

CULTURE AND ATHLETICS:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION OF EVERYDAY PRACTICE OF
THE NANDI PEOPLE IN NANDI HILLS, KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any university or institution for any award.

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Date *30 May 2012*

Nicholas Daniels

I certify that this thesis has been submitted by my approval as the University supervisor.

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Dr. W. Onyango-Ouma

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the everyday practices behind the success of Nandi athletes, uncovering the hidden secrets that give them an advantage over non-Nandi runners. By gathering the cultural history of running in Nandi Hills to provide an explanation behind the factors influencing its middle and long distance athletes, thematic issues associated with everyday life within the community shed light on its middle and long distance runners.

Research was carried out in order to deconstruct the components that produce a successful sportsperson, by offering an ethnographic insight into the lives of athletes in Nandi Hills. This was possible through the lens of anthropological research, incorporating cultural dynamics as ‘that complex whole’ of views and perspectives into social research. The unit of analysis is individual Nandi athletes who live and train in Nandi County. In addition, non-athletes who live in the research location contributed data to the study. Purposive sampling was used to select people in accordance with groups constituting athletes of different genders, ages, running distances and training locations. The main data collection method employed was ethnographic observation. Additional data was also collected from one focus group discussion, four narratives and three life histories. A survey was administered to 100 respondents selected as they became available, and taking into account gender and age.

Findings supported initial assumptions that: athletics in Nandi Hills has its origins in pre-sportised running such as raiding and cattle rustling that was organised as sport; athletes assume a prominent status in community life in accordance with traditional customs and practices that respect physical achievements and dedication to running;

and, athletics is a lifestyle choice for the Nandi, who are heavily influenced by their culture and also an aptitude for running. These findings were linked to theoretical notions such as the changing nature of running as a moral economy for the Nandi; the modernisation of ethnic identity and the changing status of women; and cultural transformation within the community as Nandi people are increasingly exposed to global systems and structures.

It is concluded that the high number of world champion professional athletes coming from Nandi Hills is because of the close relationship between sport, culture, and society which can be seen in the production and reproduction of a running tradition within the Nandi community.

CHAPTER ONE

Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Anyone who is aware of athletics has heard of Kipchoge Keino, who, at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, won the 1500 metres gold medal by 20 metres, the largest winning margin in the history of the event, and the 5000 metres silver medal; and four years later won the 3000 metres steeplechase gold and 1500 metres silver at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. Anyone who has watched a marathon or half-marathon will have been struck by how often they are won by Kenyan runners. This feat is also regularly accomplished over middle distances, for men and women alike.

What is remarkable is how many successful athletes, like Kipchoge Keino, come from Kenya's Nandi community that inhabit most swathes of Rift Valley Province. At the 2008 Beijing Olympics Kenya finished overall 13th on the medals table, the highest-ranking African country, ahead even of Jamaica with all its track superstars. This was largely thanks to Nandi athletes from the Rift Valley who ever since Kipchoge Keino have dominated international athletics. Of Kenya's fourteen medals in Beijing, eleven went to individuals from a handful of localities in and around Kapsabet and Nandi Hills towns.

With centres of excellence for elite athletes established in the larger urban areas of Eldoret and Iten, interest surrounds the factors that lie behind this long and illustrious history of world leading athletics. People come from all over the world to study and train here, believing that there is something unique happening in this part of Kenya. Athletes' reclusive lifestyles and gruelling training regimes feature in an area that has

long been of interest to historians – between 1895 and 1905 the Nandi region was the biggest barrier to the advancement of British colonialism in Africa (Matson, 1993) – and this continues to drive Kenya's athletics success story.

There is a longstanding debate about the reasons for athletes from this small corner of Kenya consistently performing at the highest level in international competitions. With Nandi Hills and Kapsabet having a combined population of about 500,000 people, various scientific studies have interpreted this sporting phenomenon as being due to genetics, physiology, diet, environment or a combination of these factors. Research by the Danish Sports Science Institute found that Nandi heart rates were extremely slow, even when running over long distances. This was attributed to the fact that they live on a plateau of over 2,000 meters above sea level, increasing the number of red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body.

Clearly there is some truth in these explanations, however they are by no means exclusive to the Nandi as a group. Where in international athletics are the Tibetans or Peruvians whose rural highland living may also be described in similar terms to the Nandi? Even within Kenya there are communities whose environmental conditions and traditional rural lifestyles differ little from what can be observed for Nandi athletes, and yet, no other region has produced anything like the same number of world champions (Moore, 1990). The notion, therefore, of an athletics dynasty – whereby children growing up in remote villages, at high altitudes, eating a basic diet that is nutritious and appropriate for running, are consequently born into an inevitable running hall of fame – is too simplistic. Traditional cultural factors must also play a part.

The popular assumption that black athletes have a genetic advantage at running events has been countered by both social constructionist arguments and physical anthropological research (Washington and Karen, 2001). It is entirely noticeable when watching track and field athletics that individuals from Africa or of African origin – especially from North America and the Caribbean – dominate certain events. However, it becomes divisive and not just a little insulting to look simply at skin colour when attesting to these achievements. What is possible is that elite athletes as individuals are on the fringes of genetic variability. With greater genetic variations observed amongst indigenous African people – which is logical if you subscribe to the theory that Africa is the origin of Homosapiens and therefore the blueprint from which other ethnic groups are derived – a genetic makeup drawn from this larger pool is more likely to produce outliers at either end of the performance spectrum (Gladwell, 1997).

The error is to confuse variability differences with average differences. It is not possible to make generalisations about groups based on ethnicity since the mean achievements of similar sample groups, when measured against practically any criteria, are most likely to be comparable. In the case of athletics, differences arise in a very few exceptional cases and, to the extent that running is brought about by genetic factors, is a consequence of greater diversity amongst genetic subsets of African populations.

This would suggest that the Nandi are the beneficiaries of a genetic lottery that has far more possible combinations, but that those who decide to convert their physiological inheritance into a viable running career may be more likely to succeed. However, on

such decisions rests far more than just a fortuitous genetic blueprint, and it is this conversion to a life of training and competing that is of interest.

Despite the trappings of immense wealth that come with Olympic medals and international fame, many athletes remain true to the community from whence they came. Those that stay close to their birthplace do so because of the countless benefits of training there. In addition to the altitude, athletes can run for hours through tea estates, forests, hills and valleys and barely encounter another person. The focus and discipline that comes with traditional living in this part of Kenya are an obvious benefit.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that the success of the Nandi in athletics is largely due to their training and commitment, following in a long line of champions who inspire immense local and national pride. But understanding the finer and less apparent reasons for continued international success from a relatively small population requires a more detailed enquiry. How can such a small area in a remote part of western Kenya produce so many international athletes? What are the traditions, lifestyles and aspirations that have created such abundance in middle and long distance athletics? Why these events in particular and how have Nandi athletes managed to sustain their dominance for so long?

My study examined the everyday practices behind the success of Nandi athletes, uncovering the hidden secrets that give them an advantage over non-Nandi. Gathering the cultural history in Nandi Hills to provide an explanation behind the factors influencing middle and long distance runners from Rift Valley Province, thematic

issues associated with everyday life within the community have shed light on its middle and long distance runners. In order to understand the relationships between time, locality and running in Nandi Hills, it is important to appreciate the spectrum of thematic issues that produce Nandi athletes. These were dealt with by considering research questions in the areas of history, culture and lifestyle, as follows:

- i. Which pre-sportised physical activities have traditionally been popular in Nandi Hills?
- ii. In what ways are athletes influenced by traditional Nandi customs and practices?
- iii. What is the relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running amongst the Nandi?

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

To explore the everyday practices behind the success of athletes in Nandi Hills.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To investigate if athletics in Nandi Hills has origins in pre-sportised running such as raiding and cattle rustling.
- ii. To examine the extent to which athletes are influenced by traditional Nandi customs and practices.
- iii. To analyse the relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running amongst the Nandi.

1.4 Justification of the Study

This study is important because of its deconstruction of the components that produce a successful sportsperson, offering an ethnographic insight into the lives of professional athletes. The history and culture of the Nandi is also rich and relatively accessible, especially given the involvement of the colonial administration in the Western Highlands and the subsequent development of agriculture that has brought much prosperity to the area. This makes it an area of national importance and, given the number of Kenyan athletes it has produced, one that is of national interest too.

Despite this development and the achievements of its athletes, Nandi are often viewed politically as an independent group within Kenya and are therefore seen as rivals to other ethno-political groupings, a belief that has even implicated athletes themselves (International Crisis Group, 2008). With athletics in Kenya largely celebrated at a national level, however, studies such as this are capable of exploring the rich diversity that exists within the country without seeking to create divisions and segregate communities. In short, it promotes unity through diversity in sport.

In addition, this study is a contribution to the ever-growing literature on why certain groups of people excel in different sports. Rather than assume a particular stance or ideology in relation to this question, I opted instead for an unbiased approach that made use of the best resource available to me, the athletes themselves. This was possible through the lens of anthropological research, incorporating cultural dynamics as ‘that complex whole’ of views and perspectives into social research, and capable of demystifying athletics as a subject that is of interest to millions of people around the world.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is not a history of athletics, nor is it an ethnography of Nandi people. It borrows from both disciplines in order to provide a short but hopefully detailed and information rich analysis of what has enabled so many men and women from the Nandi region to excel at middle and long distance running. To this end, it is a socio-cultural interpretation of how and why these athletes are able to combine local traditions with a natural ability at running to become international champions.

At no point in this research was physical or biological testing methods be employed to measure individual or group characteristics. Not only should such techniques be left to people who have adequate training and understanding of them, but they would sit uneasily with an anthropological study that has at its main objective the uncovering and documenting of lifestyles that are governed by intense discipline and dedication to achieving excellence. An athlete does not take a genetic test to determine whether or not they will become a world champion, and parents do not select certain characteristics to endow their children with an aptitude for running. What was of interest were the learned, modified, perpetuated and celebrated attributes of athletics success, with local cultural traditions seen as the vault that stores them all in one place.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review covers my three specific research objectives to give a critical assessment of the books, journals and other data relevant to my study. In so doing, I have presented an overview of my field of inquiry and touched on some of the key themes dealt with in my research. These themes are primarily anthropological in nature however they are often supported by historical or sociological analysis. Certain theoretical perspectives have been a strong influence on my research and writing as they have guided my study through various cultural, social and economic arguments. I have introduced them in this chapter.

2.2 Nandi History

Historical perspectives on Kenyan running have utilised an interdisciplinary approach that gives a broad overview of the major changes that have taken place in Kenyan running over time. Bale and Sang (1996) analyse the history of indigenous sport, the impact of colonialism in Kenya, and the subsequent change and continuity that can be viewed between traditional folk games and modern sport. Further attention was devoted to uncovering specific plans within the colonial administration to 'civilise the natives' using athletics as an organising mechanism in Nandi Hills. Research was conducted at Kenya National Archives and McMillan Library in Nairobi to this end.

The legacy of Kipchoge Keino as arguably the first internationally successful Kenyan athlete needed close consideration, combining perspectives on what gave him a platform for athletics with a discussion of how his achievements were successfully

followed by successive generations of Nandi runners. Moreover, an examination of Kenya's strong presence in middle and long distance running – seemingly to the exclusion of short distances and field events – was relevant here.

Any historical reflection on Nandi Hills must also take into consideration the events of the guerrilla campaign waged by spear-carrying Nandi against a British Army determined to colonise East Africa and develop telegraph communications, roads and a railway line, between 1895 and 1905. AT Matson, who served for fourteen years as a Health Inspector in Nandi District from 1949, conducted extensive research to document the history of Nandi people and there were important references to athleticism, courage and tribal unity that provide a basis for modern Nandi identity and its predisposition for running (Matson, 1993).

Through an analysis of colonial administrative policies from 1895 onwards, a detailed understanding of events revealed the nature and depth of the Nandi resistance and the way it impacted on the major actors involved. This was taken into consideration as an important reflection on the skill, determination and strength that has become something of a legend for the Nandi, and remains an important influence on local cultural history today. The important question was the extent to which such traditional stories are important to the athletes of today.

Useful ethnographic insights into the Nandi at the start of the 20th century can be seen in the writings of Hollis (1909) who described Nandi folk-lore and customs, and provided insights into how cattle raiding and male circumcision continued as a rite of passage even after the colonial government had begun imposing its authority across Kenya. For male circumcision Huntingford (1953) went on to elaborate how boys

who were circumcised together developed strong social bonds that contributed unity amongst the Nandi, demonstrating the importance of this cultural practice, particularly for young men. There remains, however, limited academic research into this area of Nandi history, with traditional circumcision practices remaining a taboo for discussion with non-Nandi today.

Conversely, the practice of cattle raiding has been widely considered in academic literature, and several key studies have enquired into how cattle raiding among the Nandi remains a strong component of social and cultural history for Nandi athletes today. Entine (2001) describes how raiding parties celebrated victories with a ceremony featuring milk mixed with cow's blood, representing a fixation towards cattle that is still apparent in Nandi Hills. This has been supported by Sands and Sands (2012) who explain that 'One of the first legal measures to be taken by the colonial authorities was to outlaw cattle raiding' (Sands and Sands, 2012:203). Although this did not banish the practice entirely, it introduces a new era of change in the Nandi community as the reality of colonial rule set in.

Later realising that communities such as the Nandi had a strong cultural affinity for athletic pursuits, and with a desire to educate children and recruit workers into the various sectors of the economy, Berman (1990) explains how the gradual unfolding of colonial state institutions through schools and organised sport enabled greater control to be exerted over populations such as the Nandi. This benefited the Nandi, with the bureaucratisation of athletics starting in the 1920s through the National Athletics Association. This brought on the popularisation of athletics in schools, and subsequently the uniformed services for which the Nandi soon began excelling.

2.3 Culture, Society and Athletics

In recent years there has been a sustained emergence of leading female Nandi athletes. This suggests both a cultural realignment in allowing women to pursue their own endeavours away from traditional female roles, as well as reinforcing the uniqueness of Nandi culture that may now be seen as providing female athletes with the same predisposition for middle and long distance running as it did for men. It was also important to compare and contrast male and female experiences of athletics in Nandi Hills. My ethnographic study of Nandi athletes, whether male or female, analysed more closely the ideas and attitudes of the athletes themselves, documenting how they see athletics both professionally and culturally, and what cultural features they see as being relevant to their running careers.

A central cultural practice amongst the Nandi is ritual male circumcision. Although largely now defunct for girls, boys are prepared with weeks of seclusion and instruction in the ways of the tribe that instils a strong sense of loyalty to the community and an acceptance of passage to manhood. With such a tough baptism into the adult world, the outcome is men who do not shrink from the discomfort of running (Moore, 2010). But if circumcision has long been the main annual community event, the day-to-day fixation of all Nandi traditionally was cattle. Believing themselves to be chosen by God and therefore the rightful owners of all cattle, they had to go forth and repossess. Their incessant raids for cattle created a culture in which reputation, wealth and progeny came to the fighting men who could cover long distances quickly, bravely and successfully (Pitsiladis et al, 2007).

Down through the generations, as the raiding life killed off slow runners and made fathers of the swift, the tribes must have distilled their talent. The genes that shape

football players or sumo wrestlers would have been reduced, and with a culture that continued to exalt endurance, so the Nandi became not explosively muscular, but lean and tireless. It is at this point that Bourdieu and Elias' notions of *habitus*, field and capital became relevant, linking specific groups to a particular orientation to the future. These dispositions are related to these groups' relations to their bodies and to the adoption of specific lifestyles. Thus, Bourdieu and Elias elaborated the links between the locations of people in social space and their patterns of participation in and attention to different sports as a key aspect of the sociology of sports (Washington and Karen, 2001).

2.4 Lifestyles in Nandi Hills

Bale and Sang (1996) explore some of the global factors impacting on Kenyan sport culture ranging from cultural imperialism to donor aid and global athletics organisations. Another important dimension that touches on the relationship between culture and athletics is the re-naturalisation of athletes from Kenya, many of them to the countries of the Middle East. This posed questions of what it means to be an athlete and the motivation behind the choice both to compete for a living and also to renounce Kenyan citizenship (Pitsiladis et al, 2007).

The presence of Kenyan runners as a major force in world athletics has been explained using geographical techniques in the analysis of Kenya's athletics production compared with Africa and globally (Bale and Sang, 1996). In this regard there were important questions of cultural ecology and the relationship of middle and long distance runners to their home environment and its notoriously high altitude. Further, physiological perspectives that connect nutrition, biology and sports science amongst Nandi athletes were considered too.

Table 2.1: Kalenjin percentage of world's top performers, men – end 2003 (Pitsiladis et al, 2007)

Event	Time Period	% Top 10	% Top 20
800m	2003	40	25
	All time	30	20
1,500m	2003	60	55
	All time	40	35
5,000m	2003	70	50
	All time	30	45
10,000m	2003	50	45
	All time	60	55
Steeplechase	2003	60	50
	All time	90	85
Marathon	2003	70	60
	All time	50	55

The socialisation of athletics amongst the Nandi must also be seen in its sociological context, relating athletics to an explanation of what may have so widely popularised the sport within a community. Through studying the lives of athletes it was useful to pay attention to the everyday practices that join athletes to their socio-cultural backgrounds. This required an appreciation of the different settings in which Nandi athletes find themselves, testing the assertion that individuals are nothing more than cogs responsible for the maintenance of the social world, playing their part in social interactions to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others (Goffman 1959).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework could be summarised as the production and reproduction of an athletics tradition through everyday practice. I took a dual theory approach that combined Erving Goffman's conceptualisation of everyday practice (Goffman 1959) with Pierre Bourdieu's and Norbert Elias' analysis of the socialisation of sport through *habitus*, field and capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Elias, 1939). In keeping with Goffman's analysis of the structures of social encounters from the perspective of the dramatic performance, I proceeded with the notion of understanding society in Nandi Hills in terms of training and competing. This assumed a strong degree of athletics socialisation within the community, and I enquired into the areas of community life – such as family relations, social activities, hobbies and games, child rearing and education – that connect athleticism with this first component of my theory.

The second component of my theoretical framework presented athletics amongst the Nandi as a social pretension; one that is aesthetically pleasing and distinct, and forming the basis for social judgement amongst the community and as against other communities. In developing Goffman's approach to sociological observation as a dramatic performance, I formulated my ideas on the relationship between culture and athletics in Nandi Hills in the tradition of Bourdieu's social critique of the judgement of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). This largely entailed a reformulation of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: 'the necessity internalised and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt – of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions' (Bourdieu, 1984:170).

From my literature review it was apparent that a detailed ethnographic study of the everyday practices in Nandi culture, with a specific focus on those traits that readily lend themselves to middle and long distance running, was in order. I learnt a lot about athletics from the particular approaches taken by male and female athletes in Nandi Hills, and with running so widely popularised amongst the community, there appeared to be a symbiotic relationship between athletics and culture that provided valuable insights into both.

The longstanding success of Nandi runners in middle and long distance events made it appropriate to conduct a detailed study of the location that has produced and continues to produce these runners. My ethnographic study of everyday practice initially focussed on the athletes to understand what is unique about them and their training patterns. At a second level were community and family members who are also cultural custodians. As an important influence on local athletes, they were brought into the wider framework of athletics as a dramatic performance, with all actors playing different roles but coming together to create a social structure that is heavily influenced by athletics and athleticism.

2.6 Assumptions

- i. Pre-sportised physical activities such as raiding and cattle rustling were traditionally popular in Nandi Hills
- ii. Athletes influenced by traditional Nandi customs and practices
- iii. There is a relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running amongst the Nandi

2.7 Definition of Terms

Athlete: a person trained or gifted in exercises or contests involving physical agility, stamina, or strength.

Athletics: refers to middle and long distance running events largely consisting of 800m, 1,500m, 5,000m, 10,000m, 3,000m Steeplechase and Marathon.

Capital: an endowment or amount of wealth which can be converted into financial profits. It may be physical, social, economic, or cultural.

Everyday practice: the unobtrusive human actions that occur regularly within a community, giving rise to lifestyle patterns and social structure.

Habitus: a set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions as well as a habitual or typical condition, a state or appearance, particularly of the body.

Lifestyle: the habits, attitudes, tastes, moral standards, and economic level, that together constitute the mode of living for an individual or group.

Runner: a person who participates in the physical activity of running, whether competitively or non-competitively.

Socialisation: the process of inheriting norms, customs and ideologies, providing individuals with the skills and habits necessary for participating within society.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

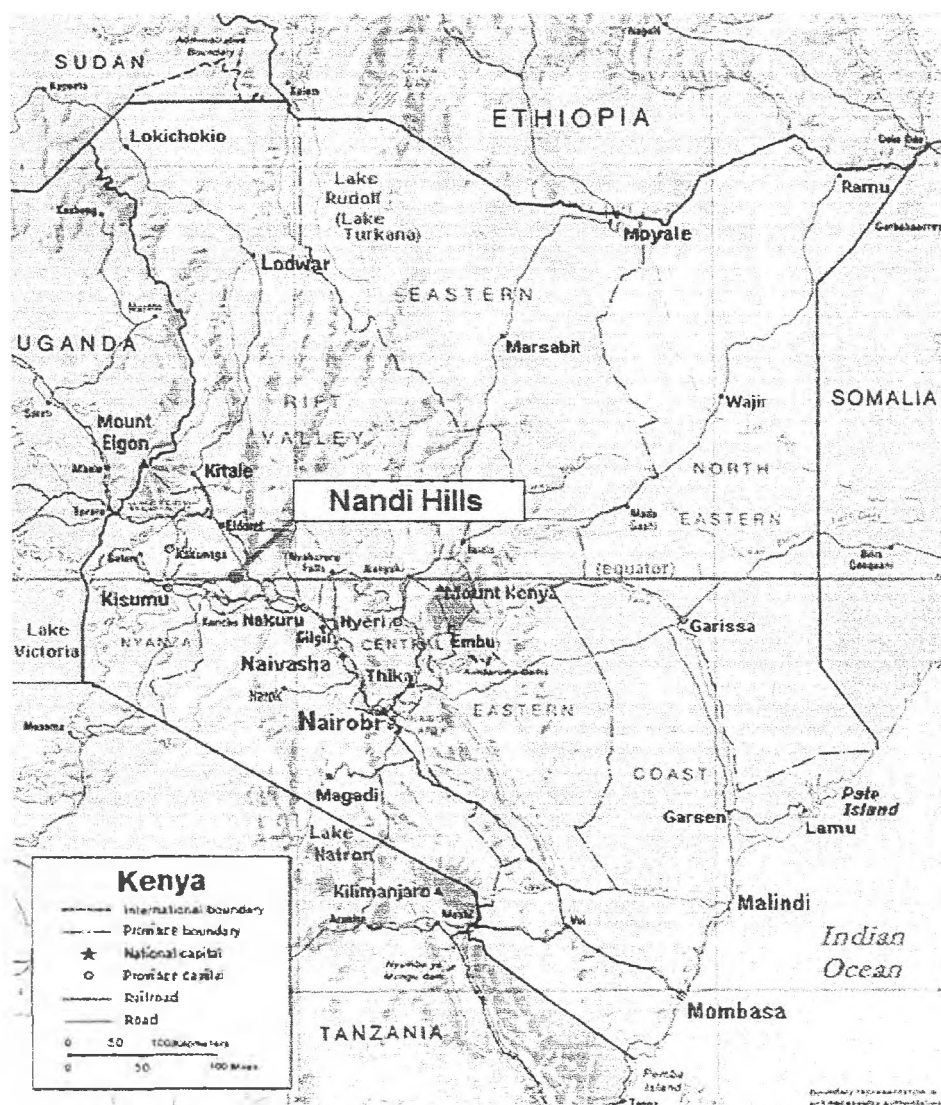
My research methodology deployed research techniques appropriate to my inquiry. In seeking an ethnographic approach, I was keen to follow scientific procedures that would generate a high volume of useful data. First, I wanted to become familiar with social and cultural phenomena associated with middle and long distance runners in Nandi Hills, whilst gaining new insights into them. Second, I wanted to accurately portray the characteristics of individuals and groups within the community. Third, I wanted to determine the prevalence of attitudes and towards running. Finally, I wanted to test my hypotheses against empirical data.

3.2 Research Site

Nandi Hills is a highland area of fertile hills at the edge of the Great Rift Valley in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya, and my study was carried out in Nandi County. The area is known for its tea estates, and is home to many world-renowned athletes, including Kipchoge Keino, Henry Rono, Mike Boit and Wilfred Bungei. It is mostly inhabited by the Nandi, along with Tugen, Keiyo, Kipsigis, Luo and Luyia people. Nandi Hills has a cool and wet climate with two rain seasons. Temperatures vary between 18 and 28 degrees centigrade which, coupled with the rich volcanic soils makes the area ideal for growing tea. The Nandi Hills road network connects it to major Kenyan towns and cities including Nairobi, Kisumu Eldoret, Nakuru, and Kericho.

Agriculturally this is a significant part of Rift Valley province and it is also an area of cultural importance for the Nandi. It was a battleground against the Luo and Luyia communities and also the burial site of the renowned Nandi leader Koitalel arap Samoei, who was killed in 1905 by British army officer Richard Meinertzhagen as part of the British government's campaign to colonise East Africa. Economically, Nandi Hills has benefited from its athletics achievements with many successful athletes investing heavily in local enterprises. High altitude training centres are increasingly becoming a feature too, offering a new dimension to Kenyan tourism as well as widening the training possibilities for future generations of Kenyan athletes.

Figure 3.1: Location of Nandi Hills in Kenya (Source: www.nandirunners.com)



3.3 Research Design

This study was guided by an ethnographic study design with ethnographic observations and a cross-sectional survey, for a period of four months.

I lived for four months in Nandi Hills in order to spend considerable time with athletes and other members of the community. Pursuing an ethnographic study of athletes can be made difficult by their commitment to rigorous training patterns and conservative private lives that deliberately exclude unnecessary distractions. In my preliminary enquiries I also discovered people taking an initial view of me as an outsider in their community, with athletes especially interested in the motivation and reasons for a Briton researching Nandi runners. Some assumed that I was an agent looking to recruit athletes for scholarships or foreign competitions, while others speculated that I was either a foreign coach or a journalist. Such preconceived ideas could have affected data gathering if participant informants were not fully aware of my intentions and comfortable with my presence.

Once these problems were overcome through explaining my research programme, my ability to follow an ethnographic approach was considerably enhanced. I was able to reach a larger group of people and was empowered to extract more information from them. I worked hard to cultivate my contact network – my limited knowledge of Kiswahili and even more limited knowledge of *Kutit ab Nandi* (Nandi language) notwithstanding – not least to overcome earlier challenges, but also to gain access to the most useful informants. This required an active sense of the people best placed to assist me with my research, excluding many, but also relying heavily on others.

One of the major benefits of ethnographic research is the data that is generated and its ability to expand lines of enquiry into new areas. With only a limited idea of what I would encounter prior to embarking on my research, I nevertheless benefited from the discovery of new ideas and concepts that readily fall within the purview of my study problem. The challenge was to remain focussed on my problem statement and its key questions.

3.4 Study Population

At about 2,000 B.C., Cushites from southern Ethiopia began arriving in the Western Highlands now known as Nandi Hills. Pastoralists, they displaced or absorbed the region's original hunter-gatherers. Then, during the first 1,000 years A.D., Nilotic people came in, again from the north. They intermarried with the Cushites, and the groups combined customs. From the Cushites came circumcision as a rite of passage. The Nilotes contributed the extraction of the lower incisors of adolescents (so they may be fed if they contract lockjaw) and a boundless passion for the milking, bleeding and worship of cattle.

Before British colonisation, the Nandi were sedentary cattle-herders, sometimes also practicing agriculture. Their settlements were evenly distributed rather than being grouped into villages. Like other Nilotic peoples, they were noted warriors. They traditionally practiced circumcision of both sexes, although female circumcision is fast fading as a rite of initiation into adulthood. Boys' circumcision festivals took place about every seven and a half years, and boys circumcised at the same time were considered to belong to the same age set; like other Nilotic groups, these age sets were given names from a limited fixed cycle. Each age set was further subdivided into a

subset. About four years after this festival, the previous generation officially handed over defence of the country to the newly circumcised youths.

The geographical origins of Kenyan athletes are not evenly distributed across the country, nor are they randomly distributed. There are, in fact, areas which overproduce superior athletes, and others which under produce, compared to the national average. In the case of track and field athletics there is evidence to show that it is not Kenya which should be regarded as the principal geographic unit of 'production' of superior athletes in east Africa but a particular region of Kenya, namely the Rift Valley Province. In effect, Kenya's positive athletic image is obtained by the exploits of athletes from one province. This is not to say that all of Kenya's superior athletes come from the Rift Valley; but a very large proportion certainly do.

The Rift Valley is a region of relatively high altitude. Kirinyaga in Central Province also lies above 2,000 metres, and yet a recurring theme is that the altitude at which the Nandi live 'explains' their running successes and world-class performances. The fact that an above average number of runners come from the Rift Valley further encourages this assumption, irrespective of the other communities living at a similarly high altitude.

The Nandi are generally regarded as quiet, ascetic, serious people who display little migration from their home areas. They are also known to be hard working and enduring, a fact which is perhaps best demonstrated by Kenya's famous long distance runners almost all of whom are Nandi. Could their traditional asceticism, seriousness, and diligence be part of a broader profile which is conducive to their successes as modern athletes?

The Nandi are arguably one of the groups in present-day Kenya with the greatest tradition of individualism and competitiveness. The Nandi were the only people to engage in prolonged 'guerrilla' resistance against the British. In 1895, as the British tried to assert their control in Nandiland, they met with considerable resistance from Nandi warriors under the leadership of Koitalel Samoei. The Nandi experienced five 'punitive' expeditions in a period of ten years, the fifth being the largest ever mounted in Kenya. It was not until 1905 that the Nandi resistance to British rule was ended following the assassination of Samoei.

The success of the Nandi in an individual sport such as running may be a reflection of their earlier, pre-sportised aggressiveness in areas such as militarised resistance and also cattle raiding. In this case, resistance is consistent with the individualism of running, while raiding may be comparable to racing. Aggression and victory as particularly prized cultural traits have therefore been retained in track athletics, sustained and improved over time.

A more detailed study would concentrate not just on Nandi athletes but on the wider Kalenjin group, in an attempt to try and uncover the unique factors of this wider. I submit, however, that such a focus would require more time and resources than were available to me, and would have presented a significant challenge in being able to research the specific and subtle differences between sub-tribes of the Kalenjin group. I therefore focused on Nandi athletes.

3.5 Sample Population

My unit of analysis was individual Nandi athletes who live and train within my study location, Nandi County. An athlete was taken to be an individual who states their

main occupation as such, and I focussed specifically on people who compete in middle and long distance running events, which are 800m, 1,500m, 3,000m steeplechase, 5,000m, 10,000m and marathon. I collected data from twenty athletes in total.

In addition, I worked with non-athletes who are members of the community in my research location. In particular, I worked with two people who are affiliated with athletics either as coaches, as well as two senior members of the community and two secondary school students. I sought to gain an equal number of men and women in my sample population at all times.

3.6 Sampling Procedure

I used non-probability sample selection since I was seeking specific predefined groups. In particular I used purposive sampling to select people in accordance with groups constituting athletes of different genders, ages, running distances and training locations. My initial group of twenty-six key informants was purposively selected to participate in focus group discussions and provide narratives and life histories (see Appendix 2). My survey (see Appendix 1) was administered to 100 people in my study population in order to obtain a wider spectrum of views on everyday practices using convenient sampling around shopping centres in Nandi Hills and Kapsabet. Respondents were selected as they became available, taking into account gender and age.

Table 3.1: Number of persons sampled by age and gender

Age Range	Number of Males	Number of Females
18-27	10	1
28-37	2	1
38-47	3	1
48-57	2	1
58+	4	1
Totals	21	6

3.7 Data Collection Methods

3.7.1 *Ethnographic Observation*

Ethnographic observation is a research method that has its roots in participant observation, commonly deployed in social and cultural anthropology. Generally, it requires a researcher (ethnographer) to live intimately as a member of the society under study, making the people feel comfortable enough with their presence in order to observe and record information about their lives. Ethnographic observation also involves establishing a rapport within the community, living in such a way that people go about their business without distraction, and becoming culturally immersed in order to understand what has been learned.

I was especially reliant on this technique as a method for collecting my qualitative data. Detailed notes on my observations as a member of the community formed the basis on which I related my theory of everyday practice to the Nandi athletes in my sample. Particularly important scenarios involved: tea drinking with athletes in their houses; pre-run warm-ups and post-run cool downs; afternoon stretches and walks

around Nandi Hills and Kapsabet; massage and muscle therapy sessions; and watching televised recordings of races involving friends and other athletes.

Detailed descriptions on lifestyles, habits, running activities, social situations and relationships were therefore tested against my assumptions, based on the data gathered from my main observation scenarios. Over the course of my four months living with athletes in Nandi Hills, I was able to become a part of the everyday training routine of one male training group, whilst closely following the progress of another three, one of which was female. On average, training groups constituted six runners of the same gender, living together for periods of up to eight months. Individual athletes would be absent only when away for competitions, or for weekend breaks visiting friends and family.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions

A focus group discussions as an organised discussion exploring a specific set of issues was held to investigate people's views, experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs on my key areas of study (see Appendix 2). My group was focused in the sense of involving a male athletics training group that I was familiar with, and comprised both professional and junior athletes ranging from 18 to 38 years of age. This focus group discussion was held in my first month of research.

In addition to a focus group discussion, I also constituted three mixed group discussions of athletes and non-athletes to obtain wider community perspectives on running and the lifestyles of runners in Nandi Hills.

3.7.3 Narratives

Narratives were a major feature of my informant interview technique, soliciting and subsequently analysing personal accounts as stories and allowing participants to use their own words and categories to describe their life experiences. Narratives as spoken or written texts gave an accounts of event or actions, providing an important insight into the lifestyles and aspirations of athletes and other members of the Nandi community. Portraying an individual's life is an essential component of any ethnographic study as the primary form through which the unfolding of events, actions and experiences are made meaningful. I conducted this approach on four occasions, in each case seeing my role as being a good listener and taking detailed notes in order to follow up on themes in their narrated order afterwards.

3.7.4 Life Histories

I collected three life histories giving personal accounts in the teller's own words. Although selective and contingent upon remembered events, they nevertheless provided a clear and ordered record that, of necessity, consists of fact and fiction. These served in reconstructing important community experiences that were related to my specific study of athletes. Informants were representatives of my target social groups and interviews provided an intimate insight into how individuals think and how personal and cultural values shape perceptions of the past, offering an important historical dimension to my study.

3.7.5 Survey Technique

A survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered to 100 respondents at shopping centres in Nandi Hills and Kapsabet as they became available. It was pilot tested beforehand and generated valuable quantitative and qualitative data. I sought participants for informant interviews during this activity, depending on their

specialised knowledge and how readily accessible they were. The survey questionnaire was tested to ensure the questions measured desired attributes and to validate social and cultural appropriateness of the questions. Final changes were made to the research methodology and survey based on these tests.

Each survey took no more than 15 minutes to complete and included sections on: a short introduction to the project; selection criteria; interview completion and supervisor field check details; location of the individual; individual's demographic information including age, sex, home language and education level; attitudes towards athletics with a particular focus on training and competing; attitudes towards Nandi culture and society.

3.8 Data Processing and Analysis

With the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) I proceeded to analyse, interpret and organise it under critical scrutiny and reflection. This was a process of determining the general trends and natural categories the information fell into. The initial stage of sorting data was followed by quality control checks. Thereafter data was processed and analysed into categories. Categorising required putting all the information that is similar for one group of people together. This meant analysing data along gender lines, locations, levels of sporting achievement, level of education completed, or training group. Data was coded, entered into and manipulated by Excel before being analysed graphically.

Qualitative data for analysis was obtained from key informant interviews and focus group discussions. It was analysed thematically using a descriptive approach, with direct quotations and selected comments from informants used to explain trends and relate data to my theoretical framework.

Data was validated and reliability ensured through the process of triangulation, whereby multiple people and different locations, over time, participated in my research, generating findings that could be compared and contrasted. This data triangulation served as an important way to develop themes within my research that could be tested for their validity and reliability. Further, methodological triangulation involved more than two methods being used in my study, in order to crosscheck the results yielded. By using multiple research methods I was able to observe similar and contrasting outcomes in my research. This gave me confidence that my key findings were reliable and should therefore be included in my study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In conducting an ethical research programme I protected my informants by adhering to the principles of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, anonymity, and was guided by the American Anthropological Association's code of conduct. It is unethical for a researcher to befriend a person simply for the purpose of studying that person without telling them that they are the subject of research. I notified the people involved of my research and its purpose so it was their choice as to whether or not to allow me to observe and spend time with them. They also had the right to know what may be the consequences of their participation. After informing them about the study, I sought their permission to be part of the research, thereby maintaining informed consent.

Anthropologists have a moral responsibility to prevent any harm to the people they study. Studying them intrudes into private lives, so it is vital to be sensitive to the right to privacy and as far as possible get permission from those studied, to do the research. Further, it is the researcher's responsibility not to reveal what particular

informants have said, keeping their information confidential. Researchers have an obligation to protect the identity of the persons studied and the information should not be published in such a way that particular people will be at risk as a consequence.

3.10 Problems Encountered

My identity as a Caucasian British male will have influenced or biased my sample population, as perceptions surrounding my presence and motives for conducting research played out in the minds of my key informants. Whilst I believe this became less of a barrier the longer I stayed in Nandi Hills, I was still not privy to some of the finer and more delicate insights into the everyday practices of my study population by virtue of not being fluent in the main languages used. Further, by not being a member of the community by right of birth I was, in the eyes of my informants, an outsider. This will have created inaccuracies within my data by virtue of misunderstandings and mistakes on my part.

Another challenge arose by virtue of my familiarity with Nandi Hills having spent considerable time there over the past 8 years. In many ways I would deem Nandi Hills my 'second home' and was keen to conduct research there in the hope of using my familiarity of the area to my advantage. As has been noted by (Onyango-Ouma, 2006), a researcher who considers himself at 'home' can still be easily designated an outsider by virtue of considerations that play out in the minds of informants. This may well have offset the advantages I thought would accrue to me by virtue of my local knowledge, connections, and prior experiences in Nandi Hills.

Once I had realised my status as an outsider in relation to my subjects, I sought to maintain a distance that set my expectations as more researcher than friend, and

ensuring I employ my research methods in a detached but professional manner. Whilst being an outsider in the literal sense may therefore have hindered my ability to understand small technical details about everyday practice in Nandi Hills, advantages nevertheless came from my realisation of this and the necessary distance this created between my informants and me.

CHAPTER FOUR

A History of Running Amongst the Nandi

'The military threat of the Nandi, which until 1906 rendered European settlement of the Uasin-Gishu plateau insecure, moulded an initial policy of containment' (Ellis, 1976).

4.1 Introduction

The importance of local history to a community such as the Nandi cannot be underestimated. With over one hundred years of international notoriety – from military resistance to athletics dominance – Nandi people place a strong emphasis on remembering – and making sure outsiders are also aware – of their collective achievements. Coupled with a reputation amongst neighbouring communities as a successful warrior tribe, there is an inescapable relationship between the Nandi and different forms of running pursuits that implies a common tendency towards intense physical exertion. In looking to understand the traditions on which athletics as both hobby and profession have been built in Nandi Hills, an historical analysis is in order.

4.2 Resistance, Raiding and Cattle Rustling

The Nandi at the turn of the 20th century were described as ferocious warriors and fearless raiders who were 'agile, athletic, and able to travel long distances without fatigue: when marching, hunting and raiding, they exhibit considerable powers of endurance and great reserves of strength' (Matson, 1972:9). Moreover, 'Distance and natural barriers ... are not insuperable difficulties, for it does not take a Nandi long to

travel twenty miles' (Huntingford, 1953:13). Athleticism was a major factor in the protracted Nandi Resistance that thwarted the construction of the Uganda Railway passing through the Nandi region in the early 20th century. Using spears and mounting raids from distant starting points – all the better to surprise the enemy – the Nandi put up the strongest and longest resistance to colonial infiltration, prompting punitive expeditions to be launched in 1897, 1900, 1903 and 1905-06 (Matson, 1972). This was significantly concerning for the colonial authorities because, in addition to the railway, the main road and telegraph cables from Mombasa to Lake Victoria ran through Nandi territory. An estimated 1,750 Nandi were killed between 1905 and 1906 alone, and on 19 October 1905 the Nandi Orkoiyot, Koitalel arap Samoei who had commanded the resistance was shot dead by Captain Richard Meinertzhagen (a British army officer) at a putative peace conference.

Long before the concept of organised running as a competitive sport entered the Rift Valley, a significant emphasis was placed on the importance of athleticism for raiding and cattle rustling, as supported by the comment: "Organised military resistance is consistent with the aggression and victory that are particularly prized cultural traits amongst the Nandi" (narrative, 68 year old male Nandi elder, 2011). Following on from these identifiable traditions, there may be a case for suggesting the Nandi sought out new forms of wealth accumulation once the old methods were no longer viable under British rule. 'Raiding cattle from outsiders was a form of property expansion from which the entire community benefited' (Anderson, 1986). With much of the community's wealth tied up in their ability to raid other tribes and acquire cattle during the early 20th century, once the colonial authorities began asserting new codes of conduct as part of their colonisation agenda, athletics may have offered an

opportunity for the Nandi to interact with the developing colonial state in a different way.

The idea that a love of cattle raiding became an affinity for athletics may be seen as a form of social embeddedness of Nandi economic institutions and practices, providing 'moral or normative meanings to the social agents who inhabit those institutions and pursue those practices' (Bernstein, 2007). This 'moral economy' was evident in cattle raiding activities by the Nandi against other neighbouring tribes, such that 'while individual sections of the Kalenjin utilised the strongest public curse and social ostracism against someone stealing cattle from amongst their own number, no sanction whatsoever was levied in a case of theft committed against outsiders' (Anderson, 1986).

It has been noted elsewhere that 'social arrangements, cultural beliefs and values ... are central to discourses of moral economy applied ... in tensions over land in rural sub-Saharan Africa' (Bernstein, 2007). I contend that a discernible moral economy also exists – and has long existed – in the way Nandi people valorise wealth accumulation within the community as a product of physical exertion.

This accords with the assertion that, 'If cattle theft by Africans in colonial Kenya was thought of as a 'young man's sport' ... then the young men of the Kalenjin in Kenya's Western Highlands were undoubtedly the sport's most enthusiastic participants' (Anderson, 1986). A way of channelling Nandi athleticism – offering a new outlet for cultural manifestations of physical prowess – was therefore needed once cattle raiding was no longer viable. A new and popular economic pursuit that was actively encouraged under the colonial regime would bring the Nandi into line with the nascent political, social and economic institutions of British colonialism, obtaining the

community's buy-in to the colonial project and capturing the hearts and minds of the once feared Nandi warriors.

The 1920s was, however, marked by increased pressures on the Nandi as more land was alienated by the government to new settlers; legislation was introduced to further restrict the mobility of African labour, reducing wages; and the government actively intervened to force more Africans into local labour markets (Ellis, 1976). Faced with the option of becoming squatters on what was previously their land, seek employment within the colonial government, or go to work on settler farms, there was considerable discontent among the Nandi at the injustices and hardships they faced. These turbulent changes were experienced across the community as individuals and their families had to adjust to things like formal education, the imposition of taxation, and the alienation of land to foreigners. As the Nandi pastoral way of life was gradually eroded, the reality of colonial rule set in.

4.3 Athletics and the Early Formation of the Colonial State

The transition from raiders to runners was not instantaneous, and there was an important step in the process that saw young men forced to seek employment in order to adjust to the rapidly transforming cash economy. The need to pay taxes and school fees was accompanied by the colonial administration's desire to recruit Kenyans into the army, police and prison services, and it is no coincidence that many of Kenya's early Olympic medallists were soldiers or police officers. John Velzian, who was hired by the colonial government in 1958 as a physical education officer, went on to coach Kipchoge Keino and many of the best athletes Kenya has ever produced.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as promising international athletes started to emerge, there were few training facilities and limited opportunities for athletes to develop their talent, so Veizian found places for them in colleges, the police or the army: 'Athletics is a discipline ... and the army and police initiate that discipline with regular hours, regular meals and regular sleep, all of which are vital to top-class athletes' (Sports Illustrated, 1966).

In 1966 Kipchoge Keino was a police instructor. Expected to perform a full work schedule, Keino had to be extremely focussed and dedicated to athletics, using his free time outside of work to train or travel home to see his young family. Although undoubtedly challenging, it is tempting to suggest that Nandi such as Keino would have enjoyed maintaining their 'warrior' status in one of Kenya's uniformed services. Following in the footsteps of their forefathers who fought the British, young men who were physically and mentally fit could get employment in the army, police or prison service whilst also pursuing their interest in running. At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, all three of Kenya's gold medallists – Kipchoge Keino, Amos Biwott and Naftali Temu – had come from such a background.

The success of athletics amongst the Nandi should therefore be seen not just as a socio-cultural predisposition for running, but also historically as a product of colonial policies that sought to integrate communities and provide the colonial state with a means of accessing the people. This was exemplified by the comment "When individuals from the Nandi community first turned to athletics, it was not because they saw themselves as a 'running tribe'" (narrative, 78 year old male athletics coach, 2011). Athletics was not the only sport promoted by the colonial administration in Nandi District, and it was not just the Nandi who excelled in athletics. But in order to

understand the phenomenal socialisation athletics underwent in and around Nandi Hills, it is worth considering how sport – and running in particular – was viewed as an important component of education and community development during colonialism.

‘Show your valour in sport and games, not in war’ has been cited as an example of the colonial authorities promoting athletics in a campaign to civilise Kipsigis youths, who, like the Nandi, might otherwise have been tempted to embark on their preferred pursuit of cattle raiding (Pitsiladis et al, 2007:45). With the colonial state slow to exercise significant control outside of Nairobi, officials in more remote areas such as the rural highlands were expected to act on their own initiative and devise measures that began to ‘civilise the natives’.

Before public services and state institutions could be started, racial barriers between Africans and Europeans needed to be overcome. Race relations were viewed as ‘essentially a problem of personal relationships to be resolved through attention to good manners and courtesy in government offices, increased social contacts between educated Africans and European officials and settlers, interracial sporting events and mass education ...’ (Berman, 1990:330). This demonstrates the wide direction afforded to young men, often fresh from university, who were seeking an adventure and a career in Britain’s colonial office.

In considering the criteria used for recruiting colonial officials, there is almost an inevitability in athletics becoming a key device towards advancing Britain’s colonial state in Kenya: ‘The brilliant or markedly intellectual student who might question received ideas, was consciously avoided. The colonial office looked for modest intellectual achievements, athletic prowess, a taste for outdoor life ...’ (Berman, 1990:100). What better way to organise the villages of Nandi District – under the

auspices of a government seeking to strengthen and expand its control – than to introduce European style running to a people who had already demonstrated a particular affinity for physical endurance, albeit in another form.

4.4 Athletics and Development in Colonial Kenya

Jeanes School in Kabete was started in 1925 to provide a special form of training for African village teachers destined to become leaders in their own communities. In 1949 it became the main adult education centre for the colony and the nucleus of social welfare and community development programmes, training Africans to take the place of British District Officers and Commissioners. In the centre of the compound were the playing fields where potential Olympic athletes and international footballers were trained. The running track was one of the finest in east Africa, pioneered by John Velzian and made from a volcanic rock substance that had previously been used for tennis courts. Early facilities like this demonstrate the importance of sport in colonial development and education policies, giving opportunities to Kenya's first crop of international running champions.

The Government African School (GAS) at Kapsabet, which had been established in 1926, also played a major part in the development of athletics, particularly amongst the Nandi. Arthur Selwood Walford, previously at Jeanes School, was appointed headmaster in 1940, and went on to make an important contribution to Kenyan athletics, working with African teachers who would take athletics into the villages. In the early 1950s GAS had the only accurately measured running track in Nandi District, marked out by engine oil that killed the grass, a method still used at schools in Nandi County today. A landmark was established in the 1950s when the first permanent track, made of sun-baked compacted earth was constructed in Nandi.

It had been the practice for the colonial administration to organise sports in the districts. It usually fell to the junior District Officers to do this, and since one of the qualities looked for at the time of selection was prowess in sport, they were well equipped to do so. Thousands attended these district sports contests either as competitors or spectators, turning outstanding athletes into early Kenyan sporting heroes (Askwith, 1995). The following correspondence between colonial officials demonstrates the early success of the Nandi at such events:

From: HH Low, Nandi District Commissioner

To: TG Askwith, Municipal Native Affairs Officer

'I am keen that the Nandi should be allowed to enter of the Olympic Sports as either a team or as individuals. They are, as you probably know, magnificent natural athletes (running and jumping)'. 2 May 1946

From: TG Askwith, Municipal Native Affairs Officer

To: HH Low, Nandi District Commissioner

'I can see no reason why the Nandi should not enter as a team or as individuals ... It looks as if your people will probably walk away with a lot of the events'. 7 May 1946

From: Provincial Commissioner, Rift Valley Province

To: HH Low, Nandi District Commissioner

'I would like to congratulate you and all those concerned very warmly on the great success of your team at the recent Olympic Sports ... I should imagine that some of the more sophisticated parts of the country got a bit of a shock that this backward Province could produce such athletes'. 7 November 1946

The training of athletes in development techniques and instilling ideas of physical fitness and preparation played a big part in the work of Community Development Officers. As Administrative Officers became more immersed in bureaucratic activities, Community Development Officers began assisting in organising sport, which became one of their principal activities. One individual still remembered in Nandi Hills for his work within the community is Ted Harris, who served as Community Development Officer in Nandi District from 1956 to 1964. In addition to setting up cooperative farming projects, youth clubs and community schemes, Harris is credited with initiating athletics training facilities and competitions in Nandi that were a forerunner to Kenya's subsequent success in international athletics. As Chairman of the Nandi District Sports Association, Harris wrote to the Editor of the East African Standard on 20 June 1958 about a lack of publicity and coverage of athletics, complaining that:

'We out in the Districts are very keen in encouraging the very real talent but we need the interest and support of the general population who are very little aware of the quality of meetings which can be seen, and who often seem scarcely aware that they are being run at all'.

It is interesting to note the frustration felt by Harris that athletics was not getting the newspaper coverage it merited, and also that there was something unique about the athletes in Nandi Hills. Athletics would have almost certainly given way in the sports pages to golf, horse racing and football in a way that is inconceivable in Kenya's newspapers today. Meanwhile, the seeds of future athletics successes were slowly being cultivated for future generations to enjoy.

From the perspective of early state formation in Kenya, the involvement of colonial officials promoting athletics as a means to reach out to the people they sought to govern cannot be ignored. The transmutation of running into organised events based on fastest times and specified distances was a logical development on traditional forms of endurance running, such as raiding and cattle rustling, which the colonial state prohibited. The everyday practices of the able bodied were guided towards athletics as a bona fide pastime, with schools promoting sport in education, and Nandi Hills defining itself as the early frontrunner in producing Kenya's top athletes. This set in motion the start of a legacy in professional athletics that remains in Nandi Hills today, giving rise to a continuous supply of role models, wealth creators and community leaders who have forged lucrative careers out of running.

The intervention of the colonial government is therefore a pivotal moment in the modernisation of Nandi economic activities, and yet, the dialectic of crisis and control within colonial rule (Berman, 1990) brought the Nandi and their British colonisers to eventually settle on running as an important social and economic activity that was mutually acceptable. Wary of their military prowess, the colonial state undoubtedly had to find ways of initially pacifying, and subsequently mobilising the Nandi to be part of their project. For their part, the Nandi were forced to adapt to the changes that were taking place around them, whilst doing so in a way that would sustain the unique attributes for which their people were well known.

4.5 Running and the Moral Economy

A moral economy is a way to describe the relationship between moral or cultural beliefs and economic activities. As a means of explaining the interplay and changes over time between running and wealth accumulation, the Nandi have arguably

depended on a moral economy that has evolved with different forms of physical endurance. Moral economies are generally observable in small, stable and close-knit communities that rely on principles of mutuality to ensure work burdens are shared and evenly distributed. With customs and social pressures coercing Nandi economic actors to conform to traditional norms, there is less risk of greed, jealousy or hardship. This can be seen in the comment: “In our community people contribute what they can, which can only strengthen our cohesion as a group as we ensure no one goes hungry” (life history, 68 year old male Nandi elder, 2010).

Changes in Nandi economic accumulation over time – with athleticism representing both change and continuity – are evident in the different forms of physical endurance being witnessed, but with a strong sense of identity, kinship, culture and society underpinning it. The importance of this moral economy has steered the community through periods of conflict and change, with running and athleticism an enduring feature in the economic activities that have provided for the Nandi for more than a century.

Manifested in cultural capital passed down through the generations, running amongst the Nandi was noticeable during raids on neighbouring ethnic groups or British colonisers, and subsequently when seeking to participate in the early developments of the colonial state. The moral economy of running can therefore be seen not only to have maintained Nandi solidarity around a central cultural norm during times of crisis, but also to have provided continuity, with the community able to relate to changing socio-economic conditions and reinvent itself in accordance with them through running.

This investigation into the physical activities that resemble running which have traditionally been popular in Nandi Hills has been dealt with by way of an historical examination in accordance with my first research objective. My findings support my first assumption that 'athletics in Nandi Hills has its origins in pre-sportised running such as raiding and cattle rustling'. This chapter has outlined relevant historical activities and events that have taken place in Nandi Hills and offers the theoretical concept of a moral economy as the basis for supporting my first assumption.

In acknowledging the importance of a moral economy as the basis for guiding Nandi economic activities through periods of change over the last one hundred years, the moral and cultural beliefs that have informed the local economy must also be investigated. With running established as a cultural practice for economic purposes, there will also be important societal dimensions to consider that have been shaped by the formation of economic norms amongst the Nandi in recent years. The interplay between cultural and social factors can be seen through observing key Nandi events and institutions. This will be dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Culture and Society of Nandi Runners

“Don’t bother going to your race unless you have dragged your body to the last inch of survival in the training runs” (Tanser, 2008:97).

5.1 Introduction

Having analysed in the previous chapter the historical developments that led to the Nandi becoming inextricably associated with Kenya’s international running talent, it is worth considering the setting in which running as an activity is produced within the community, and what unique Nandi characteristics stand out as being responsible for their running successes in a contemporary context. This will begin with a deconstruction of different facets of cultural capital that may be relevant, and go on to see how these have developed into manifestations of social capital too.

5.2 Family, Initiation, Marriage and Sports Culture

The rural setting inhabited by the majority of Nandi people fosters an economic heritage in agriculture that has preserved a strong tribal affinity to land. The Nandi are proud of their rural surroundings, an observation that was reaffirmed to me by an elder who observed that: “This has long been evident in peoples’ association with ‘home’ of things like tea farming and the local ecology” (life history comment, 63 year old male Nandi elder, 2011). Historically viewed as ‘a semi-nomadic warrior and pastoral tribe of Nilo-Hamitic origin, able to wander over a relatively large area of some of the richest and best watered land in Kenya’ (Snell, 1954:xii), the Nandi have adapted to their environment and define themselves in accordance with it. This is also

noticeable in frequent references to circumcision, culture, tradition and loyalty among athletes discussing their culture and identity.

In particular, physical exertion associated with this rural life are apparent in children who, from as young as five years old, might be expected to gather firewood, herd goats or cattle, plant crops such as maize, assist with housework and attend to various chores without complaint. One athlete commented that: “Children running to and from school – often completing 10km in a day – are an important reason for so many athletes from Nandi” (focus group discussion participant, 27 year old professional male athlete, 2010). Physical endurance must therefore be replicated in a mental determination to complete education and go on to support the family, whilst coping with basic material living standards. This is not rural poverty per se, more a resolution to avoid poverty through hard work and selflessness.

According to Nandi historian A.T. Matson, ‘The Nandi as a people are conservative and insular: new ideas are accepted only after long consideration and divergences from customary practices are frowned upon, so that the imitative faculty has largely remained dormant’ (Matson, 1972:11). This might not be as true today as it was when Matson was living in Nandi Hills, but there are certain aspects of community life that suggest the Nandi are keen to preserve their cultural heritage. Perhaps the best example of this is the traditional Nandi circumcision ceremony. Taking place in December and January each year for groups of boys aged 14 to 18, the rite of passage begins with the removal of the foreskin, followed by a period of seclusion lasting one month. It was emphasised to me that: “To become a respected adult in our society, it is important for boys to not only pass through the entire ceremony, but to do so

without complaining or showing a weakness” (life history, 18 year old male athlete, 2011).

To an outsider, the sheer brutality of what Nandi initiates endure appears barbaric, but such an event typifies the community’s adherence to traditional practices and sacrosanct cultural occasions. The month-long event is marked by the teaching of traditional songs and stories by members of the community, creating a close sense of togetherness amongst the boys who are expected to fend for themselves in the forest by building camps and hunting for food. Despite the discomfort of having their penis operated on after the first night of the ceremony, a number of activities take place where the boys are expected to demonstrate their loyalty to the tribe and pledge to be faithful to the community’s customs and practices. These include the need to withstand significant levels of pain by crawling naked through stinging leaves (*rotet*) and being beaten for making mistakes during the ceremony’s activities.

With the camaraderie of the tribe crystallised at a young age, boys who are circumcised together forge lifelong friendships that creates continuity within the wider tribe. This cultivates an almost military togetherness, passing on cultural norms as well as guidance on how to defend the tribe – by force if necessary – should it ever come under attack. It is possible to see how such a rite of passage may well be a precursor to a career in athletics, instilling the pride of being a Nandi and the need to maintain the highest standards when representing the community. At a personal level, it also instructs initiates on how to cope with pain and suffering in much the same way as middle and long distance runners are expected to overcome immense physical discomfort in training and competitions.

There are parallels with what an army does to its new recruits by way of an induction, using aggressive methods to teach obedience to its rules. Such discipline is also vital for an athlete to remain committed to training for many months or even years without reward, forcing them not just to work, but also to live in a way that is most conducive to a career in running. One recently circumcised athlete told me that: “Having been initiated in such a severe manner, a Nandi can never forget what he and his fellow initiates went through” (life history, 18 year old male athlete, 2011), and this engenders a strong spirit of mutual respect and loyalty that carries through into the training camp. The determination not to be defeated raises the standards of competition amongst the running group, fostering a culture of seriousness, focus and dedication to the sport.

Such tribal unity can also be seen in the preference to marry from within their community: “I cannot marry someone who is not a Nandi” (focus group discussion participant, 30 year old professional male athlete, 2010). Although it is now more acceptable to marry outside of the tribe than was the case twenty years ago, the possibility that the Nandi are able to insulate their culture through a strict adherence to marrying one of their own – and that this contributes to their dominance of middle and long distance running – cannot be ignored. Physical performance is determined by the interaction of extensive and diverse physiological characteristics.

The predominance of one racial group over another in any athletics discipline suggests superior functional capacity in one or more of these. For example, unique body proportions relating specifically to lower limb length and mass have been speculated as enhancing running economy, and may help explain the unusual ability of Nandi endurance runners to maintain high intensity endurance exercise (Pitsiladis

et al, 2007). The chances of preserving any possible genetic advantage – whilst still scientifically unproven – could well be facilitated by marrying within the community.

Upon marriage there is also an apparent inclination for Nandi to raise their family within the community's rural confines: "I want my children to live on the same land as me so that we as a family are never IDPs (internally displaced people) in our own country" (narrative, 30 year old professional male athlete, 2010). From an athletics perspective, this could lend credence to the suggestion that human form and function are dictated by the interaction of genes with environmental stimuli such as spatial distances, altitude and climate. Variations in environmental exposure and its accompanying lifestyle will strongly influence physical characteristics. Although a core genetic inheritance is common to all humans, small functional variations exist in these genes, which dictate that individual (or racial) responses to environmental conditions will differ. These genetic differences influence sporting performance through associated differences in anatomy and physiology and their response to training (Pitsiladis et al, 2007).

Much debate continues about the relationship between genetics and other external factors such as environment, society and culture in the production of top international athletes. Often characterised by a discourse that relates the success of black or African origin athletes to a particular physiological makeup, arguments in support of black athletic superiority – and, conversely, white athletic inferiority – have divided anthropologists, scientists and athletes for over one hundred years (Wiggins, 1989). An initial deconstruction of this debate centres on schools of thought that believe on the one hand that ethnicity is a predetermining factor for successful runners. This may be countered by the argument that science has not yet reached a stage of being able to

attribute specific genes to physical performance in running. The opposing school of thought therefore takes the position that running talent is a learned attribute, dependant on the physical, social and cultural environment into which someone is born.

My inquiry into what gives rise to so many runners coming from the Nandi community, whilst not dealing specifically with questions of biophysical science, nevertheless accords with many of the findings in support of a socio-cultural basis for athletes, or any sportspeople for that matter. As has been noted in the 'black vs white' debate on running talent:

'a variety of societal conditions were responsible for the high value black youths placed on sport and the resultant channelling of a disproportionate number of talented blacks into sport participation ... The majority of black aspirants ended up back in the ghetto ... The dream of athletic success became a reality for only a small number of black youths. The majority were left with unfulfilled fantasies of stardom, glamour, and wealth' (Wiggins, 1989).

In short, the high proportion of successful athletes is a result of the volume of interest generated amongst those prepared to try it out within a specific group of people, resulting in a higher proportion of achievers from that group but also a large number that do not succeed.

On this rationale, my enquiry is therefore one that specifically concerns itself with why so much interest in athletics exists amongst the Nandi. Having started with an historical approach that looked at Nandi traditions in running, my study has gone on to see the relevance of athletics and, more broadly, physical endurance in a

contemporary context within the community. This has been tackled through the cultural institutions and events that exist in everyday society, giving rise to norms that are a product of custom and practice for the Nandi. As mentioned elsewhere:

‘the disproportionate number of black athletes in certain sports was contingent on both the cultural setting in which black athletes found themselves and the information that was available to both them and their subculture group. Generally speaking, black athletes arranged their world based upon available information, interpreted the feedback data, and eventually made decisions which hopefully resulted in positive social reward’ (Wiggins, 1989).

5.3 A Society of Sportspeople

An ethnic group is in many ways like a running club, and the community cohesion found amongst the Nandi may be seen to add additional ingredients into the mix of what it takes to be a champion athlete. One athlete explained that becoming a professional runner is a life’s work: “you must dedicate your body to maintaining a certain weight and physique by following very tough training schedules that can last for three to four months at a time” (narrative, 34 year old professional male athlete, 2011). Outside of training and competing, athletics is also a lifestyle choice, sacrificing liberties non-runners take for granted such as what you can eat or drink, where you choose to live and when you wish to socialise. Such are the constraints on athletes’ social freedoms that a training group is all the more important, with individuals suffering together and helping each other through the highs and lows of running.

Additional communal bonds exist where this club is more an affiliation of neighbours or relatives, embarking on a common enterprise that might bring wealth and prestige to their home area. This is noticeable where Kenyan athletes train together in groups that number around twenty people, and also in races where pacesetters lead from the front to give their compatriots favourable race conditions. It also explains why athletics observers have commented that ‘groups of athletes pulling together have a tremendous synergistic power that cannot be overstated’ (Tanser, 2008). There is an additional force propelling the Nandi to international running victories and it begins at home, with the joining of a society – and thereafter a training group – that is underpinned by an athletics, as well as an ethnic kinship.

Nandi culture has certain elements that make for a perfect introduction into the physically demanding world of middle and long distance running. The strong sense of community cohesion already mentioned is a major asset, but this is derived in a number of ways from traditional Nandi customs and practices that lend themselves to the making of a professional athlete. First and foremost, location is a key component in a successful athlete’s training regime and the Nandi have long shown a strong attachment to what they see as their ancestral home (Snell, 1954). Not only are Nandi athletes the beneficiaries of a favourable climate that is cool and damp for much of the year, there is plentiful fresh air and security is scarcely a concern, all very important considerations when running outdoors over long distances for hours at a time: “It would not be pleasant to train in a congested crime-ridden city like Nairobi where there are few other serious athletes” (narrative, 27 year old professional male athlete, 2011). This emphasises why the physical environment of Nandi Hills has become so favoured by international runners.

For the Nandi, their high altitude rural setting in the western highlands that is highly conducive to running is utilised from childhood, with children enjoying the freedom to play in wide open spaces, unimpeded by roads, buildings or industrial activities. In fact, the major industry in Nandi Hills – tea farming – is actually a major enabler of athletics training as it provides good quality running terrain that is secure, private and plentiful. In stark contrast to the sedentary life of many children growing up in areas of higher material affluence – whether in Kenya or elsewhere – it is evident across Nandi Hills that children are physically active from an early age, running to school or simply passing time with games that involve athleticism and sport. Life in the rural highlands may be more rudimentary than in other more developed urban areas in Kenya, but it is possible to see how games that revolve around sport promote strong social ties that begin in childhood and carry forward into school and the rigours of athletics training that may follow.

Having a training camp of professional runners on your doorstep is a strong incentive to get involved with athletics. Although not entirely without its economic and social barriers to entry, an early induction into running is possible even with very limited finances. This was explained to me on the basis that: “Living and training at home is important for young runners with no money” (focus group discussion participant, 23 year old professional female athlete, 2011), and for athletes who begin making money and want to invest their winnings, there are considerable advantages in living near to your family, training group and the investments you make.

The athletics industry that has grown up in and around Nandi Hills generates readily available second-hand athletics kit that may be handed down or sold on at minimal cost. With strong community ties evident in the presence of world and Olympic

champions still living and training in Nandi Hills, there are opportunities for aspiring athletes to utilise ties of kinship and train with elite runners from their home area: “Coming from a place like Nandi Hills increases the chances of getting spotted by an agent or manager who is looking for new talent and has come to the area knowing that it is home to so many top Kenyan athletes” (focus group discussion participant, 19 year old male athlete, 2010). Economies of scale such as these are all important for Nandi deciding on whether to commit to a life of running.

The influence of role models from within the community is often cited for being as, if not more, important than the suitability of the local environment. With a tradition in international athletics that now stretches over six decades, Nandi Hills has long been the epicentre of Kenya’s running talent. At the risk of stereotyping, it is hard not to immediately associate the Nandi with modern day professional athletics, such has been their success in it. In many ways it is the first thing the Nandi are identified with, giving them a unique place in Kenya’s sporting history and offering young men and women a fortuitous insight into what is required to become a professional athlete. Such social capital is hard to ignore, especially when athletes in training are observed on a daily basis and the products of running success in the form of businesses or property are ever-present. When a friend or family member has been financially successful in athletics there is inevitably a strong temptation to follow in their tracks and emulate what they did, which is perfectly logical given the proximity of such social connections.

As role models, athletes from the Nandi community play an important part in perpetuating the success of other runners from the area. Whether as sponsors, coaches or mentors, athletes who have succeeded internationally and made a name for

themselves are revered members of society that brings both a responsibility to take care of others as well as the opportunity to succeed commercially, once their running career comes to an end

‘There is a lot of runner business in Eldoret; Yobes Ondieki ... opened a small gym in town on the Uganda road, as did Moses Tanui, along with his Grand Prix restaurant and bar ... Tanui is also building a row of shops to rent in the complex ... Many athletes are now building schools, as these are proving to be extremely profitable ventures for those with disposable capital’ (Tanser, 2008:44).

The wealth effect of athlete investments exists on a much larger scale in Eldoret, but it has nevertheless been replicated in the smaller towns of Nandi Hills and Kapsabet. Eldoret’s proximity to Nandi Hills – and its importance as an administrative centre in the area – ensures that people from Nandi Hills who regularly visit or use Eldoret cannot be oblivious to the transforming power of wealth from athletics within their community.

Such aspirations to wealth may be inevitable in a developing country, especially amongst people whose livelihoods are largely dependent on agriculture, and many are caught in a poverty cycle that is likely to continue without significant outside intervention. For example it was explained to me that: “Coming from a family that has few resources forces an individual into running, especially where there is little prospect of finding work and all other job opportunities are unappealing” (life history, 25 year old professional female athlete, 2011).

Emulating those from neighbouring towns and villages who have succeeded in generating a viable income from running is also a highly persuasive reason for someone to seriously contemplate the profession themselves. With such a high proportion of athletes coming from the Nandi, members of the tribe may believe that there is something unique about their compatriots' running abilities and that they too could be destined for great things. Ultimately, the individual's desire to escape poverty is the most forceful consideration of all.

It takes more than just a high tolerance of lactic acid build-up in the muscles to produce generations of international runners from the same community, and Nandi running success might also be attributed to a culture of idleness amongst men that affords them all-important rest periods before and after an intensive run. This can be observed around Nandi Hills and Kapsabet with men often seen resting alone or socialising in groups while their wives maintain the family farm or pursue other jobs. This could be another factor that for many years prevented Kenyan women from breaking into the running scene, with domestic household chores to perform in addition to economic activities necessary to sustain a family. Polygyny allowed men to accumulate wives, providing a veritable staff of workers that potentially gave them more free time to ponder agricultural and other business activities. It also made space for an active and much cherished male social life, and possibly running too.

Such a routine of intensive bursts of work, followed by long periods of inactivity and rest is highly conducive to an athletics lifestyle. Morning, afternoon or evening training sessions are interspersed with rest periods, and time spent relaxing between runs allows for little other than sleeping, taking tea or porridge, and generally recovering before the next session. With a man's farming commitments outsourced

or, at the very least dealt with at more opportune times, athletics training is prioritised within the Nandi male daily routine.

5.4 Gender Considerations

Twenty years ago the notion of Kenyan athletes applied almost exclusively to men. But in the last two decades the Nandi have undergone considerable social changes that now regularly sees women enter the running fraternity too. Such has been their success in middle and long distance races in recent years, the emergence of female runners from Nandi has coincided with the empowerment of girls and women, and the relaxation of traditional roles and expectations within the family. This may be compared to the proliferation of female education which is now arguably on a par with men, but 'was not always immediately relevant to the enhancement of opportunities within the modern economy' in previous years (Oboler, 1985). This reinvention of tradition has been very much to Kenya's sporting benefit, building a reputation for athletics brilliance in both male and female running, and drawing further attention to places like Nandi Hills, where runners of both genders are now in a position to raise standards in athletics and make important economic contributions to their family and wider community.

Table 5.1: Sporting Interests in Nandi Hills

	Are you interested in athletics? (N = 100)		Do you feel that athletics is traditionally a Nandi activity? (N = 100)		Have you or a member of your family ever been involved with athletics? (N = 100)	
Male	Yes: 75%	No: 25%	Yes: 71%	No: 29%	Yes: 64%	No: 36%
Female	Yes: 73%	No: 27%	Yes: 68%	No: 32%	Yes: 58%	No: 42%

Table 5.1 demonstrates the general parity of interest in athletics between genders amongst the Nandi. However, the arrival of Nandi women into the world of professional athletics was not altogether based on principles of gender equality. Arranged marriages within the community are still common and families – eager to sell their daughters for bride wealth – are often quick to negotiate a marriage. One woman commented that: “After the wedding there typically comes a progression of expectations: that she will give birth to and care for the children; collect firewood from the forest; attend to the cattle and much of the farm work generally” (focus group discussion participant, 34 year old wife of a professional athlete, 2010).

The opportunity to run may have become more common in some instances, and the community as a whole more accepting of this, but for many women training would not easily fit into their daily schedule, and even the chance to decide what that schedule might constitute is limited too. In other instances, however, it essentially boils down to an economic decision or, more specifically, an opportunity cost, for example: “If a wife or daughter demonstrates an ability in running, her husband or family may agree to it if her prospects are good, and would not damage business or family commitments” (narrative, 43 year old brother of a professional female athlete, 2011).

This investigation into how athletics can be seen culturally as part of Nandi identity and an important component of community life has been dealt with by way of a socio-cultural investigation in accordance with my second research objective. My findings support my second assumption that ‘athletes assume a prominent status in community life in accordance with traditional customs and practices that respect physical achievements and dedication to running’. This chapter has outlined important cultural

events amongst the Nandi, relating them to the development of a society that has cultivated strong links with professional athletics, supporting my second assumption.

Further, the production and reproduction of running amongst the Nandi has been possible through strict adherence to cultural norms that maintains a society of individuals attracted to, amongst other things, the idea of respect for physical endurance. With Nandi customs and practices incubating essential components of running such as pain and hunger tolerance, supporting your fellow Nandi, and pushing your body to extreme levels of physical exertion, it is possible to understand the high level of localised interest in running in Nandi Hills. The widespread socialisation of athletics amongst individuals – familiar since childhood of the need to be physically strong and able to carry this belief into practice later on in life – must therefore be analysed to see how social and cultural norms materialise in daily life. This will be dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Athletics as a Lifestyle for the Nandi

'An athlete in Kenya runs to escape poverty ... I fight to survive' (Pitsiladis et al, 2007:27).

6.1 Introduction

Strong social and cultural traditions in running are a major influence on Nandi athletes today. Having documented the major considerations that determine the future aspirations of mostly young men and women, it is important to describe the surrounding environment and understand the major motivational factors that compel an individual, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, into a life of running. This builds on the historical and contemporary manifestations of identity outlined in the previous two chapters, and seeks to explain the decision-making process that commonly influences members of the community to become athletes.

6.2 Socio-Cultural Orientation of the Study Population

The everyday practices of people in Nandi Hills are paramount drivers for athletics as a lifestyle choice, and the lived experiences of runners bears out the importance of community, society and culture in making this choice.

Table 6.1: Culture and Identity in Nandi Hills

Age group / Gender	Please rank the following 1-5 in terms of which is most likely to influence someone's choice of career (N = 100)				
11-20	1. Ability	2. Earnings	3. Education	4. Role models	5. Travel
21-30	1. Earnings	2. Ability	3. Role models	4. Education	5. Travel
31-40	1. Earnings	2. Ability	3. Education	4. Travel	5. Role models
40+	1. Earnings	2. Ability	3. Travel	4. Education	5. Role models
Men	1. Earnings	2. Education	3. Role models	4. Ability	5. Travel
Women	1. Earnings	2. Education	3. Ability	4. Role models	5. Travel

Faced with the challenges of growing up and living in Nandi Hills, limited employment prospects force individuals to think long and hard about their career options. Many appear to be guided by the need simply to make money and provide for their family, as is reflected in Table 6.1. Notions of job satisfaction, work/life balance or even future career prospects are barely relevant when the risk of poverty and suffering are a very real threat. Not only can such hardship serve as a stimulus giving an athlete greater determination to succeed, in many ways it creates the basic conditions needed for middle and long distance runners to train and focus on their running too.

Despite the fact that Nandi Hills is not a food scarcity area, hunger is still a consideration for many people there, as demonstrated by the comment: "The everyday reality of food shortages results in relatively lighter bodies amongst the Nandi, giving a better physique for endurance running" (focus group discussion, 28 year old professional male athlete, 2010). Dietary considerations were further in evidence in

the comment that: “the availability of nutrition in the form of milk – which is usually plentiful in Nandi Hills – is important for athletes getting essential amino acids, and is consumed in large quantities” (focus group participant, professional athletics coach, 2010).

Stephen Cherono took up athletics as a career in order to escape poverty, even renouncing his Kenyan citizenship to become a professional athlete for Qatar, under the name Saif Saaeed Shaheen (BBC, 27 August 2003). As a child Cherono’s family had 60 cows and 30 goats until a drought left them with just 7 cows and 3 goats. Since the animals would have been sold to pay for his education, Cherono was forced to abandon school and become a provider for his family instead (Pitsiladis et al, 2007). Looking back his decision to join athletics has been more than vindicated as Cherono became a world junior steeplechase champion for Kenya before defecting to Qatar in 2003 for a reported \$1 million (Daily Nation, 2 June 2005). The money he made from athletics has enabled him to live a comfortable life whilst supporting family members through studies at colleges in Kenya and the USA.

Although not a Nandi, Cherono’s case is illustrative of the thought process common to the majority of people who enter athletics in Nandi Hills. Despite the denunciation of Kenya’s President for changing citizenship for financial gain, one athlete remarked that: “athletes generally support Cherono and understand the reasons why he left for Qatar” (focus group discussion participant, 28 year old professional male athlete, 2010).

6.3 *Habitus*, Field and Capital in the Context of Nandi Athletes

There may be very logical forces connecting poverty and running that have been observed in relating other sports to social classes, for example, why wealthy individuals readily identify with pursuits such as swimming or tennis that require economic as well as physical means in order to participate. Running could be likened to the most basic and innate of all sports, needing little or no financial investment, simply the time and dedication of an individual to keep their body in the required optimal condition for performance. No formal education is necessary for an athlete to succeed, and with little by way of a code of practice or proscribed etiquette, running might be seen as less of a rules-orientated activity than socially exclusive sports like polo, sailing or golf. These are relatively capital intensive in the facilities they require, generally viewed as upper class activities found at expensive private schools and members clubs in Kenya.

The relationship between sport and socio-economic status could be summarised as 'economic, cultural and social capital (money for membership, knowledge of the 'right' sport and the 'appropriate' clubs, connections with people who can help attain access to the club) empowering socialisation processes' (Pauille, 2010). In the case of Nandi athletes using running as a means to escape poverty, it is possible to apply this rationale and consider: ready membership of a training group by virtue of their ethnicity and location; knowledge of the rural location and being able to use it for training purposes; and, connections with athletes based on the high number of people who are athletes in Nandi Hills and the success of Nandi athletes over the last 50+ years. By virtue of their socio-economic status, athletics is an obvious choice for the Nandi since it is the most accessible sport for them in terms of their economic, cultural and social capital.

It is difficult to imagine relatively affluent people wishing to become professional athletes, whether Nandi or otherwise, as opportunities to study and join office based professions might seem more appealing than the sweat and toil of running. Athletics is a last resort for a largely marginalised socio-economic group that has fewer alternatives to consider for work or pleasure, and who may be more inclined to simply equate physical inputs with likely financial outputs. In other words, “it is an easy and satisfying notion to simply assume that the harder you train, the more likely you are to succeed” (focus group participant, 48 year old male professional athletics coach, Nandi Hills, 2011).

The works of Bourdieu (1984) and Elias (1939) are informative in relating culture and society to the pursuit of running as an economic activity. In order to do so, it is important to consider that human conduct tends to be orchestrated by dispositions functioning beneath the level of discursive consciousness. Giving rise to habits that may be observed as a system of acquired dispositions activating beliefs, practices and responses to the social world inhabited, there is an early affinity for running and physical endurance amongst the Nandi that is a product of widely socialised everyday norms apparent to them.

Understanding *habitus* as a system of acquired dispositions will not, however, explain the continued production of professional athletes from one community. There needs to be a social setting – in part constructed by, but also in existence to serve and reinforce this *habitus* – that supports and offers space for the realisation of these beliefs, practices and responses. This has been conceptualised as the ‘field’, or more specifically, ‘specific bundles of shifting social relations amongst interdependent people, positions, and institutions within a broader society’ (Paulle, 2010). These

particular social microcosms take on different forms, but for the purpose of this study, the field as a concept exists in the pursuit of running in both time and space, and the social relations engendered by running as an activity.

With *habitus* and field combining to create a society of runners that, in the case of the Nandi, has dominated middle and long distance athletics, there remains one other component that makes up the triad of concepts, that of capital. Within a social system, individuals and groups accumulate different amounts and types of (non-economic) power resources which emerge out of, function within and restructure unfolding social configurations. With Nandi society heavily fixated on running as both an important cultural and economic entity, it is possible to conceive of social relations governed by a hierarchy of athletes that is dependent on notions of running success and achievement, potential and physical appearance, knowledge of the industry and even family history.

This social capital is a fundamental determinant of someone's place in society, and for many Nandi, is a struggle as important as amassing significant financial rewards. Capital equates to power within the social group and is the product of *habitus* and field coming together. In reality, the importance of significant financial incentives cannot be discounted, but it must be remembered that this exists in the context of a moral economy, and investment back into the society, support for family and other members of the community, and continued respect for socio-cultural norms feedback into maintaining Nandi running superiority.

The triad of *habitus*, field and capital in the context of running has been sustained over many years, with modifications evident in the passage of time. This study initially identified cattle raiding as an important social, cultural and economic activity

for the Nandi that relied on endurance running and physical fitness. With the onset of colonialism, the initial Nandi resistance to an emerging set of alien norms and values gave rise to a period of hypothetical negotiation with the colonial government, resulting in a modification of their running *habitus* and the valourisation of new forms of running. This was initially in the form of access into the uniformed services such as the army and police by virtue of physical fitness and aptitude, and was subsequently modified again once the opportunity of (semi) professional athletics presented itself.

The manifestations of *habitus* in different fields can also be observed over time, as can the continued presence of capital as the ultimate goal for the Nandi: either internally within the society or in relation to its neighbours; through employment by the colonial government; or more recently at the level of international competitions. This continuation and modification over time of the triad goes some way to explaining the widespread socialisation of running amongst the Nandi. Expectations, values and desires seep into the subjectivities of those who are admitted into Nandi society, and those who become familiar with its internal dynamics are deeply and durably shaped by it through extended exposure to a specific set of everyday practices.

6.4 Extraversion and the International Opportunities for Runners

Competitive running need not take place entirely on a professional basis, and there are strong connections between schools and athletics in Kenya. First, athletes may complete their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) and, having demonstrated sporting ability in school, might contemplate running whilst also pursuing higher education in college or university. Schools are an important platform into the world of professional athletics as St Patrick's High School in Iten has

demonstrated. Having produced two Olympic champions, one world champion and many others who have competed at the highest level, it is known as a bastion of nurturing Kenya's running talent (Irish Times, 22 March 2010). The equivalent for girls' schools are probably Sing'ore Girls, also in Iten, or Kapkenda Girls in Eldoret, both also known for producing top international athletes.

Another important development which in recent years has swayed students from the Nandi community to take an active interest in running has been the availability of academic scholarships in the USA. With American universities keen to enhance the ethnic diversity of their intake as well as the quality of their athletics teams, one such facilitator has been scholarship programs such as the Kenya Scholar-Athlete Project (KenSAP).

On getting admitted into KenSAP, 'all students participate in regular athletics training with a view to gauging whether any of them, regardless of previous interest or participation, demonstrates running talent of a standard that might interest a college coach' (www.kensap.org). KenSAP is further described as helping 'bright students from an underserved region of Kenya gain admission to elite colleges in the United States ... The Project's target region, western Rift Valley Province, produces most of Kenya's renowned international athletes – a fact that led the founders to expect that at least a few of the Project's students, though chosen largely for their academic accomplishments, might also turn out to be capable runners' (www.kensap.org).

It is therefore not just the Nandi themselves who believe they are destined to be amongst the world's best middle and long distance runners, but through organisations such as KenSAP and the American universities it serves, that view is reinforced at an international level. In much the same way as the British army was keen to recruit the

Nandi as soldiers because of their reputation as fighters – supplying a higher percentage than did any other Kenyan people: roughly 10 per cent of the adult male population served in the army between 1914 and 1918 (Greenstein, 1978) – so in later years did the Nandi reputation for running provide new opportunities to the community.

Bayart noted that ‘Africa south of the Sahara is often said to be the limbo of the international system, existing only at the outer limits of the planet which we inhabit’ (Bayart, 2000). Whilst this statement may be applicable to areas such as politics, business and law, my study has revealed an international system of Kenyan athletes and scholars who travel the world and compete at the highest level because of their running ability. Middle and long distance athletics has for many years been dominated by Kenyans, a trend that looks set to continue as young men and women are increasingly drawn to professional athletics. And yet for a community which has been described variously as conservative, parochial and non-materialistic, there is an apparent contradiction in relating the Nandi to a global system of high earnings and international fame.

The notion of extraversion enunciated by Bayart is one where ‘relationships such as those which African societies maintained with their external environment were crucial to the constitution of their internal politics, even if the effects of this connection between the two spheres of the internal and the external varied from place to place and time to time’ (Bayart, 2000). This concept could be exemplified by the term ‘localising the global’, demonstrating the importance of international standards, practices and norms within diverse and often remote social settings. The Nandi could be used as an example of a community that has long been part of an international

system – ever since the first encounters between Africans and Europeans in the late 19th century – from which it has derived new sets of ideas.

Passing through the periods of pre-colonialism, colonialism, independence and contemporary globalisation, we can see how the Nandi have related their running expertise to systems of capital that were initially local but now largely international. Such proximity to global standards can be seen in the Nandi transition from raiding and cattle rustling to European notions of running brought in during colonialism. It is also apparent in the continuation of Nandi extraversion from colonial running pursuits to Olympics and international marathons. This represents an ability by Nandi people to adapt to changing circumstances by continually relating their lived experiences of *habitus*, field and capital to global systems.

This investigation into the relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running has been dealt with by way of an ethnographic enquiry in accordance with my third research objective. My findings support my third assumption that ‘an athlete’s choice of lifestyle and profession is informed by their community, family and role models’. This chapter has applied the key theoretical rationale of *habitus*, field and capital, as well as extraversion to my social and cultural findings, developing a commentary on the lifestyles of Nandi people that supports my third assumption.

My research reveals a strong desire amongst the people surveyed to maximise their earning potential when considering career options. This is not surprising given the immense wealth available to athletes who succeed at international level and, as was illustrated by the story of Stephen Cherenó, it is viewed as the single biggest motivation to take up athletics professionally. In the previous chapter it was explained that poverty and hardship are conducive to a career in athletics because they force

individuals to learn pain tolerance, driving them to levels of commitment and dedication that may not be found in more affluent societies. In this chapter, the social and cultural inheritance for many Nandi is viewed in terms of the way it influences contemporary aspirations, and how new opportunities have emerged through running.

Contemporary lifestyles are still shaped by the social and cultural norms young Nandi men and women experience every day, and running remains at the centre of these experiences. However, as more opportunities open up to young runners – such as the chance to compete for a different country or gain a university scholarship abroad – there is greater plurality in the experiences of a Nandi runner. For example, a Nandi athlete might now be plying his/her trade under the flag of a European country or to pursue a degree in law at an Ivy League university. Running is still the mechanism through which he/she has transitioned to a different socio-economic status, but it represents a move away from the earlier forms of cultural capital that were subsumed within the idea of a Nandi runner. In short, the community base remains, but aspirations are increasingly international in scope.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

This study has considered the ways in which Nandi athletes have embraced and excelled in different manifestations of athleticism. With a particular focus on running, the various forms of physical exertion that have been valourised by Nandi people over the years has given rise to a phenomena whereby an entire community has contributed a disproportionate number of middle and long distance runners to the world of professional athletics. With decades of international achievers coming from one ethnic group, it is fair to investigate the factors that may have given rise to this, and they have been set out in the preceding chapters.

My findings supported my three assumptions that:

- i. Pre-sportised physical activities such as raiding and cattle rustling were traditionally popular in Nandi Hills
- ii. Athletes influenced by traditional Nandi customs and practices
- iii. There is a relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running amongst the Nandi

First, the pre-sportised tradition of running was a major economic activity for the Nandi in raiding and cattle rustling. This has carried forward into professional running in Nandi Hills that has raised material living standards for many people in recent years. As prize money for winning races has grown through greater sponsorship of events, and as Nandi athletes have increasingly been able to participate in these events, individuals and their families have accumulated greater wealth. A common feature of athletes' wealth has been investment at home in land, property, and

farming, lifting the local economy in and around Nandi Hills and disseminating financial capital within the community. Other direct beneficiaries have been those who have enjoyed personal investment from successful athletes, particularly in education, business or athletics training. By sharing their wealth within the community, the local economy of the Nandi region has undoubtedly been lifted.

The economic benefits of running therefore responds to my first research objective: 'To investigate if athletics in Nandi Hills has origins in pre-sportised running such as raiding and cattle rustling'. This can be seen as a consequence of the Nandi utilising athleticism to their economic advantage as raiders and cattle rustlers before colonialism. Under colonial rule, the Nandi were favoured for their athletic abilities and recruited into the British army, as well as the police and prison services, with these uniformed services prepared to offer promising athletes the opportunity to develop their talents through training and competitions. Once professional running became a sport that Kenya was able to contribute top athletes to, an increasing number of individuals opted to pursue running as their sole career.

Second, the Nandi have enjoyed a renaissance through the greater empowerment of women who are able to succeed through athletics. This has come at a time of political moves at a national level which have also sought to improve gender equality through legislation and outreach campaigns promoting women's rights. Against this backdrop, Nandi women have forged their own path within changing social dynamics by gaining greater financial independence and proving themselves to be capable of succeeding at the highest levels of competition. This has undoubtedly changed local attitudes to the point where women's social and family roles – whilst still defined patriarchally – are perhaps less restricted and limited in scope.

Observing these social changes deals with my second research objective: 'To examine the extent to which athletes are influenced by traditional Nandi customs and practices'. Athletics has contributed noticeable social transformation in Nandi Hills, not just through alterations in the roles of women, but through the social status acquired by runners who are able to offer financial support to the community, and investment in the area. Athletes of both genders therefore occupy an important place in community life, in contrast to the previously male-centric social hierarchy. Whereas traditional Nandi customs accorded social status to men as athletic warriors, the widespread popularisation of professional running within the Nandi community has elevated both men and women as a consequence of physical prowess.

Third, cultural transformation amongst the Nandi might be seen as the product of economic and social progress – along with other factors such as religious, political and legal changes – that have taken place and impacted directly on people in Nandi Hills. It could also be a consequence of greater interaction with other cultures, invoking adjustments in customs and habits that are commonly experienced within a number of families and social units. Greater travel opportunities both nationally and internationally have presented themselves to the Nandi as a consequence of athletics, and the likelihood that runners – whether individually or collectively – have imbibed new ideas and lifestyles cannot be discounted.

Understanding the influx of new cultural perspectives into Nandi Hills follows my third research objective: 'To analyse the relationship between culture, lifestyle and an affinity for running amongst the Nandi'. With such a large number of people from the Nandi community involved in running, local cultural adjustments have occurred in Nandi Hills as the importance of connecting with people from different ethno-cultural

backgrounds becomes more apparent. One such example could be the diminishing importance of the Nandi vernacular, as individuals increasingly resort to English or Kiswahili. The Nandi are able to maintain a language and traditional value system that is specific to them, but it must be seen within the context of the national and international standards many of their people have been exposed to that has elevated the importance of other languages.

Athletics has arguably strengthened the community through its pride in a high number of successful athletes coming from its midst, however it has also introduced new ideas that make the Nandi seem less connected to previously established cultural practices. The near-disappearance of female circumcision is an example of cultural change within the community that recognises the greater autonomy of women. For men, whilst circumcision is cited as a vital component of male athletics success, the contemporary custom is one month's seclusion in the forest, and not the six months commonly practiced twenty years ago.

7.1 Recommendations

Economics, culture and society are by no means the exclusive – or even necessarily the most critical – areas impacting on the Nandi as a result of involvement in professional athletics, however they serve as a starting point for others to consider what it means to be a Nandi today. This thesis has sought to prove the inextricable links between the Nandi and running. A subsequent investigation may wish to consider the extent to which those links remain, and how they may (or may not) reinforce each other.

As a contemporary stereotype, it is hard at first glance not to label the Nandi as a running people, and it would be interesting to see how athletics and Nandi identity interact (or at the very least coincide). Perspectives on the transforming effect of financial capital and foreign travel on rural life could be developed further, as could a study of the roles played by former athletes in political leadership of the community. In terms of lifestyles and everyday practices, these could both be viewed through the lens of economic, social and cultural practices, reversing the analysis from how the Nandi have shaped athletics to how athletics has shaped the Nandi.

Subsequent research might also wish to explore more widely within the Kalenjin group of runners to compare and contrast Nandi experiences with those of the Kipsigis, Keiyo, Tugen, Marakwet and Pokot. These other ethnic groups are linguistically and culturally related to the Nandi, and have also contributed a good number of professional runners to the world of running. The Maasai are another community whose culture, lifestyle and everyday practices might be a reason for the production and reproduction of successful runners.

CHAPTER EIGHT

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CHAPTER NINE

Appendices: Research Instruments

9.1 Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

In order to better understand the issues relating to athletics in Nandi Hills, I would like to ask you a few questions. I am writing a thesis examining the everyday practices behind the success of Nandi athletes, uncovering the reasons why athletes from Nandi Hills have been so successful at middle and long distance running.

You have been selected because you are either (1) an athlete or involved with athletics; (2) someone who was born, brought up and educated in Nandi Hills; or (3) a Nandi elder.

Please keep in mind that all answers are confidential.

SECTION ONE: Demographic Profile

Question	Answer	
1. What is your gender?	Male	Female
2. What is your age?		
3. Have you completed any of the following levels of education?	Primary school	
	Secondary school	
	University / College	
4. What is your mother tongue?		

SECTION TWO: Culture and Identity

Question	Answer
5. What remind you of home?	
6. Name one family tradition:	
7. What are some of the media representations of people from your ethnic group?	
8. What are some of the things you enjoy about your ethnic heritage and culture?	
9. Who are your local community role models?	
10. Name three skills and/or professions your community is known for?	
11. Please rank the following 1-5 in terms of which is most likely to influence someone's choice of career:	Role models
	Earning potential
	Personal ability
	Travelling opportunities
	Education / Training

SECTION THREE: Sporting Interests

Question	Answer
12. Please state your three favourite sports:	1. 2. 3.
13. Are you interested in athletics?	Yes
	No
14. Do you feel that athletics is traditionally a Nandi activity?	Yes
	No
15. Have you or a member of your immediate family ever been involved with athletics?	Yes
	No
16. Please rank the following 1-5 in terms of which is most likely to produce a successful athlete:	Place of birth
	Physique
	Diet
	Ethnicity
	Number of hours spent training

9.2 Appendix 2: Guide for Focus Group Discussions, Narratives and Life Histories

How can an individual begin a career in athletics?

What are the constraints to becoming an athlete?

What support exists for athletes in Nandi Hills?

What are the main motivations to pursuing a career in athletics?

What is the role of the community in influencing this choice?

Are athletes more likely to train in Nandi Hills or elsewhere?

How has athletics become so popular amongst the Nandi?