

Kinship in Action, Kinship in Flux: Uncertainties and Transformations in Okiek Marriage Arrangement

Corinne A. Kratz

Abstract: For Okiek in Kenya, marriage arrangement is a nexus where transformations of personhood and social relations, changes in land tenure, and shifting state engagements come together in ways that shape individual and family lives as well as communities. This article sketches transformations in Okiek life and marriage arrangement and considers how Okiek have managed interlineage discussions central to marriage arrangement. It explores the social dynamics, evocative rhetorics, uncertainties, and moral imaginations through which people constitute lineages and affinal relations in changing circumstances, and situates these processes within a longer historical trajectory of socioeconomic and demographic change.

Résumé: Pour les Okiek du Kenya, les mariages sont révélateurs de la corrélation entre les transformations des relations sociales, l'évolution de la personnalité, les changements dans le régime foncier ainsi que la participation changeante des états et démontre comment tous ces différents aspects sont amenés à façonner la vie individuelle et familiale ainsi que l'organisation des communautés. Cet article esquisse les transformations dans les mariages et la vie Okiek et considère comment les

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Corinne A. Kratz is Professor Emerita of Anthropology and African Studies at Emory University, where she currently directs the African Critical Inquiry program. She began research in Kenya in the mid-1970s and has worked with colleagues in South Africa since 1999. Kratz's books include *Affecting Performance: Meaning, Movement and Experience in Okiek Women's Initiation*; *The Ones That Are Wanted: Communication and the Politics of Representation in a Photographic Exhibition* (which won the Collier Prize in Visual Anthropology and honorable mention for the Rubin Outstanding Publication Award); and the co-edited volume *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. She has received fellowships from such organizations as the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Fulbright, Social Science Research Council, National Science Foundation, Wenner Gren Foundation, and others and has served on the boards of the African Studies Association and the Council for Museum Anthropology. E-mail: ckratz@emory.edu

Okiek ont géré les discussions intergénérationnelles au cœur de l'arrangement matrimonial. Il explore les dynamiques sociales, les rhétoriques évocatrices, les incertitudes, ainsi que l'imagination morale à travers lesquels les gens constituent des filiations et des relations de parenté au cours de circonstances changeantes, et situe ces processus dans une plus longue trajectoire historique de changements socioéconomiques et démographiques.

Keywords: marriage arrangement; history; socioeconomic change; land tenure; structure and agency; language and performance; Okiek; Kenya

Kalenjin-speaking Okiek in Narok District, Kenya, have long arranged most marriages through interlineage meetings where participants would discuss, debate, and produce social relations, family histories, and understandings of gender and their identities as Okiek and as Kenyans.¹ Marriage meetings follow particular protocols and are shaped by interpersonal and lineage politics and rhetorical poetics through which families negotiate potential matches. Marriage arrangement is kinship in action, as new affinal relations are created, older relations are reproduced, recast, or tested, and the meanings of relatedness transmute over time and across generations.

Okiek idioms describe marriage arrangement as seeking a child (*ceeng'ei laakweet*) or going for marriage (*peenti kaaita*). They liken the family's search for a wife to the luck involved in finding wild honey or nighttime travel in the forest:

Isn't it at night that you go for marriage? Yes, and if you go for marriage, it is still dark until you go and come out in a place that is open and light. That's what is usually said-e.

Being given a bride, in other words, is like reaching a clearing where you finally see the way. As Okiek families managed marriage arrangement, they presented their joint endeavor in terms of fate, using such analogies to characterize its uncertainties, for marriage arrangement is full of contradictory currents and potential conflicts.

Marriage is a crucial juncture in individual lives, even as marital changes over time create significant transformations as social and historical processes unfold on multiple time scales. As a conjunction of local, regional, and national spheres, Okiek marriage arrangement is a process where transformations in personhood, social relations, land tenure, and state-society relations all intersect. As a nexus of social time scales, marriage arrangement shows how people create lives, social practice, identities, and values that engage opportunities and constraints in changing circumstances, simultaneously shaping those changes through their choices. Over time this telling intersection also shows generational disjunctions of desire and expectation.

Family relations have often been seen as "micro-political contestations" (Ferguson 1999:192) and African marriage as a way to consider social

organization, kinship, bridewealth, and gender.² But this rich scholarship has paid less attention to the language and cultural performance used to create marriages and moral imaginations embedded in marriage negotiation. Similarly, it has often overlooked how changing patterns in marriage arrangement relate to broader political, economic, and national contexts.³

This article joins these topics to consider entwined historical shifts in Okiek marriage arrangement, political economy, and gender relations and how they figure in the language and performance of marriage negotiation. If marriage arrangement is kinship in action, the action unfolds across multiple settings and scales—from daily concerns with ongoing negotiations and dynamics of particular meetings, to relations within and between lineages across generations, to shifts in bridewealth related to economic changes and national land policies. Accordingly, this article also shifts scales. It begins with a broad view of social and economic transformations in Okiek life over roughly seventy years, transformations that have quickened considerably in the last thirty years. Initially, changes are traced to the mid-1990s, soon after land tenure changes and land sales began to accelerate. Having provided some awareness of what was to come, the analysis then returns to a case from the early 1980s, when inklings of that quickening were on the horizon. This offers a more granular, on-the-ground examination of how Okiek addressed uncertainties both inherent in marriage arrangement and heightened by transforming circumstances.⁴ Finally that marriage is followed to the present to meld particular social experiences with broader ramifications of the continuing transformations.

By combining different scales, this article examines how people manage and make sense of central life changes and social transformations. This marries traditions of social theory that analyze social processes, political economy, and history (Fortes 1958, 1970; Roseberry 1989; Williams 1977); concepts of “relatedness” in new kinship studies (Carsten 2000); classic work on African marriage; and studies of how verbal art and performance shape social relations, politics, and history. It also contributes to an enduring strand of analysis of ambiguities, ambivalences, and tensions in social relations and the social workings of uncertainty generally.⁵ Finally, this analysis of Okiek marriage arrangement highlights the interaction of structure and agency across scales. Broad social history perspectives show structural shifts unfolding through different time dimensions, while analyzing situated interaction foregrounds individual and collective agency. Integrating these perspectives can demonstrate how social and institutional structures constrain and enable differential scopes for agency, and how patterns in people’s choices and exercise of agency in turn reproduce and transform structures and institutions.

To orient readers, anthropologists typically profile their central research communities, networks, and sites, whether local, regional, national, or transnational. At the start of my research with Okiek in the mid-1970s, that might have read like this:⁶

Living in local groups throughout Kenya's highland forests, Okiek were primarily hunters and honey gatherers in the past, neighboring more numerous pastoral or agropastoral peoples. More recently, Okiek have added subsistence gardens and small herds. Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek are the southernmost Okiek groups on the western Mau Escarpment in Narok District. Their southern neighbors, pastoral Maasai, live on savannah at the escarpment's base, using lower altitude Okiek forest for dry season grazing. To the west live agropastoral Kipsigis, Kalenjin-speaking linguistic cousins to Okiek. In recent decades, some Kipsigis have moved into western Kipchornwonek areas from their rolling hills in Kericho District. Most Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek are multilingual, speaking Okiek, Maa, and adapting their Okiek lexically and tonally for Kipsigis (Kratz 1986). Some know rudimentary Kiswahili and a few speak some English.

In the same communities today, such encapsulation would be more strained. Their hunting and honey-gathering heritage remains distinctive for Okiek identity (Kratz 1993), but largely as nostalgic history. Land adjudications and sales in the past three decades have erased the ecologically complementary demography of ethnic groups in the area. Apart from higher altitude gazetted forest reserve, most forest on the escarpment has been cleared through farming, illegal logging, and charcoal burning. Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek are now a minority within dense multiethnic communities.

Okiek economic diversification began under the colonial administration and land policies, mediated through interactions with neighboring Kipsigis and Maasai. Land tenure changes instituted by the postcolonial Kenyan state are highly significant in more recent transformations. The ways that Okiek and others managed these legal changes set in motion additional shifts in settlement patterns, demography, and environment. In turn, both land tenure changes and demographic shifts became significant factors in recent transformations of Okiek marriage arrangement. These combined transformations echo across contexts. Life transitions such as marriage are key moments when they are recognized and debated, as people negotiate divergent interests and changing situations. Marriage arrangement offers a fruitful lens for considering how Okiek have framed, experienced, and shaped issues related to land, state relations, and changing household and lineage relations.

Colonial and Postcolonial Mediations: Land, Labor, Demography, and Marriage⁷

To provide a context for later developments, it is useful to summarize how Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek Okiek initially diversified their hunting and honey-gathering economy and interconnected changes that have unfolded since then.⁸ In the late 1930s–1940s, Kipchornwonek began planting small gardens as adjunct to forest-based hunting and honey gathering, leaving their gardens behind when following honey seasons through forest zones defined by altitude, flora, and fauna. Kaplelach followed suit ten to fifteen

years later. In time, this simple addition would develop into larger gardens, more permanent houses and settlements in mid-altitude forest, domestic herds at home, and gendered labor changes. The addition of small gardens followed a period of far-reaching colonial policies that altered land distribution and use for Okiek neighbors, including creating native reserves for both Maasai and Kipsigis and appropriating fertile highlands from Kipsigis for European settlement (Daniels 1980:61–66; Hughes 2006; Manners 1964, 1967). It took several decades for these land policies to reverberate throughout the region in ways affecting Okiek more directly, but eventually, after further livestock regulation, Kipsigis began grazing and settling across the Amala River in western Kipchornwonek areas. Several of these changes coincided during the 1950s.

As settlement, subsistence, and consumption patterns changed, so too did labor patterns. Men cleared land for farming and helped with agricultural work, but women shouldered much of the agricultural responsibility as men continued hunting and gathering honey. “Okiek diversification gradually introduced important shifts in the nature of household interdependence.... [Previously] women were indispensable and complementary reproducers and co-producers. Still equally indispensable, their contribution to household economy has become increasingly a matter of direct food production as well as daily support service” (Kratz 2010:88–90). By the 1970s–1980s, these economic transformations had produced a mix of farming maize and millet, keeping small herds of cattle, sheep, and goats, gradually decreasing hunting and honey collecting, and some aspirations to larger gardens and cash crops.

Okiek report changes in marriage arrangement over this same period: in marriage meeting timing, bridewealth, and the very modes of marriage arrangement. Childhood engagement, fairly common until the mid-1970s, had ceased by the 1980s. Marriages then were mainly arranged at adolescence, before or during a girl’s initiation into adulthood. Individual marriage histories show that standard bridewealth changed from honey and hives to cows during *il ny’angusi* age-set (1940s–50s), along with other economic shifts. In the 1980s, a maize-grinder or huge pot might count as a “cow.”

Okiek families traditionally arranged marriages through a series of interlineage meetings.⁹ Once convened during the day, discussions became evening gatherings during *il ny’angusi* and *eseuri* age-sets.¹⁰ The form and idiom of alternatives to family-arranged marriage also changed. The same *il ny’angusi* age-set saw developments whereby a woman unhappy with family plans, preferring another suitor, would “come out for/to him” (*mang’teci*), going to his home to live. This sometimes meant escapes on the verge of an arranged marriage, creating dramatic, charged situations. Some such marriages were allowed; families then negotiated bridewealth. In others, the young man refused the match or the bold bride’s relatives retrieved her. In recent years, elopement has become the main alternative marriage route.

Elopement is represented quite differently: a young woman is “stolen” by her boyfriend, like a cow...Young women must agree to elope, but their portrayal is more passive, closer to that of “official” arrangements, i.e. to agree and follow a chosen husband... [The young man] devises their escape plan, [leaving]... the immediate area. (Kratz 2000:144–45)

Eloperments provided equally dramatic scenarios in the 1980s. From the mid/late 1980s, schooling offered another alternative and way to postpone or reject marriage for some Okiek girls. Several Kaplelach girls, for instance, entered school as adolescents. As initiation approached and suitor families began visiting, their families might characterize them as “married to the government,” turning suitors away. These changing alternatives are related to shifts in both gender relations and opportunities for wider engagement through employment and schooling. Okiek girls were not necessarily reluctant to marry, but some found ways to take greater control of whom they married and when. Initially, marriage arrangement alternatives followed expected marriage timing. Delaying marriage beyond expected timing meant girls claimed more independence and scope for agency as post-initiation adult women, whether to continue school, choose their own partners, or to explore other destinies.¹¹

By then, however, other broad transformations had been taking shape in Okiek life along with the state-initiated land tenure changes. If the effects of colonial-era land laws on Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek were mediated through neighboring communities and entwined with other socio-economic shifts, these postcolonial reallocations and redefinitions engaged Okiek directly, amplifying earlier shifts and combining with other factors to reshape Okiek communities and social relations in the space of barely a decade. The postcolonial government legislated general land demarcation in 1969, but a prior policy had divided land in Maasai-dominated districts into group-owned ranches (Galaty 1980:161). Okiek land in Narok District was included in this arrangement, though their fertile highland forests differed sharply from semiarid Maasai grasslands. Previously, Okiek patrilineages held tracts traversing ecological zones along the escarpment, jointly controlling resources for forest-based hunting and honey gathering. Group-ranch demarcation began in the 1970s, superimposed on lineage tracts but crossing boundaries, incorporating non-Okiek into some groups in Okiek territories, and registering some Okiek land to individuals who never lived there. Men were recorded as group members, considered as family representatives, though widows were registered to give their children rights.¹² Highest altitude forests became forest reserve.

In the 1980s, Okiek learned of new policies for subdividing group-ranches into individually-owned holdings and began defining individual claims in anticipation of that division. Settlement patterns shifted again as people dispersed, gradually moving to land they would eventually claim. Instead of residential clusters of patrilineal relatives, nuclear families established new homes scattered across the landscape. This policy shift became a critical

juncture, because subdivision would enable individuals to sell or lease their land. Long before official demarcations, most Okiek began doing this, paving the way for a large settler influx from western Kenya areas with land shortages. A trickle of new Kipsigis or Gusii neighbors in the late 1980s became a host of immigrants in the 1990s.¹³

One example suggests the extent of land sales. One group-ranch in the Kaplelach area had both Okiek and Maasai members. Though individual demarcations were not yet official, by August 1993, virtually every Okiot member had sold part of their anticipated land. Technically these sales were illegal. Amidst rumors that surveyors would come soon, some Kipsigis buyers proposed a master sales roll listing members' buyers and acreage sold, verified by the seller's thumbprint, so demarcation could include them.¹⁴ When I saw the list-in-progress, it recorded sales for twenty-five Okiek. Altogether, the twenty-five members had sold 875 acres to 161 people. Sales per person ranged from one to sixteen, with total acreage sold per person ranging from 1–2 acres to 115 acres. On average each person had 6 to 7 sales. The total sold per person averaged 35 acres, but most had sold 40 to 60 acres. Each buyer represented a family that would eventually live there, clearing forest for agriculture.¹⁵ Other sales had yet to be recorded.

As immigrants settled on their new plots, the region's demography and environment altered significantly. By the late 1990s, major forest areas had been cleared and Okiek were effectively a minority in an area once populated by Okiek kin and friends. People spoke nostalgically of when they were not separated by so many immigrants. Daily interaction patterns changed too, as immigrants became their Okiek vendor's nearest neighbors. Okiek church participation was minimal until Christian immigrants came; churches had no regular presence until the 1990s.

Other factors combined with these broad transformations, including greater participation in education as schools, roads, and shops were built. For Kipchorwonek, the late 1970s saw a school opened at Sogoo, a road constructed, an assistant chief government post established, and rapid growth of a market center. These developments also affected Kaplelach further east. Schools and shops in their immediate area began opening in the mid-1980s. Both areas gained additional commercial centers and schools during the 1980s–1990s. School attendance had been low until then and gendered: more Okiek boys started and completed primary school and only boys attended secondary school until the mid-1990s. In the early 1990s two young men went to Indian universities; in 1999 both created NGOs, joining a Nakuru-based Okiek NGO registered several years earlier.¹⁶ All these developments evidenced growing Okiek integration into regional and national concerns and shifting engagements with the state.

As land tenure changes unfolded over the past forty years, then, Okiek and others worked with the new circumstances and structures through myriad individual decisions that together resulted in sizeable social-demographic shifts involving settlement patterns and population make-up. These trends, coupled with increasing emphasis on farming, began eroding the

socioeconomic importance of lineages in relation to land, labor, and production, as individual farms became more significant. Land tenure changes and demographic shifts in turn became significant factors in recent transformations of Okiek marriage arrangement. By the mid-1990s, patterns of polygyny, bridewealth, marital age, marriage alternatives, and marriage arrangement processes were all changing.

Immigration brought a new pool of marriageable women, both mature single women (sometimes with children) and young women, typically land buyers' daughters (usually Kipsigis, but occasionally Gusii). Among the first Okiek in the area to take Kipsigis wives were a handful of unmarried older men. But new Okiek wealth in land, capital from land sales, and more available women meant polygyny quickly became the norm, rather than the exception. Indeed, most married Okiek men in the area had a second wife by 1994; some had three or four, although these marriages did not always last. Moreover, relatively young men were marrying second and third wives. At times this created stormy relations, as neither young men nor their young wives had sufficient experience to manage polygynous households; they gave little thought to the future costs and implications of larger households. In the past, few Okiek men were polygynous; a decade might pass before a man would consider marrying a second wife. In the new trend, wives were often close in age, and occasionally the second was older. Popular ideas about "modernization" might find this increased polygyny counterintuitive, expecting trends to monogamous nuclear families, but scholars of African marriage find polygyny adapting to diverse circumstances (Parkin & Nyamwaya 1989:11–13).

Land sales meant bridewealth for additional wives could include large cash payments, not simply livestock, blankets, and other items exchanged previously. Sometimes, land itself counted towards bridewealth, creating potentially fraught circumstances if affines occupied the land and the marriage failed. At the same time, some younger Okiek men were delaying marriage to attend secondary school or trade school, or to seek employment. Together these patterns meant that, for the first time in memory, some Okiek women did not marry after initiation in the late 1980s/early 1990s but instead stayed at their parents' home. Some refused matches; others left brief, uncongenial marriages. By 1993, some had two to four children and were establishing independent households. In the early 1990s young Okiek women told me eloping was now the only way to marry since too many women were available. They could not wait for a family to come for marriage meetings as before. More recently, a Kipchornwonek woman noted, "Marriage is no longer done through engagement, its [sic] either by eloping, civil or religious" (email, January 20, 2007).¹⁷

The gender- and age-related ramifications of these interconnected social, political, and economic transformations are complex and still in process. They include changes in household relations and broader life trajectories and possibilities. Young women at their parents' homes gain an independence of sorts, yet have precarious economic situations with full

responsibility for their children. Some have eloped several times, then returned, producing complicated disputes over children. As the reach of Okiek life expanded, men developed broader experience and networks of interaction far more than women were able to. If Okiek girls participated more in education, these differences might narrow.¹⁸

Older married Okiek women experience changes in household labor resources if their sons delay marriage, even if their daughters stay home. Many have seen co-wives come and go, for themselves as well as for their sons. Okiek wives may have less input in decisions about immigrant co-wives than before, when taking additional wives required extended resource planning.¹⁹ This can sour domestic relations, particularly when coupled with more frequent drunkenness enabled by increased cash availability. The increase in wives and offspring spells a future of economic pressure when land holdings have been depleted by extensive sales. Some households have planned well, using capital from land sales to invest, develop their holdings, and educate their children. Yet other Okiek have become squatters after selling their land. Wealth disparities have become more substantial.

The transformations in Okiek life echo across contexts and institutions unevenly. Major life transitions such as marriage provide critical moments where these transformations become evident and articulated as people negotiate shifting circumstances, varied interests, and unknown futures. Uncertainties were always intrinsic to Okiek marriage arrangement, with unpredictable social relations and personalities. Yet the nature and range of uncertainties has shifted over this 70-plus years of socioeconomic change. In addition to personal and family relations, Okiek also contend with these systemic shifts in political economy and engagements with the state.

The next section considers the discourse and practice through which Okiek addressed possibilities, uncertainties, and preferences in marriage arrangement in the early 1980s, a transitional moment in the history here outlined. Tracing the trajectory of a particular marriage that began then, when land sales, immigration, and other shifts were beginning to accelerate, shows how these fundamental changes percolated into particular Okiek lives and the interactions of structure and agency. This change of scale moves from the broad history of interconnected socioeconomic transformations to particular events and interactions through which Okiek marriages took shape. Through “everyday actions... [Okiek were] exercising their interests, defending and advancing their values, and modifying their institutions both to subvert them and to revitalize them” (Cohen & Atieno-Odhiambo 2004:28). This brings into focus idioms and understandings of social relations, gender, and relatedness that Okiek brought to marriage arrangement and through which they managed the layered indeterminacies of marriage arrangement and unfolding transformations, using language and performance as a bridge to the situated experience of broad political economic processes. Turning to the protocols, politics, and poetics of

marriage arrangement evokes on-the-ground experience at the time and foregrounds the ways Okiek defined and negotiated complex agency through discursive performance (Kratz 2000).

Managing Past, Present, and Future Uncertainties in Marriage Arrangement

Marriage meetings can be delicate, volatile situations. They encompass complex dynamics within lineages, disputes between lineages, challenges to wife-seekers, and different suitors seeking the same woman—not to mention unpredictable young people. The *protocols* of marriage arrangement define a framework through which lineages take shape as key actors, assuming lineage responsibilities and rights as a collective person. Yet the *politics* of marriage arrangement rely on individual appeals and the casting of personal histories into paths to marriage and future affines. Narratives recounted during meetings demonstrate kinship in action. They portray different modes of relatedness, showing how particular interactions and circumstances give concrete shape and affective form to affinal relations, matrification, and the expectations, ambiguities, ambivalences, and tensions that go with being kin.

These ways of managing marriage talks constitute the *poetics* of marriage arrangement. Families attempt to fix outcomes by imagining the future, reimagining the past, and negotiating the present. As they do, Okiek articulate a moral imagination of relatedness, even as their interaction embodies and produces these very kinship forms. Idioms of kinship and the process of Okiek marriage arrangement in the 1980s drew on and assumed extensive shared histories of interaction—unlike relations with new immigrants.

It is profoundly difficult to precisely predict the course of marriage discussions and what will emerge from “the murky, ambiguous interstices between... different situational definitions of the person, of social roles, values, and beliefs” and different interests and allegiances (Beidelman 1986:9). Some imponderables are intrinsic to the process, with many participants, perspectives, and interests to accommodate and unexpected developments. From the late 1980s, however, political, economic, and demographic changes heightened potential differences in perspective and changed the circumstances within which negotiations took place. As people weighed new opportunities and choices and pursued various social paths, individual life trajectories were caught up with longer term, larger scale social transformations. Yet broad trends can be difficult to recognize as they begin; people apply familiar frames of reference and expectations to shifting circumstances. Tensions between transformations of different time scales may emerge between generations, as life course expectations, possibilities, and values conflict.

The marriage discussions considered here took place in 1983, just before this heightening of differences. Conventionally at that time, successful

marriage arrangements were conducted over four (or more) visits to the bride's family. The first, *esiretit*, declared intent by bringing a chain, honey, or liquor to the girl's home. Visitors were simply told, "We've seen you" (i.e., we recognize your interest). On subsequent visits (*enkiroretit*), elders from the groom's family (including his father) and senior kinswomen (including his mother) brought liquor. The bride's family gathered senior men and women and fuller discussions began. If the girl was already promised, suitors were told to go elsewhere. If visits continued, the groom's family might eventually be told they "were given the child/house," discussion turned to bridewealth, and they were told to "go prepare" (i.e., find required property). Ideally, arrangements were finalized during the bride's initiation seclusion. Soon after, the groom's family made the final visit, ending with the wedding (*-illa mureet*).

The wedding continued to incorporate and address uncertainties, with the bride at the center—her first official participation. Friends and relatives from both families advised and encouraged the couple, exhorting them to accept the match and behave well (Kratz 2009:174–82). During a procession to her husband's family home, the bride would stop, refusing to continue. While she did not speak, her siblings and cousins demanded gifts from the husband and his family before she continued. The most dramatic stops were just before the groom's home, where more relatives were present.

The situation in the following case was complicated, but every marriage arrangement has complications. The groom (Kishoyian) was from Kap Leboo patrilineage, the bride (Tinkili) from Araapkiplet. Another patrilineage, Kap Mengware, had been seeking Tinkili for years; during her initiation, formal visits became frequent and discussion serious. But Tinkili and Kishoyian were in love; she did not want the Kap Mengware man. Similarly, Kishoyian threatened to refuse another bride his parents wanted to pursue. Elopement was rumored; emotions and tempers were running high.

An important complication and constraint was that the Kap Mengware man was related to Kishoyian, his FaSiSo (*maama*). Accordingly, Kishoyian's fathers warned him not to steal Tinkili. Kap Leboo and Araapkiplet had long been neighbors, friends, and affines, with adjacent forests. For instance, Tinkili's father was MoBr (*maama*) to Kishoyian's mother; he and Kishoyian's father were co-initiates (*pakule*). They appealed to these long-term, cross-cutting connections during marriage discussions.

The situation climaxed when Kap Mengware came to take Tinkili as bride. She refused. For hours, relatives cajoled, berated, threatened, and advised her—to no avail. They tried again the next morning; she would not listen. Some Kap Mengware people, understandably upset, seemed angry. Talk said they would tally property "eaten" and request repayment. Two evenings later, Kishoyian's parents came via back paths to begin marriage negotiations for Tinkili. Quickly completed meetings followed all protocols, ending with Kishoyian marrying Tinkili.²⁰

Sketching tangled circumstances surrounding particular marriage negotiations underscores the varied positions, interests, and experiences that

are part and parcel of marriage arrangement. These positions and conjunctions shaped the development and outcomes, giving rise to ambiguities, ambivalences, and uncertainties throughout. Okiek marriage arrangement thus shows how Okiek imagined, invoked, and produced forms of relatedness, how social transformations ramified into different relationships and perspectives, and the structures and idioms through which Okiek managed marriage arrangement's uncertainties.

Two perennial sources of uncertainty were virtually built into the situation, regularly noted as hedges to modulate plans and commitments. First, the young couple's future actions could derail arrangements. Second, contingencies of presence shaped and altered collective decision-making dynamics if key relatives were absent. Initial discussions between Kap Leboo and Araapkiplet mentioned the first; the next meeting cited the second:²¹

C: I tell you we've seen you. We see two things. We've seen you-e [and] the child. We thought we would give her out. And she refused this family we wanted ourselves... But I don't yet know...if she will come and do that again.

N: Have you seen that everyone isn't here in the house today-wei?... Have you seen that Kap Korodo, the child's maternal relatives, are not here?

Negotiations proceed despite disclaimers. Tactically, assertions about those missing (someone always was) explicitly recognized lineage members' right to participate but could also defer conclusive discussion, extend the process, and discount full accountability or finality of decisions. This was part of the process and challenge of constituting the lineage as collective agent, apart from individuals' wishes and concerns. Acknowledging lineage members' shared rights and responsibilities simultaneously helped constitute patrilineal relations and advertise them to all gathered. Yet even if everyone participated, the final outcome remained unknown until the bride had gone. Families then had to see if the couple stayed together well.

Several organizational features of marriage arrangement limited vagaries of attendance, creating a process ensuring consultation and debate. These built-in structural assurances were integral to defining a process for reaching collective lineage decisions (even if some didn't participate), and to establishing agreed jural baselines of accountability for future marital disputes or bridewealth reclamation. Simple but effective, these features helped define patrilineages and relatives as major actors in marriage meetings. First, multiple meetings encompassed a growing range of participants, building the sense of the collective patrilineage. Absent kin might attend later meetings, accumulating broader representation and ratification. Similarly, individuals often named connections, mapping lineage membership and webs of relation.

Turn-taking patterns were explicitly noted as a means to create the lineage collective, ensuring all could speak. As Araapkiplet elders commented:²²

KS: You heard what Naresho said. He said, “I gave the child to Kap Mengware.” You gave her by yourself. Isn’t that what was done? Caa, because here is Araapkiplet and you are complete-i, do you follow today that mouth of Naresho? Do you all give her today—do you all give her today with all of you complete, or are you divided?...

Sid: Listen and I will talk, too.

KS: So first we will go around ourselves, Araapkiplet.

Sid: We go around-ais, yes, and respond.

KS: I say everyone tosi.

KT: There is no one that doesn’t respond.

Lineage caucuses (*enkileepatait*) were a final procedure marking and giving explicit, material form to the lineage when the gathering divided partway through discussion. Wife-seekers exited while wife-givers devised strategy and identified objections and unresolved disputes between families to address. Slightings and disagreements became examples of bad affinal behavior and challenges to wife-seekers, reframing individual interactions as lineage matters. Caucuses dramatized the distinction between families, providing a forum where the lineage came into being while jointly formulating a plan and position.

These procedural features created a setting where participants imagined and constituted the lineage as collective person through discussion and action, though not without tensions between individual and collective interests and desires. “Going slowly,” an idiom for treating potential affines and others respectfully, was cited as the wise, diplomatic way to handle uncertainties and ambiguities in marriage discussions. Attributing agency, responsibility, and blame could be tricky when participants might change across meetings, individuals and lineages merged and separated in complex dynamics, and political maneuvering played on it all. Okiek acknowledged indeterminacies complicating notions of agency through particular idioms (Kratz 2000).

Okiek addressed these contrary currents through analogies disclaiming their capacity to determine the outcome of marriage discussions even as they proceeded with them. Articulated by both sides and often developed dialogically, they framed their joint endeavor as, ultimately, out of their control. They did this by moving questions of agency, causality, and responsibility to a different level of abstraction, casting outcomes as “fate” or “God’s will.” Several analogies, based on men’s forest work, likened searching for a wife to fortune and fate in trapping or seeking wild honey or to walking in the forest at night. Individual disruptions, past grudges, or inauspicious circumstances might be the proximate impetus for unsuccessful discussions, but this suggested that larger forces were ultimately at work. This shared acknowledgment, a refrain throughout discussions, offered disclaimers to help manage and defuse potential conflicts. Nonetheless, the distance it suggested and urged was belied by participants’ intense concern with what happened and its impact on their children’s future.

Okiek also invoked past events and bonds to gain sympathetic hearings in meetings. They handled present uncertainties of lineage relations by calling on family histories to maximize their chance for a wife who, in turn, would perpetuate and care for the family. In addition, they pondered uncertainties in future relations. As they crafted connections across time, good and bad examples provided vehicles for imagining and reimagining kinship relations and through which Okiek repaired disruptions, reaffirmed the value of those relations, and recast expectations in light of changing circumstances. Family caucuses set the stage for inter-lineage discussion, identifying fights, slights, and insults that could terminate marriage discussions or mar future affinal relations. After reconvening, families discussed incidents and offenses; meetings mediated disputes before continuing.

Such cross-temporal reframing of interactions was a recurrent way of imagining social relations in varied circumstances and playing out lineage dynamics in marriage discussions. Past interactions were recast as impediments or abetments to present negotiations or as signs of future relations and demeanor. By reformulating past-present-future alignments through discourse and narrative (Kratz 1991; Bennett 1995:147–48; Wright 1985), Okiek dialogically concretized and managed some of marriage arrangement's uncertainties and ambivalences. They affirmed and adjusted existing social relations while preparing for the new relations the marriage would bring. In the process, minor daily interchanges became diagnostic indices, fragments illustrating meanings and modes of conduct associated with particular relations. As marriage arrangement changed in recent decades, such reframings helped imagine new life trajectories and different roles and relations between families and individuals.

One significant uncertainty where such examples and temporal alignments were mobilized concerned volatile future affinal relations. People worried about what kind of affines (*saanik*) the other family would be. The indeterminacy of future relations was a concern, but raising it during marriage talks challenged wife-seekers. It emphasized larger webs of relationship and expectations surrounding marriage, eliciting assurances from wife-seekers. Narrating good and bad examples provided ways to think about and concretize hopes and fears and, sometimes, to complain about other affines.

Okiek felt affinal relations should be characterized above all by respect (*kaany'it*), defined through appropriate behavior (Kratz 1989:642). One man explained, "You refuse them nothing, and speak respectfully. If they say, 'I want such and such,' look for it and give it to them. Don't curse, find a cow for them or whatever." At the wedding, as families advised the couple (Kratz 2000:159–67), they identified affines and cautioned the bride to be attentive to her new family. Uncertainties in future relations came from the couple themselves and from both families, all marked by admonitory wedding advice. During marriage talks, comments portraying *saanik* as future enemies summarized these issues:

M: Listen-ais. Friends, there is one truth. Oiyе, if you give someone a child today. Truly, isn't it—that person you gave the child to, he is the one that will come and kill you. He is the one that will come and kill you, honest.

Inevitable tensions that arise as affinal relations develop over time were also anticipated and addressed specifically. Wife-seekers averred that they would not be affines that become enemies. For instance, Tinkili's mother complained about other sons-in-law, showing trepidation that Kishoyian would also disappoint. In heated exchanges, Kishoyian's family sought to reassure her. Kishoyian's father also reminded them of his regular assistance to his own mother-in-law, sister to Tinkili's father, and his good relations with her and his wife's sister. Citing past actions as testimony to future relations and his own conduct both as pledge for his son's prospective behavior and as ongoing bond with Tinkili's family, Kishoyian's father recast challenges and concerns, managing marriage arrangement uncertainties through concrete examples and skillful representation of past-present-future alignments.

As kinship in action, marriage arrangement was a forum where Okiek imagined relatedness. Tensions and contradictions arose in specific situations as people tried to manage conflicting interests and ties within and beyond lineages. In marriage meetings, expectations about various relations were represented, discussed, and given felt, personal resonance. Recognizing and addressing tensions and contradictions that emerged was part of that process and its unpredictability—particularly as some lineage and individual interests diverged. In marriage meetings, then, Okiek narrated a range of histories and construed the very transformations shaping their lives.

Marriage meetings would begin with blessings for peace, prosperity, and fertility through marriage, a prayer framing protocols, politics, and poetics of the process. During ensuing talks, Okiek addressed and managed ambiguities and indeterminacies as they negotiated their offsprings' future as well as individual and lineage relations. Kinship's dark sides and golden possibilities were both in full view during this important social transition. The situation called for creative rhetoric and diplomatic skill, providing fraught, tense, anxious, and disquieting moments as well as warm fellowship, revitalized relations, humor, and hope. Imagining kinship as well as practicing and creating relatedness were at the heart of proceedings in the 1980s, enacted through language and performance. As Okiek marriage arrangement and composition of the local community transformed afterwards, foundations and frameworks for creating relatedness also changed.

Reconstituting Marriage Arrangement, Community, and Identity

The case described and the ways Okiek managed uncertainties in marriage arrangement in the mid-1980s provide context for considering how recent socioeconomic transformations have reverberated through Okiek lives. Imagining and creating kinship relations and creating past-present-future alignments remain relevant when families constitute marriages, but

frameworks of relatedness and potential youth destinies have simultaneously expanded and become more uncertain. As described earlier, Okiek marriage patterns diversified after the late 1980s: Okiek men and women alike might be older at first marriage, interethnic marriage increased significantly with immigrant influx, Okiek men had more wives and took additional wives at younger ages, and some young unmarried women were becoming mothers and creating households near their parents. These shifts lead to concluding observations about trends in personhood, agency, kinship, and lineage roles in Okiek marriage arrangement, trends interwoven with transformations in political economy, community, and state relations.

Parameters for agency now offer young men more latitude in marriage arrangement and elopement and offer young women life scenarios with greater independence—sometimes precarious. Lineages become involved in marriage arrangement later, with senior relatives less central. Correspondingly, “fate” idioms seemed less prominent in marriage discussions. Marriages with immigrant women, with sometimes distant families, are often negotiated more individually too, though they might involve a young man’s parents. Those unions do not yet build on extended histories of family interaction and may involve divergent interests and expectations. Safeguards and protection that lineage ratification provided—for women and bridewealth—are less clearly defined; later marriage disputes might still be handled through family meetings, but might also be heard by government chiefs. These structural shifts in marriage arrangement and parameters for agency, then, are accompanied by potential vulnerability for young women, greater governmental involvement in domestic relations, cross-ethnic negotiations about customs and property, and different modes of lineage involvement.²³ Kenya’s 2014 Marriage Bill requires marriage registration, further increasing civil engagement. Increased polygyny and its revolving-door nature in some households affect domestic relations for older Okiek men and women too.

As Okiek imagined and created forms of relatedness through marriage in the mid/late 1990s and beyond, young Okiek unions were shaped by timing shifts and varied paths added to their agropastoral and hunting life through education and employment.²⁴ As immigrants proliferated, Christian churches increased; Okiek began joining in the 1990s–2000s.²⁵ Families continued drawing on prior affinal expectations and interlineage relations, though these too were recast as circumstances changed. Marriages between Okiek and immigrants, however, entailed creating past-present-future alignments on different grounds, without basis in entwined family histories or shared understandings of place, and with greater uncertainty about future affinal relations. Kishoyian’s mother commented in 1993, “Better to marry someone who you know, whose family you have stayed with all the time so you know what they are like, instead of these ones who you don’t know. You can’t know what you are bringing into the home.” As they forged marriage obligations, the couple and their families were negotiating different expectations and conventions for bridewealth, marriage ceremonies, forms of respect, and financial obligations.

Tracing Kishoyian and Tinkili's 1983 marriage to the present provides a glimpse of how land tenure changes, land sales, demographic shifts, and other political economic transformations percolated into Okiek marriage practice and individual lives. A year after marrying in November 1983, their first child was born but soon died. After the loss of their second child, reproductive troubles became a source of anxiety and rumor. In 1988, they had one daughter; 1993 brought a second surviving child. They remain married today, with one son and a daughter who left school while young.

In late 1987, Kishoyian married a second wife, Kopot Seleina, a Gusii woman with three children and two previous marriages. Her first husband, a Maasai, beat her, drank, and reneged on bridewealth. She then briefly married a Kipchornwonek who also treated her badly. She married Kishoyian through a problematic land sale. Kishoyian's parents sold her father land, but he stopped making payments. When they wanted to evict him, he offered his daughter for Kishoyian. Kishoyian and his parents made three marriage visits to her father, bringing liquor for discussion. Bridewealth was two cows, eight goats/sheep, KSH30,000, and sixteen metal roofing sheets, along with use of the land.

Kopot Seleina later said she married only to respect her father's wishes. She spoke neither Okiek nor Kalenjin, communicating in Maasai or Kiswahili. Initial accord between the wives was fleeting. For almost a year, Kishoyian tried having both live in the same house, which resulted in household labor disputes.

Marital relations within and between households were often discordant. Tinkili complained, "Having a co-wife is full of *siasa* (backbiting)" and *fitina* (gossip). She spent extended periods at her parents' home; Kopot Seleina also left occasionally. Kishoyian was volatile, often drank excessively, and beat both wives. In mid-1993, both left at the same time.

Kishoyian first followed Kopot Seleina to prevent her taking the children. Twice her father refused to attend family meetings for elders' mediation, so Kishoyian took the matter to a government chief. His father-in-law was told to either repay marriage property or return the wife and children. Tinkili stayed several months at her parents' home. Quarrels and difficult domestic relations continued, fueled by Kishoyian's drinking and erratic management and jealousies between wives. Eventually, Kopot Seleina left Kishoyian, reportedly because his land sales jeopardized their future.

In mid-1993, Kishoyian took a third wife, a Gusii woman still attending school. Mary had moved there three years earlier when her parents purchased land. It was unclear whether Kishoyian's other wives knew of this plan; both were away during the dispute. Kishoyian and his father met initially with Mary's parents. He consulted his parents no further until just before the wedding, nor did he heed advice that marriage to Mary should wait until his wives were home. Kishoyian was in a hurry; he spread cash around in rushed preparations.

Affines had misunderstandings about the wedding's timing and bride-wealth. Facing Kishoyian's headstrong insistence, the wedding proceeded.

Kishoyian's parents and cousin tried to conduct marriage discussions with Mary's family in a mix of Okiek, Kiswahili, and Ekegusii. Discussion erratically combined property negotiation and advice to the couple. Bridewealth was three acres of land, two cows, two goats, a blanket, and a big pot. The bride's parents tried adding more cows and demands at the wedding. Confusions and misunderstandings about marriage property continued.²⁶ Though Kishoyian's family welcomed Mary, that marriage also dissolved in time.²⁷

When Kishoyian and Tinkili married in 1983, most Okiek expected marriage trajectories that began with arranged marriage in youth, with a co-wife possibly added later. As Kishoyian's marriages showed, marriage arrangement protocols with immigrant families were sometimes improvised, though based on familiar practice. They continued to be kinship in action, but notions of kinship were in flux, sometimes attenuated or at cross-purposes between families. Discussions were not always approached with respectful care, although that remained prominent in the poetics of marriage talks. Politics in marriage arrangement and intra-lineage relations could be volatile with land sale cash influxes. Young women made their way and crafted their own identities and marriage circumstances through modes of agency that included acquiescence, refusals, elopement, temporary refuge with parents, hard work, and the forging of relations with new affines.

Education and employment affected marriage timings and possibilities more for cohorts after Kishoyian and Tinkili, but demographic shifts and land sales significantly shaped their marriage's first decade. Available immigrant wives and land sales together enabled Kishoyian to have three wives while still young. His inexperience in managing a complex marriage, however, led to difficult marital relations and repeated disputes. Similarly, minimal family consultation in the third marriage showed attenuated lineage involvement.

The fate of Kishoyian's later marriages suggests the 1990s spate of youthful plural marriages at the height of land sales might have been a transient trend. Indeed, with no land left to sell, many Kaplelach and Kipchorwonek now struggle to support their families, being in no position to take additional wives. From a time when "they had money and life was good, the situation has completely reversed and most of our people are in dire poverty" (Tanki p.c.). Implications of the socioeconomic and demographic transformations described earlier continued to unfold and shape Okiek marriages and marriage arrangement.

Changes in marriage arrangement evidence ongoing shifts in intergenerational relations, lineage relations, and household relations. They point to ways state-level decisions and land policies eventually influence the very makeup of families and how people imagine their lives. As Okiek marriage patterns changed, interethnic relations became part of domestic life for most households. Tensions and disagreements sometimes map onto long-standing ethnic stereotypes and hierarchies. Kipsigis and Gusii immigrants say Okiek don't work steadily or care for wives. They see themselves as bringing

development to a backward area, with roads, schools, churches, and intensive farming. Okiek were sometimes suspicious of their new neighbors, saying they didn't want "smelly" Kipsigis wives before. "But now they are wanted because they work hard and farm more than Okiek."²⁸ Interlinked shifts in marriage arrangement, land tenure, and demography, then, have been redefining the nature of community and local public spheres as increasingly multiethnic.

Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek have long engaged in a regional system of ethnicity corresponding largely to ecological-economic differences (Kratz 1981, 1986, 2010; Galaty 1979, 1982). With transformations over the past thirty years, multiethnic relations increasingly became daily life rather than regional relations, even as Okiek engagement with government policies and politics increased. Land tenure changes, land sales, population shifts, and widening wealth disparities are national phenomena, not circumstances unique to Okiek. But their conjuncture unfolds differently across political economies and ethnic communities. Okiek have managed these transformations in ways still influencing different domains of understanding and action, with implications for notions of identity, lineage, community, and nation.

Wider Kenyan affairs over this period have seen fraught ethnic politics, including devastating ethnic clashes in the early 1990s as multipartyism arose, and again after the 2007 election.²⁹ Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek were not at the epicenter of the 2007 violence, but land sales and immigration contributed to xenophobia propagated in the early 1990s. William Ole Ntimama, the MP representing Narok North, portrayed other Kenyans moving in as "foreigners," "outsiders" to be driven away. Ntimama was later implicated in instigating ethnic clashes, but as Daniel Branch notes, externally incited violence could develop local momentum. "Viewed from the bottom up, the clashes were a way of resolving grievances over land" in the context of "breakdown in the administration of land laws as a whole and abuse of office by public officials dealing with land matters" (Branch 2011:202–4, 231, 277; Kenyapolitical 2008).

Xenophobic rhetoric spread to local politics too. In September 1993, I attended a local councilor's "tea party" (political meeting) with some Okiek women; Ntimama was guest of honor. The gathering encompassed the area's ethnic diversity, so xenophobia was subtly framed as "people coming into our area," "places in our schools taken by others," and environmental damage from "outsiders" clearing forests and spoiling water catchments. These themes recurred in both Ntimama's and the local representatives' speeches.

As this wave of suspicion took hold, anxiety rose among immigrant land buyers. This was soon after Kishoyian married Mary; he moved nearer her family to allay their fear. A month later, ethnic clashes occurred not far away. Some Kikuyu, Kipsigis, and Gusii had their homes burned; others were evicted. Schools closed; teachers asked for transfers or fled. A month later, things were seemingly "normal" again.

Elsewhere I have characterized Okiek stances towards ethnic neighbors as accommodating openness within a regional political economy where Maasai and Kipsigis disdained the minority Okiek. Okiek learned their neighbors' languages, adopted and adapted certain cultural practices, yet valorized some domains of practice and history as distinctively Okiek (Kratz 1981, 1993, 2010; Kratz & Pido 2000).³⁰ With transformations accompanying shifts in land tenure, demography, and marriage, this stance brought multiethnic relations and accommodations into far more facets and contexts of Okiek life. The Okiek language, for instance, is endangered through accommodating more numerous Kipsigis immigrants. Concurrently, distinctive domains of Okiek life—e.g., hunting and honey-collecting—have become occasional pursuits, historical memories, or nostalgic constructions of tradition. In the mid-1990s, Kaplelach made similar nostalgic comments about marriage arrangement.

Over these transformative decades, wealth disparities emerged among Okiek resulting from different decisions about land sales, marriage, and use of their new resources. Excessive land sales left some economically insecure, virtually destitute, or landless. Others capitalized on opportunities and now have children at university who will themselves eventually marry. Okiek also engaged with the state in varied degrees. Those most involved sought influence through local administrative offices, NGOs, and community development (Kratz 2009). With the area's expanded, increasingly multiethnic population, one might ask what kinds of public culture and public spheres are forming and what the meanings of Okiek identity are now?³¹ How are these caught up in the "highly ambiguous moral terrain of ethnic politics" nationally (Lynch 2011:218)?

Conclusion

Identities and social relations are fluid practices, unfolding within shifting institutional structures and material constraints. This article has tracked ways that Okiek have created and made sense of changing life parameters by considering marriage arrangement as a nexus across social scales, where national and regional shifts in land holding and demography intersect, combining with local understandings of social relations and history. The protocols, politics, and poetics of marriage arrangement provided ways to manage uncertainties in marriage arrangement and lineage dynamics through the 1980s. As marriage transformed along with other domains of Okiek life, uncertainties multiplied, yet some metaphors, analogies, and ways of constructing relatedness and past-present-future alignments still offered cultural resources for negotiating new identities, communities, and destinies.

By tracing political economic transformations in Okiek life and marriage arrangement, a representative case embedded in those transformations, and particular idioms and practices of marriage meetings, this article underscores the value of examining social processes unfolding across multiple

scales and time frames. Tacking between encompassing historical processes and intimate immediacies in situated social interaction is essential to understanding the dynamics of structure and agency. It shows how people work with and around social forms and institutions that shape their lives, even as their actions in time help recast those same social forms. As critical means through which people understand, craft, and respond to social relations and situations, language and cultural performance should be central to analyses of agency. Language and performance show how choices and actions are situated through moral imaginations and how “micro-political contestations” play out.

At the same time, working across analytical scales reveals intersecting uncertainties associated with structure, agency, and social transformations, uncertainties produced from “social contingencies... entwined with social relations...” that “spur both imaginations and practices” (Cooper & Pratten 2015:2–3). Examining Okiek marriage arrangement both as kinship in action and kinship in flux has shown how local practices are bound up with regional and national spheres and the uncertainties and ambiguities that emerge as they intersect in people’s lives.

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Notes

1. I use phonemic spellings in Okiek transcriptions. This differs from the “Ogiek” spelling adopted by Kenyan NGOs formed in the 1990s, which reflects phonetic variations in spoken language. In Kalenjin languages like Okiek, unvoiced stop consonants become voiced in intervocalic environments. Toweett (1979:42–3) also uses phonemic /k/ as spelling convention.
2. Classic studies on bridewealth (Comaroff 1980; Goody & Tambiah 1973; Sansom 1976) and kinship and social organization (Fortes 1962; Peletz 1995; Radcliffe-Brown & Forde 1950) address varied aspects of marriage. Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987) considers diverse adaptations in African marriage, while Cooper’s (1997) case study foregrounds gender and Healy-Clancy (2014) provides a recent regional overview.
3. Keane (1991) and Kratz (2009) focus on communicative performance in marriage arrangement. Geertz (1983) and Beidelman (1986) are essential works on moral imaginations. Cole and Thomas (2009) and Johnson-Hanks (2007) address related questions and also emphasize wider connections and contexts.
4. Field research with Okiek spans 1974–1994. After 1994 we remained in touch through mail, email, phone, and my work with Okiek schools. Kratz (2010:5–9) discusses research circumstances further.
5. Fortes (1969) and Beidelman (1986) have consistently paid attention to ambivalence and tensions built into particular social relations. Peletz (2001) is a useful overview. Karp (1987) and Kratz (2000, 2005a, 2005b) focus on tensions, ambivalence, and uncertainty in relation to marriage. Recent writings exploring uncertainty and its implications include Berthomé et al. (2012), Cooper and Pratten (2015), Johnson-Hanks (2005), Samimian-Darash and Rabinow (2015).
6. This adapts profiles from late 1980s to early 1990s (Kratz 1981, 1986, 1987, 1989, 2010).
7. This article synthesizes earlier analyses of socioeconomic transformations and changes in marriage arrangement (Kratz 1986, 1990, 2010:70–92, 2000) and tracks subsequent transformations in Okiek society, political economy, and marriage arrangement.
8. Cf. Bollig et al. (2014) on East Pokot economic diversification.
9. Maasai followed similar protocols.
10. Interviews named these age-sets, spanning 1940s–mid-1970s, perhaps reflecting different Kipchornwonek and Kaplelach timings. To explain all these shifts, Okiek cited less compliant young women, the expense of repaying gifts, and a desire to limit interlopers at meetings. They may also, however, be related to other social and economic shifts taking place.
11. Hodgson (2017:74–80) describes parallel changes in marriage arrangement, elopements, and other types of unions for Maasai in Tanzania in the 1980s–1990s.
12. Cf. Talle (1988).

13. Galaty and Munei (1998) and Matter (2010) discuss land sales, corruption, and neopatrimonialism in this region. The World Bank identifies inequitable, corrupt land distribution as a driving factor in social change and livelihood system erosion/insecurity in rural Kenya (2007:20–22).
14. Estimated holdings were 100–150 acres/member. Government surveyors did come months later but disputes prevented demarcation.
15. The cumulative effect is disastrous deforestation affecting a wide area; the Mau escarpment is a major water catchment (Morgan 2009; Government of Kenya 2009).
16. Cf. Hodgson (2002, 2011).
17. Håkansson (1988, 1994) describes increased elopement among Gusii beginning in the 1950s. Unlike Okiek, that was related to land scarcity and decreasing polygyny. Håkansson describes the situation that led to Gusii settlers seeking Okiek land and the different assumptions they brought to interethnic marriages.
18. Unlike instances of single motherhood among Gusii, Okiek daughters retained family status and cultivated gardens. With severe land shortage, Gusii turned to education as an alternative to improve work possibilities. This included girls, though boys went further in school (Håkansson 1994).
19. Parliament's controversial 2014 law requiring registration of customary polygynous marriages dropped stipulations that men consult their wives before marrying another. "Female members of parliament stormed out of the session in fury after heated debate" (Daily Nation 2014).
20. I recorded all meetings.
21. Translations maintain affective particles that punctuate Okiek conversation, marking emphasis (-e, -ais, tosi) and friendly relations (-wei, -toi) (Kratz 2010:xiv).
22. Tinkili's fathers (FaBr) spoke here.
23. Most Kaplelach and Kipchornwonek marrying across ethnic lines in the past—relatively infrequent—were Okiek women marrying Maasai men from families long interacting with Okiek in the region.
24. Paths continued diverging by gender. Economically constrained, only some families could embrace education. An Okiek colleague observed that few Okiek girls finished secondary school since the 1980s (Tanki, p.c.).
25. Denominations included Catholic, Full Gospel, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and African Inland Church.
26. Gusii once paid bridewealth all at once, unlike Okiek, but by 1985, 75 percent of new Gusii unions began without bridewealth. Mary's family came from Marani, southwest of Håkansson's research area. In the mid-1980s, overcrowded Gusii land sold for KSH10,000/acre (Håkansson 1988:54, 184; 1995:109). Early settlers exploited Okiek naïveté, buying expansive, fertile Okiek land in the late 1980s/early 1990s for just KSH3–7,000.
27. While completing this paper, sad news came that Kishoyian died of tuberculosis in October 2016; lack of funds meant he did not receive timely treatment. His untimely death has brought new challenges to his family.
28. McGovern (2015:250) describes similar stereotypes in Guinea.
29. Branch (2011), Branch, Cheeseman, and Gardener (2010) and Lynch (2011) discuss Kenya's ethnic politics.
30. Ambler (1988) and Branch (2011:292) discuss other Kenyan groups' accommodations.

31. New settlers, for instance, established women's development groups and Christian churches. Changes experienced by Okiek are part of national trends towards "erosion of rural livelihood systems," increasing wealth differences, and inequitable land distribution (World Bank 2007), trends that laid foundations for the 2007 post-election violence (Ashforth 2009; Berman, Bottrel & Ghai 2009).