

Space, Text, and Gender

An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya

Henrietta L. Moore

"There is no comparable book that explicitly takes up these three topics—space, text, and gender—in the context of a specific 'case study,' and that is both theoretically sophisticated and grounded in ethnographic observations. The Moore work is surely a cornerstone to an entirely new interdisciplinary enterprise"

—Margaret W. Conkey, University of California at Berkeley

"Moore weaves bodies of women, men, and ideas in a rich dialectic of theory and practice. She draws upon a wealth of geographical, anthropological, feminist, and post-colonial perspectives to reposition the notion of space—one of the most important concepts in social theory today—upon the 'sloping world' of human knowledge."

—Audrey Kobayashi, Queen's University

This ground-breaking anthropological study of the Marakwet of Kenya illustrates how we can use different interpretations of place to learn more about a society. Henrietta Moore focuses on the relationship between the organization of household space and gender relations among the Marakwet, and shows how that relation shifts as a result of changing social and economic conditions, including such factors as wage labor and education. This updated edition contains a new Preface and Afterword in which Moore adroitly relates her work to more recent ideas about gender, resistance, difference, and spatiality.

The author sets forth her innovative theory of interpretive action, which combines the insights of Bourdieu, Ricoeur, and Foucault with material drawn from Marxist and literary-critical perspectives. Using concrete examples, the book illustrates how the organization of space is not simply a backdrop to social activity, but is the active and interactive context within which social relations and structures are created and transformed.

Effectively demonstrating the value of a feminist approach to the analysis of changing systems of representation, Dr. Moore's work provides an exciting example of what anthropology has to offer to the study of contemporary culture and gender relations. It is an excellent text for a range of social science fields, including anthropology, women's studies, and African studies.

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THE GUILFORD PRESS

72 Spring Street
New York, NY 10012

ISBN 0-89862-825-3



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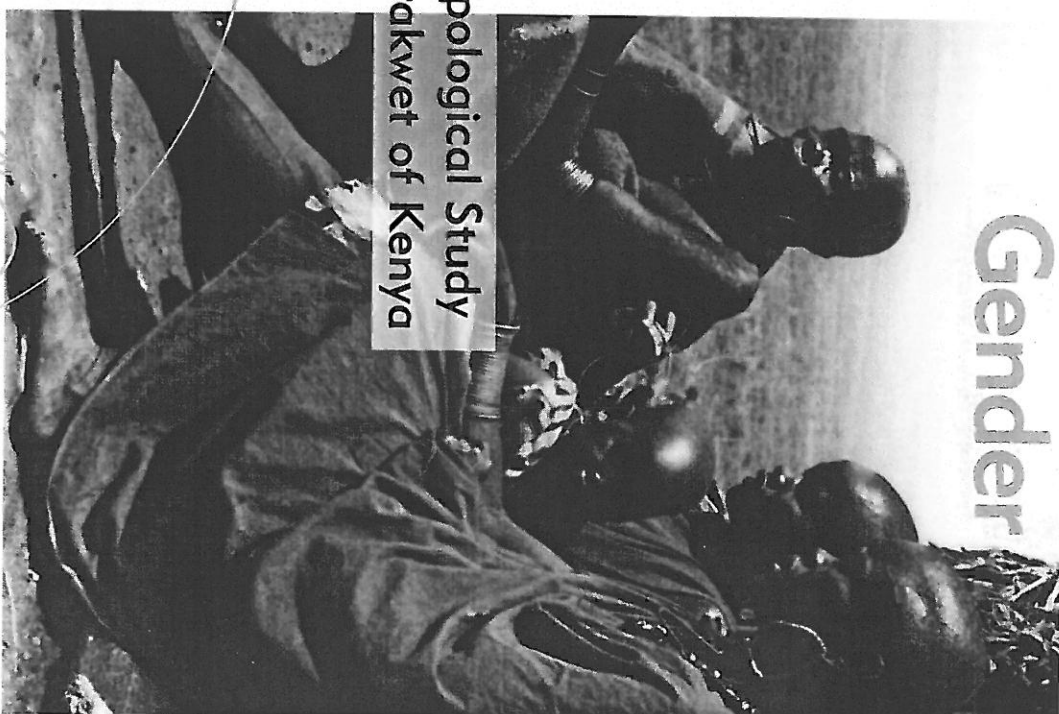
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Space, Text, and Gender

Gender

An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya



grinding stone

Kuti ya looor

Henrietta L. Moo

In 1978, Kipkoimet had two children of his own, plus the son of his dead brother. His younger brother, William, was about to finish school and return home. Plans were made and Kipkoimet started to build him a house (E, Compound 6). As it turned out William got a scholarship to study abroad, house E was never completed, and Kipkoimet built a store (F) instead, using the materials which would otherwise have been used to complete house E. In 1980, the walls of the half-finished house E were used to help rebuild house A (Compound 8), which was then occupied by the researcher. At this time Kipkoimet had three children of his own, plus the son of his dead brother. His mother was still living in the upper reaches of the village, and his brother had not yet returned from abroad. During 1981-2 Kipkoimet built a separate kano down on the valley floor, and D then fell into disrepair. The decision to build a separate kano was based on the size of the herd and the fact that his dead brother's son would soon be too old to sleep in the same compound as Kipkoimet and his wife. The events described in this last part of the case history all correspond to Phase 2 (above).

Phase 3, which corresponds to a period when the household has reached the peak of its cycle and will thereafter begin to fragment, has not yet begun. However, such a phase is presaged by the building of a *kano* on the valley floor. The recognition that the eldest boy will soon be too old to sleep in the same compound as Kipkoimet and his wife announces the future of a new compound and a separate household.⁶

The above case history demonstrates that any discussion of the typical Endo compound must be set against the development and decline of the domestic unit. Kipkoimet's case is also an illustration of the extremely variable circumstances which may affect decisions concerning the building of houses and the ordering of the compound. It is clear from the material I have presented that it is not just a matter of a man building additional houses and structures when he has the resources to do so. Cattle raids, kin obligations, position in the sibling order, and a host of other factors, govern the available choices and will ultimately determine the size and form of the family compound.

The fact that the life-cycle of the domestic unit is the key to understanding compound organization emerges from an examination of those compounds which are not occupied by a family unit: man, woman, and children. As I have suggested, symbolic analyses of the organization of space usually depend on the combination of an "ideal" house and a typical domestic unit. There is rarely any discussion of the houses of widows or widowers, or of how a household of mother and son differs from one of husband and wife.

⁶ It would be a mistake to imagine that Kipkoimet's case is a result of the impact of modern influences (e.g., brothers who are away at school and itinerant anthropologists). Even in the past the factors affecting the development of compounds were extremely variable. I could have selected a more "senior" man's compound, but chose not to do so because of problems of accurate chronology and the tricks of memory and time.

Among the Endo there are differences, but these differences are variations on a theme.

Compound 13 (Table 3) is occupied by Ko-Jemurai, a widow in her fifties. She has five children, only three of whom now live at home. Since the death of her husband, the fortunes of the family have declined. One house has fallen into disrepair, along with the *kano* (goats' house). The family's goats were decimated by disease in 1980 and the remaining two animals are on "loan" to the brother of the dead man. The impermanent nature of Endo compounds means that they contract and expand in accordance with the occupants' needs and fortunes. A widow's or widower's compound is always a former "family" compound which has contracted in size. The nonproductive nature of such households is forcefully exhibited by their air of decrepitude and disrepair, their smaller size and their lack of animals, grain, and children.

Households of mother and son are extremely rare. A sexually mature son cannot sleep in the same compound as his mother, although if he is unmarried he will return to his mother's house to eat. If a widow has to leave her home, or if she feels she is getting too old to cope, she will move in with one of her married sons. At this point she becomes part of her son's household, and is therefore reincorporated into the family compound. A widower will either live alone in what was his "family" compound, or he will move to live with one of his married sons. A widower would never live with an unmarried son because there would be no woman to cook. A man living with a single daughter is inconceivable.

The main point of the argument is that compounds are always a phase in the life-cycle of households. The elderly either continue to live in their own "reduced" compounds, or they move in with a married son and become part of the son's household. There are therefore no "special" or "anomalous" compounds. This means that, while household space is continually changing and developing, there are certain principles of organization which can be apprehended in the layout of all compounds. As I have stated, these principles include the north-south orientation of the compound, the oppositional placing of houses, the cardinal arrangement of house interiors and the different functions of certain spaces. However, the most important principles of organization are probably those which relate to the disposal of household refuse.

THE SPATIAL ORDERING OF HOUSEHOLD REFUSE

The Endo recognize three kinds of rubbish which are spatially and semantically distinct: ash (*ron*), animal dung (*segeri*), and chaff from finger millet and sorghum (*moni*). There are, of course, other types of refuse (animal bone, peel,

tin cans, etc.), which we would term rubbish but the Endo would not.⁷ All rubbish is disposed of immediately below the compound. The three recognized types of refuse have specific disposal positions relative to each other and to compound activities. Ash is always thrown behind the house from which it comes, and ash from different houses is never dumped together in the same place. Chaff is often placed just on the front edge of the compound, wherever the woman has found it convenient to do her winnowing. Given the layout of Endo compounds this means that it frequently lies between the ash and the animal dung. Animal dung is swept over the edge of the compound just below the animals' quarters (Figure 28).

The most common reason the Endo give for not mixing ash, animal dung, and chaff is the relationship between refuse and burial: "Not good to mix *takeatuka* [rubbish] because when a woman dies she should be buried where the chaff is, because her work is to dig and remove the chaff." "Old men should be buried near the goat dung." When a man dies he will be buried just outside the compound, a little way down on the right from his house. A woman will, ideally, be buried in a similar position, but just down from and to the left of her house. A man will be placed on his right side, with his right hand under his right ear; his body will lie so that his head is toward the compound and his feet toward the valley—so that, the Endo say, he "faces" the rising sun. It is thought that if a man is buried with his head toward the valley then his goats will die, or possibly other members of his family may die. Women are buried on their left side, with their left hand under their left ear.⁸ Children who are uninitiated or who have not reached sexual maturity are buried "as if they were old men or old women." Young people who have been initiated or who have reached sexual maturity are buried further away (i.e., down) from the houses and further to the right or left, depending on sex (Figure 30).⁹

⁷Other types of household and compound refuse (peelings, tin cans, etc.) are scattered over a wide area on the lower side of the compound. No attempt is made to segregate such refuse from ash, animal dung, or chaff. In a week's survey of one compound I observed the disposal of food debris, including animal bones, and could discern no regularity in either the mode or the place of disposal.

⁸Hollis notes for the Nandi: "Very old men or women and very young children are buried in the dung-heap near the cattle kraal. The corpse is placed like ordinary people, that is to say males on the right side and females on the left with the hand supporting the head and the legs outstretched" (Hollis, 1909: 72). The relational pairs male/right and female/left are well established in connection with mortuary and other practices: see, for example, Hertz, 1960. The identification of the male with the right side and the female with the left is often explicitly linked to positioning in the marriage bed: that is, men sleep on the right-hand side. The Marakwet also make the link.

⁹The Endo say that a person only becomes truly adult after initiation, but young people who have reached sexual maturity are considered to be adult with regard (1) to the regulations concerning burial, and (2) inclusion in war or raiding parties. In the latter instance, young men who are uninitiated, but of suitable maturity, are expected to accompany their elders in case of war or conflict. However, they have first to undergo a secret purification ceremony.



FIGURE 30. Position of graves by age.

The Endo find the death of an unmarried person who has reached sexual maturity, whether initiated or not, very inauspicious. The reason why the deaths of young adults are thought to be particularly inauspicious is that they are said to have "died out of turn"—that is, without having produced children themselves. Some informants maintain that in such cases the arms and legs of the corpse will be bound and the body may be pushed over the edge of the grave, instead of being placed in the proper position. It is said that those who die young may "pull after them" others in their peer group. To die without producing children is a great misfortune. A person who dies childless is said to "die for eternity" and his/her name cannot be given to a newborn child of the lineage. It is therefore the case that those who die at the end of their lives or before they are fully adult are less "threatening" than those who die "out of turn."

The above statements may be understood as a set of ideals which, the Endo themselves maintain, govern the disposal of the dead. However the actual placing of burials in any given compound is extremely variable. This variability is, in part, explained by the fact that the Endo have no "rule," either implicit or explicit, governing the positioning of houses within the compound, so that a man's house may be on the right (i.e., the north) or on the left (i.e., the south) of the compound (see above and Figure 22). Right and left are, therefore, not absolutes, but relative principles. If a man's house is on the left (i.e. south) of the compound, then he will be buried just down from his house. When his wife dies she will be buried to the left of him, rather than being buried below her house, which would put her in the "wrong" position in relation to her husband. So that the layout in Figure 31A will be the result, rather than that in Figure 31B:



FIGURE 31. Position of graves by sex.

It is also the case that the Endo rank the relevant criteria by which they make decisions concerning burial. For instance, it is apparently more important to bury a man near to his house than to bury him under the animal dung. Similarly a woman will not be buried near the chaff if this means that her grave will then be too close to another family's *kano*, a situation which would be thought to threaten its goats. Thus, it may be said that the actual positioning of each burial is the practical working out of a set of principles within a particular context (see Appendix 2).

It is through the associations established between refuse and burial that it is possible to identify a series of links which the Endo make between men and animals and between women and cooking. The emphasis of the split function of houses in the compound (cooking/sleeping), and the past and present gender associations of those functions (male/sleeping, female/cooking), is related to the rigidly maintained separation between dung and ash. In this context women are identified not only with chaff, but also with ash. (The reasons for this are discussed fully below.) It is therefore usual to find that the organization of Endo compounds relates to the association between men and animal dung and women and ash. For example, the ash placement is most commonly to be found on that side of the compound associated with the female/cooking house; while animal dung will be disposed of in the area of the compound associated with the male/sleeping hut. This does not reflect a mere functional differentiation of houses and their related activities, since animal dung, for example, will often have to be swept out of the *kano* and carried some distance, in order to be deposited in an appropriate place. Figure 32 illustrates the percentage of cases in which animal dung was actually to be found in the "male" half of the compound, and Figure 33 illustrates the incidence of spatial association between ash and the "female" side of the compound in both Sibou samples I and II. In sample I, there were ten instances where animal dung was in the "female" half of the compound; in seven of these cases there was only one house in the compound and the animals were living in that house, and in a further two cases the position of the animal dung was related to the position of the compound fence entrance; in the final case no reason could be established for the association. In sample II, there were six cases where animal dung was on the "female" side of the compound. In four of these cases the position of the animal dung was governed by the position of the fence entrance, and in each of the further two cases there was only one house in the compound and the animals were living in that house. In both samples, those compounds which I have termed "excluded compounds" are compounds without animals resident. During the period when this work was carried out, the number of compounds without animals was particularly high because a recent epidemic had decimated the sheep and goat population. In both samples, the occurrence of ash on the "male" side of the compound is lower than the occurrence of animal dung on the "female" side,

The Organization of Domestic Space

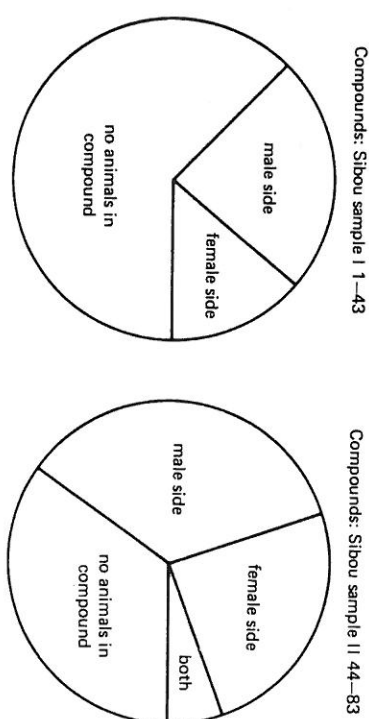
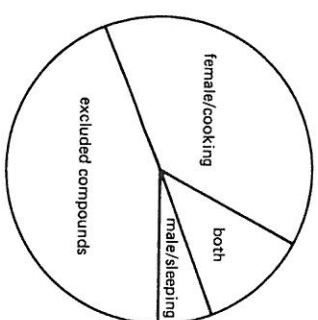


FIGURE 32. Position of animal dung in relation to the gender association of houses.

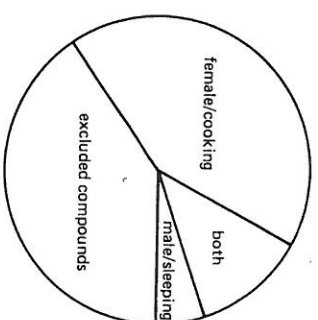
both houses in the compound and ash from different houses may not be disposed of in the same place. Figures 32 and 33, therefore, go some way to illustrate the repeated associations between ash and the area of the compound related to the female/cooking hut, and between animal dung and the part of the compound associated with the male/sleeping hut.

In the above discussion I have outlined some of the basic features of the organization of Endo compounds. I have concentrated on the major structures (houses, stores, etc.), the positioning of burials and refuse areas, and the overall shape of the compounds themselves. Other aspects of spatial organization, such as house interiors and the objects arranged and used therein, will be discussed in Chapter 8. Any discussion of the organization of domestic space among the Endo will inevitably rest heavily on an abstract notion of "the Endo compound." I have tried to show that this "idealized" compound corresponds both to a stage in the development cycle of individual compounds

Compounds: Sibou sample I 1-43



Compounds: Sibou sample II 44-83



and to an important phase in the life-cycle of individual men. This phase, which is of varying character and duration, roughly corresponds to the period of time when the individual household is at its most productive—that is, from a point shortly after marriage, when the productivity of the unit is confirmed by the appearance of children and, in some cases, extra animals and extra stores, to the time when a man becomes a fully fledged elder and his household begins to decline in size and productivity as his own children marry and move out. During this period most compounds do, in fact, conform to the “ideal,” where two houses face each other along a north-south axis and the related stores and *kano* occupy the western (upper) part of the compound. However, it is equally important to stress that this “ideal” compound is not just a physical reality for the Endo, but a formulation which represents an achieved state of maturity and productivity which is crucially linked to marital status. Thus, it is not essential that all compounds should conform to the “ideal” type. But the close link between a man’s status, his married state, the size and plan of his compound and the productivity of his domestic unit is the context from within which any interpretation of the organization and use of domestic space must be drawn out and understood.

CHAPTER 7

Interpreting Space



Having looked, in the previous chapter, at the physical organization of compounds and households, we can now begin to ask, “How does the organization of space come to have meaning?” In order to answer this question it is first necessary to link the meanings given to certain elements in the spatial order to a series of conceptual schemes which can be seen to inform and sustain the Endo perception of their world. This perception only becomes comprehensible when related to the practical answers which the Endo provide to the everyday problems which confront them. In other words, to understand how the organization of space comes to have meaning it is necessary to relate that “meaning” to the economic and social realities which both produce and are produced by the ordering of domestic space. The enterprise of establishing this relation is complex, but in the case of the Endo it can best be approached through a discussion of gender relations.

I have argued that some spaces in an Endo compound are associated with men and some with women. The differentiated functions of individual houses are expressed in terms of a distinction between the activities of the sexes. This distinction is, however, very fine, and is concerned not so much with an actual division between male and female activities as with qualities of maleness and femaleness as the Endo perceive them. Thus, even when the difference between house functions is expressed as one house for sleeping/entertaining and the other for cooking, this is a distinction which can best be understood in terms of a value system which derives, in part, from differing notions about the “male” and the “female.” To explain this value system, and its significance as regards the ordering of space, requires some indication of the way it is generated and expressed through the conflicts and tensions within Endo society. The Endo draw on the divisions between men and women in society and use that distinction as a symbolizing mechanism. While conflicts between male and female interests are not the only conflicts which