

CHWUECH MANIMBA: INDIGENOUS CREATIVE EDUCATION AMONG
WOMEN OF THE LUO COMMUNITY OF WESTERN KENYA

Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of PHILOSOPHY

by

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San Marcos, Texas

August 2011

CHWUECH MANIMBA: INDIGENOUS CREATIVE EDUCATION AMONG
WOMEN OF THE LUO COMMUNITY OF WESTERN KENYA

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a challenging and, as that goes, consequently a rewarding academic journey for me. I am especially grateful to all who have contributed to my success in it. Throughout my dissertation journey, I had the best team any Doctoral student could hope for. My dissertation committee, led by Dr. Waite (a superb adviser) included these great nurturers; Dr. Ross-Gordon, Dr. Sarah Nelson, Dr. Beverly Lindsay, and Dr. Miguel Guajardo. Thank you for your commitment to my success.

My dissertation chair Dr. Waite, I feel truly fortunate to have worked with you *japuonj manimba*. Thank you for the scholarly and material support you accorded me.

Dr. Carpenter (As former chair of EAPS): Thank you for the material and financial support.

I appreciate my mother for nurturing in me the love of all things academic. I can still hear her say, ‘*som uru, ngima tek*’ ‘take your school work seriously, life is hard.’ Yes Mum, we took your advice.

My siblings Rose, Tony, and James for believing that I would sail through any academic challenge, yes I did.

My children; for their encouragement when I needed to be away for studies and for, further, picking up the challenge to excel in their academic work, you made me proud.

To a mentor and friend, Dr. Moyo Okediji, all I can say is “*Ona do well, oga.*”

The wonderful mothers of *Bang' Jomariiek* women group of West Reru in Kenya, I am eternally indebted to you. Thank you for opening the door into the collective and community for me and being true to yourselves and your community.

To a wonderful friend, Monica Valadez: I am grateful for the invigorating discussions we often had. Your perspective on certain issues opened up new avenues of thinking for me. David Stafford, thank you for making me tech savvy.

Cohort '07 members: I am glad I met you because you enriched my life in many ways. I lived for the discussions in class in which we shared and encouraged each other at special moments. This Dissertation was submitted to my committee members in January 20th, 2011.

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ABSTRACT

CHWUECH MANIMBA: INDIGENOUS CREATIVE EDUCATION AMONG WOMEN OF THE LUO COMMUNITY OF WESTERN KENYA

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August 2011

SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: DUNCAN WAITE

As a result of the recession currently being experienced in the world, many people have lost their positions at work. Consequently, these people have wished to re-enter the job market. They have done this by going into colleges and other institutions of higher learning to be trained in new skills, or to get help adapting the ones they have, to the needs of the current job market. This addition to student diversity, and the reality of increased movement of people across geographical borders, is manifested in classrooms with learners from different backgrounds. The import of understanding and enriching practice with insight from non-Western perspectives of teaching and learning has never been more necessary. This dissertation attempts to contribute to this effort.

The aim of this dissertation is to present the procedure and proceedings of an instructional research into the teaching and learning among Luo women of Western Kenya. The purposes of the research are threefold. First, it seeks to document a system of indigenous adult education that has proved sustainable among Luo women from generation to generation. Second, it attempts to examine, document, and contextualize the local terminologies of an indigenous African form of adult education, within the meta-language of scholarly adult educational studies and practices. Third, it reports the entire process through which the research unfolded, in a systematic form that renders it reproducible in a similar setting. The principal objective of the study is to document the process through which women empower themselves through adult education, by using expressive forms of creativity as metaphors for resistance, regeneration, and survival.

To satisfy this range of aims, purposes, and objectives, I carried out research among the *Bang jomariiek* women, a group already known locally as practitioners of *chwuech*. *Chwuech* is a wide-ranging Luo indigenous term that the artists apply in reference to activities including the creative process, the aesthetic reflections, social intervention, and the art educational structure of their expressive cultures. This group practices a range of art forms including a systematic form of indigenous adult art education. My familiarity with the art forms is one of the principle considerations for choosing this group. I knew the forms as a child who grew up in the same geographical region with these women. But, I also decided to study with them because of their use of sustainable working materials, which are all sourced locally in their environments. Their use of sustainable mediums of expression, which multiplies the efficiency of their

sustainable art educational practices, makes them perfect as a model group for this study into sustainable feminist art education among adults in Africa.

I have carefully studied the theories of adult education in the process of selecting suitable tools for this research. A good portion of the reflective time given to this project elaborated on the varieties of possibilities, before I adopted two main theoretical angles, namely (post)feminist and post colonial perspectives in adult education. The study methods fostered by these theories allows for the creation of a polyvocal context that enables the participants to contribute to the research process in a comfortable and fruitful manner. Additionally, following from the ethnographic nature of this study and the pragmatic orientations of the theories that form its base, I chose participant observation, which I particularly adapted into the concept of *kit dak* in the Luo family architecture, as the main instrument for collecting data. I did this because I wished to fit the study into the local epistemologies and, by so doing, enhance its success among members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group. Other study instruments are semi-structured open-ended interviews, journaling, and photo voice. This dissertation contains the journeys from the stages of preparing for the research, to the points of post-research reflections and analysis. I divided the dissertation into seven chapters starting from the preparations for the study to reflections about it at the end of the study so as to present a comprehensive picture of the multidimensional facets of the research process.

In the West Reru community, *chwuech* functions to improve multiple aspects of the community. This feminist art education processes is anti-colonial in the way it spurs critical thinking among participants who gain the confidence of exploring avenues, at their disposal, to improve their lives and that of their community. By engaging in

chwuech, participants not only learn an income-generating skill, but are able to be actively involved in their community's economic, medical, political, spiritual, and social dimension as indigenous practitioners. Thus, *chwuech* allowed the participants one means by which they tackled the emerging problems of poverty, disease, political instability, and social strife that commonly confronted them in their community and to varying degrees of success.

The participants employed various strategies to successfully engage in *chwuech*. Some of these strategies included teaching and learning through song, sayings, modeling, scaffolding, and experiencing. Spirituality served as an important source of direction in the *chwuech* activities and the women's lives. The spirit of community created by the collective nature of the *chwuech* activities enabled the learners to willingly help each other with issues that crop up as impediments in life. This happy, accepting, dynamic, and effervescent environment also fostered free exchange of information unhindered by any forms of limitations on content.

TIEND WECHÉ: INTRODUCTION

This study, acknowledging the need to expand and enrich adult learning theory and practice, set out to explore, understand, and describe the indigenous adult educational processes that the Luo women of Western Kenya used with the sustainable art forms of pottery, basketry, and *muono* (a form of indigenous architecture). The *Bang' jomariék* women group members of West Reru, the participants in the study, refer to these processes as *chwuech*. Below, I briefly describe the gist of each of the seven chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter One details the preparations I made prior to starting fieldwork. I describe the preparations for the study from the point at which I conceptualized it. At this time, I was called upon to make adjustments to the concept before taking it through my institution's approval processes. I also describe the approval process I took the study proposal through in Kenya and the adjustments I made to my study plans once I arrived at the site.

In Chapter Two, I describe the study area of West Reru and the classrooms that we assigned ourselves. In the study we utilized two types of 'classrooms': mobile and site specific classrooms. The classroom sites provided a structure for methods of data collection. I go on to explain the method and consequent instruments I used to collect data at this site. These instruments included journaling, photo voice, and semi-structured open-ended interviews. In this chapter, I also specify the characteristics of the *Kit dak* concept of the Luo family architecture on which I

adapted the study instruments. Short biographical information and participants' reflections on *chwuech* activities form the body of Chapter Three. In these biographical sketches, emanating from semi-structured open ended interviews I conducted with them, I depict the participants' physical and emotional attributes I was able to collect. I relate this information to the participants' *chwuech* activities. The tendency has been for participants in ethnological studies and creative workshops in Africa to be treated as anonymous subjects. Even though we see the products of many of these workshops, we hardly know anything of the artist who produced them. This study places the artist at the center of the research rather than regard her as an anonymous subject. This chapter also reports the rationale of participants in the study for pursuing the production of the three art forms and their perceptions of the characteristics of successful artists and apprentices.

Chapter Four locates the teaching and learning activities of the members of *Bang' jomariiek* in an indigenous form of participant observer system of data collection as adapted to the Luo family architecture called *kit dak*. In this chapter I christen this indigenous form of art education, *chwuechgogy* from the word *chwuech*. The chapter will elaborate further on this neologism. In describing the *chwuech* activities, I take both the etic and emic perspectives to produce a more three-dimensional picture of *chwuech* as I experienced it. I also describe important aspects of the *chwuech* environment that have a bearing on the teaching and learning activities. Later in this chapter, I detail my experiences as an indigenous researcher in this study among my native Luo people.

I survey the character traits of the members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group in Chapter Five. As Luo women, the participants like to think of themselves as having particular personality attributes that directly affect and are affected by their involvement in *chwuech*. These character traits are predictive of the women's success in both *chwuech* activities and as active members of their community. This chapter also explores matters of hierarchy within the group and how the members relate to it.

Chapter Six relates the processes in which *chwuech*, as an activity of members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group is lodged in the West Reru community's cultural wealth. I include, herein, three narratives that I collected from selected participants. In these narratives, these participants described photographs they had taken of things in the community that they thought related to their *chwuech* activities. The chapter demonstrates the interconnectedness between the *chwuech* principles and the values of the community.

Last but not least, Chapter Seven investigates the indications of the findings of this study for both theory and practice in diverse fields and disciplines. These fields and disciplines include the adult education, feminism, cultural wealth, and the post-colonial. Acknowledging these theories, I divide the chapter into four sections that speak to the four bases of this study. As a conclusion, I present my reflections on the significance of this study and give suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE

DHI WEST RERU: GOING TO WEST RERU

In this chapter, I present an account of my preparations for the research into the *chwuech* activities of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group. Translated from Luo their name means, “After the wise ones.” They informed me that when they compared themselves to similar groups, they considered themselves a little sluggish in attaining the kind of fruitful organization they currently had. Then, I describe the preparation I made for this study, for which I collected data, primarily, as a participant observer—an experience that I adapted, within the West Reru study, into the Luo family life architecture of *kit dak*. *Kit dak* is a concept in the Luo epistemology that describes the complex family life design with its intrinsic and indigenous gender, age, and site specific compartmentalization. I drew on the complex essence of the community structure of *kit dak* to access and collect data from both me, as the principle research instrument, and fellow participants in the study.

In rounding off the chapter, I recount the challenges I anticipated and the ones I actually came across in the field. I also describe the adjustments I needed to make to accommodate the new unplanned for arrangements. Last but not least, I make brief mention of what I determined to be the statement of this investigation.

Outside Looking In

When I first conceptualized this study, I had planned on carrying out interviews with women group members who produced the three *chwuech* forms that form the heart of this inquiry; these are pottery, basketry, and *muono*. In my naiveté, I was going to ask them to describe to me how they were taught and how they learnt the skills they had. My advisors suggested that I seek out other methods that would give me more wholesome data. They pointed out the choice position I held when compared to other would-be researchers in the same context. I was an indigenous scholar going back into my community and so relatively familiar with its socio-cultural essence. I could afford to take the risk of adapting a more prolific and inventive data collection method such as being a novice-apprentice to the women groups that produced the three creative forms.

Additionally, by this kind of engagement in the study context, I would affirm the importance of the indigenous adult educational processes and consequent interactions that accompany these processes. Moving forward, I proposed that this study be informed by, among other theories, both the feminist and its complementary post-colonial theory. In both these theoretical schools of thought, an ideal research study was one guided by a give and take relationship in which both the researcher and the participants gained, in some way, from the study (Dueli-Klein, 1979; Marker, 2003; Menzies, 2001; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; and Weiler, 1988). Mohanty (2003) and Okeyo (1981) however believe that a few scholars described as Western feminists are reluctant to politicize feminism in ways that enable the movement to interrogate issues that face women in developing countries. The two scholars, and others who hold similar views, think that only when the Western feminist movement, in

its range of shades, acknowledge comprehension of the various dynamics that impact the lives of women in the developing world, can these women feel they belong to a collaborative sisterhood.

For my research, the mutual gain would emanate from how I conducted myself and the kind of relationships I built with the other participants. Assuming the position of a novice-apprentice to *chwuech* would enable me to affirm the *chwuechgical* activities at various levels. I would affirm the activities as a Luo, a woman, a former school teacher, a learner in an American university, and one who had an “other world” perspective as derived from my experienced as a scholar in an overseas university.

It was apparent to my fellow study participants that I did not wish to learn these forms of *chwuech* to make a living from them. In many ways, I held the position of a leader in my community; I was certainly elite by my level of education and social standing. Leaders, such as me, did not earn a living through *chwuech*. Instead, we used the skills Western education had bequeathed us to get government or private sectors jobs. This elite status conferred upon my type certain responsibilities in our community. Among these duties was that, I was expected to contribute to the effort to initiate and stimulate sustainable development. Freire and Faundez (1992) acknowledged that intellectuals could best serve their communities in leadership capacities because they had the aptitude to examine their community from multiple perspectives that they had acquired by interacting in their circles. The two scholars suggested that intellectuals should be co-creators of vision in conjunction with members of their community. This would entail that “... their words and their actions should coincide as closely as possible”

(p.55). If this ideal is not struck then the intellectuals' words spoke louder than their actions.

I thought these teaching and learning activities that women get involved in, were a good base for sustainable community development. By taking the stance of a participant observer as adapted into the *kit dak* architectural concept of the Luo epistemology, I hoped to be like a mirror that reflects my fellow participants' activities back to them. I hoped that this reflection would affirm the importance of these activities in the community. Freire (1970) particularized photography for being a medium that reflected back society on itself and thus raised the critical consciousness of individuals in it. When an individual's critical consciousness is raised, the change sparked in him or her affects others. In my case, I thought that submitting to be a novice-apprentice to the three creative forms and the use of photography would spur a semblance of the change that Paulo Freire suggested photography would engender.

My academic advisers' suggestions that I seek out other more appropriate data collection instruments for this study had created for me an uncertainty about my next moves. Nevertheless, I first made a record of my strengths and weaknesses going into the study. I examined what my biases and assumptions were and how they would impact my acquisition of the creative skills. I did all this while keeping a reflective journal starting a month before I went into the field and throughout the time I spend in the field. The journal enabled me to plan for and reflect upon events after they had happened. Janesick (1999, p. 506) made this comment about journal writing, "The notion of a comprehensive reflective journal to address the researcher's self is critical in qualitative work due to the fact that the researcher is also a research instrument." I knew that I

would be emotionally involved in this study just by the fact of being a live research instrument. Janesick further acknowledged that keeping a journal provides a major source of data for a study because it enables the researcher to appreciate his/her role as a qualitative researcher, emotionally involved in the study.

A personal attribute that I knew would enhance the quality of this research was my ethnic orientation and origins. But the ethnic advantage does not deliver an absolute victory. It is true that I am a member of the ethnic group on which my research focuses. At the same time there are many things about this group that I do not know. I consider myself a product of two worlds. I lived, and experienced the dynamics at play, in an urban setting when school was in session. I often visited my late grandparents, who lived in the Luo traditional lands, only during school breaks. From these visits during the breaks, I got to understand and learn about the traditional beliefs and practices of the Luo. My two worlds did not merge seamlessly because every time I crossed the boundary from one to another I felt as if I closed one door and opened another into the next world. For instance during these school breaks I never studied school work and likewise during the school sessions, I never once got a chance to play or involve myself in activities such as *chwuech* that I tried out at my grandparents' home. So, for the present study and to try and bridge this gulf, between my two worlds, I carefully selected a contact person, Nyar Asembo, to assist me

I believed one of the skills necessary to immerse myself among my fellow participants was to articulate the Luo language in a way that would facilitate successful communication in the study site. I needed to be articulate in the language enough to be poised to pick out and relate to what Agar (1994) referred to as the "rich points of

language.” Michael Agar discussed the intimate intertwinement of language and culture. Anyone who shares the culture and language of a group of people may constantly pick out nuanced meanings in the use of everyday words in that language. Because culture is the totality of a peoples’ way of life it includes how this differentiated, and homogenous, in some ways, group of people make meaning of their relationships, language and other such aspects of their existence that require them to engage others in the community. It is how and what individuals in such groups use to bridge the space between them and other people in the group to effect productive interaction. In this study, I needed to watch out for, and relate with, the ‘rich points of language’ in my interactions with fellow participants.

I also had rudimentary knowledge of the skills I wished to learn. I had never taken my time to go through the whole process of learning these creative forms but had learned, in passing parts of the processes in which I found my late grandmother and her friends in Karachuonyo area of Western Kenya engaged. This learning was frivolous and ephemeral, at the least, because I did not intend to put the skills I learned, to productive use. I remember learning how to decorate gourds from my grandmother, watching and helping her *muono* walls of houses in her home, all these done and left alone as I went back to Kericho, school, and later a teaching career and my “urban” community of practice. As a result of these early life experiences, I knew a little about the making of pots, baskets and *muono*. However, it is important for me to mention here that I always believed that I lacked the dexterity needed for the production of superior works of the fine arts. At the inception of this study, I even wondered if I had the ability to learn those fine skills.

An attribute that I thought could both impede and enhance the conduct of the study included my being a student and a formally trained school teacher of many years, with what I considered advanced levels of formal educational achievements. I kept wondering if these years of negotiating these social and academic circles had made me lose the skills necessary to socialize successfully in alternative circles like the one presented in this study. On the other hand, I also speculated that my many years in academic settings could positively enhance my experience in the indigenous educational context in the study.

A further point I perceived as a disadvantage in the study was that I had been born and largely raised and lived among the Kipsigis ethnic community of Kericho in Western Kenya. To confound my mixed experiences further, I had been away from Kenya for three years prior to my return to conduct the study among rural Luo women. In my many years in school and college, I got to learn and be trained in Western methods of inquiry, never in indigenous ways of doing so. This made my current study the first time I designed a study employing appropriate ways to carry out research with indigenous populations.

Nevertheless to ascend this mountain (my study), I started out by successfully requesting for formal research permission from my university's institutional review board (IRB). After that, I contacted Nyar Asembo, my contact person for the study, and asked if she could introduce me and my intentions to women groups in Lwak area. I considered myself lucky in that I knew Nyar Asembo in her capacity as a relative to my sister from my sister's marital home and so had had prior interactions with her in alternative settings in the community. Nyar Asembo was also a civil servant who had worked, before

retiring, with the department dealing with community development in the Kenyan ministry of Home Affairs. This department promoted the formation and employment of women groups for sustainable community development. She also happened to be the coordinator of *Bang' jomariiek* women group. These factors worked for me in the choice of area of research and group of participants.

The few criteria I articulated to Nyar Asembo over the phone was that I wished that the women groups she chose had, as some of their activities, the production of pots, baskets and *muono*. I also wished that these groups be ones that drew membership from the rural area settings and preferably the Lwak area, for its close proximity to my sisters' marital home in which I would reside for the duration of the study.

Living in my sisters' rural home would be most ideal for me because she, as opposed to most of the people in the Luo rural areas, had afforded and installed electrical power in her house. This would allow me to run both my laptop computer and cameras that needed periodic charging. Without provision of electricity, I would need to spend valuable time out of the study seeking electrical charging services in the market centers. I also would invariably need to make my daily field notes at the end of the day by kerosene lamp light and knew from experience growing up in a place with frequent power outages that trying to study in weak kerosene lamp light was strenuous.

Additionally, just like Wolcott (1978) when choosing the main participant in his ethnography *The man in the principal's office*, I had an idiosyncratic, if not more of a selfish reason on my part, in wishing to have a study site that would allow me to live in my sister's home. In his time Harry Wolcott had made a decision not to work with one school principal whose style of attire Wolcott disliked and whose patronizing manner

with pupils he did not care for. For me, my last and selfish reason for wanting this study to allow me to live in my sisters' home was that the home was quite modern, with basic amenities that pandered to creature comfort. These amenities included a radio, television, and electrical cooker. I thought it would be nice and convenient to, not only, keep abreast of the news in the world but to also make my meals relatively fast using the cooker, as compared to either the charcoal or firewood stoves commonly used by women in this area. I cared neither for the labor involved in securing the last two fuel types nor for the same in preparing meals with their use. I thought that it was important for me to be as comfortable as I possibly could to avoid any unnecessary bias that could have emanated from my creature discomfort and trickled onto my study processes. I was yet unaware what impact these bias would have on the study.

Another reason for wanting the study to be around Lwak area was that women groups who drew membership from a relatively small catchment area excluded those that I normally refer to as "armchair" members. These type of members hardly attended group meetings because they lived in urban centers, but were on hand to benefit from such groupings' supportive services during occasions such as family bereavement at which time funerals were conducted in the rural areas.

At first, Nyar Asembo could not understand the kind of study I intended to carry out. When I explained to her that the design of my study necessitated that I be a novice-apprentice to the skills of pottery, basketry, and *muono*, at first she laughed because she did not think I was serious. "*Idwaro chwueyo agulu, okapu gi muono? Mago to idwa timo nang'o?*" (You want to learn pottery basketry and muono? Why would you want to do that?) I wondered why she was skeptical of my intentions. Did she think that a

person from my social and academic circles would have no interest in the creative forms as produced by these rural women? Was she more familiar with researchers who seemed satisfied by only conducting interviews? I was aware of the sizeable amount of research going on in the area regarding the widespread problem of HIV/AIDS in that community. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and its Kenyan counterpart Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) was always engaged in studies among this population in their quest to tame the scourge. Some negative comments about the research work in the area alerted me to either unethical research conduct or inadequate participant education on these processes. As emerged on the first day I made contact with the group, it seemed that Nyar Asembo also had a trying time convincing the participants about the methods of data collection I intended to employ in this study.

Nyar Asembo's difficulties were apparent in the actuality that when I arrived for my first meeting with the group, members had made some shoddily done pots and baskets. They had thought all I needed was to interview them about the processes that they went through to learn the creative skills. They regarded me with surprise and skepticism when I let them know that I actually intended to be taught the three forms of creative expression as made up the gist of this study. I further assured them that I was ready to involve myself in any activities that formed a part of the learning process

It is important to be transparent and frank with study participants to avoid issues of colonial arrogance as reiterated in post colonial studies. Post-colonial scholars, (Fitzgerald, 2004; Marker, 2003; Menzies, 2001; and Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) stressed the importance of forthrightness in not only getting the required permissions but also in discussing the research intentions and use of study results with participants in indigenous

communities. When researchers are fair to the participants in their studies, they all enjoy the research process. I wished to enjoy the time in the field with my fellow participants and avoid any misunderstandings, so I set out to *keto weche te e lera* (explain) myself.

Keto weche te e lera is an aspect of cultural conduct that is considered very important among the Luo people. In addition to this ethnic notion, I also drew on ideas and values from feminist, post-colonial, and adult education scholarship and complemented it with insight from ethnographers and anthropologists before me, such as Behar (1993), Mead (1946, 1975, 1977), Mintz (1960), and Wolcott (1978). The aforementioned scholars allowed their participants to know that they were involved in research studies whose results would be disseminated in scholarly circles. Further, Agar (1980/1996) underscored the importance of prudence in handling the process of letting participants in a study know your intentions. Wrongly worded, this disclosure could sound the death knell to any field work. Agar related how, when initiating a study with narcotic addicts in New York, he at first had potential participants walk out on him when he mentioned that he worked for the narcotics addiction control commission. These people had had some bad experiences with that commission and avoided its agents. In view of the preceding discussion, I was forthright with the participants about my intentions without being patronizing nor condescending.

To avoid the error committed by Agar, I informed the participants that my intention is scholarly. I would also feel free to use the material in ways that I considered proper taking care not to jeopardize their interests. I promised to facilitate a member check at the end of the study for them to endorse the material I had collected. I explained my belief that the productions of the creative forms and the women group sites of these

productions were important for spurring sustainable community development. As a result of this belief, I wished to learn these forms so I could document the teaching, learning, and production processes used with them. Lastly, I explained, I needed to be able to give basic descriptions to any person who wished to know the processes in *chwuech*. All these explanations and requests out of the way and seemingly acceptable, Nyar Asembo then continued making plans for me to be novice-apprenticed to the *Bang' jomariiek* women group and have the venue of the study in West Reru and not Asembo's Lwak area as I had envisaged. Prior to this, I had applied and received a research permit from the National Council for Science and Technology (NCST) of Kenya.

Indeed later in the course of the study, I went ahead and believed, but did not verbalize, that the fact of the members making picture and video-records of the study was a form of member check on their part as they choose what to record. The participants requested that I make copies of many photos for them to take home as souvenirs of this study. With all these aspects of the study out in the open, I asked members how they would like to show their endorsement and acceptance to be participants in the study. They decided to do a kind of roll call that I was to capture on video tape. In this roll, they mentioned their names and their maiden home areas.

Luoro: Respect (Matters of Ethical Concerns)

It emerged from the initial meeting that my fellow participants' immediate worry was whether I could walk the 10 kilometers one way to the Nyalaji clay collection area and back with about 10 kilograms of potting clay. After I affirmed that I was ready for this study in its entirety, they held a short meeting among themselves. The chair of the group, *jakom*, informed me that they had decided to spend more time with me so I

could learn the creative forms I had chosen. They had just realized that the time they had set aside was not going to be enough for me to acquire comprehensive skills in the creative forms. They decided that for every form they would let me spend up to eight hours a day, on a five day week. They also decided to invite an expert potter from the Nyalaji area to train me in pottery. This time commitment necessitated that members spend more of their precious time with me. It was the rainy weeding months of the year. Commonly in this area, as in many areas in Kenya, women form the backbone of the agricultural food production labor in homes. Theorists and activists working within the Women and Development (WAD) community development framework have persistently raised the concern that although women form the backbone of agricultural production in many parts of Africa, the fact of their contribution does not get much attention from the worlds' development agencies (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000). Policy makers who informed practitioners do not articulate this information about African women and agricultural production in their reports.

I needed to compensate the participants for their time away from their farms and other women's chores. I had already informed Nyar Asembo that I would compensate the participants but had not discussed the fine details of the remuneration. I was particularly conscious of the need to exercise fairness about the demands of my study on the participants and to impinge on their resources as little as I could. Scholars such as Pillwax (1999) extolled this fairness in demands and processes that researchers should make of their indigenous study participants.

Later in the same meeting, we held a short discussion about how the members wished to be compensated for their time. They needed to create more time in their

typical day to attend to their farms and this necessitated waking up earlier to weed their farms or doing it later in the evenings after our day's activities. They suggested that I compensate the group with about 500 dollars for the study. For participants who so wished, they could hire farm hands to weed for them in the period that they were committed to the study. I haggled with them and got the figure reduced to about 400 dollars. In turn, I decided to pick up the bill for our joint meals at Nyar Asembo's home. In predominantly agricultural rural Kenya, nutritious food is relatively accessible and affordable. I committed to spending about 500 dollars in the study. We all decided to start with pottery, then basketry, and *muono* in that order. I obtained permission to record the proceedings of the study. I also requested help in making video, photo and audio recordings whenever I was unable to handle the recording gadgets. Initially, I only taught Nyar Asembo how to take photos and videos but it soon transpired that all the members got to learn and utilize the cameras as the study progressed.

In an early meeting I had asked my fellow participants how they would like to be referred to in this study. It is common for the Luo to refer to women by their birth place's name. This was not only considered respectful but also endearing. Nyar Asembo means daughter/girl/woman of/from Asembo area. The participants requested to be referred to likewise in the study; those being their common referents in the community. In the cases where there was more than one participant from one area, they specified what more to add to their referent to tell them apart. I did not think it important that participants address me in a particular way, consequently I happily answered to *Nyar Ugenya, japuonjre, japuonj, mwalimu*; all polite salutations.

I had informed the others that I was recording some of the interactions I observed in the site, even when I was physically engaged in the learning activities at hand and, seemed not to be aware of people. This information had caused them to be guarded in what they discussed at first, but as I gained more “insider” status in the site, they dropped their guard and got more relaxed and “real” in their interactions. Wolcott (2008) pointed out that, because of the sustained engagement that researchers had in a study, participants inevitably relaxed and related to each other normally as if the researcher was not among them.

This relaxation enabled me to collect information that I considered both flattering and unflattering to some participants and community members. I had to decide how I was going to present the unflattering, but nonetheless essential information, to ensure that I maintained ethical standards as required of me by this study’s design. Wolcott (2008) suggested that the researcher, in the face of unflattering but pivotal information, may report such data in a way that it is most harmless to the concerned participants. I have decided to present such information as I deem corrosive, by referring to the participants involved in the interaction as Nyar Kama Bor (daughter of a far off place) for the one who the information would not flatter and Nyar gi Telo (daughter of the rulers) for the antagonist(s). These two terms are generally used as terms of endearment to any women and so will easily create anonymity when I employ them in this report.

Inside Looking Out

Finally, we were ready to go on with the study. I had gained the first levels of entree into the group. I quickly realized there was other levels to scale as I negotiated my

way further into the community that *Bang' jomariiek* constituted. Language was one such barrier that I needed to overcome. Agar (1994), commenting on language use and meaning, studied the irony of a shared grammar and dictionary that did not always result in a shared meaning in conversation. A shared meaning resulted from a mutual culture in what he referred to as languaculture. This shared meaning came from the speech acts or language in use; what behavior accompanies speech. I needed to delicately find my way into the languaculture of the West Reru site.

On the first day of pottery training we started off by making the journey to Nyalaji to collect potting clay. This turned out to be a pilgrimage from which I emerged changed forever. I experienced both the hardness of the Luo women and got a measure of acceptance into the *Bang' jomariiek's* fold. Earlier, on our way to Nyalaji, I could sense that my fellow participants were a little guarded in their conversations. They chose what I considered safe topics of conversation, like the weather, the anticipated harvest for the year, and such general topics. After about 8 kilometers we came to the bridgeless River Awach. Many of the participants were worried that I could not cross the shallow, but fast moving river. I did. This, in a way, proved to be a turning point in how I was perceived by the participants. It was as if I had opened a hitherto closed door and walked across the threshold to the 'inside' and acceptability.

From this point, the conversation started being relaxed and more honest. On the return trip, I made sure I carried the same amount of clay as the others without complaint. It was particularly trying for me to go up the stony paths on the hillside with my heavy load of damp clay and as a result we all got very tired at the end of the trip as shown in the haggard picture we make in Figure 1.1 below. There was a lot of banter and good

humored teasing on our way back from Nyalaji. For instance, I listened as some participants discussed how they had advised a fellow woman in the community to go for anti-retroviral therapy for HIV infection, early enough to avoid fatal sickness.

“Ber tuo matinde ni en ni omio ji thuolo mar manyo rieke chon. An kane mio no onyisa ni jaode ndilo yath pile kendo gi sache morito gi gero an ne anyise ni tang’. Ang’o momiyo orito seche ne mag muonyo yath. Dhi mondo opimi to ka in gi tuo to mondo okonyi chon kapok weche okethore.”

(The good thing about this new illness is that it allows you time to make informed decisions about various issues in your life. When she [the sick woman] told me that her husband was taking medicine regularly and was fiercely guarded about keeping medication times, I told her to take caution. I asked her to go take a test early so she could be given appropriate help before matters got out of hand.)



Figure 1.1. Image showing some tired participants after collecting clay from Nyalaji area.

Statement of the Problem

This study is designed as a means of applying adult educational resources towards addressing the problems of struggling women in indigenous communities. It (the study) is a form of educational program that is activist oriented and geared towards the

empowerment of the marginalized members of the society. The *Bang' jomari* women belong to this category of people and as a researcher who is familiar with these women and the social economic and political conditions in which they live, I am in a perfect position to empathize with their challenges. I am also best placed to appreciate their potential.

In this study, I considered that I had something of a basic insider's perspective; something of what Maina (2003) acknowledged having when she went back to collect data among teachers in the Kenyan school, in which she had been a teacher. She could relate to their perspectives on various issues. I, too, could identify a little with the circumstances of my fellow participants. I was raised by a single mother in humble settings. My mother struggled to raise the five of us on her meager salary of a chamber maid. She had got the job in a hotel in Kericho, Kenya. Daily she came in contact with visitors at the hotel, among them women who appeared financially independent. My mother attributed this to their attainment of high education which enabled them to get well-paying jobs. She, herself had attained some education but not enough to allow her live with the comfort she saw among these women. She wanted this comfort for us. She scrimped and saved to see us through school; a real feat when I consider what she earned. My siblings and I learned to do without many things that children from other families took for granted.

Later, I was to become a single mother of five children, one of my own and four of my late sister's. These facts prepared me to understand the challenges single, widowed, or divorced mothers went through to raise their children. Many of the participants in this study were in this category. Their situation cannot even be compared

to mine because I raised my children on a school teacher's salary; they have needed to raise theirs through the production of devalued agricultural produce.

Further, I was a deputy head teacher for over seven years in a girls' boarding secondary school. Our school's catchment area was predominantly made up of poorly-paid workers of the surrounding sugar cane plantations. In what is akin to the struggles to live, as described by Mintz (1960) of the sugarcane plantation workers in Puerto Rico, I witnessed the challenges, sometimes insurmountable, parents and their children went through in their effort to acquire expensive advanced levels of education. Both the parents and their children believed that these levels of education would result in a better life. Many are the times that I witness the heart wrenching sight of girls who had to leave school and give up their ambitions of acquiring higher education in order that their brothers do so on the little available financial resources in the family. This was a practice that resulted, partly, from the patrilineal focus of the *kit dak* Luo epistemology. Men were owners and main managers of homes. They, therefore, were the best people to invest any available resources that would build their capacities to continue with these responsibilities.

While working in women's programs, as a volunteer, I came into contact with many women who were HIV positive and were trying to make the most of their lives, and often, their children's. I was thus familiar with the resilience and strength that women had when they were confronted by life's rough patches as detailed by feminists especially Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni as quoted in Arndt (2000), hooks (1989), Mohanty (2003), Okeyo (1981), Ong (1988), and Walker (1983). I watched some

women employ community resources available to them to rise from poverty and disease like the proverbial phoenix.

Indeed, studies have shown that women form the majority of the most economically poor in the world and their level of poverty is rising faster than that of men (United Nations, 2001). Rising poverty contributes to the marginalization and disenfranchisement of women. Studies have found out that gender disparity tends to be greatest among the poor (World Bank, 2001). Without essentializing women, I might conclude that it is common for women affected by economic poverty to ineffectively exercise their agency in their communities. As Kiluva-Ndunda (2001) found when studying women's agency in the provision of education to their children in Kilome, Central Kenya, poverty that marginalizes indigenous Kenyan women and inhibits the realization of their agency also negatively affects the development of the country. Poverty affects women in many ways, depriving them the ability to deliver on their traditional roles as of wives, mothers, care-takers, and providers (Ellis, Cutura, Dione, Gillson, Manuel, & Thongori, 2007; Feldman, 1983; and Karani, 1987). When these women take up practices such as the production of pots, baskets, and *muono* they can use this as an opportunity to improve their economic status.

In this Chapter, I discussed the conception of this study and preparation I made prior to carrying out field work. I also describe the adjustments I made on the initial days of the field study after coming against issues I had not planned for. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods I utilized to collect data in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

SITE, POPULATION, AND METHODS

This chapter describes the study area of West Reru. I take a little time to depict the two “classrooms” we assigned ourselves at this site. The first is a mobile classroom which we set up under a tree in Nyar Asembo’s compound and which we could relocate to a more comfortable place according to the prevailing conditions, as we did one rainy day when we set it up on Nyar Asembo’s porch. The other classrooms are our site-specific classrooms. These were necessary for learning site-specific activities like *muono* and the pot firing processes.

Later, I explain the method and consequent instruments I used to collect data at this site, starting by describing the core framework of the *Kit dak* concept of the Luo family architecture. This concept is located in the Luo community’s epistemology. I adapted the participant observation and other data collection instruments on this concept to enhance the authenticity of the resultant data. It is the suggestion of post-colonial scholars such as Diouf, Sheckley and Kehrhahn, (2000), Menzies (2001), and Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), among others that study instruments developed by Western scholarship need to be adapted appropriately for use with indigenous communities. This is because of the difference in epistemological systems that may render such instruments unable to secure reliable data when used in other contexts. The challenge posed by the use of data collection instruments across such settings comes from the history of relationships between the sponsors of the scholarship institutions that developed the instruments and

indigenous communities; it was that of a master and servant. Essentially, those instruments were like the proverbial master's tools that Lorde (1984) considered as, being unable to dismantle the master's house. Using such tools, then, would only propagate the master/servant, knower/ known, judge/judged dichotomy that the colonist established when he settled among indigenous communities. This is the type of relationship that has spurred calls for indigenous scholars to be at the forefront of conducting research with, and in, their communities by academics such as Collins (1998), Marker (2003), Menzies (2001), and Moreton-Robinson (2000). The above mentioned intellectuals believe that research that is carried out by indigenous scholars working among members of their community have the potential to have a decolonizing effect on both the researcher and their participants. Inherited power relation is a dynamic that still impacts aspects of life in these indigenous communities and, possibly, the indigenous researcher's life as well.

Jo West Reru: People of West Reru

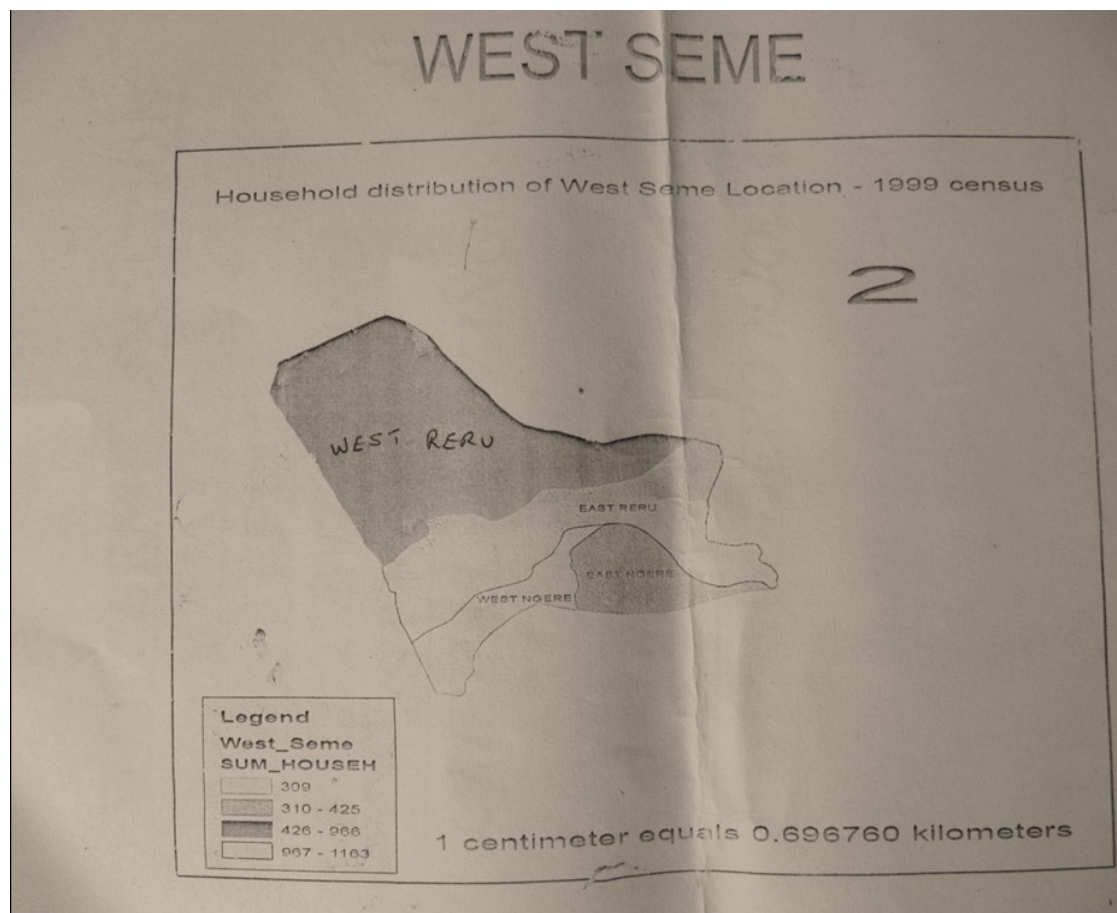


Figure 2.1 Image of map showing West Reru sub location of Kisumu East District.

My impression, traversing parts of West Reru, (shown as the Northern shaded area on Figure 2.1) on motorcycle every day on my way to and from the study venue, is that the West Reru population is dominated by agrarian life. On hillsides, plains, and at the banks of shallow rivers, there are undulating farms of the staple foods such as corn, beans, millet and sweet potatoes. During the weeding season, such as this, the farms have the lush and succulent deep green color of healthy growing crops. The refreshing and picturesque sights of the fields would never give the casual observer any inkling into the amount of manual labor that goes into such farms to make them look that healthy. On these farms, I could also see sim sim, cassava, and a variety of vegetables. Rural farmers

in West Reru keep farm animals such as cows, donkeys, goats, sheep, and poultry including chicken, quail, turkey, and geese. Many are the times when Ja Seme, the motorcyclist who took me to the study site daily, needed to evade a chicken that wandered into the path of our motorcycle.

Women form the majority of the agricultural workforce in this area. They dot the hillside farms in their most tattered of apparel, usually reserved for farm work, weeding or planting in this rainy season. They look like the proverbial busy ants toiling for their colony.

In this area of about 15.1 square kilometers with a population of about 4500, there are six public primary schools, namely the Nyaundi, Rapogi, Okuto, Ramoye, Opande, and Ochara primary schools. The co-educational secondary school, Rapogi Mixed, is also found in the area. The area has a few private schools of the primary and secondary levels. Most parents opt to take their children to public schools to avail themselves of the free primary school education. The Kenyan government enacted free primary school education in 2003 and parents only need to provide their children with school uniform, and any extra school supplies that become necessary. In addition to this concession, public schools are staffed by the government with a corps of qualified and trained teachers from mostly public teacher training institutions, the best institutions in the country.

West Reru has two health dispensaries-Opapla and Arito-which offer basic health care and refer patients to Kombewa district hospital when they need specialized care. These medical services are very important in this area because there is a problem with the common malaria and a sizeable HIV infection rate. In the case of HIV, the infection rate

may seem amplified here because it is common for people to retire to their ancestral homes when they get too ill to continue with their jobs in towns and cities and by this action also make these areas a place where people come to die.

Apart from the dispensaries, the area has eight clan elders representing the eight clans, namely the Konywera, Kokelo, Kadinga, Kombija, Kaura, Kopudo, Koyoo, and Kodita. These elders, chosen by clan members, are responsible for, among other clan management issues, the timely and comprehensive conveyance of necessary information from the government branches in the area to clan members.

There is a public health outfit in the West Reru community called the *nyamrerwa* system. Loosely translated, it means a favorite traditional healer. In this system, particular members of the community are chosen by the local administrative branches of the government to act as a first line of health workers in their community. The *nyamrerwa* groups of community public health workers are offered basic training in healthy living skills by officers from Kenya's ministry of health. They are then mandated to share the information thus acquired with community members in their areas of operation. Their responsibilities are myriad and range from advising community members on public health matters, from how to avoid epidemics namely cholera, through keeping safe from HIV infection, to good habits for successful living in the community. Nyar Asembo was the coordinator of the *nyamrerwa* group of health workers for the area around our West Reru site.

Our Outdoor Classroom



Figure 2.2. Image showing out-door classroom under the fig tree.

Our outdoor classroom, shown in Figure 2.2, was in Nyar Asembo's compound which is built on an area of roughly one quarter of an acre. There are three houses in the compound; Nyar Asembo's, her co-wife's, and the young men's *simba*. Apart from these three houses, there was one small dilapidated clay-walled outdoor multipurpose structure and a timber-fenced cattle pen in the compound. In this classroom, we were surrounded by a natural deep green of food crops, trees, and undergrowth during this wet rainy season. This first classroom, or the area we picked out for basketry and some steps of pottery, was about five by five square meters. It made up part of the bare ground under the big and large fig tree in the middle of the compound that cast its shade according to the position of the sun. At any one time this shade covered a large area under it. This

space looked more like a bald patch at the crown of a head with an otherwise luxuriant growth of dark hair.

We prepared our classroom for the day's use by sweeping the mainly dead leaves from the fig tree and chicken droppings. Once in a while, rolled onto our classroom patch would be a few ripe guava fruits that were brought down by the evening rain and which the children in the home had not bothered to snack upon as they went by our classroom on their way to school. One of us invariably snacked on such nature's bounty. After sweeping our classroom, we brought out the mats and, initially, a small chair for our use during the pottery week.

We made the pots seated on the ground with our legs spread wide apart and the pot being made in the space created by our spread legs. At first the potters thought I could not sit on the ground like them and needed to sit on the little wooden child's chair. I tried seating on the chair while cleaning clay but decided that it was too cumbersome and opted for a mat immediately I started my first pot. For the basketry week we brought out the plastic event chairs, for all of us, and for the *muono* week we abandoned our classroom altogether for Nyar Asembo's clay-walled multipurpose structure whose walls we made. On the one day that the rain fell in the middle of the day instead of in the evenings as usual, we sheltered in Nyar Asembo's porch.

On sunny days the fig tree provided a comfortable shade, under which we worked. From the vantage point of our classroom, we could watch some of the goings-on in the village. The foot path that went by Nyar Asembo's gate, and went on for about 10 meters along the perimeter fence of her home, allowed us to be, not only, privy to the comings and goings of some of Nyar Asembo's neighbors but to even hold snippets of

conversation with some of the passersby who were inclined to do so. We could hear quite a bit of the village noises as well. The chicken clucking, birds chirping, cows mooing, donkeys braying, goats calling out, and mostly the conversations people held as they walked by our classroom; all mingling to make up the generous village voice. Once in a while a motorcycle taxi was driven by, with its customer and his or her belongings perched on it. I always stopped what I was engaged in, to marvel as to how much the motorcycle could carry. I, for one, daily commuted to the study site by motorcycle taxi; a means of transport that was quite bone-rattling on the roughly hewn roads and paths we used. In the evenings we could hear the motorcycle that was coming to collect me from about one quarter of a mile away.

We also had site-specific classrooms. These were the natural vocational locations for specific activities. We could only perform *muono* at the site of the hut whose walls we worked on. This was the old clay-walled multipurpose structure in Nyar Asembo's home. It had fallen into disrepair and the clay was coming off the walls. The wooden frames, underneath the clay, were showing and the termites had started eating away at them, leaving gaping holes that threatened to bring down the structure. We also needed to relocate the pot firing exercise to a safe and most suitable spot, for such an activity. For the sake of safety, this was an open area a little removed from the buildings in Nyar Asembo's compound.

Chwuechogical Study Methods with Indigenous Populations

Various scholars, notably Menzies (2001) and Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), have analyzed the importance of adapting study methods, programs, and instruments to the existing epistemologies in the participating community. Writing about adult learning in a

non-Western context of rural Senegal, Diouf, Sheckley, and Kehrhahn (2000) suggested the importance of weaving educational programs into the socio-cultural fabric of the community. They explored how cultural traditions impinged on the adult teaching and learning spaces in the community and came to the conclusion that adult learning programs that adapted to salient aspects in the socio-cultural fabric of host communities, enjoyed enhanced chances of success in these community settings. Indigenous teaching and learning processes were intimately embedded in the essence of the community in which they were found. Because of this, the main ethnographic study method I used in the West Reru study to explore, understand, and explain these processes is closely akin to participant observation but is particularly located in the concept of *kit dak* in the Luo epistemology. This concept defines the family life architecture that celebrates both the collective and individual identity. All members of the family contribute to the interest and fortune of the collective kinship. Nevertheless, each member needs a personal space to reflect and refresh his or her individuality, to be a functional component of the group.

Luo architecture has always catered for this need to celebrate and value individuality within communal identities. The Luo community constructs spaces for people to interact both collectively and individually. The space of the husband is separate from that of the wife. Young girls sleep in the *siwindhi*, which is the old grandmother's house, under her care. The boys sleep in the young men's house, called *simba*. These *kit dak* architectural spaces enable members of the community to participate in the community's affairs fully through mutual interaction, while enabling them to withdraw into their personal enclaves. From these personal enclaves the

individual community members are able to observe the others to better understand their individual psychological locations within the group.

The logic and method of the *kit dak* architecture informed my process of interaction in this study, within the structure of a novice-apprentice to the three forms of *chwuech* among the *Bang' jomariiek* women group. The group mimics the Luo family with its various members who are committed to the collective good and participation but, nevertheless, requires time alone for individual reflection and observation. We, the participants in this study related quite intimately for about eight hours on a daily basis during the investigation in the nearly women only space created by the *Bang' jomariiek* group. However, we still required another level of space, so we all went to our homes at the end of the day, where we enjoyed the physical and spiritual resources of our personal spaces in preparation for the activities of the upcoming day. Indeed, after the first three weeks of research, we needed a longer break, so we suspended the study for two weeks.

As one of the main participants in this study, I also deliberately operated within this *kit dak* indigenous architecture of engagement and distance. I employed the engagement and distance aspect of *kit dak*, to break various barriers between me and my fellow participants, while also building an allegorical bulwark for my intellectual reflection. The barriers I bridged resulted from differences in such aspects as social class and academic achievements between my fellow participants and me in the study. I could open or close the interactive *kit dak* gate, thus constructing an intellectual weir whenever necessary, in a manner that relates the *kit dak* design to the classic participant-observation technique as an instrument of data collection. I adapted salient aspects of the common conventional instruments and poses of collecting data and weaved them in the most

appropriate way into the *kit dak* epistemological concept to optimize my chances of collecting dependable data in this study.

Membership role.

I learned how to make pots, baskets, and *muono* as a novice-apprentice to experts among *Bang' jomariiek* women group. I chose to adapt aspects of the active membership role as propounded upon by Adler and Adler (1987) when they described the main membership roles that researchers could take in their studies. This membership role, when adapted for the study community, saw me get involved in the study as far as I thought necessary to collect comprehensive data from the study environment. I was determined to more actively immerse myself in the community by participating in some non-study focused community engagements as opportunities arose. One evening, for example, I went to admire Nyar Asembo Kochieng's new fishpond, and at another time, I took a few minutes to go the block or two away from our study site to admire Nyar Kano's goats.

Early ethnographers (Mead, 1977, Malinowski, 1922) acknowledged the importance of relating with study participants in non-study linked activities. These could be in community contexts that had no direct links to the focus of the ongoing study. Suffice to state that these ethnographers commonly carried out studies in "exotic research sites" Wolcott (2008: 30), this advice is still relevant even for me, although I like to think of myself as an indigenous scholar and researcher. Indeed, Wolcott affirms that carrying out research in a dramatically different or foreign place no longer defines a good ethnography, and that in the classes he has taught, students have conducted studies in such everyday places such as a skateboard park and bicycle repair shop. Additionally,

indigenous researchers easily get “difference” in their communities because of the fences that sociological effects, such as level of education and social circles, have set up around them.

The active membership role that I took in this study, also complimented the feminist nature of the study methods. These methods seek to underscore: women’s experiences and knowledge, enable appropriate research with women, solve problems that will benefit both the researcher and participants of the study, create a rapport between scholars and participants of studies, demolish hierarchy in scholarship relationships, express feelings and concern for values, and encourage the use of nonsexist language (Weiler, 1988). Feminist methods eschews any study approaches and processes that position women as objects, or mere passive recipients of other people’s actions, as opposed to being subjects actively engaged in their world, defining their own destiny. Feminist theories, therefore, postulate fairness in relations between the two genders at any Geographical location in the world (Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000). Weiler (1988) specified a tri-thematic base for feminist methods. The base is composed of the appreciation of women’s subjective experience, recognition of the consequence of that experience, and a political commitment that comes from the union of feminist theory and policy. This base demands that researchers carry out studies with and not on women. Studies with women affirm the women’s intelligence and valuable everyday experience.

As one of the feminist theories, post-colonial feminist theory postulates approaches that endeavor to give voice to the voiceless by appreciating their circumstances. This is important for women empowerment, a necessary condition to their movement away from their position of oppression (Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Moreton-Robinson explained four major feminist research paradigms as: concern with less privileged women; an aim to challenge production of knowledge by the powerful; giving participants' voice; and, advocating for change in the status quo.

Participant observation.

As a consequence of both the feminist and post-colonial interventions of this study, I employed participant observation as adapted within the *kit dak* concept of the Luo epistemology to be a main instrument of data collection. Dewalt and Dewalt (2001) referred to the participation and observation role that the researcher plays in the field in which she/he puts on the "shoes" of the participant but still retains a level of objectivity that allows her/him to report dependable and relatively objective data from the study. Wolcott (2008) underscored the importance of the first hand experience that the participant observer draws on to relate to all else that takes place in the field. The researcher in this role hopes to access the feelings and emotions of the participants by involving herself in their activities. Thus, being a participant observer among *Bang' jomariiek* women group members made me the primary instrument of data collection in the study.

Additionally, I studied the indigenous adult educational activities that the Luo women of West Reru are involved in, in the social relationships where they naturally occur. Postcolonial scholar Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) mentioned the importance of community relationships and the need to fit into the already existing epistemologies in the community for the success of a study. I believed that had I contrived the setting for this study, I would not have got as wholesome data as I did. In adapting the study to *kit dak*, I hoped to satisfy the second tenet of feminist methods of research, which seeks to

affirm and value women's experience while being firmly grounded in a commitment to praxis (Weiler, 1988). I consider myself aligned with the feminist ideology, so I strive to use the feminist, and particularly womanist, perspective in conversations that I am involved in. Of feminist methodology Weiler argued:

...that an emphasis on the everyday experiences of women and the need for the researcher to locate herself in terms of her own subjectivity is fundamental to a feminist methodology. Moreover a different kind of relationship is called for between knower and known, researcher and object of research (p. 63).

Weiler (1988) further argued that this method should benefit from women's subjective experience and, as Dueli Klein (1983) suggested, it should admit and utilize resources like intuition, emotions, and feelings both in the researcher and the participants of the study. In going into the study as a novice-apprentice and keeping a journal of my "becoming," I looked forward to incorporating in the study findings, the affective aspects of research so favored by those who practice feminist research. In this way only, could I hope to appreciate and be sensitive to both the participants and my circumstances in this study and reflect this appreciation in this study's report, as suggested by post-colonial scholarship (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Marker, 2003; Menzies, 2001; and Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

About researchers participating in their own studies, Wenger (1999) proposed that the learning experienced when a researcher is a participant in her own study is more encompassing of the various aspects that are important in that environment. The comprehensiveness of this learning is only possible through consideration of the multidimensionality of the phenomenon under study, as a participant observer is in a position to operate. Lave and Wenger (1991) referred to situated learning, which they suggest has its main anchor in the co-participation of learners in communities of practice

through the process of legitimate peripheral participation. They explain that communities of practice refer to “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (p. 98).

Of the process of participation in such communities, they explained:

Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills (1991 p. 29).

Further, Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the terms legitimate peripheral participation to connote the process of being involved in a social practice in which learning occurs. In this social practice, the participant may opt for particular learning trajectories, develop identities, and form desired memberships. According to Lave and Wenger, the term “peripherality” is a positive term that has no relation with place in the community, just as there is no place called centre in the community. Peripherality here refers to the point at which the participant in a community of practice gains “access to sources of understanding through growing involvement” (p. 37). It is thus more of a description of a point from which growth begins than a physical position. Learning that starts off as peripheral participation enables the whole person to be involved in the activity as situated in the community. This participation is a constant motion of renewed sets of relations, of person, actions, and the world.

In the West Reru community, I took part in the communities of practice in which the three forms of creative expressions are produced. I gained admission into this community by way of a gate-keeper (Nyar Asembo), with whom I had maintained

contact. In my relations in these communities of practice, I hoped to become engaged in sustained participation in the study in a movement of what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as gaining entrance as a “newcomer” and moving towards becoming an ‘old-timer’ when compared with other “newcomers.” I planned to initiate and maintain a teaching and learning relationship with all the members of the communities of practice that I joined; a rich and diverse collection of important group members who enjoy other forms of relationships with participants. This was in contrast with the common teacher/learner dyad of learning engagements and other research roles.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews.

I employed semi-structured open-ended interviews with which I collected demographic information from six women participants; two members from each of the three sub-groups of the *Bang’ jomariiek* group. The responsibility of who took which interview was left to the groups’ members, because I was not aware of the power dynamics that guide members’ protocol in the groups. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and other postcolonial theorists suggested the prudence of using the already existing epistemologies in the community in making decisions about participants’ roles in a study.

I drew on a minimum amount of time for individual interviews so that the women might feel comfortable during the data gathering exercise. Having been a teacher of adolescent girls, from my interactions with young women in my community, and drawing from the *kit dak* epistemological concept, I believed that my fellow participants would have fewer inhibitions if we held conversations in their familiar surroundings, which would include members of their group while doing their work. This would also help me

minimize any impingement I exerted on their daily routine out of concern that they are busy people who need to maximize their time's production.

From these interviews, I educed detailed demographic information and recorded reports offered about biography, iconography, and method of instruction. I did all this through a conversational process. I followed the practice guidelines suggested by Seidman (2006), when he observed that interviewers need to ask real questions, speak less and listen more to participants, desist from interrupting participants, follow-up descriptions by participants with more questions when necessary, and generally be acutely aware of the interactions in the surrounding environment. In this way only did I hope to keep myself and the participants in the study focused on the interactions taking place at the site. I designed the questions to seek narrative answers from the participants much like the advice scholars give for designing and conducting ethnographic interviews. Spradley (1979) argued that ethnography involves the researcher trying to get insight into the participants' culture and entails the necessity to ask open ended questions that elicit narrative answers.

Photo voice.

One participant from each group and I made still picture records of the process of teaching and learning and the impact of the women's products in their community. In my case, I intended to particularly make still picture and video records of objects and processes in the teaching and learning environment that impacted my journey of "becoming," as I liked to think was one purpose of this study. Although I asked for ideas about the themes of the photographs to be taken, I proposed that they capture salient aspects of the processes of teaching and learning and the impact of the women's creative

productions on the community. This was part of my adaptation, to the West Reru site, of the photo voice data collection instrument as developed by Wang and Burris (1994) in their seminal study in China.

In Wang and Burris' (1994) study, they gave cameras to women in rural China to take pictures in the Ford Foundation sponsored Yunnan women's Reproductive Health and Development Program (YWRHDP). In this project, the rural Chinese women were systematically sampled for representativeness, and asked to take pictures of their everyday activities. At this time, the women were trained by photography experts on how to take appropriate pictures of their activities. These women got to share their photographs with policy makers as the rural women's contribution to policy decisions in their community. In my adaptation of photo voice, the processes I was unable to replicate from the YWRHDP study included not convening a meeting in which my fellow participants could share their photographs with policy makers and thus contribute to policy decisions that affect them. However to mitigate that failing, I intend to share the results of this study with policy makers when I disseminate it widely after completion of my PhD studies and through scholarly talks I give around the world.

Further, in my adaptation of photo voice as a data collection instrument, I did not give expert training to the women photographers but shared with them my knowledge of photography which is rudimentary, to say the least. It is a very good thing for the likes of me, an amateur photographer that the makers of cameras have invested in ones that amateurs can manage with relative success. I resorted to this adaptation of the photo voice process because of the time and resources available for the study. I did not have access to professional photography trainers and the time to train the participants. I asked

willing and able participants to volunteer to take these photos from the limited photography instruction I gave them. Such like adaptation of the photo voice data collection instrument is described by Stewart (1997) and Wang (1998) in the study among homeless men and women in Ann Arbor, Michigan. In this study, the researchers also posted flyers advertising their study at the homeless shelter. They recruited any volunteers to participate in the study and take photos of aspects of their community that they thought were important.

By recruiting volunteers who were willing to learn, I reduced the intrusion of the camera on the on-going interactions, an impingement I believed would occur if I took the pictures myself. Briggs (1986) raised a note of caution on the possibility of such recordings going against the community norms of the participants. To abide to community norms, it becomes necessary for the researcher to gauge when to record interactions and with which instruments. My fellow participants in the West Reru study were better placed than me to know how to negotiate the dynamics of making photo records in their community. I hoped this would increase the participants' ownership of this study and free me to direct my attention to the processes unfolding in the various moments of the study.

I believed the photo voice in an adapted form was especially suited for this participant observer feminist post-colonial qualitative study because of its theoretical basis. This base includes empowerment education as proposed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, which this study planned to do in West Reru. Freire (1970) conceived of the character of ideal education as one that raises the consciousness of the learner. A heightened consciousness results in individual change, which is the beginning of positive

societal change. Freire looked upon education as a force that empowered the individual to re-examine, with a critical mindset, the social, political, and economic relations, and in so doing, unearth inconsistencies that give rise to inequitable distribution of resources in the community. Freire thought that any medium that could reflect society back to itself could function to educate members of the society. He thought photography was an apt medium to do this.

Another foundational tenet of photo voice comes from feminist theories and policy. These theories criticize any approach that retains women as objects and not active actors in their world because such approaches position women as powerless and dependant. According to Weiler (1988), there are three important themes that characterize feminist methods of research; the appreciation of women's subjective experience, recognition of the consequence of that experience, and political commitment to women's issues.

The first theme builds on feminist theory's appreciation that research needs to be carried out with women; never on women. In this way, only, can women's intelligence and experience be valued and honored. Letting women take charge of photography, in a study in which they are participants, is a tribute to this theme of the feminist method. My fellow study participants in West Ruru made choices about what to photograph in line with what they thought gave the best illustration of the information sought by the study.

Feminist methods espouse the recognition of the consequences of women's experience. In what can be true of the adage "experience maketh the man," women's lives are shaped by their experience. They first present this experience to themselves and then to one another and in that way identify common ground among them concerning the

dynamics that impact their lives. When women share such collective knowledge they get to understand the dominant institutions in society that affect their lives in society and how these institutions do this. The women are then better placed to explore alternatives they can employ to negotiate their way about these institutions and improve their lives.

Photography allows women a visual way to place their experience, in society, in perspective. The women are from then on better placed to represent their experience to themselves and then to others. This advantage that photography allows women is empowering, both for the individual woman and the group to which she belongs.

When appropriate feminist theory informs policy, then the political commitment to improve the status of women is satisfied. Photo voice ensures that women, participating in a study, are not given mere lip service by researchers. Photo voice allows these women to highlight what they think is important in their lives. What is highlighted then becomes a catalyst for social action. The ideal that rural women be involved in policy dialogue is elusive, but photo voice is one method of research that draws nearest to this end.

The photo novellas (Wang, 1996) or photo stories, aided the study in collecting information about the effect of the women's creative productions in the community and their perceptions of the value of these products. It also provided information about what the participants thought were the items and relationships that constituted the wealth of their community. This came about when the women took pictures of things they thought had a relationship with their creative productions and their community's welfare. Apart from highlighting the participants' narratives, I also intended to employ these pictures to

orient my readers to the context of the study. But, I was quickly reminded sharply that well laid plans do not always beget success.

Management of the photo voice instrument.

It was not smooth sailing for me to manage the photo voice data instrument in the West Reru community. First, I got back only two out of the three cameras in the stipulated time; after the first three weeks of the study. One member who had a camera was absent from the study on the day I was to collect them. I had suggested, and it had been accepted, that I would receive the three disposable cameras at this time because it was when we needed to take a two-week break from the study site. I would go to Kericho and develop the photos. On my return to the field, we would look at the photos and decide which ones would be included in the study report. As things went, I went to Kericho with two out of the three disposable cameras.

Secondly, after developing the photos from the two cameras, I realized that many of them were not clear, either because of bad lighting, focus or choice of location. After some discussion about this situation, we decided to take the chosen photos again using my electronic camera, which has a better resolution and other qualities important to good photography. This was one of a few instances when the electronic media let me down in the field. I hope other scholars who plan to use photo voice with populations similar, in character, to mine invest more on training participants on the basics of photography and are able to get better quality cameras than I gave my fellow participants.

Reflective journal.

I was aware that I would be both a basic research instrument and also an object in the study in order to be true to the feminist undertones of this study. Harding (1987) and

Lather (1991) suggested the importance of the researcher's ability to reflect on and relate to his/her own variegated biography to understand its impact on the findings they come up with. I kept a journal of my reflections and observation in the process of the study. I made journal entries as appropriate every evening after a session with my fellow study participants. In this journal, I detailed my thoughts about the processes that I was involved in. My reflective journal captured and highlighted long-held views and assumptions I had about the teaching and learning processes in which the participants were engaged. I believed that keeping a daily log in my journal allowed me to be the main instrument in the study as suggested by Janesick (1999). I think it is important that I draw liberally from my journal entries when writing the study report because, after all, the report is written according to my impressions of the study.

As a native of the Luo ethnic community, albeit having been both in the US for three years and also being particularly entrenched in academia, the entries in my journal always proved a valuable source of insight on my status in the community of practice as the study unfolded. Gloria Anzaldua (1987) studied the confounding nature of being a product of different ways of life. The struggle for identity is intense and often the person has to apply herself harder than anyone else to prove her worth and be accepted in the dominant community at the time. I, too, wanted to belong and be accepted by the participants when I crossed the multiple borders; America to Seme, academic to indigenous "academic," teacher to learner, researcher to participant, and back. As I have already articulated, I took it as a challenge when most of the study participants first thought I could not walk to Nyalaji to collect potting clay, and like Anzaldua, I purposed to prove them wrong. The damp clay was heavy, the terrain treacherous, and in addition,

I had not carried any drinking water and consequently got really thirsty and hungry. I slogged on. I was not going to capitulate and let them see that I had been softened by the life experiences I had gone through.

I had already been aware that I was likely to be alienated by my extended stay away from this community as happens to native researchers when they return to their communities for fieldwork. Because of that awareness, I regularly documented, in my journal, signs of acceptability by the women participants of the study. As Fournillier (2009) observed of her experience in carrying out fieldwork among her native Mas' making community in Trinidad after being away for five years studying in the United States:

I had to quickly acclimatize my mind/body so that I could get the most out of this experience...In addition, the fact that I had left my homeland to study in the United States negated my immediate acceptance as a Trinidadian (p.754).

My reflective journal helped me interrogate assumptions about teaching and learning and education that I have collected in my decades as, first, a learner, and then a teacher in Western-style institutions. It was the space in which I got, reflected to me from the entries I made, how much of a product I was of the systems and my times. This space was instrumental in letting me acknowledge the extent to which I had let myself be colonized and the amount of pain I would undergo to extricate myself from these clutches in this journey of becoming that I had embarked upon. This was the same as the awareness that Freire (1970) described as critical consciousness and which was aroused when a person's actions are reflected back to them.

My role as an intellectual, both in the study and in my community, was also brought into sharp focus by the entries in my journal. What was expected of me by the

participants and the community? How was I to negotiate the space created for me by the participants and the community, a space which I thought I may or may not fully claim? Freire and Faundez (1992) discussed the roles of the intellectual in the community. They suggested that intellectuals should be co-creators of vision with the community members. This would entail that “their words and their actions should coincide as closely as possible” (1992 p. 55). If this ideal is not struck then the intellectuals’ words speak louder than their actions. In translating this vision into reality, it was important that the intellectuals always interrogate their intentions about the vision by being clear about whom they were translating with and for whom they were engaged in the task. If all members of the community were not involved, then the vision may never be reality. In my case, the question I needed to ask, and hopefully answer, was: How closely were my words related to my actions?

My own camera.

The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. Audre Lorde (1984)

“Ero, puonja go picha ni” “Teach me how to take photos with this camera.”

Yet, the master’s tools can be used to hand over power to Luo women.

Having earlier dispensed of the three cameras to the chosen participants, I thought of various ways to diminish the intrusion of my own camera with which I sorely needed to record moments of my learning. I thought that this instrument bestowed on me some unfair power over the other participants. By carrying the camera, I became the ‘knower’ seeking out the “known.” As Ong (1988) suggests, issues of power may not be completely resolved in a situation such as I was in, but I determined to make a spirited effort to disarm the impact of my overtly privileged status in the study environment. My

privilege encompassed my enjoyment of aspects of life such as, high educational level, financial independence, and sources of knowledge, that changing times had relentlessly affirmed as premium. In addition, I also had a camera!

I was unable to invite a photographer, because the reality of West Reru is that any photographer I would get for hire would be a man. Women in Kenyan rural areas almost never got into photography. Inviting a male photographer was out of the question. The *kit dak* architecture lays down the gender lines in which men and women may operate. A man closely interacting with the participants, as a photographer would need to do, would retard the depth of discussions about intimate issues considered “women only” such as matters to do with female sexuality.

Mead (1977) recorded the same inhibitions among women participants of her study among the Arapesh of New Guinea. She explained. “I have two women I can use in exclusively women’s groups, but they are too shy if there are any men in sight” (p. 238). The power dynamics that could be introduced in the West Reru study site by the presence of a camera *man* could totally distort the authenticity of our interactions. I, particularly, did not want any distortions to our interactions of which I wanted to believe the passage of time would progressively make genuine. Wolcott (2008) suggested that initially in any study the participants are aware of the presence of the researcher and their role as participants. Consequently, they are bound to behave in ways they think appropriate for the situation. As time goes on the participants are bound to relax being unable to keep up the initial pretense. But for this study in West Reru, my fellow participants would never be able to totally relax in the presence of the camera man. They would forever try to

make him comfortable in appropriate ways, such as getting him something to eat and some such deference to him.

To further explain the unsuitability of introducing a camera man in the West Reru site, I should explicate that Luo men expect preferential treatment whenever they are in the presence of women. I had designed this to be a ‘woman only’ space, borrowing from both the *kit dak* Luo family architecture and the design of like spaces that I had experienced in the days of my grandmother. I had noticed, in the West Reru site, that when a mentally challenged boy of about 16 years old, the son of one of the study participants, came to spend a few minutes with us, his presence affected interactions in the study site. In the time he was there the participants reverted to discussing safe issues as they had done with me on the way to Nyalaji. At meals times one or more participants invariably set out to make him comfortable by setting out his food and making inquiries if he wished for anything else. There were always questions to do with, “*amed i chumbi? In maber? Amedi kuon? Bende iyieng’ adier?*” (Can I add you more salt? Are you okey? Can I add you corn mash? Have you eaten enough already?)

The camera. The verbs associated with it are at best negative: to ‘frame’ the image of the person on the other end, and then ‘shoot.’ ‘Frame’ ‘shutter speed’ how fast it can shoot. Images shot by the camera have been used with devastating consequences the world over especially during the colonial times. It is no wonder that images recorded using the camera have been used to make colonial decisions about people and their resources, just as guns have been used to subjugate the world. With cameras around we cannot afford to have unguarded moments. Cameras doom us to be actors on the stage of life, forever vulnerable to our viewers. When our camera corps keep them away, we

heave a sigh of relief and start behaving normally again. Anyone watching a film recording is familiar with this.

Initially, I randomly and casually request that members take photos and short video shots of processes in which I was engaged in. This was easy for me as the participants had already exhibited an interest in the workings of the cameras I had brought along. They had also made it quite clear that they wished that I get them some paper copies of the photos taken in the study process. This was an easy request for me to satisfy. Consequently, some video shots turned out amateurish, but some were well done, a function, no doubt, of the user-friendly cameras we used. As time went by, my fellow participants took over matters of making video and photo records. They made decisions about what, when, and even the length and number of photos to take of the processes for my later use. They became quite adept at choosing those salient moments in the processes going on.

“Rwa anena agulu ni no mondo agoni picha. Mano nyaka ipar maber nikech ka okipare to chwuech oking’eyo. Ere picha cha? Adwa go nigo kaka iwiro kor ot.”
(Fix the clay rolls well I am taking photos of you doing that. If you cannot remember to do that then you will not have learnt pottery. Where is the camera? I need to record how you are doing “wiro kor ot”).

Further, the act of handing over my camera turned out to be akin to handing over power to my fellow participants. In this act, I became vulnerable to them. I had effectively gone from the researcher to the researched in that one move. At first, I experienced discomfort comparable to withdrawal symptoms at being stripped of my power, being removed from the status of the knower to that of known, becoming the gazed at instead of the one doing the gazing, the researched instead of the researcher. Yes, I squirmed under the unrelenting malevolent gaze of the camera! How

uncomfortable to be the object of the curiosity of the camera, how unforgiving it's fixed gaze is. What do I need to do to find favor with it? Smile for it? Straighten my back? Perform some smart trick in the particular step I was learning?

In the first moments after I had been undressed of my camera, I kept stealing longing glances at it. I could not help going to look over the shoulder of the participant who shot me to see if in her shot she had cut off some parts of me from the picture. "*kiking'ad wiya. Inena te nyaka wiya?*" (Do not cut off my head. Can you see the whole of me up to my head?) I only realized I needed to stop those compulsive questions when Nyar Gem Uranga picked the camera to shoot a scene and her first words before I had even spoken were, "*Aneni te maber onge dendi ma awe oko kata achiel.*" (I can see the whole of you. There is no part of your body I have not covered.) I kept wishing to recapture management of the camera, to taste again the immunity that it gave me against the outside. No wonder people had a hard time letting go of the power they had tasted! I was overwhelmed with feelings of sorrow when I imagine how indigenous communities must feel violated when researchers relentlessly pursue them with cameras and other instruments of data collection. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) discussed this violation of privacy and related that it is totally unsuitable for data collection with indigenous communities. These methods of study that make the researcher superior to the participants results in unreliable data (collected under conditions of intimidation) with unreliable inferences made from the data so collected.

In my case, the deed was done; the camera was out of my hands. I had taught the participants to use it, so I could never again claim back this knowledge and power as mine alone in that site. I become conscious of how lonely I had been on my pedestal.

How I had stuck out like a sore thumb; any casual visitor could easily spot the researcher among the other study participants. This was not good for me as I needed to merge with my fellow participants. But now, the power was already devolved! Slowly I let go and relaxed.

Kwe, Serenity. What tranquility came with the resignation to take the back right seat in this study! (Kenyans commonly regard the back left seats in salon cars as the boss' seat.) The burden of the success of the study was now figuratively shared between the other participants and me. This continually worked out in them taking responsibility to alert me about steps that I needed to film if I was to conserve the salient details of the skills as I set out to do and to do justice to their teaching skills. I could even take a short nap behind my open eyes if I wanted to! My fellow participants effectively became my researcher/teachers. It was as if they were trying to find out just how much Luo was still left in me!

They easily picked up the camera and recorded details such as they thought salient for the study. It was easy for them, then, to order me to engage in certain processes or correct some mistake I had made in the production process of the art forms. I recall when we needed to harvest fresh cow dung and manually mix it with clay to plaster the walls; an activity that I held a strong aversion to, the members kept cajoling and teasing me to continue with it even when I was all but ready to quit. I compulsively washed my hands after every step of handling the cow dung but my fellow participants got me right back handling the dung again, ostensibly because they needed to teach me the next step and record my attempt at that step. I would exclaim:

An: ai yawa ma koro adwaro mana logo.

Nyar Gem Uranga, *Ma ka ionge gi chuny dhako to okinyal. Ka dala ma guok bende nindo e kul to kata chieth guok bende ipo kikwanyo.*

Me: I just need to wash my hands now.

Nyar Gem Uranga: This requires the [tough, resilient] spirit of a woman to accomplish.

At times you may handle dog's droppings with the cow dung in homes that dogs share a shed with cattle.

By giving up the camera I gave up the power it bestows to its manipulator and by extension the advantage that my circles, experiences, and times had bequeathed me as compared to others in society. Despite being stripped of much of these artificial advantages, I could still hold my own in the study among the other Luo women. I was happy that this study had made me realize that I did not necessarily need these trappings of power.

Three Women Groups in One

I had anticipated being apprenticed to three women's groups but it turned out the participants belonged to one umbrella women group with three subgroups divided according to their main income-generating activity. The principle activities for the whole group included weeding group members' farms for a fee of about eight dollars for any size farm (much less than they would be charged by other weeding teams), running a small table-top saving and loan operation, and assisting each other with such issues as they felt competent to tackle. This women group had three sub-groups that concentrated on the three creative ventures that are the focus of this study: pottery, basketry, and *muono*. The creative form's skill acquisition of the members of these three sub-groups

ranged from expertise to apprentice level. Some members were relatively new in the sub-groups and thus at the novice-apprentice or apprentice level in skill acquisition.

At the initial meeting, members had agreed to let me have up to eight hours of every week-day to learn one creative form per week. I felt really accepted in their midst, particularly when I put in perspective the offer the members had just made. As I mentioned earlier, women formed the bulk of the subsistence agricultural work force in rural areas of Kenya, like Seme, and were normally very busy in weeding seasons such as this one, and especially on weekdays. For them to have committed an entire five-day period to my study and to come to Nyar Asembo's home every day of that week, contrary to their habit of rotating meeting venues, was sacrifice indeed. Later on, I learned that some members even woke up at 4 am to weed for at least an hour or two before coming to our study venue. I came to believe that this was the kind of sacrifice they would commonly make for matters educational, be it formal school matters for their children or learning new skills for themselves.

Further, we could not base this study in Asembo's Lwak area as I had earlier planned but in West Reru Sub location of West Seme location in Kisumu district, an area which was a close neighbor to Asembo's Lwak area. This change of study location was because Nyar Asembo's marital home is in West Seme. Additionally, most of the women group members live in the area of West Seme and so even the ones living in Lwak thought it wise to carry out their production activities, for the sake of this study, in West Reru under a big fig tree at Nyar Asembo's home. This was a good venue and a convenient place to meet during my learning days as opposed to the revolving venue arrangement typical of their normal meeting days. This venue allowed us to spend the

vast amount of time we had decided on per day. Additionally, Seme and Asembo have roughly similar climates, terrain, and socio-economic status. This change in my study plans was not unique in that it followed in the practice of a long line of fieldworkers who have often needed to amend their field plans when circumstances in the field change. This change renders some of the planned study conduct untenable. Mead (1977) discussed this predicament when she described how one of her researcher colleague, Ted Schwartz, had to change his plans and base his study in the relatively calm Manus in the lower reaches of the Sepik river of New Guinea. The river had suddenly flooded its upper reaches and scattered the people he had planned to study.

Nyar Asembo organized meals for us, so we did not have to spend so much time on anything else apart from the study. This also helped me relate more closely with my fellow participants. Nyar Asembo also introduced me to a reliable motorcyclist in the public transport business to bring me from my living quarters in Lwak and take me back every evening. I invariably arrived back in Lwak tired, and at times wet (it being the rainy weeding season). Despite all this, I still required to write a report of the day's activities, and download video shots and audio records that I had. This type of transport, though bone rattling on the entirely rough and muddy roads I used, proved a good idea because traversing the area daily allowed me to get familiar and comfortable with my surroundings. I did not mind that most days I had to walk across the two small rivers on my way to West Reru because Ja Seme needed to push the motorcycle through the sticky mud across the small bridges over the rivers. Familiarity with the study area was one advantage I experienced while traveling daily to and from West Reru. The area is very

beautiful with its many hills and river valleys and this gave me a serenity that allowed me to start reflecting on the day's activities even as I rode the motorcycle to and from Lwak.

Nyar Asembo had prepared the groundwork well for me, and by the time I arrived, the village chief had known of my intentions. He gave his blessings for the study and showed his approval for my study by providing me with the information on the administrative areas of the West Seme location of the Kisumu East district. This information included maps showing administrative areas and documents detailing population and area acreage; all documents as usually found in the chief's office. Nyar Asembo had taken the responsibility of periodically letting the area chief know how we were faring. He particularly wanted to know if we were comfortable and if we needed anything which his office could provide. I had also taken the initiative to get a study permit from the relevant department of our Ministry of Education.

In this preceding Chapter I described the population, sample and methods that I utilized to collect data for this study. I explained the various decisions and adjustments I made at the inception of the research and the positive impact these all had on the study conduct. The next chapter depicts short biographies of selected members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group of West Reru. I do this by presenting the demographic information that I collected from six of the study participants. The participants who took these interviews were nominated to do so by their group members.

CHAPTER THREE

KIT MINE MA BANG' JOMARIEK: BIOGRAPHIES OF SELECTED PARTICIPANTS

This chapter contains short biographies of six selected participants of this study. I had requested the participants to choose any six people among them to take the interviews. In these semi-structured open-ended interviews, I sought to collect information about their life history and experiences that bore on the choices they made to be active players in *chwuech*. I put together this information with data I collected from observing them to come up with the brief narratives about each of the six participants. These biographical pieces serve two purposes: putting a face behind the participants and orienting my readers on the personality, temperament, and moral fiber of the artists. All these qualities are pivotal to their successful involvement in *chwuech* activities. I also present reasons that these six interviewees and other participants gave for involving themselves in *chwuech*.

We were 26 active participants in this study; all members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group. A few other members would come into the site irregularly and thus I did not include their numbers among us. This group is based in West Reru sub location but also draws its membership from areas around West Reru such as Asembo. These women, except for Nyar Asembo, my initial contact person for this study, did not acquire enough Western Education to enable them compete favorably for well-paying government and

private sector jobs. Nyar Asembo was a mid-level civil servant before she retired and got actively involved in the various activities of *Bang' Jomariiek*. All the six participants I interviewed left school at the primary school level. The main reason for this was lack of school fees for secondary school education. The frustrations they experienced while trying to get higher levels of formal education may be one reason they are so committed to seeing that their children get as much formal education as they can provide. The artists try to provide their children these educational opportunities through involving themselves in income generating activities such as *chwuech*. These six participants believe that formal education at advanced levels, such as college classes, enables young people to lead a good life because they get good jobs with steady salaries. The six continually talked of their creative productions making it possible for them to provide their children with school supplies and school fees when needed.

Nyar Kano ma Awasi took care of her siblings and ensured they went to school even though she had to end her studies when their parents died. This was an illustration of the selflessness that is commonly found among the women; when they are ready to sacrifice their wellbeing and comfort for others or a 'greater good,' as related by Walker, (1983). The six participants all got married in their teens or within one year out of the teens. The art form they took up offers a form of sustenance apart from the other benefits they got from involving themselves in group activities. The six snapshots follow.

Nyar Kano ma Awasi



Figure 3.1. Image showing Nyar Kano ma Awasi preparing the kiln for firing pots.

Nyar Kano ma Awasi (shown in Figure 3.1) is a twenty year old young woman of about five foot five inches. The relatively stocky Nyar Kano ma Awasi has dark smooth skin that she wears, like the others participants, with not a single trace of makeup. She sports black hair that is easy-to-manage closely cropped. Frequently, the first inkling I would get of her arrival, even before seeing her, at the West Reru study site, was her measured low toned and pleasant voice as she answered to a greeting or some such salutation from someone. She walks in the same tempo that she talks: firm measured steps one would expect to slow her, but which surprisingly made her move about quite quickly. I know this, because I huffed and puffed trying to keep up with her on our trek

to Nyalaji even though she was noticeably pregnant with her second child. This tempo also defines how she relates to her world.

She is a calm and practical oriented person, who forever seems to be assessing situations according to their various components. I never heard a word of complaint from her even at the most trying of times: at the beginning of the second week when we discovered that the pots we had set out to cure in Nyar Asembo's *simba* had been partially destroyed by floods. Many of the other participants hovered about and cursed at our bad luck but Nyar Kano ma Awasi immediately launched into suggestions on how to make the most of what we salvaged. She led us in setting aside the untouched pots, and assessing how best to revamp the partially destroyed ones. With her advice, we only ended up discarding two pots, as the water damage on them was too extensive.

Nyar Kano ma Awasi ended her formal education after grade eight, an equivalent to elementary education level; free for all the people of Kenya. Her widowed mother could not afford to pay the school fees charged in high school. This was an unfortunate thing for her, but she did not argue with her fate. Not going to school anymore, she helped her mother manage their home and take care of her six siblings. She took an active part in farm work and pottery which the females in her family produced. She says of that time:

Minwa ne onyisa, 'Nyathina kadho to ero isekadho to onge kama di ayud nyalo' abende ne anyise ni ase ng'eyo ndiko nyinga gi somo kuma adhiye koro onge taabu.

(My mother said, "my child you have passed [the primary school national examinations] but I have no means [of paying for your education at the next level; secondary school which was until a few years ago charging school fees.]" I also just reassured her that I had learnt how to write and could read signposts if I traveled [so I could go on with my life well].)

Just as well because soon her mother got sick (and later died) and she took up the responsibilities of the household which included her six siblings. Life was hard.

Thankfully she comes from a family of famous potters in Kano Awasi area of Western Kenya. She had learnt these skills from her mother and other female relatives. Her situation, orphan and care-giver at barely 13, necessitated that she make and sell pots in addition to farm production. From the proceeds of pottery she could purchase needed school supplies for her siblings. At 17, she got married and carried on with her ceramic art in her marital home.

The process of making pots takes about a week or two and she has to divide her time between the task and performing her errands as a mother and wife. These errands include housework, agricultural work, and generally taking care of her family.

Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya



Figure 3.2. Image showing Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya carrying reed material for the pot firing kiln.

In contrast with the calm Nyar Kano ma Awasi, Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya is a more agitated and spirited artist. She is a short (about five feet five inches tall and shown in Figure 3.2) medium built woman. She has a shiny smooth dark skin that is typically a Luo characteristic, and which has the ability to withstand the ravages of unlimited time spent exposed to the elements while involved in agricultural work or some such chores. She walks with a firm sure step and talks the same way. Watching her walk into Nyar Asembo's home, one would imagine she was passing right through the compound and going into some distant place for the pace and look of concentration she wore. But the observer soon gets used to Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya's mannerisms which include a lively continuous commentary, in her Ugenya accent, on all topics under discussion. Although

widowed young, she has managed to see all her five children through secondary school, one of them through teacher training college, by conducting fee fundraisers and receiving fellowships. She is very happy and proud that her children got advanced levels of education, and kept advising fellow participants in the West Reru site not to withdraw their children from school when they lacked fees but try all ways to obtain the school fees. She believes that a widow ought to be creative to ensure the success of her children.

Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya is one woman who seemed indefatigable. Apart from her never-say-die strong spirit that saw her children through school, she always seemed to have some bottomless reservoir of physical energy that kept her going from one tiring task to another. On the pottery week, she came to the study site straight from hours of weeding that left her sweating and covered in earth, but surprisingly nimble for one who by all appearances should be exhausted. She would be this feisty through all the tasks of the day.

She got married and came to Asembo when she was 19 years old but is currently a widow, her husband having died many years ago leaving her with young school-going children. She comes from a family of potters and learnt to make and deal in ceramics from her mother, who raised her on its proceeds. She also raised her children on pottery. She supplements proceeds from pottery with those from agricultural production.

Mama wa emane opuonja chwueyo agulu kendo ne ohala ma ne opidh wa go. Kata sani dala wa no en kar chwuech. Dala wa ipuonje kata ji. Ja od owadwa moro nitie ma iluongo ga mondo opuonj ji. Ichule pesa kata jamni mana kaka giwinjore gi japuonjre. Ber maneno e chwueyo agulu en ni en ohala ma onge lal nikech ok a ware gi pesa. Aomo lowo tachako chwuecho. Yien made wanyiewo ndalo moko watong'o atong'a to okorumo to wanyiewo. Kwa tieko to wauso ne jodala, chiro, jowero kamano.

(My mother taught me how to make pots and it was the business venture she raised us with. Even now my maternal home is a site for pottery. People get taught pottery there. My sister-in-law is a pottery expert who is sought after by

many a novice. She gets called to various places to teach pottery. She is paid in money or domestic animals. I love pottery because it is a business venture that does not suffer losses because [most of the material] is free. I collect clay and start making [pots]. At times I cut firewood from our farms. I only buy firewood when I cannot find any more [in my farm]. When I am done making pots, I sell to people in the village, market people, or even wholesalers.)

When making pots, Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya uses about a week or two to complete the various steps. She takes this long because she has other chores to do besides pottery. She thinks that the best pottery teacher should be patient and know how to attend to individual differences among her learners.

Nyar Nyakach



Figure 3.3. Image showing Nyar Nyakach, on the right, demonstrating to author how palm fronds are slit.

Compared to the lively indefatigable Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya, Nyar Nyakach is a more subdued woman who goes about life in a quiet way. She is relatively tall (shown in Figure 3.3, about five and nine inches tall) slender dark skinned woman. She walks with

long light strides and has a soft footfall that any observer easily gets the impression would not exert enough pressure to kill any bug, accidentally, underfoot. She always dons a headscarf of colorful cotton cloth material and always carries a palm frond basket slung on her shoulder. From this basket she would get a wrapper to tie over her skirt whenever we started our day's activities. This apron was important, for otherwise the dye from the fronds would get onto her dresses.

At first sight, Nyar Nyakach appeared to be unsure of herself. She would come to the study site and call out greetings to others in a subdued voice, much like someone who was unsure of how she would be received and was thus using the greetings to test the waters. However, she would quickly contradict this first impression when she started out on the activities of the day. Then she was the mistress of the site. She was charged with the responsibility of managing the proceedings in the second week assigned to basketry. She always started the day with a short prayer asking for our success in the day's activities, then she went ahead to assign duties to the others. These duties involved who taught me what and at what time. She stayed on top of things by competently supervising us all, frequently ordering us to:

*...gony nyaka ka, kwany othith machal kama, to ma gony ichak kendo nikech onge
kaka inyalo los ka koro.*

(...undo here, pick this type of palm frond now, or even start this process all over as this is irreversibly flawed.)

Nyar Nyakach appreciated the value of basketry early. Her mother wove baskets for sale. An early age marked the point where she was introduced to the art form. She went ahead to develop her skills in it, in the handiwork classes offered in primary school. She terminated her formal schooling in the elementary level for lack of the fees charged in secondary schools at that time. She got married in Seme when she was 18 years old in

1973. After she got married, she continued with basketry because it gave her money for household necessities.

She notes that during the rainy seasons, such as this time, it was difficult to get well dried palm fronds. This necessitated that she uses relatively damp fronds and the resultant baskets were not of optimal quality. Palm fronds need to be sun dried soon after they are cut or they bend and become unfit for basketry. Poor weak baskets made from such palm fronds are a financial loss at the market place.

Making baskets involve buying palm fronds and paints to color the fronds. This is a time consuming process and as such, given the chores women have to do in their homes, no one day could be exclusively set aside for basketry. She weaves baskets during the time the *Bang' jomariiek* group meets, but this is only once a week and so is never enough time for serious basket production. She often needs to make more baskets on her own time. Since she has other chores to carry out apart from basketry, Nyar Nyakach always starts her day at 5 a.m. She starts by performing her housework and farm work before settling to making baskets at about 10 am to about 1p.m. At this time, she starts by coloring the palm fronds, a task that takes just an hour or so. She then starts weaving the fronds into long bands of between one and three inches in width and of which length the size of the basket determines. Being a busy person, she intersperses basketry with her other chores the whole day and calls it a day at about midnight.

The next day she makes sisal thread for joining the bands into baskets and on the last day she joins the baskets in a process called *nyono okapu*. In this process, the basket weaver joins together the bands earlier plaited using thread, made of sisal fiber, and a

special kind of large needle. She then sets aside about three or four hours of one market day to take the baskets to the market for sale.

Nyar Sakwa



Figure 3.4. Image showing Nyar Sakwa admiring a design she drew on the wall.

Of all the participants, Nyar Sakwa (shown in Figure 3.4) exhibits a high sense of self confidence and goes about with an air of both sureness and tranquility. She is a medium built light skinned woman of about five feet nine inches. She is a perceivably confident woman who walks with a firm sure tread. Like many of the participants, Nyar Sakwa seemed unable to get tired no matter what tasks in which she is engaged. She illustrates her indefatigable energy in the descriptions she gives of the work she has needed to do to ameliorate her circumstances. She narrates that during the famine period of 2009 when the crops failed she was recruited and worked in the work-for-food

program. In this program, participants cleared undergrowth from access roads using hoes and machetes for hours in exchange for dried corn and beans. In the sun and with the crude implements, this is back breaking work. Nyar Sakwa was widowed young and therefore had no choice but to take up such work to raise her children at this difficult time. Ordinarily, she derives sustenance from agricultural production and *chwuech* activities.

Nyar Sakwa came to Seme when she was 16 years old and has lived here for 18 years. She started *muono* when she was a child. She would play with other children making play houses out of clay, while copying their mothers. Later, as she grew older, she started helping her mother and other women in *muono*. In primary school, the teachers would ask them to repair classroom walls. Then, they would collect clay and cow dung for the task. Much later, Nyar Sakwa got married and was required to *muono* her own house. She drew from the knowledge she already had to make her own house.

She is happy she able to *muono* a house because it enables her to live in a healthy place devoid of chiggers and other such pests. The smell of cow dung on the walls repels both pests and harmful reptiles. Such a house is also dustless. *Muono* makes the houses safe to live in and gives the woman of the house esteem among other women in the village. Nyar Sakwa also makes some gain, monetary or in other forms, when she is invited to help beautify other people's houses or to teach them.

Nyar Asembo Kochieng'



Figure 3.5. Image showing Nyar Asembo Kochieng' admiring her wall work.

When contrasted with Nyar Sakwa, Nyar Asembo Kochieng' appears to have relatively opposite physical qualities. She (shown in Figure. 3.5) is a relatively dark-skinned long limbed wiry woman of about six feet one inch. She walks with long light strides. Any time I walk beside her, such as when she took me to admire her new fish pond, I always seem to be taking two steps for every one of hers. For me, such a walk is an exercise in catching up with both her pace and the running commentary she keeps of the changing scenery. Her commentary goes something like this:

Dala ni nenitia liel nyocha, nyithi dala ni nitie 'university', mio ma dala ni en japuonj 'sikul', wuon dala ni ema pidho kal mang'eng ahinya karwa ka, woun dala ni en wi piny, ma dala yuora. (This home had a funeral recently, this one has children in the university, the woman of that house is a school teacher, the owner

of this house usually plants the most tracts of sorghum in the areas, the owner of this homestead is a clan elder, this is my brother-in-law's home, and so on.)

Like most of the participants, Nyar Asembo Kochieng' ended her studies after she completed primary school because her parents could not afford the fees charged in secondary school. She started *muono* when she was 20 years old after having been married at 16 years. At this time, she required to live in a newly built house. Her mother-in-law trained her on the task and showed her where to collect the various materials needed for this task. She also helped Nyar Asembo ma Kochieng' perform the *muono* task.

Nyar Asembo ma Kochieng' values the knowledge she has because it enables her and her children to live in a clean healthy environment. Her house is well maintained. She avoids the health hazards posed by poorly maintained clay walls which easily get infested with harmful bugs and reptiles. Her beautiful workmanship attracts many women in the village who seek her help in making their houses. For her *muono* work, Nyar Asembo ma Kochieng' gets compensated in various ways according to the ability of her clients. This compensation includes reciprocal labor, money, or even farm products.

Nyar Ugenya



Figure 3.6. Image showing Nyar Ugenya preparing sisal fiber for joining weaved bands of palm fronds.

While Nyar Asembo Kochieng' devotes her *chwuech* time to *muono* and rarely tries her hand on the other art forms of the group, Nyar Ugenya (shown in Figure 2.6 above) at times makes pots in addition to basketry which is the *chwuech* form she is best known for. She is a dark-skinned woman of about five feet six inches and of average build. Nyar Ugenya has been involved in basketry from the tender age of five having started learning from her mother at that time. When she was in primary school, she could purchase her own school uniforms from the proceeds of the baskets she made. Later, when her parents died in quick succession, and being the first born, she took the responsibility of taking care of her six siblings. She was a mere 11 years old. She turned

to basketry and farming for sustenance. Nyar Ugenya left school after completing her primary school education because of the care-giving responsibility that had fallen on her shoulders and also as a result of her inability to raise fees for high school education.

Nyar Ugenya has taught basketry to many women in West Reru area. She is happy to have basketry skills because, combined with agricultural production, it sustains her and her family. Just as Nyar Nyakach, earlier, Nyar Ugenya makes baskets both during the meeting times of *Bang' Jomariiek* and on her own time. When weaving baskets on her own time, she does it in the night from about seven to midnight. She uses this time for basketry because she is busy with house and farm work during the day. She is able to weave up to ten baskets in one week. Many times, her children help her make the baskets.

Nyar Ugenya says it would take between two days to a month for an apprentice to learn basketry depending on how keen and observant they were. It is important that the apprentice be inquisitive and creative enough to try out new designs. From inquiring about, the apprentice gets to know about a good expert from others in the village or at the market place. It is important that this apprentice chooses an expert who is a patient person able to continually encourage the apprentice to learn new patterns and designs.

People use baskets and basketry products in West Reru because they are durable, functional, and decorative. Women in the rural areas often shun plastic paper bags as a means of carrying their groceries home from the market because the plastic bags are easily torn. The loss experienced when these bags tear and spill grocery, make the women decide to invest in the more durable palm frond baskets. Interestingly, many women still pack their groceries in these baskets even when some of the groceries items

come prepackaged in plastic paper bags. In extolling the uses of the palm frond baskets

Nyar Ugenya says:

Okapu ber. Inyalo ting'o moki e okapu kionge gi paro moro ni moki dhi pukore. Kiting'o gik moko kaka mogo ei otas nyaka ipar ni onyalo pubarore ma moki pukre. Aseneno kaka otas ose miyo mine mang'eny asara ei chiro. Ber okapu moro en ni inyalo kene kichopo ot. Mine mang'eny kano cham ei okapu nikech okapu ok keth cham ei yo moro amora. Chwuech othith moko ma ji ohero en par. Wanyalo pedho par ne nyithindo saa chiemo kata saa ma gi dwa nindo.

(Basketry is good. You can carry your flour in a basket without worrying that it will accidentally spill. When you carry things such as flour in a polythene bag, you are always worried that it will spill. I have seen how much of a loss a person can get when the paper bag, they are carrying their groceries in, breaks and their groceries are all over the ground. Another benefit of basketry is that you can store things in it. Many mother stored their cereals in baskets because in baskets they keep longer. Other basketry products that people like include mats which can be spread on the ground for children to sit on while eating or even for them to sleep on at night.

From the short biographies, it is apparent that the participants bring a variety of talents, characters, personalities, and skills to *chwuech*. Some of them are ebullient and extroverted while others are more sensitive and introverted. Some come with a measure of literacy and others only have oral tradition as their literary references. All the participants are married and are care givers to family members, although most of them are widows. They come with this variety of experiences, united by their desire to acquire *chwuech* skills that they can find applicable as they face further challenges in their lives. Despite these collective motivations for participating in *chwuech* projects, each artist brings specific individual and personal nuances to the group's rationales and goals.

Why Participate in *Chwuech*?

Nyar Asembo says that the participants realized that forming a collective would enable them to improve their lives. This idea invokes the remarks by early adult learning theorists who have observed adults in similar situations. Malcolm Knowles (1980)

explained that adults had the propensity to want to seek learning (*puonji*) opportunities when it was useful for them to do so. This appeared to be true for this particular study. Personally, I chose to learn the three forms of creativity because I was driven to understand the indigenous adult educational processes that formed a part of the community resources employed by women in informal settings such as these. These are women who had not attained high levels of formal and Western education. I hoped that this study would not only contribute to the knowledge on indigenous African adult educational processes, but also be useful to policy makers when deciding on programs designed for use with women in similar circumstances. Studies (Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000) have shown that these women are the main providers for families residing in rural areas.

Aslanian and Brickell (1980a), Jarvis (1982), and Kidd (1959) variously observed that changes in life circumstances that call for new skill sets, inadequacy of the old skills in the face of new challenges, and new social roles such as parenting are among the many triggers of adult learning. As for the triggers of their learning, the participants of the current study each gave reasons for choosing to participate in the activities that saw them learn to produce the *chwuech* forms. Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa, the expert from Nyalaji, explained that she learnt pottery because it was the thing that women in her family, and the family into which she married did as a contribution to family sustenance. It helped a lot that she loved pottery so it was in no way a drudgery to perfect her skills in it. Her other reason for involving herself in these indigenous adult educational processes is that, in these processes she also learnt a lot about what was going on in her community. She was able to get this information from the interactions that accompanied this communal

pot making sessions. An illustration of her assertions can be found in the impromptu lessons she gave us about how to ensure a new born child grew up with a good complexion and beautified head. She says of the importance of these interactions:

Nitiere weche mang'eny mag dongruok e anyuola ma iyudo e riwruok mar mine. Weche manyien ma odonjo e piny, achiel en tuo kata peche manyien mag piny owacho inyalo ng'eyo e riwruok ni. Puonj mopogore opogore mag dak maber gi anyuola bende inyalo yudo kanyo no.

(There are a lot of developmental messages that you can get from involving yourself in women group activities. New challenges to the community, like certain new diseases or new information from the government bureaus can easily be accessed in these groupings. Different teachings on how to live well in the community can also be found in these groupings.)

Nyar Kano ma Awasi pointed out the need to generate an income to sustain her siblings after her parents' death, as a major reason for involvement in *chwuech*. At that time of bereavement, she did not have any other promising method of income generation apart from pottery. It was instrumental that she was familiar with pottery so she only had to sharpen her skills by progressively learning any new developments and designs in it. This echoes the adult learning theorist's assertion that some events in life impel adults to seek out learning opportunities that would enable them to manage their lives in view of the new development. Knowles (1990) also picked out this as one major reason why adults seek out new learning opportunities.

Nyar Gem Uranga first learnt the rudimentary aspects of *muono* while helping her mother at home, and then sharpened these skills later in school when it was required of others and her to make and beautify school buildings. All this time she could get away with knowing just the basics of *muono* because she was never charged with the responsibility of ensuring a completed house. When she got married, she required to *muono* her own house, a responsibility that made her aware of her inadequacies in *muono*

skills. Such feelings of inadequacy as were felt by Nyar Gem Uranga compares to what Jarvis (1982) described as a realization that the already gained knowledge and experiences have not equipped one with the skills to confront the immediate challenge faced. The adult in such a position often wishes to improve their skill sets accordingly.

Contrary to some characteristics implied by established theory, as propounded by scholars such as Knowles (1980), Lave and Wenger (1991), Aslanian and Brickell (1980a), and Jarvis (1982) that adults learn what is useful to them in their lives at a particular point in time, I found out that the participants in this study at times learnt what was not of immediate tangible benefit to them. It was more of a learning spurred by curiosity. An example is photography. I had intended to teach the basics of photography to, at most, only three members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women's group. They would then make photo records of what they considered important and related to *chwuech* in the community. Soon, it became apparent that all the participants wanted to learn the basic skills of using a camera. Individual participants often gladly offered to make still photo and video records of some of the *chwuech* processes in which I was involved. As the study progressed, they took over photography to the eventuality that they suggested and recorded points of the study they thought were most important. For sure none of them was aspiring to be a photographer but they appeared excited to learn rudimentary photography.

***Chwuech* as transformation.**

The excitement the participants exhibited in taking up photography in the study, spoke to the enabling environment that is created by *chwuech*. Participants in *chwuech* seemed to easily get involved in other learning contexts such as that which was presented

by photography in this study. Nyar Asembo explained that she considers her involvement and those of the others, in *chwuech* as transformative because this participation motivates them to creatively confront the challenges in their lives. This transformative dimension of adult learning was illustrated by many participants in this study. Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1991, 2000) both dwelt on the transformative impact of adult education in as far so it develops the reflective aptitude of the learners.

Some ways that the West Reru indigenous adult educational environment was transformative is that the skills the participants learnt offered them financial independence and the context of *chwuech* enabled them engage in interactions that empowered. The financial independence offered members choices and the new information they got widened their various competences. An illustration of information that enhance the participants' capacity included the free advice that member gave each other on issues such as care giving to people living with HIV/AIDS. Nyar Ringa was a caregiver who freely shared the challenges she faced in her task and received advice, from others, on how to alleviate them. Nyar Nyakach Agoro received advice on how to chase away deer that were destroying her bean crop. I, on the other hand, was learning new things each day from the participants.

Nyar Asembo, my contact person in the *bang' jomariiek* group described the transformative effect of the indigenous adult educational processes on the lives of group members and their dependants. These teaching and learning processes equip the women of *bang' jomariiek* with critical and reflective thinking abilities that enable them make good choices in life. This effect can be seen from the decisions that are reached by group members for their personal and communal development.

One important goal of the group is to ensure food security among its members. The group members do this by not only charging a flat rate of 500 Kenyan shillings or about seven dollars to weed member's farms, no matter how big the farms are, but by also running a small table banking service that offers small financial loans to members. Before establishing these services, most participants could not afford the exorbitant weeding charges exacted by the local hands. With this weeding provision, all members are able to plant as much land as they can to secure their food needs.

Food security is transforming, as it gives the participants confidence, when they do not have to suffer the humiliation of begging or making do with inadequate nutrition that is the reality of food scarcity at certain times of the year. Additionally when the participants have adequate food supply, they are able to meet some of their social obligations in the community. These social and extremely priced obligations include contributing food during the funerals of clan members, being involved in celebratory community ceremonies (which invariably entail provision of food), and entertaining visitors in their homes.

Additionally, the members reached the consensus in one of their Sunday afternoon meetings that they would start a catering and chairs-for-hire business when and/or if they received any windfall. The members had done a survey of the West Reru community and realized that there would be a ready, sustainable market for these services. This is so because the Luo invest in lavish funeral ceremonies, conducted in the Luo traditional lands such as West Reru. The Luo bury almost all their dead in their traditional lands, irrespective of where they die. It is common for dead Luo to be transported for hundreds of miles across Kenya, in expensive vehicle convoys, for such

burial ceremonies. The high occurrence rate of the HIV/AIDS scourge has increased the number of the dead. Consequently, these ceremonies involve many relatives and guests and, therein, emerges the need for a catering and chairs-for-hire service.

Participants had already estimated their startup capital to be about 4000 dollars. It was important, for them, that individual members be in control of more liquid cash than they got from the sale of their *chwuech* products. If they could command more cash resources, they would be able to make better decisions for themselves and their community. For instance, participants may afford to send and keep their children in educational institutions and even take in more orphaned children than many of them are currently able to do. The fact that the *bang'jomariiek* women group members have a plan for their future and for use of any windfall they get is evidence of the transformative nature of the indigenous African educational processes in which they are involved. Successful engagement in *chwuech* is, however, predicated on certain characteristics in both the expert and apprentice.

More about Women in *Chwuech*

In the process of conducting this study, I learnt some important personal qualities that encouraged success in creative production. I got to know that everyone involved in *chwuech* needs to be inclined in particular ways. Creative women ought to be outgoing, perceptive, patient and enthusiastic about their endeavors. Particular behaviors, as detailed below, emerge as indicators for the success of participants in *chwuech*.

Successful experts.

An: Isechwuecho bang' igni mang'eny. Nyisa, japuonj dwarore ni obed ng'ama chal nade, chunye chal nade, pache chal nade eka opuonj chwueyo agulu maber.

Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa: Dwarore ni obed ng'ama chunye oksin kata ko puonjo ng'ato to ng'ano oketho. Bende dwarore ni obed ng'ama ok ol makata ng'ano otieko ndalo adi kapok ong'eyo chwueyo agulu to podi otemo mana puonje. Koneno ka chuny japuonjre ol to 'obembeleza' e mondo ojiwre.

An: en adier ni ok ng'ato ang'ata manyalo chwuecho. Mio mobiro iri inena nena ni ma chal kama kama kama. Koro ere kaka iyiero kaka ipuonjo joma opogore opogore?

Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa: an atiya tiya kodgi kama nyaka ging'e chwuech. Kama otamo ng'ato to alosa ne gi alosa, ji opogore emomiyo atio kodgi e yore ma ber kod ng'ato, anyiso gi ni tim kama tim kama nyaka ging'e. okajok ni gichanda kata aol. Aketo chunya ni adwaro ni ging'e makata tek nang'o. kata gikawo ndalo adi to an mana kodgi e puonj kanyo.

(Me: You have taught pottery for many years. Tell me what qualities does a pottery expert need to have in order to successfully teach novices?)

Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa: It is necessary that [the expert] does not give up on the novice at all, even when the novice has a hard time following instructions. It is also important that they are patient people. Even if the novice takes an unusually long time to learn pottery, the expert should still persist in her effort to teach the skill. If she notices that the novice is getting tired, it is the expert's duty to encourage the novice not to give up.

Me: I know that people's abilities are different in skill acquisition. When novices come to you, I wonder if you are able to tell their creative ability levels. Tell me, how do you accommodate such individual differences among the novices?)

Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa: I just work with them [giving them personal attention] until they learn pottery. I keep helping out by making the difficult parts as we go along. I try to

invent as we go along how best to engage the different personalities. I do not get tired or even think that they are a nuisance. I make a resolution that I want them to learn the skills at whatever expense.)

It emerged that experts need to be perceptive enough to predict the best ways of interacting with the various novices and apprentices. It is important to be prepared to face any challenges and issues that crop up during the instructional sessions. While I was learning pottery, I would observe Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa relating to us in slightly different ways. For some of us, she would go straight to the point and discuss the processes that required refinement. For some others, she would use introductory remarks such as praise for a part well done before pointing out any mistake the apprentice had made and then suggest its remediation. This kind of conduct showed her ability to be sensitive to the different personality traits in the educational environment.

Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa says that patience is a very important virtue for an expert as she relates to the novices and apprentices. It is necessary for her to be tireless in her effort to teach the apprentices the skill. If she does not adopt this attitude with the apprentices, she risks discouraging them from learning the skill in question. The expert plays an important part in making *chwuech* an indispensable service in the community so it is important that she makes everyone feel comfortable and welcomed to take part in it. Because Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa constantly encouraged me in my pottery efforts, it was not hard to repeatedly recycle any on which I had erred.

Successful novices and apprentices.

For their success in *chwuech*, the novice-apprentice required to have enthusiasm for learning. Many times, according to the participants, this interest comes out of the need to generate an income. Interest in the knowledge being taught help the women have the patience to persevere through any challenges they come across, whether intended by the trainer and consequently built into their instruction or accidental. Nyar Kano ma Awasi says of these challenges:

Samoro, iyudo japunoj ma seche ma opuonji ineno ka tije ne ema dhi nyime. Onyalo nyisi ni ikel lowo, pi, kata ni imot ne to agulu ma uchwueyo te mage. Koro kaka japuonjre iye a yiea mak mana mondo ing'e chwuech. Jopunj moko bende koneno ka agulu michwueyo ok ber kaka odwaro, to onywase. Ichako kendo koro dwaro ni iher chwuech ma kik ibed gi chuny maol piyo eka di puonjri chwuech.

(At times when you are learning pottery, you notice that it is the trainer who is benefiting from your effort. The trainer may ask you to collect clay, water or firewood for them. They may take possession of all the pots that you make. Other trainers may keep asking you to recycle pots that she thinks are not good enough back into clay. A learner needs to have the enthusiasm that fosters patience and perseverance for such challenges.)

It is important for a student to be adaptable, a quick study, and of good humor.

This is because the indigenous learning environment is as full of banter, song, and laughter as it is of the planned lessons and extra information that is useful to the community at large. This kind of environment is often comfortable and participants freely share information with each other. On the pottery week Nyar Kano ma Awasi asked Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa to show her herbs that a new mother could use to improve the health of her child. Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa described some herbs that, if rubbed on the skin of the infant, would improve their complexion.

In each of the three sub-groups in which I learnt *chwuech*, there was an established expert who got that position from both the wide experience they had in

creating the form and the tried and tested soundness of the quality of their products. In the case of pottery, group members decided to invite, for my training, a renowned potter, Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa, from Nyalaji who had been making pots from about 1953. Her fame resounded far and wide in the greater Seme location. The group did this despite having two members who had been involved in pottery for many years. Other members were in various stages of apprenticeship in which they were building their skills and/or fame in the creative activities.

The experts and trainers in the three groups are confident that their creative products are still in demand in the community and will be for the foreseeable future. They pointed out the weak points of the modern products that might be an alternative to their creative products. Plastic bags are weak, ugly and not heavy-duty, as are palm frond baskets. In the rural areas, clay pots keep drinking water clean and cool. Many people also prefer food cooked in such clay pots because, they say, the food tastes better. Indeed, of all the homesteads I went to, I invariably found a water cooling pot in each of the houses.

This discovery made me revise my earlier thought about the continued use of these creative products in the community. I had thought that they are slowly being replaced by cheap alternatives such as plastic items for pots and baskets. I had made this observations a few households in the urban Kericho town where I lived. In the rural areas such as West Reru, most people depend on these indigenous creative products because of their functionality and durability, not to mention their beauty. Many homesteads have grass thatched and clay-walled houses. This is because modern stone and iron sheet roofed houses may be too expensive for these home owners. As a result of

such cases, *muono* becomes an important skill of which the community cannot dispense. The fact of these creative products being consumed in the community necessitated that the artist produce what is considered good in the eyes of the community members. These community members just like a bureau of standards, stamped their approval or disapproval on the products in the market.

It is crucial that the artist produce good items for the market. This makes the difference between whether they can even partly live by means of their productions or not. The creative products are tested for quality and functionality by the consumers in the marketplace. The artist whose products satisfy the requirements of the market place- which includes a mixture of aesthetics, durability, and functionality- got famous and enjoyed both repeat customers and an ever increasing pool of new customers. I asked how anyone would know that a pot is of good quality. Nyar Sakwa said:

“Ing’eyo agulu motegno koyuak seche migoye gi siling.”

(You know a good quality pot when it emits a sharp sound when you hit it with a coin.)

The best baskets are not only durable and functional but also attractive to even the most inattentive customer. In this way only, could a basket weaver be assured of repeat customers in the vibrant and competitive local market. Likewise, the best houses had surfaces that repel pests and reptiles. People living in such houses do not need to worry about things such as chiggers. These houses are also strong and attractive.

The three experts for the three creative forms pointed out the various avenues from which the novice-apprentices hear about them. They hear about the experts from friends, saw the creative products at places such as the market or in use in homes, and came to them through referral by other community members. When the novice–

apprentice comes to the expert, they both agree on the terms of payment. Depending on the ability of the novice, they pay in cash, poultry, or other goods and services. The most important thing for the expert is that no one is left of *chwuech*.

In the preceding chapter, I gave brief biographical information about selected participants in the West Reru study. Most members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group are widows who depend on *chwuech* and agricultural activities to sustain their families. They are unable to seek white color jobs because they do not have the level of education required for this type of employment. These women are, however, resilient and able to actively participate in the governance of West Reru. They are heads of large households, being commonly care-givers to relatives and friends and especially at this time when Kenya is in the grips of amplified levels of HIV infections and its resultant effects on communities. I also described their reasons for involving themselves in *chwuech* and their conceptions of successful artist and apprentices.

The next Chapter describes the techniques of teaching and learning that I experienced in the West Reru site. I assume various viewpoints in the descriptions I present of these processes. I do this so that the readers may fully appreciate the comprehensive experience I enjoyed while a novice-apprentice in the West Reru site. In this next chapter, I also describe the contributions I made to improve participation in the West Reru site and the community in general. I round off the chapter by articulating aspects of the study that impacted some of my perspectives in life.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

This chapter locates the teaching and learning activities of the members of *Bang' jomariiek* in *kit dak* (see chapter two page 28) and christens it *chwuechgogy* from the word *chwuech*. In expressing *chwuechgogy*, I combine a hybridized mixture of both the classic etic and emic views to describe what I garnered from *chwuech* which involves the production of pottery, basketry, and *muono* in the West Reru study site. These two terms come from the linguistic concepts of phonetics and phonemics that describe the sound modalities of the particular and the metalanguage. In ethnography the terms etic and emic respectively refer to the “outsider” and “insider” views as taken by the researcher in his/her descriptions (Wolcott, 2008).

I determine that these two views produce a more three-dimensional picture of *chwuech* as I experienced it and trim down any personal bias that would be conveyed by only one perspective of this dynamic educative relationship. At first, in recreating the experience of the original location of this study with an indigenous community, I mount an instructional rostrum and take the etic view, in order to use formal instructional register to describe the steps necessary for the successful reproduction of each of the *chwuech* forms. Having been a schoolteacher for over a decade, I explain the steps of making these creative forms well enough for any neophyte to attempt following them. I anticipate that a conscientious novice would be able to make a form relatively similar to the forms I learned in West Reru.

Later, I adopt an emic perspective and use a more vernacular and informal register to describe how I was taught the three skill sets. I hope that these two views exhibit both my conservation of the skills I was taught, and the instructional methods that were used to teach me those skills. While still operating from the “insider’s” location, I go further to state how I personally learnt the three creative forms, and give snippets of other things I learnt while engaged as a novice-apprentice of the three forms of *chwuech*.

I round off the chapter by discussing how I contributed to the *chwuech* process both in the teaching and learning of the three creative forms and other skills not directly related to the three. I also, briefly, explain how the *chwuech* process helped me to make a connection with important aspects of my Luo heritage. I do all these for a specific reason: To demonstrate that the architectural complexity of the educative symbiosis constitutes an inbuilt aspect of mutual participation in *chwuech* activities. Here the relational expectations are that, one shares useful information with others in this growth process. This choral aspect of *chwuech* allowed me to be true to feminist and post-colonial study methods that require a give-and-take interaction between the researcher and the study participants as proposed by scholars, some of whom are, Dueli-Klein (1979); Marker, (2003); Menzies, (2001); Moreton-Robinson, (2000); Weber-Pillwax (1999); Weiler, (1988); and Tuhiwai-Smith, (1999).

Chwuechgogy: *Bang’ Jomariiek* Women’s Group Art Education

The *Bang’ jomariiek* women group members call the process of teaching and learning expressive forms *chwuech*. I propose that their activities are more anthrological in principle and consequently will not describe their teaching and learning processes as andragogy but as *chwuechgogy*. I make this suggestion after examining the development

and discussion that have shrouded some aspects of the metalanguage in the field of education.

In 1883 Alexander Kapp developed the concept of Andragogy which explores the specific ways through which adults learn. He did this to differentiate between the particular ways and characteristics of children and adults learning (as cited from Nottingham Andragogy group by Smith, 1996/1999). Pedagogy refers to the processes through which children learn. Peda means children and –gogy means learn. With Kapp's use of the term andragogy, he referred to the way men study. At that time the academia was not yet influenced by considerable feminist theories so no one really questioned Kapp's term from a feminist perspective. This term is patriarchal since “*andra*” means man and so considers this learning from a male perspective.

Later, Malcolm Knowles (1970/1980) resuscitated andragogy in his groundbreaking study entitled, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy versus Pedagogy*. In the 1980 edition he changed the subtitle to, *From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. This study generated a lot of scholarly interest and criticism. The term andragogy also became widely used in adult teaching and learning circles. Fascinating as his ideas and studies, in general, are, his use of the term andragogy has not received much sustained acceptance. The problem of general acceptance probably results, partly, from the patriarchal implication of the term andragogy. Since the meaning of andragogy is more male oriented, the term leaves out women as participants in the teaching and learning process. Elias (1979) argued that andragogy focused on the existential difference between children and adults, as being the reason why they learnt through different ways. He went ahead to point out that both men and women drew from their experience in

tackling teaching and learning tasks, and the way they related to this experience was not similar therefore the necessity of exploring the unique ways in which women learnt.

This feminist problematic of andragogy led me to think about gynogogy (as explained in Janforum, 1986). This refers to the process through which women learn. But the feminist specificity and exclusionary implications of gynogogy does not account for the place of men in adult teaching and learning. The teaching and learning of pottery, basketry, and *muono* are not a preserve of women as the term gynogogy would suggest. Many indigenous activities are no longer gender-specific as they were in pre-colonial societies.

Gynogogy here becomes an oppositional methodology to andragogy. This term apparently came up in the first wave of feminism in which the scholars tended to be oppositional to patriarchal interests. Now feminist movements have undergone a post feminism phase which has involved a questioning and revision of the ideas that came up in the first wave of feminism. Feminist scholars of note such as Anzaldua (1987), Lorde (1984), Mohanty (2003), Okeyo (1980), and Trinh Min Ha (1989), have encouraged feminist theories that focus on empowering all the underserved members of society.

Consequently, so as not to base my study on reactionary and oppositional ideas, I thought of the much more inclusive term of anthrogogy, that refers to the general way in which people study, to relate the *chwuech* activities of the *Bang' jomariiek* members. According to Trott (1991), anthrogogy is a term that encompasses the holistic life-long learning processes that acknowledge the learner's experiences and stretches it with new knowledge. The interdependent learners study for survival in the community. Scholars such as Trenton (1997) have criticized what he considers adult learning scholars' pre-

occupation with forming new terms to describe processes in the field. He thinks this pre-occupation takes off from the time these scholars would have researched on practical ways to develop their capacities to offer adults better learning experiences. However, in a dynamic field such as adult education is, it is important to come up with terms to describe aspects of adult learning, and especially those in populations, that have not been extensively served by mainstream scholarship in adult learning, such as the population in the West Reru study. As a result of all these considerations, I choose *chwuechgogy* to describe the teaching and learning activities involved in *chwuech*.

For a long time now, many scholars have studied the processes, characteristics and purposes of adult learning. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, (1986/1997), in their seminal work, came up with a most comprehensive report on how women learn. These scholars explained that women are more collaborative and empathetic in the way they relate with their world. The scholars explained that the informal learning that occurs in women oriented spaces and situations such as motherhood and home care, best thrives in collaborative and compassionate settings.

Some of these views about women education have been challenged by scholars such as Hayes (2001) who reviewed extensive literature on ways in which various scholars have conceived of women as learners. The literature shows that most of what is widely believed as women's preferred ways of learning is actually a function of their socialization in the community. For example, Hayes derived from the literature that women have a tendency to favor collaborative and empathetic practices in education. She counters this assertion by observing that in many societies, women are underserved

and thus their need to rally around each other for support purposes just as most underserved people are wont to do.

Scholars have also examined the characteristics of adult as learners and come up with various suggestions on how to improve the learning experiences of adults. Tisdell (2003) described the importance of spirituality in adult education contexts. In other words, she demonstrated that adult educational programs should include aspects that engage the spiritual dimension of the learners. Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg, (2000), Moumouni, (1968), Ntseane, (2006), Reagan, (2005) and Sifuna (1990) among others, in discussing aspects of non-Western knowledge systems in general, have studied the importance with which adults regard spiritual matters in their lives. These scholars explained that educational activities would not be comprehensive and satisfying to learners if the learners do not actively engage their spiritual dimension during the learning process. The importance of the spiritual dimension is more stressed in epistemic systems that celebrate the interconnectivity of the physical and the cosmic aspects of the world.

As western educational metalanguage, adult education processes are akin to the Luo *chwuech* practices in a few salient aspects. As I earlier mentioned, I will describe these *chwuech* practices as *Chwuechgogy*. In other words *chwuechgogy* is an Africanist form of adult education derived specifically from among the Luo. *Chwuechgogy* is a theoretical proposition that operates in the Luo community in a cyclical movement, in that it draws on, dwells in, and enriches the *kit dak* epistemological system of the Luo community by its products. *Bang' jomariiek's chwuechgogical* activities enable the

women to pursue specific tasks inter-woven with their environmental, economic, medical, and political orientations, as indigenous practitioners.

All *chwuechgogical* tasks are geared towards achieving wholeness in the West Reru community, as a primary part of the African indigenous educational systems. Anchored on five tenets, some of which relate favorably with conventional theories of adult learning, African indigenous educational philosophies are already anticipated in Western scholarship. Indeed, Swatz (1998) suggested prudence when making the Western and non-Western distinction on educational research and practices because of the overlapping nature of some aspects of the two. Some African indigenous educational philosophical tenets are holism, communalism, perennialism, functionalism, and preparationalism (Moumouni, 1968 and Sifuna, 1990,). These tenets relate positively with some pivotal aspects of feminist theories. One of these features state that women are commonly committed to securing the interest of their community. Feminist scholar Alice Walker (1993) in her concept of womanism, and with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wajira Muthoni together in an interview by Arndt (2000), elaborated on women's devotion to the survival and well being of the whole community in the face of destabilizing forces in the world.

Chwuechgogy also aligns with some important aspects of adult education discussed by early adult learning theorists. Some early adult learning theorists, such as Malcolm Knowles (1980), found that adults have the propensity to seek learning opportunities when useful for them to do so, at that time in their lives. Aslanian and Brickell (1980a), Jarvis (1992), Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, (2007) variously observed that changes in life circumstances that call for a new skill set, inadequacy of the

old skills in the face of new challenges, and new social roles, including parenting, are among the many triggers of adult learning. In like vein, each member of the *bang'* *jomariiek* women's group detailed what triggered her quest to seek *chwuech*, and justified her observations with specific explanations of why she thought it was a good idea. They all went further to specify the aspects of *chwuech* that enhance their community. Consequently, in the next sections, I describe the teaching and learning processes associated with pottery, basketry, and *muono*, the three forms of *chwuech* in the West Reru site.

Chwueyo Agulu: Pottery (Etic View Point)



Figure 4.1. Image showing pottery session.

“Lowo ngima. Dwaro ni ihoye mana kaka ihoyo japuonjre eka di ichwe agulu mangima.” (The clay is alive. You need to be sensitive to its spirit, just as you do with

the learner of pottery. It is only in this way that you are able to make living pots). The idea that potting clay and pots are living things, as explained by Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa above, comes from Luo's cosmological belief that everything has life. This necessitates that the potter treats the clay as an essential aspect of the spiritual life of the community. With clay people are recreating the original processes through which spiritual beings created them. In creating pots, these women are extending the work of *Nyasaye* who created them from clay.

Pottery, (Figure 4.1), as a *chwuechogical* art among the *Bang' jomariiek* women group is structured along four steps. The first step is preparing the clay; the second, molding the clay; the third, curing the clay; and the last, firing the clay. Three of these steps can be carried out collectively, except the second which is an individual activity. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and other members of *Bang' jomariiek* women group prefer to carry out all the steps collectively starting from taking the trip to Nyalaji to collect potting clay.

It was about nine in the morning and the sun was shining on a late April day when Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa and other members of *Bang' jomariiek* women group met to make the trek to fetch good potting clay from Nyalaji area. They were wearing colorful cotton cloths common with women in this area. Most of them also donned brightly colored head scarves. Each one of them carried a hoe or machete for digging, and re-cycled plastic containers for conveying the clay. This trip of about sixteen miles, both ways, took the women about five hours or more to trek because of the rough terrain. Such a trip is always an opportunity for the potters to bond. They talk, sing, laugh, tease each other and seem to be having much fun. They look happy, focused and eager to face the task of

the day. They exchange views about family matters, business, and important information about community members. For instance, this is a good opportunity for them to know things such as, who is getting married, who just died, who is sick, and what important ceremonies are taking place.

Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa and the others believe that Nyalaji area has the best pottery clay in the whole of Luo traditional land. This clay makes durable pots because it has just the right mixture of clay and sand. Potting clay collection points in other areas of Luo land such as Alego and Ng'iya do not have sufficient amounts of sand, so potters need to measure out sand to add to the potting mixture called *Lowo*. This mixing activity adds to the work the potter needs to do and, at times, because of inaccurate measurement the process, may compromise the quality of the resultant pots.

Potting clay is free in Nyalaji and everywhere else because the Luo believe that potting clay was given for free by *Nyasaye* for use by all. Anyone who tries to sell it is cursed. Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa and the others fear curses. These women believe that curses could result in death or other misfortunes such as insanity, poverty, and infertility. When these women bring the clay to Nyar Asembo's home, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa prepares it for use by sprinkling a little water on it, just enough to dampen it.



Figure 4.2. Image showing Nyar Karachuonyo cleaning soaked clay.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa calls this process *budo lowo* or, loosely translated, dampening the clay. It makes that clay lumpy (Figure 4.2). The soaked lumps of clay are covered and left overnight to become suppler. The next day Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa removes all sediments such as pebbles, insects, or any other foreign substances that might impair the creative process. She kneads the clay to a smooth consistency. It is then ready for making pots.

To begin the molding process, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa makes a ball of clay and flattens it to make the base of the pot or *mware*, the name given to pots that have not been fired.



Figure 4.3 Image showing *tago*; the three bowls in the foreground.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa places this flattened clay on a *tago* (Figure 4.3), which is a plate-like piece of pottery that she uses to support the pot as she makes it. She then makes a thick coil of clay and fixes it on the inside part of the base. She works in circular motions, continually moving *tago* to facilitate the addition of the coils on top of each other. She is careful to at first add the coils from the inside of the pot, thereby forming a cup-like structure. Depending on the size of the pot she is making, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa uses the number of clay coils she thinks are enough, taking care to merge the edges of the coils of clay as she adds them one on top of the other. She ensures that the cup-like structure does not look like coils placed on top of each other.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa then starts to scrap off excess clay from the structure so that it will have relatively thin but strong walls that do not collapse when handled. She

uses *ombasa*, which is the outer cover of the fruit of a tree that commonly grows in Seme and most of Luo-land. This plant yields a fruit with a hard husk. This fruit's cover is shaped like a small bowl. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and other potters collect this fruit and dry it so as to use its dried husk to scrap off excess clay from the pot. They use this scrapping motion to also erase the lines resulting from placing one coil of clay over another. This process of removing excess clay from the walls of the pot and making the walls thinner is called *chwuero*. Later, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa continues to add coils of clay to the outside part of the pot being made and thus progressively closes the top. Depending on the type of pot that she is making, she keeps closing the top until she reaches a size that she desires.



Figure 4.4. Image showing Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa *chwuero* the inside of *ohigla*.

She makes several types of pots including, *Ohigla* and *Dak pi*, both (Figure 4.4). *Ohigla* is the pot used for cooking fish. It has a wide mouth to enable users to easily cook a large

fish in it. *Dak pi* are larger and have slimmer necks and smaller mouths. These features enable users to transport water from the river or pond with minimal spillage.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa uses *Kuga*, a piece pond grass that is weaved, to draw patterns on the outside walls of the pot while it is still wet. Nowadays, she is able to weave durable *kuga* with the easily available nylon thread. She designs, adapts aspects of another potter's design or copies other potter's designs in decorating her pots. At other times she decorates her pots using the design associated with her native Nyalaji area. After decorating the pots with *kuga*, she lets them dry, bottom up, under a shade tree or where she thinks they will be undisturbed.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa stores the pots in this place for a few days depending on how dry the air is. In the rainy seasons, such as this, the air is damp and so her pots take four days to dry sufficiently for their bottoms to be shaped. These pots would have dried in about two days had it been the dry harvest months that start around August. The process in which she scrapes and shapes the bottom of the pots is called *chwuero pier lowo* a process for which she uses *ombasa*. This is the time she also removes any extra clay that would make the pots unnecessarily heavy and inconvenient to use. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa uses the shoulder blade bone of a cow or, if she cannot secure this bone, a similarly shaped piece of wood to pat the pots into more rounded shapes. When she is pleased with the roundness of the pots, she uses *kuga* to decorate the bottom of the pots to match the designs earlier made on their bodies. She then returns the pots to the shady safe place in which she had kept them to cure.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa allows her pots to cure for as long as they need to, which could be from four weeks to a few months depending on how humid the air is. She gives

them more time during rainy seasons. She knows that the longer the pots cure before firing, the more long-lasting they become. When she thinks they are sufficiently cured, she brings them out in preparation for the process referred to as *rudho agulu* (Figure 4.5). In this process, she scrubs the parts of the pot that had not been decorated using *kuga*. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and other potters usually leave out some parts of the pot undecorated for contrast purposes. She scrubs smooth these undecorated parts using stones, referred to as *ombo*, which have particularly smooth surfaces such as those found on riverbeds.



Figure 4.5. Image showing the process of *rudho agulu*.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa then knows that the pots are ready for firing.

She fires the pots or *wang'o lowo*, in a shallow depression. She lines this depression, she had earlier made, with fist-sized pebbles. She follows this with dried

thatching grass on which she piles firewood. On the firewood she lays the pots and more firewood on top of the pots. At times, she adds dried sisal plant stumps to the firewood. She covers all this with dried grass that she has collected from recycled grass-thatches of houses. This grass is usually discarded when the roof is repaired with new grass. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa sets this heap on fire. She carefully tends this bonfire to avoid any accidents. She only relaxes her watch of the fire when the initial bonfire created by the flaming grass subsides. She lets her pots sit for up to three hours in the fire. Meanwhile she boils the bark of the *orwech* plant to emit a red liquid and cuts a few twigs from the shrub *mweny* or *bwaro*. She places all these within reach for use in cleaning and dyeing the fired pots.

When the fire dies down, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa uses a wooden post to lift out the hot pots from the kiln. She lifts each pot gingerly from the kiln to ensure its safety. She dips *mweny* or *bwaro*, in the red liquid from the *orwech* plant and uses it to beat ash dirt off the pots, at this time referred to as *agulu*. This liquid also colors the pot with a pleasing reddish hue. After ensuring that the pots are sufficiently cooled she proceeds to test the quality of the new pots by lightly tapping them with a piece of metal or coin. She knows that the pots that emit a sharp metallic sound are the best quality and thus sought after in the market place.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa uses the traditional type of firing pots called biscuit firing and it results in the fired pot being a little bit porous. Both Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and the buyers know that this porosity will end after a few instances of usage. They know that the fastest way to end it is to cook millet porridge in the pot before using it for other

cooking activities or for storing water. Millet is a most common nutritious food grain in West Reru and Luo land in general.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and the other potters consciously attempt to observe the taboos associated with pottery. The Luo have taboos about women and the pot-firing process. A woman on her menses would cause the pots to crack on the fire so was not allowed near them. Unlike the Kikuyu, the Luo have no set taboos about men and pots, but Luo men shun pot making as associated with women. There are, however, very few male potters in West Seme. I was unable to meet or be referred to even one.

How I was taught pottery.

Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa and the other women taught me pottery as a part of a cohort of mixed abilities. In the ceramic cohort, I was the only one with the least knowledge of the skill. The very first day I arrived at the venue of the study in Nyar Asembo's home, most of *Bang' jomariiek* group members were assembled to meet me. They had made some little shabby pots that looked hastily made. They had imagined that all I needed was to conduct interviews with them to collect the steps they used to make the pots.

"Adwaro chako chwuech e tiende nyaka giko ne" (I want to learn this creation from the beginning to its end.) After I let them know that I intended to be taught the skills, they had a short meeting to re-strategize on how best to accommodate my needs.

"Tich matek" (hard work) participants in Dietler and Herbich's (1989) study had called pottery. Mistakes are expensive in pottery, as they render all labor in vain when the resulting pots are not useful in the home. In a venture where the customers in the market make the decision whether the pot is good or useless, the potter is called upon to take care not to compromise the pot's quality. *"Ing'e agulu maber ka igoye gi siling to*

oyuak” (You know a good pot when it emits a metallic sound when you tap it using a coin.) This diligence needed by the potter came from their being patient and enduring; very essential qualities for potters. It turned out I needed these qualities as well.

Participants in this study had already warned me about the difficult terrain and long distance to Nyalaji where we needed to collect potting clay. I affirmed my commitment to doing this study and we set off for the journey to Nyalaji. This journey was a true test of endurance. Not only did we need to walk over 15 miles up and down hills and across a shallow fast moving river, but the paths were stony, and at times covered with thorny shrubs. At other times the paths were practically non-existent, and we needed to pass through people’s millet fields. The later is uncomfortable because the leaves of the millet plant were irritating to my skin.



Figure 4.6. Image showing Nyar Nyakach harvesting potting clay.

When we arrived at the Nyalaji area, participants showed me the best clay and how to harvest it. Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya did this by first taking the hoe and demonstrating to me, in (Figure 4.6), how to harvest the clay just a few meters under the surface to avoid the coarse soil both on the surface and deeper in the vein of the earth. She explained that the coarse soil contained pebbles, pieces of sticks, and even dead insects. All these would have to be picked out and make the clay cleaning task only harder. She then let me dig out some clay for myself. Later other members also got a chance to dig for their clay. In this exercise, I, the learner, got a chance to dig for my clay first before anyone else could. I realized how important this exercise was for the success in pottery and why I needed to learn how to choose potting clay. There is a tendency for your pot to break if you do not take care in collecting good clean clay.

On the way back to the study site, we had to carry the potting clay which was heavy. Consequently, we all got really tired from the journey to collect clay. The study participants lived in trying circumstances in which only the robust of character prevailed. This resilient and generous spirit emerged from the short biographies of the selected participants and from scholars' perception of the characterization of women's fundamental nature. Scholars, notable among them Arndt (2000), hooks (1989), Mohanty (2003), Moreton-Robinson (2000), and Walker (1993) detailed the sturdy streak that runs in women of the world. Many more such trials to my patience were to come my way during the rest of the pottery week, and subsequent weeks of the study.

Before soaking the clay, we picked out any objects in it that they said could destroy our pots during the firing process. Some of these objects we picked out were small stones, pieces of plastic, glass, and plant roots. Later, we sprinkled water on the

mound of clay until it had a certain feel of dampness that the participants told me was best. The lump of clay took the sticky consistency of dough. We wrapped it in plastic paper and left it to soak overnight. In this instance, I learnt how to clean clay and soak it by participating in the process of making it.

On the next morning before commencing pot making activities, *jakom* or chairwoman of the group requested me to help her sweep clean our work area. *Jakom* explained to me that we did not want our clay getting dirty again, from a dirty ground. Later, Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa asked me to watch carefully what she was doing with the pot she had started making and to copy her every move. She modeled pot production for me to copy, at this initial stage. She had slowed her pace considerably so I could keep up with her. She said:

An ka achwuecho achwuecha ma onge ng'ama apuonjo, seche gi dikoro asetieko agucha adek. Ka a jiwo lueta to biro tami ng'eyo mapiyo. (If I was ordinarily making pots without having an apprentice by me I would have made three pots by now. If I work quickly then you will be unable to follow my lead.)

She thought it was important for me to start and finish a pot on my own. My first two attempts failed and I recycled the clay. Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya offered to help me start my third pot but Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa would not allow her and insisted that I do so myself. Apart from modeling pot making for me, Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa also gave me verbal instructions on the same:

Tago oleng'ore, chik tago.' Keth a ketha agulu michwueyo no nikech osehingo tago to e kichake. Wek tielo lowo, kimedo lowo to rwae kadhi malo. (Position the wheel well it is askew. Destroy that pot you are making because it has grown bigger than the wheel, but you have just started making it. Do not press the additional rolls of clay onto the bottom of the pot you are making, you need to fix it with upward massaging motions.)

Later, when I had started a pot that had few structural mistakes, she asked Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya to help me correct the mistakes. Nyar Ogola ja Sakwa also participated in helping me correct them. In retrospect, I imagine she wanted me to first get the feel of the potting clay by handling it myself, and so she would not allow anyone to help me handle my pot. Consequently, I started all the three pots that I eventually made but received assistance in diminishing degrees for all of them. Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa would either do it herself while demonstrating to me how best to go about a process or ask one of the other participants, and especially Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya, who was quite good in pottery, to help me.

Because of their advanced skill level in pottery, Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa and the other participants in the pot-making activity all started off by making pots that were bigger than mine. Additionally, the pots I recycled were small compared to the ones I successfully completed. Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa wanted me to make smaller pots because they were easier for a novice such as me to handle when compared to the big ones that she made. This technique was akin to shaping that Greenfield (1984) described when referring to Zinacanteco women weavers in Mexico. The new weavers were given tasks that required them to make smaller items as a preparation for the larger ones, which required more skill.

I experienced a lot of difficulty in making the necks of the pots. At this stage, Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa took over my pot and made the neck, while explaining the process to me. I would try, and not do a good job and get more help making this part, from her. For the first pot, she made the neck and asked me to watch carefully as she did it. For the next pot we made the neck together because she watched closely as I made it and helped

out when necessary; but for the last pot, I made the neck entirely on my own. I compared this process to the scaffolding technique that Wood, Brunner, and Ross (1976) described as useful when an apprentice needed to work beyond her range. In this case, I needed to go beyond the tricky neck part of pottery and continue working with the other stages of the production. This scaffolding technique aided me to continue and complete the production of the pot by tiding me over the difficult points of this process.

In addition, I drew much insight from my community of practice, which at this time was made up of participants in this study. The importance of the supportive environment, created by the community of practice is underscored by Childs and Greenfield (1980), when they considered how the Zinacanteco women weavers in Chiapas, Mexico depended on other members of their community of practice to learn weaving skills. Lave (1988) also explained that it is important that adult learners draw from their community of practice in their learning. My community of practice in learning pottery was the others who had pottery skills at various levels.

Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa and the other participants encouraged, and allowed me to carry out activities that drew from skills I already had from other life engagements. I adapted the skills as needed into the potting activity. For instance, I did not need to watch and copy anyone in the activity of *rudho agulu gi ombo*, laying the tinder and firewood for firing the pots, starting the fire, cleaning and coloring the fired pots, because I drew from other skills I was already using in my life. Scholars such as Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) explained that adults bring a lot of lived experience into learning situations they are engaged in, as I did in learning pot production.

The group members rewarded me in a variety of ways each time I succeeded in a process or step in making pots. These rewards ranged from encouraging comments to them giving me the honor to lead a certain activity in the process of pottery. They gave me the honor to light the kiln at the end of the pottery lessons. Nyar Kano ma Ng'iya:

Ere japuonjre wa mondo omok majni. Osebedo nyathi sikul maber ahinya ma onego wakawe picha ka omoko mach eka jopuonj ne ong'e ni kar agulu ong'eyo maber. (Where is our learner to light this fire? She has been a good learner. We need to take pictures of her lighting the fire so her teachers [in the USA] can know she has successfully learnt how to make pots.)

At another time, they would praise me for a job well done. When I finished my first successful pot, various participants commended me. A part of this commendation included their estimation of how much of various sizes of fish I could cook in the *ohigla* I had made. Additionally, at the end of the entire study, all members gave me a small gift, all representatives of their agricultural activities. I got five live chickens, a variety of beans, vegetables, and tubers.

The place of pottery in West Reru community.

Pottery is an aspect of *Chwuech* which is a socio-cultural feature of the Luo community. Adult learning scholars (among them Avoseh, 2001; Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg, 2000; Merriam and Kim, 2008; and Reagan, 2005) acknowledged the intimacy with which non-Western perspectives of learning, knowing, and doing are steeped in everyday life. I use non-Western perspectives of teaching and learning here in as far as I am discussing the teaching and learning that I experienced in the West Reru site, but not as a universal category. Even in the West Reru site, the indigenous teaching and learning processes would no doubt have been affected by the passage of time and that which this juggernaut prefigures. At times, the use of terms such as Western and non-

Western may result in artificial compartmentalization of people and practices. Swatz (1998) warned of the false dichotomies that such usage of terms may create, and not only obscure the similarities there could be of these practices by people in different locations, but also be a manifestation of biases and false assumptions. Further Merriam and Kim (2008) pointed out that this setting up of encampments was not only a Western habit, but that many indigenous people have relocated to Western countries, so have found their way into adult learning classrooms. The diversity manifested in adult learners' classrooms expunges the use of terms such as Western and non-Western in reference to educational experience. From which point also, post-colonial and feminist scholars would interrogate the need for such compartmentalization. Just this kind of behavior has resulted in the unfair treatment of a group seen as 'other' by the mainstream (Chikwenye ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni as quoted in an interview with Arndt, 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; and Weiler, 1988).

In an environment where there was hardly any measuring instrument, I learned to estimate the sizes of the pots in relation to its everyday use while engaged in *chwuech*, the cherished aspect of the Luo socio-cultural dimension. My fellow participants and I measured the sizes of water pots according to how much water they could hold, fish pots according to how much fish we could cook in them, and the same for grain storage, vegetable, and meat pots. We did this by looking at the pots; and after a while, I became quite adept at estimating how big the pots were. In acquiring these skills, I was no doubt aided by my lived experience in which I, like most Kenyan women, measured ingredients I used in dishes without any measuring instruments, but by just looking at the ingredients set aside for the dish. I had cooked this way for many years. We relied on sight and

texture to come up with the right mixture of potting dough and coloring liquid. We also estimated the amount of timber and grass we would need to fire the pots we had made.

Some techniques for teaching and learning pottery.

Just as we relied on the socio-cultural context to measure the capacity of the pots we made, many of the instructional techniques for the adult educational processes used with pottery in West Reru emanated from the community. Avoseh (2001), Diouf, Sheckley, and Kehrhahn (2000), Merriam and Kim (2008), Reagan (2005) and Sifuna (1990), among other scholars, discussed the holistic nature of non-Western teaching and learning environments in which learning is an activity that involves the whole person and her community. Any teaching and learning process that ignores some aspects of the learner and the community misses a unique chance to capture the whole learner and, in so doing, help the learner succeed in the lesson at hand. Holistic learning environments are natural and not contrived for instructional purposes. The learners get to learn the lesson seamlessly in multiple ways and in its natural setting in the community.

The richness of the discussions that accompanied potting, in a way made it easy for me to learn pottery. In these discussions, participants dealt with a wide range of topics relevant to the community's well-being. Once we had a long discussion about the government initiated fish farming project in the area. Nyar Asembo Kochieng' is one beneficiary of this governmental largesse, whose success depends on the diligence of the receiver. The others gave their views about the indicators of success in such projects. One of these pointers is cooperation with government agents during the project initiation and inspection exercises. "*Bedo ng'ama ni gi winjo.*" (Be a perceptive person). Anyone's success in the fish farming project depended on how appreciative of advice she

received and how much of that advice she put into action. Some fish pond owners had lost their entire 'seed' fish stock because they did not follow the advice, about care, given by the government agents. Such discussions created a very relaxed atmosphere devoid of preoccupation with results, success, and failure in the educational ventures at hand, as usually prevails in Western based learning environments.

The participants allowed me as much time as I needed to learn pottery. I only made the decision to learn in the time we had set aside for it, for convenience purposes and in order to complete the whole study in the time I had stipulated. As Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa says, "*Ka wuok ni adwa puonjo ng'ato chwuech to aketo chunya ni kata ka tek to nyaka ong'ee. ok a ol kata okawo ndalo adi ng'eyo chwuech. Ahoye a hoye mos mos nyaka opuonjre.*" (When I set out to teach someone pottery, I am determined to do it until they learn. I do not give up even when they take a long time to learn. I encourage them slowly until they get the skill.)

Participants made me aware of the traditional beliefs associated with various stages of pottery. This they did casually in our conversations. Their beliefs illustrate a relationship with a being, higher than themselves and able to affect their lives. The firing step in pottery is a particularly delicate one because it is then, that the potter gets to know how many pots are successfully completed and how many are destroyed. This step has several taboos attached to it. Dietler and Herbich (1989), in their study with potters in Pap Nyadiel in Ng'iya, articulated the belief potters had that pots would get destroyed in the firing kiln if a jealous woman bewitched them. In the same vein, Potters in West Reru attribute such destruction of pots in kilns to the presence of women in their menstrual cycle in the vicinity of the kiln, bewitching by jealous rivals, or the presence of

a woman experiencing a string of bad luck in their life at that time. The participants made every attempt to stop such women from accessing the kiln during the pot firing process.

Tisdell (2003) explained the importance of accommodating the spiritual component of adults in any teaching and learning processes in which they are engaged. She suggested that any education program that does not encompass this component of the adult learners' lived experience misses a great chance to capture the whole adult learner and thus their success in the program. She acknowledged that higher education has inordinately concentrated on knowing through rationality and ignoring other forms of knowing important for others across the world. These forms of knowing are legitimate and need to be explored appropriately as learning emanating from people's growth experiences and culture. Similarly, scholars, among them Ntseane (2006) and Mbiti (1969) have studied the spiritual nature of the African. They state that the African perceives his/her world as interconnected in all dimensions; spiritual, physical, and cognitive. All this information about beliefs associated with pottery suggested that I was not just toying about with clay but engaging in a task that had a sacred dimension to it. Participants considered their work serious business; I too did.

While engaged in potting, we bantered a lot. This chitchat was often punctuated with conversation about serious issues that affected the community. Examples are the discussions that organically came up about issues of sickness, politics, spirituality, and family life. These topics would come up on their own or be triggered by the activity in which we were engaged. While teaching me how to smoothen the bottoms of pots, Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa initiated a talk on how to shape a new-born's head. This discussion

went on for a few minutes with the other women asking Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa questions. When the discussion burnt itself out we reverted to our good natured banter.

This good natured joking did not take away from my learning experience of pottery. Amid the teasing, I would receive instruction on what to do next for the pot I was making or even caution when it looked as if I was about to “*wito laini*” or “leave the right path.” If anything, the atmosphere created by this banter aided me to learn more or less by not being conscious of the fact that I was acquiring knowledge. I engaged wholly in this banter but still heard when I was given any instructions, advice, or accolade. This same atmosphere of playfulness also functioned to correct others’ mistakes in ways I thought were not brazen. Additionally, it was almost magical, how at the end of the day I could make very clear journal entries about what processes I had learned during the preceding day. This playful banter lightened any criticism that participants of this indigenous adult educational process gave or received.

For Nyar Kisumu ma Nyahera whose pot looked like it was collapsing due to structural weaknesses, from Nyar Alego Kogelo:

Aguchi ma koro onywongo mana ka mio ma dwa nywol no. Mano be podi en agulu? Mano oki banje abanja mondo ichak manyien? Ok apar ni obiro lokore agulu. (Your pot perplexes me; it now looks like a woman in labor. Is it still a pot? Why don’t you recycle it and start a new one? I do not think it will become a pot.)

There were times that I and the other participants were firmly requested to take a certain action to make our pots better. This helped avoid unnecessary wastage of time and material resources in our site. I noticed that other study participants also used this tone on each other and me when they were helping save each other’s creations from

destruction. Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya to me after sensing my frustration from recycling two pots I had started:

Wek tielo lowo kamano, mano ema yaro pier aguchi to ingot ago ae to koro nyaka ibanje. Kapodi aguchi nipiny kamano med ameda lowo gi iye kama [onyisa kaka odwaro ni atim]. Ibiro medo lowo gi oko ka osebet maduong. Kimedo lowo oko mar aguchi ni sani to obiro ingo tago ae to obanjore. Ket lweti mayot eka inyalo rwayo lowo maber. Kik ijiw lweti. (Do not press down the clay like that on the base of the pot you are making. That is what makes the pots widen at the base, get bigger than the wheel, and need to be recycled. While your pot is this small add coils of clay on the inside with an upward motion this way [showing me by adding some clay on my pot]. You will get to add the rolls of clay on the outside of your pot when it is much bigger than this. If you do it now the pot will grow too wide and collapse. Loosen and relax your hand for you to add in the clay well.)

I perceived the use of silence as an important component of the way I was taught pottery. Participants and I would fall silent at times when we needed to. The fact of a few participants silent while others went on with their conversation, functioned to create spots of solemnity amid the sea of gaiety, much like a quilt of bright and dull colors. This silence helped the others and me concentrate while executing processes that needed more dexterity and care, such as making the necks, and drawing patterns on the body of the pots. Silence created a somber atmosphere that, in those instances, seemed to remind me of the seriousness of the tasks I was engaged in; I was collaborating with *Nyasaye* in the task of creating my world.

I was taught pottery by use of song. Participants would break into song without warning, as they worked. At times the songs had messages about the tasks in which we were engaged. Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa would sing songs about different types of pots and their functions. These songs were not necessarily master pieces but simple ones that conveyed equally simple information on some processes in pottery production and use. At other times, the songs were the popular spiritual numbers that other participants, who

felt like, could join in. At any one time, any of us would be singing, talking, laughing or silent.

Forms of assessment in pottery.

I appreciated that the processes of teaching and learning pottery had both in-built formative and summative assessment points which were so subtle and such a part of the process that they were almost unnoticeable. Formative assessment consisted of feedback on the processes that we were involved in at the time. This appraisal came in the form of comments such as:

Ng'weny lowo moro. Mano koro oromo. Rwa lowo no kadhi malo. Aguchi michwueyo no osehingo tago ma koro onego ibanje ichak machielo. Kata 'aguchi no dhi maber koro med lowo dichiel ae to ichak chwueyo ng'ute. [Koting'o agulu] aguchi ni inyalo tede nyamami. (Add another piece of clay to what you are holding. Fix that clay onto the pot you are making with upward movements. The pot you are trying to make already has structural weaknesses and you need to just recycle it and start another. The pot you are making is going on well so just add one more roll of clay and start making the neck part. [While holding pot being made] you can cook a whole 'nyamami' (big Tilapia fish) in this pot.)

For summative assessment participants lined up the pots after the firing process, and tapped them lightly with a coin. Participants considered the pots as superior if they emitted a metallic sound when hit lightly by a coin. The makers of the good pots were commended on their expertise by fellow participants (in our case only two pots were not good and that was because they had suffered much water damage). *"Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya kara chwuech iwinjo. Kara chwuech ni podi ibiro chiemo go.* (Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya you are a good potter. You will still be able to make a living from pottery for a long time.) Participants gave excuses for the two inferior pots: *"Kane koth ok oketho gi to degibedo mana maber. Koth okelo nwa lal."* (If it was not for the rains they would have been good pots. The rains caused this loss.) From the later comments, I gathered

that the potter would be ashamed if her pots did not attain the quality they expected. They would even resort to giving excuses to shield themselves from the reality that their pots had turned out inferior. They would then try to improve their pot making in the next potting session.

Chwueyo Okapu, Weaving Palm-Frond Baskets



Figure 4.7. Image showing the process of *Nyono okapu*.

“Othith inyalo chiemo go. Chwuech en kaka irite gi kaka igene. Ka irite to bende igeno othith maber to obe oriti maber.” (Creativity [of baskets] is a way of making a living. Be caring to palm frond work and, in return, it will be caring to you.) As Nyar Nyakach explains about basketry above, it is a skill from which to make a living but only

when the weaver builds the skill carefully. The weaver needs to treat the fronds with respect, careful not to waste any basketry materials so she may be a successful basket-weaver. This thinking emerges from the Luo cosmology that considers everything to have a living spirit that is responsive to the outside world.

The *chwuechgogical* art form of basketry (Figure 4.7) is accomplished in three basic steps: choosing palm fronds and coloring powder; weaving strands of palm fronds; and joining the strand to make baskets. The first step can be carried out collectively, but the rest require an individual to work alone. The process begins when the participants make the six mile round trip to Akala market to buy palm fronds and coloring powder.

It is a sunny morning in early May. Although the sun is up the distant dark clouds promise a shower of rain at a later time in the day. Nyar Nyakach and six other members of *Bang' jomariiek* women group are beginning the six mile, round trip, to Akala market to purchase palm fronds and colors. The women are dressed, as usual, in brightly colored cloths. All of them don headscarves, also made of the same colorful cloth. They each carry a basket for the palm frond and colors they will buy and for carrying their own shopping which they will also do at the market. On the narrow earth road they try to walk in a single file keeping to the edge of the road as much as possible to avoid the sizeable bicycle, human and, occasional vehicle traffic. In this attitude, they need to raise their voices appropriately to carry out a conversation with the whole group. On their way to the market they chat gaily with each other and with the people they know along the road.

But once in the market, this conduct quickly changes to one of seriousness when they start driving hard bargains for the best prices for batches of palm fronds and sachets

of color that they have carefully chosen. The care with which they choose the fronds could compare to that of farmers choosing an animal for purchase from a stock market. After Nyar Nyakach and the other women have bought the palm fronds and coloring powders, they take an hour or two to do their own grocery shopping. At that time they also tour the large market to find out what and who is new in it. The market place offers Nyar Nyakach and the other women a chance to meet and catch up with friends and family, from other areas of Luo-land in the market. Then they begin the trek back to home.

To make good durable baskets, Nyar Nyakach needs to choose long, large mature palm fronds from Akala. Traders harvest this type of frond from particular river banks and wetlands in many areas of Kenya. Nyar Nyakach and the others said they preferred the palm fronds from Bumala, the traditional lands of the Luhya ethnic group, and an area neighboring Luo-land. These women also require good quality water color dust for colorful baskets. They know that the brighter the dust the longer lasting the dye.



Figure 4.8. Image showing the process of coloring palm fronds.

Nyar Nyakach mixes each color with water and brings it to boils. Nyar Ringa, however, revealed that she usually adds some salt in the boiling mixture to get better quality color. Nyar Nyakach dips the fronds, (Figure 4.8), in this colored water, and allows them to boil for about five minutes. She dries the fronds thus colored, under a shade to allow the color to soak in and be long-lasting.

Depending on how large they are and before beginning to weave the fronds, Nyar Nyakach divides the individual fronds using a needle or any sharp object, into two or three sections. She slices off the weak edges in the same way, and discards them, as they would only make the basket weak and unable to carry heavy loads. She then starts to weave the baskets by intertwining the fronds thus prepared. She decides on any of the many different lattice work designs that she knows or is learning. She is constantly

learning new designs of baskets and basketry items.



Figure 4.9. Image showing Nyar Ringa airing the woven bands.

Nyar Nyakach weaves the fronds into bands (Figure 4.9) as flat as a measuring ruler, of a width of about two inches. The size of the basket she is weaving dictates how long she makes these bands. She uses the popular basket maker's measuring method called *bat* or "hand." This measuring method got its name from the process through which basket makers normally measure the length of woven bands. Nyar Nyakach holds the woven band across her body with both hands stretched at their widest. This length is *bat*. Nyar Nyakach and the others estimate that five *bat*, measured by a woman of her height, are enough to make a basket in which to carry ten kilograms of shelled maize.

After weaving the long bands, Nyar Nyakach takes up the next step in basketry referred to as "*nyono othith*." She begins this process when she determines that the woven band is of sufficient length. At this time, she starts to shape the base of the basket.

She uses her feet to flatten the band, laid out on the floor, as she joins it in a circular movement, using sisal thread she had prepared earlier and a special large needle.

Likewise, she makes the handles of the basket from sturdy sisal thread and frond, and attaches them to the basket using the same needle and sisal thread. At this time, Nyar Nyakach's basket is ready for use. A basket that can carry a load of ten kilograms of shelled maize fetches about 100 Kenyan shillings or about two dollars and fifty cents.

How I was taught basketry.

The second week of the study in West Reru was set aside for basketry. The fronds I first used to learn were those my fellow participants in the study had earlier bought and colored. I started making baskets with these fronds instead of following the logical sequence of first learning to choose, buy, and color the fronds. This is because the local market, Akala, was held on Wednesdays only. This was the day traders from far and wide brought their wares to the market for sale and thus the ideal day to get the best palm fronds. Consequently, I started learning basketry somewhere in the middle of the process. This made it easier for me when I needed to learn how to choose and color the palm fronds as I had handled this material already. This fact in itself negated my assumption that it was necessary to have a logical sequence for instruction like I had used in my years of teaching.

Additionally, on the first day of this basketry week, we also needed to check on the status of our pots that were curing in Nyar Asembo's *simba* (house where the young boys slept). We did this after we had completed our basketry activities for the day. (I need to mention that at this time this *simba* was empty. The young men who used it had traveled to visit with a sister in an urban center a little removed from West Reru). This

“status update” exercise dealt us a big blow because we discovered that our batch of pots had been partially damaged by heavy rains. The heavy rains had flooded the room where the pots had been stored, causing a range of damage to some pots in the batch. We quickly moved the whole and partially damaged pots to a safer location, and discarded the few that were damaged beyond hopes of repair.



Figure 4.10. Image showing Nyar Nyakach demonstrating how palm frond is sliced.

So on that Monday morning, Nyar Nyakach taught me how to slit the individual palm fronds to sizes that could be used in weaving. She split the fronds (Figure 4.10) as she explained to me her every move and the reasons for it. She explained that the sizes of the split frond slivers needed to be equal for the basket to be shapely and not have sides that appeared, and felt heavier than others. I split the fronds as she supervised me. She constantly showed me why she thought I had not split the fronds correctly, whenever I

erred. We kept this up until a time that she gave me a verbal approval, that I could do it well.

Nyar Nyakach then handed me over to Nyar Nyakach Agoro, who she charged with teaching me how to start the base of the basket. Before she started, Nyar Nyakach Agoro took a few minutes to explain to me, the importance of making a strong base for the basket. She said this made the difference between a strong, durable basket and a weak, useless one. A weak base would mean that this basket would unravel easily, and would not carry anything remotely heavy.

Nyar Nyakach Agoro then had me copy her every move, from how many frond slivers she picked, how she positioned them in her hands, to how she weaved the fronds. All this time she explained to me the expected results of carrying out the process the right way and the repercussion of not doing so. Following the process diligently resulted in the ideal tightly weaved basket, while not being meticulous about the process resulted in a basket with a weak base that had unwanted spacing, and could not hold grainy items such as sugar, flour, and other such things for which people bought baskets.

On Tuesday of the second week, I weaved the bands that measured about two inches in width and two sizes in a length measured in *bat*. I was taught how to measure *bat*. To do that I would extend the band I wove, from one tip of my fingers to the next, across my body, with my hands stretched wide. The size of the basket depended on how many *bat* the weaver measured. When I asked how the difference in size of the weaver's physique was accounted for, I was told that weavers needed to estimate how much they would compensate for these differences. I was then taught to use my gut feeling to decide whether I had the right number of *bat* and to decide how much I would add or

subtract to make the size of the basket I needed. We measured the size of the basket according to how much grain it could carry. A basket that was made out of five *bat* could carry about six kilograms of shelled maize. In this way, I needed to get used to viewing the sizes of the baskets made according to how much grain they could hold. I decided that I wanted to make a basket for carrying six kilograms of shelled maize, so I needed to weave a band of five *bat*. I finished weaving my band on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, we made the trek to Akala market to select and buy both palm fronds and powdered paint for coloring them. The palm fronds are sold in small batches, tied together with thread, and the paint is sold in small plastic sachets.



Figure 4.11. Image showing palm frond batches on sale at Akala market.

At Akala market (Figure 4.11), Nyar Nyakach showed me how to choose sturdy but pliable palm fronds for strong baskets. She explained that wide and bendable fronds make good baskets. She also showed me the bad fronds and explained why they were not suitable for basketry. The bad ones are thin, shriveled, too dry, or even too short, among other shortcomings. After choosing a few batches of the palm fronds, Nyar Nyakach asked me to pick out some among a batch, one trader was selling. I already knew which fronds were good because I had been handling just that kind of frond for the last two days. The task of choosing and buying palm fronds took just a short while. As for powdered color, Nyar Nyakach explained that the brighter the powder, the brighter and longer lasting the color on the baskets. I helped pick out sachets whose contents looked quite bright when looked at through their clear polythene wrappers.

We walked home to prepare the palm fronds for the next day's weaving. Nyar Nyakach asked Nyar Ringa to show me how to color and dry the palm fronds. I worked with her, following her example, as she boiled the color, adding a pinch of salt to the mixture so that the color could last long. She colored different batches of fronds with different colors one after another. Nyar Ringa showed me how to hold the fronds for about five minutes, half-dipped in the boiling mixture, so just the necessary parts got colored. We estimated the time that the fronds required to boil; about five minutes. Later we dried the colored fronds under the shade. We removed them from the shed as soon as they dried because they were ready for use. This was a delicate process requiring the weaver to be very careful in order to color just the right length of the fronds. If this is not done, the color pattern in the basket would not be uniform and beautiful. Once in a while, I invariably, from not concentrating, would let go of the palm fronds I was holding

over the boiling liquid. This resulted in some fronds getting color into more places than we required. It would slip my mind that the result of this oversight, would affect the color scheme in our baskets. At such times, Nyar Ringa would firmly remark, “*Mak othith maber, ka iweyo to okapu biro bedo gi kido marach. Ng’ama biro yie nyiewo okapu ma kite rach?*” (Do not let the whole of the palm fronds fall into the boiling mixture. It will result in unevenly colored fronds. Who will want to buy a basket that has unevenly colored fronds?)

On Thursday of the basketry week, I learned *lunyo othith*. This process involved putting out the long strands of woven palm fronds to dry in the sun for a few minutes. This drying process enables the weaver to tear off and discard the brittle and weak lengths of palm frond that were not weaved into the strand. Nyar Ringa explained to me and showed me how to carry out this *lunyo othith* process. It is important that the process is carried out meticulously and no evidence is left of this torn off ends. If *lunyo othith* is done carelessly, the band would make a rough looking basket-not a pleasant sight. Nyar Ringa taught me this process by letting me watch and copy her actions. At first, I did not copy well and she pointed out my mistakes and had me go back and correct them.

Nyar Nyakach Agoro taught me the next step, which was *nyono okapu*. This step involves joining the edges of the earlier weaved strands in a spiral manner so as to form the flat base of the basket. To *nyono okapu*, the weaver straightens the resulting spiral by using her big toe while joining the band on the floor. The physical exertion needed to work in this unnatural posture is tremendous and, when I started, I could hardly maintain this posture for a few minutes. Slowly, I was successful in *nyono okapu*. Again Nyar Nyakach Agoro explained to me how and why it is necessary for me to follow the steps,

and then she let me copy her. We all worked on my basket, handing it back and forth as she checked on my work. Nyar Nyakach Agoro periodically asked me to undo and redo parts that I had not done well, all the while explaining how I should do it better. In this way, I joined the whole woven band in a spiral to make a complete basket.

Both Nyar Ugenya and Nyar Ringa showed me how to make the straps of the basket. They explained the process to me and had me follow their example. This was the easiest part for me because I used the weaving skills I had already learnt. I attached the strap to the basket and I was done learning basketry. Different from pottery, I learned to create one basket from beginning to end with short periods in which I undid parts in which I had erred.

Some other members of this basketry team-Nyar Ugenya ma Ugunja, Nyar Kano, and Nyar Uyoma, were also learning various aspects of basketry. They were also being taught as I was. Nyar Uyoma had never completed a basket all by herself and had always depended on another person to carry out any steps which she felt incompetent to execute. She purposed to complete a basket by herself when she saw that I was also determined to do so. Nyar Kano took the chance of my learning to learn the weaving style that I was being taught. She knew how to weave and made baskets, but used a different lattice work design.

As opposed to when I learned pottery, in basketry I had different participants who taught me the various steps of making a basket. They were the recognized experts for the various stages and they shared the responsibility of teaching me and the other participants. This sharing of responsibility also brought in the communal aspect of these

creative ventures. This group felt a responsibility to share these tasks because the group consisted of women with expertise in basketry.

Just as in pottery, both the formative and summative assessments are built into the process of basketry. The formative assessment in basketry includes being made aware of my short comings in executing the necessary instructions from my trainers at any time I blundered. The various trainers let me know when I did not do what they expected me to do, and asked me to redo such processes. When I made a mistake in the *nyono okapu* process, Nyar Nyakach ma Agoro said, “*Ma gony agonya nyaka ka*” (Undo up to here). They watched me closely all the time. This kind of attention minimized the instances when I had to undo large portions of the basket I was working on. Gradually, my trainers relaxed their supervision of my learning process, once it was apparent that I had learnt the procedure at hand.

For basketry, summative assessment consisted of my various trainers evaluating my complete basket. They each commented about it, about its beauty and durability. The feedback they gave me about its tangible value, made much of the final appraisal of my basketry activities. They congratulated me for successfully completing the basket. We all made estimates about how much grain it could carry.

Muono

Figure 4.12. Image showing house made using indigenous architecture.

“Ot en miyo” is a traditional Luo proverb that describes the house (shown in Figure 4.12) as the woman, and the woman as the house. Because the Luo regard the house as an embodiment of the woman, the conditions of a woman’s house reflect and affect her physical and emotional situation. A house in disrepair indicates that the woman does not have the physical capacity to maintain her house. People will ask questions: is she sick? Or is she just lazy? Because her house is falling apart, people believe that her life is falling apart. Such a house shows that the woman does not have the emotional and psychological connection with it that would make her a happy person functioning at her ultimate capacity. She may be unaware that it needs repair-a function

of psychological incapacitation; or maybe she does not care about her condition-which reflects her in a bad and ugly light within the community. Living in an ugly house has already harmed this woman because she now embodies ugliness itself. She becomes the brunt of ridicule among the village women. Her husband may react to this situation in a variety of ways, one of which could be abandoning the woman, getting a further wife, or even resorting to violence against her, further complicating her situation.

Women's groups, such as Bang' jomariiek, offer this woman a space in which to heal both physically and psychologically. By facilitating the reconstruction of her house, the group repairs her dented confidence and begins the process of her emotional healing. As this woman learns and/or sharpens her *muono* skills in this site, she gets a chance to engage in the development of her family and community by first building on her capacities to do this. The work of reconstruction enables the women to interact with one another, and discover the problems facing the woman whose house is in disrepair. By asking questions, the women discover those facing similar problems. As they repair the building, they generate ideas about addressing such problems. The building site becomes not only, an indigenous adult educational site but a healing place where members draw energy from each other and build their capacities to meet the challenges in their lives.



Figure 4.13. Image showing author putting finishing touches in *muono*.

Traditionally among the Luo, men made the structure of the house and the roofs. Women filled in and beautified the walls and floors in the Luo *chwuechgogical* process of *muono* (Figure 4.2). Filling in the walls is a four-step activity that sees the women collect and use different types of clay for each step. The first type of clay is called *marrum*, which is a mixture of soft stones and clay also used for making all-weather roads in Kenya. The second is whitish clay mixed with sand. This clay mixture occurs commonly in the area. In the third step, the mixture of whitish clay and sand is soaked and the clay separated from the sand. The resultant thick sludge is used as paint on the

walls. The fourth and last type of clay is any colorful soil that also frequently occurs in the West Reru area.

Nyar Gem ma Uranga and six other women have gathered in Nyar Asembo's compound to repair her kitchen structure from whose walls clay is falling off and exposing the timber to attacks by termites. The women are dressed in old tattered clothes specially set aside for such demanding work. They also don old tattered headscarves. They have collected the implements they need for the day, which include hoes, spades, and wheel barrows for digging out, shoveling and transporting the clay respectively.

Nyar Gem ma Uranga leads the other women to the point in Nyar Asembo's home where they will dig for *murram*. She guides the others to dig out the clay and transport it to the site of the kitchen in disrepair. This is back breaking work but Nyar Gem ma Uranga is a cheerful woman, who with the others, sustain a light-hearted work atmosphere. Once Nyar Gem ma Uranga determines that they have piled up enough clay, she starts the process of mixing the clay with water referred to as *nyono lowo*. This process involves the women trampling on the dampened *marrum* to form a mixture of dough-like consistency. This mixture is too heavy to for the women to handle effectively by use of hands, thus the trampling.

Nyar Gem ma Uranga and the other women drop the resultant thick dough into the wooden frames of the house, earlier built by the men. This process of fixing the clay onto the frame of the house is called *luto lowo*. Nyar Gem ma Uranga and the others take care to apply the clay onto the wooden frames of the house. Their goal here is to completely cover the wooden frames with this first rough cast. In doing so, they protect the wood from the marauding termites, which are common pests in this environment.

Sometimes the women sing as they work. They are never quiet. They talk about their lives, exchange cooking recipes, gossip about their husbands and lovers, discuss domestic problems, and provide support for each other in the group.

The women start fixing this mixture around the base of the house, and slightly raise this base to make an area on which people can sit against the walls. This seating place is called *ndiru*. Ndiru also functions to be some kind of buffer area that prevents flood water from washing away the base of the house.

Before Nyar Gem ma Uranga and the other women can move on to the next step, it is important that they let the walls cure for between one and two weeks depending on humidity levels in the air. In this next step, the women smoothen the walls or *wiro kor ot*. To do this, the women harvest a special mixture of soft grey clay and sand from particular points in which it is naturally found. They mix two parts of this grey clay to one part of cow dung. They use this mixture to *wiro kor ot* (smooth the walls). These women use this mixture of clay and cow dung to further fasten the clay already fixed on the walls.

The women are now ready for the next step called *yuoyo ot*, a process where the whitish clay mixed with sand (earlier harvested) is separated from the sand, mixed with water and smeared on the walls. The women then mix it with water to form a thick liquid of house paint consistency which they smear onto the walls as one would do paint. This is synonymous to using an undercoat to prepare the canvas for future drawing or painting. They then turn to the floor and level it by digging and packing *ge*, pebbles from hard rocks, on it.

The women ensure that the floor surfaces are even and devoid of bumps. The floor is the ground on which the beauty of the house rests. The women pay attention to the floor because the floor is the metaphor for falling or standing. If Nyar Asembo falls down in her own house, she cannot blame the floor. She can only blame herself for building a bad floor. These women are therefore paying a lot of attention to the construction of the floor, to keep Nyar Asembo's feet firm on the ground, which in turn becomes a symbol for confidence, responsibility, and reliability. A falling woman is not confident, cannot be relied upon, and cannot face her responsibilities to all her resources.

They smear the mixture of clay and cow dung onto the floor just as they had earlier done for the walls. While this surface is still wet, the women then proceed to draw beautiful patterns onto the floor using the thorny edges of the leaves of the Aloe Vera plant, called *ogaka*. They create, copy, or incorporate aspects of the other women's patterns into their own. They know that a house thus prepared has been treated with organic chemicals and does not get dusty, is beautiful, smells homely, and repels insects, reptiles and especially chiggers, which, if left unchecked, could cause a bad infestation on peoples' feet.

Nyar Gem ma Uranga and the other *jo muono* (women who carry out the task of *muono*) do not pronounce the house completed, before drawing mural designs on its walls. Not all these women consider themselves competent muralists. The building process only offers them an opportunity to improve their skills in mural decorative work by learning from each other. For Nyar Asembo's house, Nyar Sakwa decided to do a contour drawing of a flower petal, using a dark color that contrasts with the dominant color on the wall. Nyar Gem and the others know that the idea is really not to produce a

masterpiece. None of them thinks she is going to be the next Leonardo Da Vinci. The painting is not art for art's sake. It is art for health's sake. The painting makes the artist happy, which in turn makes the entire. It is also a gift of love to the house owner, to demonstrate that the group values her, and considers her happiness as vital to the health of the entire community.

How I was taught *muono*.

In this relatively collective activity, we collected and used four different types of clay to complete the process of *muono*. The first clay the others and I collected was a coarse one that was more of a mixture of clay and soft stones. Nyar Gem ma Uranga showed me the vegetation of the place in which it was found and demonstrated just how far down into the earth I was to dig for this coarse clay. I learnt by copying the others in digging and collecting this clay. We dug out the clay with hoes, then used spades to pile it up on wheel barrows in which we transported it to the *muono* site.

After we had collected sufficient amounts at the site of Nyar Asembo's aging kitchen, Nyar Sakwa and Nyar Gem Uranga showed me, by doing, how to mix this clay with water. We did this by trampling on it because it was much too heavy to be mixed by hand. We moved mounds of this mixture to points along the walls of the kitchen to make it easier to access when we commenced *muono* work. We then started the process referred to as *luto kor ot*. In this process, we filled the spaces between the intertwined timbers, already made as a frame for the walls by the men. I learned this task by copying the other *jomuono*.

Nyar Gem ma Uranga and the other women taught me the next step called *yuoyo kor ot* or smoothing the walls through the use of more than one technique. They did this

probably because I found some processes in this step to be particularly challenging.

During the initial process in this step of *muono*, I had quickly copied the other women in digging out the best clay and transporting it to the work site. This was a mixture of grayish clay and sand which occur naturally in many places in this area. The next process in this step required that we harvest fresh cow dung and mix it with this clay. Nyar Gem ma Uranga explained that it was important for me to be careful to mix two parts of clay to one of cow dung. For this, I balked. Cow dung repulses me.

I was particularly repulsed by the activity of handling fresh cow dung in this wet rainy season. My revulsion emerged from having to handle the squishy green smelly goo of fresh cow dung that occurred in diner plate-shaped mounds. Dung beetles were already busy burrowing into the dung making the task even viler because I needed to be careful when removing them from the dung. They have a way of fastening their clawy feet on appendages such as fingers and toes. I would have to carefully unclutch their feet from my fingers because I could not afford to shake my fingers violently to dislodge them. This same motion would see me spray myself with fresh cow dung and so became revolted further.

The other women sensed my repugnance. They used various techniques to tide me over this revulsion. They encouraged me by giving me their experience that illustrated that this task could be even messier when the dung was mixed with dog's dropping which was useless and had to be manually separated from the cow's dung. They also explained to me that this was an important step in *muono* because the use of cow's dung on the walls not only had the effect of repelling reptiles and harmful insect pests, but also made the house smell good and ensured the walls did not get dusty. The

others told me that the only way I could know if the mixture was done correctly was by feeling the texture, a sense I could get only from handling it. Participant also teased me into handling the dung. I did handle it but I compulsively kept washing my hands and going right back to the activity and greatly amusing the other *jomuono*.

Of my apparent struggle, Nyar Gem Uranga said, “*Donge ineno ka ma dwaro chuny dhako. Chuny dichuo dikoro osebolo tijni kucha.*” (Do you not appreciate that these kind of work needs the resilient and persevering spirit that only a woman has? A man’s spirit would have abandoned this work by now.) This high praise, for me and for womanhood helped develop tolerance for this activity, an achievement of which Nyar Sakwa took pictures and a video shot. The teasing and joking helped me overcome my aversion, when I started imagining how funny I must seem to the other *jomuono* washing my hands only to dive right back and handle the cow dung mixture. After successfully mixing the clay with cow dung, I was able to copy the others in the process of *yuoyo kor ot*. I learnt by doing.

Nyar Sakwa took me through the third step which is referred to as *wiro kor ot* or painting the walls. For this process we soaked the whitish clay in water to separate it from the sand in it. We did this by mixing it with water and letting it settle. We used the resultant thick sludge that settled on top of the container, and which had the consistency of paint, to coat the walls. The walls appeared to have been covered with some greyish paint.

After painting the walls with the grayish clay mixture, we moved on to the last step of painting mural designs on the walls. Nyar Gem ma Uranga led me and the other women to her farm, nearby, to collect reddish clay with which we would draw the mural

designs. This was a relatively easy task because it involved scooping clay from the millet farm. We did not even have to dig it out because the farm had recently been weeded and so the clay was loose and devoid of much foreign bodies. Nyar Asembo Kochieng' showed me how to mix this clay with water to form sludge of paint-like consistency. Nyar Gem ma Uranga explained to me that they created their own designs, copied from others or adapted some aspects of other women's designs into their own. I copied the participants' designs and tried to add in any personal touches that I could. The house was then complete and ready for Nyar Asembo's use.

The process of building and repairing the walls of a house is an investment in the health of the house owner, and, ultimately, in the life of the entire community. We all inspected and admired the work and commented on its beauty. Nyar Asembo knew that each complimentary comment about her kitchen was not simply an architectural remark. It was our way of saying, "Nyar Asembo, you are now a healthy woman. Therefore you are beautiful. We are proud of you and we love you."

Just as in pottery and basketry, *muono* had an inbuilt formative evaluation. At every step, my fellow participants let me know how I had done. If it was good, we moved on to the next step and, if not, I got to practice more of that process. They took pictures and videos, at times, as a reward for me having learnt a particular step. Summative evaluation consisted of our admiring final comments to Nyar Asembo on her beautiful house.

How I Learned *Chwuech*

The learning enables in my personality and those in the West Reru community helped me learn *chwuech*. Some particular personal qualities that I perceived to have

helped me learn *chwuech* include the fact that I am a Luo speaker and a woman. All participants spoke Luo better than they did our national language, Kiswahili. They had just a few words of English which they used once in a while, more as a light hearted teasing of each other, or as one said, “*Nyaka asung dho odiero mane anyiewo*”(I have to show off the language I bought from the white man). My ability to speak the Luo eased communication among us.

Moreover, as a Luo woman, I had relatively free access to the group interaction when compared to how a male in my shoes would have fared (men would have restricted access to female spaces because of their gender). The man would not have gained the level of acceptance, among the participants, that I did. Being a woman made it easier for me to be assimilated among the participants. As related by Kenyatta (1965), there are certain processes in indigenous communities that are gender specific. He described pottery among the Kikuyu community of Kenya as one such venture. The presence of a man in the vicinity of the firing pots was considered a bad omen that resulted in most of the pots breaking in the kiln. Furthermore, apart from my gender and linguistic orientation, the fact of my being a Luo allowed me to be privy to the *kit dak* epistemological concept. Because of the knowledge of this concept, it was relatively convenient for me to integrate my study design with this structure, for the success of my learning and the study.

Another personal advantage I perceived in this study was that I am former teacher of a teenage girls’ boarding school in an economically poor area, in addition to being a veteran of Western style learning institutions. I have been a student and teacher in these institutions almost all my life. My most recent assignment in these institutions in Kenya

was in the referred to position of a deputy head teacher in a girls' boarding school in a poor agricultural area. As a result of my involvement in educational ventures at their various levels, I felt confidence and prepared to engage in like activities in the study and among an economically challenged population.

Further, I was raised by a single mother and watched her struggle to raise the five of us on her meager pay as a chamber maid. I had also often volunteered to manage programs designed to build the capacities of underserved women and out of school girls in the Kericho area of Western Kenya. In these programs, I was involved in activities that explored the various alternatives women had in fighting poverty and disease in their community. I was thus familiar with the physical and emotional dynamics at play in the lives of poor girls and women as is presented in the West Reru community. All these experiences worked for my good by making me familiar and empathetic with the various backgrounds of study participants.

Also, as a child, I had tried my hand, though playfully, in the creative forms these women produced. I was not serious and so never purposed to learn a *chwuech* form from the beginning to end. Nevertheless, I remember how proud I always was when showing off my little baskets, pots, and gourds that I had made and decorated even though I had received much help from my late grandmother. So the creative forms such as pots, baskets, and *muono* were not totally new to me.

In this study, I required to be more careful because I am a researcher who has been trained by Western scholarship. The study instruments I had access to, were best suited for collecting data from contexts that were Western in orientation and characteristic. It was necessary that I adapt these instruments appropriately in order that

they become acceptable among an indigenous population. Last but not least, in the study, I interrogated and let go of some deeply held assumptions about instructional processes which I had collected in my many years in school. These ideas formed the frame through which I had hitherto interacted with educational matters and issues.

My assumptions.

Rigid lesson plans result in successful teaching and learning.

I have been a learner and teacher in Western based educational institutions almost all my life. The passage of time has reinforced, in me, some ideas about teaching and learning have gone unchallenged all this time. This study offered me the chance to re-examine these assumptions. One common assumption I held, was that for successful learning it was important for the teacher to have a rigid plan for the lesson ahead, and to design instructional activities around this plan.

The first day I started to learn how to make pots I was tempted to ask for an agenda of the day's activities. Participants engaged in interactions which at times had no relation with the learning activities at hand. At first, I felt like steering the conversation back to pottery, which was the first form I learned, but later I realized that these discussions did not in any way detract from my learning experience nor even distract Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa, our pottery expert, in her instruction. She took part in the conversation but also watched my progress keenly, making suggestions, correcting me, or even asking someone else to help me through a process. These interactions even made learning the skill easier for me because they offered background to the learning activities, akin to soothing background music. Normally, such music would function to keep ones'

mind focused on the task without being unduly distracting. The following are some examples of discussions that came up.

Advice on saving crops from deer.

Nyar Nyakach Agoro complained that deer were likely to eat up the entire bean crop on her farm by the river Awach, if she did not find a way to stop them soon. She lived near the banks of the river, in an area that was forested with thick undergrowth. She basically lived there alone with her young children, since her husband was always away in the urban area where he had a job. The fact that the deer ate at night was a major challenge for her, as she was afraid of going out to chase them at that time because she feared meeting other dangers that the darkness might harbor. This area had other dangerous wild animals like leopards and hyenas. She lamented that each morning she found larger portions of her bean crop that the deer had destroyed the previous night. She wondered whether her harvest would feed her family that year. Nyar Nyakach advised her to lather water with the strong scented Rexona bathing soap and sprinkle the water on the edges of her farm. The smell of this pungent soap would discourage the deer from getting into the farm. Nyar Nyakach said the deer would interpret the scent to mean that there were humans in the farm and a deer trap was set up. Nyar Nyakach advised:

“Kaw a kawa sabun mar Rexona ni. Ibude ei pi ae to ikwo e dho puodho no kama; mwanda no, koro kobiro, to paro mana ni in e puodho kanyo. Koro oluor ma ok ochop kanyo.”

(Take Rexona soap, lather it and sprinkle the edges of the farm like this. When deer come they will think that you are there in the farm. They will not come near there.)

Advice on caring for patients with full-blown AIDS.

Nyar Ringa has a patient she is giving care to; her mother-in-law. Apparently all the Bang’ jomariiek group members have at one time or another given care to terminally

ill relatives or friends, and often ones with HIV/AIDS infection. There was always much discussion about how to take care of terminally ill patients. The members mentioned compassion as a reason why they offered care to relatives and friends who were in a helpless state or '*ok gi nyal kata matin.*' On the first day of pottery, Nyar Ringa's mother-in-law had wanted soda-pop. Nyar Ringa had sent for the Coca-cola brand Fanta, thinking that the fruity taste would appeal to her patient. Most of the participants present on that day advised her against giving her patient such a drink. They said that for patients as sick as her mother-in-law, the brand Coca-cola was best as its sizeable gaseous content helped relieve stitches in the stomach, common with such patients. They also mentioned certain types of food that care-givers should keep away from their patients, however much they wanted them. *Dek* or spider web vegetable, and especially when it was mixed with beef could cause fatal diarrhea in the patients, whereas for healthy people it was a very nutritious dish. To endorse this advice, Nyar Ringa gave the example of when her patient insisted on eating *dek* and beef. The patient had consequently suffered a serious and almost fatal bout of diarrhea.

Classrooms have walls.

In this research, I also interrogated my assumption that it was necessary for a classroom to have walls. Many, if not all, the classrooms I had been a learner or teacher in, had walls. The name classroom itself suggests some walled structure. In a Western setting, a wall-less classroom refers to online instruction which allows the learner to take instruction anywhere, and in most cases as an individual relating with a computer. As such, this instruction through computer is not really a wall-less situation. This kind of

distant learning introduced the dynamics of management of the technology involved in this learning and teaching relationship.

In West Reru, most of the time we learned under a tree and at the sites of the activity or processes we were engaged in. It was refreshing for me to relate with this alternative concept of classroom that I experienced here. While in class, I was able to watch life go on around us. It was not uncommon for a passerby to drop in to check on us. The rigidity and thus stressful effect of being confined within walls was absent in this comfortable classroom situation. Learning was more natural in these innate surroundings, and I enjoyed it. I, like Maina (2003), did let go of my assumption about what a classroom should look like. In her time, Maina talked of the pain of having to give up assumptions and ideological perspectives which she had collected over the years in educational institutions; a step she needed to take for her study among Kenyan secondary school teachers and students.

Teachers are managers of classroom interaction.

In my years in Western institutions I got used to one teacher taking charge of the class and interactions in it. Indeed, when more than one teacher taught the class, as in some of my doctoral classes where two instructors shared a class, the two would share the responsibility of being heads of the class. The instructional processes in the study site were conducted more in line with what Reagan (2005) observed about non-Western systems of teaching and learning. He explained that it is the duty of all in the community to learn what they do not know and teach what they know to others. He submitted that:

..education and child rearing have commonly been seen as a social responsibility shared by all the members of the community. Although individuals may play greater or lesser roles in this undertaking, it is significantly seen as the province of everyone. The concept of some adults being teachers and others (presumably)

being *non-teachers* is a somewhat alien one to many traditions...The idea of teachers engaging in a profession, with specialized knowledge and expertise not held by others, appears to be a Western and relatively recent innovation (p. 249).

In the West Reru site, participants took a teacher or student role according to the skill being learnt at that time and what they felt they were adept in. Here, participants felt free to step in and help me correct mistakes that I had made. This kind of readiness to aid each other and me could have resulted from the communal nature of the environment and production of the creative forms.

In the indigenous teaching and learning environment, everyone assumes the roles of a teacher and learner. The experiences and knowledge everyone brings to the group is highly valued and actively sought after. Everyone is expected to share the information they have and which could be of good to the other participants in the indigenous adult instructional environment. It is almost tantamount to being anti-social when one does not share known important and useful information with others. The participants in this learning environment seek the expert opinion and knowledge of the experts, when they are confronted with a situation in their learning that needs it. The designated trainer of the group or expert is more of a manager of the instructional activities than the main conveyer of knowledge. They were truly my community of practice, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their articulation of the idea of situated learning.

Accesses to educational opportunities.

In my years in Western based institutions of learning, I have known the use of a specific system in admission decisions to school and college. These admission systems include bottlenecks such as testing and, even, levying of fees, which result in a relative homogeneity of learners. Although adults have been known to bring into any learning

situation life experiences, (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) the similarity of learners in Western learning institutions delimit the range of these life experiences that learners come bring into instructional environments. In the study, anyone could join the group, there was no membership fee charged. The participants let me know that all who could be faithful to the groups' activities and responsibilities in the community were free to join it.

In this study site, I learnt *chwuech* within a group of participants with mixed ability in the skill. I was the novice-apprentice, and because of this it was necessary for me to start learning the tasks from their logical beginning, which for pottery was choice of clay, and for *muono* the choice of first type of clay. It was different for basketry, because in place of choice of palm fronds, I started off with the fronds that had been pre-selected by my fellow participants. It was only on the third day that I went to Akala market to pick out ideal palm fronds. By the time I went to Akala market to buy palm fronds, I knew the good ones and even the best color to buy for them. I had always assumed that it was important to deliver instructional content in a logical sequence or else the learners would have a difficult time understanding it. The reality that I had no difficulty in learning basketry, although I started from the middle of the production process partly negated my assumption that instructional content should always be designed in a logical sequence.

In addition, the rest of the participants were at various levels of skill acquisition. This worked well for me because they could chip in and help me when I was experiencing difficulties with a process which they already knew. They, in turn, got help from each other and the experts on processes they had not yet conserved. This kind of

multi-directional activity created a healthy interaction circle in which everyone contributed to the success of the instructional venture. This aspect of these indigenous adult educational processes was different from the formal school classrooms, where an effort is made to put together learners in one skill acquisition level and use a uniform curriculum to teach them.

***Chwuech* environment.**

The facilitators of *chwuech* that are intrinsic in the West Reru community include the characteristics of the environment that surrounds the indigenous adult educational processes and the characteristics of its participants. This instructional environment is comfortable, welcoming, and accepting. Participants in the study confirmed that, no one was locked out of these trainings because they did not have fee charged for training. Such participants, as did not have money, could still pay for the training services in kind. Apart from accessing the training, the training environment was accommodative of members with diverse needs. Mothers with small children and no alternative childcare arrangements could easily mind the children as well as carry out their creative production. The village *Nyamrerwa* who would need to attend to emerging village health matters once in a while could absent themselves from meetings at such times. I liked to be in an environment that was inclusive of all in the community. A major question in this study had been about how underserved women in the rural areas of Luo traditional lands could best access these *chwuech* activities; they only needed to organize themselves into a group and be recipients of *chwuech*.

Indigenous African adult educational environments are vibrant, spaces teeming with information sharing in all directions. In such a space, learning is made easier when

all feel free to share their experiences, and new knowledge with others present. Experts share their knowledge with the novices and apprentices, but this in no way means that the apprentice may not share some new information they have with the expert. From my interactions in the *Bang' jomariiek* group, I understood that participants got esteemed according to how readily they shared any new information, skills, or anything useful they knew. Members took it upon themselves, and were actively encouraged by those who suspected their advantage, to share what they knew with each other for the betterment of the group of women. The responses they got from the others affirmed the appreciation these others felt in receiving such information. Some information shared in this site included: agricultural best practices, and healthy living (especially about avoiding and managing HIV/AIDS infection and patients).

I learnt *chwuech* because in this indigenous adult educational environment, there was much more information pertinent to the community well-being, that was always shared by the participants. I felt that the interactions in this site were designed to help me succeed in life. To a large extent *chwuech* is about what was good for me. This feeling made me take pride in learning *chwuech*. Indeed, scholars such as Avoseh (2001) described the importance attached to an individual's continued learning throughout his life. This attitude of continually being ready to learn, as exhibited by members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group made one an active member of the community, able to confront new topics that beset the community.

Indigenous African educational philosophy view learning as communal activities which are designed to enhance the community by preparing community members for life in it. The communalism tenet of African indigenous educational philosophy recognizes

that teaching and learning is a process that enhances the community, both in the sense of supporting a community of learners, and teaching to promote social cohesion; this cohesion being that between one and the “other”. This “other” could be another person, the environment, spirits, or even the greater whole, among other things (Ntseane, 2006). It is thus the responsibility of all community members to involve themselves in educational activities. Community members owe it to each other to be knowledgeable in matters crucial for community health. The community depends on the input of every person, for its success.

For the case of this study, some of this extra but interesting information was conveyed in discussions that would generally follow from some step in which we were engaged in the instructional process. One instance was the discussion that ensued while we were shaping the bottoms of the pots; and activity called *chwero agulu*. We got to discussing child birth processes in which the pottery expert Nyar Ogola Ja Sakwa explained to us how to shape a new born baby’s head, so they have a pleasingly shaped head in adulthood. She also described to us how to rub particular herbs (such as devils’ fruit) on the baby’s face to ensure a good complexion in adulthood. This is useful information to members who were of childbearing ages, or those who could transmit this information to any such women, that they know. Indeed, had all the discussions in the West Reru site only revolved around the skills I was learning then I would have been really bored after a relatively short period of time every day. The other information that was shared offered variety, and helped keep the study site and activities interesting. Wolcott (1978) describes the boredom he felt in his research study in which he was confined to ‘shadowing’ a school principal. Some of the days proved routine and boring.

I found some of the discussions that went on in the West Reru site very captivating because they appealed to my affective dimension. The discussions worked to keep me fascinated by the learning activity I was engaged in, and even soothed away the discomfort I felt, at times, when I had to sit or work in unusual postures. When making the pots, I needed to sit on the ground with my feet spread apart with the pot I was making, between my stretched feet. This was a very uncomfortable posture for me, as I was not used to assuming it. However, with my affective dimension captured by the narrations going on, I had little chance to feel sorry for myself the way I would if I focused on my physical discomfort. I thought these narrations were important in helping me focus on the lessons at hand. I got so engaged by the narrations and discussions going on around me that I empathized with the players in these narratives and wondered how I would react if I was to be confronted with the same situation. The participants in their talk attributed bad things to the devil and good to *Nyasaye* or the creator to whom all things belong. In this vein, Nyar Ugenya ma Ugunja narrated to us how she once woke up with *jochiende* (evil spirits):

Nawuok ot ni adhi manyo kibarua 'taon'. Aluo ndara gi jowete wa to kara janeko moro osenena. Ochima achima tir ae to owacho nia 'in chiega ma oselal na highni mang'eny ahinya, asemanyi kuonde mang'eny kawuono ayudi. Wadhi dala.' Dhoga ne omokoma onge gima nanyalo timo. Ji bende wanwa nafas kaparo ni ang'eyo janeko no. Ne ang'ado ndara to janeko bende odum kono kae to odhi ie ji mbele to siema kowacho ni, 'kawuono onge kama tini dhie, an kodi'. Na luor ma adok ot makata chieng' no ok nawuok oko nikech naluoro jachien mane achiewo go chieng'no. (One day, I left for town to get a temporary job. I was with fellow jobseekers on the way to town when a mentally challenged man stopped me amongst all the others on the road. He said, 'you are my wife who disappeared and I have looked for you everywhere. Today I have found you. Let us go home.' I was very frightened. Other people seemed to think I knew this crazy man because they did not want to interfere in what was going on. I crossed the busy road to the other side but the crazy man followed me saying, 'today I am not letting go of you.' I decided to go back home in fear. For the rest of the day, I tried not to go outdoors as I feared that I was under the powers of an evil spirit.)

I empathized with Nyar Ugenya ma Ugunja. I wondered how I would have behaved in similar circumstances. This kind of imagination worked as a learning opportunity for me as it gave me something on which I could focus, and develop my thoughts about alternatives I might take.

Apart from narrating stories that involved them, the participants invariably related stories about others in the community, who were not members of our group. Commonly, society would call this gossip, and especially if it is negative stories about an absent person. But, in the study, these kinds of stories were used more for their teaching content, than with a malicious intent. Once, our talk shifted to family life, and how perseverance was an important part of its success. Nyar Gem Uranga got to narrate a story about a member, Nyar Mwalo. This member rarely came to the site, and, consequently, I might have seen her only once or twice the whole time the study was going on. Nyar Ugenya said of her:

Nyani ne ogolo ywuak okinyi mang'ich. Kane ji ochokore to ne owinjo mana ka oywuok ni, 'achandora malit yawa, achandora malit e dala ni yawa.' Gima ne odhiero ji en ni kata mana okinyi no, ne okudho mach odwa tedo ne nyithinde! (That woman raised an alarm one early morning. When people gathered at her home to find out what her problem was she was heard to wail, 'I am suffering so much, I am suffering so much in this home.' What perplexed all gathered was that, she was claiming to be suffering so much yet even at that time, in the morning, she was lighting a fire to prepare breakfast for her children!)

This might sounded like gossip but it functions to affirm the importance attached to perseverance. The participants particularly picked up on the fact that Nyar Mwalo had the food for her childrens' breakfast. They observed that, she was better off than other women who did not have food to cook for their children. Nyar Gem Uranga thought that being able to provide her children with food was so important and satisfying for a

woman, that she could not fathom what the said “suffering” entailed. According to her a woman only suffered if her children were uncomfortable, otherwise she should persevere through any other life circumstance. Life was not always easy, and it was essential that people developed a firm and resilient spirit.

This study’s instructional environment is holistic. This environment engaged me in multiple levels; physically, mentally, and spiritually. This comprehensive involvement ensured that I was captivated and there was little chance of detractors like boredom in my learning efforts. Holisticism in instructional processes refers to the teaching and learning processes that involve all the faculties of a person. This is an aspect of adult education that is increasingly being debated in the adult education conversation in global scholarship, as described by Merriam and Kim (2008). Merriam (2008, p. 3) articulated: “Learning is a holistic activity involving the mind, body, and spirit. It is also a collective activity, in that learning is done with the community for the benefit of the community.” Experts who develop learning programs that do not capture the whole person miss the opportunity of positively enhancing the experiences of their learners.

As a result of the holistic nature of the indigenous adult educational context in West Reru, I got to learn the art forms and some Luo traditions by utilizing my affective, psychomotor, and cognitive faculties. One of the many instances that came up for me to learn something about our traditions included the time on day three of *muono*. Nyar Sakwa, a widow, received a visitor who came looking for her at our study site. The visitor was a *jater*. Traditionally, such men would have their own families but, in addition, choose to take up the duty of looking after a dead family members’ family unit. Their duties involve, but are not limited to, protecting the widow’s family. This was an

honorable thing in the olden days but with time it has been reinterpreted and trivialized to be harmful. *Jater* of current times reinvents tradition and often greedily takes up responsibility to many widows and so easily passes on HIV/AIDS infection from woman to woman. Participants told me that the Luo women who held on to traditions thought that if they were not good to *jater*, then misfortune would follow them. Some participants did not believe this, recognizing the dangers of submitting to this tradition, and thus did not have a *jater* in their lives. The women who did not believe in *jater* had also reinvented tradition in order to keep themselves safe from the dangers of *jater*. Of not having a *Jater* although she is a widow, Nyar Gem ma Uranga said:

An jater aonge go gi kinde. Ka jaoda ne Nyasaye ose omo to oromo. Ok adwa ng'ato ma biro chando wiya ae to mia paro mang'eny manyalo ketho ngima na. Ka ineno gi kama seche moko obe koro okak mana ni odwa goyi to jaodi monindo to ne ok jalweny. Rito jater en tich mohinga. (I do not have time for an inheritor. Now that God has taken my husband I will live alone. I do not want a person who will hurt me and give me harmful stress. At times *jater* would get violent and want to assault you and yet even your husband who died had not assaulted you. Living with *jater* is not easy.)

In the study, there was widespread belief in the spiritual world and its effects on the lives of the living. Participants discussed how to avoid harm, in the form of punishment from the spiritual world, by being of good behavior in the community. This kind of behavior ranged from what the Christian Bible suggests as appropriately God fearing, to what the community saw as appropriate ancestral fearing conduct. The spirituality component is built into the interactions in these indigenous adult educational

processes, as it formed a very important aspect of community life. Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) described that an important characteristics in most indigenous cultures, is that an individual is seen as connected to nature and all that is in it. This includes the spiritual world and all earth's resources.

Illustrations of this belief in the inter-connections of individuals to nature came up fairly often. The Luo believe that anyone on whose farm potting clay naturally occurs should be ready to allow others who need it, to collect some for free. Such people on whose farm potting clay is found would experience harm from angry ancestral spirits if they asked to be compensated for the clay or even forbid others from collecting the clay. Nyar Asembo gave an example of a person who asked for payment from clay collectors and got sick with some unexplainable condition that baffled medical personnel. He got well when he let people collect clay, for free, from his farm.

Another illustration of this important spiritual belief system is that cow dung ought to be given free to anyone who needs it for *muono*. Anyone who wanted it just required to inform the owner of the home, into which they went to harvest it, of their intentions. This acknowledgement and reverence of matters to do with the spirit, led me to believe that, for the success of any learning programs developed to be used with adults, it required to deliberately incorporate a spiritual component in order to appeal to and capture the whole learner.

This spiritual component seemed to encompass the total environment of the study. Reverence of the afterworld was an important component of the community life in West Reru. John Mbiti (1969 p. 1) proclaimed that "Africans are notoriously religious." Mbiti explained that the African carried his religion wherever he went, be it beer parties or the

farms. Magesa (1998) also attested to the suggestion, that the African religion is a way of life, as it involves everything that exists in the society. On arrival, the White missionaries found the indigenous people in Kenya already a very religious people, who had elaborate worship and related ceremonies that organized and controlled their lives in the community, thus ensured their survival. Slowly, the White missionaries tapped into this religious nature to introduce the worship of one Supreme Being.

The acceptance of this kind of worship was slow, and to date it is sprinkled with ancestral veneration that is the main point of many of the religious ceremonies the Luo observe. Elaborate funeral ceremonies and cleansing of the living are an example of this ancestral veneration. For the *Bang' jomariiek* members, prayer was the set norm to begin our meetings. Although the members prayed the Christian prayers, and believed in the Christian mysticism, they nevertheless had strong beliefs of the presence of the Luo ancestral and spiritual world. This was a world that was inhabited by the living dead and ancestors who had an impact in the way the community members conducted their lives.

To give an inkling of how highly esteemed and respected the inhabitants of this alternative world were, the many widows in the group invariably related dreams in which the spirits of their dead husbands gave them advice on how to manage issues in their lives. These women still experienced a loyalty to their departed husbands and felt obligated to uphold the husbands' wishes. To be sure, the Luo refer to widows as *monde liete* or literally translated as wives of graves. *Jakom*, a widow, talked of a dream in which her late husband asked her to stop a business venture that kept her away from home, as she went to sell goods at different market places. She says he appeared in the dream and uttered one statement, "*Ere ng'ama iwe dala?*" (Who have you left at home?)

She took that to mean that he was displeased that she, the first wife, whose responsibility was to take care of the home, had left his home without an adult to take care of it. This was more so given that her co-wife was also always away on business trips. *Jakom* stopped her business venture, and stayed at home.

In view of this, I would suggest that adult teaching and learning environments have a spiritual component built into their programs. If this is left out then the program would have failed to serve the whole adult who engages it, especially given that by the time one attains adulthood, one may have gone through some experiences that they cannot logically explain but only relegate to the mysterious alternative world. Things such as the death of loved ones frequently make both adults and, even younger people, to seek a relationship with the hidden, mysterious alternative world.

To learn *chwuech*, I relied heavily on my community of practice which in this case was comprised of the participants in the study. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) studied the importance of the supportive network of a community of practice in helping adults learn and conserve the new knowledge they had learned. The other women helped me learn the creative forms in the study. In the same way, our pottery expert and trainer, Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa, said she easily learnt different designs of pots from her community of practice, which consisted of her peers involved in pottery. The implication for this finding is that developers of adult learning programs ought to include a support structure in the form of a cohort of learners in their programs. In this cohort, learners are also able to draw on the strengths and different knowledge that they each bring to the learning program. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), stated that adults bring into any teaching and learning environment a lot of lived experience.

This lived experience is important, as adult educators can harness it to enhance the educational experience of the adult learner.

My learning experience was boosted by how much I came in contact with the three forms of creative products. The community utilized the products that we produced. In her concept of situated cognition, Lave (1988) observed that adults learnt better by when the instructional content is useable in their everyday lives. The African indigenous educational processes involve content that deals directly with issues that the learner has to cope with daily in the community (Kenyatta, 1965; Maathai, 2006; Sifuna, 1990). We used pots in homes, found them on sale in markets, and came in contact with potters in the community, such as in my case, in West Reru. The same was true for palm frond baskets and *muono*. The creative skills we learnt were useful in our community, as the products were visibly in use by community members.

I learnt *chwuech* through song. An example is when Nyar Gem ma Uranga while *wiro kor ot* sang the praises of a beautiful woman/house. In this song, the house and the woman were one and the same, as Nyar Gem ma Uranga expressed, in similar terms, the importance of both in sustaining the family. The house shielded the family from harmful external forces just as the woman did the same for the family. The house was a source of comfort and happiness, qualities also expected of a woman by the Luo.

I learnt *chwuech* from the sayings, metaphors, proverbs, and similes that participants constantly invoked as we worked. All symbolic language conveyed information pertinent for the task we were involved in, the community, or for entertainment. While *muono* various participant reiterated that *ot en miyo* (a house is the woman). The Luo believe the woman is the embodiment of the house and they succeed

or fail as one. Once when I had to recycle the pot I was making because it had mistakes, Nyar Ogolla ja Sakwa explained to me the importance of making the decision to recycle early. I would then not waste my time working on a pot that was doomed to be recycled. She said, “*chako chon oloyo dhi ka ajuoga*,” (Starting [making a healthy decision early] is better than visiting the doctor). The other participants latched onto this saying and a discussion soon ensued of the importance of seeking medical attention early in the case of HIV/AIDS infection.

I learnt through humor. There was a lot of teasing and banter in the production of these creative forms. Participants would crack jokes about their productions, especially when they had made a mistake. Time and again, I came to appreciate the function of the pervasive good humor and banter that permeates the indigenous teaching and learning environments such as this. This aura encouraged all learners to succeed in their skill acquisition. Participants laughed about a woman in the village who claimed to be suffering in her marriage yet she was able to feed her children. They found this hilarious because they thought that real suffering was tied to a woman’s inability to secure and provide for her family.

I learnt *chwuech* because more emphasis was placed in appreciation and praise than in reprimanding mistakes made in the learning process. The others made me aware of the positive steps I made in the learning tasks at hand. When making pots Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa would detect that I was experiencing some difficulty in a process and verbally instruct me on how to approach the process. If I still could not get that process of production, she would ask someone to demonstrate that process for me to copy. In case I still was unable to conserve that process she would decide to demonstrate it herself.

Although discussing learning among children, Mead (1975), studied how they learnt in an indigenous community. She described the teaching of children in the Manus community of New Guinea. She observed that this teaching style was more focused in affirming the child's learning progress than chastising the mistakes the child made while they learnt a task. For instance, adults stopped what they were engaged in to applaud a child's success in punting a canoe, walking or swimming but never made a big deal out of the mistakes they made while learning these tasks.

My need to identify with fellow Luo women.

I learnt *chwuech* because I wished to identify with fellow Luo women. I felt that I had been challenged to successfully learn the three creative forms. From my experiences in this study, I obtained that Luo women are always ready to learn in order to improve their community. Participants were always prepared to learn the new positive knowledge available. It even did not matter much if participants were in a position to employ this new knowledge in their lives or not. It was an affirmation that such new information was good and ought to be gained. I saw this, not only, when we actively inquired and learnt things from each other, but also in how the other women eagerly took up the opportunity to learn how to take photos and video shots using my cameras. None had a camera or even hoped to go into photography, but that did not stop them from learning rudimentary photography from me. Participants were also curious to learn from me about various things, some of which included life in the U.S.A, processes in higher institutions of learning, and such.

In the study, I was very proud of the pots, baskets, walls, and floors I made. Learning these functional and useful skills made me acquire some semblance of a sense

of independence and a measure of self-sufficiency. The skills I acquired also made me get a sense of belonging to my native Luo heritage. By my success in *chwuech*, I was affirming to myself that I could hold my own among fellow Luo women. I had developed an acute awareness of my shaky claim to my Luo heritage when I came to the U.S.A I had missed speaking my language and its ever present banter, eating our traditional foods, going for our ceremonies and just about anything Luo, that I had taken for granted when I was back home and surrounded by the familiar.

Nevertheless, it was never lost on me and the others that unlike them, I did not need to make a living out of the creative skills I learnt. In fact, the unlikeliness of my using these skills to earn a living had contributed to their bewilderment at the inception of the field work. They had appropriately wondered why I needed the skills, since I could make a living from the professional teaching skills I had acquired from school. I am glad that this realization, though acknowledged by all of us, did not constitute much of an impediment to our interactions in the study, apart from being alluded to once or twice during the duration of the study.

My Contribution to the West Reru *Chwuech* Environment

Towards pottery, basketry, and *muono*.

Apart from compensating my fellow participants for their time with a mere token of appreciation in cash form, I determined to give back in kind to this generous community of women. This was a fair thing to do, an in-built aspect in the *chwuechgogy*, and also an important precept of both the feminist and post-colonial study methods, as proposed by Menzies (2001), Moreton-Robinson (2000), Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), Weber-Pillwax (1999), and Weiler (1988). I pro-offered myself to give of any skill and

information that any study participant thought might be useful to them. In this frame of mind, I answered all questions the participants asked me with as much information as I could give.

I had not known how much I had been watched, evaluated, and considered inspiring until I heard the sentiments that my fellow participants expressed on the last day of the study. They had organized a debriefing meeting on this last day. In this meeting, we reflected on our experiences during the study. It was the first time I had involved myself in such a study. This was also true of the others in this study. Although, initially, they had been skeptical about my intentions in the study and its conduct, they had progressively comprehended and appreciated its objectives and goals. For this reason, they wished to share their reflections with each other and me. They let me make my comments first, and then took it up from there, one after the other with their thoughts about the study and its process. Nyar Asembo, my initial contact person in the group, made her comments at the end of the meeting. I present selected reflective sentiments below.

As a member of the *chwuech* environment, I challenged some participants to learn forms of *chwuech* they had not given much thought to. They were reminded of this neglect when they watched me learn pottery, basketry, and *muono* with relative success in the study period. One woman, Nyar Ugenya ma Ugunja said:

Asechwe okapu higa mang'eny kendo osebedo ka konya ei oda. Agulu nyocha akia chwueyo, imiyo wachokore kama koro aseng'eyo chwueyo agulu. Anyalo chwueyo agulu saa a saya nikech kama iome e lowo aseng'eyo. Abiro dhi nyime gi puonjora chwueyo agulu to ang'eyo ni abiro ng'eye maber. Muono, to udi wan go wamuono. Wang'eyo muono gi goro maber. (I have been involved in basket weaving for many years, and I have used the proceeds to run my home. I had not learned pottery; you have enabled me to learn the skill by this exercise. I can make pots at any time now, as I know where to collect potting clay. I will go on

improving my skill in pottery, and I know I will be a good potter. About *muono*, we have houses that we always *muono*. We know how to *muono* well.)
By my engagement in West Reru, I am proud to have affirmed the virtues of

diligence and hard work, that the participants value. Nyar Nyakach a basketry expert had this to say on this last meeting:

An be apuonjora e kit kaka ne wabedo ka. Apuonjora kit ji ang'uen. Apuonjora kit ji miluongo ni jafoung' wach, ng'ama ok winj wach, ng'ama winjo wach, gi ngama ohero tije. Apuonjora chwuero agulu ma anyalo tero e chiro ma anyiew go gwenda moro ma achak go pith. Apuonjora ni ka an gi ot marach to anyalo, lose ma abed ei ot maber. Apuonjora ni anyalo bedo jamwando ka ahero tija. Aneno ni kara dhier mar riek e dhier maduon' mogik. (In what we did and how we related in this study, I learned a lot. I learnt the character traits of four personalities; the person who takes matters lightly (never learns), one who collects worthless gossip from all over (destructive), one who listens to advice (learns), one who never listens to advice (never learns) and one who loves what they are engaged with (excels). I have learnt how to make a pot which I can take to the market, and exchange for a chicken, and start raising chicken. I have learnt that, if I have a house that is falling apart, I can repair it, and live in a hygienic environment. I have learnt that, I can be prosperous if I love what I am doing. I have learnt the truth that poverty that affects the mind is the most destructive one.)

Nyar Alego Kogelo studied the positive attitude I displayed in the study. She commented that this attitude made it possible for me to relate intimately and productively with their group, of hitherto, virtual strangers. She saw this as a function of a deep seated desire in my spirit, which drives me to seek knowledge. She said:

Adwoko ne japuonjre ero kamano. Ne obiro e dier wa ka ka odwaro puonjore agulu, okapu gi muono to oa ka kong'eyo gik moko adek go. Ing'e ni nitie ng'ama dwa timo gimoro to okia timo gino to okodwa ng'eyo to ok ong'e. Nitie ng'ama kata okapu ni ber ne to onyalo lose to okodwa lose. En (japuonjre) nobiro kodwaro ng'eyo emomiyo ong'e gigi. (I thank the student (me). She came and got among us wanting to know pottery, basketry, and *muono* and is leaving having learnt the three skills. You know, there is the kind of person who wants to do something that they do not know, and they do not want to learn so they cannot do it. Another would love to have a basket like this one, and they are able to weave one but do not want to. She (me) came with a desire to learn, and that is why she learnt the three skills.)

Nyar Asembo Kochieng' argued that my involvement in the West Reru community in the capacity of novice apprentice to the *chwuech* forms, had affirmed to her the importance of valuing the skills that one has. She said:

Asomo kuom wach mor achiel maduong', ni kara tich moro amora ma ng'ato ong'eyo onego omak tij no matek eka tij no nyalo konye e ngima ne. (I have learnt one important lesson [in this study] that any skill that a person has is important. The person needs to continually develop their skill in it. In this way, only, can that skill help them in their lives when they need it.)

Nyar Kano ma Awasi is relatively new in this area, and the *Bang' jomariiek* women group, having moved here from Naivasha in Central Kenya after the post election violence that came up after the 2007 presidential election results were disputed. She credited my study design with enabling her to get to know and engage with fellow potters and women in the community. She got to know where to collect potting clay and who she could collaborate with in ceramic work. She said:

Adwoko ne dawa kod in ero kamano nikech an wendo to ne akia ji ka. Kane onyisa ni riwruok ni ni Konywera, an kata Konywera no ne akia. Imiyo atudora gi mine jowete na to akwayo mana ni watim kinda e tij wa ni kod riwruok wa ni. Akia chwueyo okapu to ang'eyo ni abiro puonjora ba ang'e. (I thank my mother-in-law and you [me] because I am a visitor here, and did not know people in this community. When I was told that this group is in Konywera, I said that I did not even know where Konywera was. Through this study, you have enabled me to enter this women group, and I hope we will keep up the good work that we have been doing. I do not know how to weave baskets, but I am confident I will learn the skill soon.)

Jakom, our chair woman, commented about the conduct of the members during the study. She described how this had enabled us to successfully complete the study. She said:

An adwoko ero kamano ne Nyar Asembo kuom riwo wa kama. Nyaka ne wachako bedo e dala ne ka, osebedo ka orito wa adier. En gi buche mang'eny to nyicha owe dhi e buche go kane marwa ni dhi nyime. Bang' mano adwoko ne jobucha ero kamano maduong'. Nyicha gimia luoro ma ok aneno wach malich mane owuok e tich mane watio ni. Mogik adwoko ne in, Nyar Ugenya, ero kamano.

Nyocha ibiro irwa ka ni idwaro ng'eyo chwuech to ero idhi ka iseng'eye. Kinda ma in go no ber kawamako. (I want to first thank Nyar Asembo for bringing us all together. Since we started this project, she has taken care of us well. She has a multiple of responsibilities in the village but she suspended them to ensure we succeeded in this project. Lastly, I want to thank our *japuonjre* [me]. She came among us to learn *chwuech* and I can see her departing having learned it. The diligence she has is best copied.)

Nyar Asembo closed the meeting by reiterating the importance of the collaborative relationship that we had initiated in this study. She commented on the unlimited opportunities that could be within the member's reach if we kept this liaison alive. She articulated:

Amor ahinya ka buch wa ni odhi maber. An adwa mana jiwa wa e buch wa ni. Nyar Ugenya, adwa ni ka iyudo kony mora amora to mondo iparwa go. Kaka wan ka ni, ng'eny wa gin monde liete. Wan be wajiware gi tich ma watio ni kod moko manyien ma wabiro chako. An gi geno ni Nyar Ugenya biro paro wa ka oyudo gima ber kama odhie no. (I am very happy because we have had a successful project. I only want to ask members to keep up this strong spirit of involving ourselves in the group. Nyar Ugenya, when you go back [to U.S.A] and get any resources that may help us bring our plans of expansion to fruition, please send it to us. As you know, most of us here are widows [with families to take care of]. For the rest of us, we also need to maintain our unity and diligence in order to succeed with our development plans.”

From these few selected narratives, some common threads emerged. Participants appreciated that, a learner needed to have a strong desire to learn and love both the process and product of their learning. They realized that the main reason why I successfully learned *chwuech* was that I had come to them ready to be taught. This was comparable to the assertions of adult learning theorists in Western scholarship. These theorists have picked out learner readiness, which could be brought about by any number of things, as an important indicator of success in learning ventures (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980a; Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007 Jarvis, 1982; Kidd, 1959; and Knowles, 1980).

The remarks I selected from the debriefing meeting also reconfirmed to me the importance placed on the give-and-take aspect of the indigenous research processes. Nyar Asembo, among other members, asked me to help them in the development projects they had planned. Such a request matches the postcolonial scholarship suggestions about practical relations with indigenous communities. They suggest that research should be a mutually enriching undertaking for all involved. The research undertaking should also be an analytical, participatory and negotiative process. Some post-colonial scholars who have called for this kind of mutually beneficial studies are Menzies, (2001) and Tuhiwai-Smith, (1999).

Study participants placed a premium on a person's ability to persevere unpleasantness for a greater good. By involving themselves in these *chwuechogical* activities, these women developed both themselves and the community. They commented me for putting up with discomforts during the duration of the study, for the purpose of being a part of the community's *chwuechogical* activities. Feminist scholars such as hooks (1981, 1989), and Walker (1993) have studied the characteristic of women and noted that they tend to be selfless. Women often gave up personal comfort for the sake of others.

In like manner, most of the women in this study had, at one time, to give up something of personal value for the convenience of others in the community even when they clearly would rather have not done so. I picked up some illustrations of this service from the stories of and by Nyar kama Bor, Nyar Ringa, Nyar Gem Uranga, and Jakom. Women in Kenya consider financial independence very important because it sets them free to make choices in their lives and thus lead a better life. For example a woman who

has her own financial resources does not need to stay on, in an abusive marriage as Nyar kama Bor has done. She has had to endure brutish neglect and physical abuse since her husband married a second wife. Nyar kama Bor, however, cannot leave her matrimonial home because she has no way of sustaining her three children whom she would have to take with her. She could never conceive of leaving her children behind because raising children is traditionally the work of women and she fears her co-wife would mistreat them.

Nyar Ringa gave up her job in Central Kenya to relocate home for the purpose of caring for her terminally ill mother-in law. She would have rather kept her job because it gave her financial independence-a very important state of being for any women in the West Reru community, just as in other areas of the world.

Nyar Gem Uranga had given up a small scale grocery business commonly called *mama mboga* or 'vegetable mothers' which she conducted in Nairobi. The mother of her late husband had wanted her to relocate to West Reru and live near her husbands' extended family. She would then take up care-giving tasks in the family, as is commonly expected of daughters-in-law.

Jakom had stopped her business endeavors that took her away from her home for extended periods because she had had a dream in which her late husband forbade her from continuing with these ventures. This particular case also illustrates how much the afterworld was considered part and parcel of the present. Scholars such as Ntseane (2006) and Mbiti (1969) perceived the African to consider her world as interconnected in all dimensions-spiritual, physical and cognitive thus it was not a surprise to me that Jakom obeyed her husband's command that came from beyond the grave.

The women variously acknowledged that a learner required drawing from their experiences to learn specific tasks. Participants in the study studied and commended the way in which I engaged in *chwuech* among them. They thought that I, not only, drew from my lived experiences to learn *chwuech*, but also that I thought it was important for the community. Adult learning theorists acknowledge the importance of learners engaging in meaningful undertakings that captivate their interests (Knowles, 1980, and Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

About other socio-cultural matters.

I credit myself for being a learning resource that my fellow participants in the study drew on for other matters unrelated to our *chwuech* activities. These topics ranged from the basics of photography to matters about learners in our American and Kenyan public schools, and life in the USA.

Study participants in the study were full of questions about life in the US. They wanted to know things that included family life, air travel, religion, and politics. This curiosity was not born of my presence there alone but had been there before because they invariably started their inquiries with the phrase, “*bende en adier kaka awinjo ni Amerka kuro...*” (Is it true what I hear that in America...)

Nyar Asembo Kochieng’ asked: “*Awinjo ni Amerka kuro, ji ok ti. [Serikal] miyo gi chiemo gi pesa kata gi bedo mana e dhot. Donge dhano winjo maber kuro ndi?*”

(I hear that in America people do not work. The government gives them food and money even when they just sit around. Isn’t life enjoyable there?)

An: “*Amerka ji tiyo kendo gitiyo matek. [Serikal] ok pog ji a jia pesa giko dwe, mana joma ong’ol kod matuo ma ok nyal tiyo. Kony majiyudo en ni gin gi masinde mang’eny*

mamiyo tij gi bedo mayot. Masinde kaka maluoko lewni, udi, matedo miyo tije matindo tindo makawo seche mang'eny e udi ka dhi piyo kucho.”

(Me: People in America work and work very hard. The government does not give out money each month end to anybody. The government only takes care of the disabled and sick. The greatest help [in America] is that there is a lot of machinery that makes peoples' work easier. There are machines that wash clothes, houses, cook and this makes the many household chores that take much time here move faster there.)

Nyar Ugenya asked: “*Kuro be nitie jopur ka wan? To gipuro ang'o? Ma awinjo ni koyo geny ere kaka gipuro?*”

(Are there farmers like us? What do they raise? I hear that there is a lot of cold. How do they farm?)

An: Jopur nitie mang'eny. Gipuro chiemo mopogore opogore. Nitie kit oduma, alote, olemo gi kothe mopogere. Oduma, sikuma, rabolo, machungwa moko chal gi ma wango ka to moko opogore.

(There are a lot of farmers [in America]. They plant many types of food crops. There are different types of corn, vegetables, and fruits. Some food crops such as corn, collard greens, bananas, oranges are the same as the ones we have here.)

The questions that came from the other participants were a manifestation of *chwuechgogical* interactions as they occupy their place in the *kit dak* epistemological system of the Luo community. *Chwuechgogy* allowed us to get involved in the economic, medical, and political dimensions of our community as indigenous practitioners. It was conducive, therefore, for us to explore and share any other skills and

information that we held in this part of what I considered to be my attempts to reclaim my footing in my native Luo heritage.

Bedo Nyar Nam: Learning to be “Native”

Apart from learning the three art forms and other communal matters in this study, I also got to know what impact my life experiences had had on me and, consequently, on my relationship with the participants. The process through which I returned home to conduct research among the group of Luo women *jochwuech* was not a seamless and friction-free experience. My homestead return was an experience that was somewhat traumatic because, unbeknownst to me, I had become an alien in the process of leaving home, interacting with the communities that have hosted me in North America, and assimilating culturally in order to benefit from the material and spiritual opportunities to which I have had access. I had needed to fit in with my new environment in North America. The geographical and physical borders that I crossed also came with cultural boundaries. Having crossed those cultural boundaries, I had developed a complex layering of identities that I brought with me as I returned to my original home in Kenya, Africa. The journey home was therefore not merely a somatic transportation across the Atlantic Ocean. It was also an emotional and psychological journey that came with substantial pain and difficulties, some of which caught me quite by surprise.

First, I discovered to my bewilderment that the American Diaspora within which I was immersed is a site of alienation, even when the diasporant willingly departed from home to enjoy the benefits of advanced learning away from home. At the conception of my study, my dissertation chair had hinted as much to me but, buoyed with feelings of eagerness to return to my native home, I had not given much thought to the possibility

that I could be alienated by my stay in the U.S.A. Second, I realized that the one who left for the shores of the foreign land is not the only one who has changed. The place that one left behind has also changed. Third, it became clear that the process of returning culturally home was going to entail a substantial measure of adjustment on my part, otherwise I would be imposing certain exogenous expectations and foreign values on the very people with whom I was trying to interact. Fourth, it also became clear that those who had remained at home would also have to make some adjustments to accommodate me both physically and emotionally.

My mind began to ponder some of the questions that agitated Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003) in their contemplation of alienation, exiles, and Diaspora: [How] are geopolitical boundaries and territorial identities predicated not merely on internal exclusion...but also on constitutive forms of externalizing exclusion...? [How] do odyssey, sojourn, and travel differ from migration, Diaspora, and exile?"(p. 18) The editors argued that the term Diaspora deineate "mark of deterritorialization, dispossession and displacement from territory, custom, protectorship, and citizenry," while the idea of odyssey and sojourn "constitute forms of territorial conquest or exploration"(p. 18-19). As I embody these realities, I found it less problematic to impose the sort of analytical differences that the theories suggested, and discovered myself in the circuitous territories of the crossroads of culture that was neither clear to define, nor easy to depart.

I had gone into the West Reru study site armed with some advantages that I was sure would ease my relation with my fellow study participants. Being Nyar Nam, speaking Luo, being familiar with underserved women's issues in my community, and

being a former school teacher (still quite highly esteemed in these sites), I did not foresee myself causing much ripples on the surface of the water when I dove into the West Reru site. That ignorant bliss did not hold. I caused ripples, starting the first day I arrived at the site but, good for me, I progressively gained acceptance as we got to interact with each other more.

I arrived at the site on a Sunday afternoon, for the purpose of making contact with the participants, during their weekly meeting time. Painfully obvious to me, I could see they had no illusions that I could be one of them. They had made shoddy pieces of pottery, which they were prepared to show me. By the women's eagerness to get on with the question and answer part of the study, that they seem to be expecting me to embark on, they had variously started to offer snippets of the processes observed in pottery. It was as if they wanted to get a routine activity over and done within the shortest time, so they could be free to return to their normal lives which had been interrupted. It must have come as a surprise to them, when I stated that I purposed to learn their *chwuech* forms in their entirety, and that I would not be relying much on interviews for this.

The surprise that members of the *Bang' jomariiek* showed at my suggestion that I wanted to learn their forms of *chwuech* let me know that I had acted contrary to a frame they employed in relating to a category of people into which they had placed me. I had inadvertently not played my part as expected in this interaction and so had, kind of, thrown a spanner into the works. Garfinkel (1967) came up with the now famous concept of ethno methodology in the field of sociology. He was studying how people got to do what they did, in their everyday life. Garfinkel suggested that the way to know of the

existence of frames, or rules that people followed in their everyday relations, was to deliberately ignore or consciously break them.

I had deliberately ignored the inkling I had, that my fellow participants would have some expectations of me that would be informed by their earlier relations with people similar to me in socio-cultural status. The many researchers who these participants had related to, and who they regularly mentioned in our later conversations, always related in a superficial manner with the participants of their studies. Many times these researchers employed interviews as their main data collection instrument. I wanted to do something different and penetrate deeper into the ranks of this community. I can only imagine them collectively thinking, “*ma dopogore gi jowetene. Wan wa ne*” (Hmmm this one sounds different, lets’ watch and see what becomes of her plans.) Loudly, they tried to dissuade me by citing the difficulty of the journey to collect potting clay at Nyalaji and the processes necessary for ceramic, basketry, and *muono* production.

Later, I successfully made the long (about eight miles one way) walk to Nyalaji, and came back with clay over much rough terrain. By this trek, I infiltrated further into the socio-cultural dimension of life in West Reru, and especially as this dimension is manifested among my fellow participants in the study. I observed that, as we started off the walk to Nyalaji, my fellow participants in the study confined themselves to general topics of conversation. They were the kinds of conversation topics that were not too demanding on the speaker, and they could be kept going while the speaker reflected on other important things. They seemed to be preoccupied with assigning me a position in their midst, and from which they could relate with me, given that I was not one of them, yet I was going to be among them for an extended period of time. I understood their

bewilderment to emanate from my relatively elite academic and social status in the community, and my quest to learn their *chwuech* skills.

After successfully and stoically collecting clay from Nyalaji, I seemed to have proved that I could be worthy of joining the group, albeit in a junior member position. Granted, I held the advantage of having been a school teacher of many years, I, nevertheless, could not presume a position higher than what I assumed at the inception of the study. This situation was a function of the requirement for initiates into the *chwuechgogical* environment. There were the experts and other participants, who were at various levels of particular skill acquisition. My fellow participants started letting me enjoy the benefits of an insider status, which in this instance consisted of talking freely in my presence. Nyar Gem Uranga and other participants talked freely about HIV, and how they interacted with it in as far as managing their status and that of their relatives. I considered this kind of acceptance to be like one that early anthropologists such as Margret Mead (1949, 1975, & 1977) enjoyed, and that allowed them to collect the comprehensive data that they did. Mead would manage to garner the affection of her study participants by getting involved in their lives in ways such as providing them basic medical attention and joining their festivals.

Before I understood this systematic structure of *chwuechgogy*, I was inclined to try and impose the frames I carried over from being both teacher and student in the academic world. Initially, I was always tempted to ask for an agenda for the day, when our day started. I was so used to making lesson plans for the classes I taught over the years that it was the only way I knew, to conduct a teaching and learning episode. My questions about what we would be doing for the day were met with gestures of lack of

understanding from my fellow participants. I stopped making these kinds of inquiries when I realized that my fellow participants did not quite understand what I meant by the questions, and that the learning activities seamlessly flowed one into the next.

Ethnographers, many times, have had bewildering experiences when they tried to relate to their study participants using their own (ethnographers') cultural frames. Agar (1980, 1994) described how the ethnographers frames of looking at the world can impinge on his/her relationship with participants in his/her study. He related how:

It is clear that the ethnographer's culture-personality background, though increasingly acknowledged as critical, is a great unknown in ethnographic research. To make things worse, it's not clear how to integrate it into discussions of ethnographic methodology (1980, p. 44).

Agar went further to describe how gestures are interpreted differently in the world. He says that whereas he lived in New York, he believed that eye contact was employed for particular reasons, and at times to convey hostility. In South India, he came to realize it conveyed harmless curiosity. At first, when stared at, Agar would ask the starrer what they wanted, and the person would be taken aback, and declare that they did not want anything. Agar stopped making these inquiries when he understood the harmless nature of these encounters.

At the beginning of the study in West Reru, I had not appreciated the intimate way in which the *chwuech* activities were steeped in the socio-cultural fabric of the community. Consequently, I always imagined we were digressing when we discussed other things that were not related to the *chwuech* forms we were engaged with. However, these discussions in no way interfered with our learning activities, and slowly I started looking forward to them, as they seemed to spice up our *chwuech* environment. I would

not have felt the fullness of engaging in *chwuech* had I not been exposed to these other interactions that accompanied it.

In enjoying the fullness of *chwuech*, I got to visit some participant's homes for one reason or another. I visited Nyar Asembo Kochieng's home to admire her fish pond, which was touted to be the best in the area. It was a very important investment, of which she was extremely proud, and so she thought that I should see it. I interpreted this as a sign of my acceptance into the *Bang' jomariiek* fold and did not hesitate to go see the pond.

Nyar Siaya also wanted to show off her new timber manger to me. I went to see it and, in fact, took photos of it as an item for the photo voice instrument in the study. Anthropologist Margret Mead (1949, 1975, and 1977) recorded her involvement in the daily lives of her participants. Mead attended ceremonies, gave medical treatment whenever she could, oversaw cases, and behaved as was expected of a woman in those communities in which she carried out studies. Indeed, early anthropologists of note, such as Malinowski (1922/1961), suggested that it was important for the researcher to, once in a while, put aside his/her scholar stance in the field and get involved in the everyday life of the study participants. This involvement could be in matters such as casual conversation, ceremonies, games and other non-study related activities. The involvement in such activities helps the researcher step away from the rigors of his/her study and regain some measure objectivity that easily gets compromised when he/she is steeped too deeply in the study and for a prolonged period.

On the last day of our study, we had a short celebratory meal and a short gathering for debriefing purposes. I got involved in the cooking and even went to the

stream, from which we collected water and carried home on our heads in 20 liter (about 660 ounces) containers. In the debriefing meeting, most of my fellow participants acknowledged that I had indeed exceeded their expectations in the way I had related to them. They pointed out my success in learning the three forms of *chwuech* that I had set out to. This was not the case with some participants who had not learnt more than one form of *chwuech*. They remarked that I had shown a diligence and a resilience that challenged even the most assiduous of them. They each gave me humble gifts for a job well done. I, in turn, promised to keep my membership alive in the *Bang' jomariiek* group, and be of benefit to the development plans of the group in whichever way I could.

My stint in the field ended. I was soon preparing to return to the US and school. How had I done? Could I now say that I had gotten my native “groove” back, and that I was now a full-blooded Luo returning to the “diaspora” landscape of the US? I considered ways in which I had been alienated by my stay in the U.S.A and the ways this affected my relations, both physically and emotionally, with my fellow participants in the study. I also reflected on any changes me, my fellow participants in the study, and by extension the Luo community had experienced in this time I had been away from Kenya.

In the U.S.A, I had got very little opportunity to speak *dho*Luo except in telephone conversations with family across the Atlantic Ocean and the few Luo I had had the chance to meet. At times the Luo I met in the U.S.A were at various stages of forgetting how to speak *dho*Luo and extensively sprinkled their orature with words in English. I was proud of myself because I could speak *dho*Luo fluently. This proved to be an important point that counted towards my acceptance among the women of the *Bang' jomariiek* group. Few of them could speak English spontaneously, so had I needed

to communicate, even partly, in English, I would have not been able to gain the fine reception as I did here.

I had succeeded to diminish the effect of some trappings of power that I had needed to carry into the West Reru site. Such accessories included the cameras I carried along to record salient processes in the study. I gave out three cameras to three selected women, so they could make photo records of items that they associated with their *chwuech* activities. I also gave out my own cameras to study participants who wished to record aspects of the study that they thought were important for me. They happily obliged, and I was instantly disarmed of my camera, which could have made me conspicuous. I considered this a big emotional adjustment I made so I could be accepted by the participants.

On the other hand, participants had had to make emotional adjustments to accommodate me among them. I only became aware of state when some study participants started confiding in me. They had had to decide whether I could be trusted with issues that were intimate to them and which affected the deepest parts of their being. I felt that my fellow participants had progressively trusted me and accommodated me as much as they could emotionally. They variously shared information that made me know that they had made space for me at various levels of their environment-the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. Nyar Ugenya asked my advice on how she could secure school fees for her daughter who had been send home from school at the beginning of the first term in January. It pained her to daily confront the reality that her daughter may never complete her secondary school education. I pointed her to a few organizations that could help her and which I had asked for help from, for some of my students, during my

teaching days in Kenyan secondary schools. I advised her on the processes through which she could access these organizations that had provided scholarships to needy students I knew. I considered Nyar Ugenya's request an illustration that she had accommodated me emotionally because, I being a Luo, knew how much we were inhibited by our pride when we needed to ask for help.

Additionally, towards the end of the study, Nyar kama Bor opened up to me and let me know that she was at her wits end in trying to resolve problems that had been created by her husband's decision to marry another wife. She spoke with an intensity that revealed that she was sharing information from a part of her that hurt deeply from the betrayal she felt the actions of her husband had dealt her. She said:

Wan ji ariyo. Kane odwa medo ng'at machielo, ne akwere to ne ok owinja. Koro onge gima ne anyalo timo ka mano emane odwaro. Omiyo ngima wa obedo matek. Ma ok denda. An ne achwe malich. Weche mag dak ema oketho denda. (We are two [wives] of us. When he [husband] wanted to add another person [wife] I tried to stop him but he could not listen to me. He has made our lives difficult [constant fighting]. This is not how I used to look. I was plumper [a prestigious physique] than I am now. The problems I continuously experience have destroyed my former physique.)

In my interaction with the members of the *Bang'jomariiek* women group, I discovered that it was easier for the study participants to accommodate me physically than emotionally. At the inception of the study, and when they realized I would require more time with them, they had quickly had a meeting and had accepted to spend many more hours with me on a daily basis. They just needed to make alternative arrangements for their daily chores. Many of these women had even had to suspend their usual activities. Being the April rainy and, thus, weeding season, some of them weeded before sunrise and went to the market for their trading and shopping ventures in the evening.

What do I consider some of my failures in the West Reru study site? One thing I regret not being able to do was to take up the challenge posed by Nyar Alego Kogelo. She had challenged me to point out some of their shortcomings. This was a tricky one, and having been a teacher, I felt that making such a list could cause rifts among them. I skirted this request because, had I been honest in confronting it, I would have had to mention that members with sharp tongues could easily cause disharmony in the group by their abrasive criticism of others. Despite having been a teacher for over 10 years, I missed the words with which to communicate this observation I had made of some group member's dispositions, in a manner likely to be acceptable to them. Here I was, back at the crossroads. I was not an outsider enough to not know that talking about inadequate behaviors by the women would create a rift among the organization. Yet, I was not an insider enough, among the women, to understand what to do if such a rift arose. Shamefully for me, I choose the cowardly way out-evaded the question.

However, I was forever changed by my experience, as I worked with the artists. I was certain that they were also changed as a result of my interactions with them, as they confirmed at the debriefing meeting we held at the end of the study. Here we had taken the opportunity to articulate our take of the study. The question now was this: How was I going to use the materials that I collected in the study to convey an accurate portrait of the entire experience? Was it even possible for me to understand the full complexity of the experience I had just had? Stepping out of the site of the study in Kenya, and going into the far-away land of my study in the U.S.A, helps to create a good physical distance that could help me in analyzing my data. But it was also clear that only time could create

the temporal distance that I need to connect all the dots in the data and make a complete sense of the stories within the stories.

In the preceding Chapter, I articulated my experience of *chwuechgogy* in West Reru. I mounted both the etic and emic rostrums to describe the *chwuech* activities that I undertook. I went on to describe the assumptions about teaching and learning processes that I had collected over the many years I have been an active player in the field of education, as developed in Western scholarship. I needed to re-examine and adapt these assumptions, to the new emerging insights about adult learning that I collected among the women of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group as they involved themselves in *chwuech* as ensconced in *kit dak*. These women and I exhibited various characteristics that predisposed us to be successful in our *chwuechgogical* activities. In the next Chapter I will explore the character traits that I observed in these women and illustrate how these traits enable the women to be good participant of *chwuech* activities.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AS LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

Mine ma Bang' Jomariiek: The Bang' Jomariiek Mothers



Figure. 5.1. Image showing some of the Bang' jomariiek women group members.

This chapter surveys the character traits of the members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group from my perspective as, both a member and researcher in this group. I suggest that these character traits inclined them to be successful in the *chwuech* activities that required a sturdy psychological constitution. I employ the referent “mother” with the

individual members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group because of its more positive connotations among the Luo, and, especially, when I compare it to the word “woman.” Consequently, I use the term *mine*, (mothers) as opposed to *mon*, (women) because of these positive nuances commonly associated with the term *mine*. The term *mon* starts off by being negative, it means jealousy, as in “*I mon koda nang'o?*” (Why are you jealous of me?) *Mon* has at times been used negatively when belittling women and their activities, as in, “*...ai e weche mon ma dondore.*” (...do not get into women's affairs, as they are trivial.) It is a plural of the word *dhako* as in the sentence, “*dhako ni kite rach*” (this woman has bad manners). The same is hardly heard when using the term *mine*.

Among the Luo, the term *mine* does not consign itself within a strictly reproductive function. It is true that the term mother within the English language appears to have a reproductive connotation. Indeed among the Luo, every woman is a mother. Motherhood is not limited to the biological identity, in other words every woman is a mother to every child in the community. The realities of women as mothers are therefore one that is geared towards the welfare of the general community. The responsibility of a woman as mother does not stop with her own biological children.

Because women are frequently an underserved population in Kenya, Kenyan feminist scholars have located their struggle for women's rights on various aspects of the woman's realities in Kenya. Mukabi-Kabira, Wanjiku, Nzomo (1993) and Nzomo (1993) are feminist scholars who have considered the deconstruction of the gendered character of culture and language which puts down the woman in society. They observed that this deconstruction was pivotal to women's fight for democratic rights. Additionally, Wanjira Muthoni, a Kenya writer and African feminist activist, was quoted in an interview with

Arndt (2000) discussed her work with a gender sensitization program in Kenya. In one project, she and other scholars went all over the country sensitizing the population about gender issues such as asking the police to be sensitive and kind to women rape victims. Many times these victims are blamed for bringing the crime on themselves by behaviors such as their way of dress and talk. In another gender sensitization project, Wanjira and other scholars tried to change the negative image created about woman in oral narratives, whereby women can only be good when they serve the men in their lives. If they take their own initiatives, that go against what their men's wish, they are branded evil women.

So, about *mine ma Bang' jomariiek*.

Bang' jomariiek members as Luo women like to think of themselves as selfless and dedicated on preserving the wholeness of their community. They contribute to the resources of the community by participating in *chwuech* activities. The participants' involvement in *chwuech* activities spoke of their wish to better themselves and their community. It did matter that they spent their time and energy in *chwuech* to learn and develop West Reru area. With the same attitude, participants such as Nyar Ringa showed a lot of courage in giving up her job in a flower farm in Naivasha, Central Kenya to come to West Reru, her marital home, to be a caregiver to her mother-in-law who was terminally ill with AIDS. Giving up her job meant that she had relegated herself to the unenviable position of a dependent on her husband after having tasted the power that comes with some level of financial independence. Many times, in present day Kenya, women who are dependent on their husbands hardly get a chance to make decisions on matters that concern their family's life. In cases where they are in abusive relationships, the women may be unable to ameliorate their situation because of their dependent status,

a status that makes them subservient even in the most noxious situations. The other participants in the West Reru site supported Nyar Ringa in her care-giving task by readily giving her necessary advice on care of such patients and letting her take time off the day's sessions, as she needed to. Arndt (2000), Moreton Robinson (2000), and Walker (1983) all variously discuss women's nature as demonstrating concern for others and seeking the good that can be shared with community members.

Mine gi are generous. This spirit of generosity is illustrated by their readiness to share what they have. While involved in *chwuech* activities, participants helped those who found some processes unfamiliar. The inclination that all participants are successfully and productively involved in *chwuech* brooked no sense of competition in the activities. They thrived or failed as a group. Participants in this study were humble farmers, eking a living from their farms. Most were poor widows who headed large extended families. They had taken in orphans from family members and even from friends. They truly believed in sharing what they had with others. Nyar Asembo took care of her own orphaned grand children and two other children from her deceased friends. To illustrate this generosity and willingness to share what they had further, at the end of the study, each participant gave me a small gift. These food items are symbolic. They included traditional vegetables, sweet potatoes, live chicken, and a variety of bean types, all reflecting the agricultural nature of the West Reru community. They could hardly spare what they gave me, but they sacrificed to do so anyway.

Mine ma Bang' jomariiek are resilient. Participants mentioned determination as a very important virtue for *chwuech*. They needed to painstakingly learn the intricate *chwuech* processes and to teach it to others as necessary. While learning or teaching

chwuech, they could not lose patience and give up when they encountered intricate and time consuming processes. Nyar Kano explained that the pottery learner was to be prepared to patiently recycle the pot they were making. They would do this until the expert accepted one that promised to be a good pot.

In manifesting resilience into their lives, participants showed an uncanny ability to bounce back despite what, I thought, were insurmountable odds according their descriptions. Nyar gi Telo is a widow who has been through a lot of rough patches in her life. She talked of her husband getting sick, dying and leaving her a helpless widow with three young children to take care of. She described how she involved herself in *goyo amal e puothe ji*, agricultural work that commands daily pay, in order to raise her children.

Nyar gi telo's situation became worse when she realized she was also infected with HIV, as her husband had been. Initially, apart from suffering from intense denial, she often would be too sick to engage in any agricultural labor. At such times she relied on friends and relatives to help her out. This is what almost killed her spirit because she is a proud woman, just like the other members of *Bang' jomariiek*. She overcame the denial and sought medical help. The doctors put her on a course of anti-retroviral drugs. Her health is not very good, but she is driven by the wish to see her children through high school and college and hopes she will live long enough for this. She is happy that her children are not infected and her optimistic mind provides her with a glorious vision of the future. Various feminist writers, Arndt while interviewing Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni (2000), Anzaldua (1978), hooks (1989), Mohanty (2003) and Tuhiwai-

Smith (1999), described women as resilient and able to survive in the midst of much trouble in their lives.

Nyar gi Telo occupies herself with the therapeutic work of care-giving to those in need in the community. She is an HIV activist and is always about giving advice on care to other care givers and people living with AIDS. This and other community work keeps her busy and productive. One morning, Nyar gi Telo arrived at the site to inform us of her intentions to be absent for the day. She is a coordinator of a group of people affected or living with HIV in West Reru area. A member of that group had abruptly lost a child that morning. Nyar gi Telo needed to go and organize for the funeral which, according to Luo customs, had to take place soon after death, as opposed to those of adults that could be put off for weeks in current times.

Mine ma Bang' jomariiek are ingenious. In the *chwuech* activities participants experimented with processes and designs, some of which they had adapted from other artists. Nyar Ringa informed me that when she colors palm fronds, she always adds some salt into the boiling coloring liquid. This was a process she had learned, while she was trying to find ways of making the color in the palm fronds more durable. In other conversations during this study, I espied traces of this characteristic when I got to know that all the participants were always in the process of trying new ideas and things that would make their lives better. At times they failed, but at others they succeeded. Nyar Sakwa and Nyar Gem Uranga were once so hard up that they registered for the government run 'food for work' program in which people worked on access roads in the village and were paid in food. Nyar Asembo ma Kochieng' had embraced the new government introduced fish farming project in the West Reru area. She hoped to start

selling her fish at the beginning of the New Year, 2011. In like manner, most of the participants had taken the initiative to seek out any avenues from which they could draw sustenance for their families. Arndt reporting on an interview with Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni (2000) and Mohanty (2003), cited the ingenuity of women from developing nations in confronting the many impediments in their lives, thus their more comprehensive agenda that includes political activism in their countries.

Mine ma Bang' jomariiek are selfless and charitable. They are involved in the governance of their group and community. All the administrative positions in the group were voluntary and of a fixed term. Each participant had a chance, and eagerly took it up, to be in the management team of the group. Additionally, they routinely contributed ideas towards the management of the group, as the necessity arose. This could be seen clearly during the meeting in which they allowed me to spend more time with them on a daily basis, after they understood my intentions for the study. In the same vein, most of the participants of this study are involved in the political arm of the government in their local levels. Every day, there was mention or discussion about some political activity or climate in the village and beyond.

Nyar Sakwa was a local women's wing party leader. The others were active members of one or another of the two most dominant parties in the country. Incidentally, the participants would go into discussions about what they liked and not liked about the two parties and not even once did participants' tempers flare when parties they were affiliated to were criticized. How different and refreshing this scenario was when compared to the much violence there usually is in similar discussions when men are involved! I hastened to conclude that if all of Kenya could hold such peaceful political

discussions, then peace would always prevail in the country and politically-instigated land skirmishes that had beleaguered our country would be a thing of the past.

Mine ma Bang' jomariiek are vivacious and full of life. Despite their disadvantaged station in life brought about by numerous issues, the participants were always a happy lot that constantly bantered and teased one another as we went about our work. I realized the importance of this kind of comportment when the physical exertion needed for the *chwuech* activities did not tax us much because we did not focus on it. The atmosphere lightened our demeanors to the extent that we overlooked physical and emotional impediments while involved in *chwuech* activities. While working, we assumed some uncomfortable postures for extended lengths of time although such postures would have brought us discomfort in other places. Furthermore, various participants talked about finding solace in being in the *chwuech* environment where they could use their minds creatively and their hands productively.

I did too. This happy place helped lift their spirits when it was weighed down by life's stressors. This was an important place for most of these women, as many of them were poor widows struggling to give care to large numbers of people in their homes. Nyar Gem Uranga and Nyar Alego ma Ng'iya are among the participants who described the stressful lives they had led while, solely, trying to see their children through high school. They talked of the children being sent home for school fees and then getting frustrated because they were unable to raise the fees. It was a relief for them to have received counseling and help from membership in the group. Of the frustrations, Nyar Gem Uranga related the inflexibility of a head teacher who sent her daughter away from

school when she could not come up with the required school fees in time though she pleaded for more time to settle it:

Kane nyathi odwogo na ei ot ne a gole mana sano mondo adhi awuo gi [headmistress]. Achopo gi nyathi to anene ka ong'iya. Atemo nyise ni aye ni aselewo gi pis kod uniform mane idwaro to atemo abiro mana tieko chulo. Ne japuonj odagi kata mana winja. Gima ne owacho kende en ni 'ka ionge gi pis gi uniform ma wadwaroto dog mana dala gi nyathini no mama. Sikul ok nyal dhi nyime ka jonyuol ok chul pis kod rwako uniform madwarore.' Ok ne ong'iyi kata ni asechulo nus. Kane aonge gi pesa modong' to ne ok odhi winja. Ne ochuna golo nyathi e sikul no ma tinde arwake e [dei] moro karwa ka. Odhi maber.
(When my child was sent home, I immediately took her back to school hoping to negotiate payment with the head mistress. I saw how she regarded me [contemptuously] when I entered her office. I tried explaining to her that I would come up with the fees and buy the necessary uniform, but she refused to listen to me. She said 'If you do not have the fees and the required uniform just go back home with your child. School cannot be run when parents do not pay fees' She did not even consider that I had paid half the fees. Since I did not have the remaining fees, she was not going to listen to me. I was forced to withdraw my child from that school and nowadays she is in a day school here. She is doing well.)

Mine ma Bang' jomariiek are both hard and soft when their circumstances require it. The main driving force behind their actions was the wellbeing of their families and community. Feminist scholars such as Chikwenye Ogunyemi (Arndt, 2000) observed that African women have many issues to deal with at any one time, some of which their Western counterparts are spared. Ogunyemi stated that, apart from their sexuality, African women are impacted by their race, culture, the economy, inter-ethnic skirmishes, ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism; gerontocracy, and even "in-lawism" (Arndt, 2000). The African woman perseveres to preserve the wholeness of the community, even when this preservation takes the form of sustaining the production of monetarily devalued creative items like pots (Dietler & Herbich, 1989) in hard economic times. This kind of perseverance requires a person who is pliable and adapting as the circumstance might require.

It was remarkable how the participants of this study could be both firm when they needed to be and meek when the situation called for it. Most of the participants were care-givers to orphans both from deceased family members and friends. This act of letting in orphans to their care spoke much about their empathetic spirit and character. Their hardness also came out as they successfully confronted the challenges life threw at them. An illustration of this hardness is when they needed to teach young people in their charge good habits, similar to the Western notion of “tough love.” Nyar Alego Ng’iya commented on the importance of teaching children good habits, which become life skills, even when such lessons may initially be misconstrued to be unnecessary harshness to the children. This discussion came up when Nyar Asembo needed to firmly reprimand one of her grandchildren who had erred. The little eight year old girl wanted to be allowed the danger of frying dough in a pot full of boiling oil. She threw a temper tantrum when her wishes were denied, but Nyar Asembo stood her ground and did not yield to her demands. Nyar Alego Ng’iya said:

Ka idak gi nyikwayi to nyaka itang’ ahinya nikech ginyalo kethore. Dwaro ni seche moko iwe gi gichandore matin eka ka ipuonjo gi to degiwinji. Aneno ka Nyar Asembo cho chwado mare. Mokelo wiye to ichwada achwada. Ka owegi ni gima gi dwaro ema gi timo to gikethore te. (When you live with your grandchildren, you have to be keen, because they can easily adapt destructive habits. It is necessary to at times seem as if you do not care about them so they can appreciate you. I can see that Nyar Asembo is paddling one of hers. One who tries to be difficult for no reason should be paddled. If you let them always get their way, they will all come to a bad end.)

Additionally, while a member of Bang’ jomariiek, I noticed that members did not shy away from openly discussing their weaknesses and strengths. I repeatedly noticed how other members would latch on to the points of discussion either to help the particular member in question navigate their weaknesses or get some insight of their own on this

member's strengths. Nyar Asembo Kochieng' described to us how she had refused to take a gift of dried corn and beans from her stepmother at one time when she had visited her maternal home. She had done this out of pride. That was one of her vanity points. Nyar Asembo Kochieng' had felt that her stepmother would think that she had gone to her maternal home to beg for food. This would imply that she was not well taken care of by her husband; traditionally a shameful situation among the Luo. However, Nyar Gem Uranga thought she had acted badly and unnecessarily caused disharmony between her and her, apparently, innocent stepmother by exercising her pride:

Min u no to nichwanyo nono yawa. Ng'ama omii amia chiemo ma ok ikwayo ok onego itamri kawo. Obende ong'ee ni idak maber to kaka in nyathi dala no nyaka notem kowi gi gimoro mondo jaodi one ni jowu oheri. Mano kit Luo." (You must have made your mother [stepmother] very uncomfortable. The person who gives you food without you asking should not be repaid that way. You should have accepted that food. She [your stepmother] knows that you live well, but as a child of her home it was her responsibility to send you off to your marital home with some foodstuff so your husband can know that your people love you. Those are Luo customs.)

Kelo Kwe e Riwrwok: On Group Member Comportment

Adults are invariably called upon to interact in a managerial position with members of the community; be these people their children, people they work with or even live with. I appreciated how the indigenous teaching and learning processes used with Luo women allowed for all the participants to learn people-managing skills. Apart from the tangible things I learnt about life in the West Reru community, I also learned the dynamics at play when different personalities get confined in close proximity for a period of time each day. Some members were not as extroverted as others and would reserve their comments on a situation they thought was potentially volatile, only to air them later when they felt safer to do so. Some members, on the other hand, were quick with their

words and always risked stepping on other members' toes. Our group leaders treated these different personalities in different ways in order to draw their best for the group environment. Different members of the group had different leadership positions. Positions like chairperson, treasurer and such positions in the group are filled through voting by members, and the ones chosen have one year terms with a limit of up to three years. I dare suggest that all adult learning programs ought to allow learners to benefit from activities that build their people management skills, which should be a component of such programs. Any program without this management component ignores an important skill that all adults need and which is different from other skills they may have learnt as children.

On our last day together as a group, I got an important lesson in group management from the chair or *jakom* of the *Bang' jomariiek* group by the way she handled such potentially explosive patches of the group interactions. In one instance, when members had to fetch water for our proposed celebratory meal together. One member was sick and was thus exempted from this tiring task. But Nyar kama Bor did not just want to be involved in this task. The other group members felt it was unfair for her not to carry out this task of fetching water from the spring. The *jakom* listened to these complaints from the other women and calmly requested Nyar kama Bor to go fetch water with the others to avert the imminent ill feelings in the group. Nyar kama Bor did as requested and peace was restored in the group. Such impromptu lessons are very necessary for adults who meet such tricky situations often in their lives.

Telo e Riwrwok: Matters of Hierarchy

Hierarchy was one social dynamic that fascinated me during the study. Hierarchy gave structure to the group's activities and imposed a social design that comes from the larger sense of community among the Luo people. In West Reru, hierarchy emanated from variables such as on age, experience, and distance; but it was not a requirement that the occupant of the hierarchical summit have all these characteristics. Hierarchy bestowed privileges and responsibilities to members. For example, members of *Bang' jomariiek* often deferred decisions about the conduct of the group to the chairperson or *jakom* as they referred to her. She was more of a servant-leader (Greenleaf, 1977) as her chairperson role functioned to affirm the consensus of the group for which she sought and considered the opinion of all. *Jakom* was an embodiment of the whole group's spirit. She led by example, and fully participated in any activity the group was involved in such as collecting clay from Nyalaji and preparing meals for our celebratory meal. Nyar Asembo, whose home the study took place, did not assume much power or control in the group. She served the others in that she made the meals and joined in the *muono* part of the study. *Jakom* mostly led by example and consensus. She was more of a manager of the decisions the group had reached which were also binding for her.

Another source of privileges and responsibilities in the West Reru hierarchical structure was age. It is common for Africans, Kenyans a part of, to revere age and acknowledge it in their behavior towards older people. Older people were considered wise. They also deserved to be served as they had, no doubt, served in their youth. I could see this reverence played out all the time in the teaching and learning processes in

West Reru. At meal times, younger women served the older ones just as they fetched items for older women in the course of our creative production.

On the other hand, I got some privileges and responsibility from the distance I occupied from the group. At some level I was still considered distanced from the group because I was the student, and therefore in the same status as any visitor would be. Visitors are always given preferential treatment in all ethnic communities of Kenya. This is largely a result of people feeling that a visitor needs to be comfortable around them because she is not near what she, the visitor, is familiar with. It was also important to treat the visitor the way anyone would wish to be treated if they were in those shoes. Consequently, I was always served food at meal times.

The preceding Chapter discussed the character traits of the participants of this study. These traits enabled them to succeed in their *chwuech* activities and in living in their community. I have also briefly discussed some matters that define hierarchy in a *chwuechogical* environment. In the next Chapter, I describe the location of *chwuech* in the West Reru community. *Chwuech* is a part of the community's resources that can be freely employed to fight the challenges that the community faces.

CHAPTER SIX

CHWUECH MWANDO PINY: CHWUECH AS CULTURAL WEALTH

Wan nyikwa Ramogi wan gi mwando mang'eny chakore e kit kaka wadak, piny wa, timbe wa gi pach wa. Wan gi rieko matut. Ka wayiero to wanyalo dak maber molooyo ji moko.

We the grandchildren of Ramogi are very wealthy. This wealth ranges from how we live, our ancestral land, our behaviors, and thoughts. We have profound wisdom. If we choose we can live better than many other people. (Nyar Ugenya ma Uholo.)

This Chapter describes the processes in which the indigenous adult educational processes among members of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group is lodged in the West Reru reservoir of community wealth. I include, herein, three narratives that I collected from selected participants in this study. I had given out three cameras to the women and asked that they take photographs of salient and important items that they attributed to and were reflective of their *chwuech* activities. All the other participants had taken part in choosing the three photographs that best illustrated the good things in the community that originated from or were associated with their involvement in *chwuech*. Nyar Gem Uranga and Nyar Siaya narrated the stories behind the photos.

Nyar Gem Uranga shares the thoughts that motivated her to take photographs of her home and of her brother-in-law with his wife planting cassava in their farm. She describes the wisdom of having a home and especially in her case because she is a widow. For the next photo of her brother-in-law with his wife planting cassava, she elucidates on the wisdom of collaborative work and counsel. Likewise, Nyar Siaya describes the processes by which she got the insight to build a durable manger

for her goats from her basketry work. In building the manger she copied the patterns she used while weaving baskets.

Nyar Siaya's technical skills that she used to design and build her manger already existed in the community well before she acquired them. As scholars such as Kenyatta (1965) and Sifuna (1990) noted when discussing African indigenous education and how it plays an important part in the affairs of its community of origin, indigenous teaching and learning processes definitely constitute a sizeable part of any community's cultural capital. This capital consists of the skills, abilities, and dispositions of all members of a certain community, resources that they can freely deploy for the improvement of their life circumstances.

Both Tara Yosso (2005) and Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) referred to these advantages that exist in communities and which foster success in community members if employed appropriately. This cultural wealth provides income to the community members. The *chwuech* processes is an example of a community's cultural wealth. These processes also equip the participants with critical thinking skills that enable them to creatively confront challenges in their lives. In Nyar Kano ma Awasi's words:

Ibedo ng'ama wiye chiemo, ma pache tut. Inyalo manyo yore ma iloso go giki maber. Medi rieko mang'eny ma de ok ibedo go ka iyueyo mana e dhodi.
 ([Involving oneself in the teaching and learning processes] makes you a deeply reflective person. It allows you the space to seek a wide range of alternatives when facing life's various issues. You become a better person than if you just sat at your doorstep.)

In order to collect more information about other levels of learning and advantages participants garner from these teaching and learning processes, I employed an adaptation of the photo voice data collection instrument. In my adaptation of the instrument as

developed by Wang and Burris (1994) in their seminal study among Chinese women, I gave out three cameras, one each, to the three sub-groups of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group. I showed all of them how to use the cameras and left it up to the particular group's members to decide who takes the photos. I suggested that the theme of these photos include things in the community they considered important and which had a relationship or came into being as a result of their creative production activities. The participants nominated three people to be in charge of the cameras. I requested that they be ready to narrate the story behind photos voted most insightful by all the participants. Later and because of the poor quality of the photos from the disposable cameras, I decided to take the chosen scenes again, with my easy-to-manage electronic camera.

Abila mar Nyar Alego ma Siaya



Figure 6.1. Image showing *Abila mar Nyar Alego ma Siaya*.

Nyar Alego Ma Siaya took pictures of her manger or *abila* (Figure 6.1) above. This *abila* is made entirely of timber and a grass thatch. In this structure, she kept her sheep and, in the night, they were safe from the marauding leopards and hyenas common in the area. She explained that she decided to do this in order to raise her sheep successfully after she noted that the old *abila* was easily destroyed by both the sheep and predatory animals. She needed to be creative and display her knack for deep reflection (*paro*) in securing her sheep, which was her form of wealth. She liked the refurbished *abila* because it was more secure. She would be awakened by the breaking timber if the wild animals tried to gain access to her sheep. She has had that timber *abila* for two

years now. She thinks it is durable and worth the labor it took to construct. About the benefits she gets from keeping the sheep, she says:

Ber ma aneno kuom pidho jamni en ni sama oriemb nyathina moro e skul, kata ka chandruok moro owuok anyalo uso [jamni] to ayudo pesa ma akonyora go. Kata ka nyathina ochando 'uniform' mar 'skul' anyalo golo moro ma adhi a usi to anyiewo ne go [uniform]. Kata ka tho moro ochopo 'gafula' to anyiewo jamni to ayudo kaka anyalo yudo 'transport.' Abila no en mwando na machal gi 'bank' nikech gik ma akano eiye kanyo en 'pesa' na. Kama ikene nyaka bed motegno eka gik mikano kanyo bedo eyo maber. Rieko mar gero abila bila ni ayudo bang' neno 'hasara'ka jamni na le nego. Aparo ni ka anyalo riwo yien ka ng'ama riwo othith e okapu to abila na nyalo bedo motegno.

(The benefit I get from raising sheep is that when my child is sent away from school for unpaid school fees, lack of school uniform, or when a problem [death] arises, I can sell some sheep and raise the needed money. That manger is part of my wealth, just like the modern banking institutions, because the animals I keep there are easily turned into cash money when needed. It is therefore important that I make the manger secure just as anyone would want their bank account to be. I decided to build this type of manger after suffering losses of sheep to wild animals. I thought of looping timber the way palm frond is looped in basketry.)

This discussion points to the importance Nyar Alego ma Siaya attaches to the teaching and learning activities which she sees as a springboard from which she got insight into how to tackle other problems in her life. These *chwuech* processes enable the participants to seek creative alternatives to their problems. Others in the community begin to emulate the women involved in *chwuech* because of the level of success that such women have attained.

All members frequently talked about the provision of school education to their children and relatives. They all expressed desire for their children and relatives to excel in school education, as the women thought this gave their younger ones an advantage. These women associate good education to good jobs. The importance of education was a recurring theme throughout the study. Many of the participants shared stories of their struggles, as they tried to keep themselves or family members in school.

The participants placed such a high premium on education that choice resources in the home were thought to be best used in this quest for acquiring knowledge. This desire for education was not one confined to the school setting but goes beyond the classroom. Nyar Asembo Kochieng proudly mentioned that, although her son could not go on into secondary school, for lack of school fees, he was training to be a vehicle body painter. She constantly seeks opportunities to improve her skills. She does *muono*, but was learning basketry. She learnt the rudimentary of photography from me, apart from joining other members in querying me about life in the U.S.A and the process of flying.

Additionally, among the Luo, it is very important to attend various community ceremonies. The Luo have elaborate funeral ceremonies and beliefs associated with the dead. It is very important for the dead to be sent away to the next world in a manner deemed respectful. Thus, the importance of attending relative's and friend's funerals and contributing to the expenses involved, as mentioned by Nyar Alego ma Siaya. These kinds of activities fostered community cohesion so it is imperative that all community members be involved. *Paro ma tut*, or deep reflection, that enabled Nyar Alego ma Siaya to construct a strong *abila* allows her to keep face and maintain her status. This happens when she observes such obligations as contributing to the funeral expenses of community members and paying her children's school fees.

Kit Dak: Pidho Omwogo

Nyar Gem Uranga took a photo of her brother-in-law with his wife planting cassava (*pidho omwogo*) on their farm. Cassava is a tuber that can form the base of a variety of dishes. Apart from generally yielding more harvest than the other plants like corn, cassava can withstand drought conditions. Just like corn, it can also be cooked as

the staple *kuon* (corn flour mash). Cassava is more versatile because it can be boiled or roasted for consumption. From various discussions with members of the *bang' jomariiek* women group, she had come to acknowledge afresh the hardiness of the cassava plant in the face of drought and bad weather. This plant had lost its position as a choice food item among the Luo, when corn was introduced by the Europeans in Kenya. People had progressively preferred the taste of corn to cassava and dedicated less and less space for cassava's cultivation.

Nyar Gem Uranga thought that the posture of a man joining his wife to plant the hardy cassava plant was unique because it indicated where the strength and resilience of the community lay. This seemingly intact and close family and the food security represented by the cassava plant, constituted some of the most valuable aspects of the community. The act of husband and wife working together in their farm points to the unity they have in their family. That bond of this husband and wife is affirmed by the activity they are engaged in, in which they were pooling their energy in the quest for food security for their children. Nyar Gem Uranga thought that the fact that this couple decided to plant the hardy cassava, of all plants, pointed to their intelligence and foresight in view of the common food shortages occasioned by droughts in the area.

Commenting on the importance of the symbolic collaborative venture by the couple, Nyar Gem Uranga said:

Kit dak maber en ni uwinjoru kendo uloso gik u. Winjruok e teko mar ot. Ka okunyal winjoru to ing'ee ni odno en ot ma oleng'ore ni , nikech ng'atcha ni gi pache yore, ibe in gi pachi yore. Koro kiwuok ni idhi timo ma en obed ni itime matin to kauwuk dichiel ni udhi time ute mondo upidth go nyithindo ing'e ni utime ka un gi teko uduto. Koro ka ji owinjore ma obede achiel en e teko mar ot. Miyo ot chung' motegno. Dak ma chal kama dwaro rieke matut ma ng'ato yudo mana ka oyawo pache ka odak e gweng'. (The genre of good family life requires harmony and collaboration in developing family resources. Collaboration is the

backbone of family life. If a member of a family cannot collaborate, then that house is weak and about to fall apart. Only if the parents in a family work together for the benefit of their children can they succeed. Homes in which family members work as one team are successful. Living with such astuteness only comes when one is ready to accommodate the wisdom they collect from their various ventures in the community.)

Nyar Gem Uranga's narration of ideal family life is in connection with the widespread HIV/AIDS problem experienced in this community. The participants viewed a lack of collaboration in family affairs as one reason for the large number of infections in the West Reru community. Family members who worked together to sustain their family proved their intelligence, often borne of creative critical thinking abilities, as fostered by the indigenous teaching and learning processes. The participants in this study were constantly preoccupied with thoughts and ideas of how to prevent and manage HIV/AIDS because they were all either infected by HIV or affected by the challenges with which family members living with HIV/AIDS grapple.

Food security was another issue on which participants constantly reflected. They kept recalling how much they suffered while trying to secure sustenance for their family when the crops failed for lack of adequate rain in 2009, and how the food prices were so high that many families were faced with a real danger of starvation. Nyar Sakwa and Nyar Gem Uranga talked of joining the government program, aptly dubbed "food for work," in which they dug trenches and repaired rural roads. They were paid in part with food rations. For Nyar Gem Uranga to single out, as important, the planting of the hardy cassava plant by the couple, illustrates that she thinks this action points to the couple's intelligence and ability to strategically plan for their family's food security. It is the wise person who thinks beyond the taste of a possible crop item, and considers its resilience in the face of failed rains and its better harvest per crop.

Dala Nyar Gem Uranga: The Home of Nyar Gem Uranga



Figure 6.2. Image showing Nyar Gem Uranga's home.

Another of Nyar Gem Uranga's photos was voted best for narration in the photo voice instrument. This was a picture of her home. It has the main house as its focus, outside the door of which there is a water pot, positioned to collect run off rain water from the roof. The house has clay walls and an iron sheet roof. Next to it is a kitchen built with the same materials. When I asked Nyar Gem Uranga why she thought this picture of her home was important, she said it reminded her of the process she took to build the walls of the houses in her home and thus the importance she attaches to her *muono* skills. These indigenous *muono* skills have served her well because she has not

had much money to spend on building her house and other out houses (such as kitchen and bathroom) in her home. She is a widow who depends on meager returns from her agricultural and small business ventures. She realizes that had she not had the *muono* skills she would have lived in a poorly walled and pest infested house. She acknowledges the importance of having a home and that these indigenous adult educational processes have made it possible for her to have one:

Ber maneno ei bedo gi dala na en ni dalani ka in go to in gi thuolo mang'eny. Gimoro amora mihero inyalo time gimoro amora mihero inyalo pidhe. Kaka in emipange e kaka inyalo tie. Dala ni miyo ok ilawri gi ng'ato. Ka udak gi ji samoro lweny moro owuk ma ibe irwaki e weche go. Kaka an aluoro weche madhi kama kama, omiyo bedo gi dala na okonya ndi. (I think having a home is a very important thing for everyone. It gives one the freedom to do anything, plant anything that they want. One plans for the home on their own for its success. If a person has a home, then they rarely bother with pesky people. If one lives in another's home and there arises a fight, it is difficult for one to avoid getting involved in it. I, for one, usually try to avoid negative confrontation with others, so having my own home has helped me a lot.)

My Pot and Basket



Figure 6.3. Akinyi Wadende, *Pot and Basket*, Clay, Fronds, and Color, 2010.

For my part, as a participant in this study, I took a photo of the basket and pot that I made (Figure 6.3 above). I did this because they represent the tangible results of the work I had put into this study. I had learned a lot of skills that I am unable to document or physically reproduce. I was very proud of the product I made out of these indigenous adult educational processes because it is an affirmation of the importance of *chwuech* in developing the community. I felt deeply satisfied that I had managed to come up with these finished and functional products. In a strange way, the process of producing these creative objects affirmed to me my usefulness in the indigenous community among Luo women. I especially feel nostalgic about learning these forms after many years of

absence from my community, while I had other experiences, such as school and life abroad. I had proved to myself that I could hold my own among other Luo women.

This Chapter located *chwuech* as an important aspect of the West Reru community's cultural wealth. I presented narratives from participants who described photographs they had taken of things in the community that they thought related closely to their art productions. In the next Chapter, I present concluding thoughts and reflections about the study findings and its conduct. These reflections retrace my steps along the journey in which I carried out the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes this dissertation with reflective thoughts that take the journey back to the beginning of the study. In presenting the reflections from this research on indigenous adult educational processes, it is imperative to also examine some of their possible suggestions for both theory and practice in diverse fields and disciplines. These fields include adult education, feminism, community cultural wealth, and the post-colonial theories. Acknowledging these theories, I divide the chapter into four sections that speak to the four bases of this study.

In the section about adult learning processes, among the questions that I grapple with (having drawn insight from this study), include what it means to succeed as a learner of *chwuech*, what efficacy cohort-based delivery of learning programs have for adults, what place the local epistemologies and ontologies play in the success of the adult learning programs, and, lastly, what need, if any, is there a people managing component in adult learning programs. The implications of this study that relate to feminist theories are: the participant's definition of a strong woman, their ideas about what makes women sad or happy, and their notions about what constitutes sustainable development in their community. The next section of this chapter deals with the topic of what constitutes the cultural wealth among the Luo and what are its currency? Two main constituents of this wealth are intelligence and particular personal attitudes, and dispositions. The currency

of this wealth is in the people and the products of their work in the community. The concluding sections of the chapter highlight the importance of my conception of ethical conduct in polyvocal research contexts such as the West Reru site. This section also considers the significance of the study for further research in study contexts with similar characteristics as well as its applicability to contemporary practice.

Implications for Adult Education

Hero chwuech: Loving chwuech.

From the participants' actions and words, I learned that they loved taking part in *chwuech* activities. They often talked of the benefits they had got from involving themselves in these indigenous adult educational activities. The participants mentioned two main advantages of *chwuech* in their lives. These were the income they made from the sale of their products and the emotional support they got from each other. Emotional support is an aspect of *chwuech* that is most important and necessary for such an underserved population as these women are. Most of them are poor widows with large families to care for. Additionally, they are either infected or affected by the big problem of HIV/AIDS in their community. Indeed, this emotional support enhanced the participants' educational experience.

As a member of the *Bang' jomariiek* women group, I observed that the design of the indigenous adult educational processes included features that actively engaged the affective and spiritual facets of all participants. As participants worked, they often got into discussions of spiritual issues in which they held strong beliefs. There was talk of traditional beliefs that, if not kept would result in curses from the community elders. The participants believed that curses would give rise to bad luck and even death. One

widespread belief was in life after death and that the dead could still affect the lives of the living. *Jakom* (our group chair) told us of the dreams she received from her late husband and which she believed to be instructions on how to run his home in his absence. She took this advice from her late husband through a dream. This speaks of the ‘never say die’ attitude that the participants had in their struggle against the impediments in their lives. Scholars such as Mbiti (1969) and Magesa (1998) described the spiritual nature of the African. The African weaves their spiritual aspects into all that they do. Any adult learning context that did not engage the spiritual aspect of the learner failed to fully utilize the learners’ capacity to engage in the educational processes. Indeed, Western scholars such as Tisdell (2003) articulated the importance of inviting and employing the spiritual dimension of adult learners for their success. Spirituality has often emerged as an important aspect in the lives of adults. Developers of adult learning programs may consider incorporate it more into their designs.

Cohort-based model of classroom for adults.

In addition to designing programs that acknowledge the affective dimension of learners, I suppose the cohort plan for classes may boost the chance of success for adult learners. The cohort-based model of learning as I experienced it in West Reru enabled me to get help with my skill learning from other members of the group. Other members of my cohort often came in to show me a process which I was having difficulty with. This kind of help provided me with a group of instructors possessing mixed abilities in the *chwuech* form at hand. All these participants formed what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as a community of practice. This community was made up of people involved

in similar activities and collaborated with each other in a supportive fashion in this joint activity.

Chwuechgogy is an important aspect of the Luo epistemology and is deeply seated in the essence of the community. As we worked on our *chwuech* we often made reference to our community to elucidate aspects or processes we were engaged in. We measured the sizes of our pots according to how much food we could cook in it, water it could hold, and grain it could store. We estimated how much grain, food, and supplies baskets could carry or store. For the walls we *muono*, we tried to suggest how long they could stay before they needed to be repaired. From this finding, I think that the most abstract of learning content, even ones such as nuclear physics could still be made relevant by the tasks chosen by the teachers.

I was a novice-apprentice in a cohort of *chwuech* practitioners. Membership in this cohort allowed me the advantage of learning from the various perspectives brought in by the diverse group of people. The members of my cohort ranged from the mild and calm personalities, such as Nyar Kama Bor, to the more fiery ones, such as Nyar gi Telo. Their different responses to different circumstances gave me insight into the different ways to relate with people and issues in the community. This lesson was an important aspect of *chwuech*. Once Nyar Kama Bor thought that Nyar gi Telo's comment that, she, Nyar Kama Bor, should take more interest in *muono* and study it well, was construed as ridicule of her house, whose walls were in dire need of repairs. To no one in particular she said:

Kama iwuoye no to ang'eyo to ok rach, nyier anyiera. Ng'ama nyiero obende ibiro mana nyiere ka ndalo ne ochopo. Oda no kata ochal kamano an ema ang'eyo gima arito kode. An be an nitie kaka acheno kode. (I know what the ridicule is about, but I will not take offense. The one who laughs now will be

laughed at when the time for laughing at them comes. Even if my house looks like that, I know what I plan to do with it. I also have plans for it.)

On another occasion, when we needed to collect cooking water from the nearby stream, Nyar kama Bor did not care for the tedious task of carrying water on her head. She mumbled that she was not feeling well and could not carry any weight on her head. Apparently, other study participants had construed her mumbling as refusal to get involved in the task to result from a pride and vanity they seem to think she had. Some participants mutedly complained about this suggestion by Nyar kama Bor, but not so Nyar gi Telo, who ensured that Nyar kama Bor joined us in fetching water. She declared within Nyar kama Bor's earshot:

Ka idwaro ni waumbi to wadhi wate ma onge ng'ama dong'. An mine ma ohero fitina kama an ok a hero gi. Wawinjore e wach maber ae to ng'ato achiel dwaro lokore ni en okodwa timo kakaji te osewinjore. Ok otwuo. Ochung' malo wadhi e soko. (If it has been decided that we fetch water, we should all go. I do not like mothers who are recalcitrant such as this one. We have all agreed only for one person to try and change the group's decision. She is not sick. She should just get up and come with us.)

The place of adults' prior life experiences is an issue that often came up in the study. The *Bang' jomariiek* women's group actively sought and employed members' prior life experience, both for the success of the individual member and the group. Nyar Ringa had worked as a clerk in a commercial flower farm in Central Kenya. The group appointed her *jandiko* (treasurer) because she had rudimentary accounting knowledge from her prior position. Nyar Asembo, before retiring, worked in the Ministry charged with the management of women's groups. Then, she had overseen management issues of the women's groups in her locale. Members of the *Bang' jomariiek* group choose her the coordinator of their group. She made such decisions as venues of meeting and other group coordination issues. Additionally, participants asked me to describe my experience

of living in the US, flying, and most closely relevant to their current needs, how to get fee bursaries for their children. It was considered quite important for all participants to contribute to the success of the group in whichever way they could. Adult learning scholars such as Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) observe that adults bring in lived experience to enrich their new learning tasks.

Positioning adult education programs to the local epistemologies.

Developers of Adult educational programs ought to comprehensively and successfully assimilate and utilize the learners' prior life experiences. In doing this, such adult educational programs require to be designed to recognize and align themselves with the local community's foundations, scope, and validity of knowledge. Every community has structures into which members' life styles fit. In West Reru, *chwuech*, as an indigenous adult educational activity, is closely enmeshed in the Luo epistemology system's concept of *kit dak*. *Chwuech* draws from and enriches this epistemic aspect of the Luo community by its processes and products that acknowledge and incorporate diverse initiatives from participants. The participants learnt in the community utilizing locally available materials and in a sustainable manner. Additionally, participants utilized the benefits they got from their *chwuech* activities to improve their community. From considering the place and utility of *chwuech* in the West Reru community, I may guess that this finding has some implication for the design of adult education programs.

Inclusion of a people management component in adult education programs.

Most indigenous African adult educational activities are carried out in a communal environment. This is because they draw membership and material from the community in which they are found and enrich this same community with the educational

processes and products. Human resource management is a skill seamlessly built into these indigenous adult educational programs. During the course of the study, I was daily in contact with participants of different personalities and temperaments. Because of this, I was often reminded of the importance of including a management component in adult education programs. It was a delicate exercise to interact with these different personalities in a way that was mutually productive to both of us. I remember a case when one member did not like the tedious task of collecting water and helping with making our elaborate lunch on the last day of the study. Nyar gi Telo sharply told her off and made her aware that if everyone had behaved in the same way then the food would not be ready for our lunch. *Jakom* handled this situation by appealing to the reluctant member to join the others in the task to avoid discord in the group. The reluctant member heeded her.

Implications for Feminist Theories

Ang'o ma kelo kuyo? What causes sadness?

The *Bang' jomariiek* women's group members seem to consider as deeply troubling certain issues that manifest themselves in their community. Some of these issues are also found in some Western communities. They include a woman's inability to provide her family with food, comfortable housing, and education. The women are also distressed when they are unable to attend and contribute material support for community ceremonies in which they are expected to actively participate. Such include funerals, marriages, and naming ceremonies. The disintegration of families is also another issue that deeply troubles these women. On this last point, I hasten to mention that among the Luo, keeping members of a family together is deemed so important that a man will marry

more than one woman but keep all his family members in his home. Divorce is almost non-existent and hard to imagine. Much as a man having multiple wives may prove oppressive to the women, the male-centered nature of the society hardly ever considers the feelings of the women in such relationships. Women, most times, pretend to be happy in these relationships with multiple partners because they have no choice.

Women in all over the world understand how disturbing it is to be unable to provide children with food. It is more so in developing countries especially among women who are described as uneducated, and so disadvantaged, such as the participant of this study. Such helplessness assaults the very essence of womanhood and motherhood in the community. Some Western feminists have been accused, by some feminist scholars from developing nations, of essentializing womanhood. These feminist scholars, from developing nations, have observed that such Western feminists are unable or unwilling to fully appreciate the nuances of the conditions of womanhood which differ from place to place and from person to person.

Feminist scholars from developing nations' such as Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Wanjira Muthoni (as quoted in an interview with Arndt, (2000), Mohanty, (2003), Okeyo, (1981), Ong (1988), Moraga and Anzaldua (1981), and Savane (1982) among many others have suggested a feminism that broadens its definition and focus as an attempt to appreciate the circumstances of women in these localities. Underscoring Chikwenye Ogunyemi's observations about the challenges most African women typically contend with; ethnic skirmishes, gerontology, "in-lawism," Okeyo (1981), a Kenyan feminist scholar, studies the exclusivity and alienating power of a feminism that narrowly confines itself to a struggle against gender discrimination with which some Western

feminist ideas seem pre-occupied. These feminist scholars from developing nations think that such Western feminists are naive in conceiving of the “feminist terrain as an almost singular antisexist struggle” (Johnson-Odim, 1991 p. 315). This conception of a narrow feminist agenda is seen by feminist scholars from developing nations such as Okeyo (1981) as an attempt by some women from the developed nations to take over leadership on issues affecting all women in the world. She thinks that they are attempting to define and chart themselves as both leaders in the academic arena and in development assistance programs. Stemming from this discussion on some Western feminists’ relation with women from developing nations is my suggestion that it is important for the feminist discourse to draw insight from cultures around the world in its development. In this way, there will be less dissatisfaction from a group that feels it has not been served by the on-going conversation on women development.

Ang’o ma kelo mor? What creates happiness?

The women seemed happy, though this is a state that is elusive to an observer. I wondered if they pretended to be happy after realizing that it was expected of them to be in such circumstances or if indeed they were. The women, nevertheless, expressed happiness when they made personal sacrifice for their families and communities. They tried to improve their community by serving it in ways that at times took up almost all their time, but they steadfastly made the sacrifice. Nyar Asembo was an exceedingly busy woman, both with issues of her own development, and with those of her community’s well-being. Apart from being a care-giver to about five children, she was the chair person of the *Nyamrerwa* group of community paramedics, the coordinator of the *Bang’ jomariiek* women group and a church deacon charged with coordinating the

management of church affairs in her area. Although these responsibilities left her with little or no time of her own, she was a seemingly happy woman who was always cheerful. Walker (1983) and hooks (1981) are feminist scholars who study the self-less nature of women and how they draw fulfillment from sacrificing of themselves.

Miyo ma otegno gen mane? Who is a strong woman?

In the study, I observed aspects of womanhood to which the participants ascribed. I wondered what had shaped their perspectives and if they had been coerced by the male-centeredness of their community to define a strong woman as they did. Nevertheless, while engaged as a novice-apprentice in this study, I tried to identifying my fellow participants' definition of a strong woman. What was the essence of womanhood according to the participants? How was this fundamental nature of womanhood manifested in this community? I picked up that a strong woman persevered through physical exertion that benefited her family and community. *Chwuech* required much physical exertion in its various processes. I rarely heard complaints about the tedious processes.

The participants applauded the self-sacrificing behavior that was considered necessary for a greater good. Although from another perspective, this self-sacrificial behavior may be construed to be a function of the power dynamics in the community. The collective and communal expectations bear down on the individual woman and force her to exhibit certain behaviors or else she suffers ostracization. From this study, I comprehended that a woman was expected to persevere through physical and even emotional distress if it was for the sake of others. Nyar Asembo sacrificed most of her time by involving herself in her community's various management arms-among them the

church, health, and economic dimensions. Additionally, I listened as members derided a woman who claimed to be suffering in her marital home, yet she was able to feed her children.

A strong woman was a wise one who planned for the survival of her family. On this score, Nyar Ugenya disparaged a woman in the village who worked so hard in her farm but exchanged her farm produce for alcohol, causing a lot of distress to her family when they lacked food. Apparently, she was an alcoholic but, to the study participants, it was both saddening and inexcusable what she did to secure alcohol, because her actions interfered with the very core of the community, the family. Interestingly, not a single participant appeared ready to interrogate her circumstance and consider her side of the “failure” story. They all felt that the only “cure” to this situation was that the alcoholic stop drinking because they thought it was a condition she could snap out of. This reflected a sort of contradiction to the sisterhood that the women displayed in the study; when they were ready to help each other through their troubles. This contradicting situation could also be a function of ignorance about issues such as alcoholism. Of her, Nyar Ugenya said:

An Nyar Mwalo no lit na to seche moko be ase e. ero kaka ng'ama mio nyalo madho kong'o gi cham ma ose tio ne matek kamano. Nyar wegi no mondo okinyi e puodho to oriyo kuro odiochieng' mangima. Ka cham iko a ika ni tochako madhe. Ndalo ma jowete ne keyo en kech osehako mana kaye. (At times I feel sorry for Nyar Mwalo, but at other times, I do not. That woman goes to the farm very early in the morning and is there the whole day working hard. When her crops start maturing, she starts exchanging it for alcohol. By the time other women are harvesting their crops she has finished hers and has nothing to harvest.)

How did these definitions of strong womanhood compare with some Western feminists' ideas about womanhood? From the prior discussion, it is apparent that some

Western feminists are more preoccupied with a fight for gender equality that gives little to no time to the exploration of concepts of womanhood in various cultures. The exploration of diverse concepts of womanhood is important if Western feminism is to speak to all women in their diverse locations throughout the world. Certainly, it is the hope of Black feminism and its closely-related indigenous feminism that different feminisms, grounded in the specific details of women's varied experiences may give birth to a comparative global feminism (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000). All women, wherever they are, will be appreciated for who they are, what they do, and what they believe in. It is only after complete appreciation of these women's circumstances, can policy makers develop programs to expand their capacities successfully.

Dongruok mar piny: Community development.

In the study, I wondered what the women defined as successful community development and what had shaped their definitions. The *Bang' jomariiek* women group was a relatively successful group. It served its members in ways that improved their lives. Membership benefits included, but were not limited to, getting weeding services for a low flat rate for any size of farm, accessing soft loans with an almost negligible interest rate, and enjoying free *muono* services. The group members led me to appreciate that these were services they urgently needed when they founded their group. Indeed, they noted that even at this point they had clear plans about how to employ any windfall they would get from benefactors. About the plans they had, Nyar Asembo explained:

Kaka ineno wa ka ng'eny wa wan monde liete. Wan gi nyithindo ma wan ema warito. Mano emomiyo ne wachokore mondo wapuonjre rieke ma wanyalo yudo go dongruok. Kaka in ng'atwa man oko, ka iyudo kony moro amora ikelnwa mondo wajiwa go mine gi. Wasewinjore ni ka wayudo nyalo to wadwa chako tede e liete. Ma wabiro timo ka achiel gi tije wa moko kaka doyo, chwuech, kata muono. (As you see us here, most of us are widows. We have children

depending on us. That is why we came together to discuss ways in which we could develop ourselves. As one of us whom has outside contacts, we would like you to look for any help you can get for us, that can help us improve our group and lives of our members. We have agreed that, if we get any resources, we will start a catering business in funerals. We will do this business in conjunction with our other endeavors such as weeding, chwuech, and even *muono*.)

These clear plans by the *Bang' jomariiek* group members speak to the need that policy makers closely work with communities of women when designing and developing programs to widen their capacities. The success of capacity building programs depend on how much they are fitted in with the desires, aspirations, and the foundations of knowledge of the receiving community. Mohanty (2003) cautioned against essentializing women from developing nations because different dynamics in their lives affect them in different ways, as is the case for these women in the study. Mohanty further noted that concepts such as the sexual division of labor are often misconstrued to erroneously illustrate the oppression of women in various societies and consequently these trivial or non-issues become a focus of extensive debate. Consequently, the real needs of women in such communities are not addressed. Mohanty suggested prudence in making generalizations based on issues such as geographical areas, economic status, or any other distinguishing characteristics when referring to women. She derided the latent suggestion by the some Western feminists that they need to represent their oppressed developing nations' sisters by comparing it to Marx proposing that the oppressed must be represented because they cannot represent themselves.

The descriptions and explanations for the different women's state of affairs can only be coaxed from the historical aspects of the specific community. Experience is, in most cases, subjective, and treating it as such is the only way for scholars to present authentic reports on studies with women. When the experience of women in developing

nations is appreciated, their agency in these communities is also respected. From and because of this respect, development agencies explore ways of enhancing the women's capacities. This will go a long way to diffuse the feelings of mistrust with which the women from developing nations view some Western feminists, when they sense that these feminists trivialize and ignore their agency, priorities, and abilities in and for their communities. Just such feelings of mistrust came to a boiling point in the 1975 First International Women's Conference in Mexico City (Okeyo, 1981). Essentializing issues that are important to women from developing nations, tempt the some Western feminists to consider that they alone are subjects and active at redressing the status of women in the world while women from developing nations come out as weaklings deserving of help.

Implications for the Employment of a Community's Cultural Wealth

What constitutes cultural wealth among the Luo?

This question, about what constitutes cultural wealth among the Luo, is one that I kept at the back of my mind the entire time I was involved in the study. I kept collecting tit bits that would help me construct what my fellow participants regarded as the wealth inherent in our community. From the comments of Nyar Ugenya ma Uholo (see beginning of chapter six) to the actions and words of my fellow participants in the study, I came to identify some, but certainly not all features that formed this community reservoir of resources. I adapted the definition of scholars, notable among them Yosso (2005) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) in seeking out those resources that women in West Reru have by virtue of being Luo and living in this community.

Rieko, paro, winjo, gi luoro (intelligence).

The terms *rieke* (cleverness), *paro* (reflexivity), and *luoro* (respect) all combine to describe an intelligent person and the knowledge that he/she acquires from around him/her through his/her reasoning, intuitive, and perceptive faculties. Grigorenko et al. (2001), in their study among the Luo, identified these four terms (*rieke, paro, winjo, and luoro*) to describe both the socio-emotional and cognitive competence. In West Reru, this intelligence manifested itself in good products. Participants considered the intelligence which is described by these four Luo terms to be critical for a successful life. In their conversations, they would give examples of people who behaved intelligently and succeeded and those who failed in their lives because they were not intelligent. In a discussion that arose about the dangers one faced when they did not make intelligent decisions, talk gravitated to Nyar Malo, a community member who always complained that she had a lot of problems in life. According to some participants, Nyar Malo did not seem to make any effort to improve herself. It was the belief of others, observing Nyar Malo's life, that she had the resources to improve her life but choose to be wasteful in their usage. Of her, Nyar Sakwa said:

Oyuak saa te ni ochandore. Odak e ot ma kore oteng'ore ka ragol. Ka obet ei ode no inene a nena ka in oko. An akia kaka onindo ei od no ndalo koth kama. Macha dalaw kata nindo. Mokuongo an aluor ma ok dadak e ot machal ka gima adak e pap oko. Ngima matek no to ohero kende. Be iseneno kaka chae momadho opoto? Kendo ok madhe nono. Kata chiembe okoted awutha. Kor ka chiemo to orito to ot to lich kuome. (She complains all the time that she is suffering. She lives in a house with walls which have spaces like a comb. When she is seated in the house, you can see her from outside. I do not know how she sleeps in that house during the rainy season. I would secure another place to spend my nights. She has chosen that difficult lifestyle. Have you ever seen how much milk she uses in her tea? [Milk is considered dear in this community] She never takes only tea for breakfast [such as many other people]. Even her food is well prepared [uses what is considered expensive ingredients]. She cares more about what she eats than where she lives.)

In this narrative, Nyar Sakwa is illustrating Nyar Malo's lack of productive reflection. According to Nyar Sakwa, Nyar Malo could use the resources in the community, which she has access to, to repair her house. She could even save some money by not eating expensive food, as she was observed to be serving her family, and use the savings to hire labor to help her repair her house.

Mwando mag piny: Community Wealth.

Participants study identified items and attitudes that formed part of the wealth inherent in the West Reru community. They considered their *chwuechgogical* activities as one such wealth the community had. By getting involved in these activities, the participants addressed a myriad of issues impacting their lives. These issues affect the economical, medical, governmental and psychological aspects of the community. They generated income by trading on the products of *chwuech*. The community created by their *chwuechgogical* activities allowed them to exchange information that was pertinent to the success of their lives as community members. The participants got to involve themselves in matters of government when they interacted with others who were active in the local arms of the government.

Implication for Study Methods with Indigenous Populations

Researcher's level of involvement in study.

As a novice-apprentice, I assumed an insider position in this study. As a result of this role, I was able to join other participants in matters beyond the limits of this study. This kind of conduct allowed me a well-rounded picture of the study. I would suggest that researchers strive to be involved in their study as closely as they can to enable them collect more genuine data.

Additionally, my involvement in the West Reru site reiterated to me the importance of establishing a give and take relationship with study participants, as has been proposed by scholars such as Marker (2003), Menzies (2001), Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), and Weber-Pillwax (1999). For this Study, this reciprocation went beyond the tangible level and onto the emotional level of community members. I, like early anthropologists, (Mead, 1977) used material resources to partly compensate study participants for their time. Mead recorded how she gave gifts, food, medicine and encouragement to her study participants. In my turn, I also gave money, advice, and a listening ear for one or two members who needed to get oppressive matters off of their chests. I got closer to the participants in this way and this closeness augured well for the study.

Japuonjre, japuonj, mwalimu, a teacher.

I wondered what level of membership I had attained in the study, according to the participants. I based this description on Adler and Adler's (1978) three types of membership roles of researcher in their field work. I found out that at the end of the study participant viewed me as an active member. Was I surprised? No, because I had taken a conscious decision not to go beyond active membership in this study. I did this to avoid the pain of extricating myself and going back to my circles, both social and academic. I identified a lot with the participants and took particular care to continually step back and break any rapidly forming attachment to them. I succeeded in my quest to be a participant observer in their *chwuechogical* activities and made use of my space in the *Kit dak* family architecture. I realized I had succeeded in attaching and detaching

myself appropriately in the study when on the last day, and at our debriefing meeting

Nyar Alego Kogelo made these remarks:

Nitie gimoro achiel ma adwa penjo japuonjre. En japuonj, 'mwalimu' 'a teacher' to kaka obedo kodwa ka to ne odwa chalo ka gima wan nyithi sikul. Koro an akwayo ni do pimo nwa niya, e kindwa kama nyicha wabedo ni, wan ji piero ariyo ga abich. Samoro 'nosomo' gimoro ekindwa ka manyalo miyo wakethre to bas kama osomo no kiki oluor mar nyiso wa ni "kama ne udwadhie marach en ka utimo gini gi gini, gi gini 'ama' udwa timo kama gikama gi kama. Los uru kama mondo omiyo obed kama." Mano tich ma amiye sani. Oyiere gima nyicha nyalo ketho wa, kudni moro achiel ma owinjo kata moneno. Obet gi jo agulu mokwongo. Ogolie makosa moro achiel kuom jo agulu mondo wajirekebisha, bas nyicha en gi jo othith. An gi adier ni onge ng'ama ni 'a hundred percent' ma onge makosa motimo to kisenone wadu makosa ba inyise ma 'rekebisha biro miyo wadhi mbele. (There is one thing I would like to ask the one seeking knowledge. She is a teacher [Luo], a teacher [Swahili], a teacher, and the way she presented herself in our group, she became like a child in school. I ask her to tell us, here we were all twenty five of us, is there anything you saw or got wind of that may bring the group's downfall? What negative thing you got to know of us, do not hesitate to tell us that "where you erred is when you did this thing, and this thing, and this thing or you did this thing this way, and this way, and this way. Do this to correct this anomaly." That is the job I give her now. She needs to select the thing that would have brought our downfall [as a group], the worm that she saw or heard about. You sat with the potters first, point out one mistake they had so they can correct it. Then she was with the palm frond group. I am sure there is no one who is one hundred percent without fault and if you see your colleague faulting and you let them know it, they will correct it and proceed stronger.)

For participants in the study to ask what I thought of the group, it was apparent that I had been successful in relating with the simultaneous movements of closeness and distance as is the design of *kit dak*. In this context, I held multiple personalities, a teacher, a learner, a woman, and a member of an elite group. The participants in the study commonly referred to me as *japuonjre* or "one seeking knowledge." This made it easier for them to point out what they thought was important for me to learn and even give suggestions of the processes that were important for me to make records of. This perception they held of me in no way hampered their quest for the new knowledge I

might have, both from my teaching days and the new experience I had gathered as a learner in the US, as the initial quotation from Nyar Alego ma Kogelo showed.

Additionally, I had wondered what the effect of my having been a teacher would have on my interactions with the participants. The above orature by Nyar Alego Kogelo, on our last day as a group, proved to me that they had not forgotten that I had been a teacher and once a teacher, always a teacher in my community's eyes. Commonly, retired school teachers are always fondly addressed as teachers. I believe the contradicting personas I held- that of student and teacher-watered down the effect of my former position in the community but in no way made my fellow participants forget that I was once a teacher. Teachers are highly thought of in Kenya. Kenyans perceive them as having the potential to develop the country by developing the young in their charge. Young people represent the future and anyone charged with their care is a truly important person. This reverence is reflected in the community by the reverent teachers have. Among the Luo, teachers are fondly referred to as *japuonj* or simply "one who conveys knowledge". They are seen as wise counselors on most matters affecting the community.

Further, I was invariably bombarded with questions about my experiences living in the US and flying:

Amerka kuro ichame ang'o? Be gipuro cham ka magwa gi? Sama un e 'ndege' be uchiemo? Uchamo ang'o? Bende luoro maki? Awinjo no ng'ama muche tin nyalo tho e 'ndege'. (What is eaten in America? Do they plant our kinds of crops? Do you get fed on the plane? What are you fed on? Do you get afraid of flying? I hear that people with a weak constitution may die when they fly.)

These questions and the challenge by Nyar Alego Kogelo made me realize that as an adult I was expected to be wise and share what I knew with others. I was privileged to have experiences that the participants in the study did not. I had advanced academic

knowledge; I had been out of the country, and many such experiences accord people who have them advantage in the community. I was expected, and indeed I did as expected, to not hoard what is good but to share it with others. I gave as much information as I could on life in the USA, flying and other questions I was asked by the participants. Such questions were easier for me to deal with as compared to those that required me to evaluate the group or point out errors of individual members of the group. I believe I skirted those types of questions because I thought they had the potential to be abrasive and I risked alienating myself if I took a firm personal stance in addressing them. I was in the position of a learner, an indigenous outsider, and a visitor among other identities I held in the study. I perceived myself to be walking a tight-rope on which I needed to be careful to preserve the goodwill of my hosts. This was one of the failings I noted of myself; a teacher withholding information that could help the group grow. At that time I was at a loss on how to behave, knowing that doing the right thing would impact my relationships negatively.

Additionally, the participant deferred to the experts and took instruction from them although they also acted in the capacity of teachers. They formed me of the fame of Nyar Ogolla Ja Sakwa when they invited her to lead them in teaching me pottery. In basketry, they made me aware of the various participants who were considered experts in the different stages of basketry. They treated the expert in *muono* the same way, by deferring to her. I could still see that they took me for a different type of *japuonj* and *japuonjre*. This must have come from the fact of my Western training and that I did not need to make a living from the skills I was learning. I could also finance my way to receiving these trainings in a way that none of them could. All these facts set me aside

from the other participants of this study. I was more of a privileged *japuonj* and *japuonjre*. Apart from separating me from the other participants, these facts formed the basis of the significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant to me at various levels. I conceived this study to have both multi-tiered purposes and multi-layered levels of implications. I anticipated these various levels by the twin acts of the study's design and conduct. I had set out to explore, understand and, describe the indigenous teaching and learning processes that are employed in pottery, basketry, and *muono*. I wished to study these processes among a group of women from whom I would collect the predominant perceptions of these teaching and learning processes. These various tiers formed the purpose of this study, and thus its importance as far as it would generate literature on an African system of teaching and learning, and the value of both the women collectives and the educational processes. The study would also contribute to scholarly methods of conducting research with indigenous communities, some of which are non-literate. Such communities predominantly employed orature in their instructional processes. Last, but not least, I wished to document adaptations of the indigenous teaching and learning processes as used with creative forms among Luo women of Kenya.

On a personal level, I regarded this study process as an intimate journey that would allow me to know myself better in the process of knowing the cultures of my people. I thought it was important to be true to an aspect of feminist research that requires the researcher to be rigorously involved in his or her study process (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). I intended to employ this research

process to deeply reflect on components of my biography, and reveal the personal, political, and intellectual dimensions. Given these extensive benefits that I have derived from Western forms of education, would I still be open to indigenous ideas of teaching and learning?

Nature verses nurture, which carried the day? Who was I? I had this deep desire to know more about indigenous African educational opportunities and how these might contribute to international systems of teaching and learning. Does my native Luo community have any educational ideas to offer the world, even as they also benefit from inspirations from other parts of the globe? I believed this type of study would allow me access to the *rieko* (intelligence) that define Luo ancestry.

The Luo were a proud and courageous people who prevailed over their environment with relative measures of success all this time. An insight into *chwuech* enabled me to better understand the relationships between Luo indigenous systems and various forms of adult education from other parts of the world. What made the Luo tick, what were their challenges in adult education? What resources did they employ to counter these challenges? This research has given me an opportunity to reflect on some of these questions. I have now found out more about myself, the educational resources in the Luo community, and the unique possibilities these opportunities hold for the sustainable development of the community. I have also only started to appreciate the price I paid for the acquisition of Western education. For instance, I now know that although Western education has alienated me to a certain extent, it has also given me the opportunity to benefit from cultural skills from other parts of the world. I still ask myself if I really needed to leave home for the United States and return home to appreciate all

this. Many times I taken for granted what I have at hand. I tend to appreciate them from a distance, as was true in this case.

Other questions I had grappled with during this study were: would I be capable of presenting myself as a worthy learner among a group of Luo women in rural Kenya or would I be tolerated just for my entertainment value? Agar (1994,) had suspected that entertainment was his main social skill when he had conducted a study in a village in South India. He would cause laughter whenever he failed to distinguish the different referents used for relatives, of which the English language had but one general referent. Indeed, he jokingly suggests that one reason why ethnographers are tolerated by participants emanates from their entertainment value (Agar, 1980/1996). I, too, was apprehensive of making similar mistakes and being relegated to the position of an “entertainer” in the study.

I had anticipated alienation from my fellow participants as had been experienced by other scholars conducting studies among their own native populations. Fournillier (2009) wrote of her experience when carrying out fieldwork among her native Mas’ making community in Trinidad. After being away for five years studying in the United States, she said, ‘I had to quickly acclimatize my mind/body so that I could get the most out of this experience...In addition, the fact that I had left my homeland to study in the United States negated my immediate acceptance as a Trinidadian’ (p. 754). Another scholar from Kenya Maina (2003) also related the challenges of being in a double role of indigenous insider and researcher in a study she conducted in a Kenyan secondary school where she had been a teacher before. She studied the confounding nature of the double roles when relating to the participants in her study. Her new role as researcher was at

times in contradiction to her being an indigenous insider who had been a teacher in the school before she left for further studies in the United States. Likewise, before the study started, I had considered the possibilities of my alienation with apprehension.

Additionally, by this study, I set out to sharpen my skills in pottery, basketry and *muono*, all skills in which I had dabbled in sporadically in my childhood. I found this educational aspect important because, being a trained school teacher, I wished to compare the processes used in the teaching and learning in these three creative forms by being personally trained in them. About these educational aspects, I asked questions such as: what does an indigenous African classroom look like? How do the teachers conduct themselves? What relationships do they build between themselves, their students, and communities? What relationships do the teachers encourage among their students and their communities?

Lastly, this study was imperative to me for reasons driven by a need to contribute to adult and women education. Education is a form of social activism. My current involvement in adult education is a continuation of my previous engagement in community activism. Adult education is especially important to me because it is a program of hope especially among underserved communities. It is an optimism that assures the adult learner that opportunities exist even after he or she has missed schooling as a child.

Furthermore, the world has already become a global village; what with the communication technologies that are all encompassing. The briskly evolving internet and other communication technologies have allowed people all over the world to be connected and, consequently, opened up hitherto unreachable communities in the most

inaccessible parts of the world. This has irretrievably affected the processes of human knowledge and its production in the world (Anderson, 2008). It is important for adult educators to be aware of other perspectives on the teaching and learning that their students are engaged in. One main reason for the need to know other teaching and learning perspectives is that physical and virtual borders have become porous and there is brisk intermingling of people from different cultures in the world. Any one classroom of adult learners often has people drawn from many different parts of the world. Teachers who have some knowledge of non-Western perspectives of teaching and learning are better placed to succeed in managing such classrooms.

Suggestions for Further Studies

One of the problems that I discovered in this study was the issue of fluidly crossing borders. These borders included ones created by: language, age, class, political orientation, and spiritual beliefs. Despite the fact that I grew up among these people with whom I was studying, I still experienced some difficulties in crossing these borders. These barriers would be far more insurmountable to an outsider without my advantages. Consequently, the question then is: how does an outsider face these challenges?

This is not an easy question to answer and certainly is a subject for full research by itself. The question about what an outsider needs in order to negotiate the barriers would benefit from research by linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, theologians, and even political theorists. I suggest that scholars in these disciplines conduct studies with populations that are similar in characteristics to this study's participants. Could such studies be extended to include men? What adjustments are needed to accommodate both sexes? Should *Bang' jomariiek* expand to include men?

Could unemployed men benefit from such collectives? Could unemployed women college graduates benefit from such collectives? Suppose the materials were not so sustainable, and demanded some sizeable financial investment? Where would the fund come from? Can the educational system be applied to more practical vocations such as sewing, silversmith, batik, and weaving? What would be the effect of having a permanent meeting place that serves as a vocational center? How gender-specific are the *chwuech* activities? Could they be successful in contexts where men and women worked together? These are some of the questions I ask myself retrospectively and of which answers I still contemplate.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Chwuech manimba-Consummate creativity.

Chwuech-How the study's participant's referred to the process of production of pots, baskets, and *muono*. *Chwuech* also refers to other creative productions and in this case used interchangeably with creative skills.

Chwuechgogy-A concept I propose and employ in describing the *chwuech* activities of *Bang' jomariiek* women group. This concept describes how *chwuech* allows women to pursue specific tasks in their environment as indigenous practitioners. These tasks may involve their economic, medical, and political orientations.

Indigenous women-Women who live in the rural areas of Kenya or their ethnic community's traditional land. This is opposed to women in urban areas or immigrants.

Indigenous scholar-A person with relatively high academic achievements and engaged in a research study and development programs within her native community. These scholars have the advantage of preserving knowledge from their experiences in both their indigenous and academic contexts.

Ja-Man. This term, just like *Nyar*, is also attached to a geographical location and is a respectful referent to a relatively young man commonly below middle age. When men attain middle age it becomes polite to refer to them as *Jaduong*' which means old man.

Japuonj-one who gives others useful information, like a school teacher.

Japuonjre-one who receives information from *japuonj*

Kit dak-A concept in the Luo epistemological system that describes the family life architecture with its various compartments, which are commonly carved on strict gender, age, and time lines.

Kwe-Peace and serenity. It refers to a situation that is almost perfect for its lack of stressors as happens when everything is in harmony and working for the good of the community.

Luoro-This is a feeling which can be described as respect infused with fear and awe but not in equal proportions. There is more respect than fear in *Luoro*. It gets its meaning from usage. It can be used to purely refer to fear but many times it refers to a respectful relationship between people.

Muono-The comprehensive process that involves making, curing, and decorating clay walls.

Mwalimu-Swahili for teacher. This is more or less the equivalent of the Western conception of teacher.

Nam-Lake. In this case referring to Lake Victoria or *Lolwe* as it was called before its name was changed by the colonial settlers. Luo women are fondly addressed as *Nyar Nam* only when the speaker, commonly a man, wishes to be particularly endearing to the woman and most likely that she is his relative. A man may display his love for his wife, daughter, or even sister by fondly using this term with them.

Nyamrerwa-favorite traditional healer and seer. In the old days one would not move from one healer to another because of beliefs that some healers had medicine that was

contraindicated to those of another healer. It was important to choose a healer carefully, as one would need to maintain a lasting relationship with that healer.

Nyar-Daughter, woman, or girl. This term is usually attached to a geographical location from which an individual was born. Thus Nyar Asembo was born in the Asembo area. It is considered a respectful referent to a woman in the community.

Post-colonial theory -in the nineteenth century most areas of the world felt the brunt of European imperialism. Although most of these areas are now free of this direct domination, they still feel its effects upon the community through the policies enacted at that time. Post-colonial theory and scholars examine and describe the nature and impact of inherited power relations in such communities.

Puonj- as used in this report means adding new and useful information onto a person's collection of useful information. What a teacher in school does. *Puonj* can be negative when a person collects harmful or even useless information.

Simba-A dormitory for young men in a home.

Siwindhi- A dormitory for young women and in which a grandmother takes care of them.

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