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Fictive Kinship as Social Capital in Jubilee Christian Church Nairobi

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Abstract

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted at *Jubilee Christian Church* (JCC), Parklands, in Nairobi, Kenya. It examines how fictive kinship among the church members functions as social capital, facilitating trust, resource sharing, and mutual aid. Using data gathered through an ethnographic study of JCC, the study posits that fictive kinship offers its members spiritual, emotional, and economic benefits. The primary methods employed for data collection were participant observation and unstructured interviews. The resulting data was analyzed thematically, and the discussion is based on the fictive kinship theory by Seltzer (1993). The study found that while fictive kinship provides a sense of solidarity and belonging among members, it is possible to exploit individuals based on its principles of public acknowledgment and reciprocity. Notwithstanding, fictive kinship is reinforced by the human need for connection and belonging in a complex urban environment.

Keywords

Fictive kinship; social capital; social networks; Jubilee Christian Church; Kenya

Introduction

As a non-member of the *Jubilee Christian Church* (JCC), I was perturbed when I heard the terms ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’ used in reference to Bishop Allan Kiuna and Rev. Kathy Kiuna for the first time. I grew up knowing that these terms were reserved for close kin relatives from the father’s or mother’s side. It was even more disturbing to hear people much older than the couple and unrelated to them, even by ethnicity, calling them ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’. My curiosity led me to the ethnographic research that has produced this article. The questions that arose then were: Why were they referred to as ‘Dad’ and ‘Mum’? Did they compel their followers to refer to them that way? What does this relationship mean to the founders of JCC and its members?

In my quest to understand this complex and fascinating relationship, I came across the term fictive kinship. Kane (2000, 693) defines fictive kinship as familial relationships with people not related by blood and who may or may not live with the nuclear family. Braithwaite

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et al. (2010, 390) define it as those you perceive and treat as an extended family yet are not related to you by blood or legal ties. In both definitions, the lack of blood relation stands out so clearly, yet family-like relationships exist among these individuals. Seltzer (1993, 158) defines fictive kinship as 'a relationship that is (i) acknowledged publicly and undergirded by reciprocity, (ii) defined as being qualitatively different from friendship, (iii) voluntary rather than obligatory or legal, and (iv) has affective content found in context.' In her definition, she outlines the characteristics of fictive kinship that describe the nature of the relationship between two or more people who are not related by blood yet are more than just friends. These definitions characterize the types of relationships we observed in JCC. Congregants were family by virtue of belonging to the same church, sharing beliefs and rituals, and being guided by the church's doctrines. These individuals used familial terms like dad, mum, brother, sister, son, and daughter although they come from different ethnic backgrounds. I was struck by how easily they employed these terms to denote a relationship stronger than friendship and that is not defined by blood. It was a social relationship that extended beyond biological or legal family ties.

In this paper, I use the term 'fictive kinship', which socially and anthropologically describes relationships that are not based on blood or legal ties but are recognized as familial. This is supported by Seltzer's (1993, 158) assertion that fictive kinship is 'a relationship acknowledged publicly and undergirded by reciprocity.' Fictive kinship here is a social construct that appropriates biological kinship bonds and is based on mutual recognition, public validation, and reciprocal exchanges rather than formal ties. The key components of this fictive kinship are public acknowledgment and reciprocity, which lead to long-lasting, trust-based networks that function as family. These relationships, although not biological, are culturally and spiritually meaningful. In these relationships at JCC, members recognize one another as brothers and sisters, thus rendering the church a family under the leadership of 'Dad' Bishop Allan Kiuna and 'Mum' Reverend Kathy Kiuna. I acknowledge that these relationships are socially binding, even if they are not legally formalized. The reciprocity characterized by sharing resources in times of need, providing care, advice, and companionship, and offering networks, introductions, and advocacy is vital for building trust and reinforcing social capital. Therefore, for the members of JCC, these relationships are meaningful and hold deep spiritual and emotional significance. For some members, these relationships arise from a common bond of church membership. This contrasts with the term 'spiritual kinship' or 'divine family', favored in African Pentecostalism, which Dube (2018) describes as a practice that creates spaces for kinship networks resembling traditional rural kinship networks. Thus, according to him, African Pentecostalism creates spaces by building alternative relationships geared towards survival, providing alternative kinship ties and economic networks (Dube 2018, 6). It should be noted that JCC members do not give or use the term 'fictive kinship' to describe their relationships. It is a term I adopt to explain the observations borne from the research undertaken in the church.

Kinship is not a new phenomenon in African Pentecostalism. Dube (2018) discusses the concept of spiritual parenthood within the church in Zimbabwe, positing that spiritual parenthood redefines the role of biological parents. Spiritual parents serve as advisors and role models, imparting wisdom and spiritual insights to their mentees (Dube 2018 4). These spiritual parents help their spiritual children achieve spiritual maturity. This suggests that the church operates as a family (Amadi 2023; Orobator 2000). This family, as constituted in JCC and other African Pentecostal churches, may consist of believers united by their faith in Jesus Christ, bound together by the blood of Christ (Kaunda 2025). The blood of Christ is a significant aspect of African Pentecostalism, viewed as a spiritual weapon that protects against malevolent forces, cleanses all types of sin and defilement, and provides triumph in spiritual warfare. This blood brings believers together into a family or faith community,

forming a unique kin group. A kinship of believers cleansed by the blood is divine and supernaturally binding. For African Pentecostals, this network of kinship is genuine, much richer, and superior to biological kinship. Nevertheless, in JCC, this kinship is evident and related to a typical African cultural kinship group-like formation.

In African culture, kinship groups are founded on blood relationships and a common ancestor, reinforcing the spiritual connection among the unborn, the living, and the dead (Mbiti 1971; Shorter 1975). As Kirwen (2010) argues, kinship embodies spiritual values that are deeply embedded in the lives of African people, who believe that their immediate relatives—whether living, deceased, or yet to be born—impact their past, present, and future existence. Therefore, kinship groups function within a kinship system, establishing strong social obligations and responsibilities. These obligations include caring for children and the elderly, providing economic support to blood relatives, and maintaining family unity. Often, these responsibilities are regarded as extensions of religious duties and align with roles such as socialization, care, and marriage, as kinship ties dictate who provides support and to what extent. Kinship groups are vital for *ubuntu*, which emphasizes our need for one another as human beings in our daily activities and lives. In ubuntu philosophy, group solidarity and interdependence are central to sustaining the African community. This is well illustrated in the kinship system, which offers a robust social safety net, as members of kin groups assist each other in times of need. This assistance may include financial aid, labor division, security, and emotional support, forming the backbone of social capital.

Fictive kinship is qualitatively different from friendship; it is voluntary rather than obligatory or legal and contains affective content in context. These characteristics are crucial for generating altruistic behaviour, which is essential for social capital. Generally, kinship relationships foster altruistic behaviour due to genetic relatedness. Consequently, Qirko (2011) opined that altruistic behaviour can be found in fictive kinship because of the fictive kin terms such as ‘dad’, ‘mum’, ‘son’, ‘daughter’, ‘brother’, and ‘sister’, which act as triggers for altruistic behaviour. Similarly, social capital refers to the value of social networks, which bond similar people and bridge the gap between diverse individuals, characterized by norms of reciprocity (Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Uslaner 2001). It is ‘the goodwill available to individuals or groups, whose source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor (Adler and Kwon 2002, 23). This implies that social capital is a non-monetary asset that individuals use to facilitate mutual support and access to resources. This is generated through the strength of social networks, which warrants the reciprocal sharing of favors and trust that facilitates societal transactions. Social media significantly strengthens JCC’s social networks by providing communication channels such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and the JCC Parklands app. Members consistently keep in touch outside of the church. Social capital becomes more potent over time, depending on the established trust levels and patterns. It is worth noting that social capital is generated through the strength of social networks. Thus, JCC is a social network, and the social connectedness through fictive kinship associations created in JCC is a significant cog in the wheel that drives social capital. In light of this, it is essential to understand the nature of fictive kinship in JCC, its role as a source of social capital, and the benefits and potential drawbacks of relying on these kinship networks.

Fictive Kinship in Jubilee Christian Church (JCC)

JCC was founded on January 17, 1999, by the late Bishop Allan Kiuna and his wife, Reverend Kathy Kiuna. The first services were held at a rented hotel in the city center. As the crowd grew from the initial six to thousands, the church relocated its services to a rented hall in Ngara and then to the current location in Parklands, a former Hindu temple. The

congregants were drawn to the church by the eloquent preaching of Bishop Allan and the captivating preaching of his wife, Reverend Kathy. The church features vibrant worship services with state-of-the-art musical instruments and technology comparable to what is typically seen on television in mega-churches in Nigeria and the United States. The congregation mainly consists of middle-class individuals from various parts of the city, attracted by the gospel of prosperity and wealth. This does not exclude those from lower or upper classes, though they remain a minority. The congregation has expanded from a single church in Parklands, Nairobi, to twelve branches throughout the country and four internationally, located in Dallas, Atlanta, London, and Johannesburg.

The expansion of the church necessitated an increase in the pastoral team and the decentralization of functions within the church. This led to the mentorship of certain individuals to assume pastoral roles—a pattern inherited from their spiritual mother, Evangelist Teresia Wairimu of the Faith Evangelistic Ministries. Bishop Allan, who was trained as an accountant, was mentored as the spiritual son of Reverend Teresia Wairimu and did not attend any theological college. It was a call to serve the Lord, a narrative that is prevalent in most Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa. Similarly, he mentored his wife, Rev. Kathy, along with spiritual sons and daughters who serve as pastors in the various branches of the church. This marked the beginning of a fictive kinship arrangement in the church. At that time, kinship terms like 'Dad' and 'Mum' had not become standard.

The use of kin terms, such as 'brothers and sisters', is common in churches, whether Pentecostal or not. This tradition dates back to the early church when Christians referred to each other as brothers (Darko 2016). Therefore, it is not uncommon for Christians to refer to one another as brethren and sisters in Christ. For JCC, these are standard terms, but what is intriguing and led to the research that prompted this paper is how they use the terms 'Dad' and 'Mum' to refer to the church's founders. The terms 'Dad' and 'Mum', ascribed to the Kiunas, hold different meanings for various congregants. To the pastors they mentor, the Kiunas are their spiritual parents, which explains the use of the terms. For many congregants, these terms arise because they are the founders of JCC and thus considered the father and mother of the church. However, some instances illustrate how they were perceived as dad and mum. In an interview cited in one of the country's newspapers, a congregant stated that this reference demonstrated that they are a family and that they care for one another and support each other. This indicates that for her and other like-minded congregants, dad and mum unite the community into a caring family. Another congregant shared how Allan Kiuna sponsored her through her primary, secondary, and university studies, fulfilling the responsibility of a biological father. She credits him for mentoring her both spiritually and physically. Another man recounted how the Kiunas practically 'adopted' him from the streets, gave him his first pair of shoes and some clothes, and provided mentorship in both physical and spiritual matters. Dad helped him achieve sobriety after many years of battling alcoholism. Later, when he met his future wife in church, Dad and Mum Kiuna stood in as his parents during the bridewealth negotiations. For another congregant, it was the moment Mum Kathy contributed a substantial amount to cover her father's funeral costs that solidified her reference to her as a mum.

There were many examples of why congregants considered the Kiunas as Mum and dad. On the other hand, the Kiunas also had sons and daughters who were either pastors being mentored into ministry as pastors or in the different ministries in the church. In an interview after the death of her husband, Kathy Kiuna narrated how they organized a celebration in the church in December 2024 after Dad had been declared cancer-free. They were so happy that they called their spiritual children to share the news and to celebrate. This was also evident during the funeral of Bishop Allan, as the spiritual sons and daughters spearheaded the arrangements and running of the program. Evangelist Teresia Wairimu, the spiritual mother to

the Kiunas, was present at different gatherings to support Mum, Reverend Kathy Kiuna. In eulogizing the husband, she kept referring to Evangelist Wairimu as 'Mum' even though her mother was present. It is, therefore, clear that kinship terms invoke intimacy, loyalty, honor, and familiarity.

Fictive kinship in JCC is used to promote group identity and solidarity. Allan Kiuna, serving as the father figure, was the overseer of the church. His vision aligned with that of the church, while Kathy Kiuna, taking on the role of the mother, assisted in overseeing the congregation's sons and daughters. On days when Allan was absent from the church, Kathy would begin her sermons by delivering a message from Dad. The expressions of fictive kinship within JCC reflect traditional kin relationships and obligations, offering a sense of continuity and connection to the past. Despite establishing and managing a thriving church independently, Allan and Kathy Kiuna maintained ties with their spiritual mother, Teresia Wairimu of Faith Evangelistic Ministry. Occasionally, they either attended her church as guests or invited her to visit JCC to minister or participate in events. In their sermons and other engagements, they referred to her as 'Mum'. She was their confidante and prayer partner, providing guidance on spiritual matters. Having mentored them into the ministry, they, in turn, began mentoring others to lead the pastoral ministries in various church branches. Furthermore, they offer mentorship programs for men through the Men of Valour group and for women via the *Daughters of Zion* (DoZ) mentorship class. In the DoZ mentorship class that I enrolled in, the primary instructor is Mum Kathy, who also invites other speakers for specific topics, such as stress management and entrepreneurship, among others. These speakers are either practitioners or experts in their respective fields. It was also through these mentorship classes that Allan and Kathy identified protégés and provided individual mentorship, a trend I observed when one of my classmates was selected and later chosen to be nurtured into ministry.

The church is organized into six departments: media, ushering, protocol, choir, sports team, and catering. The members of these teams consider each other as family members and refer to each other as brothers and sisters. These departments also comprise sub-teams such as the praise and worship teams and the creative teams. In addition to these are the various ministries in the church, including the Men of Valour group and DoZ. These different church families maintain kin-like relationships by praying together on particular days of the week, having departmental or team fellowships, and visiting one another. The members reinforce a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility by addressing one another as brother and sister or Dad and Mum. The various family-like groupings lead to the formation of social networks that function as sources of emotional, economic, and social support.

De Marco (2025, 27) writes that fictive kinship is used to create social networks and support systems for people who do not have traditional family ties. Even though it is not based on blood relationships, marriage, or adoption, this connection is recognized and valued as family. These relationships are often formed through exchanging gifts, sharing meals, or other forms of mutual support. In JCC, it is customary for people to share a cup of tea, bread, or other snacks after church. The catering department prepares this meal, and it is during this time that many individuals meet and connect. I often conducted unstructured interviews with members during these tea breaks, allowing me to learn more about the fictive kinship arrangements within the church. It is during these tea times that networking occurs. The tea is served in a hall where the bookstore is located, and other members display their wares for sale with approval from church leadership. This resembles the early church community described in Acts 2. Both communities share aspects of shared meals, fellowship, mutual support, and generosity, as well as elements of unstructured community building. Key to this paper is the formation of a new spiritual family, referred to here as fictive kinship. Fictive kinship, as practiced in JCC, strongly echoes the values espoused in the early church community as

described in Acts 2. These relations and connections are significant in a city like Nairobi, where relatives are often far away in the village. These fictive kinship systems are essential for providing emotional support and financial assistance during times of need. One man spoke about how, during his bridewealth negotiation process, Dad and other leaders from the church accompanied him and represented the elders. In another interview, a daughter of Zion members recounted how Mum had been helpful when she lost a parent. There were various instances where congregants came together and raised funds for school fees or hospital bills despite not being relatives but as friends sharing a similar faith. Therefore, this fictive kinship, as exemplified by JCC, serves as a means for people to create and maintain strong social bonds.

Fictive Kinship as Social Capital in JCC

Machalek and Martin (2015) define social capital as a set of shared values or resources that allows individuals to work together to achieve a common purpose effectively. Thus, social capital entails the sharing of favors within a given group. The key components of social capital include trust, the expectation of reciprocal treatment, the extent and form of perceived obligations among the people, and social networks. The latter is significant, as social capital is generated through the strength of social networks. The fictive kinship in JCC is such a social network, and as social capital, it can be approached in three distinct but related forms: material support, emotional support, and spiritual support.

Material Support

Material support includes the tangible, practical, or financial assistance that members provide to help each other meet physical or economic needs, enhance living conditions, achieve financial stability, or gain access to necessities. This support is significant in a Pentecostal setting like JCC, whose slogan is ‘a church of excellence.’ Rooted in the principles of the prosperity gospel, the pursuit of excellence must be achieved in all areas, including the material dimension. Fictive kinship in JCC generates social capital by materially assisting its members. From interviews, some members noted securing jobs through their brothers and sisters in JCC. This occurred either through recommendations, hiring, or by informing them of an opportunity in their field. At times, job openings were announced as part of the notices, allowing those who qualified to apply for them.

Also, during the study, it was clear that owning and running businesses was one means through which church members preferred to grow financial capital. This occurred either through direct encouragement from Dad or Mum or through networks within the church. Throughout the research, there were at least four occasions when either Dad or Mum provided prominent business figures with the opportunity to discuss their enterprises in relation to the theme of excellence in the church. These included a real estate mogul, a property sales executive, a counseling psychologist/life coach, and an investment banker. The introductions by Mum or Dad were crucial for building trust and encouraging altruistic behaviour. In other instances, altruistic acts were vital in promoting businesses, securing collaboration opportunities, and offering services both within and outside the church. For example, when Mum discovered that one of the women in her church was a talented makeup artist, she hired her for her makeup needs. She also learned that another church member was in the decoration business and did an excellent job. She was contracted to handle the decoration for all church events. Both of these women operated their businesses and were employed as professionals to provide necessary services. The church also runs various business services, including selling snacks through the catering department and offering books in the church bookstore. The books come from a range of authors and include titles authored by Allan and Kathy Kiuna. By the time of his death in July 2024, Allan Kiuna had ten titles and was working on another

volume. This authorship fosters bridging capital by connecting the authors and the church with wider audiences. Furthermore, these books serve as multipliers of social capital by solidifying the Kiunas' status as thought leaders and extending their reach beyond JCC, creating long-term revenue streams in addition to tithes, offerings, and donations.

A popular ministry at JCC is the DoZ mentoring group. Founded by Mum Kathy Kiuna in 2003, this ministry seeks to elevate standards among women. The monthly meetings attract thousands of women from all over Nairobi, regardless of their denominations. Parsitau (2019) notes that in DoZ, the women discuss issues affecting not only their spiritual lives and needs but also their marital, social, economic, and emotional needs (Parsitau 2019, 19). As I attended the monthly DoZ meetings, I experienced the various issues discussed firsthand. One Saturday, the topic was the youth and how to redeem them from vices like alcoholism, gambling, and drug abuse. In another meeting, the discussion focused on submission to husbands, and yet another was on real estate, where an expert spoke to the women about investment opportunities. The monthly meetings expanded to include the DoZ Cooperative Society, a savings and loans organization that aims to provide affordable loans for starting and running small- to medium-scale businesses.

Through the church, members who fellowship together in a Bible study group or share common interests have formed social welfare groups. These groups include merry-go-round and table banking. The nature of such groups is that they operate on trust, as they involve money. Consequently, people who know each other through JCC, often living in the same area or having similar aspirations, come together to form one or more groups. In the merry-go-round groups, often called 'Chama' (a voluntary alliance of people who collect a prescribed amount of money into a common fund), members contribute an agreed-upon amount of money monthly or bi-monthly. The total sum collected is given to one member, and this process continues until all members receive their share. Some rules govern the Chama, including where to meet, the time, and the deadline for submitting the agreed-upon amount. Failure to adhere to these rules results in a penalty, typically a prescribed amount of money, and repeat offenders are removed from the group. In table banking groups, which are often favored by women, members contribute an agreed-upon amount of money every month. The difference from the Chama or merry-go-round is that all the money is pooled together and loaned to those who need it on the condition that, by the end of the month, they will return the borrowed amount plus an interest of at least 10%. The money accumulates monthly as members contribute their funds alongside the loans disbursed. All members must take a loan during the table banking cycle, whether for a year or six months. Both methods of money circulation represent informal banking. They strictly rely on trust, and therefore, members of JCC in these groups operate on trust and have a fictive kin relationship of some sort. Often, they are members of Bible study groups or DoZ who regard one another as sisters.

Emotional Support

One of the lasting impacts of COVID-19 has been on mental health. In response, JCC established counseling services to support its congregants. These services are provided voluntarily by counselors from within the church and continue for any member in need. The Men of Valor (Men's Ministry) and DoZ hold monthly meetings featuring various invited guest speakers and resident ministers who address marital, social, and emotional issues affecting families. Individuals also support one another in times of need. There was a case of a young man who was homeless and came to the church seeking help. Dad Allan gave him his first pair of shoes and helped him restart his life, and he later found a job and began a family. The job was thanks to Dad Allan, who recommended him and vouched for his skills and work ethic.

Another social welfare group favored by the brothers and sisters in JCC is focused on parent visits and burial support. In the former, members come together to contribute money and other items to visit their parents. Each group collects these items and visits a member's parent on a scheduled date. These groups were primarily formed to build modern houses for parents, install water tanks, furnish their homes, or meet other basic needs. In return, the members receive blessings from each other's parents. The WhatsApp forum plays a crucial role in mobilizing members and resources and and planning the visits. One member of such a group expressed that this was the best thing that happened because, through the group, she was able to upgrade her parent's house from a mud-walled structure to a cement one. The contributions of her friends, whom she now considered her sisters, were instrumental in this achievement. For her, the visit further strengthened their bond. They were like her biological sisters, especially since they had visited her parents, shared a meal, and received blessings. By the end of 2023, they had completed parental visits and were now looking forward to a joint investment that they believed would be beneficial in the future. They had even discussed plans for attending important events in their children's lives, including graduations, bridewealth ceremonies, marriages, and funerals.

Burial ceremonies are expensive in Kenya. People living in urban areas often grapple with the high costs of funerals, as many are typically buried in their rural homes or ancestral villages. Furthermore, funeral expenses carry not only financial implications but also emotional and psychological ones. Consequently, some members of JCC have come together to form burial welfare groups to help each other shoulder the burdens of death through their shared religious affiliation. There is a dynamic shift from the former arrangement, where relatives were responsible for covering funeral costs, to a new social reality in the urban environment where having a support network is essential for managing these expenses. To help defray costs, members contribute monthly to a fund that is helpful in case of death. They have established rules regarding the amount one receives based on their relationship to the deceased, whether a parent, child, or sibling. In an interview, one member revealed that being part of the welfare group was beneficial when his father died. The group wrote him a check, visited him every evening, and formed a committee to plan the burial. Among them was a counselor who played a vital role in grief counseling. He says he felt surrounded by warmth and a family away from home. This eased his burden and helped him cope with the loss.

Spiritual Support

This is the core mandate of the church, and therefore, a lot of resources are deployed to cater to the members' needs. All the ministries within the church are directed toward spiritual growth. Church-based fellowships, such as Bible study groups, reinforce shared religious values. Blessings are conferred upon members on various occasions. Reverend Kathy Kiuna has established an annual ritual where she donates her clothes, jewelry, shoes, and more. We witnessed this in February 2023 when she announced during one of the DoZ meetings that she would give away her clothes, shoes, and jewelry. After the meeting, women rushed out, pushing and jostling to grab an item. One of the ladies collected a dress that was clearly oversized. I was curious and asked why she would choose a dress she wouldn't fit into. She responded, 'I do not necessarily have to put it on. As long as I possess it, I will tap into the blessings of the anointed woman, Mum Kathy Kiuna.' The belief was so strong that some people left with one half of a paired item, and they did not seem to mind at all. A common phrase that was repeated frequently was that by owning anything from Mum, they would tap into her anointing. This belief stems from the understanding that these items symbolize a spiritual connection between them and mum, and they are likely to achieve material success just like her. For others, they believed that they would attain health success and thus peace of mind. The visits made to parents serve as another avenue for blessings, which is an important

and desired aspect of one's life (Magesa 1997, 70), as participants receive spiritual blessings from elders, reinforcing fictive kinship bonds.

Benefits and Potential Drawbacks

The fictive kinship structure in JCC has expanded the network of individuals who provide social and even economic capital to one another, serving as a resource to navigate urban life. As people navigate their lives in the urban landscape of Nairobi, they benefit from a community that facilitates social support, increases access to resources, and fosters a sense of belonging. Leyton (2009, 683) asserts that fictive kinship is essential for people in urban areas, as it bestows on them a social institution that bridges and/or transcends their ethnic and class boundaries. In this case, the individuals are connected because they belong to the JCC family. These networks, with their social customs and bonds that define and unite them, constitute social capital.

Fictive kinship establishes a moral imperative of loyalty and solidarity among its members. This was particularly evident among the JCC pastoral team. Regardless of their age in relation to Bishop Allan and Reverend Kathy, they refer to them as 'Dad' and 'Mum' and hold them in high esteem. They see them as mentors and spiritual authorities—their spiritual dad and mum. The same was observed in the DoZ mentorship classes, where the members expressed a connection with Mum and how she resonated with their issues and needs. The solidarity of the JCC family became clear when Bishop Allan passed away on July 9, 2024, in the presence of his wife, Kathy, and spiritual son, Pastor Andrew. The sons and daughters (pastors) from the various JCC branches played different roles in the planning and burial of their Dad, Allan. The outpouring of tributes on social media described him as a dad, a mentor, a friend, and a brother whose life was worth celebrating. His brothers and sisters in the ministry traveled from all over the world to attend the funeral and support Kathy Kiuna.

The members of JCC expressed a strong social bond and sense of belonging, evident in their collective response to crises and hardships. As discussed above, members have formed welfare groups to help them navigate different crises and challenges they face in urban centers, particularly in Nairobi. Within these groups, they provide each other with emotional, practical, and financial support, sometimes exceeding what the traditional kinship system offers. Additionally, the networks offer access to education, employment, and various opportunities.

Nonetheless, there are potential drawbacks to these fictive kinship networks. This includes ambiguity in roles and responsibilities, which can lead to fallout when expectations are not met. In an interview with a former church member, he claimed the church was full of liars. Upon inquiry, I learned that one of the senior members had mentioned a job opportunity that he applied for but did not receive. He insisted that the member had been in a position to advocate for him yet did not, despite having informed him that he submitted his CV and was shortlisted for an interview. The member expected an advantage over the other applicants because he was a brother to the JCC member in a senior position in the company. He claimed that the man had promised to help him, so he anticipated that he would go the extra mile to assist a brother in Christ who even attended the same Bible study fellowship with him. This resulted in strained relationships and eventually led to the withdrawal of this member from JCC.

There is also a risk of exploitation in fictive kinship relationships, such as the one in JCC. Some members may take advantage of the generosity and altruistic behaviour of their peers. This exploitation can be social, emotional, or economic. In one of the merry-go-round groups, a member disappeared and changed her phone number after receiving money from other group members. As is the group norm, all members must contribute until the last person on

the list gets their money. However, in this case, the fourth member in a group of twelve stopped answering phone calls after she received money from other members. She even ceased attending the meetings and the church altogether. When some members followed up, she claimed she could not continue and would find a way to refund those she owed. She never refunded anyone and ultimately moved away from the group members. To maintain cordial relations and sustain the social networks created, it may be necessary to have a trusted mediator hold the funds and only release them when obligations have been met. In a city like Nairobi, where people come from different backgrounds, it may be essential for church members to improve member screening and trust-building. In many groups, members first assess each other's credit history, and entry into the group is through the sponsorship and recommendation of an existing trusted member. It may also be necessary to encourage public record keeping through social media platforms like WhatsApp groups and to promote or enforce moral responsibility by applying faith-based ethics of engagement, emphasizing that social and spiritual accountability go hand in hand and are key ingredients of trust.

The members of JCC come from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Meeting cultural expectations while fostering a sense of family can be challenging. Often, as seen in some JCC groups, individuals from the same ethnic group tend to bond and trust each other more than those from different ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, groups can form along ethnic or tribal lines, which negatively impacts the church that prides itself on being welcoming to people from all walks of life. Welfare groups frequently consist of individuals from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, creating conditions that may be unattainable for those from other classes, potentially leading to their marginalization.

Conclusion

This article examined fictive kinship as a form of social capital within the context of the Jubilee Christian Church (JCC). Situated in Nairobi, this urban African Pentecostal church has a diverse congregation united by rural-urban migration. To navigate the complexities of urban life, church members creatively leverage fictive kinship as social capital. By forming social networks, gaining public recognition, and fostering reciprocity, members work collaboratively to build extended networks of trust. These networks embody the Ubuntu culture in action. The use of kinship terms such as 'dad', 'mum', 'brother', and 'sister' promotes altruistic behaviour that is essential for social capital. Furthermore, fictive kinship networks create support systems that offer spiritual, emotional, and economic benefits. These networks, functioning as social capital, enable members to access resources like job opportunities, financial assistance, and extensive social support. Moreover, the church has utilized fictive kinship to foster group identity and solidarity. Through this approach, the church has effectively integrated members into new communities and cultures.

The study also revealed the benefits and potential drawbacks of fictive kinship. While these networks provide a sense of solidarity and belonging among their members, they can be vulnerable to exploitation and may serve as a basis for ethnic or class-based divisions. Nonetheless, the enduring appeal lies in the capacity of the fictive kinship networks in JCC to create a surrogate family that offers stability and community in a complex urban setting, helping members develop essential coping strategies to navigate urban life. The appropriation of fictive kinship in JCC reveals the human need for connection and belonging. It also demonstrates how religious institutions can serve as essential social hubs that foster relationships mirroring traditional family ties. As modernization and urbanization continue to reshape social structures, fictive kinship in religious settings provides an alternative for urban communities to thrive as they adapt to emerging changes.

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