense such politics have a transformative potential. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007:36) noted: 'But to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of the imaginary'.

In my endeavour to politicise the lack of category of a widower caregiver among the Luo, I have coined the term a 'husband of the grave' (*Chuor liet*). While the mapping of a widower caregiver has been guided by the biography of one caregiver, his situation connected rhizomatically to other relations and individuals. Mapping his experience of caregiving was guided by a conviction on the importance of understanding individual lives as a pathway to understanding collective lives. Indeed, as Biehl and Locke (2010:344) noted, individual biographies can illuminate collective perspectives that have collective implications. Listening softly to the account of being assembled, presenting oneself, and becoming a widower caregiver, pointed to a need for alternatives in mobilising as well as imagining required care and social protection for vulnerable children under the care of widower caregivers.

In thinking together with Kothari and Hulme (2004:31–32), I have noted that the widower caregiver was 'not poor due to inaction but rather because of a range of daily constraints produced by a specific constellation

of personal, social, economic and political relations that [he] constantly seeks to overcome'. For example, in social protection, *Chwor liel* (a linguistic abomination for a widower that I have devised) was compared to *Chi liel* (widow) and in some cases, was cast as non-deserving. He also faced a host of norms that questioned his caregiving skills. All of this affected the quality of care he could provide to his children. His agency and self-representation and the challenges and contradictions he faced, all offered spaces for working differently with widower caregivers in enhancing their ability to provide care and support to their children. Unpacking his cartographies of experience can also 'challenge lazy, homogenising and stereotypical depictions' (ibid 2004:34), and the invisibility of widower caregivers in the context of Siaya specifically and that of Kenya more generally.

Taken together, while demonstrating the creativity and resilience of caregivers in navigating these contexts, I was influenced by Mbembe and Comaroff (in Shipley 2010:659) who, following the arguments of Appadurai, noted that it is in these cramped spaces where caregivers have to rework their 'own humanity [and that of their children] in the face of powerful dehumanizing and, at times, abstract and invisible forces'. Influenced by Deleuze (1988), I have argued that being located at these interstices with the attendant constraining forces makes the caregivers manoeuvre around the interstices by initiating specific responses (see also Deleuze 1995:133). These perspectives of creativity at the margins were supported by Katz (1996) when she argued that occupying the space of 'in-betweenness' or interstice enables one to engage in minority politics.

The (often times) performative cartographies of resistance by caregivers (like presenting their dead husbands as better angels), in some cases formed by structural challenges of their contexts, enabled caregivers to take care of 'their' children. Such politics have the potential to disrupt the status quo and potentially recalibrate, even in small ways, the gendered, economic and social relations of care. I was inspired by Rose (2004:280) who noted that 'minor engagement with cramped space can connect up with a whole series of other circuits and cause them to fluctuate, waver and reconfigure in wholly unexpected ways'. They hold a potential for influencing the way we think about caregiving through policy, practice and activism for children.



### 10.4 Children's Experience Beyond a Package: Rhizomatic Categories

In demonstrating the difficulties of 'tidying up' the experience of children into neat categories, which has been the norm in more linear approaches, I have taken the entry-point of various heuristic categories with the aim of complicating these categories. These include outsider children, children staying on their own, children fostered and children following after projects. Referencing categories while disavowing them might look like I am caught up in my own argument. However, from an analytical perspective I had three aims. First, I responded to the knowledge gap earlier identified in this research: how can we understand the experience of children 'complexly' and without packaging it and fixing it as an essence? I was also guided by the view that categories may eschew diversity and gloss over experience that deviates from the norm of the categorized experience (Reynolds 2014:138). Secondly, by exploring the fluidity of these categories, I revealed the entangled factors and processes at play in the experience of these children. These included material conditions, social and other relations, structures, identities, rights claiming strategies and subjectivities through the everyday realities of children.

I have also offered glimpses of how children may occupy simultaneous fluid categories. This has supported the assumption by Minh-ha's (1989:94) assertion that, even though we may always want to 'separate, contain and mend, categories always leak'. She thus suggested that we need to decentre categories, to question them, work within them and even go beyond them.

In stepping in and out of the categorical thinking and by problematizing the known categories, I have brought to the fore new perspectives and the need for re-thinking categories. Such an endeavour also points to the potential for new action, based on these shifting characteristics, in support of the children and their caregivers (Crotty 1998:155 in Pillay 2016:3). For example, it points to the spaces for intervention and the need for attending to the different processes interacting in these cartographies of children's experience. Lastly, by presenting these conceptual, spatial and embodied mobilities of children's experience, the analysis in this thesis engages the erasures of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability that occur when more linear methods of analysis are utilized.

### 10.5 What Does a Fluid Experience Mean for Policy or Practice?

In this section, I engage with the question what does a ‘fluid’ experience mean for policy and/or practice? When engaging with the issue of street children, some authors have questioned the assertion that categories of vulnerability are fluid. Gigengack (2014:8) argued that talking about categories and experience as ‘fluid’ risks overlooking the structural issues influencing children’s experience and that these categories are only fluid from a theoretical perspective. However, my continued interaction with children for a period of one year enabled me to gain a deeper perspective on this fluid experience of children, and to go beyond theoretical perspectives. I witnessed specific experiences change, transmute and other fluid categories emerge for specific children.

I also conclude that theorizing and doing child poverty research differently should not be seen to be at odds with policy or what Abdu and Delamonica (2018:882) termed as a ‘theoretical curiosum’. In going beyond ‘doing science as usual’ (Harding 1991:1), I see this level of engagement with the experience of children as alive and reflexive (V. Reynolds 2014) and aimed at questioning the rigidity of categories.

Children’s fluid experience also points to a need for attention to the contextual differences and idiosyncrasies of this experience. This does not mean that such an approach should be seen as relativist. It goes beyond simple contextual differences, to a perspective on entanglement of fluid and contingent differences within specific settings. Such an idiosyncratic approach may look elusive, fragmented, disorderly and destructive of established criteria for fixing experience or categorizing, which is important for policy. However, I argue that research that is attentive to context and specificity of experience, and that attends to children’s voice can yield important insights for our understanding of what it means to live as a (poor) child in a specific context. It is an approach that behoves us not to rely on predetermined maps but to map reality as we encounter it.

In supporting fluidity and idiosyncrasy of experience of children Goethals et al. (2015:87) suggested we approach the context with an attitude of ‘not knowing’ thereby creating spaces for understanding complex experience. Such ignorance also pushes one to wanting to know what the context offers. Taking a middle ground from the suggestion by Goethals et al. (ibid) of taking an attitude of ‘not knowing’, finding out how specific contexts may make some experience more plausible than others, would be a stepping-stone to knowing children more fully. Such an approach can

make visible some experience such as that of the children seen as ‘outsider’, as discussed in Chapter Six, who may be living out of the focus of the ‘bright lights of policy’ (Bakewell 2008:450).

Biesta (1998:505) would call this sensibility of approaching the context as intervening with an ‘ignorance that does not show the way, but only issues an invitation to set out on the journey’. It would also mean listening to the admonition by Maxine Green (1978 in Fels 2012:54) to be ‘widely awake’<sup>82</sup> to the context of children’s experience and to respond to any emerging issues. This is also what Fels (2012:55) has called being sensitive to that ‘tug on the sleeve’ or moments when we encounter something new that we had not considered before and to make a ‘stop’ when called upon as we work with the children.

In addition, walking the route of addressing child poverty cannot be indifferent to the processes in diverse contexts that influence it. Such an approach should reveal not only how children may be complexly disadvantaged but also reveal the processes and non-linear relationships between the different experience of child poverty and vulnerability in these contexts.

As a signpost on the map, useful questions for practice and policy among others would be the following. How do we factor in possible changes in the experience of children? How do we capture fluid and emerging experience of children? What other categories or experiences might exist within a particular context? What other experience is being eschewed by a focus on the fixed category? This means that predetermined categories do not drive the agenda, but project implementers should be open to what is available on the ground.

Talking about fluid experience does not imply that I have suspended rules of causality in understanding the experience of children in this thesis. These minutiae of children’s experience provide a context that should assist policy design and implementation agencies and actors to better connect the larger dots of poverty and vulnerability. Following Biehl and Locke (2010:318), presenting the complexities of fluid experience has

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<sup>82</sup> Maxine Green used the concept of wide awakeness to imply to be ‘vividly aware’ and imagine or see those things that one would normally not see. They are moments when a person recognizes things that they had not considered before.

implications for research. I took their advice that we should be attuned to ‘intricacy, openness, and unpredictability of individual and collective lives’ (ibid).

### 10.6 Children’s Experience Within Schooling: The Future as Imaginary

In Siaya, schooling is one of the sites where the experience of being a poor and vulnerable child was located. While economic lack was a major challenge for children’s participation in schooling, it did not write the entire script of the problems that children faced. I have presented this experience as an assemblage and a messy reality that brought together various material as well as discursive perspectives and/or objects. These included children’s brains that were supposed to enable them to excel and get out of poverty. Both the children and others described children’s bodies as ‘often hungry’. Other challenges included school uniforms, infrastructure, buildings and other spaces where education takes place, all as part of the assemblage. Other elements interacting in this cartography of schooling were norms about the needs and identity of poor children, and an education policy that was tacitly structured along the lines of inequality. This was for example demonstrated by the latent expectation that children of poor caregivers should attend low quality schools or what I termed as ‘small schools’ in this thesis.

Children’s experience of schooling was also defined through their politics as well as their claims making. Schooling therefore emerged as a site of contradictions, where children enacted agency or (what I have called after Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) took ‘lines of flight’, claimed, contested and shaped their rights to education through everyday practices and their voice (van Daalen et al. 2016, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013, Sanghera et al. 2018). These were the rights as guaranteed in Kenya’s Constitution, but they also claimed a right to claim these rights to education and re-imagined different rights to education. In laying these claims, children also imagined a different future for them and their families.

Children positioned these imagined alternative futures through education as a site of imaginary citizenship. In locating this future citizenship however, one can aver that within the context where the then current circumstances looked difficult for children (where for example they noted that they ate *onge* [nothing] for breakfast), the future they envisaged through education looked utopian or can be described as an *onge* future.

This *onze* future was also demonstrated by the context where most of the children noted that it was difficult to even get paraffin oil for lamps to enable them to do schoolwork in the evening. It was also demonstrated by the situation where some children were still struggling with fees for the ECCE centre, the foundation of the education system. This ‘one day’ in the future, when most of the children said they would eat breakfast, therefore seemed distant. I am however indebted to Isin (2008:4) who argued that, while such future citizenship that is yet to come is imagined, it is not fictitious. This also means that constraining children’s imagined futures to a temporal future and perceiving them as citizens of tomorrow (Lister, 2007:698) is to miss their message. Children’s experience within education invites a visceral sense of responsibility and accountability. Their future ‘one day’ must be translated into a present with a sense of urgency.

From a state perspective, even though the education policies in Kenya may be well intentioned, they do not adequately meet the needs of all children and specifically the needs of poor children and can sometimes be exclusionary. There is an urgency to ensure that poor children too receive quality education instead of relegating them to small schools.

Action is also required from a larger global level. Processes like the MDGs and SDGs come to mind here. For example, I concur with Arts (2017:59) that ‘the nature of the MDGs “has encouraged many countries to focus on those that are easiest to reach” which has on occasion resulted in disregard of the situation, needs and rights of especially vulnerable or marginalized groups’. This would for instance be the case for the MDGs where the focus was more on gender parity, which might be relatively easy to measure. For the SDGs, it may be worth the effort of revisiting what is meant by Goal Number 4 in terms of equitable and quality education for all or what it means to have no child left behind in schooling.

### 10.7 The Lived Experience of Children in Support Programmes

In exploring the children’s experience of poverty and vulnerability, I also took the entry point of support programmes. I was interested in understanding how the needs and rights of children were represented in programmes and how this affected the experience of children.

I have acknowledged that the state is the primary duty-bearer for children’s rights including the right to an adequate standard of living. I have also revealed how, in the absence of adequate state support to vulnerable children and their caregivers, the state (which is the ultimate guarantor of

citizenship rights of children) has done what Okwany and Ngutuku (2015:29) have called entering into a trustee relationship with non-governmental actors who were providing for the needs and rights of children. However, my research revealed that such citizenship rights, realized through non-governmental actors and through charity, also meant entering into an assemblage of local and global discourses that influence the day-to-day experience of children. Fulfilment of the needs of children by these programmes emerged as paradoxical, where the organizations were simultaneously supporting but also undermining the interests of children that they espoused. This for example was revealed through negative discourses on the children they supported and appropriating their free time as well as offering piecemeal support.

These spaces have also emerged in what Foucault (1979:172) termed a specific architecture of governance on the bodies of children through definition and satisfaction of their needs and rights. In these sites, different calculated methods were used to direct children's behaviour through the exercise of power (Foucault 1979:264). Being a poor child located in a programme of support showed the encounters between these technologies of assistance and being positioned as a needy child. In going beyond a deconstruction of the practices of support programmes, I have also pointed to the potential creative and transformative import of such an exercise. In some cases, such deconstruction has revealed norms that subjectify children and, in some cases, affect them negatively. For example, discussions in Chapter Nine on the holiday camp revealed that there was a raft of these discourses including discourses of supported children as weak academically, as feeling entitled or as disobedient. These findings reveal the need not only to re-think the support to these children but also, as Foucault noted, a need to think about these interventions differently if we are to open them as fields of possibility in thinking about vulnerable children:

To show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that which is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such [...] Since as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought of them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible (Foucault 1988:155).

While not imputing the wrong motives on the part of these interventions, problematizing the practices opens a potential space for exposing the façade of interventions that purport to protect the rights of children while at the same time disrespecting them through their modes of intervention.

The study has also revealed that, even when the state addressed the needs of children, for example through the Cash Transfer for Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) Programme, this transfer emerged as a site not only for accessing material support but also as a space for discursive constructions of children and caregiver needs and identity. For example, caregivers noted that they were surveilled in terms of the items they bought with the money as well as how they used the transfer in supporting their children. Caregivers also enacted specific sociabilities in response to negative social relations and where they subverted the discourse of instrumental needs as embedded in the CT-OVC and constructed alternative subject positions. For example, they not only positioned themselves as ‘purchasing individuals’, who needed to buy good food for their children, but also did what I have called ‘whitening’ the transfer by attributing it to white benefactors.

These cartographies of children’s experience in programmes have implications for different actors including state actors and global actors. From a citizenship rights perspective, I am guided by the arguments we developed elsewhere (Okwany and Ngutuku 2018:69) that there is a need for a citizenship approach instead of a client-based approach. Such an approach would work on enhancing the capacity of children and their caregivers to lay claims to their rights and entitlements and also to hold duty bearers accountable including both state and non-governmental actors (*ibid*).

I am also inspired by Ansell (2016:173–174) who argued that, in addressing child poverty in Africa, there is a need to adopt a social justice framework and for a contextually located interrogation of the different processes that interact in marginalizing children. The support programmes that I studied have in some cases emerged as sites for this. Indeed, I would add an activist tone to it: since childhoods are already burdened with poverty and other types of vulnerability that I have explored in this thesis, they do not need to be burdened with surveillance in support programmes.

My research on children’s experience in programmes of support also has implications for understanding children’s agency. It has revealed that children enact agency within the space of support programmes. Instead of reading children’s agency as (only) something we give to children, I argued



that it is a doing as well, and is relational (Blaisdell 2016:34). I also read their agency beyond contradictory agency and demonstrated that both children's agency and that of their caregivers was emergent and in flux. Subjectivating practices in support programmes emerged as incomplete since agency emerged continually, as children and caregivers refused to be appropriated, or as they accepted and/or were appropriated. Indeed, it was the experience of living in the 'choked spaces' (Deleuze 1995:133) of interventions that in some cases triggered specific forms of agency by children and their caregivers. For example, I demonstrated how children questioned the practices and vitalized their rights differently in these programmes of support and thereby enacted their living rights (Hanson and Nieuwenhuys 2013:6). Children engaged with notions of inferior education provided to them through various support programmes and questioned the appropriation of their leisure time by these programmes. Children also introduced other rights grammar, including their notions of entitlement to what would normally be seen as charity. They claimed other rights like the right to visit relatives, and the right not to wear a school uniform during weekends and school holidays. In so doing they redefined their rights and shaped what their rights ought to be (ibid). Such agency has implications for scholarship on children's agency. It is through the cartography of this disparate experience of children, and sometimes through contradictory, illusory, and/or ambivalent agency, that we begin to see the need to engage with the discourses that have homogenized children's experience.

In further innervating discussions on children's agency and locating further fresh horizons in our scholarly understanding of their agency, I engaged with the prevailing perspective that children's agency is localized and without the capacity to affect the status quo in terms of bringing about transformation. For example, Ansel (2009:203) noted that action by children in the local spaces may not jump scales:

Children in particular may have a special relationship with the people and places immediately around them, because they lack ready access to the technologies, interpretive repertoires or social status that would allow equivalent relations at a distance. While children are social actors, they do not act as autonomous individuals and are inherently very limited in how far they can deliberately change their world.

In engaging with Ansell's argument and in re-imagining children's agency as citizenship acts, as discussed in my research, children were able to connect their immediate situation not only to the local contexts but also to factors far removed from their context. They also brought in the role of other players such as the state, which seemed a distant player in some cases. In the holiday camp for example, children pointed to several immediate, local and global configurations of power that affected their wellbeing. This included actions by the Child Development Centre, actions by donors, actions by the board of the organization, actions by the sponsors among others. Beyond this, perceiving their agency as cartographic has redefined the concept of scale. It has provided a lens through which to view the scale of their agency and politics not as 'nestled and concatenated, [but] tentacular and amorphous and bleed[ing] into each other' (Isin 2009:377). These point to possibilities of agency in the context of children's everyday experiences in programmes influencing other connected scales. Seen this way, their actions have the potential to bring their issues to a broader scale of accountability and to highlight the responsibilities others (including global actors) have towards them.

### 10.8 Watching the OVC Category Representing Painful Childhoods

I have explored the way the term OVC has been deployed in explaining or addressing the experience of children. Beyond critique, I have placed it in different spaces and watched it for the varied work it does. Placing it in its genealogy, I argued that a poor or a poor and vulnerable child in Kenya is a historical child. When placed in its colonial antecedents a poor child was largely seen as a threat to the colony and the structural issues at play in children's experience were often silenced. In its post-colonial antecedents, the poor child was an icon of nation-building and breaking free from the throes of colonialism. In the wake of HIV/AIDS the OVC category performed another function: sick bodies not only represented a sick state, but a sick economy as well as a sick future, all represented by the existence of OVCs. In placing OVCs in the day-to-day spaces of the households, the OVC category was the evidence of the subjectification of children and caregivers, while in some cases, children also appropriated the category for their material benefit.

When used in support programmes, the OVC category becomes something else. It can aid in meeting the needs and rights of children, in articulating identity of particular organizations and can also be a tool for governing children and populations in general. Watching the OVC category in these different spaces and the work it does enabled me to be less judgemental and instead critique the deployment of the category in scholarship with care (Barad 2012). As Deleuze adjured us, seeing it this way enables us to also be less judgemental in our analysis of children's experience as OVCs because judgement 'prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence' (Deleuze 1997:135).

In engaging with the category of the suffering orphan and vulnerable child, I have represented both the agentic as well as the suffering child. Here I engage more with my reasons for the latter. Balancing the traumatized and suffering child and a normal or agentic child was also a challenge. I did not want to occlude other ways of being a child by focusing only on the suffering of these children. I also listened and continue to listen to the way I was expressing my different emotions in my encounters with children. Instead of readers seeing my association with their pain as a spectacle (Chouliaraki 2016), the rhizomatic factors in such pain hold a promise. A research that is engaged and a theorizing that draws the fine line between sensationalism and solidarity with children's pain, is useful and transformative science. I invite the same affective sensibilities among my readers as I again ask reflexive questions. Was I sensing the pain because of my privileged position? Was I seeing their suffering through the eyes of my own children? Behind this pain and the telling of suffering therein, what voices are very loud, and what voice is only whispered or silenced altogether?

The aim should not just be to deconstruct the painful experience of children but to act on it and to transform it. Guided by Ahmed (2004:78), who was inspired by Audre Lorde (1984), I argue that 'learning to hear the anger of others, without blocking the anger through a defence of one's own position [as a researcher] is crucial'. This means that, in critiquing those who engage with the pain and suffering of children, we should do so with care and examine the role played by affect in these representations.

I am also influenced by Barad's perspectives that, as we encounter the pain of children, we should act responsibly. She argued that, in each opportunity for intra-acting we encounter, we should intra-act responsibly to ensure that we 'contest or rework that which has been excluded from mat-tering' (Barad 2007:235). Death and pain of children has been excluded

from mattering, especially because of the fear of being accused of sensationalism.

### 10.9 Gendered Poverty and Vulnerability: Re-turning Ayo

In presenting the complexities of children's lived experience, I have approached and presented the cartographies of children's lived experience as a rhizome. In revisiting the reconstructed narrative of Ayo, which applies to several other children in the research, one can see the various ways in which her experience is complex from a gender perspective. For example, Ayo was not only a girl who had to care for her young sister and therefore miss school, but she was also defined by other axes like birth order and level of maturity, illness and poverty. Because she was young, other more able relatives could not foster her. Her brother Ben, older than Ayo and also more mature, seemed more privileged because he was fostered for education while Ayo could not transition to primary school from pre-school because of lack of school fees among other needs.

While fostering itself would provide dividends for girls who are more likely to be fostered to provide household labour, there are also possible negative outcomes. For example, as discussed in Chapter Six, Lizzie reported that she was sexually abused and became pregnant in her foster home. Philip's sister seemed more privileged than Philip because she was fostered for education by a relative. However, it is also important to remind the reader that she was also fostered because she could not continue to share the small house with her father because of poverty that was appropriated as gendered norms and taboos in this community. One can also argue that, while Philip could 'borrow' sleeping space in his friends' home, poor girls in this community often lack this privilege and often have to sleep in the kitchen (a separate cook house). My interactions with caregivers revealed that girls who sleep in the cook house, often on the floor, are more vulnerable. They reportedly tend to present low levels of self-esteem and to get married early to get their own sleeping space. Some were reportedly preyed upon sexually by men.

Earlier discussions in Chapter Six also revealed that, while girls may be fostered for their household labour, they are also seen as more 'disobedient' and therefore reported being returned to their biological parents. I explored in Chapter Six how in some instances outsider girls may face less scrutiny from the adopted families because of the perception that they would not compete for the resources of insider children like boys would

do and would also bring in resources in the form of bridewealth. I also explored in Chapter Six how paternal orphans (both boys and girls) may be more privileged in social protection opportunities. In specific contexts, programmes meant to address gender inequalities in education may also further exclude some of the deserving children. Being brought up by widowed caregivers (as was revealed in Chapters Five and Nine), even though privileged in interventions for support, has other vulnerabilities embedded within it. This is because there are social relations that govern the sexuality of widower caregivers as well as other community norms.

I cannot therefore claim with Crenshaw (1989:149) that the traffic is only heavy on girls and/or that it is only girls who were experiencing marginalization at the crossroads. The processes and factors that influence children's experience are not linear but complex and the interstices around which their gendered experience is formed are sometimes contingent and shifting. They may shift around gender, birth order, age, or level of maturity, with some children having bigger dividends than others. While gender is still a useful category in an analysis of children's experience of poverty and vulnerability, it does not entirely write the script for their experience. The gendered experience of children can therefore be understood as a messy reality and an incomplete process (Grellier 2013:93). Thus, I have favoured and recommend an approach that maps how the processes and factors (including gender) interact.

The challenge I pose in this thesis is not to dissolve gender as an analytical tool for children's experience but to underline that there are several implications for this gendered messiness. This experience needs to be captured by methods attuned to such messiness. This is therefore an invitation to widen the research frames used in capturing the shifting hyphens in children's experience but also to examine how policy, programmes and scholarship respond to the gendered challenges. This awareness also points to a need for an ontological shift in conceptualizing the gendered experience of poor and vulnerable children and a need to explore it as multiplicity. By placing differently located girls and boys in an analysis context that is shifting and fluid, we will be able to see the marginalization of specific children from a fresh perspective.

As admonished by Garnew (2017:331), it is also possible to ask new questions about gendered marginalization in every context without forcing a perspective that girls are more vulnerable than boys and at the same time, without undermining the feminist project of ensuring equal starting points

for both boys and girls. We should also be careful to identify how boys who are seen as privileged may be discriminated in some contexts. And as Geerts and van der Tuin (2013:172) noted, this means we should be observant to cases where ‘the waves of gender privilege or marginality cancel each other or are weakened’. My research also supports Scott (2010:14) who argued that, while gender is an important category for social analysis, it should remain like an open question in different contexts. In the case of my research this extends to understanding children’s lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. These gendered quotidian experiences of girls and boys exceed perspectives from intersectional theory and support the invitation by Baily and Holmarsdottir (2015:841) to the new generation of scholars to understand gender inequality differently.

### 10.10 Imagined Solidarities with Children

The discussions in this thesis point to a need to act and think differently about children living in poverty and vulnerability. On the basis of their age and location, children need allies in ensuring their right to a better life. I therefore call for a different type of politics for the cause of children. These politics is what has been termed as ‘becoming minoritarian’ with children. Following Deleuze, I take the perspective that a minority position is not a status, but it is defined by its ‘subjective geography’ and the ability to separate itself from the factors that define the majority (Conley 2010:167). Minority politics also emphasizes a perspective on politics that is not based on identity but, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1986), is a process of forming relations with specific experiences. For my research, this would mean forming relations with the experience of poor and vulnerable children. Not only children can occupy a minoritarian position but everybody with an interest can take a position to identify with the politics and the cause for supporting poor children and their caregivers.

Braidotti (2005:175) asserted that the notion of becoming minoritarian is a pattern of subversion and an ethical principle reserved for both those from major or minor constituencies. I therefore argue that minority politics can also be enacted by researchers, academics and policy makers who set out to question that which has been seen as normal and taken for granted and also those who identify with children’s and caregivers’ quests for justice.

Becoming minoritarian is therefore not just a conceptual exercise but it is practical, and political. It inspires hope. It means a certain kind of

reflexivity when intervening for children. I explore the implications of such a perspective from different interconnected scales below.

The perspectives that the research has brought to the fore mean that children and their rights need to be protected. The state is the ultimate duty bearer for children's rights and must act on their behalf. According to the CRC Committee's General Comment No. 13 (CRC Committee, 2011: para. 5)

State Parties have a positive and active obligation to support and assist parents and other caregivers to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities and with respect for the evolving capacities of the child, the living conditions necessary for the child's optimal development.

This is the protection that children of Siaya and Kenya in general need and this is the ultimate accountability to children to which different actors must hold the state to account on behalf of children.

For programmes of support and other interventions there are also implications, including a need for solidarity with children. Walking tentatively with the concerns of children means positioning in ethics differently and making the interventions of children 'loci for ethical practice' (Moss 2005). Such programmes should be guided by accountability to children (Arts 2017:59). A reflexive intervention would ensure that support to children does not further foster vulnerability. It calls for a new way of engaging with children or making stops (Law 2004; Fels 2009). As noted by Fels (2009:3), a stop enables one to pause and think about one's relations with others and to question one's modes of engagement. Such ethics also call for what Thiele (2014:205) called 'worlding differently' or thinking differently about the needs and rights of children in programmes. It also means returning rights to these programmes 'in their lived forms' (Karlsson 2019:73).

Such a practice requires that we ask ourselves various reflexive questions. What influences how we are intervening? How are we conceptualizing the rights of children? How is children's voice included in our practice? What is the effect of the intervention on children? What do we see as good science in understanding children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability? Attempting to respond to these questions as we work with children, will world our research, scholarship, policy, activism and



practice differently. It also has an impact on the children whose perspectives are considered. This represents the ultimate solidarity of reflexive policy and practise imagined for the children of Siaya in my research. In the usefully eclectic spirit of this research, such reflexivity can traverse various children-related fields: education, social protection, academy and activism. The findings in general point to the need for crossing these interdisciplinary boundaries as we work with children.

As revealed in this research, children's experience as well as their politics and rights-claiming also point to the need for action at other levels: the research context, the immediate community and the far-removed context of the global community and humanity as a whole. I do not see the perspective of a non-dyadic citizenship where children claim rights from a range of others including non-state actors as weakening the role of the state as the final guarantor of the rights of children. Indeed, the CRC Committee's General Comment number 21 (CRC Committee 2017: para. 5) obliges the state to ensure that these non-state actors are guided by the UNCRC when they provide for children.

Seeing children's rights as living does also not mean that social justice is lost. I hold the view with others, for example Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013), that children's claims-making can shape the way others, including the state, provide for their rights. Such rights-claiming and citizenship acts also have the potential of entering into the global idioms of rights and in essence can form the agenda for policy even for addressing poverty and vulnerability. In addition, children's acts have the potential for contributing to social justice for children because, as Isin (2009:381) noted: 'acts produce actors that become answerable to justice'. These various actors, as I have revealed in this research, need to be answerable to children.

There are no blueprints for solidarity in returning rights to our work with children. I however again suggest that there is a need for asking ourselves various reflexive questions. For the ultimate duty bearer (the state) the question would be, what does it mean for each child to enjoy the highest standard of living as embedded in the Constitution of Kenya? What does it mean for the children of Siaya to really enjoy their rights as embedded in the UNCRC and what does it really mean for them to enjoy them as vitalized by children themselves in Siaya?

For other actors, as well as State, this also means that children's voice should be heard in all undertakings with children (Roelene et al. 2019). This will not only ensure that children get epistemic justice (Murriss 2013)

but will also acknowledge children as rights-holders and as knowledgeable people.

Taken together, for the different actors and levels, this would point to a New Earth (Deleuze and Guattari 1991) in policy, practice, research, and scholarship for children and in other everyday spaces where we ask what I feel is the ultimate question about this solidarity for children: how can we live differently for poor and vulnerable children, like Ayo and others that I encountered and will encounter?

### 10.11 Reflecting on the Research

I have not only responded to the research questions, but my research can also be seen as a form of intervention into the lives of children. In responding and reflecting on the research, my research was fulfilling to me and the children of Siaya that I encountered. A research that enabled children to dream, to imagine themselves from a philosophical perspective to stage a performance of resistance is emancipatory and acted as a theatre for children. Travelling with children and mapping their experience was an eye-opening experience for me as a researcher. I have learned to critique with care. For example, I have moved from my initial research topic, which was a heavy critique on support programmes where I had started with the need to interrogate the dominant constructions of children's lived experience by dismantling it. However, in heeding to Barad's (2012:49) admonition that we critique with care and creatively, I have instead engaged the dominant knowledge on children's experience not by dismantling it but by situating children's voice and lived experience within it. Such accounts, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1986), send the dominant knowledge racing or to stutter it.

While the arguments made in this thesis and the research was located in Siaya, a local context, the results should not be interpreted as relative to this context only. Through the rhizomatic approach I explored the entanglement of contexts and drew implications for emerging findings from a perspective of scales that are entangled. For example, I explored how children's politics and resistance connected to circuits of donor politics and governance structures with a potential for reconfiguring them. Thus, one can not only explore children's experience in similar contexts but, importantly, being 'widely awake' to each context is one of the main arguments in this thesis.

In revisiting the ancient art of making maps, there might still be some areas in children's experience that I did not explore or that might be considered in the ancient cartography as 'snakes or monsters' out there that I did not capture in terms of children's experience (van Duzer 2016).<sup>83</sup> Inspired by Leafgren (2007:257), I argue that in mapping children's experience 'no matter which lines of flight I travelled, there were others I missed, and depending on which middle or fold of the line of flight I grabbed, other connections I might have made'. My research could have created further lines and shoots that somebody else might discover in the context of children in Siaya. My research could also have escaped certain paths in children's experience. I hereby make an invitation for future research in such directions.

### 10.12 Bringing it Together: Tentative Ending

Inspired by Deleuzian arguments on the incompleteness of a rhizome, I now bring the arguments in this research to a tentative close. In providing a re-reading of children's lived experience of poverty not as linear and by recasting them as rhizomatic, I have heeded the call by McDonald (2009) for social theory and social policy to work hand in hand in understanding child poverty and vulnerability. My research also supports the argument by Tafere's (2012:23) that children's contributions should respond to the ontological, epistemological and methodological challenges childhood studies are facing.

As I have explored in this thesis, rhizomatic cartographies of children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability do not mean that we cannot know children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. It means we can, but we can know them in a complex way and should stay as close as possible to children's lived experience in our work. I am not reifying this

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<sup>83</sup> I use the metaphor of snakes or monsters as used in the medieval cartography where cartographers placed monsters or snakes at the edges of the maps to depict unknown territories. Several authors have argued that the fear of leaving an empty space for what they did not know pushed this move. In the same way, the perspective that what we do not know about children's experience or what we are uncomfortable about including in our research and practice may be labelled as unknown and/or standardized with other measurable experience guides me. I invite others to attempt to discover the issues that I might have left out.

way of knowing, but I issue an invitation for others to explore the vistas that have opened up through this research.

In the Deleuzean philosophy of becoming, ending with the figure of vistas is a good place, because we never stop knowing about children and we should continue and begin our journey and work with vulnerable children with the expectation of seeing something new in the journey of discovery. In the Deleuzean spirit, as I bring this thesis to a tentative close, as an activist-researcher-practitioner, I am inspired by the hopes of bell hooks (1991) who believed in the possibility of theory being liberatory in social justice work. I end with this sense of liberation. Most importantly, in revisiting the main aim that I set myself four years ago, I am excited about the Deleuzean possibility of a 'New Earth' in working with children.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Some arguments made in this chapter have been included in a book chapter that I published: Ngutuku 2019.



## 11 Appendices

### Appendix 1: Research Participants

<b>Household 1</b>	
Ayo Awino Ben Michael	Ayo (seven years old) was the main research participant from this household. I met her in an ECCE centre. With her three siblings, she was fostered by “mama”, a widow who was a friend to their mother and who was also taking care of her own twelve-year-old daughter. Ayo’s mother had passed away a few months before our encounter. Awino, her two-year-old sister, was taking anti-retroviral drugs). Her older brother Ben (sixteen years) was in class seven and was co-parenting with their foster caregiver. He made and sold Togo (straw for mats) after school and charcoal too. Michael, the other brother (nine years), was in class one and he was described as a slow learner. Another brother, aged nineteen years, was mostly absent from their narratives because he was incarcerated in Nairobi. Their late mother had two sisters, but they could not adopt them because their husbands did not approve of that. One of the sisters supported the caregiver financially.
<b>Household 2</b>	
Gabriel	Gabriel (sixteen years old) lived with his grandmother who was his father’s stepmother. He was abandoned by his father at birth and his mother remarried elsewhere and left him behind. The grandmother relied on the church for support and occasionally sold farm produce to support Gabriel. Gabriel was also a caregiver to the elderly grandmother and sometimes sold charcoal and pigweed in the market to supplement their family income.
<b>Household 3</b>	
Philip Twin brother Sister Dead baby	Philip (16 years old) was in class 8. His mother had died, and they were under the care of their sickly father, who had not remarried after the death of his wife. His sister was already fostered by a relative. Their youngest sister died after birth. Philip had a twin brother.
<b>Household 4</b>	
Priest	Priest (eight years old) was in class 2 at the time of the research. His father had died but his mother was described by his caregiver, a paternal aunt, as ‘having nothing’. His aunt did not have a child of her own nor a secure livelihood. At the time she was looking for a

	buyer for her ancestral land so as to get money for constructing a house.
<b>Household 5</b>	
Lizzy Donald Brothers Lizzy's son	Lizzy (sixteen years old) had a two-year-old child and had dropped out of school for some time to take care of her child. Earlier, she had been fostered by different sets of relatives in Kenya and Uganda. Her parents did not have a secure livelihood and her mother worked as a wage laborer on people's farms. Lizzy dropped out of school and got married during my research. Her brother Donald (twenty years) had completed high school by the time we met, and he was set to join the university. He was supported through high school by some well-wishers and his grandmother's sister. Lizzy and her three siblings lived in their one bedroomed house in the shopping centre and at night, the siblings would sleep in an unfinished structure in the centre.
<b>Household 6</b>	
Aaron Mary	Mary (nine years old) and Aaron (eleven years old) were both part of the child rights club supported by COA and they lived with their grandmother who had a physical disability. Both their parents and their only uncle had died. Aaron sold sesame ( <i>sim-sim</i> ) seeds in the market three times a week. Mary and Aaron were also caregivers to their grandmother and occasionally pushed her in a wheelchair.
<b>Household 7</b>	
Naomi	Naomi (twelve years old) was in class 7 and she was a third-born in a family of six. She was under the care of her forty-year-old mother and their father had died in 2015. Her brother and sister had dropped out of school due to school levies and her older teenage sister had a child. The mother survived on periodic wage labor on people's farms and her children occasionally joined her to help.
<b>Household 8</b>	
Aisha	Aisha (sixteen years old) had a younger brother. They were officially under the care of their grandmother, but Aisha moved amongst different relatives in search of care and support. She had not transitioned to high school due to lack of funds. I met her hanging out by a project for girl's education, hoping to be enrolled and to access support for her high school education.
<b>Household 9</b>	
Purple	Purple (sixteen years old) was in form one and was living with Gabriella's maternal aunt. She had migrated from another County to be enrolled in a girl's education project in Siaya. The project was only paying partial fees and she occasionally was sent home for school fees. Her mother was terminally ill and together with her other siblings, the children were receiving occasional support from their aunt.
<b>Household 10</b>	



Gabriella Linah	Gabriella was eighteen years and Linah was sixteen years old. Linah was staying with a well shisher who maternal aunt to Gabriella was. Linah had earlier been living with a relative when she was in class six because her father had died, and her mother had remarried. She had been fostered by different relatives. Gabriella had migrated from another County to be enrolled in a girl's education programme. Before migrating, she was under the care of her eighty-year-old grandmother. Gabriella was also a mother of one and had earlier dropped out of school after the birth of her child, before reentering school. Gabriella used to take her child to the village mid-wife or babysitter who took care of several children belonging to student mothers.
<b>Household 11</b>	
Otieno Ochieng	Otieno (eleven years old) and Ochieng (thirteen years) lived with their fifty-three-year-old widowed grandmother who had a partial stroke and was on anti-retroviral drugs. Their uncle and his twenty-year-old wife and their one son were also part of the household. Their father died when they were young, and their mother remarried, like was the case for many other children in the research site. They had two other siblings who stayed with the grandmother's sister in Nairobi. Their mother had four other children in her other family and in total they were 8 siblings.
<b>Household 12</b>	
Blessing Cousin	Blessing (five years old) was in the ECCE centre. She was staying with her paternal widowed aunt who had taken her in because Blessing was malnourished and was not going to school. Her father was a construction worker but was not providing support to his children. Her mother did not have any meaningful livelihood. Blessing had cousins (children to their father's sister) who were reported to be suffering because their widowed father had married another wife who mistreated them. One of the children was part of the study.
<b>Household 13</b>	
Catherine	Catherine (five years old) was fostered by her paternal aunt who did not have a child of her own. The caregiver took Catherine in after the death of her mother because she was living in difficulties. Her caregiver earned a living by making mats. Catherine had sickle cell anemia and was hospitalized regularly.
<b>Household 15</b>	
Linda	Linda (twelve years old) was fostered by her grandfather's sister and was receiving support with school levies, in exchange for providing company to the caregiver and helping out with household chores. Her parents did not have a meaningful livelihood. Later, after I had completed data collection, Linda was withdrawn from her grandmother's home and went to stay with another relative in Nairobi.
<b>Household 15</b>	

Oketch Stella	Oketch (twenty years old) and Stella (twelve years) are step siblings. Their father died when they were very young, and they were left under the care of their respective mothers. Stella's mother later passed away and she was left under the care of Oketch's mother. After the death of Oketch's mother, they were both left under the care of their paternal grandmother. By the time of our encounter, their grandmother and 4 paternal aunts had passed away, leaving Oketch as the caregiver to his sister.
<b>Household 16</b>	
Daniella	Daniella (twelve years old) was fostered by a woman who had previously employed her mother as a domestic worker. She had a twin sister who was living with a different family. Prior to living with the foster caregiver, she was staying with another relative because their mother's husband perceived them as illegitimate or outsider children. She provided company to her current caregiver, in exchange for support with education
<b>Household 17</b>	
Barak Nephew	Barak (ten years old) was enrolled in the Mercy Project. His father had a partial stroke and his mother was a cook at an ECCE centre. He had other siblings who were not receiving support and their teenage sister had a son.
<b>Household 18</b>	
Irene	Irene (eleven years old) was living with her grandmother and was enrolled in the Mercy Project. Her grandmother was also taking care of another child who was described as having a learning disability.
<b>Household 19</b>	
Alidi His sister	Alidi (seven years old) was living with his 20-year-old brother and 16-year-old sister. Their parents had died earlier and their brother, whose livelihood was small-scale fishing was their primary caregiver. Alidi was on anti-retroviral drugs and was moving between different relatives at different times. His sister sold food at the beach in the lake where they had rented a one room make-shift house. Their other sister died in 2016.
<b>Household 20</b>	
Vicky Her two sisters	Vicky (twelve years old) was staying with her parents and was enrolled in the Sponsorship Project. Her parents sold trees for timber and cultivated food crops.
<b>Household 21</b>	
Celestine	Celestine (fifteen years old) in form two was receiving support from the Sponsorship Project. Together with her siblings she was living

Her 3 step siblings	with her stepfather and grandmother. She dropped out of school during the research because of lack of school fees.
<b>Household 22</b>	
Musa Rafiki Three siblings to Rafiki	Musa (twenty years old) and Rafiki (17 years) were cousins. Both were previously supported by the OVC Project but had been de-registered. They both lived with their grandmother. Musa's father (who was not married to Musa's mother) died but his mother, who had remarried and lived elsewhere, came to visit and occasionally sent support. Rafiki's mother passed away and his father married another wife. Rafiki's father was on anti-retroviral drugs and had three other children with his new wife.
<b>Household 23</b>	
Briana Brother	Briana (twelve years old) was in class six and lived with her mother, brother and younger siblings. Their father had passed away earlier and Briana and her siblings were at one point receiving support from a project but were 'exited'. She was part of the child-to-child club supported by COA. Her elder brother used to receive school fees from COA but was also discontinued.
<b>Household 24</b>	
Pius Annete	Pius (thirteen years old) and Annete (eleven years) were living with their three siblings and their parents. They were receiving support from the OVC project and Pius and his parents were on anti-retroviral drugs. Their parents engaged in multiple small livelihood activities like selling fish, firewood, and working on people's farms.
<b>Household 25</b>	
Allister	Allister (thirteen years old) lived with his two siblings and their parents. His mother was on anti-retroviral drugs and was partially blind. After school, Allister sold paraffin in the community. Allister also kept chicken that he occasionally sold to support his education
<b>Household 26</b>	
Aluoch Her aunt's child Her three fostered siblings	Aluoch (seven years old) had multiple disabilities and lived with her forty-three years-old widowed mother and two siblings and two small cousins (her uncle and aunt's children). Her teenage mother's sister was also living with them and had a young child. Her mother relied on the small-scale farm for their upkeep and kept a few goats.
<b>Household 27</b>	
Kim His three siblings	Kim (twenty-four years old old), was a caregiver to his three siblings in high school. Both their parents had died.

<b>Household 28</b>	
Alloyce His brothers	Alloyce (eleven years old) was enrolled in the Sponsorship Project. He lived with his parents and his three siblings in a small dilapidated house. His mother was serving an out-of-prison court sentence and his father had been released on bail from remand prison. His father did menial jobs. Before her arrest, his mother used to sell vegetables in the market.
<b>Household 29</b>	
Peter	Peter (fifteen years old) in form one was staying with his grandmother. His mother had married into another family and could not take Peter with her. After completing primary school, he had participated in a girl's bridge program. By the time of the research, he was already enrolled in high school but was still waiting for well-wishers to support his education.
<b>Household 30</b>	
Isaac	Isaac (sixteen years old) was in form two and was attending the Mercy Project-supported holiday camp.
<b>Household 31</b>	
Household Jane	Jane (sixteen years old) was also participating in the Mercy Project holiday camp and was also the captain of the sports team. She was receiving support from the Mercy Project even though she did not consider her family as poor.
<b>Household 32</b>	
Rod	Rod (seventeen years old) was receiving support from the Sponsorship Project and a year earlier had been a victim of an arson attack. We took him to hospital, but he later died. I recollected his narrative when he was in his sickbed and after he died.
<b>Household 33</b>	
Shauri	Shauri (sixteen years old) was a student mother attending a secondary school. Her parents had died and she was fostered by her uncle.
<b>Household 34</b>	
Keziah	Keziah was one and half years old when I met her and her mother in the Children's Office when she had come to seek maintenance from Keziah's father.
<b>Household 35</b>	

Wilbroda's three children	Wilbroda was a widowed caregiver to three children belonging to her daughter who had died. One of them was a recipient of the cash transfer.
<b>Household 36</b>	
Joyce's three children-	These children belonged to Joyce, a widowed caregiver. Her children aged between 5 and 15 sold charcoal by the roadside over school holidays. They were benefitting from the cash transfer programme.

<b>Household 37</b>	
Terry Terry's Brother	Terry (nine years old) was a recipient of the CT-OVC. Her parents had died, her brother was under care of a priest. Their caregiver was a widow.
<b>Household 38</b>	
Dan Three Nieces	Dan (seventeen years old) was on CT-OVC and he was an orphan. Their caregiver was widowed and was taking care of three other grandchildren, the children of her daughter.
<b>Household 39</b>	
Tom Two cousins	Tom (nineteen years old) was a mechanic and on CT-OVC. His mother was widowed and was taking anti-retroviral drugs. Tom had a sister who had three children, and these were already under Tom's mother's care before the sister started living with them. Occasionally the caregiver used to send money to this daughter. Tom had two nieces, under the care of his mother.
<b>Household 40</b>	
Cate	Cate (fifteen years old) was enrolled and supported by the OVC Project in a high- cost secondary school. Her father had died, and she was living with her mother.
<b>Household 41</b>	
David David's cousins	David (seventeen years old) was a recipient of the cash transfer grant from government. He lived with his maternal aunt and his cousins, who were the daughters to the aunt.
<b>Household 42</b>	
Pascalynne older brother Pascalynne's sister	Pascalynne (eleven years old) was in class five and lived with her mother and three siblings. Their father and the uncle who was supporting them both died. The mother was a teacher at the ECCE centre.
<b>Household 43</b>	

Cecilia	Cecilia (seventeen years old) was in form two and was living with her grandmother. Her mother had been married to a man who had adopted Cecilia (who was from another relationship) but some few months before our encounter, the man had disowned Cecilia leading to the breakdown of her mother's marriage. Cecilia moved to live with her maternal grandmother. The son to Cecilia's uncle taunted her to leave home and look for her father. Cecilia attempted suicide due to his harassment.
<b>Household 44</b>	
Justus Fausto	Justus and Fausto (five years old) were staying with their mother, but most of the time they were at home alone as the mother worked as a wage labourer on people's farms.
<b>Household 45</b>	
Akinyi	Akinyi (nine years old) was in class 1 and was described as a child 'who does not wear a school uniform'. Her mother, who had married into another family, had seven other children.

**Other Children Reached**

In secondary schools	20
In primary schools	67
In the Mercy Project Camp	41
In the ECCE Centre	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>

**Key Informants and FGDs at Local Level**

Sponsorship Project	3
OVC Project	5
COA	4
Mercy Project	2
Organization one	4
Organization 2	1
Children's home	3
Teachers	9
Administrators	3
Children's County Coordinator	1
Children's officers	3
Director of Education	1
Caregiver reached through FGDS	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>

**National Level Informants**

UNICEF	1
Save the Children	1
OVC secretariat	1

Plan International	1
Sponsorship Organization	1
OVC Project	1
Network of Social Protection in Africa	1
Social Protection-Think Tank (plenary)	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

## Appendix 2: Research permit by National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI)





## Appendix 3: Research Permit by Ministry of Education



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**  
**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**  
**State Department of Education**

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
 SIAYA COUNTY  
 P.O. BOX 364  
 SIAYA

When replying please quote  
 Ref: SCA/10/VOL.1/80

Thursday, June 16, 2016

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**  
**ELIZABETH MULEWA NGUTUKU**

The above mentioned have been mandated to carry out research in Siaya County vide the authority letter from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation Ref. No. NCST/P/16/42407/10734 dated 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2016

The research title is "*Cartographies of child poverty and vulnerability in policies and programmes in Kenya: Locating children's voice at the interstices of competing representations.*"

Kindly accord her the necessary assistance.

Thank you.


**EZRA ODONDI**  
**FOR: COUNTY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**  
**SIAYA COUNTY**

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## Curriculum Vitae

Elizabeth Ngutuku holds a Master of Arts degree in Development Studies from the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS-EUR) in The Hague, the Netherlands. This degree was obtained in 2005, specializing in Women, Gender and Development (WGD). Elizabeth's Master's thesis 'Young Single Motherhood, Contested Notions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Program/Policy Discourses' at the time won an ISS research paper prize. Elizabeth also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology, obtained from the University of Nairobi in 1997. She has worked and collaborated with various child-centered organizations in Eastern Africa and Asia in program-related work and research for over 20 years. In 2015 Elizabeth decided to be reflexive on her experience working with vulnerable children and started her PhD at ISS-EUR. Her PhD research focused on children's lived experience of poverty and vulnerability. She is a co-founder and the Executive Director of Nascent Research and Development Organization. Elizabeth is also a research mentor and has supported various young scholars in research and publishing skills. She is currently the Director in charge of research and mentorship in Eider Africa Limited.

Elizabeth has published various journal articles and book chapters. A selection of her authored and co-authored publications includes:

2019: 'Beyond Categories: Rhizomatic Experiences of Child Poverty and Vulnerability in Kenya' in K. Roelen, R. Morgan, and Y. Tafere (eds) *Putting Children First: New Frontiers in the Fight Against Child Poverty in Africa*. Ibidem Verlag, Stuttgart, 25-47.

2018: 'Small Stories from the Margins: Cartographies of Child Poverty and Vulnerability Experience in Kenya' in H. Ebrahim, A. Okwany, & B. Oumar (eds) *Early Childhood Care and Education at the Margins. African Perspectives on Birth to Three*. Routledge, London, 16-30.

2018 (With Okwany, A.) 'Social Protection and Citizenship Rights for Vulnerable Children: A Perspective on Interventions by Non-State Actors in Western Kenya' in W. Gregor and N. Awortwi (eds) *Non-State Social Protection Actors and Services in Africa Governance Below the State* Routledge, New York, 55-71.

2017 (With Okwany, A.) 'Youth as Researchers: Navigating Generational Power Issues in Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health Research'. *Childhood in Africa Journal*. 4(1): 70-82..

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