

Relative Distance

The socio-economic and political uncertainties of Kenya in the 1990s jeopardised what many saw as the promises of modernity. An increasing number of Kenyans migrated, many to Britain, a country that felt familiar from Kenyan history. Based on extensive fieldwork in Kenya and the United Kingdom, Leslie Fesenmyer's work provides a rich, historically nuanced study of the kinship dilemmas that underlie transnational migration and explores the dynamic relationship between those who migrate and those who stay behind. Challenging a focus on changing modes of economic production, 'push-pull' factors, and globalisation as drivers of familial change, she analyses everyday transnational family life. *Relative Distance* shows how quotidian interactions, exchanges, and practices transform kinship on a local and global scale. Through the prism of intergenerational care, Fesenmyer reveals that the question of who is responsible for whom is not only a familial matter but is at the heart of relations between individuals, societies, and states.

Leslie Fesenmyer is Assistant Professor in Social Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Birmingham. She is currently leading a project on multi-religious encounters in urban Kenya funded by the European Research Council. Her research has been published in leading journals, including *City & Society*, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, and *Social Anthropology*.

THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN LIBRARY

General Editors

LESLIE BANK, *Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa*

HARRI ENGLUND, *University of Cambridge*

DEBORAH JAMES, *London School of Economics and Political Science*

ADELINE MASQUELIER, *Tulane University, Louisiana*

HELENE NEVEU-KRINGELBACH, *University College London*

DAVID PRATTEN, *University of Oxford*

Managing Editor

STEPHANIE KITCHEN, *International African Institute, London*

The International African Library is a major monograph series from the International African Institute. Theoretically informed ethnographies, and studies of social relations ‘on the ground’ which are sensitive to local cultural forms, have long been central to the Institute’s publications programme. The IAL maintains this strength and extends it into new areas of contemporary concern, both practical and intellectual. It includes works focused on the linkages between local, national and global levels of society; writings on political economy and power; studies at the interface of the socio-cultural and the environmental; analyses of the roles of religion, cosmology and ritual in social organisation; and historical studies, especially those of a social, cultural or interdisciplinary character.

For a list of titles published in the series, please see the end of the book.

Relative Distance

*Kinship, Migration, and Christianity between
Kenya and the United Kingdom*

Leslie Fesenmyer
University of Birmingham

International African Institute, London
and



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009335072
DOI: 10.1017/9781009335096

© Leslie Fesenmyer 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fesenmyer, Leslie E. (Leslie Elyse), author.

Title: Relative distance : kinship, migration, and Christianity between Kenya and the United Kingdom / Leslie Fesenmyer, University of Oxford.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2023] | Series: The international African library | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022055194 (print) | LCCN 2022055195 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009335072 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009335089 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009335096 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Families—Kenya—History—20th century. | Immigrant families—Kenya. | Immigrant families—Great Britain. | Transnationalism.

Classification: LCC HQ692.5 .F47 2023 (print) | LCC HQ692.5 (ebook) | DDC 306.8096762—dc23/eng/20221121

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022055194>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022055195>

ISBN 978-1-009-33507-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page vi
<i>List of Characters</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 Securing the Future: Family, Livelihoods, and Mobility	30
2 Aspirations, Obligations, and Imagination in Family Migration	55
3 The Making of ‘Migrants’	79
4 Kinship Dilemmas: Negotiating Relatedness across Space	103
5 Weddings as Transnational Household Rituals: Marriage and Other Intimate Relationships	130
6 Change and Continuity: The Social Reproduction of Families between Kenya and the United Kingdom	160
Conclusion	186
<i>References</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	224

Acknowledgements

This book is the product of more than a decade of thinking, researching, talking, and writing in the United Kingdom and Kenya. I am deeply grateful to those who I came to know in the course of its making; they will remain unnamed here for the purposes of anonymity. They generously gave their time to talk with me, sharing their stories and perspectives, with some warmly inviting me into their families in London and Kenya. It was an intense process of learning and un-learning, questioning and being questioned, caring and being cared for.

The book is also part of a much longer encounter with anthropology and Kenya, encompassing my time as a doctoral student and as an undergraduate and an MPhil student. Its development and writing took place alongside my work on the Oxford Diasporas Programme, an ESRC Future Research Leaders fellowship at COMPAS, Oxford, and my post in the Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham. The debts I have accumulated and the circles of reciprocity in which I am embedded are extensive. Those who have each in their own way – supervisors, examiners, colleagues, friends, mentors, and peers – spurred me onward include Lisa Åkesson, Mette Berg, Maxim Bolt, Katharine Charsley, Reginald Cline-Cole, Robin Cohen, Marco di Nunzio, Juliet Gilbert, Wendy James, Jessica Johnson, Rebecca Jones, Esra Kaytaz, Michael Keith, Marisa Macari, Katrin Maier, Cetta Mainwaring, Knut Christian Myhre, David Napier, H elene Neveu Kringelbach, Insa Nolte, Karen Fog Olwig, Benedetta Rossi, Kate Skinner, John Spencer, Nicholas van Hear, Jane Wangaruro, and Ina Zharkevich. Kenya has been part of my anthropological journey from my first visit there as an undergraduate in the 1990s. Several families have been instrumental in making me feel at home there at different moments in time – thank you to the Owino, Hopcraft, and Syanda families.

I am appreciative of the support, encouragement, and constructive comments I received from the International African Institute. The book benefited tremendously from Harri Englund’s thoughtful engagement with the text, as well as from Stephanie Kitchen’s meticulous stewarding

of the manuscript through the process. I am also very grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

(^c)For the support I received at different stages of my research, I gratefully acknowledge the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, COMPAS, and St. Antony's College, University of Oxford, as well as the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi.

Alongside these different spheres of support are my friends, on whose wisdom, perspective, and humour I very much rely. To my fellow anthropologists – Melanie Griffiths, Iza Kavedzjia, Giulia Liberatore, and Ammara Maqsood – I'm so glad I met you early on; you have made academic life and beyond so much more enjoyable. The generosity and care of friends, old and new – Susan Cahn, Henrietta Ghattas and Josie Appleton, Leslie Hulse and Mark Stafford, Myfanwy Lloyd, Martha Newell Maier, Pieter Serneels and Marcela Tarazona, Sarah Varney, and Julia Wedel and Ingo Outes-Leon – have nourished me.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my parents, Dee and Ken Fesenmyer, who always encouraged me to pursue my interests and ideas wherever they led; and to Anita Lagercrantz, who encouraged me to take chances, and Peter Edler whose prolific writing remains a source of inspiration. I am so sad that I cannot share this moment with each of you, much less those still to come. Thank you to my sister Kendel Fesenmyer and her family Todd, AJ, and Emery Kurth for their love and the sanctuary of their house in New Mexico. Returning to Oxford to do my doctorate marked a significant transition in my life. It would not have been possible, much less a success, without the steadfast faith, unstinting support, and love of Darius Lagercrantz. His insights always brought new dimensions of understanding, just as his editing skills unfailingly clarified what I was trying to say and his humour reminded me to embrace the possibility and joy in what I was doing. It was also during the making of this book that Ezra was born. He has brought such delight and happiness to my life. I am eager to embark on the adventures the future holds for us.

Fragments of Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 were published as part of an article in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, as well as part of chapters in the edited volumes, *Affective Circuits: African Migration to Europe and the Pursuit of Social Regeneration*, and *Re-thinking Home: Transnational Migration and Older Age*. I thank Brill, University of Chicago Press, and Routledge for their permission to reprint this material.

List of Characters

Core Families

Margaret: younger migrant
 Violet: Margaret's mother

John: younger migrant
 Susan and Joseph: John's younger sister and
 brother-in-law

Robert: younger migrant
 Geoffrey: Robert's older brother

Jane: older migrant
 Rose: Jane's oldest daughter
 Mbenyi: Rose's house girl

Beth: older migrant
 Samuel: Beth's husband
 Christopher: Beth's son

Additional Interlocutors

Younger Migrants

Isaiah and Stella	3, 4, 5, 6
Lucy	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Conclusion
Sarah	Introduction, 3, 5, Conclusion
Mercy	3, 5, 6
Faith	3, 4
Francis	6
Pastor Paul and his wife Joyce	4, 5
Phillip	6

Older Migrants

Ann	2, 3, 5, 6
Lillian	2, 5

Chapters of Appearance

Introduction, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Conclusion
 1, 3, 4, 6

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Conclusion
 4, Conclusion

1, 2, 5, 6
 2

Introduction, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Conclusion
 Introduction, 1, 2, 3, 4, Conclusion
 1, 2

2, 4, 5, 6, Conclusion
 2, 4, 6, Conclusion
 4