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TOPICS AND TANGENTS FOR MUTUAL HELP IN UNCERTAINTY

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Help is a good thing, unless taken too far. It implies a need or a want to be filled, and it connotes both kind intentions and beneficial effect, without precisely specifying any of these. Too much help can seem patronizing if not matronizing; and it can lay unwanted expectations of gratitude or reciprocation on anyone at the receiving end. So it is sometimes suspect, and often best kept within limits. But the uncertainty of life requires it, and life is less satisfying without it. The articles in this collection ask whether help is any more beneficial, or less suspect, when it takes mutual forms. I note a few threads of common concern and suggest a few of the possible pathways for others who might wish to connect these works to other studies, inside and outside Africa, in the future.

Help takes many forms, and it can come from many sources. It can come from kith and kin, from clubmates or classmates, or from officials or contractors. It can come from dogs, donkeys or oxen volunteering, enticed or enslaved to serve our needs. Or from a spirit or divinity, for a believer or knower. Help can be deliberate or inadvertent; it can come from an individual or group; and if the same person or group is taken to be both giver and receiver, we can speak too of self-help. Help can take material forms like a seed or an axe, active forms like a boost up a tree trunk, or immaterial and passive forms like the forgiving of a perceived debt. Humans use help for many things: for suckled milk, for breathing or resuscitation after injury, for cremation or burial, or for reproducing in between. You can use it, by Lake Victoria in Kenya, to wash your hands before eating (one hand pours the kettle and a second holds the basin below, for the other pair of hands being cleaned); or across the continent along the Gambia River, with a densely woven straw fan, to cool down on a hot day: for here it is customary always to fan the other person before yourself. Live your life properly, in such places, and help may come all day long.

Mutual, too, is a nice warm word. Mutuality or mutualism, though, can mean more than one thing. In a narrow usage, it can mean a strict reciprocity between two contemporaries, a kind of controlled exchange, tit for tat, that gives an impression of connectedness but perhaps of coolness and calculation too. More broadly than this, it can mean a sharing of something in common, not just in a dyadic relationship but perhaps in a more inclusive association of persons or parties, and no direction of movement need be specified. It can mean a likeness of relationship, as when two people have a friend, enemy or hobby in common and call that a mutual acquaintance or interest. At the term's most vague and

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versatile, mutualism, it can mean just a *sense* of something held, owned, or just thought or felt in common – or even (in the 'ism') just a notion or belief that there *ought* to be something of the sort: an ideal or an ideology. In any usage, mutuality or mutualism raises a question of perspective: in whose mind, and in what particular sense, is there anything that can be called a bond, or connection, or even a commonality? And, since more than one mind must be involved, is the idea itself, well, mutual?

Part of what makes mutual help a good thing is the uncertainty of life's conditions. When we don't know whose help we might need, or what form it might need to take, it can make sense to spread it around beforehand, as Sara Berry has shown in south-west Nigeria (Berry 1993). Jane Guyer and colleagues' work on currencies in West and Central Africa (1995; 2004) has sought to bridge anthropological and economic understandings in a related way, extending it to questions of value, authority and currency choices and showing that 'crises may be averted by a dramatically skilful performance from a familiar repertoire of transactional institutions': a 'combinatorial juggling of multiple independent scales – for things and people, in quantities and qualities'. Some of the benefits, harms and risks can be measured and others not. Feeling and emotion, as well as reason and rationality, form part of any topic that is economic, political or cultural in nature. And since feelings are facts (as figures not always are), there can be little good social science or humanistic study without them.

Who trusts whom for what, and why, is a perennially recurring question in social studies. Certainly, among the answers likely to recur are kin and family (and perhaps particularly mothers), for many things. Various scholarly traditions, including philosophy and anthropology, have inclined towards such conclusions since Adam Smith's early work (1976) in the eighteenth century picked up this old Aristotelian ethical theme in affective and moral terms, yet also general and abstract ones. Moving closer towards real behaviour and recorded cases, while still attempting to generalize on tendencies and likelihoods, has been a task for anthropologists and others since then. Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940), for Nuer in Africa, and Marshall Sahlins (1974), for Pacific islands and elsewhere, both considered closeness of kinship and of residence together, concluding that kindness tends to be extended more readily to the near and dear. And, along quite different, sociobiological lines, Edward O. Wilson, William Trivers and William Hamilton (for evolutionary theory in general), and other evolutionary theorists in their wake (see Wittenberger 1981; Alcock 1998; cf. Runciman 2009), have sought to establish their own kinds of diagrammatic and formal calculus for kinship distance and altruistic behaviour. Their legacies have inclined many, inside and outside sociobiology, towards the generalization that the closer the kinship, the greater the trust and cooperation. Comparative studies by Africanists, for instance by Robert Netting on family in agrarian societies (1993), provide evidence of how broadly the principle can apply to both small families and households.

And yet Africanists have also come to appreciate better, since the early 1980s, that family and household are not necessarily coterminous, and that they do not always behave as cooperative units under a single leadership or rule for decisions (Guyer and Peters 1984; Moock 1986). We realize more fully now that apartments or households in towns and cities often conjoin single in-migrants from around the countryside as fictive families (Obbo 1980 on Uganda; Stoller 2002 on West

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Africans in New York City). And we have come to accept that the closest kin can sometimes, for or against common evolutionary expectations, be the fiercest rivals, and the most likely suspects of witchcraft accusation and targets of vengeance or purging campaigns (LeVine 1962; Geschiere 1997; Niehaus 2001; Smith 2008), including – in some cases surprisingly often, as in parts of western Kenya – the persecutors' own mothers (Ogembo 2006). Still, African politicians, not least heads of state, continue to exploit the idiom of parenthood (most often fatherhood) and nurturance to legitimize themselves to their sceptical nations (Schatzberg 2001). And this linguistic sleight-of-hand becomes, as much as anything, part of broader strategies of exploitation – to some, predation. If goodwill, mutual help and cooperation cannot be counted on among intimates like the closest kin and neighbours, it cannot be counted on either in larger settlements and polities beyond. Not, at least, in times of political or economic uncertainty.

But kinship, fortunately, is not the only basis for human trust. Tunisian-born ibn Khaldûn, as early as 1377 (2004), also pointed to religion, and to the self-discipline, sharing and mutual help requisite in desert life, as contributing to the clannish solidarity, or *asabiyah*, that he perceived in his travels among nomadic and transhumant herding people across North Africa. Sometimes translated as group- or fellow-feeling, it seemed also a social reality. He found less of it in towns and cities, where, as he saw it, corrupting influences weakened human character (and what he deemed manliness). We also know, from other experience, that commonalities as perceived in race (however defined), ethnicity, gender, age (as in formal age grades and age sets), caste, class, trade, political party and ideology and ties to the old school or home town also enter in as categorical delimiters of in- and out-groups. The list is far from exclusive.

People lacking any such basis of trust have sometimes sought to link up by blood brotherhood (and, though less pronounced, sisterhood) or shared-substance bonding with a mystical dimension. This way of ritually conjoining individuals by physical exchange of fluids, sometimes from lesions or by drinking from a common bowl, has served valuable purposes in the past for trade, personal protection and diplomacy. It is done even in some African contexts where blood is not a widely chosen idiom for communicating about kinship in the first place, as it is in casual English usage ('blood ties', 'blood is thicker than water'). Over the past century or so, where found across Africa, the practice seems to have waned in occurrence, and it began to do so well before the age of HIV/AIDS, when fluid transfers became biologically so much more dangerous. Why it did so is hard to say, but the change may be related to colonially imposed peace and subsiding needs for other forms of security, as hard as that may be to accept as a blanket proposition. Blood brotherhood has received some careful study in particular ethnographic cases (e.g. in Evans-Pritchard 1933) and comparatively (Tegnaeus 1952), but still far less than it might. Similarly, 'milk kinship', from having suckled at the same breast in infancy or early childhood, is also thought in some contexts to form a lifelong bond; this concept is prevalent over much of the Maghreb and much of Islamic Eurasia (MacClancy 2003; Parkes 2005). Both blood brotherhood and milk kinship are sometimes heard to be 'deeper' or more respected than genetic kinship or marriage. They have often been used to forge valuable trade partnerships between individual members of mutually suspicious or potentially hostile ethnic or religious groups, involving their own, cross-cutting

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kind of trust and loyalty and allowing lending or sharing otherwise deemed risky, sometimes over long distances.

More generally, friendship itself is a topic much undertreated in the literature on Africa, perhaps because Edward Evans-Pritchard, among Nuer in what is now South Sudan, and Meyer Fortes, among Tallensi in what is now northern Ghana, both decided so influentially to study kinship when they did and set the train on that track instead. But the Manchester and Rhodes-Livingstone schools picked up the topic of friendship in the mid-twentieth century as part of their hallmark method of network analysis. The ball has been set rolling, but many kinds of friendship remain to get their due.[1]

And what about the kind of solidarity that unites the multitudes for mutual help or cooperation? Moral philosophers in a Euro-American tradition since before Plato have described a division of labour emergent in growing towns; Adam Smith in 1776 (1937) and Emile Durkheim in 1893 (1966) elaborated the idea so famously again, pondering the pros and cons of role specialization in theories about productive efficiency and human interdependence. Since Smith's and Immanuel Kant's time, too, moral philosophers have devoted much attention to the ethical issues involved in transactions, asking whether a good deed is virtuous when some sort of eventual return is expected, or only when not. And anthropologists, since before Marcel Mauss in the 1920s (1967) posed the question with Pacific islanders and Northwest Coast foragers in mind, have asked what it is about a gift – and whether it is moral, spiritual, or both – that seems to compel a return. But in places less well described than Kant's Königsberg, Smith's Glasgow or Mauss's Paris, or even than the Trobriand Islands or the American Pacific Northwest re-analysed by Mauss, we might ask questions more basic still. It can be of little benefit to ask whether 'mutual help' is good, or exactly what motivates it or should reward or even punish it, before we have properly understood what forms it can take – or even whether 'mutual', from a Latin root, or 'help', from Old English with Old High German and Old Norse cognates, can directly translate into African tongues. Or whether the people one has suckled, washed or fanned will have disappeared, or *been* disappeared, by the time one needs some real help in return.

HELP IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

The papers in this collection explore various meanings of the idea of mutual help. Earlier anthropological work on the topic, from the times of European colonial occupation of most of Africa, was collected under the heading of cooperation. It focused especially on the kinds of societies once deemed primitive, with a special interest in child upbringing and education (Mead 1961) and in attempts at long-distance economic aid and community development (Goodenough 1963). These works devoted special attention to Native North Americans and Pacific islanders. Since that time, much of the social and cultural research done on the

[1]On the anthropology of friendship, see Boissevain (1974); for home-town ties in Nigeria, Trager (2001); for a detailed, diachronic cohort ethnography, on Ndembu male friends in Zambia, Pritchett (2007).

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topic, in Africa as elsewhere, has incorporated more political-economic concerns on larger scales, sometimes with partisan agendas. Picking, choosing and compromising between stock political-economic ideologies, and seeking to move beyond them, the present papers on African settings eschew orthodox socialism and libertarianism for a more realistically rooted understanding of how real people fashion their sharing, transacting and withholding, and they note the ironies in concepts like saving and hoarding. They tend to seek an order neither authoritarian nor chaotic, bespeaking a populist approach with not just tolerance but a versatile empathy at its core.

The questions they address are not just locally specific and current, as they are indeed, but also more widespread and more timeless.

Whom can we trust, for instance, in a situation of social scrambling, where our accustomed reliances may be challenged by seemingly random disappearances or surprising betrayals? African people have many thoughts of their own about this; and in more than a few places of late, they have had to. And their responses to it vary far more widely than we might suspect if we blithely just assume that 'blood is thicker than water', i.e. kinship is stronger than friendship. Acholi people in northern Uganda have a saying, *Cun yam tude*?, relayed to us by Okot p'Bitek (1985: 3), which translates roughly as 'Can you tie two penises in a knot?', implying that males will never bond well and in the end are likely to compete. On the other hand, James Pritchett's careful longitudinal research among a cohort of male friends among Lunda Ndembu in Zambia describes loyalties strong and enduring enough to prompt his title, *Friends for Life, Friends for Death* (2007). Can they not both be right? For instance, where pairs or larger groups form or hold together in competition with other groups? Or where such competition is only intermittent?

If trust is to be imagined as a bond, it exists in contrast to something unconnected or disconnected. And what the trust sometimes seems to involve is a *secret*. If secrets have insiders, they have outsiders too. The strategy is a risky one: for one thing, nothing provokes resentment like a secret; and for another, every secret is by its very nature an invitation to crack it – if only as a sport, of a sort. Studying secrets is an endeavour with a paradox built in. If they are real secrets, we can't all know them, and a publication on secrecy invites puzzlement. Sometimes the only secret, where secrets are spoken of, is that there is nothing inside actually known or practised where it was supposed to exist. Be that as it may, some parts of the world have become better known than others for their secrets, and moreover for their 'secret societies' that define themselves, or get defined by others, by such hidden knowledge they are said to possess – if not also for the secrecy surrounding the very fact that these associations exist.

Among the ironies of 'secret societies' is that their very secrecy, or sometimes just the feigning of it, ends up attracting more attention.[2] Still, something about secrecy, particularly when hard or painful initiations are involved, may enhance trust and cooperation among members afterwards. Still to be answered

[2]See Ferme's discussion (2001) of secrecy among Mende speakers in Sierra Leone, a predilection and value deriving in part from a long history of troubles and dangers. Vokes (2013), analysing the tragic case of a Ugandan church, links secrecy to feelings about fertility, fairness and political change.

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convincingly, perhaps by psychologists, is the question of whether enhancing trust within a group must diminish the trust outside it (as by a hydraulic principle), or whether such an effect is likely to be offset by the training it gives just in being more trusting and cooperative (as by an elasticity or exercise principle).

The papers also raise the larger issues of human connections to animals and the bush that are relied upon in the modern contexts of uncertainty. According to Erik Bähre's study of Cape Town's taxi operators, for example, some style themselves as lions. In this we find a reach for esteem, especially by young adults. These, and others like them elsewhere, include many who are relatively poor and powerless in gerontocratic societies with enormous disparities in wealth, and who must grasp at straws to find a place in the world and a platform of pride. One of the ways in which they do this is by co-opting the powers of animals, of the 'bush', and, by extension, of nature more generally, to their own names and images.

What they are doing is not too unlike something that mythical-historic figures such as Sundiata (following his foretold destiny as the progeny of a buffalo-woman and lion-man) have done in recruiting animal-spirit allies to gain ascendancy over what would become the empire of Mali. It is something like what African politicians have done by adopting leopard-skin caps (Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo/Zaire) or animal-tail fly whisks (for instance, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya). And it is something like what others in rebellion against authority have so commonly done in civil insurrections and wars (for instance, Alice Lakwena in Uganda, adopting snakes and bees as her ostensible allies in forming the Holy Spirits Movement and army) (Behrend 1999). These are all ways of trying, symbolically, to recruit unseen powers of nature to the protagonists' side. Doing so emboldens them and their followers, in part by a kind of mystification through an assumption of occult and unmeasurable power, one sometimes suggested in names but not as easily put into words.[3]

And this, in turn, expands our definition of mutuality, or mutual aid, to its limit. Choosing an animal species as an emblem or collective totem glorifies the animal, and the animal lends a kind of symbolic power to the team, the army, or the category of persons seeking advantage by it. But here is where we reach the limit: all of this goes on in the minds of humans themselves, with maybe only the residuals of animal bodies or their fluids as the tangible objects in question. As sentient beings, the actual animals are hardly complicit. It's a powerful strategy, this co-optation, for just the same reasons why the animals are chosen in the first place. Humans have evolved into what we are by paying close attention to animals, by caring about them, and by dreaming and wondering about them when they are out of sight (see Morris 1998; 2000, on the many ways in which this is done in Malawi). And we do – whether in deep bush or city centre, whether hunting hippos or, in that so-common metaphorical usage, hunting jobs. This is true of the case of some 'hunting societies' described in urban Sierra Leone after

[3]Co-opting the powers of animals and nature for power, prestige or intimidation is by no means an exclusively African strategy. Familiar too from Native America, it occurs often among disrupted, dispossessed and disempowered people arising for revitalization, relocalization and redignification (Shipton 2012). It is also something countless sports teams do, for instance the AFC Leopards in Kenya, or the Boston Bruins. See also Bulliet (2005).

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a period of conflict (Carpenter 2010). Theirs, though, is a distilled, abstracted tie between human and non-human animal, here a one-sided mutualism at most.[4]

In other related research, for instance Paul Richards' studies of youth orphaned in Sierra Leone's civil strife, these refashioned friendship into kinship or fictive kinship, even going so far as to enact marriages between young teenage couples to make new families, as if explicitly to substitute for the natal kin they have lost. This leads us back, then, to the question of whether blood might be *deemed* thicker than water after all, so that friendship ennobled as fictive kinship comes to seem unbreakable. Like *compadrazgo* in Latin America, or 'blood brotherhood' pacts in and around Africa in past times, or the 'brothers-in-arms' that soldiers find and forge in trenches under shelling, these human connections are ones with high hopes and strong expectations in them. They seem hardly less valued or strong than a tie between some mothers and their children.

Daivi Rodima-Taylor's article, on Kuria people in northern Tanzania, takes up the question of work in collaborative groups, constituted once again largely on the basis of friendships. Kuria are a society that remains relatively little studied, and with good reason. Living on both sides of the border between Tanzania and Kenya, these farming and herding people have developed a formidable reputation as fighters and cattle raiders, no less feared because Kuria men who engage in such activities can often use their border as a shield behind which simply to disappear. Few of their neighbours, including Luo and Maasai, who are known for their past military glories themselves, have wanted to have much to do with them. Only the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments, which have sometimes recruited Kuria for storm troops and intimidation squads, and a tobacco company or two lately interested in their land and labour, seem to have been eager to deal with these people. The automatic weapons coming home with returning soldiers – if not also new cash from growing tobacco or other drugs – have enabled Kuria young men at the same time to arm themselves up for ... that's right, more cattle raiding.

But Kuria do a lot more than just fight and raid, as Rodima-Taylor describes their lives. In recent decades they have been remarkably active in forming local cooperation groups to pool and share their labour, and these groups take a wide variety of forms. Rodima-Taylor names and describes three such forms, as ways of beginning to sort and typify them. They are old ideas, she finds, but they are applied to new tasks (commercial tobacco farming on corporate contracts, for instance). The fact that some of these forms of association are also found among neighbouring Luo and Luhya (or Luyia) groups on the Kenya side, as I can attest from my own observations there, shows that modes of human organization do not necessarily stop at national, ethnic or linguistic boundaries. And that it really doesn't take very regular communication for ideas like these to spread and be shared across such lines. Kuria people, like other humans, form their clubs, gangs and networks because of the satisfactions and rewards they can get by belonging to them, not just as markers of wider group identity: not just because they're

[4]The secrecy of associations and their rites, with totemic animal emblems, is familiar from international civic associations (and 'lodge' branches), often single-sex, for instance Moose, Elks or Lions. For 'secret' societies with world fame, think, for instance, of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa, or Freemasonry almost anywhere, with its cryptic, archaic symbolism.

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Kuria, Tanzanian or African. And certainly not because Kuria are known abroad as great collaborators (they aren't), or because Tanzanians believe in what their first president, Julius Nyerere, considered a general tradition of 'African socialism' (a stylized version, arguably a fiction).

One who studies comparative social history, indeed, might well be tempted to liken the kind of locally cooperative joining that Kuria do so actively to the kind that Alexis de Tocqueville famously described as a hallmark of American life. America, found Tocqueville, is a land of joiners: a land of voluntary associations, mostly just local but with interlinked membership stretching nationwide, and members with multiple allegiances helping to knit it all together. And it is precisely this hidden network of linkages, between interest groups of all sorts (together with what he found to be determined religious orientation and faith), that Tocqueville found kept America as strong as it was – and perhaps still does. The fact that Kuria and Americans might have that much in common might come as a surprise to many Americans, but probably not to most Kuria.[5]

While Rodima-Taylor shows what kind of stitching can hold African societies together or patch them back up after being rent asunder, Erik Bähre shows us in his article how some of those rips and rifts can occur in the first place. Here in his work, they appear in taxi stands and along taxi routes. Now taxis, from a sociological and cultural standpoint, are an interesting and rather special institution. In them, strangers are thrown together in a liminal space, where they are free to exchange some of their most personal intimacies, as so often happens, under the cover of basic anonymity. But they are also free to take one another for a ride, so to speak: to rip each other off, or to renege on a fare, or to lead each other into mortal danger. Taxis, that is, are an excellent if risky lab for observing instant trust, but also distrust and betrayal, between drivers and riders. But the world of taxis is not just about dyads or triads, and not even just about the small crowds that sometimes shove into a cab or minivan in certain African settings. It is also about companies and coalitions, and thus also about politicians and parties: about city- and countywide, indeed national or even wider dealings. Access to taxi transport is a critical resource, almost a vital bodily function, in the circulation of many African road arteries. But taxis are many and mobile, hard for state authorities, county councils or municipalities to control.

Vital resources, hard to control: the perfect prescription for protection-scheme racketeering and for mob-like gang control. Or, perhaps, for networks of religious patrons and clients. Much study remains to be done on how taxi firms get organized, and to whom – the drivers, riders or others – they are ultimately loyal. Bähre leads us into this gritty, part-underground world with a sobering vividness to portray South African taxi turf wars – with their shootings, petrol bombings, bush camps suggestive of jungle wars, and local accusations of cannibalism. While, on the surface, taxi driving may seem as if it is about exchange of needed rides for needed money, it can also be about mutual help between conspirators to stymie, cheat or eliminate third party competitors. Or about siphoning money

[5]Abrahams (1998) compares Tanzanian vigilante groups (*sungusungu*) with others in Africa and North America (including ones as violent as the Ku Klux Klan) that can coalesce and operate, for better or worse, where state authority seems absent or inadequate. See also Heald (1998) on Gisu, and Fleisher (2000) on Kuria.

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to mobster racketeers or parasitic politicians. Or vicious competition over turf, variously definable as parking spaces, routes or clientele, but also interpretable, just like rural land struggles, as competition between autochthons (insiders) and allochthons (outsiders, aliens). It brings up a bigger topic than one can deal with here: all the many socially disapproved-of activities such as bribery, kickbacks, blackmail (a term surely needing a substitute in Africa), hush money and so on that can be more neutrally or positively considered mutual help, depending on perspective. Here ethnography shades at its edges not just into fiction, but also into investigative journalism. As Bähre suggests, in taxiland, the worst in human nature, in Africa as in anywhere else, comes out in times of shrinking opportunities, when accustomed livelihoods are threatened, self-esteem damaged and expectations frustrated.

We are reminded of a most fundamental human predicament, no less true of West, East and South Africa than of anywhere else. That is, we humans can't get along without each other, even when we don't get along. That human lives seem strung between such seeming contradictions should not in a sense be too surprising. It is precisely the process of teaming or ganging up, as we've known since the early works of Niccolò Machiavelli, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or more recently of Edward Evans-Pritchard and his Nuer subjects, that occasions the felt need for others to team or gang up in opposition. And trust just is not trust without some risk of betrayal and resentment, or at least the perception or submerged fear of that risk. Such are the things that keep our lives as interesting and hard to predict as they are.

ALONG THE AGE RANGE

Some people are more able than others to offer help, but people of all ages beyond infancy can help or be helped. Already waiting to be connected to the research presented in this collection are studies of childrearing and the process of growing up, and of cooperation not only between children but also between them and their elders. How people in African settings learn about, and grow into and maybe out of, habits of mutual help is hardly well understood as yet. We have yet to learn a great deal about how such habits are reformed and interrupted in cases of disruption and hardship, and about how and how thoroughly they might be reconstituted.[6]

Child fosterage (Goody 2007) and animal fosterage (by humans and by other animals) have more than a little in common. Among adults who take responsibility over family herds, the lending and fostering of animals, extending sometimes into lifelong or longer entrustments, are a common part of rural life in many parts of Africa where large animals are kept. First documented in ethnographic depth by Philip Gulliver in northern Kenya and adjacent eastern Uganda (1955), livestock associateships have both practical and symbolic import.

[6]Good book-length studies on African children and childhood remain few. LeVine *et al.* (1996), on south-west Kenya, show methods worth emulating. On children's adaptations to civil strife in several parts of Africa, see Richards (1996), Honwana (2006), Cheney (2007) and Finnström (2008).

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They can mark special friendships, and with them wider family alliances, in a way not too unlike blood brotherhood or godparenthood. They can redistribute milk and power for traction, and, on the other side, grazing ground, labour and caretaking know-how, between homes or families unequally endowed with these. The division of an animal's offspring over the years can vary, depending on local convention and on who requested a loan or entrustment in the first place (Shipton 2007: 91–8). African patterns of inter-household and interfamilial animal entrustment, for example among Fulbe across West Africa, are becoming well enough known to be able to be compared closely with patterns found elsewhere, for instance in the wide northern areas and highlands where reindeer are kept, and where their sharing and transference serve many of the same functions (Khazanov and Schlee 2012). It would be interesting further to compare and contrast child fostering and animal entrustment as they occur together in different regions. But it is worth noting that the sharing of parenting roles, tasks and responsibilities beyond biological parents (or what Sarah Blaffer Hrdy has called 'alloparenting', i.e. parenting by others) is something that is done not only by humans, in Africa or anywhere else. It happens among many other species too (Hrdy 2009).

Money, though, is a distinctly human contrivance, and not one for which we have much innate preparation. It gets shared, lent and exchanged between contemporaries of all ages beyond infancy, and across generations. The sharing, lending and pooling of money – the kinds of exchange we may call mutual help – take place between individuals, in clubs, and in other associations of all sorts, including through companies and government bureaux. We look briefly now at just a few forms of monetary mutuality and exchange, as representing a much broader variety.[7]

At its simplest, the placing of money between individuals for safe keeping (or 'deposit taking') seems to occur between both males and females, but often, in Africa, along gender-specific lines. At least as often as not, it seems to go from juniors to elders, and from those less solvent to those more so, who are deemed less likely to use entrusted cash furtively for their own purposes.

A common local form of pooling association is the rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA), found in all regions of Africa (and around the world), and by correspondence (including lately electronic) over long distances, although they are not found in all localities. These clubs go by many names, including tontine, money-go-round, or, in West Africa, *osusu* (or *esusu*). Members chip in periodically and simultaneously, and they withdraw their sums by taking turns. Commonly, these associations occur among acquaintances in comparable economic circumstances, for instance between women in a marketplace or between soldiers in a barrack, often those close in age or life stage. Pooling money this way can be an important means of helping each other to save and invest in larger purchases, and to guard money from needy or grasping spouses without

[7]For a few other sources on local saving and lending habits and institutions, including contribution clubs, see Guyer (1995; 2004) for West and Central Africa; James and Hull (2012) on South Africa; Shipton (2010) on equatorial East Africa; and Stiansen and Guyer (1999) and Kane (2010) on eastern and western Islamic Sahelian Africa respectively. Robinson (2001) compares rotating savings and credit associations in development studies.

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seeming selfish and anti-social and incurring community opprobrium (for instance in witchcraft accusations). Some ROSCAs have adjustable orders of rotation for accommodating emergencies. It is not true, as once widely supposed, that they occur only among people who have no access to banks; in many places some people use both. Contribution clubs tend to assume more importance, though, and to last longer for women than for men (Ardener and Burman 1996). Recently, aid agencies have sought many ways to harness local contribution clubs as conduits and intermediaries for their resources, as part of the microfinance movement in the development field since the 1980s (Robinson 2001). This is hard to do without drowning these small, efficient clubs in capital beyond what they can eventually repay, or without interfering with their self-monitoring function by arrogating responsibilities and sapping member pride. Some of them, at least in Cameroon, have been known to transform on their own into banks; but in most places they do not readily scale up.

Another common form of financial association across Africa is the burial society, which functions, through periodic contributions, emergency pooling or often both, as a kind of insurance club for body transport home. This function is most crucial where land claims can depend on graves – as they tend to do in western Kenya, for instance, and in at least some of the other settings described in this volume. Urban-based life insurance companies seek also to extend into rural areas of this sort, competing in places with the local burial societies (Golomski 2013).

REVERSIBLE PERSPECTIVES

All saving and investment, including personal deposit taking, banking and insurance, involves trust of some kind, and thus a risk of deception or other betrayal. If we run a risk of being deceived by those we trust, we also run a risk of being deceived by ourselves, and by our culture or cultures more generally. Self-deception is part of the topic that Gustav Peebles brings to our attention in his article on financial terminology and the ethical and emotional values it brings to bear on human decisions. Peebles is particularly concerned with the concepts of saving and hoarding. One connotes a strongly positive social value to economists and policy makers, he notes, and the other a strongly negative, selfish one. And yet they refer in essence to the same thing. The only real difference is that 'saving' with a deposit taker, for instance a bank, allows that person or institution to use the deposit in the interim, or to lend against it as 'security', thus tacitly multiplying its potential claimants. Withdrawing value from circulation, whether in mattress or bank vault, subjects an individual to public opprobrium. Peebles' paper shows how heavily we freight our perceptions with moral judgements, often unawares, depending on who is putting money aside, and whose mattress or vault is holding that money. To Peebles' observations might be added one more: the withdrawing of currency of any kind from circulation can raise the value of that currency for *others* by a principle of supply and demand. It increases their purchasing power. From their perspective, in this indirect and ironic way, 'hoarding' can seem a sociable act.

Inside and outside Africa, people who save or hoard, and do it to the greatest extent, usually do it as adults, and they do it not just in banks. They also do it in other kinds of companies. The picture of corporate cash reserves, on a macro

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scale, contains some outsized peaks and valleys. The figures involved, were they better known, would make just about anyone in Africa, North America, or anywhere else, feel like a have-not – that is, if the numbers were not so large (some companies holding many billions of dollars in reserve), and the concentration of wealth so extreme as to be virtually incomprehensible.[8] It would be hard to generalize about whether the officers, board advisers or shareholders of these companies intend to put these stashes eventually to good uses. But the questions of when, and how, and for whom or what, loom large. And the question of whether saving is hoarding, or if either one is a denial of help where needed, becomes inescapable.

More generally, history has yet to prove whether money will turn out to be more a means of mutual help or of mutual harm. Obviously it can be both, depending on how we use it. But money appears only in the last few millennia in the archaeological record in Africa or anywhere else (Cribb 1986). And the evident absence of anything like money among still extant species many times older than our own suggests that it is not necessarily adaptive in the longer haul. It might, indeed, in conjunction with the technology it facilitates, turn out to be more *mal*adaptive.[9] The question is a big one for archaeologists, historians and futurologists – and I suggest for zoologists and ecologists of long vision too. But let us return to the shorter run.

Cooperation between the very young and the elderly, for instance between grandchildren and grandparents, has lately gained interest and urgency as the HIV/AIDS plague has been thinning the middle generation in some parts of Africa, leaving those in the straddling generations to arrange many tasks to fill in. These may include fetching water, cooking, building and farm tasks, including even ploughing – as well as market transport, trade and management (see Weisner *et al.* 1997; Whyte *et al.* 2004; Geissler *et al.* 2007). More often than not, in Africa as elsewhere, members of alternate generations seem to enjoy freer, easier relations than do members of adjacent ones, albeit with many exceptions.[10] They cooperate and share company, and perhaps much more of a material nature still to be studied.

The trust and mutual help that can come from a shared sense of belonging are brought down to earth in Andrew Ainslie's contribution to this collection, on Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. It is centrally concerned with land and people's attachment to it, in South Africa, in a way that might be compared with others' and some of my own findings on entrustment in East (Shipton 2009) and West Africa, not least in the Gambia, where women as well as men exchange

[8]At the end of 2012, according to senior editor Emily Chasan at *The Wall Street Journal*, US-based companies held some US$1.8 trillion in 'cash and liquid assets'. Figures from some three months later showed that twenty-two companies together held half the cash and short-term marketable securities in the Standard and Poor's 500 Index. Five companies alone, mostly high-tech firms, held one-quarter of all the cash of 'non-financial' companies in that index. Other big savers/hoarders included healthcare companies (Chasan 2013).

[9]For related reflections on the big canvas, see Hart (2001) on money and exchange, and Malmberg's sweeping summary (1980) on territoriality, property and spatial accommodation. On how human brains and minds adapt older structures and processes to novel purposes – or try to – see Sapolsky (2010).

[10]As A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) noted, matrilateral kin can contrast with patrilateral ones, the one providing succour and relief from the other's stern discipline. Depending on the kinship system, it can work either way.

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in land transfers with labour or support expected in return (Kea 2010). Rural, if not also urban, sequences of settlement and relations between generations are seldom irrelevant to land matters, to the sense of belonging, or to chances of general well-being.

Death, land and belonging are intimately related. Whether cooperation between the living and the dead is a one-way or two-way street, or exists only in the minds of the living, depends on perspective, of course. Humans are unusual among animal species in using contrivances such as writing and machinery to record and remember claims to territory over generations. And we are also unusual in how maldistributed our claims to land can become. Examples of successful land redistributions (Taiwan's in the 1950s, for instance) are few; more often, in Africa as elsewhere, redistribution programmes have ended up *worsening* the skews instead, as persons with special access to information and contacts have gained early advantages. Where farming people have left the land but later, after restitution, their descendants try to move back onto it to farm or to herd, they may need the help of the dead to show them how … but alas not get it. And learning farming or herding is no easy task.

Ainslie's contribution on Eastern Cape Province shows that shared ritual or ceremony helps make possible the psychological and social adjustments to change that political action and economic needs can require, cementing a sense of belonging. And it can allow participants to feel continuity – over time and between individuals – as a part of that belonging. In one understanding, the timeless recurrence of ritual, in fixed and predictable sequences, helps define the groups we belong to and helps indeed to make us human (Rappaport 1999). And yet Ainslie shows that, far from being timeless and unchanging, rituals wax and wane in frequency, over time and from place to place. One reason is that they occur in relation to *other* kinds of rituals; which ones to emphasize can be a matter of choice. Male elder-organized celebrations of agnatic kinship (relatedness through males) and hierarchy, involving animal slaughter, sometimes yield to more egalitarian, female-organized versions involving beer brewing and drinking instead; but then a male backlash remains a possibility. Ritual appears to serve partisan interests, as well as redistributive functions, and it is easy for males or females, elders or juniors, to feel slighted as the mix of ritual forms shifts.

I have suggested that exploring the age range in depth, to see who might be helping or hindering whom and how, means considering the dead and the not yet born as well as the living. And this in turn requires looking into forms of help, or parties to mutual aid, that some deem imaginary. Sacrificial offerings, for instance, are often carried out in supplication to a spirit or deity with the hope or expectation of a favour to be granted later, like a good harvest or health – or in thanks for blessings already bestowed. Moreover, they often involve cooperation by many living people (divination, sponsorship, direction, enactment, butchering, cooking, meat distribution) and a sharing of sentiments in human groups. The religious and economic dimensions of sacrificial offerings, while not always coterminous, actually overlap more than a little.[11]

[11]For comparative descriptions and analyses of African sacrifices, see Bourdillon and Fortes (1980) and de Heusch (1985). Shipton (2014) uses sacrifice in the lakes region to show the overlap between economy and religion.

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Before moving on, let us recall that the study of mutual help has its counterpart in the study of mutual harm. Some of this takes traditional ethnographic forms, as with, for instance, Evans-Pritchard's study of Nuer feuding and homicide compensation (1940: 152–62); and criminology and military history have taken it much further. Whether the help and harm are just mirror opposites, however, meriting a common term such as 'payback', deserves more scrutiny than such glib parlance might suggest. It is harder, for example, to reciprocate a gift or a hand if the hand held a knife or the gift was a grenade. Moreover, even when we survive the harm, our psychological responses to losses or hurt can be much stronger than our responses to help, and more likely to spiral out of anyone's control. (This may help explain why taxi controllers in the Bähre study became so belligerent, so quickly, when regulation shrank their turf.) It may well be a general feature of human nature that our emotions about help and harm are asymmetrical in ways like this. But even if there may be something innate about these propensities, there is much that may be done to train and accustom ourselves, and each other, to controlling our emotional imbalances.

CONJOINING PATHS

If the collaborations of ethnographers, historians, political scientists and others have revealed much in recent decades about kith and kin, about schism and solidarity, and about authority and its resistance, much still remains to be done in weaving together the endeavours of disparate disciplines. Mythic narrative and ritual symbolism tie in to the manipulation of wealth and power in countless ways that cultural and social studies have begun to illuminate well. Elders' origin stories and trickster tales have long illustrated the moral values and practical dilemmas involved (Radin 1970; Isichei 2002; Belcher 2006; Binsbergen and Venbrux 2010). But studies of religion and economy in Africa have tended to remain separate (for an exception see Freeman 2012).

The more scientific sorts of study bearing directly on questions of cooperation and trust have tended to remain in separate disciplines, and in separate journals and websites, with separate methods and standards of evaluation that discourage cross-fertilization with the humanities. Endocrinologists have been linking hormones to some kinds of trust and suspicion (not least oxytocin, vasopressin and others) and have tracked changes in balances over life courses (say, between testosterone and oestrogen) (Kosfeld *et al*. 2005; Churchland 2012; Fischer-Schofty *et al*. 2013). Neuropsychologists have meanwhile shown brain structures affected by experience (brain plasticity) and have opened up big questions (for instance, about mirror neurons and empathy) (Iacoboni 2009). But their emerging findings are yet to be tied in to, or tested against, studies about, say, votes, loans, gangs or ethnic groups, in Africa or almost anywhere else. Social psychologists studying game theory and experimental economics have moved from the lab into the 'field' in Africa as elsewhere (Aronson 2004; Ostrom and Walker 2005; Cook *et al*. 2009; Habyarimana *et al*. 2011), but seldom in sustained cooperation with researchers doing intensive fieldwork and participant observation. Linguists using formal methods have tended to reach few readers or listeners outside their own circles. Along other lines, we know that coordinated body movements, as in dance, sport and drill, can powerfully enhance solidarity and mutual trust

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(McNeill 2008), but not really why; the studies of mind and brain have yet to be closely allied.

Ethologists have been living with other animals in captivity, in the rainforest and on the open savannah, addressing problems of mutual understanding and cooperation that compare and contrast well, and sometimes measurably, with those of humans (Dehaene *et al*. 2005; De Waal 2009; Schino and Aureli 2009). But these have only lately begun to enter, or be welcomed into, the discussions of Africanists studying topics such as associations, exchange or authority among humans.

When scholars of different disciplines' traditions open up to more sharing of questions and methods, it is anyone's guess what new learning may emerge. Part of it must be that more obstacles remain to be overcome. But in Africa, if not elsewhere as well, studies of mutual help, with their varied concerns of reason and feeling, are coming together.

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ABSTRACT

Self-help groups of varied kinds emerge when kinship, territorial governance or other accustomed associations prove unreliable. Interactions that appear helpful and mutual to one party need not always seem so to another. Shaping their character are not just reason and economic or political necessity, but also feelings, some of which humans share with other animals. These feelings often depend, however, on distinctly human symbolic and linguistic contrivances, sometimes of ironic kinds. Mutual help in Africa often spans generations, and by some interpretations both the living and the non-living. Rites and ceremonies can change over time in relation to other ones performed. Whether these conventions strengthen each other, as if by exercise, or substitute for each other in a more hydraulic way as a trade-off is hard to predict or generalize. Input from several sciences, once integrated with humanistic inquiry, may further enrich our understanding.

RÉSUMÉ

Des groupes d'entraide de genres variés émergent lorsque la parenté, la gouvernance territoriale ou d'autres associations coutumières s'avèrent peu fiables. Les interactions qui semblent utiles et mutuelles à l'une des parties ne semblent pas nécessairement l'être à une autre. Leur caractère n'est pas façonné que par la raison et la nécessité économique ou politique, mais également par les sentiments, dont certains sont communs aux humains et aux animaux. Ces sentiments dépendent souvent, néanmoins, de dispositifs symboliques et

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linguistiques distinctement humains, parfois de genres ironiques. L'entraide en Afrique s'étend souvent sur plusieurs générations et, selon certaines interprétations, au vivant et au non-vivant. Les rites et les cérémonies peuvent évoluer au fil du temps par rapport à d'autres qui sont pratiqués. Il est difficile de généraliser ou de prédire si ces conventions se renforcent mutuellement, comme par la pratique, ou se substituent à d'autres de manière plus hydraulique, comme un compromis. Les données multidisciplinaires, une fois intégrées à une pensée humaniste, pourront nous aider à mieux comprendre.

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