MARRIAGE MATTERS

Imagining love and belonging in Uganda

Edited by Lotte Meinert,
Julaina A. Obika and Nanna Schneidermann

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Marriage matters in Uganda: an introduction

Nanna Schneidermann, Julaina A. Obika and Lotte Meinert

A morning in Gulu: is marriage about love?

Evangeline is sitting outside her husband John's shop selling *mandazi* in the morning hours. Greeting friends and acquaintances in the busy street in the middle of Gulu city, she bags the deep-fried cakes, takes payment and a few women stop and chat for a while. Some are in a hurry and others slip into ongoing conversations about friends, family and getting by in town. The second eldest child in the family, Jenny, joins the group of women. She is on a break after her senior secondary school exam. Nanna, an anthropologist on fieldwork, joins them for *mandazi* and tea. She settles down on the bench between Jenny and a woman called Grace, who sips tea from a bright pink plastic cup before leaving for her job at an NGO. Nanna has a pressing question after an interview with a cultural leader the day before: 'The elders say that for the Acholi, marriage is not about love. Do you agree with them?' she asks the women. Evangeline proclaims:

> Ah no. That one is a lie, I cannot accept. What makes people come together and make people stay together for very many years? It is love! What makes us to get so close and have that friendship if not love? Without love, there is no marriage. It cannot happen and it will not work out. The elders, maybe in their time, they just get somebody and marry them [then and] there, but for us now, it is about love.

'Hah!', responds Grace and jeers, 'Love these days is not easy'. She stays in a rented room and is alone with her children. She only has bitter remarks about her children's father after he 'married' another woman and stopped supporting Grace and her children.

Later, while Jenny, Evangeline and Nanna are washing up the cooking gear in the semi-privacy of the courtyard, Nanna asks Evangeline: 'So what about you? Do you also love your husband?' 'I loved the man!' Evangeline exclaims, stands up and wipes her forehead with the back of a wet hand. 'But I got so disappointed in love. I wanted to be somewhere else by now, in my own house with my children. I used to love that man so much, but what he has shown me has made the love almost disappear'. For 10 years, Evangeline had hoped for a traditional marriage with bride wealth from John to secure her place in the family, and she had hoped for John to buy a plot of land and build a house for her and the children. This is why she started selling *mandazi*. Evangeline hopes that she can save money and buy her own plot: 'I want to show him that I can do it and become independent from him. Then me and the children can stay in peace!' Nanna then turns to Jenny: 'What about you? Do you think you will find love in the future?' Jenny rolls her eyes and tuts like she has heard the talk of these older women one too many times:

> I don't have time to think about love. I am going to study Law and make my own money. I know what I want in life, and I cannot be disorganised by boys. Anyway, my husband will be a professional like me – I have no time for a guy with an idle mind.

Marriage matters as modes of imagining gendered futures

This situation in Gulu in December 2019 was recorded in fieldnotes by Nanna Schneidermann as part of our collective research project on marriage and gender in northern and eastern Uganda. In Uganda, formal marriage – in the sense of marriage with bride wealth – is apparently declining sharply (Baral et al. 2021). From the declining numbers, one might assume that marriage is simply not as important as it used to be. Yet, as evident from the conversations between Evangeline, her friends and her daughter, marriage still matters a great deal to most. What warrants investigations is how marriage matters and what it means as partnerships in Uganda are transforming.

The decline of marriage in Uganda may be seen as an instantiation of global processes of transformation of partnerships, gender roles and reproduction, characterised by the rise of companionate marriage as an ideal for partnerships (Hirsh and Wardlow 2006; Parikh 2016), economic liberation of women and access to family planning and assisted reproductive technologies (Davidson and Hannaford 2022). Yet these processes are not homogenous, neither across the world, nor across Uganda – not even in the same families. As in the conversation at the *mandazi* shop shows, what is at stake in marriage is complex. The clan elders may say that marriage is not primarily about the individual emotions of the bride and groom, but about the good life, understood as social harmony between families and clans (Obika et al. 2018; Porter 2017). However, as Evangeline discusses, affective dimensions of partnerships between individuals do make a difference, which underlines the normative link between romantic love and modernity. At the same time, love is not merely about emotions, but also about economy and social security. For Grace, love is not easy, and her relationship ended when her partner stopped supporting her and their children. Evangeline hopes for a formal marriage with an exchange of bride wealth. The social recognition of being a married wife matters, as does the access to land and property, and thereby economic security, provided by a formal marriage. Jenny, who is part of a younger generation, adds a different expectation of companionate marriage from Grace's and Evangeline's hopes of being provided for by a husband: one based on mutual economic and educational status and, perhaps most importantly, a shared 'mindset' of social mobility. Jenny also grew up in a different time; Evangeline's childhood and youth were deeply marked by the insecurity and displacements of war in northern Uganda. She met John towards the end of the devastating civil war between the rebel group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan government, which lasted from 1986 to 2006. Jenny was coming of age in the optimistic times of post-conflict reconstruction and economic boom.

Both Evangeline and Jenny's dreams were radical, though, in terms of imagining gendered futures and challenging patriarchal ideals and practices: land tenure in Uganda is largely patrilineal and settlement is mostly patrilocal, which means that women typically move in with their husbands' families, and children belong to their fathers' clan. Yet many women, like Grace, Evangeline and Jenny, live otherwise and face public discourses that brand well-educated women, single women, divorced women, migrant women or women in well-paid jobs as 'difficult' and 'selfish' in their unwillingness to submit to traditionalistic

gender roles. And, as we shall see, men are also sometimes brandished as 'irresponsible', 'disrespectful' and 'lazy' when they fail to perform their idealised gender roles.

What and how marriage matters here raises questions about generational, economic and educational positions in the past and present, and how one envisions a future for oneself and one's children, community and larger society – visions that are deeply shaped by gendered experiences. How different would these stories be if Nanna had asked Evangeline's John, Jenny's older brother Nathan or Grace's ex-partner? In this book, we approach questions about marriage in Uganda from a range of different positions – from among men, women, grandparents, children, rural and urban, rich and poor, more- and less-educated – in order to acknowledge some of the diversity in Uganda.

As the deliberations of the women in the *mandazi* shop in Gulu demonstrate, marriage matters: as an ethical project in the tension between continuity and change, as a search for the good life and for love. These deliberations are ambiguous at times, as Evangeline expresses so clearly – disappointment and hope can co-exist. At other levels, marriage matters as a political project and an institution that reproduces family units, clanship, citizens, communities, ethnic groups and the state. This book examines how marriage and partnerships matter and considers these central parts of gender relations in times of social transformation in Uganda. It takes these marriage matters as modes of imagining gendered futures – how people imagine and strive towards gender roles and ideals, families, reproduction and child-rearing. Analysing enduring concerns and recent innovations, we discuss how Ugandan realities are changing, and how anthropology about marriage and partnerships has changed as well.

Marriage in Uganda

In the 1995 census in Uganda, 64 per cent of women aged 15–49 considered themselves 'married', while 9 per cent were 'co-habiting' (Uganda Statistics Department 1996). By 2016, only 30 per cent of women considered themselves married, while 30 per cent were co-habiting. The proportion of those who were never married increased from 16 per cent to 26 per cent (UBOS 2017). In the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) in 2022, the categories of 'married' and 'co-habiting' had been combined, and, according to this survey, 61 per cent of women aged 15–49 considered themselves married or living together with a partner.

The decision to combine the two categories together in the UDHS statistics is interesting and could indicate that less attention is being paid to the differences between being formally married with bride wealth and living together with no formal agreements. This raises questions: Are fewer people in Uganda getting married than before and, if so, why? And, has the question 'Are you married?' come to mean something different over the past decades? Rather than trying to find out whether it is one or the other, this book explores 'the how' of large-scale social transformations taking place at the centre of intimate relations of social and biological reproduction.

Our approach to this inquiry involves in-depth case studies on the diversity of transformations taking place in and through partnerships in Uganda, using comparison as a method of critical engagement with differences across geographical regions, conflict histories, urban, rural and migrant situations, as well as gender and generational perspectives. The studies in this book take as their vantage point people and families from northern and eastern Uganda, characterised by being the poorest regions in the country but also by very different historical structures behind this marginalisation. In the Acholi region, we often heard claims about 'people not marrying after the war'. Yet the declining trend in marriage was approximately the same in regions that had not experienced war, which raised our curiosity.

Conflict is one dimension of difference between northern and eastern Uganda. President Museveni and the Ugandan army, first the National Resistance Army, then the National Resistance Movement and later the Ugandan People's Defense Forces, had, since taking power in 1986, been fighting rebel movements. In northern Uganda, clashes with the rebel group LRA turned into one of the most longstanding and violent civil wars on the continent in the decades after 1986, with 90 per cent of the population in the Acholi sub-region staying in camps for internally displaced persons (Dolan 2009; Finnström 2008). After the ceasefire in 2006, processes of recovery and repair have been taking place. In the Karamoja sub-region of northern Uganda, conflict patterns have been marked by mutual raids between armed groups, before disarmament efforts resulted in more lasting peace in the 2000s, even though they too have been violent. A strong public discourse in northern Uganda, from media, cultural institutions as well as research, posits that the war caused trauma, tore apart institutions that supported social reproduction and destroyed wealth, leaving young generations 'lost' with no knowledge of how or what possibilities existed for legitimising partnerships. Here, a number of studies have followed children abducted by the rebel army, and

how they struggled to create and maintain families after the war (Apio 2016; Kiconco and Nthakomwa 2018). Schulz, Apio and Oryem (2024) remind us to examine the simultaneities of love, care and suffering, as it is problematic to describe the conflict in northern Uganda with only a view of violence, further dehumanising those living through it. One of the questions that prompted our common research project was about what violent conflict has meant for continuities and transformations in marriage and partnership practices – in this way, our studies in northern and eastern Uganda became pertinent and interesting to compare.

In contrast to the north, eastern Uganda was relatively peaceful and experienced no large-scale violent conflicts during the time after Museveni's take-over in 1986. Yet, economic development in both eastern and northern Uganda has been below the national average. In eastern Uganda, there has been the same trend of a decline in marriages and profound unease and uncertainty about the future of partnerships and families, as institutions around marriage seem to weaken. We were curious to learn: What might the different dimensions of the decline of marriage be in these two regions? How do people of different ages and gendered positions understand these changes? And what comes instead of marriage?

Perhaps there are other structural changes than conflict that have been shaping the transformation of marriages and partnerships in Uganda? Since the census in 1995, the population in Uganda has almost tripled from 17 million to 47 million in 2023, despite also going through the height of the AIDS epidemic in the same period. Northern Uganda is the least densely populated region in Uganda but, after the war, there have been numerous conflicts over land and other resources (Meinert and Whyte 2023). Eastern Uganda is much more densely populated, and the pressure on access to land has intensified, not least for the young generation. Overall, Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with half of its inhabitants younger than 15 years old and one in three (33 per cent) households headed by women (UBOS 2022). Though total fertility decreased from 6.8 children per woman in year 2000 to 5.2 children per woman in 2022, it is still twice the global average. These structural transformations of politics, economy, education, demography and conflict seem to indicate that the conditions for establishing a marriage have radically changed in the past 30 years; yet partnership formation, having children, a home and a family continues to be highly valued by Ugandans.

By focusing on a diversity of experiences from different gendered and generational positions in northern and eastern Uganda, we are able to say something about what is at stake, and what matters for individuals,

families and communities within seemingly large-scale structural transformations in how a society organises partnerships and the belonging of children to families. As described here, there are multitudes of structural processes of transformation that shape 'marriage matters' in Uganda, and our joint exploration should be seen as an attempt to engage with these diversities as intersecting dimensions of gender relations. Hence, this is a critical engagement with comparison (Carsten et al. 2021) aimed at describing and analysing diversities, and providing a nuanced and multi-vocal case study from Uganda on the overall global trend of declining marriage rates.

Changes in marriage and bride wealth practices have consequences for the relations between generations. Children of parents who are not married have less rights than children of parents who are married – e.g. in relation to land and property inheritance. Parents of couples who are married are in an in-law position in relation to their daughter- or son-in-law, and these relationships come with obligations, respect and sometimes avoidance rituals. If a couple is not married, the relationship to the father and mother of the partner depends on a variety of personal preferences and issues and does not include formal obligations in terms of financial or other support. The changes in marriage practices thus indicate profound transformations in social cohesion and a sense of belonging in Uganda. Kinship, ethnic group and religion continue to provide – we argue – a primary sense of belonging in Uganda, but the 'marriage glue' that used to stick different clans, ethnic groups and religious communities together across boundaries of belonging is decreasing in power. Yet, other forms of belonging may be increasing in significance, such as education, class and, perhaps, the state (see Schneidermann and Otim, this volume; Meinert, this volume).

Marriage in flux

Listening to contemporary debates in Uganda, both in the media and everyday conversation, like at the *mandazi* shop above, it is tempting to slip into a dichotomy between marriage past and present: an infinite unchanging 'tradition' of families in harmony stretching into the past, while the present is characterised by upheaval, uncertainty and change, making the future unclear. But historical research suggests that marriage matters in Uganda have always been contested, emergent and diverse (Alava 2017, 2021; Foster 1958). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in an attempt to 'bring order' to the diverse marital practices,

the missionaries in Uganda tried to establish existing parallels to Christian marriage ceremonies, and whether divorce was lawful (Stephens 2016). They observed a variety of both contemporary and historical practices of marriage and domestic sexual relations. Taking the case of central and eastern Uganda (Buganda, Bugwere and Busoga), Stephens' historical perspective of marriage in Uganda reflects a continuous transformation and complexity of domestic relations coated with varying degrees of disruption, change, continuity and dynamism that 'enabled women and men to negotiate changing social and political realities by adapting the ways in which they constituted marital relationships' (2016: 129). These complexities are also reflected in national politics. Attempts to pass a marriage bill that is suitable for a modern nation-state have failed again and again over the past decades but have successfully sparked intense public debates on gender, rights and the future of the nation.

In 1995, the passing of a new constitution in Uganda concluded decades of war and political upheaval around the country's government, as the National Resistance Movement (NRM) consolidated state power with Yoweri Museveni as president. The new constitution imagined new gender futures for Ugandans, by setting a framework for gender-sensitive laws and introducing the requirement that there should be representation of women at all levels in elective politics. But gender equality and inclusion are more complex than that (Tamale 1999 [2018]). Creating legislative frameworks that reflect Uganda as a modern state has been notoriously difficult. Article 31 of the 1995 Ugandan constitution reads: 'Men and women of the age of eighteen years and above, have the right to marry and to found a family and are entitled to equal rights in marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution'. But the Marriage Act of Uganda, to which the constitution referred to, was an inherited colonial law from 1904.[1] It recognises five distinctive forms of marriage: civil, customary, church, Moslem and Hindu. These legal frameworks laid the groundwork for the presentation of the Marriage and Divorce Bill in 2009. The bill sought comprehensively to address a spectrum of issues, including marital rights and duties, inheritance, co-habitation's impact on property rights, separation and divorce, and their associated consequences (Marriage and Divorce Act 2009). In the initial presentation before Parliament, the Marriage Bill encountered resistance from conservative forces, leading to its rejection (Larok 2018).

However, the bill resurfaced in 2022, accompanied by an acknowledgement that Uganda's existing legal landscape governing diverse marriage types was dispersed and warranted unification under a singular law. This resurgence underscored the need to address the

evolving nature of marriage in contemporary Uganda. A central issue in the bill was bride wealth: to categorise material wealth given to the kin of the bride as marriage 'gifts' rather than an obligatory 'payment' in exchange for a bride. This proposal of changing the phrasing of 'bride price' has a deliberate emphasis on safeguarding the rights of women within the institution of marriage. When the proposed bill repeatedly failed ratification in Parliament, it was partly due to the way it would promote women's property rights in marriage and divorce (Kabumba 2021). The bill is yet to be adopted by Parliament, despite advocacy campaigns led by human rights NGOs and women's rights NGOs. The intense public debates about what defines marriage and its dissolution, but also about sexuality, gender roles, rights and activism, has made marriage a lens for imagining a future Ugandan society for both politicians and citizens.

These debates run parallel with, and at times entwine, questions about the rights and lives of LGBT+ people in Uganda (Moore 2020). In 2023, President Museveni finally signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act after almost a decade of national and international debates, hence violating the fundamental rights of Ugandan citizens. Uganda's penal code already punished same-sex relations with life imprisonment – a criminal offence that was rarely prosecuted – but the new law creates new crimes, such as the vaguely worded 'promotion of homosexuality', and introduces the death penalty for several acts considered as 'aggravated homosexuality'. At the time of writing, the first cases under the new law are being prosecuted. As a response to the criminalisation of queer love in Uganda, a movement of resistance and advocacy is contesting what does and should count as partnership and love, supported by scholarship (Byarugaba 2023; Nyanzi 2013; Tamale 2007; Tamale and Murillo 2007) and human rights organisations (Dasandi 2022).

We recognise that in imagining gender futures in Uganda, questions about LGBT+ rights and partnerships would have been obvious to include in our research. But in this book they are not represented in order to protect the Ugandan researchers and their informants from state scrutiny. We hope this book can, from a different perspective, show the diversity in what partnerships, marriage and reproduction look like, and what they mean to people in northern and eastern Uganda. The book highlights that both gender and partnership are always vehicles for imagining futures, and are always in transformation. Questions about the transformation of marriage in Uganda invariably are also about the politics of the institutions that reproduce families, clans, communities and nations, and the social fabric of society.

Political debates on gender and marriage reinforce new forms of conservatism while, at the same time, the rise of wedding culture creates new spaces for imagining, seeing and consuming love and partnerships. Popular culture, though, has always been a main modality through which Ugandans explore and reconfigure marriage, love and families. In school, many Ugandans will have read African classics like Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, Elechi Amadi's (1966) *The Concubine*, Buchi Emecheta's (1976) *The Bride Price,* Ngugi wa Thiong'o with Ngugi wa Mirii (1980) *I Will Marry When I Want,* Okot p'Bitek's (1953 (1989)) *Lak Tar* [*White Teeth*]. Roadside second-hand book shops offer heaps of faith-based self-help books to solve marital issues and romance novels, alongside Ugandan works like *The Official Wife* (2003) by Mary Karooro Okurut. Magazines like the glossy *Bride and Groom*, the annual 'Wedding Expo' in Kampala, and weekly broadcasts of wedding videos on all national television stations, together with Nigerian films, Latin-American telenovelas and Ugandan soap operas, have, over the past few decades, been popular publics of reimagining Ugandan family life and couplehood (Moore and Schneidermann 2024). Popular culture might easily be brushed aside as mere entertainment and passive consumption. Yet, as evident from the rise of popular singer Bobi Wine to presidential candidacy, popular cultural forms are at the centre of the politics of transformation in Uganda, as well as across Africa (Barber 2018; Schneidermann 2020). Within the glossy magazine pages, the songs and performances of wealth captured on camera and their consumption in homes, on the bus and through smartphones, there are diverse expressions and profound transformations in the roles of men and women, and in what it is that ties a marriage together (see Schneidermann and Otim, and Langole and Whyte, this volume). In the subtle expressions, shifts in gaze, discussions in taxis, sharing of WhatsApp memes, Ugandans are making space for change and figuring out how to negotiate various positions, accommodating both traditionalism and ruptures – just like in the scene captured at Evangeline's shop above.

Imagining gender futures research

This book has grown out of a long-term collaboration between scholars interested in peacebuilding, human security, well-being, kinship and other topics at Gulu University in Uganda, and Aarhus University and the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. The collaboration started in 2008 with a research project on 'Changing Human Security after the LRA War',

followed by a project focusing on land conflicts, 'Governing Transition in Northern Uganda: Trust and Land' (2015–18). One of the findings in the study on land conflicts after the war was that patterns of access to land were changing, and some of these changes were related to changes in marriage, partnership and how children belong in families. New questions arose: Were these changes caused by the war, or by changes in norms, the economy or other factors? Were these changes specific to northern Uganda or also common in other parts of the country that had not experienced war in the same period? How do individuals, families, institutions and politicians imagine gender relations and partnerships for the future? These questions led the research group to formulate a comparative project about changing patterns of marriage and child filiation with studies in both northern and eastern Uganda.

Shared methodologies

'Imagining Gender Futures in Uganda' (IMAGENU) ran from 2018 to 2024 and included 17 researchers from Uganda and Denmark, with backgrounds in anthropology, peace and conflict studies, human security, social work, law, gender studies, development studies and philosophy. Throughout the project, we built a common methodological toolbox that offered an ethnographic lens into partnerships in transformation, which we called a 'generational approach'. We wanted to understand how experiences of recent changes and imaginations of marriage futures where shaped by not only place, but also by generational and gendered positions, as well as intersecting dimensions of education, livelihoods, health and child filiation. To gain this diversity of perspectives, in addition to long-term fieldwork in communities in northern and eastern Uganda, each of us interviewed people whose lives were linked by kinship or other kinds of bonds (see Bjerrum Nielsen 2017), aiming to include 10 grandparents, 10 middle-aged parents and 10 young people. The linked lives interviews were about experiences with partnerships and expectations of the future. These partnership histories, among men and women from eastern and northern Uganda, of different ages, in rural and urban areas, with different education and economic backgrounds, formed a shared context from which we discussed patterns, outliers, cases and ideas for connections across our sub-studies. Following family histories of partnership and children's belonging as they were told over time allowed us to identify patterns and ruptures in practices. Furthermore, in these narratives, we also identified how social imaginaries of marriage, partnership and

reproduction change and are transformed by structural changes in society like conflict and peace, new patterns of labour mobility, poverty and not least hopes of the future.

As such, the book joins conversations in anthropology and beyond about the transformation of marriage matters, the decline of marriage and the transformation of gender relations and family lives across the globe in the early twenty-first century. Where other efforts have involved comparing cross-cultural cases to point to global tendencies and differences (Carsten et al. 2021; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Pauli and van Dijk 2016), we take Uganda as a case study of the global tendency of marriage decline in order to explore a diversity of perspectives on partnerships and imaginations of the future of marriages.

Writing together

Writing together, Europeans and Africans collectively, warrants mentioning. Besides having a mixed group of senior and junior researchers, male and female academics, our cultural backgrounds were also multiple and varied. Keeping this in mind called for continuous reflections about decolonising knowledge and grounding our work in empirical data. In our collaboration we were inspired by Amadiumbe's (1997) critique of both Western and African anthropologists for reproducing Western notions in descriptions of African experiences. We have tried to write and think together with a point of departure in Ugandan experiences. The majority of the chapters in this book are co-authored and have been developed through our joint workshops and writing retreats in Denmark and Uganda. Throughout this writing process, we have consulted each other about language and concepts, reflecting on how the English language does not always neatly fit nor express local notions of certain phenomena and vice versa. Writing together and discussing issues related to gender, marriage and partnership have also made the importance of positionality clear. Due to our different perspectives as men and women, young and old, of European and African backgrounds, married and unmarried and from different disciplines, we have not always agreed on the data analysis or how to frame something. We believe that this diversity can bring extra validity to the data and, where there have been clearly different and interesting positions, we have made a point of this in the chapters.

Where many mid-twentieth-century anthropologists obsessively studied universal rules of marriage and lineage 'systems' to describe types of social structures (e.g. Fortes 1962; Lévi-Strauss 1947), the Ugandan anthropologist Okot p'Bitek (1964) recognised the historicity

of partnership patterns, and how they were changing under colonial regimes. He also confronted the limits of the emerging social sciences to capture the affective dimensions of the ongoing colonial transformation of gender relations at the centre of marriages through his two epic poems, 'Song of Lawino' and 'Song of Ocol' (p'Bitek 1966). In our project, we have taken a cue from p'Bitek and explored the possibilities of analysing transformations in marriages beyond conventional academic formats. One way of doing this has been collaborating with research participants to create short documentary films on transformations of marriage practices and partnerships, as they are confronted by communities and individuals (Meinert, Lochul and Segera 2024; Whyte and Segera 2022).

In the process of developing the chapters of the book, we have also used writing poetry during writing retreats and workshops. These poetic exercises have helped us refine and reimagine the prose. Some of these poems are included as 'appetisers' of the chapters in the book. In addition, the lyrics of two songs are part of the book. They are based on the findings from the sub-projects in IMAGENU and created in collaboration between researchers and artists who are active wedding singers in northern Uganda. Throughout the past two decades, some of the biggest pop stars in the northern Uganda have also been wedding singers. While bespoke wedding songs are often in daily discourse considered as trivial, and part of the conspicuous consumption of wedding culture, they are also demonstrations of joy, celebration, wealth, and social coherence, in communities that were torn by civil war for decades. The first song, following this introduction, is called 'Lim Nyom Peke' ('No Money for Marriage') by the artists Lucky David Wilson and Otim Alpha Ozaite. The second song 'Middle East', by the artist Docky Sandie Akello, appears in the middle of the book, after the chapter about homes and belonging. The poetic, visual and auditive forms of analysis of the project have circulated through screenings and discussions at schools, faith-based gatherings, popular radio, social media and music shops and, we hope, added storytelling and rhythm to our studies.

Our shared methodologies generated a rich empirical material, which offered our joint analysis and writing process many possible ways of answering our research questions. Yet three themes cross-cut all our studies and discussions: (1) the role of materiality in relation to marriage; (2) marriage matters in the sense of problems; and (3) the meaning of marriage over time and as an issue of belonging. We expand on these three themes below and introduce the chapters in relation to this analytical framing.

Marriage as materiality

A central theme running through the chapters that follow is how marriage matters as materiality. As a whole, the book draws together diverse ways in which partnerships matter in concrete, tangible and economic ways. This theme highlights how transformations in the materiality of marriage and partnerships resonate with wide-ranging social changes in Ugandan society. Our interlocutors talked at length about the material aspects of marriages, just like the link between marriage and materiality has been at the centre of anthropological studies of African societies and of the discipline as a whole, right from the beginning. The exchange of women for 'matter' was central to the functioning of social and political systems in the analyses of researchers in the first part of the twentieth century (Evans-Pritchard 1934; Fortes 1962; Gluckman 1950; Lévi-Strauss 1947; Mair 1969; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). Describing what, when, where and how things are exchanged for wives, and what kinds of categories of women are in and out of bounds for exchange led to the definition of the 'actually existing relations' reproducing social structures and economies (Radcliffe-Brown 1940 [1952]: 188–204).

Feminist scholars and activists alike have criticised this way of linking matter and marriage for reducing women to economic assets to be traded by men. Gayle Rubin's (1975: 177) famous declaration, that such 'traffic in women' constituted their 'world historical defeat', fuelled new kinds of understandings of marriage exchange and new imaginations of what anthropology could address. As Ogbu (1978) observed, anthropologists had examined marriage and bride wealth 'primarily from a male point of view', thus missing at least half of the 'functions' of marriage and bride wealth in societies. The idea of bride wealth itself, as Jane Guyer (1994: 235) suggested, is the product of more than a century of missionary, colonial, legal and social scientific interventions, which 'all tended to create a particular illusion of the recent past' in the service of counting, classifying and governing the wide heterogeneity of African marriage practices.

It is exactly these central problems in the anthropology of marriage that the chapter by Mary Ejang and Lotte Meinert confronts. They investigate the matter of bride wealth in Lira district in northern Uganda from multiple gender and generational perspectives, and discuss the continuing expectations of bride wealth as a basic form of reciprocity between families, despite changing economic realities, gender norms and possibilities. Bride wealth negotiations involve a range of compromises that are expressions of economic issues of both the bride and groom's

relatives, as well as the couple themselves. The chapter argues for a multi-generational and gendered perspective that considers the pros and cons for all these various positions when studying and debating bride wealth. Too often bride wealth has been studied or argued about either from an androcentric (early colonial anthropology and patriarchal perspectives) or gynocentric (early feminism, that focused entirely on the perspectives of women) perspective, leaving out children's and other generational and systemic perspectives that include both advantages and disadvantages.

In the current discussions of partnership and the Marriage Bill in Uganda, it is obvious that whose perspectives matter for marriage is not only an academic question. Politicians, lobby groups and NGOs, cultural institutions, religious communities and Ugandans across the country debate and reimagine how marriage and materiality relate, and how they ought to relate. In their chapter on wedding committees and love, Nanna Schneidermann and Jimmy Otim explore how wealth circulates through marriages in urban, northern Uganda, not only as exchanges of bride wealth between affinates – relations by marriage – but as expressions of love between friends. They show how friendship matters to marriages among upwardly mobile urbanites in Gulu city, and how wedding committees may shift the relational basis of couplehood. These novel kinds of 'fundraising' for marriage cause anxieties among traditionalists, but couples who marry 'by committee' advance ideals of companionate marriage by working together to mobilise their joint social networks to contribute to lavish marriage ceremonies. How friends matter to the formation of marriage, and how love in wedding committees, in turn, shape notions of class in Gulu point to the importance of non-kin relations in analyses of partnership in transformation.

In newer work on materiality and marriages, anthropologists have paid attention to the political economic shifts that transformed global intimacies, which also recentred the relevance of economic matters to marriage (Cole and Thomas 2009; Meiu 2017; Mojola 2014; Parikh 2016). This includes the changing status of children as they are increasingly seen as economic burdens, subjects to be educated and supported materially (Meinert 2009), and less as sources of labour and helping hands in subsistence agriculture. With this transition comes questions about the obligations towards and rights over children. In Anna Baral's chapter, parents and their families reimagine power, gender and the right to claim children through a novel kind of materiality in Uganda: the DNA molecule. In the past decade, commercial clinics for paternity testing using DNA testing technologies have mushroomed, and the cold matter of gene matching, percentages and irrefutable 'scientific facts' challenge

rituals and negotiations that in the past allowed women and entire clans to legitimise and confirm the emplacement of a child into the kin network. What ultimately matters for paternity, it seems, is not only genes but also the economic support that sustains the life of a child. This is also at the centre of the chapter by Susan Reynolds Whyte on 'frail fatherhood' seen from the perspective of mothers who negotiate legitimate fatherhood through claims of material support and care for their children.

Matters with marriage

A second prominent theme in the book is about matters with marriage in relation to problems with marriage: how ideals and expectations of love, partnerships and bride wealth can be difficult to live up to; and how people across generations and gender positions still try to navigate troubled love and marriages. Because marriage is such a strong gender norm across Ugandan society, it also poses significant problems when people try to make marriages work, but struggle and sometimes fail; because ideals of marriage tend to be romanticised, realities of marriage matters can hit hard. If and when individuals cannot live up to marriage norms for various reasons, they may be perceived as failures by themselves or others in society, especially if they do not have the opportunity to have children, which is perhaps an even stronger gender norm than being married.

Hierarchy is a deeply-embedded form of sociality in marriage and takes multiple forms. Perhaps the most apparent of these is the hierarchy of gender (Carsten et al. 2021). As gender norms are changing in Uganda, women, who have been at the bottom of this hierarchy, may not be as interested in marriage as they used to be, unless the hierarchical relations become more egalitarian. As we have seen in other parts of the world and through histories of change, when women gain access to education, have their own income, have rights to property and inheritance, they also demand more equal relationships with men, or they choose to live by themselves and create their own families. Mark Hunter (2016: xiii) points out that 'Marriage is constitutive of gendered relations, through not only acts of bringing people and families together, but also symbolic significance … changes to marriage can lead to particular anxieties about changing gender norms in society'. We recognise this in many of the chapters of this book, including the chapter by Lioba Lenhart about marriage, masculinity and mental health. The chapter follows a young man from northern Uganda who grew up during the war in a camp for internally displaced people. Since his teenage years, he has been struggling

with mental health issues and finding a way to and in marriage. The chapter argues that norms around marriage and gender roles constitute both challenges and forms of help for persons who struggle with mental health problems, as many do after the war in northern Uganda.

In this book, we meet many Ugandans who say that they cannot afford marriage, and that the decline of marriage rates is due to poverty and increasing inequality. The main problem with marriage, in their view, is that they do not have the resources to actualise marriage in the way they hoped to. Even though many interlocutors in the chapters of the book claimed that bride wealth and acquiring resources for white weddings is the main problem, *the* matter, with marriage, interestingly, almost all of them contended that they would not like to do without bride wealth or lavish weddings. This echoes tendencies across Africa of a turn towards exclusivity (Pauli 2019; Pauli and van Dijk 2016) and the complicated and ambiguous status of 'co-habitation' and 'marriage' for most families (Hunter 2016). The basic issue of reciprocity is at stake here: being able to give, receive and reciprocate is a fundamental part of marriage and its social function.

While cultural leaders articulate that the exclusivity of marriage is a source of social instability in Uganda (see Schneidermann and Otim, this volume), this has given rise to a growing wedding industry in Uganda, as well as innovations within the religious realm, where marriages and weddings have become spaces for negotiating faith, inclusion and exclusion through intimate relations (Alava 2017). The white church wedding as a cultural form is the subject of Stephen Langole and Susan Reynolds Whyte's chapter on wedding economies and the meaning and motivations behind lavish church marriages in northern Uganda. Their chapter highlights the cultural significance of Protestant and Catholic church weddings, and the role these have played in providing recognition and validation to couples, families and church communities. Thus, church weddings matter to people as they confirm relationships, social standing and religious belonging through public expressions of worth and social validity. Church weddings have also become matters of trouble, with risks of misrecognition, which couples, families and friends often have to negotiate before they reach an agreement (see also Reece 2022). Church weddings are matters of recognition in three ways: (1) Couples recognise one another, providing a sense of personal security that extends to each other's families; (2) Christians recognise their belonging to the church and are recognised by church authorities and others as virtuous Christians; and (3) The couple recognises and appreciates kin, family, colleagues, friends and neighbours, and they in turn recognise and appreciate the couple.

Marriage as matters of time and belonging

The third overarching theme in the book is about how marriage matters – perceived as significant and meaningful – in relation to time and belonging. Filiation and giving direction to the future are some of the areas where interlocutors in this book point out that marriage really matters. Even though we may criticise anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss, due to their androcentric views on women as objects of exchange in bride wealth (1947), the points they have made about how marriage constitutes what stitches different families and clans together over time, in order to create cohesion across groups in society, still hold value. Belonging in kinship groups and lineages is (mostly) given by birth and blood, whereas the work of cohesion across kinship categories is done in marriages, friendship and partnerships.

Marriage establishes kinship ties and affiliations and shapes individuals' sense of belonging within familial and communal networks; yet, marriage is also often what reproduces social structures, including structures of inequality and class. In his studies of marriage strategies, Bourdieu (1972 [1992]) pointed out how marriages in rural France, as well as Algeria to a large degree, functioned to reproduce existing power hierarchies and class structures. Marriage is about reproduction and thus inherently about the future, even though this is often articulated through idioms relating to 'tradition'. How differently situated Ugandans imagine gender pasts, presents and futures in their own lives and collectively is a central theme running through the chapters of this book. In particular, different gendered and generational perspectives on partnerships, marriage and children-rearing frame temporality in terms of near and distant futures (Guyer 2007), 'vital conjunctures' (Johnson-Hanks 2002) and spaces of negotiation when alternative future horizons open.

For some in Uganda, marriage is a vital conjuncture (Johnson-Hanks 2002) – a point in time that becomes decisive for so many other things in life. Yet the idea of a 'point in time' does not fit marriage processes in Uganda very well, as they are often very long processes, at least if they are defined by the giving of bride wealth or carrying out bride service. White weddings may be expected to have a different and faster temporality but, in reality, they are often processes that are planned and funded over many years, and often preceded by 'customary marriage' and exchanges of bride wealth. As Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950, 49) famously wrote, 'to understand African marriage we must think of it not as an event or a condition but as a developing process'. In contemporary Uganda, marriage is for many both an event *and* a

process, and increasingly a 'project' – a hoped-for future one projects oneself towards, which is why it is fruitful to explore the different temporal scales in marriage (Baral et al. 2021).

In Botswana, Solway (2016) pointed to how temporalities of marriage have been changing from 'slow marriages' in the past to 'fast *bogadi*' exchanges. Rituals and exchanges that used to occur over decades are now speeded up in shorter time frames. With the speeding up of marital prestations, the debt that used to be socially productive for creating relationships has turned disruptive (Solway 2016). We see a similar pattern in Uganda, but also point to how other temporal aspects of marriage, such as courtship, engagement, wedding ceremonies, separation and divorce, reflect different values and norms regarding marriage across Uganda. The issue of temporality in relation to marriage is the focus of the chapter by Lotte Meinert. She analyses marriage as a 'time practice' that reaches into the past as well as into the future – through plans, hopes, fears and claims. Using the future tense as a heuristic analytical tool, the chapter takes a comparative perspective on young men and women in eastern and northern Uganda. Through these perspectives, Meinert considers ideas about futures with and without marriage and education, and the consequences of these futures for issues of belonging in families across generations.

The assumption that there are radical differences between 'traditional' and 'modern' marriages is something we examine and question in this book. One might have the perception that marriage is changing from being primarily a relation involving long-term exchange, property arrangements and materiality, to one of egalitarian intimacy (Carsten et al. 2021) and romantic love, but the studies in this book show a more mixed and complicated picture. Interestingly the idea that marriage signifies 'tradition' seems to haunt both public discourse and anthropology alike, even though we see many studies and experiences that challenge this idea. The chapter by Daniel Komakech presents meditations on the concept of love in Acholi philosophy in order to explore how partnerships and intimacy have been constructed through time. With a vantage point in the idea of love as a 'movement towards home' (Porter 2020), he shows that 'movement' in a Foucauldian analysis helps us to move beyond binary opposites between Western and Acholi, 'traditional' and 'modern' love and reconsider current transformations of urban love in Gulu city.

The chapter by Hanne O. Mogensen and Julaina A. Obika discusses how the concept of 'home' informs marriage and shapes gender dynamics in Uganda by looking at home as a bistable figure, examining the

co-existing images of homemaking. They suggest paying attention to the shifts from a patriarchal view of home where women move into men's homes (patrilocal marriages), to one where women and children reside consistently, and a man moves in and out, whether he thinks of it as his or the woman's home. With formal marriages reportedly on the decline and female-headed households on the rise, the chapter dives into what makes a house a home, and what this tells us about changing gender relations. Thus, the authors explore the notion of belonging within the context of homemaking in Uganda, revealing mutual discontent in partnerships and homemaking as a process achieved as people go along. The chapter by Susan Reynolds Whyte continues the discussion of belonging in the future by focusing on the frailty of fatherhood when mothers are not married, and fathers do not take responsibility for children through providing childcare and support. This poses problems for the mothers in the present, but is also a potential problem for children – not least boy children – in the future. If these children do not have a patrilineal connection, they miss an important link through their fathers for accessing land and property in the future (cf. Meinert and Whyte 2023).

The book closes with an afterword by Koreen Reece that draws together the threads of belonging, temporality, diversity and comparison throughout the chapters in the book. It is our hope that this book, through both theoretical discussions and cases from contemporary Uganda, will speak to and create debate among academics and policy makers, as well as men and women from different generations and walks of life, such as the women we met at the opening of this introduction: Evangeline, Jenny and Grace, as well their past, present and imagined future partners.

Note

1   With revisions in 2005 and 2014.

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Interlude song
Lim Nyom Peke: No Money for Marriage
Lucky David Wilson and Otim Alpha Ozaite

Son
Daddy, I have some word that I need to share with you Daddy
Daddy, I want to tell you something
Daddy, please sit down

Father
Let's sit down and discuss this issue.
My son tell, let me hear […]

Son
I want to marry this beautiful woman, for so so long,
The time has come for me to pay her bride price.
It is time … to marry my wife
Her parents have waited for so long, so so long
My in-laws have been so patient, for so so long
My daddy give me money, let me marry a wife

Father
There's no money now
I would have married for you a wife, my child
I have no money

Son
Daddy, I need some money
Because, I want to marry

Father
I have no cows,
I would have married for you a wife, my child
[but] Cows are no longer there

Son
Girls nowadays: you pick
Immediately you need to marry her!

Father
I know … my son, you need to marry your wife.
Your sister
Who could have stayed at her husband's place
Your sister came back home
Your sister – that you were supposed to use her bridewealth [to marry],
Your sister got back home
Your sister who could have stayed at her home
Your sister got back home
The money that I was supposed to give you to marry with
It's now for feeding.
Your sister got back with her children, your father started taking care of them again.

Son
My father, you said it was your father who married for you sometime back
By then I remember what you told me
Now it's my turn
I want money from you, give me!
I want to marry with a wife
I want cows from you, give me!
I want to marry with a wife

Father
The money I got to marry with, I did cultivate [on my own], my son
My cows for marriage I did cultivate [on my own], my child
My father used to see how I could sweat doing it
My father only added me one cow
To marry your mother

Son
Ha! marrying, you have to struggle yourself?
Daddy, give me money to marry a wife!

Father
There's no money
I would have married for you a wife my child
I have no money

Son

[…]

I have talked to everyone Daddy

No one wants to support me

Even if I call for a meeting, no one wants to contribute

I struggle on my own, on my own

My father, I struggle on my own, my father

I need some help, you need to help me

Father

Marriage these days has become so hard

Marriage these days has become so painful

Let me first talk to your uncle

Let me first talk to your auntie

Let me talk to my people

Let me talk to your brothers

Boys these days don't want work that dirties their clothes

Boys these days want soft touch

Boys these days don't want to hold a hoe

You children these days you have turned marriage for bragging

You boys have turned to showing off

Eeeeee

Those days our clans could unite

Son

Why it's no longer there?

Father

Those days clans could be together

They separated the clans

Kony killed many people

My son, I bore you from the camps

My son you grew up from camps

I and your mother could just struggle

Son

You could struggle to make us eat

Father

I and your mother could just struggle my son

Son

Let me talk to my woman, Aahhh

If she can talk to her parents, Aahhh

[now addressing the wife:]
Tell them to wait … a little bit
Let them wait …
Very soon we are coming
Tell them to wait … a little bit
Let them wait … Very soon we are coming home …
I have tried to look for money,
Money is not there.
Tell them to wait, tell them
For now things are tight, if you love me

Baby tell them, please tell them
For now things are tight, if you love me

Let them give me more time
I need some more time
I thought my relatives could support me
It is very disappointing
I thought my friends would contribute
The turn up was so so low

Father [now to daughter in-law]
My daughter in-law, please be patient
Your husband loves you
My daughter in-law, please be patient
Your husband loves you
My daughter in law …, marriage needs patience
Please be patient
Listen to your husband
Please don't be angry
Tomorrow money will be got

Son
Daddy wee, give me money so that, I marry a wife

Father
There's no money
I would have married for you a wife my child
Money is not there
I have no cows

1

From clan to class? Wedding committees, friendship and love in Gulu city

Nanna Schneidermann and Jimmy Otim

Friendships Kinships Money Love
Working Class Corporate Class Reconstruction Boom
Wedding Organising Committee Meetings
Classmates Colleagues Club-members WhatsApp Groups
Congregation Members Acquaintances
Fundraising Chairman Milestones Treasurer
Collective Aspiration Budget Time Plans Pledges
Time Plans Pledges Please Keep Time

Showing Love

Mar to like something, to love someone
Mit to want something, desire
nyuto mar to show love
waribu cingwa let us join our hands in solidarity
Ribbe aye teko' unity is strength, togetherness

Thank You for the Love

I must commend that our friends showed us much love throughout the journey, but our relatives did not even bother. Just imagine if I had relied on my relatives?

Introduction

In the news bulletin on MEGA FM read both in Luo and English on 24 May 2022, Acholi cultural leaders discouraged their subjects from fundraising for traditional marriage and religious weddings, saying that 'fundraising'

is the reason for increasing cases of divorce in the sub-region. According to them, in the Acholi tradition, a man was dependent on the leaders and elders of his lineage for marriage, as they would contribute the bride wealth in terms of materials such as goats, cattle and money. Rwot Owor, a chief in the Agago district, argued the following: In the past, the Acholi believed that if a man gets money from other people who were of his clan, it comes with all the blessings; but when people feel forced to contribute money for the marriage of someone they are not even related to, they give the money begrudgingly, and consequently the union will not be healthy. He said that this modern way of looking for resources for marriage is the reason many marriages are unstable, and divorces are common. The money collected from people of other clans does not have the spirit of the clan of the persons getting married.

Meanwhile, fundraising for both traditional marriage and religious weddings is part of everyday life, even a tedious part, for adults in Gulu city, as elsewhere in Uganda (Moore and Schneidermann 2024). On early evenings, after work, one encounters groups of people huddled in bars and eating places, sometimes church halls, across Gulu. At times, just a handful are gathered, sometimes dozens. Wedding committees have a chairman, a treasurer, an array of different officers and sub-committees, and they focus intensively on raising funds and organising a rite of passage that in Uganda has become increasingly less prevalent over the past decades: marriage. These wedding committees may include kin, but most commonly include mainly non-kin relations of both bride and groom – friends from school, co-workers, members of religious congregations or local dignitaries.

Though the Acholi leaders on the radio did not outright admonish wedding committees as such, they offered a strong critique of the apparent modern phenomenon of 'fundraising' for marriages and weddings. They pointed to how new forms of mobilisation of resources for marriage mark a relational shift in how couples are tied together in marriage and speculated about how this relates to experiences of social instability in the form of 'divorce'. In this chapter, we explore this perceived shift – as well as continuity – by examining what kinds of relational work around forming couplehood takes place in wedding committees.

A common thread in each of our ethnographic fieldworks on marriages in northern Uganda was the persistent articulation of 'love' within the work of wedding committees. Curiously, this love did not commonly refer to the love between the bride and the groom, but between the couple and the participants in the wedding committee. We examine how participants in wedding committees articulate the mobilisation and

exchange of resources, and how these ideas produce particular social positions and networks of provisioning: as 'members', 'friends', 'couple'. We examine how materiality, giving and receiving support for marriages and weddings, is related to affect in wedding committees, and how this love is productive of social positions that are different from the idealised past of clan-based mobilisation of resources. Following this, we show how the shift of the mobilisation of resources for marriage from clan to class also questions or even alters modes of obligations and affect towards entrepreneurial ideals that rub awkwardly against burdensome obligations to both kin and non-kin relations.

In the following, we start by providing a background for marriage and the world of committees in Gulu and describe the methods we have used to learn about wedding committee work. Next, we frame our inquiry within a theoretical discussion about love and economy in Africa, refining further how love in committees relates economy and affect in ways that rewire conventional ideas about relationality and obligation around marriages in Gulu. We then explore how this plays out in practice by following tensions and negotiations in the wedding committees we followed between 2019 and 2021. The focus is on how accountability and claims of obligation are mediated in meetings, online social media platforms and on the circulation of wedding committees, and the role of 'social networks' within these. We then return to the overall questions about the shift from clan to class in the mobilisation of resources for marriage. This allows us to revisit the critique of 'fundraising' by the Acholi elders and propose friendship love as a crucial aspect of the relation between continuity and innovation in seemingly gender-conservative institutions such as marriage.

Fieldwork

Neither of us had planned for wedding committees to be a big part of our fieldwork. Nanna had previously worked with young singers and their aspirations for the future in Gulu (Meinert and Schneidermann 2014). She returned in late 2019 to explore the apparent boom of wedding media, and the partnership trajectories of media producers and of their clients – the brides and grooms commissioning wedding songs and wedding videos in the bustling town. Through a survey of 26 wedding media outlets, participant observation and interviews with videographers and singers, she found that young men who found work in the nascent wedding industry were struggling to 'find money' to

formalise partnerships (Baral et al. 2021). As it turned out, it is rarely the marrying couple who commissions their work; rather, they get hired and paid by wedding committees. This led Nanna to follow four wedding committees to better understand the use and economy of wedding songs and videos.

Jimmy had set out to compare partnership trajectories of young men and women in rural Palaro and Gulu city, comparing how marriage practices figure in their everyday lives and hopes for the future. From October 2019, Jimmy carried out participant observation in a village in Palaro and in Gulu, building 11 extended case studies, including interviews across three generations (early 20s to late 70s) with up to 10 family members in each case study. In addition, he interviewed key interlocutors and collected information from religious leaders, traditional cultural authorities and government offices on the transformation of marriage practices over the past generations. In the course of this fieldwork, it became clear that urban marriage practices differed from rural ones by being organised by committees. Curious about how this shapes ideas about marriage and couplehood, Jimmy carried out participant observation with a series of wedding committees and weddings in a Catholic charismatic congregation. At the same time, his personal life also became a fieldsite, since as an Acholi man he had undergone traditional marriage and was a participant himself in wedding committees of friends and colleagues in Gulu.

Changing marriage in northern Uganda

Mobilising resources for marriage seems to be a perennial concern for families, and in particular young men, in northern Uganda. Lamenting the high price of marriage as a kind of cultural critique of socioeconomic change also seems to be a permanent fixture of social life, at least since high colonial times. So how can we understand Rwot Owor's claims about fundraising for marriage through non-kin networks as causing social instability?

Girling's (1960 [2019]) ethnographical record on the socio-political set up of the Acholi society in the 1950s describes some of the kinship and marriage practices of the time. He observed that in Acholi society – largely patrilineal, patrilocal and organised in village-based descent lines – a clan and its extended network played a crucial role in establishing new marriages and thereby ensuring the smooth transition of young people into social adulthood. He also observed that bride wealth was most often

a collective clan affair to ensure that their kin's marriage was formalised. Bride wealth was, however, subject to change, as conjunctures such as famine and conflicts, socioeconomic and political changes affected the practice. What Girling shows is that even though his interlocutors identify a 'marriage system' in which wealth circulates through kin networks by brothers marrying with their sister's bride wealth, this 'system' does not necessarily work for all and at all times. Young men and their families bemoaned the high prices of bride wealth as it fluctuated with the total wealth in society. In one case, a young man seemed to have given up marriage because his family did not have the resources, but hoped to instead elope with a woman. His mother explained: 'It was not so in the old days (she said), the old Rwot was generous, he would give cattle to allow poor men to marry. But now the Chief does not know his people' (Girling 1960 [2019]: 108). Girling (1960 [2019]: 157) explains further: 'To such men as this the raids for cattle and women, which took place in former days would have provided an opportunity for them to distinguish themselves and perhaps to obtain a wife … Lim oloye, he was conquered by the bride-wealth, is the way it is expressed'.

Where the mother in Girling's case points her critique at colonial structures of government as the reason that young men in poor families cannot marry (the chiefs instituted in the British protectorate are not accountable, since they are not from the areas they rule and 'know' the people there), Okot p'Bitek (1953 [1989]) in his novel *Lak Tar* [*White Teeth*] also critiques the transformation of marriage practices during high colonial times in Uganda. Young men struggled to marry or could not afford to marry because of the high bride wealth costs which, according to p'Bitek, were mainly serving the interests of Acholi elites. To accumulate bride wealth, young men migrated to central Uganda to work, making marriage not a clan endeavour but an individual pursuit, where the young man himself mobilises resources through labour in the (colonial, 'modern') market economy.

The first decades of the post-colonial period in Uganda were marked by upheaval and war. While the central region of the country stabilised around the regime of the National Resistance Army/Movement under Yoweri Museveni, the war between the rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the Ugandan army in the period 1986–2006 led the people of northern Uganda into extreme suffering – losing their socio-economic livelihoods and homesteads, kinship ties through death, displacement and violence (Branch 2011; Finnström 2003). Upwards of 90 per cent of the population were at some point during the 20-year conflict displaced beyond the region or into internally displaced peoples'

camps, living in conditions described as 'social torture' (Dolan 2009). Both sides of the conflict systematically destroyed wealth, including cows, and in various ways engaged in warfare aimed at tearing away the social fabric of society among civilians.

Thus, our older interlocutors would report that 'real' marriage was impossible in the camps. Sexual violence and early and forced marriages were part of the humanitarian emergency in northern Uganda, and girls were abducted, reluctantly given or 'eloped' to serve as 'wives' of the rebels or soldiers in the Ugandan army (Amony 2015; Baines 2017; Kiconco and Nthakomwa 2018). While it is impossible to assess the extent of the harm done by the conflict to kinship and forms of belonging (see Meinert and Whyte 2017; Porter 2016), we note here that the war profoundly affected both the institution of marriage and experiences of kinship, intimacy, sexuality and partnership, and that these changes have lasting effects.

Allen (2019: 41) notes how the dearth of marriage during the war affected reconstruction and resettlement:

> With the breakdown in traditional patterns of marriage as a result of life in the internal displacement camps, enormous numbers of children have been born to mothers for whom no bride wealth had been transferred. That has made the lineage status of children, and their mothers' access to land a matter of difficult negotiation.

It can be problematic to reduce an analysis to 'before and after conflict' in Gulu; yet both traditional and religious leaders, as well as brides and grooms in our fieldwork, told us that traditional marriage ceremonies and church weddings have, since the end of the war, 'become popular' and 'come into fashion'. Pido (2022) describes the rise of white weddings in particular as a 'groundswell', indicative of wider social transformations in the growing city.

There is no central register of marriage in Uganda, and the state recognises both traditional, religious and civil marriages, so it is difficult to get a statistical overview to support these claims. Jimmy accessed the church register of the Christ Church, an Anglican church in Gulu city,[1] and found that between 1984 and 1996, 28 weddings were conducted. Compared to the 170 registered weddings between 2010 and 2020, it seems that weddings have, indeed, come into fashion.[2] This has happened at a time when Uganda has seen an overall decline in marriage (see introduction, this volume).

However, we suggest that the rise of white weddings is not only quantitative; there is also a change in who is getting married and how wealth and marriage relates. In the marriage register at Christ Church from 1984 to 1996, most of the couples were either pastors or primary school teachers linked to the church. In 2010 to 2020, the majority of the 170 people married comprised businessmen, social workers, civil servants, bankers, nurses and engineers. These are people generally identified with the middle or trading classes.

The transformations in Acholi marriage practices are linked to shifts in political economy, and sociohistorical changes have quickened considerably in the last 25 years. Gulu became an aid capital and a hub for humanitarian activities, and government reconstruction projects poured into the region, particularly between 2000 and 2010 in the last years of the war and the first years of reconstruction. These developments absorbed specialists in various fields, who took up positions and were paid high wages. The ongoing reconstruction projects also created business opportunities in sectors such as banking, construction, hospitality, private education, universities, and more.

This context has seen the emergence of new local elites, sometimes referred to as 'the big boys and girls', 'the working class' (people in formal, waged labour rather than subsistence farming or urban informal sectors or 'the corporate class' in Gulu). In Christ Church's register, it seems to be exactly these kinds of people who are behind the increase in white weddings in Gulu. While one might argue, and many folks in Gulu do, that lavish weddings are about 'showing off' through conspicuous consumption, we think there is more to it than this. We note, like Girling (1960 [2019]), that how marriage takes place in northern Uganda on the one hand comprises what we might call marriage ideologies – persistent ideals of the organisation of social and biological reproduction – and, on the other hand, marriage conjunctures – the changing economic and political conditions of negotiating partnerships. It appears that the friction between these have been a site for social critique on governance, intimacy and social cohesion at least since colonial times.

Love and wedding committees

The following extract is from Nanna's fieldnotes (November 2019):

It is just after 7 pm, and the darkness outside grows thick, while we sit in sofas and plastic chairs around a large, low table at the Fine

Grape Wine Garden. It is my first wedding organising committee-meeting. We are discussing 'action points' for the planning of John and Lydia's wedding in December. They have been a couple for almost 20 years, had their customary marriage some years back, with three children. Both work in prestigious jobs in the public sector in Gulu. The 'chairman's envelope' has been passed around after opening prayers, each of us placing a note or two in it, while chatting and catching up with the others. Some people arrived late, but we are around fifteen people. Everyone looks like they're in their mid-thirties or older. 'Please keep time', the chairman says with a stern face, 'we are all busy and need to get home to our families'. The different sub-committees report to the group on catering, venue, security, transportation, liturgy and documentation; 'points of action' are discussed. The meeting then turns to fundraising. Peter, who has the role of 'mobiliser', stands up and says with a twinkle in his eye 'Well, we all know what these meetings are for: fundraising! Let's not be lazy'. He starts by jokingly 'fining' those who were late for their tardiness. Next, he says that John and Lydia have shown so much love to their friends over the years, now it is time to show them love as well. He lets an envelope pass from hand to hand of the participants. 'Now, if you love this couple, give them something, and if you don't give … haaa, no love'. Among much banter and laughter, the envelopes pass around several times, with different games. I quickly run out of small bills, but it is fun to participate. Some make a show of constantly finding new bills in different pockets to add to the envelopes. Others pledge support that they will bring later. As the treasurer calculates how much money has been raised this evening, Lydia and John get up. 'I woke up today and felt like, yes, I am ready', John says, 'with your support I could even have the wedding tomorrow. I am ready'. Lydia nods, 'We are so grateful for your support. Thank you for the love'.

We raised 750.000 UGX this evening.

One might expect the love between the partners getting married to be the centre of attention when preparing for marriage. But sitting in on dozens of meetings, we made a curious observation: love in wedding committees is more often than not about the relationship between the couple and their friends than between the two people getting married.

In elite, English-speaking wedding meetings, 'love' was part of how participants spoke about the mobilisation of resources and expressed emotions related to others participating in the planning and the

mobilisation of resources for the wedding. Asked to translate 'love' from English to Acholi, Peter, the mobiliser, answered '*mar*' – to like something, to love someone. Here, p'Bitek (1964 [1997]: 190) teases out notions of love in relation to partnerships:

> What is Acholi love? The emotional content of the relationship between the young man and the young lady is called *mit*, want, desire. The young man tells the girl he wants her, desires her to be his. But after marriage, the happy relationship between wife and husband is attributed to *mar*, fondness. […] Others have interpreted the word *mar* as love, but it is obvious that its meaning and significance differs from that of the English word; *mar* is used to indicate the feeling that children have towards fruits and sweets and games.

p'Bitek writes of love between heterosexual couples, and how notions of love, as phrased in English, in a post-colonial context, must be understood within the context of indigenous languages. The same goes for the love between wedding committees and couples intending to marry in Gulu.

Lydia and John's wedding committee was conducted in English, and they used 'love' to speak of both emotions and fundraising. Jimmy followed Acholi-speaking wedding committees and noted a range of ways of talking about love. A common refrain during meetings was to *nyuto mar* – to show love/fondness, as a way to encourage members to contribute funds to the wedding. A different plea, *waribu cingwa* – let us join our hands in solidarity – was also a way to ask for love, but addressed the desire for a smooth process of fundraising and organising the marriage and celebrations. The Acholi saying '*Ribbe aye teko*' – unity is strength – was also used to emphasise a love between friends as a collective mobilisation of resources for the couple. Jimmy noticed during his fieldwork that calls to *ribbe* became louder to remind the members of their obligation to contribute financially as committee members.

As p'Bitek (1964 [1997]) set out to show in his work on Acholi love, the association of romantic love and companionate marriage with so-called 'higher emotions' or 'modernity' is entangled with colonial ideologies of capture, oppression and violence against racialised groups of people deemed to be devoid of 'love'. In their seminal book on *Love in Africa*, Thomas and Cole (2009: 6) speculate that this is perhaps a reason that love has been difficult to approach for anthropologists, and urges us to consider how love becomes part of particular, also colonial, histories, local lexica of emotions and is embedded in networks of language, materiality and culture in diverse settings (Thomas and Cole 2009: 3).

In Lydia and John's wedding committee, love and money were entangled; Peter asked for donations through love. This trope of love and money has been explored in sexual and romantic relations, as sexual economies (Newell 2009) or provider love (Hunter 2010), but also in how states, NGOs or public campaigns seek to regulate and control love (Parikh 2016). Love and economy have also become a lens for examining changing gender relations, the construction of masculinities (Baral 2018) and femininities (Bocast 2017), gender equality and the experience of aspirations for partnerships in the midst of structural adjustment programmes and neoliberal transformation. How love and material resources related to partnerships but supported by friendships seems to be an overlooked aspect of modern African lives.

In northern Uganda, where histories of violence, trauma and war are at the centre of scholarship from the region, focusing on love may provide 'otherwise' glimpses of life after war (Meek and Morales Fontanilla 2022; Porter 2019). In this pursuit, we are inspired by Bhana (2013a), who writes about configurations of love, gender and power, and encourages us to think of love as a 'slippery category' rather than a universal concept. This invites us to 'attend to local concepts, practices and their historical transformation over time' (Bhana 2013b: 100). In this regard, Porter (2019: 12), in examining partnerships as homemaking in Acholiland, suggests that the 'phenomenon of love should consider the wider societal backdrop as well as the particular web of social relations in which lovers find themselves'. Examining love in wedding committees means expanding on this consideration towards how love and materiality figure not only between lovers but within webs of social relations around them beyond kin, in friendships. Following wedding committees in practice attunes us to how love, intimacy and materiality is co-constituted, and shaped by institutions, interventions and structural relationships, not just between partners but between couples and their friends. How are transformations in the relational-material basis, so to speak, changing or stabilising the meaning of marriage – and of love?

This brings us back to the lament of the cultural leaders and elders at the beginning of this chapter. At John and Lydia's wedding meetings, the aim to fundraise was explicit and, through this practice, a group of people categorised as 'friends' showed their love for 'the couple'. These expressions of receiving and giving love may be exactly what the elders warned against, because here it was clearly not only the clan or exchanges between generations that ensured the consolidation of Lydia and John as a couple, but a network of former classmates, colleagues,

members of congregations and acquaintances of both bride and groom. To understand wedding committee love, we have now moved beyond love as strictly between partners – and even between kin – and moved into an exploration of how friendships, kinships and love entangle in the making of marriages in Gulu.

Clans to class?

If wedding committees in Gulu are sites for mobilising resources for marriage comprised not of kin but of friends who share love, it becomes interesting to examine what kinds of people are considered friends. Furthermore, do the kinds of friends that a couple gather make a difference in how money and love is shared? Jimmy compiled an overview of the participants in 10 wedding committees he attended.

Perhaps the most glaring difference in Table 1.1 is the budget of the committees, ranging from Okeca and Anena's marriage budget of 3.7 million Uganda shillings (UGX) (approx. 800 GBP) to Ocaya and Kevin's budget of 95.7 million (approx. 20,600 GBP). Lydia and John, who we met earlier in the chapter, ended up with contributions far beyond their budget of 185 million UGX. Though all the marriages here were lavish events, there were vast differences between the resources that couples mobilised through wedding committees. These differences are rooted in *class* in the Ugandan sense of the word (often understood as social status: see Pier 2022), as well as stratification in wealth, education, employment, religion and urban–rural orientations.

Couples working in the NGO sector, in local government and state agencies to a large extent gathered professional networks in wedding committees and in general had higher budgets. Couples who were casual workers or stated to be self-employed (being engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship, like selling tomatoes by the roadside) relied more on faith-based networks to mobilise resources for their marriages. Okeca, Simon and Oyet and their spouses struggled to raise funds for their weddings and heavily relied on the contributions of church friends whose financial backgrounds were just as weak as their own. Most of them did not have regular incomes, which limited their ability to contribute, even when they desired a grand-style wedding. Apart from their church 'brothers and sisters' as their social group, they had their kin, who also did not actively participate in most of their meetings, except on the final day of the celebrations.

Table 1.1 Overview of 10 wedding committees in Gulu

S/n	Couples	Profession	Family	Classmates	Workmates	Church members	Others Incl. friends of friends	Budget
1	Omara + Grace	Teacher Civil servant	2	4	17	28	1	41.8 million UGX
2	Okeca + Anena	Casual workers	1		3	25	4	3.7 million UGX
3	Oroma + Olanya	Nurse Self-employed	3	5	21		6	40 million UGX
4	Julius + Adong	Self-employed Business entrepreneur	6	8	25		4	47.3 million UGX
5	Ocaya + Kevin	NGO workers	8	6	20		5	95.7 million UGX
6	Simon + Anena	Causal labourers	3			28		7.6 million UGX
7	Oyet + Akanyo	Self-employed Housewife	1			30		8.5 million UGX
8	Ronny + Nancy	Army officer Local government	2	3	29		3	51.8 million UGX
9	Ojok + Stacy	NGO worker Self employed		2	6	32		27.9 million UGX
10	Ocen + Stella	Local government Business entrepreneur	8	4	31		6	66.3 million UGX

While the Okecas struggled to 'do' a fancy wedding, Ocaya, who works with an international NGO with an extended network in Uganda and beyond, mobilised financial resources through both online and physical meetings. When Jimmy attended some of their meetings, the majority of the attendees were from the 'corporate class'. The large pledges and immediate financial contributions signalled status and association. Ocen, Ronny and Omara were also members of what in Gulu is referred to as the 'working class', meaning they were employed and earning monthly salaries. In their wedding committees, groups were easily formed, and members stated how networks formed to support colleagues in times of need or distress, such as with weddings and burials. These groups were quickly formed, and members often exited freely shortly afterward or immediately.

All the relatives who attended wedding committees were from the same generation as the couple – either sisters/brothers or cousins. None had parents or grandparents attend the meetings. Another notable category is the 'others': people who were not directly connected to the couple, but who came along with their friends. We were not the only ones tagging along as 'friends of friends' in wedding committees, it seems. Like us, these friends of friends sometimes developed contacts and friendships by returning to the next meeting and contributing towards the wedding over time.

We might think of these kinds of friendships as strategic markers and makers of 'class' in Gulu – what Bourdieu (1986: 249–50) would deem social capital:

> The product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term […] relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights).

In the late 1960s, Jacobson (1968) described how elite friendships in Mbale in eastern Uganda were formative of the 'social system', in which men who had attended the same prestigious high schools later took up prestigious formal wage-earning jobs as civil servants or businessmen. He pointed to how friendship was a marker of social class in Uganda, of being able to have 'leisure' – time for friends – and to choose one's social company, as a consequence of having access to education and wage-earning jobs.

In the age of studying social systems and elites, Jacobson may have overlooked other kinds of friendships, but his findings resonate with how couples in Gulu navigated friendships in wedding committees in Gulu. Characteristically, 'working-class' couples whose networks were largely school and work friends held their wedding meetings at bars or restaurants, while charismatic, faith-based networks met at their place of worship. Though friendships tend to be about love and support, the people we worked with were aware of the strategic aspect of these relationships (see also Dungey 2019). As one committee member expressed in a WhatsApp group: 'The one thing I know is that there is no better investment than the one in friendship. It takes you places without a doubt'. But what Bourdieu seems to consider a by-product of strategic action – the subjectively felt durable obligations, gratitude, respect and friendship – is actively cultivated in wedding committees, reminding us not to separate material and affective bonds.

For Lydia and John's mainstream Catholic wedding, around 30 people regularly attended the wedding committee meetings. However, the WhatsApp group for the committee reached the app's limit of 250 members, many of whom also pledged support. Lydia tried to explain how so many people sent contributions for the committee's work of organising the wedding: 'Many times, your social network will determine how much money you are able to raise. Like … people contributed a lot to our wedding. And I think it's because the relationships we have with people, Uh, maybe our jobs, we – we have a very strong social network'. Asked about how a strong network is expressed in wedding committee work, Lydia hesitated to speak about class and status: 'Sometimes people will support you according to … I don't want to say, "according to who you are", that might sound like, you know … But yeah, there are some people who get more support than others, definitely'.

Wedding committees were seen as a direct outcome of a collaborative project between partners to fundraise and conduct a successful marriage ceremony. Notably, where resources for marriage traditionally were mobilised and transferred between men (with symbolic gifts for the mother of the bride and aunts), brides actively mobilised their networks in wedding committees and women contributed financially as well. Where bride wealth in the traditionalist sense valued the groom's provider masculinity and the 'price' placed on the bride (Moore and Schneidermann 2024), wedding committees constituted coupledom and valued the ability of couples to show and receive love; how they, through their lives, have engaged in the cultivation of friendships. Where traditional ideals of kinship defined marriages through the

exchange of bride wealth between the parental kin of brides and groom (often involving aunts and uncles), contemporary wedding committees emphasise networks of lateral dependence that constitute 'class' in Gulu, manifested in the lavishness of marriage celebrations.

A marriage system of friends

So the apparently perennial concern with how to mobilise wealth for marriage exchanges and celebrations for people in northern Uganda remains intact. But what about Girling's (1960 [2019]) findings that marriage ideologies may remain relatively intact while conjunctures fluctuate? Our suggestion is that friendships and love in wedding committees offer an alternative way of understanding what and who is spliced together in a marriage – something beyond creating affinal kin through exchange. This phenomenon would probably not have surprised urban anthropologists in the middle of the twentieth century, as they studied urbanisation and change as aspects of African lives under colonialism. They pointed out how in towns the meanings of 'tribe' and 'clan' were transformed, and non-kin relationships, such as 'work mate', took on new significance in emerging forms of association (Epstein 1961; Mitchell 1956; Grillo 1974). But what we offer here is a look into how friendship love as material-affective practices work as markers and makers of 'class'. Wedding committee love is aspirational as a mobilisation towards a common goal – a lavish wedding. But it is also a process of inclusion and exclusion through circulation of wealth in networks of friends.

Robert, a born-again Christian at 26 and a casual worker, had recently married Julia, who was a teacher at a local school. Their wedding committee had mainly been friends from church, but also a few of Julia's colleagues and some of their common friends from school now living in the same neighbourhood on the outskirts of Gulu. While chatting and drinking tea in their modest cemented house, Nanna marvelled at the posts of millions of shillings for catering, transport, cake and bridal wear, totalling over 15 million UGX. Robert admitted that it had been the committee, not he and Julia, who had come up with these lavish expenses:

> They just do this budget for fundraising. So that others can pledge: I am going to give the wedding cow and so on. I love this because, it is not just saying that we [Robert and Julia] love one another, but we just see how people are committed, you just see that love. That sign

of togetherness. Because we call on you to say that we want to get married, and then we see this group coming just to start with you.

Julia had been worried: 'You think it is too much. It might even scare you and you think I will end up not getting married'. In the end, the committee raised just under 5 million UGX. The couple first had a customary marriage, to which Robert's relatives contributed some bride wealth as well, before a successful church wedding a few months later with hundreds of guests. Though the wedding committee did not manage to raise the full amount for the celebrations, the lavish budget worked as a collective aspiration and as an incentive for their social network to commit to supporting the marriage. The love that Robert talks about is not only about lavishness, but, as he phrases it, 'togetherness'.

This does not mean that it is easy to either give support or to get others to support. Every wedding committee that we attended meant waiting for long hours for meetings to begin because committee members had not shown up. It meant the couple or chairperson calling on members to attend; pleas for contributions and expressions of frustration and anxiety were common in meetings, as members felt pressured to contribute more funds than they were comfortable giving. Yet all the wedding committees we attended resulted in marriage celebrations and the continued emphasis on love and 'togetherness' between friends.

The process of excluding who can mobilise resources through wedding committees seems to take place prior to the formation of the committee itself; those who are not able to form a committee willing to commit to up to a year's work of organising and fundraising for the marriage cannot start the process. This again emphasises friendships and wedding committees as formative of class and a result of how the couple in the past have been able to share love with others. As Robert said: 'People always come to support when they see you supporting others. … But if you are greedy and you are always alone you have to organise everything yourself'.

In practical terms, most wedding committees consist of both scheduled in-person meetings and ongoing conversations on social media platforms. As we described earlier in the chapter, Lydia and John's wedding committee met at the Fine Grape, and usually up to two dozen people attended. Beyond that, a group of supporters were gathered on the WhatsApp group 'John weds Lydia'.[3]

In the group chat, the committee coordinated meetings, and the chairman posted lists with the names and amounts of pledges and contributions towards the wedding. Those who had fulfilled their pledges appeared with a blue tick next to their amount and name, and the chairman

sent messages to the group when new contributions were made: 'Members, I have received Ugx375,000 from Abola Godfrey through mobile money. Join me to thank him for his generous contribution. Thank you Godfrey'. Lydia herself, when going through the list of contributors in the WhatsApp group during an interview, was taken aback by the support and love she and John had received: 'It keeps loading. It keeps loading. Those are hundreds and hundreds of people … we're now beyond 300 …'. The contributions included 20,000 UGX from a lunch lady at John's workplace, as well as a bull from a local member of parliament, equivalent to 1.2 million UGX. The WhatsApp group, combined with the Mobile Money platform – which allows phone subscribers to transfer money via text message feature codes – facilitated transparency regarding the large sums of money mobilised within the group. The list of contributors also documented and made public the power of John and Lydia's social network; the love that they received and from whom they gained support was also a marker of their elite status. Members also joked and chatted in the group, posting religious memes, and the couple stated their gratitude as the day approached. On the day, members who could not attend sent their congratulations, and guests at the wedding shared photos and videos. The WhatsApp group made it possible for John and Lydia's network in Kampala, and Lydia's sisters and brothers-in-law living in Canada, to follow and participate in the wedding planning.

Yet, in addition to the seemingly easy-going socialising online, there were also darker sides. There was, for example, the obvious lack of blue ticks next to friends of the couple who had not yet fulfilled their pledges. And there were reminders, wrapped in politeness, such as this message on WhatsApp:

> For all those who have responsibilities to finish up, now is the time to tie up all the loose ends. For our beloved friends who have sacrificed to help us facilitate this function and have graciously pledged support; now is the time to fulfil your pledges. We badly need this to effectively facilitate the day. Please do reach out to the treasurer and do the needful. We continue to thank you immensely for your love to John and Lydia.

Other pleas for members of the very large WhatsApp group to fulfil their obligations were more direct: 'BREAKING NEWS: The following have not yet honoured the pledges […]'.

Complaints about wedding commitments were a common refrain among 'working-class' people in Gulu during our fieldwork. Being invited to wedding meetings of a colleague, or suddenly finding oneself

in a WhatsApp group, meant expectations to contribute. Not contributing would be considered anti-social, or at least an admittance of being too 'broke' to be part of the committee. Even involuntary members would try to keep up with the contributions of those they considered to be of equal social status as themselves. Stories of alternative strategies to avoid participating in wedding committees – and often failing, being pressured into sharing more love than one wanted to give – were shared as jokes in the very same bars where wedding meetings were held. The ambivalence of friendships, characterised by mutual 'help', social pressure and precarious trust (Dungey 2019) is also part of wedding committee love.

The common cause of a lavish budget, proving that 'togetherness' of friends can achieve the seemingly impossible, the accountability and at times very burdensome obligations to contribute to wedding committees, form one part of what we might jokingly call a marriage system of friends. The latter refers to the circulation of wealth for marriage through wedding committees. Girling (1960 [2019]: 119) writes about the ideal set up of customary marriages, which is echoed by Acholi leaders today, where bride wealth circulates through society by affinal ties in the exchange of wives for cows: 'A sister describes her brother's wife as *ci lim-a*, the wife of my bride-wealth'. This system ensured the circulation of wealth within the village lineage while also fostering alliances with non-kin (Girling (1960 [2019]: 147). Cultural leaders commonly critique wedding committees, arguing that wealth is accumulated through market dynamics for the purpose of conspicuous consumption.

The last meeting of Lydia and John's wedding committee happened a few weeks after their wedding. The group met at the Fine Grape and were served a meal and drinks, as well as one of the wedding cakes. The ceremony and celebration were evaluated, and the different sub-committees gave reports on how the last preparations and the day itself had unfolded. The couple thanked the committee, and people chatted about the successful event. As the chairman concluded the meeting, he invited members of the group to pledge to marry and thereby start the formation of a new committee. 'Is anyone here ready to make the big jump?' he asked humorously. After a pregnant pause, John's colleague and friend from university raised his hand. 'We are ready' he said, as his partner, smilingly, sipped a glass of wine next to him. Laughter and applause broke out. 'Ok', the chairman said, as if he had known this was coming, 'then we can get to work'. Members of the old committee may not be formally obliged to attend, yet it is implied. It is also expected that any couple that has just married will take up significant organisational posts in the new committee. In this case, John had already agreed to be

the best man. In this pretty direct way, wealth for marriages circulates through networks of friends in ways that are, on the one hand, open-ended, as participation is elective and who participates fluctuates, even in the same wedding committee, and, on the other hand, full of obligations and commitments.

Jimmy sat in on an elite wedding committee for a religious marriage and, while sipping sodas with his friends Luis and Anena, they discussed why friends had contributed more than the family of the couple. Anena said:

> Most of the couple's friends attend the meeting voluntarily and give generously. Often the couple's relatives do not attend these meetings regularly. Sometimes they only attend the wedding launch and the final meetings. Your friends attend your wedding meeting and contribute, aware that, next time, it will be their turn.

Luis added:

> Yeah, it is important to come for your friend's wedding meeting, but also to socialise and make new friends, because when your turn comes up, these friends will be there for you, to make the function very colourful. You may have all the money to organise your wedding but if you don't invite your friends to help in the planning, are you going to celebrate your wedding alone?

In one meeting that Jimmy attended, the chairperson in his opening communication said that '*ka wabino ka ribbe ikom luremwa i nyom maleng, miyo iwa kero me nyoto yoo matir ki jo ma gudong angec*' ('If we come together to support our friends in their wedding, it shows that, as friends, we can help others move toward the right path'). The joy of collectively moving friends towards 'the right path' – the ideal of marriage that still greatly matters to many Ugandans – seems to be a big part of what wedding committee love is.

Kinship, friendships and cultural critique

We return here to our initial story about the chief of Agago and the common lament that wedding committees are changing the material basis of marriage unions, and affecting how marriages are constituted with the mobilisation of resources for marriage as a site for cultural

critique of power. While Acholi leaders voiced their concerns on radio, in speeches and at times in newspapers, less is heard from those who rely on the love of friends to have the wedding they dream of. In the stories of our interlocutors, there was a different kind of critique; in wedding committees, friends take up the responsibilities and burdens of kin who either cannot, or refuse to, partake in mobilising resources for marriage. They are processing intergenerational tensions and accommodating experiences of kinship as 'weak ties'.

In his late 30s, Omara teaches in a private school, while his wife Grace works as a lower-rank civil servant in local government. They live in Gulu city with their two children, a housemaid and Grace's two younger sisters. Grace's family had asked a high amount in 'fines' for co-habitation, for their children who were born before the marriage (*luk*), and for her bride wealth. Ideally, Omara's kin would have mobilised the resources and helped him settle the elopement fine and future bride wealth payments; but the support did not materialise. Instead, his network of friends helped finance the traditional marriage and the subsequent wedding:

> *Ma dong anywako tam me nyom bot lurema, gin gu keto committee me neno ne ni yub otum maber. Yub weng otum I nge mwaka acel, ma lurem wa gi onyuto kiwan maa madwong tutwal I kare meno. Ento wadi pe gi onyuto miti mo keken. Kong I tam ka onongo wa ket gen I kum wadi?*

> [After sharing my ideas, my friends initiated a wedding committee that was charged with the responsibility of delivering the wedding. It took us almost one year to achieve our objectives and I must commend that our friends showed us much love throughout the journey, but our relatives did not even bother. Just imagine if I had relied on my relatives?]

Nonetheless, in the rituals of marriage, and later in couples' church weddings, parents are upheld as those who contribute wealth; Omara bitterly commented: 'Their contribution was purely ceremonial or symbolic as culture dictated. Could you imagine! I had to pay for their transport to attend'. Love is not just felt from friends; the lack of love, at once material and affective, from relatives was, for people like Omara and Grace, the source of deep hurt.

For others, like Lydia and John, their families had contributed to their customary marriage, and their relatives, especially same-generation kin like Lydia's sisters in Canada and John's cousins in

Kampala, were active participants in the wedding preparations. Yet they included friends and acquaintances in organising and fundraising their wedding – 'sharing the love'. If love is an overlooked topic in anthropology, friendship seems to be even more invisible (Guichard 2014), and in the anthropological study of marriage in particular. In the shadow of Lévi-Strauss (1947 [1971]) and his definition of marriage as the creation of alliances through the exchange of women between and through men, there is little space for those who are not defined in terms of kinship. Yet in the wedding committees we worked with, the alliances that contributed to and supported marriage were friends who stayed friends after the marriage – they were not transformed into kin by the ceremony – and they did not exchange brides. Wealth circulated between friends to realise 'full couplehood' for partners in a network, yet the networks remained open and mutable, and were reconstituted with each wedding committee.

Exploring friendship and kinship in Africa, Guichard (2014: 6) points to ways that friendships differ from kinship: one is usually not born into a friendship and friendships can be terminated or fade away. Friendships are not 'given' relations, they require relational work, and their future remains uncertain. But in Omara's story, it seems that these qualities were not mutually exclusive from kinship, yet the expectations of these differently categorised people varied.

Even if family members are not able to contribute towards marriage or weddings, and couples experience tension, grief and disappointment in their attempts to mobilise resources, their symbolic role as contributors was upheld, as in Omara's story. Robert and Julia stated that, even though their families had committees on either side for their traditional marriage, they had not played a major role in making their traditional marriage and subsequent wedding at their church a success. As Robert explained: 'Then [in the old days], you tell your father this is the woman. I want to get married. Go get the cow. These days you struggle yourself. They are just there, actually, to witness'.

When people like Robert, Julia and Omara experienced that the wedding ideologies of clan-based fundraising for marriages and religious weddings could not be expected to materialise, they sought out *love* and support from wedding committees. In her study of female university students in Kampala and practices of 'housing' – making a date or a 'sugar daddy' pay for a group of friends on a night out – Bocast (2017) illustrates how asymmetrical exchange (between a woman and her sugar daddy) opens up spaces of horizontal reciprocity and friendship between young women. Importantly, the economic dimensions of 'housing' are to her

interlocutors not an economic necessity, but rather a 'social imperative' that allows for the formation of friendships and experiences of 'fun' and 'freedom' (2017: 371). Similarly, some of the couples we worked with may have been able to find the resources for their own wedding themselves, or within a small group of kin/friends, yet they highly valued the wedding committee process and the contributions of friends. For affluent and less affluent brides and grooms, the social networking of wedding committees constitutes positive couplehood through their lifelong and ongoing cultivation of friendships – lateral networks of sharing love. The friendship love in wedding committees is in this way about the production of personhood in couple form.

This brings us back to the question raised by the Rwot at the beginning of the chapter: What becomes of the relational basis of marriage when it shifts away from being kinship-based – characterised by permanent, fixed relations with well-defined mutual obligations – and instead moves toward friendship-based lateral dependencies, which are seen as transitory, less defined, mutable and requiring continuous 'work'? As in the story of Omara and others, people's expectations of kin might be permanent and fixed, but their experiences differ; and this tension has been a site for social critique at least since colonial times. Kinship is not experienced as a permanent, given, or fixed intergenerational exchange. Additionally, it tells us about the relational aspects of personhood, marriage and redistribution of wealth as love.

In the literature, anthropologists have analysed how individuals gain social efficacy through the accumulation of dependants – a self-actualisation through 'wealth-in-people' (Guyer 1995; Guyer and Belinga 1995). These modes of selfhood are grounded in patron–client relationships, where patrons can command the resources of 'followers' and, in turn, dependants make claims on resources and support from their patrons. In the exploration of personhood in Africa, studies have foregrounded kinship and political patronage (Bocast 2017: 376). Yet, wedding committee love might help us see a different aspect of 'wealth-in-people' – one based in friendship 'as a distinct relational practice characterised by both resource exchange and sentiment' (Bocast 2017). Wedding committees are, in turn, networks of redistribution that are also a cultural production of difference, of structures of power and inequality through the formation of couplehood.

Conclusion

The anxieties of cultural leaders that the clan or relatives no longer matter in the formation of marriages seem to be unfounded. Rather, there exists great tensions in how couples, their kin and wedding committees expect kin to play a role in both the mobilisation of wealth and in the ceremonies. Questions arise about who can be relied upon for support both in the marriage ceremonies and exchanges, but also in the future of being married. Shifting attention to how people are defined as friends or a *social network* opens up a view towards what holds marriages together and what shapes ideas of couplehood beyond kinship.

Taking seriously 'wedding committee love' calls attention to how friendship and marriage interlink as affective-material formations that are spaces of negotiating resources and sharing wealth – spaces of boundary-making through processes of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, we have set out to deepen recent discussions of love in Africa, and how anthropologists analyse it, by recognising love among friends as both socio-material and affective practices that shape the formation of couplehood and class. The qualities of friendships are not polar opposite to kinship ties – there are uncertainties, cut connections and filiations that fade away and are rekindled – but they do represent different kinds of dynamics based on class-formative relations and the circulation of wealth. The roles of friendships and friendship love in marriages seem to be an overlooked space in emerging discussions on love in anthropology, and one worth exploring further.

Notes

1   As much as possible, we follow local terminologies in English about marriages in this chapter. Marriage and wedding are at times used interchangeably, yet marriage is used to refer to the category of conjugal unions in general and to customary marriage, where wedding refers rather exclusively to Christian marriage. However, it would appear that all kinds of committees that organise marriages are called wedding committees.

2   Between 1984 and 2020, the population in Gulu almost tripled, so this also accounts for some of the increase in weddings. However, this does not fully account for the rise in marriages. Most people living in Gulu are Catholic and northern Uganda has historically been more influenced by Catholic missionaries and faiths than the southern part of the country, where the Anglican faith dominates. The Anglican Church is the second largest denomination in Gulu, though charismatic churches are popular as well. We use the register from Christ Church not as representative, but as indicative of tendencies that our interlocutors described as an 'explosion in weddings'.

3   WhatsApp is an online messaging platform that registers users with their phone numbers and allows for both private, dyadic chats and group chats. Users can post text, images and videos, and these are encrypted and easily forwarded between chats, which is why it is the platform of choice for many different kinds of group communication among Ugandan urbanites, who use it for family groups, small-scale marketing and political mobilisation – and wedding committees.

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2

DNA paternity testing in Kampala and Jinja: local understandings and the future of relationships

Anna Baral

Hands, toes, stomach, chin
That is how we spotted kin
Fathers stared with scorn and dread
Mothers smeared, made holes, tied threads
In the group they assessed the baby
To the group she belonged – maybe

Now they call us to the clinic
The technician – such a cynic!
Saliva, a machine, your DNA
And then nothing more to say
It is *true* – father and son
Or it ends – before it has begun

Introduction

It is a Monday afternoon in November 2019. Like every Monday, women, men and children sit patiently in a big hall on the premises of NBS Radio in Jinja, eastern Uganda. They have come to present their problems to Nakapachu, host of the programme '*Ensi n'ebyayo*' ('The world and its problems'), hoping for her support. Nakapachu listens to litanies of individual and family issues all day: land grabbing, unemployment, a car accident, hospital fees. Can, and will, Nakapachu do something to help? Several visitors bring up problems related to children and kin that can be settled only through a DNA paternity test. These are mainly stories of suspicion and mistrust within the household, of inheritance gone bad, of fathers who refuse to support their biological child.

The ailing visitors write their contacts on a big, crammed notebook. They hold Nakapachu's hands in their own, thanking her profusely, and walk away with hesitant steps, as if fearing that she will forget them once they go. As soon as she can, Nakapachu dives into the big book, calls her several assistants, distributes banknotes for calls and transports, and activates her networks, which include a couple of clinics running DNA paternity tests in town. Some of the stories she has collected at NBS Radio will be chosen and broadcast live in her programme on Wednesday. Listeners will call to have their say on the issue, and they will be asked to contribute to the costs of the DNA paternity test, should this be considered the only way to settle the problem. As a candidate for a parliamentary seat in the 2021 elections, Nakapachu knows that her help will be rewarded; facilitating DNA tests for her fans is a gift that will circulate and return in the form of votes.

DNA paternity tests are increasingly part of popular thinking about fatherhood in Uganda, though their costs are prohibitive for the vast majority. This chapter takes DNA paternity testing in its individual, social and intersubjective aspects and explores what consequences it has had on partnerships, and on social imagination of family relations in Uganda. The chapter is based on 14 interviews among 11 men and three women who had the experience of, or planned to have, DNA paternity testing, in addition to conversations and observations in seven clinics that provide the test in Kampala and Jinja. Research was carried out between November 2019 and February 2020, and during July 2022. Based on this ethnography, the chapter offers a reflection on DNA paternity testing that mainly draws on the men's perspective. Throughout the following sections, it will become clear how gender dimensions affect the conceptualisation and consequences of the test. Additional factors such as class and urban/rural location also play a role in how the DNA paternity test is accessed and valued. In order to better understand how the DNA paternity test has come to occupy such an important role in family relations and fatherhood in Uganda, it is pertinent that these intersectional dimensions are taken into consideration.

The central focus of the chapter is examining how the DNA paternity test is able to create, modify and terminate relationships. I first provide a brief overview of DNA testing in Uganda and, afterwards, I illustrate some of the features that make this procedure an illuminating entry point into the changing dynamics in Ugandan families and couples. I focus in particular on the temporality of the test, its connection to local understandings of the working of blood and kin and its profound relational qualities. Far from being only a neutral 'proof' of a genetic connection, as

described by clients, media and clinics, the test is both the starting point and the result of complicated social negotiations, and a tool for kinning (Howell 2003) and unkinning/dekinning (Fonseca 2011; Sarcinelli and Guerzoni 2019), profoundly informed by power and intentionality.

DNA paternity testing in Uganda: discourses and practices

The DNA test confirms biological paternity by showing the matching of specific regions (markers) in the genes of both the child and parent. Compared to earlier methods, DNA testing is strikingly reliable; a positive test shows a 99.9 per cent probability of relation. The test proceeds by comparisons and exclusions: the result says less about the single person's genetic material than about the relation to other DNA samples.

DNA testing became possible in Uganda in 2007, when it was only available at the Government Analytical Laboratories and used solely for police investigations.[1] Several private laboratories were later established across the country, often co-owned by foreign companies and supported by foreign laboratories (mainly in the US and South Africa), which conduct tests that Kampala laboratories are not equipped for. Clinics can be found in the major cities of Kampala, Jinja, Mbarara and Gulu; all of them work to respond to an increased demand for DNA paternity tests.

During my research, I have been in contact with seven out of the nine most popular clinics in Kampala and Jinja, and I closely followed the work in one clinic in the Wandegeya neighbourhood in Kampala. Its owner, Nelson Mwesige, who has a background as a laboratory analyst, worked there with his wife seven days a week. He started his venture when he realised that the demand for paternity testing was increasing, and he envisioned a future in which DNA testing would become more easily available to all. DNA is the future; however, as I will illustrate below, this DNA testing future maintains a relation with tradition.

In other national contexts, the diffusion of DNA testing has been actively encouraged by legislators. In Brazil, family law has recognised that married men had an 'unrestricted right to challenge their paternal status' (Fonseca 2009: 272); while in Australia and England, DNA testing has become 'a means of reducing the cost to taxpayers of growing numbers of socially fatherless children' (Cannold 2008: 251). The Ugandan testing industry boom arose not from the encouragement of legislators, but from the demands of a male public increasingly frustrated with economic precariousness and the hardship

of maintaining a family. Many of my informants, unwilling to maintain children who are not theirs, wished for a law that made DNA testing free and mandatory. In a song on DNA testing by Mark Makumbi, the lyrics explicitly encourage men to join forces and buy machinery to allow the mandatory test to happen: 'I am talking about the DNA machine […] The government cannot buy it because it's expensive so let us join our hands and collect money for this'.[2] This might be surprising in a regional context in which 'wealth in people' and the condition of having dependants still partially represent a morally desirable condition (see Monteith and Camfield 2024). Political and economic precarity and the seeping of market logics into the everyday lives of Ugandans, especially in competitive urban contexts, have however taken a toll on moral personhood, bringing to the fore tensions between culturally approved logics of redistribution and neoliberal expectations around accumulation (see Baral 2023). To limit redistribution to the biological descendants might represent a solution to this tension.

The media and clinic personnel promote a different discourse, which advertises the DNA test as an empowering and emancipatory tool for women. By revealing 'the truth' about the father, the test provides the capacity to pacify disputes, prevent domestic violence and make it possible to demand genitors to live up to their responsibilities. In this way, the test has become a tool for 'social justice' (see Ballard 2007), as the clinic director, Nelson Mwesige, maintained in our first interview in November 2019. He told me how he advertises the test in churches, village communities and media as an act of 'civic responsibility', since information about the test spread through the media will 'help the whole world' in a 'public health approach' to solving family problems. This family-centred discourse ignores the fact that, once a child is shown to be from another father, this child's dekinning from the 'wrong' father is readily done, but it is not certain that the 'real' father will be found and will accept his responsibilities. This has resulted in abandonment and couple breakages with no possibility to 'rekin' (Sarcinelli and Guerzoni 2019) the child.

Listening to songs, skimming through Ugandan daily newspapers, chatting about family issues with friends or following the evening programmes in Luganda on TVs and radios, one may gain the impression that DNA paternity testing is widespread. While official statistics on the prevalence of DNA paternity testing do not exist, the Ministry of Internal Affairs described in the media in June 2023 an increase of 70 per cent in the number of the reported tests, with hundreds of new cases every month (the source of these numbers is however not mentioned).[3] The test has been made popular by scandals among public personalities – pastors,[4]

university professors,[5] comedians[6] or ministers. Local and social media recount stories of common people struggling to gain knowledge about their biological relations.

Media has played a central role in expanding the DNA test market. More than half of my informants resorted to DNA testing because they were inspired by media stories. The DNA paternity test has become normalised in the discourse on paternity and fatherhood in Uganda. But in the absence of statistics on the phenomenon, caution is needed: access to the DNA test is still limited by the prohibitive cost. If ordered by a court, the test may be carried out for free at the government's laboratory facilities. The court can, however, decide that one of the claimants should bear the costs,[7] which at the time of writing oscillated between 300,000 and 600,000 Uganda shillings (UGX) (85–170 USD). In the words of the business director of another clinic, 'third class families' are not able to afford the costs. Another clinic professional observed that 'peasant families' may save money 'for a whole year' to carry it out.

During my ethnographic observation in Kampala clinics, I have met men and women coming from faraway rural regions of Uganda, who visited Kampala for only a few hours to do the test. In order to gather money for this procedure, some poor families have turned to TV and radio programmes in Luganda, similar to the one in the opening of this chapter. The format is imported from the US, where these shows are also 'associated with the lower classes, women or other marginalised groups in society' (Markarian 2013: 14). These programmes showcase families' intimate problems to keep the public hanging episode after episode; but in Uganda they profess a charitable mission. As the TV host Nakachwa, who became famous due to her programme on DNA testing, maintained, such programmes have a civil and benevolent orientation: the hosts only select 'the very poor, those who cannot afford the DNA test or the school fees: abandoned mothers or children', and mobilise viewers to help them obtain a DNA paternity test. The test is, therefore, for some, a tool to protect men; for others, it is a tool to empower women; and, for others, it is a means to justice.

Why the test? Reviewing the past, fixing the future

The widow of a soldier needs a DNA test on the exhumed corpse to prove her children's right to government compensation; a mother reveals to her sons that they were born out of an affair and have no right to the family land;[8] at a funeral, a group of strangers snatches the body of the deceased, claiming that her real father was from another family, and she has to be

buried at his ancestral land. These are just some examples of the reasons behind a DNA paternity test that I came across in my observation and conversations. From the reading of court proceedings, the observation of media pieces and in my ethnographic material, three reasons stand out as the most common: a suspicion of paternity fraud; a mother's attempt to get monetary support from the biological father of the child; and the wish of a man to write his will.

In the case of 'paternity fraud', an expression that in local parlance and international literature defines the suspicion that a woman would lie about her child's father, men wish to test to make sure that a child is really their own; here, 'normative claims about the wrongs of female infidelity [...] and the potential reproductive consequences' (Cannold 2008) are reinstated and overemphasised. On the use of DNA testing in contemporary Uganda, a former market worker who found out that one of his two kids was not his own succinctly stated: 'I'm telling you, having a child that belongs to you is a chance'. A Kampala businessman I interviewed at a clinic expressed a similar sentiment: 'Some young women … [*laughs*] they get confused: when the child gets sick, she'll get money from *this* man and *that* man'. An old friend concluded more generally that 'people have totally lost the trust as a result of adultery'. Men had unflattering stories to share about the extent women could go to ensure a safe upbringing for their kids: 'A woman can bring the child to two different families and tell him that he belongs to this family, "but never tell the other family!"'.

Stories about men who want to cross-check their biological relationship with the child have the peculiar character of focusing on the past. As an interviewee declared, the test 'is not an event' but a 'process', based on a review of what has happened so far: when the suspicion arises, the relationship with the woman becomes scrutinised for signs of unfaithfulness. My interviewees spoke of gossip heard in the village, or among friends and colleagues, about the women having an affair; men started living in doubt, fearing the shame that would ensue from having devoted their life to someone else's offspring. The men I interviewed had lived in suspicion over periods that spanned from eight months to 17 years before they 'gathered courage', in the words of one of them, and money, to finally initiate the DNA test. The test was often conceptualised as an assessment of the truthfulness of the relationship. For most (although not all) my interlocutors, there were no good reasons to spend money on a child that was not their biological descendent.

The second most frequent case, according to clinic personnel, included women trying to demand that the biological father of a child take responsibility, often within the framework of court cases. Women

also turned to the clinic to ascertain if two of their children came from the same father – in the case of a rape, for example. In this circumstance, a 'paternal siblingship DNA test' can reveal the shared paternity even in the absence of the fathers' DNA.

Another common reason – and increasingly frequent – for a man to get his children's DNA tested is that he is planning to write his will, a topic that came up often in my conversations. Men wished to put their DNA profile on record, so that nobody after their death could unlawfully access their wealth or stop their legitimate heir from doing so.

While the 'paternity fraud' narratives dwelled on the past history of a relationship, men who were preparing their will were more focused on ensuring a desirable future – safeguarded from manipulation and improvisation and fixed on paper, for the peace of mind of the coming generations. Max, an NGO consultant who became a father at an early age, described his traumatic childhood memory of an uncle who had to be exhumed to check his relationship to a child: 'When I saw that, I felt that it would be important for me to carry out the DNA [test] … Your database will always be there, they can check with [the clinic] – other than digging me up'. With a DNA portfolio, as Nelson Mwesige, the clinic director, maintained with passion, 'even in your absence you can be part of the future; even when you are out of the future, your name continues'.

Blood calling

The temporality of the DNA test allows for a sense of closure, where the past is confirmed and the future preserved. It also affects men's lives in another way – by determining a sharp turn in their and their children's lives. Upon revelation of the identity of the biological father, a child (at whatever age) ideally 'moves' out from the clan that has raised him/her their whole life and, if the name of the biological father is known, enters with full rights their true blood line. As mentioned, the ideal case is when the mother knows the father, and the latter agrees to take care of the child. Most of the men I interviewed did not seem worried about the child's destiny, where the result of the DNA came out negative: it was, after all, the woman's responsibility to bring the child to their rightful genitor. While some fathers thought it was the right of the child to know their origins, and others were mainly guided by their grudges with the child's mother, some of my interlocutors explained how they took the test because of a fear of finding out the truth too late in life, when they would need the child's support and when the child's migration to another

clan would result in the man's loneliness. The possibility of being left by children was terrifying to many, even more so when, after spending a full life with 'the right number of children he wants to have' (in Max's words), a man suddenly finds himself alone, too old to have other kids.

There is a sense of irrefutability of the DNA test in these narratives, presenting the migration of children between clans as the only logical and morally fair option after science has revealed the ultimate truth. Although this was often presented as a revolutionary novelty, the compelling qualities of the DNA testing resonated with local conceptions of how biological ties affect the future of an individual.

Some interlocutors explained how the consequences of a negative DNA test was an irresistible 'call' by 'blood': sooner or later, 'you will look for your blood' and a child will be reunited with their real (patrilineal) clan. My research assistant, Tom, explained that clans are about 'blood attachment': a clan 'can hunt their people' and, if someone is not allocated to the right clan since birth, because they were born from an affair with a man from another clan, 'the clan can *come for you*'. It does so 'by making you sick or mentally unstable, or mak[ing] you fail in your business'. A man may also become ill when he refuses to recognise a child who is indeed his; he will only recover when he finally finds the child, gives them a name and places them in the right clan – his own. 'Blood follows you, until it finds you', Tom concluded. In the song on DNA testing by Mark Makumbi that I quoted earlier in the chapter, a line refers ironically to how children, wickedly assigned by unfaithful women to wealthy men who are not their biological fathers, would one day leave and return to their real poor parent: in fact, 'the poor are seeing that blood will never stop [*omusayi gujja kunoonya*]; these children […] one day will go back to their real fathers'. Local understandings about the working of bloodlines can now be substantiated by the scientific 99.9 per cent probability of the DNA test.

Being 'called by your blood' can also be scary, because it may change the future in ways one cannot foresee. Ronald, a 40-year-old moto-taxi rider in a village on the outskirts of Kampala, was contacted by an old neighbour who claimed he was sure to be Ronald's father, and proposed to 'take him to the DNA' to prove it. While liking the man and his family, Ronald found the idea 'challenging', as he felt attached to the people (and the father) he had grown up with. However, he also recounted that his own child had fallen sick years before, and that the child's mother had been accused of having caused the illness by conceiving the child out of wedlock (in this case, the child would have been affiliated to the 'wrong clan', hence his sickness). In our discussion, we pondered whether it was

not the case, instead, that Ronald's child was in the 'wrong' clan because of Ronald's 'misplacement'. In this case, the DNA test proposed by the old neighbour might not only reassess Ronald's past history, but also 'fix' the future and the health of his child.

In a reflection on the increased trend of genetic testing in American society, Carsten (2000b: 697) argues that 'knowledge of the medical history of forebears is desired […] as something that might be transmitted down the generations. It encapsulates a history of kinship, but its significance is for the future'. Genetic information contributes to the writing of personal (and medical) histories, but, as shown in this section, is also key to one's projection into the future. Although the reunification scenario through the reconnection to the 'real clan' is often hard to put into practice, DNA testing is a very powerful disconnecting mechanism, which is given meaning through, and at the same time confirms, local understandings of the workings of blood.

The illusion of simplification

For some interlocutors, one attractive factor for using a DNA test was that the DNA test results 'cut the story short'. Differently from 'you white, who have a culture for adoption' in the words of one interviewee, 'Ugandans like to have their own children, their own blood', as simple as that. The DNA is there to verify blood: a simplifying scientific (i.e. irrefutable) mechanism to establish who is kin. In this interpretation, the DNA test seems to draw on a conception of fatherhood that boils down to genetic components and to the dyad father/child, abstracted from the larger social context and from the difficult entanglements it implies. It reminds of reproductive technologies that enact a 'deconstruction of motherhood' by dismembering women's body parts, their physiological functions and their social roles (Neyer and Bernardi 2011; St. Peter 1989), or to biopolitical interventions on parenthood that '[isolate] the site of responsibility for outcomes to the individual' (Pentecost and Ross 2019: 755–6).

While anthropological studies have interrogated kinship beyond the Western-centric focus on substance, blood and genes (Carsten 2000a; Schneider 1984; Strathern 1992), DNA paternity testing seems to be enacting an opposite turn – re-essentialising kinship as genetic and unnegotiable. The DNA test is commonly understood as the simple reading of a 'truth' that is already there – and that, as such, does not depend on intentionality and creativity, but rather simply on scanning what nature has already done.

It should be noted that the preference for one's 'own children' and one's 'own blood' is far from being an historical phenomenon in Uganda, where adoption-like practices and the circulation of children between different households have been the norm for a long time. Historically, both social and biological ties between children and adults have interwoven around Lake Victoria (Doyle 2016; Stephens 2013). In precolonial Buganda, an emphasis on biological fatherhood (Stephens 2013: 95) paralleled an increased centralisation of power along paternal lines, but ties with the mother were also important and, according to Doyle (2016: 69), they encouraged 'mobility and competitiveness'. The circulation of children in different households as a pedagogical experience and path to maturity also has a long history in the Great Lakes region (Doyle 2016). Contemporary literature on Africa acknowledges that any tie with a caring adult is relevant to the child (Morrel 2005), such as 'surrogate parenthood' (Warrington 2013) or fostering (see Isiugo-Abanihe 1985). In Uganda, uncles and aunts are often the primary advisors to teenagers, such as in the case of the *ssenga* (paternal aunts; see Tamale 2006), proving that biological fatherhood has never been the only focus of childrearing. Similar flexibility between biological and social kinship applies in other regions: in the Iteso area described by Meinert (2009), a child belongs to the man who paid the bride wealth to his mother, rather than the biological one. A child is also the 'son or daughter of a certain home rather than of individuals' and can be thus addressed as one's own child by 'more adults than the biological mother and father' (Meinert 2009: 25). Meinert observes how the reality on the ground is blurred, with the 'system being constantly negotiated and pulled in various directions' (Meinert 2009). Finally, the recent HIV-AIDS epidemic has made adoption of orphans and other forms of kinning key to the survival of an orphaned generation (Whyte 2014), along with a tradition that emphasises social, rather than biological, intergenerational relationships.

Is DNA testing really eliminating all this complexity? Is it really only about gene markers and the dyad father/child? In the next section, I propose instead to understand DNA testing as a profoundly relational, collective and messy process that involves fathers, children, mothers and entire clans.

A relational, collective, process

Clinic director Nelson Mwesige translated for me the Luganda words for DNA, *endaga butonde*, as 'to show the way something is created'. This

suggests a processual and relational context, where *something* is brought to life, and at least two parties are engaged in a relationship – the one who shows and the one who sees how that *something* has come to life. For my research assistant Tom, *endaga* is difficult to translate: it could be translated with the English word 'scanner', but 'the scanner is more of a device, while *endaga* is more an action, the *way* to see or show'. The DNA test is an action, a process, the way in which something appears to an observing agent. Exploring the 'way someone has been created' (in Tom's words) is a relational practice, a pedagogical process of explanation and translation. The DNA in this perspective is less the picture of a fact than a negotiated and shared effort to show and to see.

The conceptualisation of the test as a process of active construction and attribution of meaning, I suggest, is also shown by the lexical slippage from 'DNA paternity testing' to simply, 'the DNA' in everyday parlance. 'I have done the DNA'; 'she has received the DNA'; 'they told me the DNA' are common expressions. What people refer to as 'the DNA', here, is neither the genetic material involved, nor the laboratory techniques. Compare this to the sentence a Ugandan colleague in Makerere once uttered: 'In the past, looking at the nose, saying "this guy doesn't resemble his father": that was *the DNA*!' 'The DNA' captures metonymically the active process of *producing knowledge* about someone; a process based on observation, comparison and pondering.

The very process leading to the DNA test originates in information shared within relationships. This was my interlocutor Mawejje's experience: 'In getting information from colleagues [about a possible affair of my wife], I got suspicious: I looked at the [kid's] eyes, ehhhhh maybe … The skin colour – ehhh I am too dark, the child is so light …'. Traditionally, as well as today in rural contexts, aunts and uncles would scrutinise the baby's body to confirm similarities with the clan's members. They could notice that 'something is strange with the shape of the hands, the colour of the skin, the behaviours … often *the DNA* starts from there'. Suspicion itself does not grow in isolation but is filled by others' opinions: 'People will be involved instantly of course', Mawejje laughed; 'It's not about you, that *you two* talk about this and that. It cannot be too private, if you inform people; and you *have to* inform them, because at that point there is so much boiling!'

The couple may take the case to the local council, where local leaders may try to bring the parties together to agree on separation, child custody and so on. If this fails, the process will continue with the police and in the courts, until the dispute is settled. All along, friends and family will play some role – as counsellors, drivers, financiers. Even

strangers may become part of the process. A father who appeared on a radio programme told me: 'I have not had any fear [to go public], I was determined to know. We went [to the radio] with the people from the village [*bakukyalo*], all [*bonna bonna*], they were many, we went in five vehicles!' He opened his arms full of happiness.

Before testing their children (with or without the consent and presence of the mother), men often consult other men in their families: fathers or brothers. These are also the chosen interlocutors after reading the results, in case of 'a negative' that shatters all certainties. One example is Nick, who found out his daughter was from another man:

> It was a hard experience for me. My father was alive, and I had a lot of confidence in him. I was speaking on the phone and breathing fast, and he could immediately tell … he said 'where are you, stay there and I am coming'. He came with my brother, I handed them the documents [the test results], they said 'we know how to handle it'. I wanted to call [the mother of the kid] and burst, but they confiscated my phone, it was a good thing. We went to Jinja [to his family place]. I sat with my mum, she said 'these things happen, but how you handle it is what matters … because if you don't handle it the right way you end up in jail'. So I said, 'fine'. They counselled me, they called her to come … but she knew, and she didn't turn up. Then they said, 'Let's go to her parents' home', and her parents called the woman to join us … She denied. We had to involve the parents, the church leader, but she still denied.

This testimony shows the importance of relationships in conceiving, receiving and handling the DNA test process and results. A drop of blood or saliva can mobilise broad social contexts, inserting the individual in thick and complex networks of relationships. Parents and siblings are also affected, as well as relationships between families and between clans. Situations of crisis and potential breakage in intergenerational reproduction, like the one presented by an illegitimate child, call for collective moral reflections and the need to be situated in larger moral communities. In a different context, within her work on prenatal scans in Vietnam, Gammeltoft (2014: 46) reflects on non-Western conceptions of reproduction and filiation less as 'a matter of individual autonomy and choice' than as 'questions of collectivity'. Prenatal scanning is also a technology that may provide knowledge that is hard to take in, and that must be translated into 'choices' (for abortion, for example, or for keeping a child with malformations) that are never really individual but rather

the result of 'quests for belonging' (Gammeltoft 2014: 105) in larger communities. If taken as a screening technology, the DNA testing also challenges one's positioning within a number of relationships – with the child, the partner, the clan – and its results are far from simplifying the concept of fatherhood.

The relationship with the child: hurting, and the ambivalences of 'care'

Despite the reduction of paternity to the genetic relationship between father and child, the DNA does not – and could not – erase important emotional and material dimensions of father-and-child relationships, in a country in which models of caring fatherhood are increasingly appreciated (see Baral 2021).

My interlocutors' attitudes toward the children they tested varied broadly. For example, Max decided to test his child when the latter reached 13 years of age; Max had gotten the child during his school years and he had often suspected that he may not be his biological father. He was ready to keep the child with him in case of a negative result. This attitude was very different from Musa's approach, who sent me a message after the negative result stating that he intended to cut any contact with the child and the mother, and to stop 'sending school fees'.

The phenomenological dimension of the father–child relationship is complex. A common theme in my material is the tight entanglement of material and emotional care: both are part of the investment made by a father, and both are challenged by negative test results. Spending money on children in a precarious economy and finding out that they are not yours hurts. It *literally* hurts – it triggers physical pain (as described by one informant who had a 'running stomach' after the test) and feelings of betrayal and despair. 'Caring for children but finding they are not yours, makes someone *very hurt*. That's why it's better to test before caring for the children', Mawejje echoed. 'Imagine how much *hurt* that would be', he said, 'after taking care of that child for many years, finding out that this is not mine'. 'Wasted love' was how this man defined the time, money *and* emotions invested in the child. To my question if the damage was psychological or material, he replied 'It is all what you have mentioned'.

Asked about emotional attachment to the child, Musa replied: 'No problem about that, I can have it; I can help with something like school fees'. Here, emotional and monetary care are conflated. This point also arose in another interview: 'I will not stop *paying* for the kid if it's not mine – I will still *make relationship* with him'. 'Relations' and 'emotions'

are inseparable from materiality: a negative DNA test causes both an emotional and a monetary breakdown. Parent–child relations involve a 'social transaction and bonding' with an 'economic aspect' (Meinert 2009: 150 on Kapwa sub-county): raising a child is supposed to generate resources that a negative DNA test may tragically destroy by separating the child from the clan that had raised them. In this perspective, the DNA test does not really reduce a relationship to its genetic core – it rather triggers emotional and economic anxieties that fathers deal with in many different ways.

Relationship with women: DNA testing as a patriarchal advantage

Concerning the relations between men and women involved in the test, we can observe important gendered implications of the DNA testing process. Typically, men have an upper hand when it comes to demanding (rather than suggesting) that a DNA test is taken. They can even decide by themselves, without informing the child's mother. My interlocutors hardly regretted forcing their women into a corner; Max maintained that women's offended reaction is misplaced. 'If I can verify a plot of land, why can't I verify my child? If you have something to hide' he observed, 'that's when I don't trust you'. Despite the 'family justice discourse' promoted by clinics and media, the fact that refusing to take a test can be taken as a confession of guilt in itself puts a lot of pressure on women, worsening rather than ameliorating the atmosphere in the family.

For a woman, to insist that a man appear at the local council or the court and undergo the DNA test is much harder: the man has on his side the power of withholding provision (if not of physical violence), or can simply disappear. A negative result, moreover, will almost certainly result in separations; men resort to the test less to *construct* a relationship with a child (and his mother), than to shut it down. As a technology that screens the material of reproduction to determine a relationship in ways that will heavily affect the future of a woman, DNA testing bears resemblance to technologies such as assisted reproductive technologies, prenatal screenings and the like – described by feminist critique as ambivalently emancipatory *and* alienating (Deech and Smajdor 2007; Gammeltoft 2014; St. Peter 1989). Moreover, DNA testing 'naturalize[s] a specifically patriarchal version of kinship' (Nash 2004: 8) where women are mere 'kin-keepers' (Haddow 2009: 1015), while 'the father to son Y-chromosome transmission is elevated as the superlative direct connection' (Nash 2004: 11).

As shown by other chapters in this book, women's agency may lie in preserving their bond with their children, often by excluding men from their life or cultivating multiple ties with different men (see Whyte, and Mogensen and Obika, in this volume). Nakapachu, the radio presenter we met in the opening scene of this chapter, who described herself as a women's rights campaigner, told me how she believed that women should not run after men. 'We [women] have kids, we have everything!', she shouted passionately, an argument that she thought made the DNA irrelevant from a woman's perspective. From the perspective of the mother/child dyad, women's strategies to affiliate their children to men who can guarantee a better future becomes understandable, even to some fathers. Max, for example, told me that he would have understood if his ex-girlfriend had lied to him about their child, assigning the child to him even if he was not the father just to ensure the child a good future: 'If this child came to me, if the mother chose to give this child to me', he said, 'the mother probably knew and chose to act that way [for good reasons]'.

The DNA testing, however, removes women's leverage in deciding their child's affiliations. In the past, rituals would be carried out to confirm the baby's belonging to the father's clan; women could steer the process and influence the affiliation of their baby. In the ritual *kwalula baana*, still practised in central Uganda, the umbilical cord is put in a mixture of water, ghee and herbs (some say also cow dung: Mukunya, Haaland and Tumwine 2020) and it will show the baby's 'true belonging' by floating or sinking. As widely recognised, mothers can act on the mixture's density. 'In the old days', as recounted by an old grandmother in Kampala, women also had an array of options to ensure that a kid conceived from an affair would resemble their legitimate husbands. They could bathe in a specific mixture of herbs, pronouncing words such as 'I want you baby to look like the father of this house and nobody should discover this', or give the herbalist a thread from the shirt of the husband and a piece of cloth used to clean the baby, to guarantee that 'when you go and check, you'll never see' the difference. A woman could also look at her husband through a hole cut in the bottom of a basket, in order to make her illegitimate child look like him (something that can be seen in the video of Makumbi's song). These stories are imbued with a sense of (real or presumed) agency for women, who could decide what could be seen or not seen – before the 'DNA scan' came about.

Men recounted more violent rituals of deciding affiliation.[9] With a mixture of horror and respect for the old days, one of my interlocutors wanted me to understand their rationale: 'A woman would think hard if she had slept with another man. She had to recall, and say "Ah-ahhh, I

think the child doesn't belong to this clan". The logic behind the ritual was for her to *kwefumintiriza* [reflect, ponder], to think if really the child belongs to this clan'.

In the accounts of the process of attributing paternity in the past, women are therefore described as active and powerful: they could seemingly try to let others see or not see, they could reflect and ponder, they could actively defend their baby's position in the clan. That is why an old Luganda proverb maintains 'if your mother is not yet dead, you will not know your actual father' ('*Nyoko nga tanaffa tomanya kikakyo*') – a mother could reveal the name of the real father on her very deathbed, having been able to hide it throughout her whole life. Today, the DNA test deprives women of this agentive choice. 'It was the responsibility of mothers to know in the old days', an interlocutor put it, 'until the DNA came, and you had to go scientific'.

While a positive DNA test may contribute to making the father–child relationship stronger, it does not necessarily make the household thrive. 'DNA negatives' jeopardise women's possibility to navigate poverty, loneliness or violence without offering better options. 'The DNA' interferes heavily with the relationship between men and women, and between children and mothers. It simply removes the possibility for mothers to tighten or loosen relationships with different men in their lives, or the chance to 'keep quiet until you're old enough', as a TV presenter put it. A waitress with whom I happened to watch a TV piece on DNA during a restaurant lunch put it clearly and simply: 'This DNA is not doing us women any good'.

Relationship with the clan: kinning and unkinning

As we have already seen, DNA testing affects relationships between the man's and woman's families and clans. In theory, children in central and eastern Uganda belong to the clan of their fathers, structured on the principle of 'blood' descent (although, as other chapters in this book show, children's affiliation works in more complicated and creative ways in reality). Ideally, the clan represents the source of belonging and the place where a life should start and end. Relatives from the father's clan apply traditional routines to check the physical resemblance of a newborn to other clan members; the patrilineal clan, in its wholeness, approves the baby's affiliation to a particular line of blood by assigning names that belong to the clan's name repertoire and by installing children as heirs later on in life. When Max decided to take his child, whom his clan had welcomed years before, to 'the DNA', the clan were 'furious' because the

decision signalled mistrust in their capability to sensibly assess belonging. The DNA test risks undermining the power of the clan in deciding a children's affiliation, and elders can perceive it as a technological intrusion that dismisses their knowledge and wisdom.

When the test proves that a child does not in fact belong to the clan he was born in, the child may be rejected. Nick, a policeman who decided to continue caring for a child even after finding out that they were not biologically related, told me how 'the love the clan had for him is different now'. The idea that he could take care of the child no matter what made his paternal relatives confused and question his sanity. His child had lost the access to the clan who had raised him, and was no longer allowed to visit the grandparents' village without Nick's presence. 'But I don't blame them', he added, acknowledging the importance of 'blood' in local understandings of kin. It was up to Nick, now, as a single parent, to support the child and decide whether his will would leave wealth and goods to his non-biological son.

Thus, while 'genetic thinking' seems to reduce children to 'genetic fragments' and elides the 'complex ways in which parent–child relationships and children's relational identities are embodied' (Robert 2019: 68), social and cultural work around the test proves the continuing relevance of negotiation and reflection for positioning oneself and one's descent into a community, such as in a patrilineal clan. DNA thus becomes an act of 'kinning' (Howell 2003: 465) or 'the process by which a foetus or new-born child […] is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom'. At the same time, it is also an act of 'un-kinning/akinning/neverkinning' (Sarcinelli and Guerzoni 2019: 9); that is, an effort to prevent or dismantle possible kin-relations, or, in the case of an unknown father in my material, the impossibility to rebuild those very relations to compensate for the loss of emplacement in the clan who has raised you your entire life.

Both kinning and unkinning are imbued with intentionality and relationality. Howell (2003) argues that the kinning of biological children requires much less effort than the kinning of the adopted children that she describes in her work. The ethnographic material I have presented here has so far shown how even the apparently simple shortcut represented by the DNA tests requires a notable emotional and relational investment on the part of everyone involved. The test is key to activating and deactivating kin relations, in a way that is processual, relational and entangled with gender and power.

After the test: relations and negotiations around the 'ultimate proof'

My interlocutors described 'the DNA' as 'scientific' and 'ultimate proof' of 'the real father'. Despite not knowing the details of the process the DNA sample undergoes in the laboratory, the '99.9 per cent' probability advertised by clinics' websites and flyers was enough to inspire fervid defence of the test's reliability. DNA testing is perceived by both clinics and parents as a modern, scientific tool, in a country that – in the words of one informant – 'is developing' and increasingly 'trusts technology'. For Nelson Mwesige, the director of his own clinic, DNA paternity testing is both a form of diagnosis and a treatment – 'pure medicine'. As such, the DNA test is defended prima facie as incontrovertible proof.

In the ruling of a 2015 civil suit for land grabbing, the judge declared that she was 'more inclined to believe the DNA report […] because it is scientific and not based on *mere information*' (Civil Suit 15/2013, emphasis added). The DNA 'truth' is an alternative to the unreliable narratives that people provide on their identity, so that 'the stories we repeatedly tell about ourselves and our origins', as Lee writes (2012: 33), 'are deemed to be less real than the results of a buccal swab test'. Science is, however, ultimately understood and used socially, contingently and locally. Relationships are both the origin of the whole process, and key to how the results are received.

'DNA is a very trusted source, I can say' Mawejje told me, only to contradict himself soon after: 'When you're disappointed with the result, you could think that maybe there was an error somewhere … Since these things are made by humans'. In the same conversation, Mawejje described the DNA as 'Gospel truth', because 'if they say it's scientifically proven, nobody will say it can be wrong'. References to religion were made by other interlocutors; one remitted the results to Allah's will, while clinic director Nelson Mwesige maintained that, whatever the test results, it was 'God's will'. Despite the sacrality of these references, biological truth can become a topic of discussion and negotiations 'suffused of uncertainty and ambiguity' (Gammeltoft 2014). Radio host Nakapachu, whom I introduced in the opening section of this chapter, maintained that people do not trust DNA per se – 'they rather trust *me*', the public figure with broad networks of favour, who can provide the DNA test results. Similar to Gammeltoft's observation on Vietnamese women receiving information about fetal screening, DNA test clients may have trust in medical authority, but scientific results can only become meaningful by drawing on 'everyday experience rather than by virtue of […] abstract authority' (Gammeltoft 2014: 165). Trust in people, rather than trust in science, is key.

That 'the ultimate proof' is not perceived as entirely ultimate is also shown by what happens after the results are communicated. All clinics offer counselling sessions either before or after the test, if not both. As Mawejje jokingly told me, counselling is useful 'if you get a positive result, but if you get the negative, you know that it will strike your heart anyway'. Some men react aggressively, returning to the clinic in the company of family members to protest the result. A psychologist in a clinic outside town recalled a man shouting at her, accusing her of having embarrassed 'the whole clan' with 'her' results. Nelson Mwesige, at his clinic in Wandegeya, used to counsel couples before the test and to collect their stories in order to understand how they came to the decision. In this way, he could better counsel them after the test. Sometimes such stories may be key to understand the result: for example, if a mother had sex with the brother of the alleged father, the story should become part of the testing process, as the brothers would share 50 per cent of their genetic material (see Kotze, Scholtz and Opperman 2006). Nelson has, however, been accused more than once of 'tweaking clients' stories' to influence the outcome of the test, and has since decided to stop pre-counselling.

Rather than being alternative to human stories, therefore, 'genes tell stories as well [...] rooted in equivocal and challengeable claims' (Lee 2012: 33). But which stories should one listen to? Whether the DNA stories are valid at all is itself a choice – a form of 'cultural work' to '[convert] the highly technical and inaccessible language of population genetics into meaningful concepts' (Nash 2004: 4). Stories make sense within relations much broader, and much more complicated, than the father/child dyad. The 'scientific truth' told by the test is not the end of a process, but just the beginning of new negotiations with experts and among family members.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how the DNA test, officially presented as a cold scientific truth that simply provides a picture of what is already there, is actually a process with its own social and temporal dimensions, capable to kin and unkin and to throw off balance entire communities. In this way, the DNA test is an interesting social process that is important in understanding kinship dynamics in contemporary Uganda.

In a world in which intentionality and choice are increasingly valued in the construction of relatedness, genetics seem to 'prescribe', instead, who *should* be kin (Finkler 2001: 245). Fathers often seem interested in

cutting, rather than building, relations with women – thus contradicting the promises of unity and harmony made by media and clinic personnel. However, I have shown that DNA paternity testing cannot be extrapolated from an array of relationships that the test establishes and augments, while destroying others. On their side, mothers do not necessarily find in genetics a relief to their economic and affective problems, and rather perceive the process as humiliating and further isolating.

As I have discussed, DNA paternity testing also has its peculiar temporality. Not only does it affect the past and future of single individuals and families; it also promises to play a role in emergent ideologies of kinship in Uganda, whose future is still to be imagined and observed. What will the fate be of children who are unkinned after a negative test? Will the law adapt, as it has done in other countries, to the needs of this new category of children? Will women get legal tools to hold the children's father accountable even if they refuse the test?

As shown in this chapter, however, elements of novelty in the DNA test (for example, how it limits women's agency or provides 'cold truths' about kinship ties) should not obliterate the elements of continuity that the test shows in comparison with traditional pasts. DNA testing confirms local ideologies of 'blood', and cannot be understood outside pre-existing relationships with private and public networks.

Max showed me a picture of the child whose DNA he had tested, with tears in his eyes for the love he feels for him. The child was unaware that Max had tested his DNA, having been told that the clinic would check only his blood group. 'Will you tell him one day?' I asked him. 'Yes, when he has finished his school and he is a man', he replied. 'I will tell him that there was nothing wrong in doing that, in verifying where he belongs. And that DNA is a normal way how people do it: that it will be really traditional, that there is no big deal about it'.

'DNA will be really traditional' as Max expressed – part of the natural way of conceiving and practising fatherhood and kinship in future Uganda. There is still much to be understood about what kind of relationships DNA testing entices and dissipates, rewriting, while doing so, the past and future of Ugandan families and clans.

Notes

1   See https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1160506/uganda-dna-testing-machine, accessed on 27 April 2024.
2   *Endaga Obutonde,* Mark Makumbi, 2014.
3   See https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/more-men-seeking-dna-tests-for-children-ministry-4267966, accessed on 25 September 2024.

4 https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/pastor-yiga-dna-results-out-file
   -submitted-to-dpp-1828258.
5 https://observer.ug/news/headlines/73932-former-makerere-university-accused-of-killing
   -his-daughter-maid-arrested.
6 https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1336720/paddy-bitama-father-finally-revealed.
7 According to the Child Act, art. 69, when an application is made for declaration of parentage,
   the alleged father or mother of the child has to appear before the court, and the court may
   require proof, such as 'a blood sample for the purpose of blood tests'. However, DNA testing is
   not mentioned.
8 Bukedde TV, *Akakaliko Enfuufu,* 29 November 2019.
9 For example, children sitting on a high stone, and confirmed as clan members if they did not
   fall down – or similar challenges involving bodies of water. In another ritual, herbs to drink
   were given to the kids from a special plate (*kibya*): the child would survive the concoction only
   if they were true member of that clan.

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3
Bride wealth as trade-offs, security or exploitation? Multiple generation and gender perspectives on marriage realities in Lira

Mary Ejang and Lotte Meinert

The challenge of bride wealth

If you give us your daughter, Mzee
We will pay you with cows and with money

Young man, let me tell you a thing
My daughter is not for transactional bling

You give us some gifts and she cooks for you there
Bring plenty of grandchildren every year

Now children are many, but money are few
Be patient for bride wealth, I'll give it to you

My husband, my parents are calling for you
They struggle with feeding and ask what you do?

The future of children depends on your giving
Which lineage and clan will take them in willing?

My daughter, come home, that man is a failure
bring children along, if he wants, he will bail 'ya'

Okay let me come, but my husband is broken
Is this exploitation, protection or token?

My wife, don't leave me, and kidnap the children
Your parents should know they will get future million

Mama, where is Daddy? Is this a divorce?
Is this our land, for grandpa or yours?

Introduction

Despite significant social shifts in customary marriages and partnerships, bride wealth provision remains a longstanding ideal for many in Uganda. Yet, the ideals and expectations towards bride wealth seldom fit the economic realities, creating social tensions and disappointments. The tensions often appear between family members holding different generational and gender positions. This chapter thus focuses on generational and gendered positions and perspectives on bride wealth trade-offs, marriage security and exploitation in relation to Lango customary marriage in Lira district in northern Uganda.

According to the Ugandan Customary Marriage Act, marriage is referred to as a contractual union between a man and a woman who decide to live together as husband and wife for the rest of their life (Government of Uganda 2021). In customary marriage, the 'contract' is essentially proved by the negotiation and provision of bride wealth; hence, the fundamental reason for bride wealth presentation is to cement the relationship socially and publicly between the spouses, their families and clans to ensure some level of mutual agreement between the parties. In this way, marriage with bride wealth communicates sociability between families and partners as mutual recognition, but it also, consequently, establishes family-based hierarchical social orders where women and children are dependent on men, and where the older generations hold power over the younger generation.

By marriage security, we refer to partners having a high degree of confidence that their spouse is committed in the marriage on a long term and full-time basis, and partners share and stay together through struggles and fears. Marriage security is largely perceived to be initiated and communicated socially with bride wealth provision in marriage. The provision of bride wealth is customarily meant to create a bond of mutual recognition between not only the partners, but also the partners' families. Yet, these bonds in marriage relations can be, or turn, exploitative.

Bride wealth may be a form of exploitation if, for example, a father marries off a daughter early in order to gain bride wealth for his personal gain or exploits the situation of the young man who would like to marry

by demanding a high 'bride price'. Bride wealth may also turn exploitative if a husband (and/or his family) uses it as an argument of having 'paid' for a wife and therefore 'owns' her, and can manipulate, maltreat or abuse power to control her.

With the term bride wealth trade-offs, we bring attention to processes of negotiating and compromising interest for something else that is beneficial economically and socially. Bride wealth trade-offs are mainly considered from older (male) perspectives and bear the connotation of compromises for material gain or labour loss. The economic analogy of trade-offs refers to the assessment process with competing expectations of kinsmen. In Lango custom, the transfer of wealth is usually from the groom's kin to the bride's family, and the trade-off entails the transfer of the bride's rights, labour and her capacity to bear children for the groom's patrilineage.

The discussion we raise in this chapter is thus a classical one about current bride wealth ideals and realities in Lango. Are bride wealth practices and ambitions forms of exploitation and trading of women in order to legitimise marriage and older male generations' power over women and younger men, or/and do bride wealth practices also enhance women, children and older generations' security and rights? We use a multi-perspective generational and gender approach to discuss the bride wealth perspectives in Lango customary marriage.

A multi-perspective framework

Our analytical framework in this chapter is what we term a multi-perspectival view presenting and focusing on inter-relational generational and gendered perspectives. What we attempt with this framework is to include multiple perspectives, positions and intersections (female and male children, young women and men, older men and women) and consider the inter-relations between these positions regarding bride wealth and marriage. This framework is a push back against two older theoretical approaches: structural androcentric approaches presenting ideas about the 'exchange of women' and gynocentric early feminist approaches focusing exclusively on women's perspectives. We unfold these two perspectives briefly below before describing our multi-perspectival framework.

Male and patriarchal perspectives dominated old colonial theories of bride wealth and marriage, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural theories (1947) arguing that what characterised human society

Table 3.1 Perspectives on bride wealth in relation to generation and gender position

Generational/ gender group	Pros	Cons
Girls	✓ Provides girls with temporary identity and filiation to paternal kin ✓ Girls have stronger claim for support for their own bride wealth negotiations in the future	✗ In case of marriage dissolution, the children remain the father's property ✗ If no bride wealth paid, father's family has fewer responsibilities ✗ Girls lose rights to support when bride wealth issues are not solved
Boys	✓ Provides boys with identity and filiation to paternal kin ✓ Boys have stronger claim for support, inheritance, access to land, and a basis for their own bride wealth in the future	✗ In case of marriage dissolution, the children remain the father's property ✗ If no bride wealth paid, father's family has fewer responsibilities ✗ Boys lose rights to support and a secure future when bride wealth issues are not solved
Young men	✓ A sign of maturity ✓ Respect from the clan and the community ✓ Appreciation of your wife ✓ Confirms relationship with in-laws ✓ Provides security in marriage	✗ Exploitative when amount demanded is too high ✗ Tension and conflicts with wife and in-laws ✗ Wife can be removed when you cannot 'pay' ✗ The in-laws expect more resources even after marriage ✗ Denied access to children if wife's family keep them

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Young women	✓ Provides security in marriage ✓ You command authority in the family and the clan ✓ You gain respect from your family and the matrimonial family ✓ The basis for asset inheritance including land	✗ In-laws equate bride wealth to purchase, and you can be exploited by those who have 'bought' you ✗ Can bind you in a violent marriage because your family cannot refund (fear of not being able to divorce) ✗ Your family can remove you if no 'payment' has been given ✗ Lack of control over reproduction ✗ Denied freedom of movement ✗ Denied access to children if husband's family keep them
Women's parents	✓ The husband and in-laws show respect for the bride's family ✓ Provides social cohesion between the two families ✓ Provides a sense of security in old age, when son-in-law will continue to help ✓ Perceived as a source of income in appreciation of a daughter	✗ Perceive the loss of a daughter as loss of labour ✗ Your daughter can be mistreated because of bride wealth given ✗ The bride's parents perceive it as a source of income ✗ May prevent daughter from divorcing even if marriage is violent because they think they have to refund the bride wealth
Men's parents	✓ A sense of pride that they and their son are able to provide for a daughter-in-law ✓ An appreciated daughter-in-law provides reliable labour to the groom's family ✓ Provides a sense of security in old age, when daughter-in-law feels appreciated and will continue to help	✗ Loss of assets to the groom's family ✗ Daughter-in-law may escape if the bride wealth is not 'paid' ✗ Daughter in-law may kidnap the children as 'hostages' if bride wealth is not 'paid' ✗ The family and clan lose custody of the children over unpaid bride wealth

universally was the exchange of words (communication), things (trade) and women (marriage). Lévi-Strauss' idea of exchange of women was central in French structuralist approaches to the study of kinship and marriage. Marriage was considered the elementary structures of society, which through the 'circulation of women' bound social groups (e.g. clans) together and created stable, cohesive societies. This 'exchange of women' concept has been criticised thoroughly on three grounds: (1) the androcentric perspective that reduces women to objects of exchange; (2) the lack of ethnographic material to support the theory; and (3) the speculative nature of relying on logical categories rather than empirical material (Dousset 2018).

Some of the critics of the 'exchange of women' conceptualisation were early feminists, such as Gayle Rubin (1975) who carefully analysed the premises and consequences of structural theories of marriage in relation to Marxism, psychoanalysis and other popular ideas of the 1970s. In 'The traffic in women' (1975), she pointed out that one of the premises of marriage and bride wealth in the structuralist perspective was that women were considered subordinate and the object of men's desire, and not subjects who actively desired sex (or anything else) themselves. Rubin described these connections between power over women's sexuality, subordination and gender roles as the 'sex/gender system', which was, she argued, basically a patriarchal (and capitalist) construct. Many in this early generation of feminists argued strongly for turning the frame of reference to look at and understand women's perspectives and transforming basic power hierarchies. The proceeding generations of feminist scholars refined these perspectives and insisted that feminism is not about promoting an exclusively gynocentric perspective, but about focusing on various kinds of intersecting inequities in society (e.g. in relation to (dis)ability, age, race, class, as well as gender).

Our multi-perspectival framework pushes back on both exclusively androcentric perspectives (i.e. Lévi-Strauss) and gynocentric perspectives (i.e. Rubin), which easily become polarised and biased. We are inspired instead by generational perspectives on kinship and marriage in Africa (Alber, Häberlein and Martin 2010; Pauli 2019; Reece 2022). We argue for the inclusion of multiple perspectives – both male and female, as well as generational male and female perspectives, to gain more nuanced and balanced views of marriage and bride wealth.

Based on our empirical findings, we have presented this multi-perspective on bride wealth elsewhere for policy purposes (Ejang, Otim and Meinert 2024) in a matrix form spelling out advantages and disadvantages of bride wealth from different positions. In this chapter, we

provide some of the empirical material from fieldwork in Lira that gave rise to this multi-perspectival matrix. In Table 3.1 is a short version of the matrix, which also structures the presentation of data in this chapter. In order to break with the patriarchal tradition of beginning with elderly men, and to break with the early feminist tradition of focusing on women, we start with children: girls' and boys' perspectives on bride wealth.

Methods, positionality and context

The empirical material for this chapter was collected by Mary Ejang during fieldwork in Lira district between 2020 and 2023. Mary is a Ugandan gender scholar and Lango speaker, and she conducted this fieldwork in her home district where she interviewed 45 participants aged 18–78 years. We categorise these into two generations: young people who were not married or in the process of marrying and roughly between 18–30 years; elder parents who were mostly above 60 years. Mary also interviewed a few elders as key informants from Lango Cultural Foundation to generate their perceptions on bride wealth giving. The interviewees were distributed as: eight young women and seven young men, 12 elderly men, 10 elderly women and eight members of Lango Cultural Foundation. Mary conducted two focus group discussions with 15 young women in Ogur and Lira sub-counties, distributed as eight and seven respectively. For ethical clearance reasons, we could not interview and do focus group discussions with children and young people under 18 years. We thus represent their perspectives as presented by their parents. Mary is uniquely qualified and situated in her home community to carry out interviews and focus group discussions in the Lango language. Yet studying intergenerational issues of marriage and bride wealth in one's own culture and as a woman also presents specific challenges. Certain ideas and practices can be taken for granted when studying one's own society, and Lango men may have assumed that their perspective was the most important, while Mary was also interested in women's and children's perspectives. Being positioned as a woman in the field meant that certain stories were highlighted by interlocutors, while other perspectives would have been given to male ethnographers.

Lotte Meinert is a Danish anthropologist who has done research in Uganda since 1994 and lived in the country for more than seven years. She has done studies on bride wealth and marriage in Kwapa sub-county among the Iteso and in Ik county in Karamoja (see Meinert, this volume), which provide an implicit point of reference, but in this chapter we

present only Mary's data from Lango to be able to focus thoroughly on this context. In this chapter, Lotte's role as an 'outsider' anthropologist from Denmark with ethnographic experience from eastern Uganda was to ask questions to Mary's data, analyse and discuss theoretical perspectives and co-write the chapter.

Our positions are similar in that we are both middle-aged women academics, married-with-bride wealth (Mary in Lango and Lotte in Teso for fieldwork purposes) and we have children. But we believe that our different perspectives 'from inside and outside' provide a fruitful combination for articulating issues around multi-perspectives on bride wealth.

Lira is one of the nine districts in Lango sub-region situated in northern Uganda, south-east of Acholi sub-region. Inhabitants in the Lango region number about 2.8 million people, and the region is mainly rural, with Lira city as the main urban centre. The city council is the main administrative and commercial centre of Lango sub-region. Lira district has diversified economic activities with subsistence farming as the main occupation for the majority of the population. Livestock keeping (mainly cattle, goats, pigs) and poultry complement crop farming, as well as trade and small-scale industries. The population is ethnically mixed, but the Lango-speaking group dominates and belongs to the Luo speaking group of northern Uganda. Lango as an ethnic group share a lot with the Acholi ethnic group, both socially and economically.

Although long untouched by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency that ravaged Acholi sub-region, the increased violence of 2002 resulted in massive population displacement within the district of Lira. The LRA conflict greatly disrupted the socioeconomic set up of people in Lira; marriage practice as an economic asset was lost during the insurgency. Conflict and displacement negatively impacted Lango marriage traditions and its forms and practices. However, as of June 2009, the security situation in the district was relatively peaceful. Thus, between 2006 and 2007, Lira district experienced a massive return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Over 310,000 of the estimated 350,000 left camps to return to their home villages in a period of 14 months. The violence, displacement and return also impacted marriage and bride wealth practices. During the war many people lost their assets, including cattle. The average value of bride wealth, which used to be about 12 cows, went down to an average of three cows during the war and, in some cases, pigs were used instead of cattle, which was considered humiliating by many families. For couples where the men could not afford any form of bride wealth, they had to resort to co-habitation, even though it was considered wrong and degrading in the local community.

Intergenerational and gendered perspectives of bride wealth

The views on bride wealth vary significantly across generations and gender in Lango. In the following section we bring forth voices of different generations of both genders who participated in this study, ranging from the perspectives of boys and girls, young women and men to the older generation of men and women.

Girls' and boys' perspectives

Parents in the study pointed out that, from the children's perspective, bride wealth payment in marriage provides children with identity, filiation and security,[1] because when bride wealth is paid, the children take on the fathers' lineage in the Lango patrilineal society. In the event of no bride wealth payment, the children take on the mothers' lineage and are often labelled as '*atin luk*' meaning a 'bastard without a fine paid', and those children have little or no opportunity to inherit property, including land from the father's line. Boys who are *otino luk* are particularly vulnerable, because they will have nowhere to stay and farm in the future, unless the mother's family agrees to take them in. Girls who are *otino luk* are less vulnerable than boys because they will get access to a home and land through their future marriages, but if they do not marry, they are in the same position as the boys. Though girls may seem structurally less vulnerable than boys, they may be psychologically tortured. The plight of *atin luk* was expressed by one of the mothers:

> When your bride wealth is not paid, your son cannot have identity and any belonging. He cannot access land for settling, cultivation or inherit the land from the grandparent. In fact, sometimes they refer to him as '*ogwang-ogwang*' [wild cat], wandering between the father and the mother's home.
>
> When you are not fully married with bride wealth, your children become very insecure wherever they are. The relationship between your son and his uncle even worsens. Your brother begins seeing him as a land grabber when he grows up.

This statement presents the boy-child's dilemma when born out of marriage and the nephew inheritance challenge. The girls' perspectives and vulnerabilities similarly came up in the women's focus group discussions:

For the girl child, when the mother is not married, the community can begin calling her a prostitute at an early age. In Lango, they will say, '*aweno pe weko wie*' [i.e. the child follows the mother's trend]. Such an utterance hurts me as a mother.

In the event that your daughter gets a man who is willing to marry her, it is usually the uncle who presides over. Sometimes he can even deny you as the mother access and control of the bride wealth.

Sometimes your daughter can be forced into early marriage by the uncle, and when she resists, the uncle can turn against her that she wants to be like the mother.

When bride wealth is not paid, the father's family has no responsibility over the child. Generally, the child's future is insecure as he/she loses inheritance rights. But when bride wealth is paid even if marriage breaks, the child remains the father's property with all the rights.

The voices above highlight how, regardless of their gender, the children born to unmarried mothers are vulnerable in Lango culture.

Young men's perspectives

During the study, 15 young people were interviewed of whom seven were men. From these young men's perspective, bride wealth presentation in marriage bears a number of advantages as well as disadvantages. First, it is perceived as a cultural initiation into maturity, from childhood into manhood, which most men in the study were eager to fulfil. Second, they mentioned that it is an avenue through which an adult man commands respect from the clan and the entire community. Third, young men claimed that, when you present bride wealth, you gain power and control over your wife, which they considered a benefit. Finally, for the young men, the 'payment' of bride wealth was considered a means of cementing relationships with the in-laws and compensating for the fact that their daughter could have generated wealth for the family, if she had not married. The different young men interviewed expressed their perspectives:

You know, when you pay bride wealth for marrying your wife, it is a sign of appreciation for her and her family.

To me, bride wealth payment for my marriage is a transition into adulthood from adolescence which is a sign of maturity. After

marriage with bride wealth payment, I get respect from my clan and the community. In fact, the relationship with my in-laws is likely to become stronger. I believe they will start to respect me more, now that I have just eloped with their daughter.

When I pay bride wealth, I feel secure and own my wife since her parents will not have the rights of taking her away from me and grabbing my children.

To me, bride wealth can sometimes be exploitative. Some parents over-demand for wealth as if you are marrying gold.

I see bride wealth in marriage very problematic. When you do not pay, you go into conflict with your in-laws. They can even take your wife away from you. And when you pay, some families expect continued support from you. How I wish this practice could be stopped one day. Our parents suffer raising us equally, but when it comes to marriage, it is the man to pay bride wealth. I get irritated with this practice.

I cannot pay bride wealth for a woman unless she has produced at least three children for me. What about if she changes her mind after I have given her family the bride wealth? Who loses? Isn't it me? We have to work for the bride wealth together so that both of us feel the pain after giving her family.

Young women's perspectives

The younger women had divergent views on bride wealth, just like their male counterparts, which also included pros and cons. According to this group, bride wealth ensures security in marriage provided by the husband and the in-law family. Socially, the young women said they derived authority and 'a voice in marriage' when bride wealth was given to their parents. Young women also claimed to gain respect from their families, as well as the matrimonial homes, when bride wealth was given to their parents, since they were not perceived as 'eloped women'. Above all, marriage and bride wealth presentation were perceived as a livelihood matter by the younger generation of women. Accordingly, the payment of bride wealth provided younger women with a basis for asset inheritance, including land in their husband's family.

Many young brides expected the groom to play the provider and protector roles for them, the offspring and her family. One of the women, aged 32, in a discussion claimed:

[M]arriage provides women and children with economic and social identity, through the clan lineage system. Marriage gives a sense of belonging and assurance to benefit from the family assets. You know when a man has not married you [by paying bride wealth], he does not feel for you nor the children. In fact, when it comes to land issues, unmarried woman is seen like *yugi* [rubbish] without any voice. The same applies to children, they will not have any inheritance right in the family when their mother is not married.

(Focus group discussion with younger women in Ogur sub-county, 15 September 2021)

In the same discussion, another participant added that:

Bride wealth presentation cements the relationship in marriage. When the husband pays for your marriage, he feels your worth.

When your bride wealth is paid, as a married woman you tend to have a voice in marriage, the family and the clan. You can even be elected as a member of the women clan council and command respect. When your bride wealth is not paid, no one respects you, and you cannot participate in any clan meeting, and your decision is not taken.

I totally agree with the practice of bride wealth negotiation and giving in marriage. My labour should not go in vain. What if the groom's family deliberately brings items that do not meet the demand of the bride's family? For instance, horses for cattle, yet in our community, horses have no use.

On the darker side, younger women also pointed out that bride wealth can be exploitative in that some families equate bride wealth to 'purchase' and, as a young woman, you can be subjugated in compensation for the wealth given to your family. Below are the voices of younger women in a discussion with divergent views on bride wealth giving:

Bride wealth giving is a sign of patriarchy that puts women in a subordinate position to men since only men are involved in the negotiation process. And you are there being bargained for. I don't support the practice at all. To me, bride wealth should not be negotiated but simply given to my parents as a token for my upbringing.

Even if they pay bride wealth, it is the greedy kinsmen who benefit much, not the parents. Some men revenge and mistreat the wife after wealth negotiation and marriage.

Some men believe that when their bride's kinsmen negotiate bride wealth and they give, they think they have purchased a wife. The wife therefore becomes a man's personal asset. This makes a man possess and control his wife in all ways including movement.

Some women expressed fear of not being able to divorce in case of a violent marriage:

When you land on a wrong husband, he can seriously mistreat you and you cannot walk out of such a violent marriage. It becomes worse when your father cannot refund the bride wealth.

But again, when your bride wealth is not paid, your family can remove you anytime from your marriage. Then, the children remain in a balance without identity and placement. This is very painful to see your children grow up without a lineage, yet their father is alive.

Some men expect you to produce as many children as the family wishes. Forgetting the bigger burden of child-upbringing lies with us mothers. In Lango they say, '*nywal ipong pacu*' [produce and fill the home]. This is because the clan believes the fundamental reason for marriage is child bearing.

For me, I feel terribly deprived and hurt because my husband stopped me from running my business. He cannot support me financially. My parents brought me up and trained me how to run business. But now, I cannot support myself and parents. My husband stopped me from running my business yet, when we met, I was running my business. He says women who are market vendors are prostitutes.

Older women's perspectives

The older women's view on bride wealth giving in marriage also varied and pointed to both positive and negative aspects. Many older women say that bride wealth cements relationships between the spouses and their families and safeguards intergenerational security for the bride and the women in her family. To older women, therefore, marriage with bride wealth upholds sociability and, consequently, a family-based social order.

The story of an old woman, whom we call Konsi, serves to build the case that bride wealth is both a source of security and of exploitation for women in marriage. Konsi shared her experience of marriage in the past generation where a sister's bride wealth was transferred to the brother for marrying his wife.

Konsi's case

Konsi was a 72-year-old woman from Lira sub-county. In an interview Mary did with Konsi in her home, in Barapwo village, Lira sub-county, she shared her experience with bride wealth expectations and the sustainability of her customary marriage. Konsi lived in a two-room, small, iron sheet-roofed house and had two grass-thatched huts on her compound with three mango trees. Her home was located along the main road leading to Bala sub-county in Kole district. Konsi had just returned from her garden at around 11:30 a.m. when Mary arrived. She welcomed Mary and gave her a wooden chair to sit on. Konsi's husband had died approximately 13 years previously. Even so, this was still fresh in her memory, including how she sustained her marriage until her husband's demise. They had been married for 42 years. Mary asked Konsi how she managed to sustain her marriage for so long:

> You know, my daughter, I was able to stay in this marriage because of a number of factors. I got into this relationship when I think I was about 17 years old [she was not sure of her exact age then]. My elder brother needed to marry, and my father could not raise the required bride wealth for my brother's marriage. The only option was for me to get married so my brother could marry as well.

Mary asked: 'How much was the required bride wealth for your brother's marriage?', to which Konsi replied:

> The standard was 12 herds of cattle, nine goats, two chicken, two spears, two packets of cigarettes, one gallon of paraffin, a box of soap and *bongo kor* [traditional wear for the mother in-law]. The bride wealth package further constituted of a suit [an attire] for the father-in-law, money [200 Uganda shillings] disaggregated as: [*cente me tekika, leb alam, atekere and cente me opwoc*[2]] and six hoes, plus some assorted materials. However, some parents could demand as much as 16 herds of cattle and 12 goats. But money was standard – 200 Uganda shillings since colonial administration.

Mary then asked: 'How much did your husband give for your marriage?' Konsi replied:

> My husband paid nine cattle and completed the remaining three [cows] four years later in a ritual called '*tweyo nyom*'. It was not easy though to stay in this marriage since I was young. But when I remembered what my family told me, I had to persevere in the marriage. My family had told me to keep my marriage through thick and thin since my brother had transferred the wealth for marrying his wife. Therefore, my father would suffer refunding the bride wealth should my marriage break.

Mary asked, 'What would happen if you did not keep the marriage?' To which Konsi replied:

> Aah, my daughter, remember my father would be asked to refund the bride wealth given, yet my brother had already used it for marrying his wife, what could I have done? In fact, the wealth was not there. Besides my brother using it, part of the bride wealth was given out to different parties [kinsmen] as dictated by Lango tradition.

In another interview with a 62-year-old woman, she expressed her opinion on bride wealth giving as a guarantee for security:

> Bride wealth giving is a test for the groom's family to ascertain if the bride will be economically secured in her matrimonial home. You know, in some families, even getting food alone is a problem. So, when the young man cannot raise sufficient amount of wealth to pay for marriage, what kind of life do you expect your daughter to lead in such a family? Starvation?

The statement indicates that bride wealth presentation is a determinant of the bride's economic and livelihood security in marriage and an extended support from the groom. One of the participants alluded:

> In case a bride's family member passes on [dies], it was expected that each married daughter contributes a goat for the burial. While collectively, the married daughters contribute a bull and each a bag of *moko* [fermented millet for local brew making] for the last funeral rite. The girls could get these resources from their matrimonial home.

Another woman added: 'When a mother in-law lacked seeds, she would call upon her married daughter to support her if they have the seeds. In peak farming period, the bride's family expected the groom to support them in case of labour shortage, having built the trust and bond through marriage and bride wealth giving'. In the same discussion: '[T]he groom and his kinsmen supported the mother-in-law in ploughing in case she became widowed. Meanwhile at peak times, especially planting and harvest seasons, the bride and her husband organised labour from the matrimonial home to support the mother-in-law'. Another member added: 'In case of emergency, like sickness, the bride's family expected financial support from the groom to meet the treatment bills [...] The groom and his kin constructed shelter, in the event the mother-in-law is widowed, too weak and old to construct or renovate a hut for herself'.

All these expectations arose from the built trust based on bride wealth given in marriage. In the event that the bride's wealth was not given, such expectations would be in vain, a participant concluded.

The older women's views in regard to bride wealth further demonstrate the hidden power in marriage and bride wealth and its implications for the spouse, their offsprings and families' security, exploitation and trade-offs. It also reminds us that older women do not only occupy one position; they hold several different positions in relation to bride wealth: (1) in relation to their own bride wealth as wives (and to their husbands, fathers and brothers); (2) as mothers of daughters for whom bride wealth is given; (3) as mothers of sons who have to give bride wealth; and (4) as mothers-in-law who get a daughter-in-law.

Older men (as husbands, fathers and fathers-in-law)

Older men in the study viewed bride wealth presentation for daughters mainly as a means of asset transaction and livelihood, and they saw bride wealth presentation mainly as a positive practice: 'I have the right to use my daughter's bride wealth the way I wish; for instance, with this famine, I can sell off a bull to buy food for the family. I cannot let my family starve when we have some resources at our disposal' (Wilberforce, an elder and a father).

Wilberforce lived in Angolonyom village, Ogur sub-county, Lira district. Ogur is a rural sub-county in the northern part of Lira district about 20 kilometres from Lira city. The people there were less educated compared to Lira sub-county. The main livelihood activity was subsistence agriculture with sites of commercial agriculture managed by people outside the sub-county.

Mary discussed the practice of bride wealth trade-offs in Lango customary marriage with Wilberforce. He had just returned from the garden and welcomed Mary to sit under his mango tree on a wooden chair. He explained how, in Lango culture, bride wealth was matched to a girl's brother. Whenever a girl was married, her brother was supposed to transfer the wealth and marry a wife to replace his sister. In case the girl did not have a blood-brother, her first paternal cousin would be given the wealth to marry. It was also expected that, after marrying, the cousin and his family would settle on the compound of the uncle who gave him the resources to marry, so he could help the uncle with garden work and defend him. The situation has, however, changed. Wilberforce explained:

> You know, those days when you marry a wife for your brother's son, he would settle in your homestead to support you. These days, however, things have changed for the worse; even if you contribute bride wealth for your brother's son or close relative, they are unpredictable and sometimes turn against you.

This indicates weakened extended family bonds. Wilberforce pointed to a number of factors that seem to have contributed to mindset changes. First, land has become a scarce resource to offer to the sons and their families to settle on. Second, the influence of globalisation and capitalism has ushered individualism among kinsmen. Third, increased attainment of formal education and subsequent employment outside homes has made sons settle at their work places rather than the parents' home. Therefore, marrying for a brother's son did not guarantee proximity and subsequent routine informal support. Amid the changes, Lango customary marriage remained a family, not individual, affair. However, bride wealth giving was a trade-off, with a lot of economic value, and not used for the initial purpose, since the family has the liberty to decide how to use it.

During the conversation, Wilberforce told how he treasured his daughter's contributions in the family:

> My daughter is an asset to me, she helps me with domestic chores like cooking, fetching water, firewood […] She also helps me with garden work. So, when she is married off, it means I have lost an asset. In return, I expect the husband to give some wealth in compensation.

Wilberforce's argument was complemented by one of the other elders who shared his opinion on the practice of bride wealth giving:

> You know, when a man marries off your daughter, he gets more benefit than you, the parent. This is because she will produce children for the groom's family. These children contribute to the family labour yet, as the father, I would have lost her contribution. I therefore support bride wealth giving in exchange of my daughter.

An elderly male interlocutor shared his view on bride wealth presentation and eventual transformations in Lango customary marriage. Accordingly, the unrealistic materials demanded by the brides' kinsmen was responsible for marriage decline:

> Lango customary marriages have taken different forms over time; the recognised customary marriage in which bride wealth is given now begins with co-habitation that is officially known by the spouses' parents, or elopement of couples without knowledge of either parent and cross-generational partnerships in which young women get into relationships with older men above their age bracket.

Another elderly man gave his view on bride wealth giving: 'Bride wealth must be paid since the bride will transfer all her services including income and labour to the groom's family. To me, bride wealth is a means of compensating the bride's family for the loss of their daughter'.

The perspectives of older men also differed in relation to which position and role they played as husbands, fathers and fathers-in-law. They remembered the time in their youth when they, as husbands, had to struggle hard to secure the bride wealth for marrying their wife, and most of them thought back on this with pride, because they succeeded. They complained, as fathers-in-law, about sons-in-law who did not work hard or manage to give bride wealth for their daughters. The older men also grumbled, as fathers of sons whose wives' families demanded too much bride wealth. However, overall, they saw bride wealth practices as mainly a positive practice that secured a sense of cohesion in society between groups and clans, because the bride wealth for one man's daughter would be passed on to her brother's wife's family to create amicable feelings of generosity and appreciation.

(In)security, exploitation/generosity and transactional trade-offs

In our discussion of bride wealth and marriage in Lango, we focus on three overall themes that run through the material and through the gendered and generational perspectives. They include the themes of: (1) (in)security and (dis)respect; (2) transactional trade-offs and reciprocity; and (3) exploitation and generosity.

(In)security and (dis)respect

The theme of security (and insecurity) and respect (and disrespect) was raised by interlocutors from all positions in relation to marriage and bride wealth. From children's perspectives, security in their lives meant that they were ensured of a home and a line of belonging to both their mother's and father's sides of families. When bride wealth was given to a child's mother's family, this provided security for the child's future in the sense that he – if it was a boy – will have access to land and property in the future. If it was a girl, she will be assured to have male support from her father's side in negotiating her own bride wealth in the future and gain moral support in her future marriage, as illuminated by participants in various discussions. Having this form of security in life also demands respect from others, and this was something children experienced and sensed.

The negative side of the bride wealth system for children's insecurity and disrespect was that when the wealth was not negotiated or not given in time – which was more common than the opposite – children easily became 'hostages' between the parents and families. As we saw in the case of younger men's perspectives, children may be 'kidnapped' back by their mother's family when the bride wealth was not given, and this disrupted children's lives in a range of ways. They may not have known what was taking place, but sensed the insecurity of the situation; they heard harsh and disrespectful words about their parents and themselves, which were likely to affect them mentally. Children's schooling may have been disrupted when they were moved around between homes. Where the father did not provide any bride wealth or child support, the children's security of a stable life and thriving were at risk.

The so-called 'nephew problem', as mentioned in the focus group discussion with young women in Ogur sub-county, also points to future land and livelihood insecurity problems for boys who do not have a father who recognises them.

The young women mentioned that when bride wealth was given in a marriage, it provided them with a sense of security and 'official' identity in the family and clan of the husband, and they felt respected and appreciated for this. But the reality was that, in most situations, when bride wealth was not given, or not given fully, the opposite emotions prevailed. Women did not feel secure when they were not fully accepted in the husband's family, and they did not get a sense of respect and appreciation.

Dynamics of (in)security and (dis)respect also coloured young men's relationships to bride wealth. When they were able to give bride wealth, this provided them with a sense of pride and respect in their own families, and also in relation to their parents-in-law. And when they were not able to fulfil obligations, this became a source of shame and humiliation. When young men were able to give bride wealth, they talked about this as creating security in the marriage, in the sense that they became more certain that the wife would stay with them and not look for another man who was able to better provide for them.

For a woman's parents, the provision of bride wealth from their son in-law not only created feelings that their daughter was secure and well taken care of in the husband's home, but also provided concrete material security in their lives and old age – such as the old father, Wilberforce, who said that he would sell a bull (given to the family for the daughter) to buy food for the family, so that they would not starve. Our argument on bride wealth and security complements Bell and Song (1994) who posit that the amount of bride wealth that a family is able to provide serves as an indicator of the bride's family's social status and shows how much the groom's family will be able to support the bride in the future. The in-law connection also provided a sense of security for some parents, even and perhaps especially in case the son-in-law had not provided all bride wealth. Some of the parents would talk of 'having something in the bank' with their sons-in-law, in case of problems or illness. When sons-in-law did not give anything at all, a woman's parents experienced insecurity in both material and emotional terms – for themselves, their daughter and grandchildren.

The parents of husbands felt respect and security when their son was able to give bride wealth, and often families helped their son for this reason. Similar to young men, it was a source of shame and humiliation if they were not able to give anything, or much, to a daughter in-law's family. They may have had to listen to hard words from her family and, at times, received physical threats. As grandparents, they may have seen their grandchildren being moved around in unstable ways, and they may

have feared for their future as well as their own future in old age. Issues of (in)security and (dis)respect in relation to bride wealth may have arisen differently for the various family members, but these have had a significant impact all across the board.

Transactional trade-offs and reciprocity

The themes of transactions, trade-offs, reciprocity, human value and compromise in relation to bride wealth were prominent, especially for the parents' generation; but the consequences of these ideas and practices also played into the couple's relations and the children's relations to their parents and grandparents.

When bride wealth was perceived from an androcentric perspective as the 'exchange of women' (Lévi-Strauss 1947), as if they were objects or animals, bride wealth was interpreted as the transmission of property between two families. The everyday phrase for giving bride wealth in Lango is '*culu lim nyom',* which literally means 'paying wealth (for) marriage'. The word and term '*culu*' were sometimes emphasised by men who wanted to point out that they had acquired a wife and they owned or had rights to her productive labour and reproductive capacities.

From women's and others' points of view, this way of interpreting bride wealth in terms of 'payment', 'ownership', and 'rights' over women, seems derogatory and patriarchal, and yet some of the women in the study use these terms themselves.

Other ways of interpreting and talking about bride wealth entailed terms of 'giving' – in the Lango language '*miyo lim nyom*', which has connotations related to gifts, appreciation and generosity. These terms and language evoke ideas about gift exchange (Mauss 1966), rather than market economies. The difference between 'giving' and 'paying', not only bride wealth but also in other spheres of life, has been explored in many different contexts (see Mogensen 2011). Perhaps the language of paying has become more prominent in bride wealth exchanges with the historical introduction of the market economy. Papadaki (2021) views bride wealth giving in marriage in Athens from the perspective of compromise and politics which transforms through time. Interlocutors in our studies pointed out how bride wealth may be negotiated in terms of cows, goats and goods, but often this was converted into money and given as cash or transferred in other ways. The monetisation of bride wealth may have contributed to practices where family members take on a very transactional mode of trading 'something-for-something'.

However, money as bride wealth is not necessarily a sign of cold speculation in profit. As van der Geest (1997) pointed out in Ghana, money is not only a way to measure the value of goods; it is also used to create bonds between people. Money can show care, respect and devotion, and money can be given in ways that increase respectability (van der Geest 1997). Moreover, in relation to western Kenya, Shipton (1989) has pointed out how some money can be perceived as 'bitter' when it is paid to someone in a way that depersonalises a relationship; whereas money can be perceived as very acceptable and even ideal when it is given in order to confirm or establish a social relationship. Bride wealth that is given in a purely calculating, 'bitter' manner, and after a lot of pressure, may not be experienced as respectful as bride wealth that has been given as an act of appreciation and as a gift that is part of a larger system of reciprocity. Servy (2020) analysed the links between marriage, bride wealth and reproductive autonomy and found that the payment of bride wealth deprived women of their reproductive rights in Port-Vila. In Lango, a married woman's reproduction is controlled by the entire family not necessarily her husband, hence a violation of her right.

Gifts, however, are never entirely free. The structure of gift exchange, as described by Mauss (1966), consists of an obligation to give, receive and reciprocate. If you receive a gift, you are indebted to the giver. The debt can be paid by giving another gift. This kind of reciprocity is also the basis for the giving of bride wealth exchanges; for example, when a father receives bride wealth for his daughter and gives it to the parents of his son's wife. This kind of reciprocity in bride wealth may be somewhere in between what Sahlins (1972) has described as 'generalised reciprocity' and 'balanced reciprocity'. In generalised reciprocity, the transactions are generally unselfish and depend on solidarity, and things are given in the spirit of keeping good relations and mutual obligation towards each other. Some bride wealth – but not the majority – may be given in this spirit. Balanced reciprocity, according to Sahlins (1972), is when two objects of the same value are exchanged. When bride wealth is negotiated and arguments about a woman's education, reproductive value and other 'assets' are brought forward, this may be done with an idea of reaching some kind of balanced reciprocity, and with warmth and humour.

Yet the value of a human being can never be measured against cows, goats or money and, therefore, classifying bride wealth as a kind of balanced reciprocity would be odd. Sahlins (1972) also wrote about negative reciprocity, where the parties try to maximise their gains at the expense of the other party. Sometimes the language in bride wealth

negotiations may sound as if one party is trying to exploit the other. But the gist of bride wealth exchange tends more towards generalised and balanced reciprocity than negative, maximising exchange.

The trade-off element of bride wealth has an economic analogy since compromise is inherent in the assessment process. The transfer of wealth from the groom's kin to the bride's family may be misread as an economic transaction (similar to how the transfer of money through mobile payment apps for a gift may look like a 'payment' rather than a gift). These nuances between the reciprocity involved in gifts and in payments were mentioned by some interlocutors as quite unfortunate – not least when the wealth transfer by default was taken to imply the transfer of the bride's rights, her labour and her capacity to produce children, along with her decision-making capacity.

The trade-off aspect from men's perspectives was about gaining access to these qualities in women in return for wealth; and from women's perspectives, the trade-off might have entailed giving up those rights and autonomy in exchange for security, respect and safety for their children.

Exploitation and generosity

The presentation of bride wealth in marriage can be perceived from two different perspectives: as exploitative and as generous. The roots of exploitation in marriage are entrenched in patriarchal societies in Africa, including Lango. Thus, married women's authority is drawn from patriarchal laws, norms and inferred rules of interaction between men and women. Komter (1989) argues that the hidden power in gender relations are entrenched in marriage and patriarchal laws and legally permitted gender discrimination in the Netherlands. In Africa, and in Lira specifically, the giving of bride wealth has been understood as a way to legitimise marriage and give a woman full authority in a home as a wife; hence, marriage is perceived as a source of social protection for women. For this reason, a married woman relinquishes all her productive and reproductive rights in marriage to sustain the husband's lineage. Our finding corroborates Chiu's (2021) point that bride wealth marriage has significant social and moral value for upholding the cycle of patrilineal reproduction.

The patriarchal system of controlling women's reproduction and sexuality is exploitative, as seen from many of the younger women's perspectives in Lira, and it is one of the reasons why fewer young women today opt, plan and hope to get married with bride wealth. Horne, Dodoo and Dodoo (2013) argue that in Africa bride wealth and norms

around marriage significantly constrain female reproductive autonomy. Consequently, married African women's reproductive and sexual behaviours are often regarded not as a product of their own desires, but more in terms of normative constraints imposed on them by family and community members. Yet, some Ugandan women claim that getting married with bride wealth is due to *their* strength, their power in relation to men and ultimately their decision; they do not see this as exploitation, but facilitating acts of generosity.

This line of discussion is also well-known in relation to Muslim women's agency and politics of piety when wearing head scarfs and denying global feminists the power to define them as 'subordinate' (Mahmood 2011). Women's adherence to patriarchal norms – such as bride wealth – questions key assumptions in feminist theory, as pointed out by Mahmood (2011), about freedom, agency, authority and the human subject. Who defines when something is exploitation or a choice to accept generosity? These questions point to the close relationship between sexuality, reproduction and political imagination and the nexus of ethics, embodiment, gender, feminism and postcolonialism.

Women's lack of – or dependent – control over their reproductive behaviour has a range of health implications, including risk of sexually transmitted infections, high fertility and exposure to domestic violence. This supposition was substantiated by Muthegheki, Crispus and Abrahams (2012) and Chitakure (2021), who pointed out how the process of bride wealth giving in Bundibugyo, and Africa generally, prescribed women's roles in marriages and ensured women's subordination to husbands, which invariably condoned the abuse of wives. Frost and Dodoo (2010) increasingly recognised men's power within marriage as resulting, in part, from the marriage process and bride wealth payments. Yet men's own attitudes toward family planning and their desires for additional children have been shown to influence childbearing in ways that women's attitudes do not, although women bear the direct burden of childbearing.

In Lira district, the young men interviewed decried unrealistic amounts of bride wealth demanded by the brides' parents as a form of exploitation. Unrealistic demands for bride wealth exposed young men to the shame of not being able to mobilise resources for marriage, even though they preferred to give bride wealth and show generosity towards their parents-in-law. This was a reason they gave for increased co-habitation and unstable marriages.

Casale and Posel (2010) studied male marital earnings in the context of bride wealth giving in South Africa and noted that the giving of bride wealth, or *ilobolo*, by a prospective husband to the bride's family

posed a significant constraint to marriage. This was because of the high amount of *ilobolo* demanded by the bride's family. The seemingly high amount of wealth demands cut across Africa. Yet as Demo and Cox (2000) opine, through marriage a young adult transits into parenthood. While the Dagaaba regard it as a cornerstone upon which marriage is built (Abdul-Korah 2014). In Lira, the poor young men who could not afford raising the hefty, monetised bride wealth felt exploited and resorted to co-habitation and elopement as new ways for being in a relationship. Hence, societal economy and marriage practices are intimately interwoven. In north west Ghana, Abdul-Korah established that some (young men) argued for a reform of the payment, while some (young women) argued that the practice should be abolished altogether due to the challenges associated with bride wealth payment.

Hunter (2016), Pauli and van Dijk (2016) and Solway (2016) all point to how changes in kinship and marriage practices can be destructive and shattering for the whole society and family, just as changes can have positive effects on the entire family and wider society. Pauli and van Dijk (2016) addressed the transformation of marriage in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid neoliberalism in South Africa. To them, marriage was seen to be such a fundamental, societal building block, any change in the institution was taken to imply rupture and even destruction for society as a whole. Hunter (2016) termed the changes in kinship and marriage as 'teleological' narratives of 'family breakdown' in Africa. He argued that, despite the presence of very complex ethnographic data, several South African ethnographic studies since the 1930s fuelled the conviction that 'African families were in slow but steady decline'. Moreover, he cited the work of Schapera on married life among the Kgatha families in present-day Botswana within the southern African context as a good example of continuity and change in African marriages, though there is no uniformity in the changes. Similarly, Chitakure (2021), while exploring the origin, functions, commercialisation and corruption of bride wealth in South Africa, shows how exorbitant payment subjugates and exploits women, which has established tremendous dynamics of change in the African customary marriage process.

In Lango, the more than 20 years of LRA conflict and displacement, coupled with the influence of girl-child formal education, have been some of the larger-scale changes that have caused transformations in marriage and bride wealth provision. For many in Lango, the war and displacement meant that they had their assets taken away from them, and they lost family members and human connections, which slowed down bride wealth practices. Posel and Rudwick (2014) observed a slow marriage

practice among the Zulu due to high demand for *ilolobo*. Yet, increasing girl-child education has also contributed to this slowing down. This was partly because parents of educated daughters tended to demand higher bride prices, which men with shrinking finances could not meet; and partly because educated women sometimes opted for future possibilities other than marriage and patriarchal structures.

Some of the young women in their conversations expressed how they felt exploited by their in-laws after bride wealth payment. When bride wealth provision was regarded as a transaction, women were regarded as objects who were transferable. The findings from Lira corroborate Ogbu's (1977) and Gulliver's (1961) arguments of marriage transaction and wife purchase as mechanisms by which households distribute property and maintain women's status. In the case of Lango, marriage was the responsibility of the family/clan. Thus, a married woman was controlled not only by her husband, but by the entire family. Nonetheless, the presentation of the bride wealth by the groom to the bride's family indicated the generosity element of bride wealth provision. The young men in Lira felt that bride wealth provision indicated appreciation to the wife's parents for their good upbringing of their daughter.

The ensued pressure for bride wealth violated, according to Sennott, Madhavan and Nam (2021), the bride's rights as an independent adult to make decisions. They argue that often the amount of bride wealth provided in *ilobolo* among Kwazulu in South Africa leads to speculations on factors that are likely to affect marriage outcomes. In Lira, we noted that while Konsi maintained her marriage, she found it tough, and she lived quite an unhappy and unfree life after her brother had transferred the bride wealth for his marriage. She felt stuck because she knew her parents could not afford to refund the wealth. Konsi's case challenges Stutzer and Frey's (2006) study on marriage and happiness, and the effects of marriage on the spouse's happiness in Germany through using a panel survey. They argue that, through marriage, spouses can gain happiness or life satisfaction, since married people engage in a long-term relationship with a strong commitment to mutually rewarding exchange. Spouses, therefore, expect certain benefits from their partner's expressed love, gratitude, and recognition, along with security and material rewards, making these a source of happiness. For Konsi, the question was not about whether she was happy or not, but about the fact that she could not walk out of the (unhappy) marriage for fear of offending her family.

The economic expectation of the bride's labour upon bride wealth presentation was another source of exploitation and marriage uncertainty. In Lango customary marriage, the bride was expected to transfer all her

labour to the groom's household after marriage. With modernisation, particularly through formal education and women's employment, not all married women have the time or energy to engage in agricultural work and domestic chores in their husbands' homes – tasks that were once considered the traditional roles and obligations of housewives. With these changes, the groom's family may feel that the wife does not contribute generously with her labour to the household, and they may accuse her of being exploitative, by getting access to property and land through her husband.

Conclusion

Changes in bride wealth practices in Lira, and in Uganda more broadly, point to how gender and generational norms have been changing, and how they have been interwoven with large-scale changes in economy, politics, education and law. Based on fieldwork in Lira, in this chapter we have described and discussed these changes and the frictions they have caused from the different generational and gender perspectives.

A multiple generational perspective is our contribution to the larger discussion of bride wealth and marriage in Africa. In the old colonial anthropological literature on bride wealth, the perspective highlighted was commonly that of older men, and it focused on the structural and stabilising aspects of societal cohesion through marriage. In reaction to this androcentric perspective, the feminist literature in the 1970s focused mainly on women's perspectives, and on bride wealth and marriage as ways of controlling women's sexuality and exploiting their labour and reproductive capacities. In our discussion, we have attempted to get beyond the androcentric versus gynocentric perspectives, and have included generational perspectives from boys, girls, young women and men as well as older women and men.

We have tried to highlight that, even within these groups, there are different perspectives, positions and intersections in relation to bride wealth. The chapter has pointed to a range of themes that cut across the material from and in these groups: (in)security and (dis)respect, transactional trade-offs and reciprocity, exploitation and generosity. We have attempted to present a balanced view of bride wealth in a current rural Ugandan setting that both stays true to the empirical material where most interlocutors have been in favour of continuing bride wealth exchanges and with critical perspectives that point to some of the negative consequences of bride wealth practices from different generational and gender perspectives.

Notes

1   We derived the children's views through the parents or caregivers due to ethical restrictions. We did not have permission to interview children or young persons below the age of 18. Yet we still find it important to present children's perspectives, because this has not been given sufficient attention in studies and in the literature.

2   The money was apportioned in these categories: *cente me tekika* is shared by the bride's mother and a few elderly women, *cente me leb alam* was (is) shared by the bride's male negotiation team, *cente me atekere* is shared by the clan leaders and *cente me opwoc* shared by the team that verifies and confirms the cattle in the kraal.

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Frail fatherhood: belonging and care
Susan Reynolds Whyte

In memory of Rinah Keku Namuyonga, co-researcher and friend

Frail fatherhood
Fading patriliny
What kind of child
Doesn't know his home
Father's mother loves
Recognition
A name
Nothing else
Care for
Care about
Single mothers
The heart of the home
In future
Is there a good woman there?
Paternity?

'I came alone, and I must leave alone', my friend answered definitively when I asked how she could think of quitting her husband when it meant leaving the children with him. In 1970, people in Bunyole, eastern Uganda, regularly asserted the principle that children belonged to their father and his lineage. It meant that if a marriage dissolved, which was quite common, the children stayed with the father and his family, unless they were very young, in which case they might go with their mother to be returned to their father when they were older. In the same way, children born to single women ('out of wedlock', as we used to say) were supposed to be sent to their biological fathers, their genitors, when they were old enough.

In retrospect it was never so simple. But there is no doubt that the practice of placing children is more varied and complicated today. Mothers make remarks like: 'I would like to send the children to their father, but they will not be well cared for there'. Or, 'He has never contributed anything at all to the support of this child'. In this chapter, I will consider the relations of children born of transient or failed partnerships to their biological fathers – or, rather, the ways their mothers manage those relations. In a society that is nominally patrilineal, where children take the clan of their fathers and should belong to his family, frail paternal ties present practical and emotional problems as well as categorical ones. There is often a mismatch between, on the one hand, 'belonging' in the sense of being recognised by a father and taking his clan identity and, on the other hand, actual care and concern on the part of a father. The frequency of 'frail fatherhood' has increased over the five decades I have worked in Bunyole.[1] People still say that children belong to their fathers and his clan. And genitors recognise their offspring – or at least their family members do. Biological rather than social paternity determines clan identity. But many mothers say that their children's fathers do not care in either a material or emotional sense. So why do they insist that children belong to their fathers? I will suggest that the assertion of belonging to a father may be an imagination of a possible future where fathers and their families care for and care about the children more fully.

Belonging is a roomy concept, used in different ways by anthropologists (Mattes et al. 2019; Otto, Whyte and Whyte 2023; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2013; Whyte 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006 – to mention only a few). As Gammeltoft (2018) suggests, we can distinguish forms of belonging (intersubjective, territorial and political) as well as elements of belonging (possession, membership and moral obligation). Here I use the term in a limited way, as do my interlocutors, to refer to the identification of a child's paternity. When they say, 'A child is for the man' or 'he is the owner of the pregnancy', they speak of the socially recognised connection of a child to its father, and through him to the father's family and clan. A child *has* a father, and a father *has* children. Single mothers contrast this categorical paternal belonging with the care and support that ideally should be a moral obligation of fathers who 'have' children.

The Nyole concern with the implications of biological paternity is a local reflection of a universal puzzle that has been central to anthropology. 'Fatherhood has always been problematic and therefore fascinating to anthropology because there is no plausible biological reductionist explanation for its existence' (Guyer 2000: 61). Children's relations to their mothers are seen as given and universal, while those to fathers are

socially contingent and highly varied. Yet in every society there are ways of linking the offspring of women's bodies to men of the senior generation in some kind of recognised belonging. The anthropologists of the colonial and immediate post-colonial period approached the issue of belonging in terms of marriage and membership in kin groups.

Filiation as categorical or practical

'Marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society, determined by parenthood in the social sense', wrote Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950: 5) in the introduction to their agenda-setting edited collection, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. But the parenthood of men was not simple. The editors made liberal use of the distinction between a biological father (genitor) and a social father (pater). This was important for analysing the ways in which filiation and descent placed children in relation to their forebears: 'whereas filiation is the relationship that exists between a person and his parents only, descent refers to a relation mediated by a parent between himself and an ancestor' (Fortes 1959: 207).

The term 'filiation' sounds a little old-fashioned. Basically, it means the recognised status of being the child of a mother or a father. It was often used in those older studies of kinship and marriage in Africa to denote the link through a parent to membership in a descent group (Fortes 1969). In patrilineal systems, the emphasis is on filiation through a father to his group. (Fortes used the term 'complementary filiation' for relations to mothers and their families.) The concern was to identify norms for the allocation of lineal identity. If the parents were properly married, the filiation of their children to the father and his kin group was usually clear. If the father was not married to the mother, he could filiate a child by making a payment to her father in order to be recognised as the pater as well as the genitor of the child.

A fine example of this concern with how children were filiated to fathers and descent groups was Southall's (1960) article contrasting the patterns in Nilotic and Bantu ethnic groups. For Nilotic people (like Nuer, Luo, Japadhola, Acholi), children belonged to the man (and lineage) who paid bride wealth for their mother or who made a recognition payment for the child. Being a social father outweighed being a biological father. In Bantu groups, Southall argued, fatherhood always depended on 'blood' (biology); whether or not a man had paid bride wealth, the children he begot were seen as his and belonged to his lineage and clan.

A strong focus on lineal structures led to a view that filiation was about placing children in the right slot so that there were no blurry margins to patriliny. If society consisted of patrilineal descent groups, then every member should be categorised in one or another. Gluckman clarified that, among the Lozi, an 'illegitimate child, unless redeemed by his genitor with cattle, or by his or another's subsequent marriage to the mother, belongs to his mother's agnatic lineage' (Gluckman 1950: 170). Filiation slots carried rights and obligations that were tangible and material. In patrilineal societies, sons and, to a lesser extent, daughters gained access to land through the father and his lineage. Fathers and their families received payments for formalising the marriage of a daughter. In tandem with a model of society as structured in lineal descent groups, there was an effort to identify the rules that governed status and roles. In his well-known description of the different forms of Nuer marriage (ghost marriage, woman-to-woman marriage, leviratic marriage , widow concubinage), Evans-Pritchard (1951) asserted that there were clear rules for assigning offspring from all forms of partnership to a patrilineage. For those women who evaded marriage and its rules, there were mechanisms for ensuring that order prevailed anyway. For example, Evans-Pritchard (1951: 118) wrote about 'unmarried concubines' as 'women of strong character who valued their independence and did not desire matrimony'. They had children by different men, who paid four to six head of cattle to the woman's father in order to claim the children. 'Children born of a concubine by different men become in consequence members of different lineages' (Evans-Pritchard 1951).

Colonial-era ethnography in urban areas and regions heavily affected by labour migration was less preoccupied with the filiation of children to descent groups. Anthropologists noted increases of 'illegitimate' children and 'adulterine' children (Barnes 1951: 95). They acknowledged that there was variation in whether or not a genitor took responsibility for his children. If not, maintenance was the responsibility of the mother and her family (Mair 1969: 34–5). Still, this early research did not examine mothers' strategies and concerns in relation to these children and their fathers. For east Africa, Christine Obbo (1980: 103–6) broke new ground in that respect. In her study of women in Kampala, she wrote of 'motherhood and wifehood as transactional tools', giving examples of how single mothers negotiated with the fathers of their children to the benefit of themselves and the children.

In the 1980s, there was a shift from studying social structure to studying diversity of practice, accompanied by a greater commitment to women's perspectives. More recent studies do not focus solely, if at all,

on the procedures for allocating the children to a patrilineage. Rather we are more concerned with the various ways women manage the lives and livelihoods of themselves and their children. About the situation of young women in the Acholi sub-region, Langole (2014: 73) wrote: '"Slippery paternity" was a problem for several of the young mothers, who had no further interaction with the fathers of their children'. He was concerned to show how they dealt with this problem, rather than how the children were assigned to social categories.

If we were to take this perspective on the 'unmarried concubines' in Evans-Pritchard's old account, we would enquire: Did those Nuer women of strong character always hand over their children? What about the fathers who did not care, or lacked the four to six cattle? We cannot answer those questions because the paradigm of filiation was different for the early kinship studies. This means that any attempt to identify historical changes in patterns of filiation must also recognise the different ways in which earlier and later scholars have construed them, as Jackson (2015) has shown for studies of kinship in general. Current studies are less fixed on rules and structure, and more open to practice, diversity, change, uncertainty and the fundamental significance of care (Borneman 1997; Carsten et al. 2021). It is the element of subjectivity that has become more pronounced – the attempt to grasp people's perceptions and intentions, hopes and uncertainties as they act and interact.

Janet Carsten's (2000) work on relatedness epitomises the shift from structure to practice. Her agenda was manifold. She called for a rethinking of the biological and the social, questioning whether kinship was necessarily rooted in the biological facts of procreation. She proposed seeing attachments as processual, requiring work to make and maintain relations. That work takes place in everyday life, where women and children are key actors. Relatedness should be described in indigenous terms and we should give far more attention to the implications and lived experience of relatedness in particular local contexts. Yet that may even mean that we are led to people's concerns with the 'facts' of procreation.

Having myself been trained in the earlier approach to kinship as social structure, I find in my old notes information about kin categories and norms for relationships. Our household survey from 1970 enquired categorically about clan identity, bride wealth, divorce and the location of women's children. It was only indirectly, not through purposive interviews, that I learned of women's subjective concerns about their children's filiation. Such personal exchanges as opened this chapter were recorded in my daily journal, where I often noted gendered experiences that puzzled or perturbed me. Over the years, I too shifted towards

intersubjectivity, practice, pragmatism and uncertainty. Perhaps because of my early work, however, I remained sensitive to how our interlocutors enact kinship relations and the moral considerations they imply. Filiation and even descent are significant for people in eastern Uganda – for some more than others, more heavily in some situations and sometimes over the long run of lifetimes.

How is filiation relevant?

In some ways, people in Bunyole express a kind of biological materialism when talking about kinship. They speak of corporal connectedness between parents and children: the wombs, blood, semen and breastmilk that make children and parents. In Lunyole, a man 'gives a woman a pregnancy' ('*ohumun'ga ehida*'), and he can be referred to as the *omwene hida*, the owner of the pregnancy or, better, the person responsible for it (Whyte and Whyte 2004: 84). As in many east African Bantu societies, a child is assumed to take the clan of the one who 'gave the pregnancy', even if he has not made any payment to the family of the mother. Southall's old (1960) observation seems to hold here. It is rare in this rural area to find a child whose father, and therefore whose clan, is unknown. Mothers and their families identify a father, and usually he and his relatives recognise the child as theirs.

The word for clan in Lunyole also means kind or sort. To ask someone's clan is to enquire what kind of person he or she is. In everyday interaction, people place one another in terms of 'kinds' and they find clan connections to people with whom they interact. (In interactions across ethnic groups, it is ethnicity more than clan that is significant.) Clans are exogamous; you should not marry or have a partnership with someone from the clans of your four grandparents. At burial, the eulogy (*erepoti*) always mentions the clans of the four grandparents. Partners living in a man's home are called politely by the names of their clans, rather than by their personal names. Outside the home, a woman might also be referred to by the name of the clan into which she is married. A woman can be *muhana mulubajjo*, a daughter of the Balubajjo, and *muhasi mugombe*, a wife of the Bagombe. So, in many ways, clanship provides a nominal identity. And knowing your clan requires knowing your paternity.

Paternal filiation is also important for access to resources. Explosive population growth has meant scarcity of land. Although some young people have left the rural area to seek life chances in town, the sons who stay are still allocated land by their fathers and they bring wives who

help cultivate it. Unmarried daughters often stay on their fathers' land. The payment of bride wealth has declined drastically, but the material rights of a father in his daughter's partnerships persist in that fines for impregnating a schoolgirl are paid to a father (Parikh 2012). That said, there has been a definite decrease in material practices of transmitting resources from fathers to sons and exchanging wealth to formalise children's marriages.

I will not go into all the reasons for this, but what is crucial for my reflections on filiation is that partnerships are becoming more fragile, and many children born of transient or failed partnerships have frail relations to their biological fathers. They may have been taken with their mothers when their mothers left their fathers' homes. Or their mothers may never have lived with their fathers. In a patrilineal society, they should belong – somehow – to their fathers and his lineage and clan. But while paternity is known, the significance of paternal filiation can be tentative – more or less rather than either/or.

Changing patterns of paternal belonging and care consequent upon unstable partnerships and death of parents are reported from elsewhere in Uganda (Baines and Gauvin 2014; Whyte and Oboke 2022) and western Kenya (Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2003). In southern Africa, where the decline of formal marriage was evident even earlier, scholars have also discussed problems of paternal recognition and care (Ingstad and Saugestad 1987; Krige 1936; Pauli 2019: 199–226). Perhaps the attenuation of paternal kin links is part of a general increase in matrifocality and feminisation of kinship in developing societies under forces of modernity, as Jackson (2015) has argued. Still, the work of ethnography is to attend to the specifics; in Bunyole links to fathers and their families are important in practice or as potentials that perhaps might be activated.

Establishing paternity

Establishing filiation requires that a man acknowledge his paternity. Mostly men were willing to do this, even if they were not living with the mother and had no intention of staying with her. Only if the child was conceived by rape or if the mother was in school or if the man did not want the liaison to be known, might the father deny or disappear. But even in these cases, another member of his family might accept that the child belonged to them. Irene told how she conceived after being raped by someone she knew. When she brought that baby to the father's home, he

denied that it was his. But his mother, the child's grandmother, accepted the baby as her grandchild. It is important to understand that paternity is not only a matter of a biological link to an individual man, but also a connection to his parents and siblings. They can come to play a role in caring for the child of course. Yet even belonging as acknowledgement and identification can depend upon them.

On what basis does a father or his family decide that the child is really his? A woman's word is usually enough; it is generally accepted that a woman always knows who fathered her child. Even in cases where she had several partners at the time of conception, her assertion is decisive. Obbo (1980: 103) wrote that some of her Kampala interlocutors were calculating in naming the 'right' man. In contrast to the DNA tests deployed by those with material and social resources (see Baral, this volume), physical similarities provide some kind of additional proof. As was the case in late colonial Kenya (Thomas 2003: 130–1), it is most often women of the father's family who make the identification. Nalongo, the mother of twins, told how their father refused to come in person after they were born. His mother sent his sister to check whether they were really his. The sister examined their legs and declared they looked just like Salongo's. She rang her mother: 'They are real children. And they are our children!!'

A young nursing mother, occasionally holding her full breasts, related the harrowing story of how she recently achieved paternity for her child. The father had disappeared, but very close to her delivery she managed to get his parents' phone number from his sister. Although she had never met them, she rang and said they should wait for her at the taxi stop. With labour pains setting in, she travelled to their home in Busoga and delivered with the help of her baby's grandmother an hour after arrival. 'In that home they have a ritual test they perform on women who claim their sons have impregnated them'. With satisfaction and some amusement, she told how the new baby just smiled contentedly as it passed the test. Women of the family broke into ululation, and they ate a special meal together, after which the convinced grandparents gave the child a name. The young mother went back to her own parents' home, where she stayed with the baby. Its father appeared to be avoiding the whole situation; in fact he seemed annoyed that his sister had put the mother in touch with his parents. He only saw his child because the mother took it to show a friend who lived near him; he has not been in contact since. Still the young mother asserts that the child belongs to him and his home.

The issue of recognition has been thoughtfully discussed by Reece (2019) in considering her material from Botswana on the problems brought on by pregnancy and marriage. She observes: 'Recognition makes room for both affect and economy, sociality and self-making […] It creates a space to draw filial and affinal relationships into the same analytical frame, marking a key point of articulation between the two. And it makes room for ambiguity, partiality and reversibility' (Reece 2019: 44). I appreciate the emphasis on the potential of recognition, and on the elements of partiality and ambiguity. Paternal recognition in Bunyole assures a child a socially recognised identity: filiation in the minimal sense of being the child of a father. Yet it is partial; it guarantees little about how paternity will actually play out in terms of caring about (affect) or caring for (economic support) the child. Whether filiation will be associated with affinity in the form of a more lasting relationship between the parents is often an open question.

A name but nothing else

A key step in recognising paternity is giving a family name (*enjelulwa)* to the baby. My interlocutors described how either the man himself or his parents named the child, usually after a deceased relative, sometimes after a living one. Having a name from a father's family is an enduring indication of belonging, even if filiation to the father and his family is not practised in the expected ways. One young woman's father advised her to change her child's name because its father was not providing. She explained how she refused because the name from the delinquent father's side provided her daughter with an identity and a possibility. If the girl went to look for her paternal family in the future, the name would be there. The name was a handle, not only as an appellation but also in the sense that it could open a door for her some day. The mother was imagining a potential future.

An amusing example came up a couple of years ago. A well-educated young man from the city, visiting his paternal home, met a classificatory grandmother, a woman he would jokingly call a wife. She scolded him in fun: 'You man, you fathered a child with me, and you have not even given the child a name'. He replied: 'I'll send you the name on your telephone' 'Ha', she countered scornfully: 'Did you make me pregnant by telephone?' At which everyone laughed appreciatively. Yet it is not amusing for many women. Rita has three children by three different men. Going through them one by one, she remarked of the first: 'Yes, he gave the child a

name. But nothing else'. She was pointing to the disparity between explicit recognition of paternal filiation and the paternal care that many find lacking.

It is not only that clan membership requires recognised paternity. Belonging to the state, in the sense of being registered formally as a citizen member, requires a paternal identity. This is a clear example of the 'politics of the womb' in the form of state attempts to regulate reproduction, especially affiliation (Thomas 2003). When a pregnant woman attends antenatal clinic, she must name the man responsible for the pregnancy. A father's name is required on the attestation of birth, the birth certificate and the immunisation card. The National Identification and Registration Agency demands it for the all-important national identification number. The minority who attain formal marriage or a passport must indicate their father's identity. On some of these application forms, the space for the father's name even appears before the mother's name. Here too belonging to a father is categorical.

Older approaches to kinship and marriage would appreciate the ways in which paternity, and thus clan membership and even citizenship, are established. Despite sweeping economic changes in rural as well as urban areas, children are being identified by paternal filiation and linked to paternal families and clans. What was far less appreciated in the old accounts was how the moral obligation of fathers to care for their children actually played out.

Paternal care

The law of Uganda requires that both biological parents maintain a child (Children Act 1997 as amended by the Children Amendment Act 2016). But in practice, legal cases for child maintenance are not brought in rural Uganda. As was the case in Kenya under the Affiliation Act (1959–69), it was mainly urban, more educated women who sued men with salaries for child support (Thomas 2003: 145–6). Mothers I talked to seemed resigned. Often the fathers of their children had few resources and it seemed useless to press them. Moreover, bringing a case to court or to the Police Child and Family Protection Unit always costs money, which the mother usually does not have. Two women I knew had taken their problems to FIDA, the International Federation of Women Lawyers, that advocates for women's rights. Both were disappointed that the attempt had been costly and in vain. Neither the police nor FIDA seems to have effective means of forcing men to maintain their children. A meeting might

yield an agreement, but payments did not continue for long. Perhaps most important, mothers may not want to worsen relations to the fathers; it is better to keep open the possibility that fathers or their families may help in future or that the children will go to live with them in time.

Some fathers do provide material support sporadically. Mercy, with eight children by seven different men, was a sharp judge of paternal care. She remarked that the father of one of her children occasionally sent 1,000 Uganda shillings – a measly amount. But the father of another was paying school fees, even though his son lived with her. As to the father of her latest child, he came to the hospital when she delivered and paid the doctor 20,000 Uganda shillings. Later he brought a long bar of soap to the baby at home. But when the child fell gravely ill, he did not help. At least, he buried the baby boy at his home when it died, although it was a hasty and tense affair since his wedded wife was furious. Mercy concluded that particular conversation saying: 'Of all the fathers, only the first one was good'.

Support may also come from other paternal relatives. Even more than paternal belonging, paternal care reaches beyond the individual father to his family, which should show responsibility. Indeed, the father's parents and siblings did sometimes come to visit, bringing small gifts. Kathy told that her former mother-in-law brought garden produce for the grandchildren from time to time. Yet it was far more common to hear mothers complain that neither the fathers of their children nor other paternal relatives helped.

Failure of men to provide for their children was a complaint even among women who were living with their children's father. (One woman remarked that there were many such women who were just like single mothers.) Failure to care was frequently cited as a reason for leaving the father and taking the children. Often, mothers recounted that the father had another woman and used whatever they had on her and her children. Particularly bitter accounts concerned men who failed to help when children fell gravely ill. In this, rural eastern Uganda resembled Kampala; the ideal of men as providers was as pronounced as were men's constant shortcomings in this regard (Wyrod 2016: 80–90). In listening to women's complaints, I thought that in some cases they may have exaggerated men's neglect. Maybe the father or his family did make some gestures of care. But it was never recognised as enough.

Money, food, clothing, medical treatment, housing and school requirements are all crucial material needs for children. But these are not only material objects. Providing them is taken as an indication of love and care. It is a way of practising relationship. A father's failure to do so, just

as failure to spend time with a child, leaves a relationship to lie fallow – providing a name and nothing else. Like a fallow field, it can be cultivated in a future season – at least that is what many women hope.

Questions about relationships to children's fathers preoccupy mothers, but they have not preoccupied scholars to any great extent. As Jane Guyer (1994: 248) states: 'what needs research attention is potentially new practices of *parenthood* under new economic conditions'. In writing about changing marriage patterns among Yoruba people, she proposes the term 'polyandrous motherhood' for the pattern in which a woman has not concurrent husbands, but concurrent fathers of her children.[2] She suggests that there is a lateral logic of forming links to men through children, as well as a lineal logic of descent groups over time. But how feasible are these lateral strategies, when many men are less interested in taking responsibility for all of their children?

> Under present economic circumstances support may attenuate to recognition alone, recognition may attenuate still further into selectivity, and selectivity into neglect, at least for some offspring. In this scenario the lateral strategies of women may ultimately turn out to be illusory hopes based on the projected persistence of old patterns into a more radically new age than they imagined.
>
> (Guyer 1994: 233)

For all of the single mothers I followed, present economic circumstances were extremely difficult. They and their relatives struggled to support the children. They hoped that fathers would give more than names to their children. That hope may indeed turn out to be illusory, but for now it is still a hope. The assertion that children belong to their fathers may be less a statement about the present than an imagination of future possibility based on older patterns.

Placing children

The placement of children is a material dimension of relationship – perhaps the most important as far as patrilineal relations are concerned. Where a child sleeps and eats is where most tangible care is provided. This is not a straightforward matter. Even children whose biological parents live together may spend years staying with other relatives. But the issue is particularly complicated when the parents are not co-habiting. There is no single practice here. They might be with the mother or father, or

with various maternal or paternal relatives. Sometimes a child stays with a father and his partner and their children. Sometimes a woman brings a child of a previous union to stay with her and her new partner. Where children stay and who is responsible for them is often worked out step by step, child by child.

The principle that children should stay with their father is still widely accepted. Women who leave their husbands often leave their children too, if they are old enough and/or if they think the children will be well cared for. Otherwise, a departing woman takes her children, often planning to send them to their father's home when they are older. How are decisions made about whether a child should stay with its father? Mothers think not only, maybe not even primarily, about the father; they consider the women in his family who would be providing the actual care. This could be a stepmother if the man has another partner living with him. But very commonly, it is the father's mother who is considered as a potential caregiver.

Susa had four children with different men to whom she was not properly married. She said she would like to raise the children and then send them to their fathers when they were old enough. She has already sent one daughter to the father, but the girl came back after a week because there was no one to care for her:

> If my mother were still alive it would be easier, I could send the children to her. There are problems sending them to stay with their fathers' people. For my first son, one pair of grandparents died. His other grandparents already have too many grandchildren to care for. The mother of my last husband moves from one man to another; she is not settled, and she has HIV. It will be hard for the last two children to go to their father's family; I will have to stay with them for a long time. Maybe the first two can go to their fathers.

Paternal grandmothers are an obvious choice when children are sent to stay with their father's people; in rural areas, they usually live close to their sons, so the children are 'with their father'. But in several cases, they went to stay with a father's sister, at some distance from the father. One of Mercy's daughters was going to her father's married sister in another district. The baby boy who died was slated to be sent to his father's sister when he turned one year.

The father of Judith's three daughters arranged with the police (and her brother) to collect the girls on a police motorcycle and take them to his home. (Probably this had been suggested because people said she

was not sending them to school regularly, she was poor, and they looked malnourished.) Judith was worried. He had never shown any interest in them, never helped to support them, she claimed, and now he was just grabbing them. She was sure he would not care for them; he had no wife, and his mother was careless. In the event, the girls stayed with two of his sisters, one of whom lived about 40 kilometres away from him. He took his children, not to care for them in his own home but to place them with 'female fathers', women of his and their clan. When I last visited, the children had made their way back to their mother. There was widespread amazement at how far one of them had walked in order to return to a place where she evidently felt better cared for.

Despite the principle that children belong to their father's people, there is a strong tendency for them to stay with their mother and her relatives if the parents are not together. This pattern was strengthened during the worst years of the AIDS epidemic, when women who were sick went to their natal homes for care, often taking their children (Whyte 2005). A study done in 2006 among HIV positive mothers in south-central Uganda found that mothers looked to place their children with their own families rather than those of the children's fathers in the event of their death. The maternal relatives were already providing more care than were those from the father's side (Roby et al. 2009).

The disinclination, or inability, of fathers to provide material support for their children leaves the burden on mothers, who look for assistance from their own parents and siblings. We saw the pattern of matrilateral care 20 years ago in a household survey. It was not new even then; as we argued, parents had long supported their adult daughters in difficulty and cared for their children. In 2002, two-thirds of all children being fostered were daughters' children; but even in 1970 the children of daughters comprised half of those being cared for in addition to own children (Whyte and Whyte 2004). Our survey of the same village in 2019 revealed the same pattern: about two-thirds of children being cared for by other than their own parents were with maternal family members.

Paternal relations over time

The relation of non-resident children to their fathers often changes over time – for better or for worse. Relationships to fathers that have lain fallow may come alive with cultivation. Or they may wither without the water of care. The life situation of fathers should be seen longitudinally too. As Townsend (2000) points out on the basis of research in Botswana,

men have a long fertility life; the situation of a young man who has sired his first child is very different from that of an older man with children of different ages. Mothers reflect on how relations with fathers and fathers' families might take shape in years to come. They are imagining gender futures, not in a definite way, but in the tentative mood of possibility.

Family configurations shift; family members die or go away or change partners. As they come of age, children develop their own views about their fathers more clearly. Most important, changes in paternal relations often depend on the relations between the mother and father, and between the mother and others in his family. Mothers, and occasionally fathers, take steps to change the relationship between child, father and father's family.

Mothers, and their families, are particularly keen to send sons to stay with their fathers so that the boys may be given a share of land as they grow older. Indeed, more sons than daughters were staying with their fathers; daughters were more often staying with maternal relatives. Timing is important; it is better that boys go to their fathers at a younger age before other sons (and their mothers) have established too firm a claim. But often the issue is postponed until the boy is coming of age. In one instance, a mother took her son, who had grown up in her home, to his father to ask for land. The father was willing, but his wife had four sons, and she was so hostile that the mother and son gave up and left. The father's brother advised them not to try again while the boy's stepmother was there, because she might even try to kill him. Now the mother is planning to call her son's father for a meeting at her home, without interference from the antagonistic stepmother. Another woman speculated about which of her sons might be given land some day. She was sure about one, because his father's father loved him, even if his father was neglectful.

It is easier to claim land where your father is buried. We knew a man who had grown up in the home where his mother married. When he died, his mother's husband, who had always treated him as a son, tearfully begged forgiveness of his corpse: 'I am sorry I cannot bury you here; we must carry you to your father's home'. The dead man had a son, and it was important to secure that son's claim to the land of his father's biological father.

For daughters, issues of paternity can arise in connection with the payment of bride wealth. In past decades, when bride wealth was paid more regularly, the principle seemed to be that it was paid to the bride's genitor and his agnates. Lonzio, now a very old man, recalled how he brought bride wealth for his wife, not realising that the man to whom

her mother was married was his pater not his genitor; he had taken the mother and her two children when her biological father became mentally ill. The brothers of her genitor appeared and demanded the bride wealth, so Lonzio had to give more to them. Despite the fact that his wife had grown up in the home where her mother remarried, he had to acknowledge the circumstances of her conception. In other cases where payment was made to a father with whom the daughter had not stayed, a portion was given to the family who had cared for his daughter. One man with three daughters married in the early 2000s explained that he did not want bride wealth from their husbands. But he asked that the man who married the middle daughter pay 100,000 Uganda shillings to his wife's sister, who had raised the girl. Women were attentive to whether any gift of appreciation (*ahasimu*) was given to the person or home that had provided care. They wanted their husband's family to recognise not just the man responsible for their conception, but those who had taken responsibility for their well-being.

In Bunyole, the Ganda custom of introducing and welcoming the bridegroom and his family (*kwanjula*) is practised where a woman's family can afford the celebration. This can raise the question of who is responsible for her. Who is her family? This became an issue in the case of Agnes, the child of rape, whose father had denied her. Agnes had grown up in her mother's home together with her other siblings from another father. When Agnes wanted to introduce her husband, her mother's brothers suggested that the big event be held at the home of her father. He was dead against it, even though others in his family were willing; they had always recognised her as his daughter. Recently, Agnes' mother speculated that the father might be coming around. He had just attended the funeral of her brother, paid a mourning contribution, and asked to talk to her. In other words, he seemed to be accepting his relation to Agnes and her mother.

Veria's father never recognised her at first; it seems her mother did not insist (she was pregnant with Veria when she moved in with another man), and her father's ring wife wanted nothing to do with an 'outside' child. Veria was in grade P6, maybe around 12 or 13, when her mother brought her to her paternal grandparents. Her father's father gave her the name of his own mother. But still her father rejected her, refusing to let her call him *baba*; her father's brother took her to stay in his home some 5 kilometres away. Now she is a parent herself, with six children by four different men. She comes to her father's place occasionally and claims that he even calls her daughter on the rare occasions when he sees her. But she still resents the fact that he never wanted her to stay in his

home. With satisfaction she showed me her new national identity card; she had registered with her father's surname. Veria's efforts to belong to her father's family were supported by her father's father who named her; she received paternal care from her father's brother, who took her in. She herself carried on the struggle for paternal filiation as an adult.

The key role of others in the paternal family was apparent in many of the stories I heard. Often it was positive, but it was risky to depend on one paternal relative only. Patience was beloved of her father's mother, who used to take her to see her father. When the grandmother died, Patience did not see her father any more. The mother of Eva had no contact with Eva's father, but used to talk to the grandmother when they met in the trading centre. Then the older lady stopped coming there after rumours circulated that she was a witch. So the link to Eva's paternal family was suspended.

Guyer (1994) proposed that we look at how single women form lateral links to the father of their children and his family. The father's care and support for a child might be extended to helping the child's mother. In rural Uganda, this can happen if a father provides land for a child that the mother can use. Most single mothers dream of having their own house on their own plot, a dream that is difficult to realise since they do not inherit land and seldom have money to buy it. The next best thing is to have a house on the land of a child. In one case, a mother already had a friendly relation with the father of two of her children. When he gave their son some land with a partly built house, she optimistically used her own money to finish it. Still, it was for her son on his father's land. She would have liked her very own place, where her children from two other men could also stay.

A similar situation of change over time developed for Lily. She too dreamed of having her very own home on her own land where she would not have to pay rent. When the paternal grandmother of her children bought a plot of land for them, Lily moved there with the children. She too completed a building that already stood half-finished on the parcel. But her optimism turned out to be 'cruel optimism': 'when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing' (Berlant 2011: 1). The children's father imposed himself, as if the house and land belonged to him since he was the father of the children. His drunkenness and abusive behaviour turned her dream into a nightmare. Finally her children threatened to run away if she did not leave the house and land. She took them to stay with her brother in town and, once again, had to struggle to contribute to rent every month. She hopes that one day the children will have a better relationship with their father – if he changes his ways. Like all the other stories, this one is unfinished. There are almost

always possibilities that a father and his family will care for his children somehow, more or less, as time goes on. It is when we consider paternal belonging and care over the long run of lifetimes that we most clearly perceive the imagination of gender futures.

Conclusion

It was striking that so many women declared that children belong to their fathers, even when the fathers seemed to care so little. Many referred to the father's place as the child's 'home', even when the child had never lived there (see Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen 2023 for similar ideas about paternal belonging in western Kenya). They made statements like: 'this girl has never been to her home' or 'this boy should get to know his home'. The ideology of patriliny seems to contradict the practice of homely care from mothers and their families. Or perhaps women were simply keeping possibilities open, hoping that they or their children could realise some kind of claim in the future. Mothers realise that children want fathers; as one woman said: 'It must have something to do with DNA or else it's something spiritual'.

Conditions of life have changed and so has anthropology, where weight has shifted from structure to diversified practice. Today mothers (and fathers) are trying out a variety of ways to form families and make homes. There is more variation in household and family configuration than ever before – in Bunyole and globally. Male disengagement from paternal obligations is a widespread concern in many parts of the world. But there is also a contrary trend whereby some younger men are cultivating more caring and intimate everyday relations with their children (Bledsoe, Guyer and Lerner 2000: 3). My interlocutors in Bunyole meant that filiation to a father and through him to other members of his family was materially and socially significant for a child's future. They hoped, as well, that belonging as filiation would open onto emotional care as another kind of belonging some day.

Notes

1   I carried out fieldwork from 1969 to 1971 together with my husband Michael in what was then Bunyole county, now Butaleja district. Since 1989 I have been making regular return visits, working on different topics, and following families we have known for decades. For the IMAGENU project, I assembled 12 partnership and filiation stories, mostly through repeat conversations.
2   As Haram (1999: 169–71) showed in her study from northern Tanzania, Guyer's observations on the potential and problems of polyandrous motherhood are relevant there too.

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5

When does a house become a home? Homemaking, belonging and the mutual discontent of men and women in Uganda

Hanne O. Mogensen and Julaina A. Obika

Bistable figures of homemaking

What is a home?
Whose home is it?
Who is at home?
Who makes a home?
How are things at home?

Moving towards home with children
Whose movement?
Moving towards home without a man

Provider, owner, dodging and roaming like the air
Living outside
Or moving between homes

Cohabit
Concurrently
Consecutively
Changing, contradicting, and confusing

Men build houses
Women build homes
Women father homes

What to expect and who to trust?
Tension and mutual discontent
Longing for
Grieving for
Belonging and going along
Whether building or renting

Introduction

Aspirations for home are central to people's imaginations in Uganda. The longing for home is maybe one of the more fundamental desires in human experience, suggests Porter (2020: 829). But what is a home, for whom is it a home, and what do we learn about changes in partnership and gender relations in Uganda by looking at notions of home?

People in Uganda are usually described as patrilineal and predominantly patrilocal. A man may marry or co-habit with one or more women, concurrently or consecutively. Men are the 'heads' or 'owners of the home', as people say in Uganda, and women move in and out of men's homes. Or do they? A home is where a man lives with his wives and children. Or is it? Women are said to belong to their father's home until they marry, and to their husband's home after marrying. But what does belonging mean?

Based on material from our respective long-term fieldworks in northern and eastern Uganda and a shared study on partnership and livelihood options focusing on labour migration from Uganda to the Middle East, we discuss how a house – or 'the place where you live'– becomes a 'home', what it means to belong to a home, and what shifting notions of home can teach us about changing gender relations. The formalisation of marriage is in decline in Uganda, partnerships are known for being unstable, and the number of female-headed households seems to be increasing. 'In Uganda, men are fewer than women', people would often state when we discussed during fieldwork the fact that so many women did not marry. 'That is why polygamy is possible', 'that is why so many women fail to marry', people say. However, the preliminary report of the 2024 Ugandan population census, showing a slight statistical difference between genders with 22,495,030 males and 23,440,016 females (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2024), does not explain the apparent absence of adult men in Ugandan homes. So why do so many Ugandans seem to think so? We argue that the men are there, but at times out of sight, because they are on the move – between homes. We suggest trying to catch sight of some of the 'missing men' by approaching 'home' as a bistable figure, i.e. a figure that has the possibility of being perceived in two different ways: a figure that can evoke two distinct perceptual interpretations that alternate and compete for dominance.

In a well-known bistable figure the viewer sees either a duck or a rabbit. They are in the same image, yet you can see only one at a time. Similarly, when our starting point is the man as the head of a home, which women move in and out of, we see one image, but lose sight of the

other: the one of women as homemakers and men as moving between homes. We are not simply alluding to differences between the ideal and reality, between the 'idea of home' and everyday practices and living arrangements; households headed by men co-exist with female-headed households that men may join temporarily or for longer periods. But not only that: a man may say that he is 'the owner' of a home that the woman would describe as a home owned by her. The living situation they describe is the same, but they show us different images within the same figure. We thus suggest approaching home – or rather homemaking – as a bistable figure and will in the following describe co-existing images of what makes a house become a home and thereby contribute to the decentring of some classical androcentric concepts in anthropology.

Marriage in Africa has for long been discussed as processual and a result of exchanges between kin groups over time (e.g. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). Thinking about marriage as a process of becoming helps us avoid approaching it as something which either is or is not, and as Porter (2020: 826) adds, writing about the Acholi of northern Uganda, when approaching marriage as a process we should pay attention not only to exchanges over time but also to space and movement. An Acholi village homestead is an imagined moral geography associated with the activities going on there. You do not move haphazardly or carry out activities anywhere in the homestead. The set-up of the homestead enables movements that facilitate gendered roles, intimacies and divisions of labour between spouses and between generations. Unmarried people or those who do not have children are problematic to the ideal notion and set-up of an Acholi homestead (Porter 2020: 822).

One of the most important movements in space is the movement of women from one clan, and thus home, to another when she settles with a man – though this is not a linear process with finality either (Porter 2020: 826–7). The possibility of a woman's mobility in and out of a clan – and its home – is ever-present. Her status is always subject to change and renegotiation in a way that men's belonging to the home is not (Southall 1960, 1961; Porter 2017: 89). Acholi women describe the seasonal nature of their love lives. In agricultural seasons, when their help is most needed, their men 'say sweet words' and touch them more gently. After the harvest, women might be neglected by the men or even mistreated to provoke them to return to their natal home so that the man may have less interference with how he spends the income. Some months later, the man might go to the natal home of the woman and coax her back with promises of reformed behaviour (Porter 2020: 826–7). Obika (2021) also highlights the seasonal nature of relationships amid conflicts in northern

Uganda. Sometimes the marriage may not last, and a woman may move out for good. As Porter further points out, 'woman', *dako* in Acholi, is derived from the word *daak* to migrate from one place and establish oneself in another (Crazzolara in Porter 2020: 817).

Porter (2020) thus suggests that we approach marriage as process and movement, linear, neither in time, nor in space – and she adds that maybe we should not translate this process with the Euro-American term 'marriage' at all. Acholi speak of 'beginning a home' or 'having a home' much more commonly than of getting or being married and, when 'married', a woman talks about being married to a home, rather than a man. The institution of marriage – usually understood in Africa as a process of joining two lives or kin groups – should perhaps instead be seen as a project of moving toward home over time (Porter 2020: 816–7).

While Porter writes about the Acholi post-war context in northern Uganda, our material is from many parts of Uganda (see discussion of the study and its methods below). Nevertheless, we take inspiration from her discussion of marriage as a process and a movement in time and space, and of the difficulty of translating the Euro-American term 'marriage' into not only Acholi but also other Ugandan languages. Inspired by Porter (2020: 814), we thus talk of 'homemaking' rather than 'marrying' and of home as an idea and a project rather than a place. Where our discussion diverts from the one of Porter is in our attention to the fact that it is not necessarily the movements of women from one clan to the other and in and out of the man's home that are at the heart of homemaking. We may also talk of women as homemakers and of men as the ones on the move, and even of homemaking that does not involve men at all.

Women fathering homes

In Uganda it is still common to aspire to and to manage to build a home on the land of the man (especially in rural areas, and maybe more so in northern Uganda), but we know from long-term fieldwork that many women (especially in urban and peri-urban areas) spend their adult life in a series of more or less formalised partnerships – men going in and out of their lives – while they themselves stay with their children, sometimes of different fathers. Some have co-habited with one or several men, but the relationship was never formalised, and often the man was co-habiting with more than one woman at a time. Many women rent a place; and sometimes a man contributes to the rent while their relationship lasts. Some women have managed to buy a plot of land and build a house of

their own. Women are often the ones who stay with the children in one place for extended periods, while men who co-habit with more than one woman at a time move between houses, at times including a house that he also thinks of as his 'home'. But not always. And when a man talks of his home, he sometimes includes a house that a woman considers 'her home', because she built it, or pays (most of) the rent, and has stayed there for an extended period with her children.

Female-headed households have existed since precolonial times (Mair 1934), but the urbanisation of the colonial period caused significant changes in gender relations and an increase in the number of female-headed households (Southall and Gutkind 1957), which also continued after independence, though at first primarily in urban areas (Obbo 1980). We are thus not dealing with a new phenomenon but a difference in scale. The instability of partnerships and female-headed households have become more common, including outside of the big towns and in rural areas all over the country. According to a survey carried out by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2022: 11), female-headed households, defined as 'the member under whose guidance the major decisions of the household are taken' comprise 26 per cent in Busoga, 27 per cent in Buganda, 34 per cent in the Acholi sub-region, 48 per cent in the Karamoja region and 41 per cent in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. While it is not surprising that Kampala, the largest city in the country, and Karamoja, a region with a significant population living a nomadic life, have such high numbers; the numbers clearly show that the phenomenon is not limited to these parts of the country.

Uganda is inhabited by different ethnic groups described in anthropological literature as having variations of patrilineal kinship systems, with the Baganda (and other Bantu groups) having more centralised political structures that, also in precolonial and colonial times, limited the influence of patrilineal clans over women compared to, for example, the Nilotic ethnic groups of northern and eastern Uganda (Southall 1960; Wyrod 2016). Our long-term fieldwork was carried out among two Nilotic groups in northern and eastern Uganda (the Acholi and the Jop'Adhola), but in our shared study we followed family networks spread out over the country, with members who often had parents from different ethnic groups. We took our starting point in networks we knew from long-term fieldwork and followed family members who had been to the Middle East, most of them having settled in other parts of the country after their return (usually in urban areas) than where the original fieldwork took place. We also asked people who were in or had returned from the Middle East to help us get in touch with other people who were

or had been working in the Middle East. By the time of writing, we had spoken to and followed 50 men and women who had been, or who were planning to go, to the Middle East, and their networks, between 2019 and 2023, but the material we draw upon is not limited to the lives of those who migrated. Our study on migration to the Middle East brought our attention to questions of homemaking that we have then pursued more generally. We did not recognise significant differences between central, eastern and northern Uganda in terms of how the instability of partnerships and women's homemaking were discussed. Differences between rural and urban settings persisted, but when looking at the trajectories of people's lives in a longer time perspective, rather than places at a specific point in time, even these differences were difficult to uphold. Many people, men as well as women, moved back and forth between rural and urban settings. One of the unexpected results of the study was the extent to which women in rural areas also considered themselves household heads, and that the mobility of men in and out of homes was not confined to urban settings.

Generations of females heading homes

Migrant work, inside and outside of Uganda, is but one of the many things people do to cope with the dire economic situation that many Ugandans face. The existence – and apparent increase – of female-headed households is by no means merely a result of recent trends in migration, as shown by one of the family networks in our study. This family network has a grandmother, Awori, at its centre, originally from eastern Uganda, now living in a permanent house outside a small trading centre on the main road east of Jinja, rented by her daughter, a domestic worker in Dubai. Awori divorced in the 1970s, and her mother divorced back in the 1950s. None of Awori's children and grandchildren are in a formalised marital union. They have all lived in different matrifocal constellations since the 1950s, sometimes on the land of one of Awori's brothers, sometimes with Awori's widowed sister on her deceased husband's land, but more often in rented houses in trading centres and towns. Awori stays in the rented house near Jinja with one adult daughter and about 11 grandchildren from her six daughters, ranging between two and 25 years of age (some away in boarding school some of the time). Two of Awori's daughters died of AIDS in the early 2000s, and two of them are presently domestic workers in the Middle East. The children living in the house introduce themselves as Jap'Adhola, Munyankole, Musoga, Muganda, and Acholi, whether speaking their father's language or not, whether knowing their

father or not. If we go by patrilineal affiliation, they belong to at least five different ethnic groups, but have no or very limited contact with their fathers.

In the late 1990s, Awori's brothers bought a small plot in Mwello in eastern Uganda for her, at a distance from their own place where she and her brothers were born. Her brothers and their wives are now settled there, and Awori has herself lived there on and off during parts of her adult life, but where she cannot spend her old age and be buried. The plot in Mwello is too small to feed the family, and the house is not permanent, though the thatched roof has recently been replaced by iron sheets. Awori and her grandchildren therefore spend most of their time in the house rented by her daughter working in the Middle East.

Awori's sons and grandsons have no fathers whose land they can inherit. The daughters have no fathers to negotiate bride wealth for them. They live on the margins of the patrilineal lineage and do not belong anywhere, as Hanne has previously phrased it while also portraying the role of these women in binding dispersed members of their natal lineage together (Mogensen 2011). However, we suggest reconsidering the appropriateness of describing their lives as taking place on the margins of an otherwise predominantly patrilineal society, and revisiting what it means to belong. Female-headed households and matrifocality is, if not the norm, then normal, alongside persistent ideals that it ought to be different.[1]

Female heads of households are women who are not – or not yet, or no longer – married or co-habiting. Have these women decided that marriage/partnership is not for them? No, usually it just never happened as Pauli (2019) phrases it, inspired by Johnson-Hanks' (2005) discussion about judicious opportunism. They may have co-habited with one or several men, but the relationship was never formalised. Maybe they never even lived together, or only partly so, since the man was co-habiting with more than one woman at a time. Many of these women are in a situation of what has elsewhere been called polyandrous motherhood (Guyer 1994; Haram 2005). They have one or several children, often with different men, none of whom they live with, and most of whom do not contribute to the upbringing of the children (according to the women).

The necessity of children and of buildings

Men find it increasingly difficult to live up to the role of provider. As we shall show, tensions between men and women stem from decades of 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' discourses and interventions.

Tensions on what it means to be a provider or what to expect of a spouse may also have contributed to the instability of partnerships and a shift towards more female-headed households. This apparent development towards female-headed households and matrifocality is akin to what has previously been documented from other parts of the world. Studies of AIDS orphans have shown an increasing significance of maternal relatives in childcare, also in contexts where it used to not be the norm (e.g. Foster et al. 1995; Ingstad 2004). AIDS may have pushed towards matrifocality in Uganda and elsewhere, but Cecile Jackson (2015: 21) further argues that, generally speaking, social changes of modernity drive relatedness towards matrifocality in many parts of the world.[2] When descent groups do not control property rights, and the marketplace replaces familial rights to labour, it is difficult to maintain patrilineal ideologies. In cases of male labour migration, conflict, displacement and social upheavals, the stable unit is usually the mother or grandmother/child dyad (Jackson 2015: 11).

Even as we see a decline in the formalisation of partnerships and an increasing uncertainty of paternal support, we also see that motherhood continues to be an unconditional necessity for women in Uganda. The marker of social adulthood for women has shifted from being a wife to being a mother, as has also been discussed in West Africa for some time (Guyer 1994). A Teso woman who had recently returned from Oman got pregnant while she was planning to 'buy herself a new job'. This time she hoped to be in Qatar, as she said: 'Why should I do all this work for nobody? At least now I have somebody to do it for. I will leave the child with my mother as soon as it can walk and reason'. All women we spoke to in the study on labour migration linked their decision to go to the Middle East to their disillusionment with men for not living up to the ideal of being providers. But they still dreamed of housebuilding and homemaking. And a house needs children, though not necessarily a man, to become a home.

'Can a woman have a home of her own?', we asked both men and women of different ages from different parts of the country. Two young Acholi men in Gulu town said without hesitation that she can. If children are there, and if the woman owns the house, then she can say that it is her *gang*. A woman in her 40s who spoke Lugbara confirmed this: 'There must be children living in a house for it to be a home [*aku*], and yes, a woman can have a home if she has children living with her. A house becomes a home if two generations live together'. Though people at times started answering us by outlining the ideal of a home consisting of man, woman and children, they would often finish their answer adding further nuance.

For example, an Alur woman in her 30s who first said that a home (*gang* or *pecu,* depending on what branch of Alur you come from) needs a husband, wife and children, but then ended her explanation by saying that: 'If children are there, then you can call it a home, whether the man is there or not'. The defining feature of a home seems to be moving towards the idea that more than one generation live together, independently of whether it has both the father and the mother living there (but you rarely find fathers living alone with their children for very long, unless they have daughters of an age where they can take care of housework).

A home needs to have a house – not just children, but also buildings. And, if possible, a permanent house: one that does not have clay walls and thatched roof that must be renewed regularly; one that is built of bricks and iron sheets and has a door that can be closed and locked and a pit latrine. The compound should also have trees and animals, some added. Mwello had the potential of becoming a home for Awori and her descendants, but the construction there was not yet permanent. June, the daughter working in Dubai, hesitated between using her money on construction on the land in Mwello, buying another plot closer to town or simply continuing renting until more of the children had completed school. While some will say that you need to own the land and the house for you to call a place your home, then others argue that, even when renting, you may talk of a place as home. A young Acholi man explained to us that:

> Men who rent in town can easily find a lady and go and eat at her place. They will find a woman who is also alone. The woman calls the place 'her home'. If the man is not recognised as her husband, and if she is the one renting, then it is her home.

Others would confirm that a woman who is renting can call a place her home if the children live there with her. Ideally, a home is a place from which you can be buried, but if you rent, then you may still call it home while also longing for a place where one day you can be buried. June knew that renting was not a permanent solution for the growing family; meanwhile, her children, now in secondary school, talked of that place as their home, the only home, they knew – the place they returned to in their school holidays.

A young man, studying in Gulu, who grew up near Masindi with a Muganda mother and a Nyoro father, with whom we spoke in English, said:

Men build houses, and women build homes. If a man is not married, he does not have a home. If he does not stay with [any of] his wives and children, he does not have a home. We call it *nakyeyombekedde* meaning that a woman is left to father the children, to father the home. The word for 'fathering' and 'building' are used interchangeably.

The word he thought of was the Kiganda word '*okuzimba*', meaning 'to build' or figuratively, 'to grow' – but not only regarding the physical building of a house, also building a family.[3] The Kiganda term *nakyeyombekedde* directly translated means 'a woman who failed marriage'. The Sanyuka Morning Express TV Show, a programme broadcast in Luganda debating current topics, often relationship issues, dedicated a two-part show in 2023 to the question: 'Why are single women very many these days?' and discussed the situation of both *banakyeyombekedde* (women who failed to marry) and *basekyeyombekedde* (men who failed to marry). According to one guest on the show, *banakyeyombekedde* are women who have tried marriage or relationships but have had bad experiences and walked away to be on their own; they either build or rent a house with their own money. Some of them may even decide not to accept any help, financial or other, from men who try to woo them. They may continue having a relationship with a man but insist on maintaining their independence and autonomy for decision-making (see also Obbo 1980). They will even try to control men's access to them, only being available to the man when it is convenient for them.

Thus, to sum up, a building is material, and the size and quality of it matters. But to build a home also means to build relationships, and what we see in Uganda at this point in history is an increase in – and an acknowledgement of – women who are 'fathering' in the sense of making a home, whether renting or building.

Men roaming like the air

What are the men doing while women are fathering? They are roaming, Danny said, a man in his 40s who was a regular visitor to his mother's place, one of the matrifocal households we visited regularly. He would turn up to eat, and sometimes also to sleep. We asked him whether he had a family and a home; and, yes, he did have two children, but no home:

I am not staying with the children. I am dodging. I have no house. I move around quite a bit. Sometimes I am in a woman's place. Sometimes I stay with friends. I know how to joke and tell good stories, so people welcome me. I wanted to bring the kids to my sister's place, but there are already so many children there. I do send help to their mother now and then. 2,000–3,000 Ush. For chapatis. Well, the mother uses the money as she wishes, of course, but I know it can only cover a chapati now and then. They grow from their uncles like I did myself [i.e. the mother's brother helps the mother and pays school fees for them]. You know, staying in a woman's house is difficult for a man. They can chase you anytime, throw your clothes in the street so that everybody can see you have been chased. That is why I don't even prefer staying with women anymore. I am roaming. I am like the air.

Danny may be referred to as *sekyeyombekedde*, a man who failed marriage. While men usually do not describe themselves as roaming and being like the air, and though Danny did so with a certain irony in his voice, he may not have phrased it that way had he not had something to drink before turning up. Danny's honesty about his lack of attachment to a home, his inability to 'father' a home, is a reminder that, if we pay attention to the trajectories of men, they are at times more mobile than women who tend to stay put for extended periods with their children. In central Uganda, Obbo (1980) also found both men and women who were often referred to as *kirerese*, i.e. a person who is restless and 'cannot stay in one place for long' (1980: 93).

Awori told stories about her ex-husband and their short but passionate, and at times violent, marriage which came to an end when he brought a second wife to their home in rural eastern Uganda in the early 1970s. These are stories of a woman who was made to leave the man's home and who thereafter no longer belonged – neither in her natal home, nor in her ex-husband's home – and who for decades had to fend for herself and her seven children with four different fathers in various parts of the country. But when following the movements of her ex-husband, it becomes clear that he was also mobile over the years. During the civil war and political instability of the 1980s, he fled his ancestral land in the east and settled in Busoga with his second wife on land that happens to be not so far from the rented house where his first wife, Awori, now 30 years later, lives with the grandchildren. When we tried to make an appointment with this man, now in his early 70s, to get his side of the story, we realised that he no longer lived with his wife. He had been

thrown out by her six years ago. He told us on the phone that he lives with his sister on her deceased husband's land in eastern Uganda, close to where he was born. His second wife and her children had taken over their land in Busoga – 'because of jealousy', said one of Awori's grandsons. They fear that he will divide the land between the children of the first wife (Awori) and second wife, so the second wife and her sons made sure to get rid of him before he could do so. As a result, the man had to move from one woman (his wife) to another (his sister).

In the case of Amal, a woman whom we met in rural eastern Uganda who had worked as a security guard in Iraq, it was even more clear that the same 'figure' of homemaking contained more than one image. She had initiated the construction of a house on land that she told us she had bought with money she earned in Iraq. She had for some years co-habited with a man, Alex, who in time became abusive, so she threw him out. Alex, who had had a 'side-dish' (Ugandan term for a person with whom one has an affair) while co-habiting with Amal, moved in with this woman, on the other side of the road, when Amal told him to leave. When talking to Alex, he told us that he had made the choice to leave Amal, and he furthermore said that he was the one who had paid for the land and the house with money he had earned in Kenya. Amal had taken the case to court and won. 'But' as Amal said to us:

> People in the village still assume that I was the one who stole from Alex. On the one hand, people do know that educated women prefer bringing a man to her home so that he cannot interfere with her plans the way he can, if he is the one who brings her to his home. On the other hand, people still think that a woman like me with land and a house of my own is a failure – that I have stolen from men instead of making a home with a man.

Another man, whom we will call Jonas, lived at Amal's place at the time of our visit to the area. Neighbours disagreed on whether they were a couple, or whether he was simply getting accommodation in exchange for helping her out in the garden. Jonas told us that he had been married three times. His first marriage was in a village not far from where we found him, but his wife had a habit of taking 'whatever little mistake he did' to the police. 'My husband cannot afford this, and he doesn't do that', she would say to the police, and consequently he was arrested three times because of there being no food in the home. He then decided to break up with the woman; she had spoilt his reputation in the village, so he left. He stayed with another woman for 10 years on a plot of land in

Busoga. But at some point this land was claimed by a rich man. Jonas told his wife, 'Let us go back to Tororo district, since they are trying to chase us from this land'. But she refused to come back with him. And, in fact, people were never chased. The case just stopped. Up to this day, people still live there, including his ex-wife and the children they had together. However, Jonas returned to the part of eastern Uganda that he originally came from: He settled with a woman there, and lived with her for about a year until she abandoned him for the man, Alex, whom Amal used to co-habit with. Now Jonas stays with Amal. Amal's ex-partner, Alex, with Jonas' ex-partner. Jonas' children stay with his ex-wives, while Amal's children and her mother are with her.

Homemaking is a process and a movement. It happens over time, and it happens through movements in space. A home is not necessarily just one house. It can be the result of movements between different houses, within a customary homestead (cf. Porter 2020; forthcoming) or between a house in town and one in the village, between one's workplace and one's village home, between the home of a woman's family and her marital home, between the houses of a man's wives and lovers. But not only that, at times you need to move away in order to make a home, as has been described in relation to discussions of growing up (Meinert 2003) and in literature on labour migration (Schielke 2020). Migration to the Middle East is but a more recent way of moving away to make a home back home.

In sum, movements in space have always been part of homemaking for both men and women. Still, we suggest that these movements have been described within an overall narrative of women's movements towards or between the men's home, and that this is but one image within the figure of moving towards home. Neither Awori's ex-husband, Jonas, or Alex, the ex-partner of Amal, think of themselves as air or see themselves as roamers, *bakirerese,* as did Danny in his clear-sighted drunkenness. They refer to themselves as being – or in Jonas' case, as having been – heads of homes. Amal's ex-partner, Alex, even continued to claim that he was the 'owner' of the home in which Amal now lived with her children and her mother. Yet, in these cases, we see women and mothers of children who have been residing in places where buildings have been built and bones buried. The men have moved in space in non-linear ways, while the women have been 'fathering' the homes. And the women refer to these places as 'their' homes – the place that they belong to.

Homemaking as you go along

A quick search on the internet tells us that 'to belong' means to 'be the property of' or 'be a member of' (e.g. Oxford English Dictionary). Being a member of (e.g. a clan) or being owned by (e.g. a man) is also the meaning that seems to be implied when the English word 'belonging' is used by Ugandans. Ugandans will often say, when speaking English, that a woman belongs to her father's clan and home and has rights and obligations there, and that she, and her rights and obligations, are transferred to her husband's clan when she moves in (and starts a home) with a man. Ugandans also often talk of being 'the owner' of a home, a woman, or a pregnancy, when speaking English.

'Belonging', however, has no direct translation in Ugandan languages, and it may be an example of a European term that has been used uncritically when addressing non-European experiences, as discussed by Amadiume (1997: 1) for various other terms used in academia in general, and by anthropology in particular. We suggest that 'belonging' may have reinforced an androcentric perspective on marriage and relationships, in anthropology as well as outside of academia. However, it may still be useful as an analytical concept if we pay close attention to what it originally meant – and what people in Uganda actually tell us. There are numerous languages in Uganda from different language families, into which we will not be able to go in depth here. But when trying to make a verbatim translation into English of what people say when answering questions about 'belonging to a home', they seem to simply say: 'I am a child of this home', 'I am from this home', 'this is where I am married', or 'this is where I stay'. When talking about a woman 'belonging' to a certain home, the verbatim translation is that she is a wife to or a mother of somebody in that home. When a woman talks in Acholi of her home, she will distinguish between her natal home, *gang wa*, and the place where she now stays, *ganga*, which can refer to the place where she is either formally married, lives with a man or lives alone (with her children but without a man). In this case, *wa* refers to 'our' and *a* denotes 'my'. When somebody talks of being the owner of something in Acholi, they may replace *wa* with *a* – indicating that this is mine (*mega*) not ours (*megwa*), but this is only done where there is some disagreement, conflict or uncertainty about whose it is. The expressions 'the owner of the pregnancy' or 'the owner of the woman' are thus used when there is doubt about or conflict over who the father is or the status of a relationship. In sum, when the English words 'belonging' and 'owning' are used, the verbatim translations in Ugandan languages refer to matters of who has relationships with whom, and who stays with whom.

Belonging gained importance as an analytical concept in anthropology in the 1990s to bring process and pathways into kinship studies and political anthropological discussion of identity and citizenship (for an overview of this see Glavind 2022; Thelen and Coe 2019). Belonging has been used to cover formal rights, negotiation practices and political membership – but belonging itself has usually been vaguely defined when used by anthropological scholars (Glavind 2022: 72). We suggest that, even though belonging as an analytical concept has been used to break with the categorical and structural understandings of kinship and lineage systems and give room for process and negotiations, present-day Euro-American use of belonging as a word with connotations of property and membership may at the same time have contributed to an already androcentric perspective on kinship and marriage in Africa. This needs not necessarily be so.

Gammeltoft (2018) is one of the scholars who has revisited the term. She argues for an anthropology of belonging that attends to the ways in which individuals come into being through mutual relations of possession, attachment and dependence. Possession here is understood not as ownership in an economic sense, but as human beings' capacity to inhabit each other in ways that are experienced as existentially forceful and binding. Attachment is understood as attending to the ways in which selves are premised on their belonging to larger social bodies (membership), and dependence is understood in the sense that being owned by someone or being a member of something allows people to place moral demands and expectations on one another (2018: 88–9). Gammeltoft's exploration of belonging as matters of intersubjectivity helps us shift our attention from lineage, place and house, to questions of who does what together with whom; hence, homemaking becomes a process of striving towards something with somebody.

According to etymological dictionaries, the original sense of the word 'belong' was 'to go along with', 'to properly relate to'. The word is thought to derive from *long*, both as an adverb – extended in space, of long duration – and as a verb – *to long/longing* (v) i.e. 'to yearn for, to crave for, to grieve for'. [4] The meanings 'to be the property of' and 'be a member of' first appeared in the late fourteenth century, and the word 'belongings' as in goods and possessions only started appearing in the early nineteenth century. [5] It may thus be useful to hold on to 'belong' as an analytical concept – if we do not reduce belonging to matters of 'membership' and 'property'. It may help us catch sight of other images in the figure of homemaking than the one usually described. What do we see if we think of 'belonging to a home' as a matter of 'going along with', 'properly

relating to', 'yearning for' and 'grieving for' or, as Ugandans often phrase it: matters of who you have relationships with, responsibilities towards and stay with – i.e. as matters of everyday practices and intersubjectivity? We suggest that we then see women who build and 'father' homes.

Longing for home

Mwello, the small plot of land in eastern Uganda that Awori's brothers bought for her, is becoming the place for those who went along with each other in life and who long for a home where they – even if they do not stay there much – can be buried. The importance of knowing where one will be buried has not diminished, though people have become more mobile, and the instability of partnership has intensified. The location of remains and foreknowledge of this during life is part of social personhood and negotiations over belonging (Meinert and Whyte 2013; Porter forthcoming; Whyte 2005). As Porter suggests, in the absence of customary exchanges between kinship groups, specific aspects of materiality – bones, babies and buildings – take on even greater prominence. They are at the centre of the project of homemaking (Porter forthcoming). We have already discussed babies (children) and buildings; we now turn to the importance of 'bones' and burials for our understanding of homemaking as a process of longing for something and going along with somebody.

It is unsettling for many people in Uganda not to know where to bury loved ones, and where you will be buried yourself. Contestations around this come to the fore at the time of burial, but at times also long before and long after the death of the person. Awori's first daughter to die from AIDS was buried on the land in Mwello in 2001. Awori's mother – who had left her husband back in the 1950s – died in 2002, and she was also buried on the land in Mwello. Awori's second daughter died from AIDS in 2004, but she was buried on her father's land in Busoga – the one he fled to in the early 1980s. When she knew she was dying, she had asked him if it was possible for her to be buried at his place. An adult daughter who had already had children should not be buried on her father's land, but what should she do? She had never settled with a man, though she had co-habited for shorter periods with the fathers of her two sons. Her father's answer was that she could, but not too close to the house; on the edge of the homestead would be okay. Her mother and sisters cared for her in her last months, and nobody remembers why she was not taken to the land in Mwello as her sister was a few years earlier. One of the reasons, most likely, was that she had stayed in touch with her father as an adult, which her older sister had not, and that she had told her mother that he agreed for her to be buried there.

'You see the condition?' Ocen, her oldest son, Awori's grandson, repeatedly said when we went to Busoga together 18 years later to repair the decrepit cement grave of his mother. 'You see the condition?' by which he meant that his mother was buried in a place where nobody loved her. As mentioned above, his mother's father had been chased from this land by his wife and adult sons. He was now visiting there for the first time in six years to help repair the grave. 'You see the condition of this place' Ocen repeated all day. 'Her father does not even live here anymore, only the stepmother who never loved her. Her bones should be transferred to Mwello where at least she will be buried with people who loved her'. Transferring bones is not easy, and it may never happen, but her mother, her sons and her siblings long for it to happen.

The homemaking of Awori, her daughters and grandchildren consists of movements between Mwello, a plot of land in eastern Uganda, a rented house in Busoga and workplaces in the Middle East. It also consists of people who have been 'going along' with each other over time, while longing for a place to call home, independently of whether the fathers of their children are in their lives or not.

Images of mutual discontent and changing gender relations

The purpose of our discussion in this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, we suggest that there is a decline in the formalisation of partnerships, an increase in the number of female-headed households, and a move towards matrifocality in a country otherwise described as being strongly patrilineal and predominantly patrilocal. On the other hand, we also suggest a change of perspective that allows us to catch sight of the men as mobile. The decline of marriage, and the increase in female-headed households, are not new phenomena, but they have largely been described in terms that cover up some of the images in what we have called the 'bistable figure of homemaking': from a woman's perspective, it is often she who is the homemaker, and the husband who is mobile.

'Men are running away from women', one man told us. He continued:

> The government has given women the power. If you beat a woman, you go to prison, and if they take me to prison how then will the woman and the children manage that? It is better that I don't follow the woman at all and leave the children to live with her.

A mutual discontent between men and women prevails in Uganda. Men say that women place incessant demands upon them and refuse to contribute economically to the family themselves. Women feel that men are not living up to their role as providers of the family, and that if the woman does have an income, the man will take it away from her – or completely stop contributing to the family. Men and women have different images of what is taking place, and what men and women think should be taking place, both of which have long historical roots.

In his overview of changing gender dynamics in Uganda, Wyrod (2016), based on Lucy Mair's work among the Baganda in the 1930s, notes that in precolonial and early colonial times, women, not men, were family providers, supplying the essentials for their families' survival through agriculture. Men, however, did have the responsibility of acquiring material possessions needed for gift giving – an essential part of the many ceremonies of family life. Colonialism brought privatisation and the introduction of cash crop farming and, during colonialism, men became not breadwinners but earners of money to provide the household with clothes and the new necessities of life that European contact had created (Mair 1934: 54); hence, the notion of the man as dispenser of material goods intensified greatly in the twentieth century (Wyrod 2016: 47). Women's opportunities to acquire material goods were at first very limited because they were excluded from the market economy. On the eve of independence, a wife was completely dependent on her husband for clothing and other material goods. The early independence period provided new employment opportunities, especially for men, creating the conditions for the emergence of an urban male breadwinner identity. Throughout the twentieth century, the link between masculinity and money thus became ever more entwined with men's identity as heads of households (Richards 1964: 257, 264).

The urban male provider ideal is a recurring theme in much of the literature on gender relations in contemporary Africa (e.g. Hunter 2010), but there is also a history alongside this of women contributing financially to their families (e.g. Mair 1934; Obbo 1980; Richards 1964). While men's identity as breadwinners and providers of material goods developed, so did women's income-generating opportunities. Economically self-sufficient women seem to always have existed in Uganda (in particular in Buganda), and they enjoyed significantly more sexual freedom, including having affairs with whomever they desired (Doyle 2013: 56; Obbo 1980), though they were also stigmatised and marginalised as unmarried women with too much sexual freedom (Davis 2000). Women started playing a vital role in urban economic life in Uganda in the colonial

period by selling staple produce, making food and brewing alcohol. Through the late colonial period, women gradually expanded their range of urban income-generating options and became more involved in petty trade. Already, then, the emergence of independent single urban women caused anxiety among men and posed a threat to male authority (Wyrod 2016: 55–6, 88). During the extended period of political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, an informal economy based on illicit and semi-legal trade developed (Southall 1980: 632), which not only men but, to a large extent, also women got involved in. Obbo's ethnography of urban slums in the 1970s describes how severe urban unemployment during this period forced many men to rely on women's expanding income-generating activities in the informal economy, including beer brewing, food preparation, sex work and petty trade. This resulted in strained and conflict-ridden intimate relationships (Obbo 1980: 67–8).

New configurations

The first decade of Museveni's presidency was a period of radical change for gender relations. Women's political participation and certain aspects of women's rights were promoted by the new government. In the second decade of the Museveni era, political support for women's issues began to wane and attempts to pass new legislation extending women's rights failed (Wyrod 2016: 71–2). The gender equality advocated by women activists posed a direct challenge to ideas of men's authority as assumed and natural, and Wyrod suggests that some men withdrew from family responsibilities in response to this pressure (2016: 72) – or, as the man cited earlier said: 'The government has given women the power'.

While polygyny has always existed, most Ugandan men in pre-colonial and colonial times spent much of their adult lives in monogamous relationships since only older men were able to afford a second wife. Yet all men retained the privilege of starting another relationship that could lead to marriage – a privilege women did not share. Today, extramarital love affairs are recognised as almost an essential part of masculinity (Wyrod 2016: 50–1). Hunter (2005) argues that the South African men he studied placed a high value on having multiple sexual partners to fill the void left by their inability to establish independent households, marry and provide for their families. Silberschmidt (2001; 2004) discusses gender antagonism in rural Kenya and urban Tanzania and describes men's experience of being 'disempowered' by socioeconomic changes. She suggests that their insistence on sexual privileges and multiple partners needs to be understood as linked to their feelings of inadequacy.

Ugandan women these days are reluctant to accept explicit polygyny, and they respond to men's extramarital affairs with hesitancy regarding developing the home they share with a man. They may even ask him to move on, so that they can develop a home themselves, as we saw in some of the cases earlier in the chapter.

'The reason why men don't think much of women's money is that we know it will not benefit the family', said one man whom we encountered. He continued:

> Women don't marry these days. They don't want disturbances. And a man does not easily tolerate a woman who is working. If she works, there will be two men in the house. The man is obliged to buy everything, but the woman will spend her money on herself. On beautiful things, clothes, shoes, whatever, for herself. Or on her side [her natal family]. She is married, yet she prefers to support her side.

And, as another man said:

> A man cannot say to a woman: 'Today we sleep hungry'. But a woman will say to a man: 'Today we sleep hungry', and then she will blame the man …. Imagine, how would you feel if somebody tells you that they are hungry, but you don't even have the money to buy soap for the family?

One woman even commented about her sister: 'She works and earns good money … but she likes [to buy] good things. She might forget to marry'. Wyrod (2016: 87) notes that nearly all women in his study recognised that poverty makes it difficult for men to live up to the provider ideal, but their sympathy was limited. Based on Wyrod's discussion and our own material, we may sum up as follows: Women expect men to be both breadwinners and providers of material goods, school fees, etc., but they do not recognise men's authority and sexual privilege as much as they used to. They accept that they may have to provide for themselves, whether living in rural or urban settings, and that, if they do have an income, small or big, they should not share it with the man, since he still believes in his sexual privilege and right to 'invest' in another woman (and her home) with that money. In other words, heightened gender tensions permeate social contexts in Uganda; tensions that are part of a long history of how men's and women's contributions to their families have merged with tenacious gender ideologies.

A new configuration of gender relations is appearing in urban Uganda, observes Wyrod (2016: 131) – one that accommodates some aspects of women's rights while retaining previous notions of men's authority over women. At the same time, he also argues that women's rights have only been integrated in a limited sense into everyday gender relations and the personal lives of women (Wyrod 2016: 154–5). While we agree with this, we also suggest that our attempt to shift back and forth between women's movements and men moving in and out of women's lives gives us a glimpse of the many ways in which gender relations are indeed changing. Women are fathering homes, and new masculinities are developing.

In this chapter, we have focused on men who 'dodge' and stay out of sight due to the challenges they face in living up to ideals of masculinity. Other scholars, however, show us different aspects of how gender relations are changing. Baral (2021) argues that during the national Covid-19 lockdown, it became even more difficult for men to provide for the family. They found themselves confined to the home for the first time in their lives, which some of them used as an opportunity to explore different ways of validating themselves through emergent forms of caring masculinities and fatherhood, performed through presence and sharing.

In sum, women make and father homes, and men are increasingly frustrated with their difficulties to live up to the provider ideal associated with masculinity. This frustration brings backlashes to gender equality, e.g. through male insistence upon sexual privilege, while other kinds of masculinities are also emerging.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that many other subtle, or less subtle, ways of translating and using the word 'home' and talking of matters of belonging in Ugandan languages could be identified. We suggest, however, that the conversations and interactions we have had with men and women of different ages and from different parts of the country show us that many people in present-day Uganda live with a notion of home as a place, or as movements between several places, of two generations, and that a home does not necessarily include both a man and a woman. The customary exchanges that used to consolidate partnerships and homemaking are declining, but parenthood and homemaking remain unconditional necessities, and children, buildings and places to be buried remain at the centre of the project of homemaking (cf. Porter forthcoming). You build a

house, and you build relations, and you hope that one of the places where you do so will be a place that you can be buried. Women build homes and children can belong to their mother's home. Belonging is understood as longing for places where you can live with people whom you 'properly relate to' while alive, and where you can remain after death with people whom you went along with in life.

Southall and Gutkind (1957) noted that, by the mid-twentieth century, Uganda was seeing increasing marital instability and more permissive sexual culture, especially in Kampala. Higher bride wealth payments were becoming the norm, and marriage was becoming less attractive to young men because of increasing difficulty to pay and to recover bride wealth payments in the case of divorce. Christian marriage was becoming linked to social status and prestige. In other words, many of the changes and challenges identified by authors of this book were already described by scholars 70 years ago. Still, we argue that Uganda is presently in a context of heightened gender tensions, where men and women have very different understandings of what to expect from each other. This underlines the importance of trying to catch sight of the different images that may be present within the bistable figure of homemaking.

Notes

1   Matrifocality here refers to social situations where women, in their roles as mothers, are the focus of relationships within households. Such female-headed households typically consist of a mother, her adult daughters and their children. The mother–daughter–sister bond forms the core of affective and social life (Macfarlan, Quinlan and Post 2019: 2).
2   Modernity she understands as the demographic features and institutions of capitalism, such as market economies, nation states and industrial production (Giddens and Appadurai in Jackson 2015).
3   In Acholi (a Nilotic language), the word '*dongo*' is used in much the same way.
4   Also known from Germanic languages (German: *lang*), Old Norse (*langr*) and Latin (*longus*), which literally means 'to grow long, lengthen' from Proto-Germanic 'langojan' (www .etymonline.com/word/Long). And, as stated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the use of 'belong' as having to do with concern and to relate was common in the fourteenth century but is now rare (www.oed.com/dictionary/belong_v?tab=meaning_and_use#23769543).
5   Online Etymological Dictionary.

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Interlude song
Middle East
Docky Sandie Akello

Chorus
Searching for greener pastures in the Middle East
Is a game of chance
Is a game of chance
My sisters you got to know
It's a game of chance

Verse 1
Survival for the fittest, is full of challenges
Its survival for the fittest, is full of hard struggle
You may succeed, you may not
The motto is trial and error
You may excel, you may fail
There is no guarantee

Job opportunity in the Middle East is so enticing
It so so perfect, in your ear
It makes you hopeful in life
My sisters, job opportunity in the Middle East
Is so convincing
It's so so perfect, in your ears
It makes you hopeful in life

If you are not careful
You may end up losing your properties
Some people have sold their lands
In order to pay the agency
Some people resorted to loans
In order to secure their visas
Later they regretted
They got so disappointed

Chorus
Searching for greener pastures in the Middle East is the game of chance,
Is the game of chance
My sisters you got to know
It's a game of chance

Verse 2
Is starving in Uganda better than being emotionally
Tortured, in the Middle East?
Sometimes I ask myself and get confused
Is being locked up in the house in the Middle East
Worse than seeing your children die of sickness
With no money for healthcare

Searching for greener pastures
In the Middle East is a game of chance
You may acquire a house back home
With the money you have made
In the Middle East

Or
You may lose everything
Before you reach Uganda
Even your own family members
Can misuse all your savings
Even all your family members
Can misuse all you have worked for

Children are suffering in Arab's world
Because of searching for better life
Young girls are suffering in Arab's world because for jobs
Children are suffering, our youths are suffering
Our boys are suffering, Children are suffering.

Chorus
Searching for greener pastures in the Middle East is the game of chance
Is the game of chance
My sisters you got to know
It's a game of chance

Verse 3
With no protection
Our youths, they are treated like slaves,
Our girls, with no protection
Our boys, are treated like slaves

They work so hard, day and night
Without payment

They are sexually abused
Physically tortured
Emotionally tortured
With no medical attention
They are poorly fed
With no proper place to sleep
Making them mentally unstable
Ohhh … what a tragedy

Aaaaiiii

Outro
Children are suffering in Arab's world
Because of searching for a better life
Young girls are suffering in Arab's word, because of job
Children are suffering in Arab's world, our girls are suffering
My people, lets open our eyes, help our girls.

Chorus
Searching for greener pastures in the Middle East is a game of chance
Is a game of chance
My sisters you got to know
It's a game of chance

6
Turning points: Oloya's gendered path to mental health and marriage

Lioba Lenhart

For Oloya

You have impressed me, young man:
How resilient you are
despite the experiences you had to go through
and continue to go through

A journey fraught with peaks and lows:
At times mind and emotions overwhelmed
the war, camp life, death of the father, poverty
a labyrinth of norms and expectations to navigate

But then:
Two souls unite in love and partnership
Hand in hand
You and Atim are braving the storm

Your confidence:
Together, your hearts
and the hearts of those around you and close to you
will be transformed

You know your way:
Even when the goal seems far away
you forge ahead
Your journey is a courageous testament to resilience and love

Introduction

This chapter looks at the lived experiences of Oloya (pseudonym), a young man from northern Uganda who is dealing with mental health challenges and gender-related societal expectations in a difficult post-war setting. I draw on the life course theory framework (Elder 1994; Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003; Mitchell 2003), which explores the 'intricate interrelationship between social structures and the impact of time, place and history on individuals' lives' (Black, Holditch-Davis and Miles 2009: 39), to understand and analyse, through his example, how gender, marriage and partnerships interact with mental illness and recovery in this particular temporal, social and cultural context in the views of those affected.[1]

This chapter begins with background information on post-war northern Uganda and its extremely high rate of mental illness – the unique geographic and sociohistorical context in which Oloya and his significant others, including his birth family, peers, mental health workers, traditional healers, amorous partners, and others, have organised their lives. Then, Oloya and his life story are introduced with references to turning points (Rönkä, Oravala and Pulkkinen 2003; Teruya and Hser 2010), or life events related to his mental health and partnerships that brought about lasting shifts in his life-course trajectory. The subsequent interpretation of findings draws on fundamental concepts of the life-course approach: time and place, linked lives and agency and timing of lives (Black, Holditch-Davis and Miles 2009; Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003; Mitchell 2003). Finally, with reference to the concepts of vital conjunctures (Johnson-Hanks 2002; 2016) and waithood (Durham 2017; Honwana 2012; 2013; Masquelier 2013; 2019), Oloya's becoming a man and pursuit of marriage – an essential marker of manhood in Acholi society (Dolan 2003; Onyango 2012) and an important goal on Oloya's path to mental health – are discussed against the background of new developments he faced when he thought he was then 'safe'.

As pointed out by Mark Hunter, marriage is constitutive of gendered relations and ideas about masculinity (2016: xiii). Marriage does not only bring people and families together, but also plays important parts in how gender is imagined and practised. When individuals choose not to marry, or circumstances mean that they are not in a stable relationship, this can lead to anxieties about changing gender norms in society (Hunter 2016: xiii). These gender and marriage norms and anxieties may be both implicit and explicit in social groups, and they are felt and internalised by the individuals involved. When individuals, such as Oloya in this chapter,

are dealing with mental health challenges and their often stigmatising effects, the significance of marriage and gender norms may increase. Thus the chapter argues that norms around marriage and gender roles constitute a double-edged sword: they provide both challenges and forms of guidance for persons who struggle with mental health problems, as many do after the war in northern Uganda.

Time, place, history: lives in war-torn and post-war northern Uganda

Oloya and others living in northern Uganda differ in terms of gender, age, family structure and class, urban or rural ways of life and livelihoods and educational and economic opportunities. What they have in common, however, is that they share the same geographical area, and their lives have been shaped by the common experiences of war, displacement and the challenges of post-war reconstruction.

Northern Uganda has seen one of Africa's longest violent conflicts – the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Ugandan army (1987–2006). During that time, tens of thousands of children and youth were abducted and recruited into the ranks of the LRA. Civilians suffered extreme forms of violence, killings, rape and mutilations. Ultimately, approximately 90 per cent of the population of northern Uganda was forced to live in camps for internally displaced people (IDP) (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; Branch 2011; Dolan 2009; Finnström 2008; Lomo and Hovil 2004).

In the post-war era, northern Uganda has gained unfortunate notoriety as a place with one of the highest rates of mental illness in the world (Businge 2008; see also Amone-P'Olak and Omech 2020; Mugisha et al. 2015). People suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder, depression, bipolar affective disorder and schizophrenia. Substance abuse and alcoholism are widespread. The suicide rate is high, particularly among men (Kizza et al. 2012; Whyte and Oboke 2022). The high prevalence of mental illness has been attributed to prolonged experiences of war, extreme violence and long-term displacement, as well as continuous poverty and lack of future prospects after the war had ended (Deleu and Porter 2011; Okudi 2014; Owich 2015; Pham, Vinck and Stover 2009; Roberts et al. 2008; Ssebunnya et al. 2009; Tumwebaze 2014; Vinck et al. 2007). Some people seek biomedical psychiatric care in hospitals, where they experience the effects of the insufficient state budget for mental health services (Kagolo 2012). Others

prefer alternative treatments provided by traditional healers or Christian churches, since mental illness is often associated with spirit possession or attributed to past offences (Parker et al. 2021; Williams 2021). In all these settings, human rights violations have been reported (Kigozi et al. 2010; MDAC and MHU 2014a; 2014b; Ssebunnya et al. 2009). A common experience of mentally ill people is discrimination, stigmatisation, abuse, neglect and exploitation at home, in their neighbourhoods, in school and in the workplace. Caregivers, mostly family members and relatives, have problems coping with the tremendous physical and emotional demands. All this is reinforced by the high level of poverty (MDAC and MHU 2014a; see also Lenhart and Whyte, 2016).

Young men in post-war northern Uganda, like Oloya, are not only struggling with a lack of educational opportunities, high unemployment and limited means to secure their livelihoods. Many of them are also denied the chance to become an adult and a respected man in Acholi society through a 'proper' marriage. They face difficulties living up to the expectations anchored in a hegemonic normative model that defines Acholi masculinity – namely to be a husband and father, provider and protector of one's family (Dolan 2003; Onyango 2012). They cannot fulfil the high expectations of their partner's parents in terms of bride wealth (often called 'bride price' or 'dowry') in the form of cattle and other animals, predetermined items and money.[2] Co-habitation and early parenthood have therefore largely replaced socially-sanctioned marriage, which has involved courtship, consent of the families and bride wealth (Ejang, Otim and Meinert 2024; Independent 2019; 2021; Schlecht, Rowly and Babirye 2013).

Oloya's story[3]

The life history method

I researched Oloya's case by using the life history method (Lanford, Tierney and Lincoln 2019; Stewart 2024; Tierney and Lanford 2019), which entails a qualitative, interpretive approach that aims to provide a comprehensive, in-depth and contextually-embedded understanding of life experiences (Stewart 2024). Life histories are based on narratives, which are practices of everyday life, as 'people use storytelling […] to connect with other people, to engage with social structures that govern their lives, to make sense of what is happening around them, to find a way to fit into different contexts, and sometimes to change them' (Daiute 2014: 3). These narratives, or life stories, are as much records of facts

and events as they are imbued with individual interpretations and meanings; they reveal how individuals make sense of their past, navigate their present and envision their future in particular social, cultural and historical contexts (Stewart 2024).

Using the life history approach, I adopted a predominantly 'constructivist' perspective, but without negating that a certain 'objective' knowledge can be gained from the life stories, which corresponds to a more 'realist' point of view. Life stories reflect a lived 'reality' and can therefore make an important contribution to both 'subjective' and 'objective' knowledge.

From a constructivist perspective, the 'life story' told by the narrator leads to the 'life history' as the researcher's interpretive account of a person's life for the targeted audience (Ojermark 2007: 4, with reference to Roberts 2002), be it academics, development agencies, NGOs or the general public. Life stories are actively constructed through the interaction between the narrator and the researcher. They are analysed through a micro-analysis of the text by tracing themes and sub-themes that emerge from the narrative, and identifying patterns to capture the perceptual and contextual nature of 'reality'. The final text is then considered to be the result of collaboration between the narrator and the researcher, with the narrator's point of view representing a unique perspective mediated by the social context (Ojermark 2007: 5, 15, with reference to Miller 2000 and Roberts 2002).

In contrast to other narrative approaches that seek to make meaning of individual experiences (Daiute 2014), or 'why someone acts in a particular way', life history research draws on individual experiences to make sense of broader social phenomena, or 'how it is that person has come to act in a certain fashion' (Tierney and Lanford 2019: 17). A life story of a person sheds light on larger processes and contexts (Hatch and Newsom 2010). It documents 'the multivocality and multi-directionality of a person's identity while offering a unique perspective on contemporary social issues' (Tierney and Lanford 2019: 17). This is particularly important when it involves giving a voice to marginalised groups that are generally ignored.

Research context

Oloya, a 20-year-old man in 2020, grew up in Pabbo IDP camp. When the war ended, his family returned to their home in Guru-Guru, a remote place in Lamogi sub-county in Amuru district. He resumed school but dropped out in grade P6. When he was about 12 years old, he was admitted to the mental health unit of Gulu Regional Referral Hospital,

where he stayed for several weeks. He struggled with relapses and was readmitted twice. Oloya did not know his diagnosis, because the doctors and nurses told neither him nor his mother, who was with him in the hospital as his caregiver. In 2015, he decided to stop taking psychiatric drugs and consulted a traditional healer. His mental condition improved noticeably, and he started farming. In 2019 and 2020, he stayed with his elder brother in Bweyale for some time, where his uncle ran a shop. Oloya first worked with blending and selling juice. Later on, he burned music and movies on CDs/DVDs. In 2020, he returned to Guru-Guru after eloping with his then 15-year-old girlfriend from Bweyale.

I met Oloya for the first time in 2012 at the mental health ward of Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, when I visited the brother of a friend of mine. Oloya caught my attention because he was a vivid and charming boy. Throughout the following years, we have stayed in contact. I visited him from time to time in Lamogi and invited him for lunch whenever he came to Gulu as an out-patient to pick up his medication from the hospital. In March 2019, I asked him if he would be interested in sharing his story and allow me to follow his life and write about it. He agreed. I conducted five life history interviews with him and have remained in contact with him and his family to this day.

The following extracts are quotes from the interviews I carried out between 2019 and 2021, during which Oloya told me his life story. The interviews were conducted in the local language (Lwo) with the help of an interpreter and later translated into English. I have arranged these extracts around turning points in Oloya's life trajectory.

Oloya's narrative

About me

I grew up in Pabbo camp […] and later in Guru-Guru. I think I was born in the year 2000.

This land [where Oloya, his mother and siblings with their families stay] belongs to my auntie [father's sister]. My father passed on in 2004, when we were still in the IDP camp. When people went back to their original homes, my mother feared to come back. She wanted to go to my father's ancestral home in Pabbo. The sister of my father advised her not to do so, because people were not welcoming, but to return to my auntie's land … There was a land wrangle. People destroyed the wall of my mother's hut. Our neighbours and ARLPI [Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative] mediated, and so the land in question was given to my mother and will be inherited by me and my brothers […]

Two years ago, I have started planting beans. I have the ability to farm. Before, I did not do anything because of the medication [psychiatric drugs] I was taking. It made me unenergetic and lose interest in everything.

Now, I feel my life is coming back to what it was before [before he fell mentally ill], the way I talk and behave […] Even people tell me that what I say these days makes sense to everyone.

Developing a mental illness and being admitted to the psychiatric ward

It all started in 2011. At that time, I stayed with my uncle in Pabbo. A man requested me to work with him in his video hall. From then on, I started to not behave normally. I took off my clothes. Whenever music was played, I would go and dance, day and night.

One of my relatives informed my mother and she took me home. When there was no improvement after four days, she rushed me to the hospital [mental health unit of Gulu Regional Referral Hospital]. I stayed there for several weeks and was readmitted two times after relapses.

It was very difficult living in the hospital, because it was like being forced to stay there. When I wanted to go for a walk to town, they did not allow. Even the gate man was instructed to not let me pass. At the ward, I became restless. When I was restless, I was injected forcefully. This used to happen whenever I got tired of taking my medicine. I wanted to escape and was locked in the seclusion room. It was very difficult to be in that room. You are already [viewed like] a criminal when put in this small room. They [medical workers at the mental health ward] often threatened to lock me up, and out of fear to be locked up in the seclusion room again, I accepted taking the medication.

After getting back from the hospital, I took the medication faithfully. It made me sleepy and, in my sleep, I would see people walking and entering the house where I was sleeping. It was confusing. It happened at night and also when I was sleeping during the day. I found it difficult to wake up when things were threatening me. When I woke up, I had little energy. At times, when I saw the vision, it made me shout. When people called my name, I woke up. When I was alone, it was difficult to wake up. When I was awake, I had no problem. The moment I fell asleep, like five minutes later, it started.

Stopping medication and exploring the cause of sickness

I think it was in 2015, when I stopped taking medication. I did not even finish the dose.

My brother took me to Piyela trading centre in [Lamogi sub-county], to Min Owiny [a female traditional healer] who gave me local medicine. She cut the roots of the *lango* tree and peeled the fruits of the *yago* tree [sausage tree], pounded them and boiled them in hot water. I took the brew after it had cooled off. This medicine made me sleep for about 30 minutes, then I became active again. I used this [medicine] for about one month.

Min Owiny told me that I did not suffer from mental illness [in the biomedical sense], but that I had a kind of spirit inside me that made me behave not normal. I believed her, because I remembered a certain event in 2011, when I was moving to the trading centre at night. In our area here, there is a rock, which people fear. When I was near this rock, I saw someone moving towards me, asking 'why are you bypassing me?' I apologised. A sudden lightning made me see clearly, that this was not a human being. It was a spirit. I became so frightened and ran home. When I told people about what had happened, they said that I had encountered a demon. That would be a bad sign. I would have acquired *cen* [a vengeful spirit of a person that had been killed]. Two weeks later, I started to feel mentally ill.

I stayed at Min Owiny's place for a week and, as soon as I started using her medicine, all the bad spirits disappeared.

About one month after I had been treated by Min Owiny, when I was sleeping at home, my father's spirit told me to come out [Oloya's father had passed on in 2004 in Pabbo IDP camp]. He showed me the roots of a tree and told me to take them, and that this would help me. These were the same roots that Min Owiny had given me.

Searching for a wife and striving for a 'normal' life

While I was taking modern medicine [psychiatric drugs], I was getting motivated [to find a partner] but I did not have the boldness to propose to a lady. I was still young, but I admired women, I was thinking about them – including the nurse in the hospital. I told her: 'One day you will give me medication in my home'. I persisted, I was serious concerning the relationship with the nurse, but she was just thinking that I was sick. She brought me something to eat. I was excited, I had the feeling that she had accepted [the offer]. But for her I was just a patient.

It was difficult to find a partner. I was hesitant to get a woman before I had some resources and feared that the lady might be taken back [to her family]. And that's what actually happened when I got my first lady [girlfriend]. I brought her here [Oloya's home in Guru-Guru]. Shortly thereafter, her family came and demanded some payment [for elopement and living together without the parents' consent]. I could not afford, so they took her home.

We had been in the same school, the same class. We had become friends at school and shared the food we had brought from home. Later, when I dropped out of school, I frequently met her in Pabbo centre. She was always asking what I was doing. So, I got the courage to ask her to become my wife. Initially she refused. When I insisted, she agreed. She was aware of my mental health issue. Later, when I became well, when she thought I was a bit stable, she agreed to stay with me. This was in 2018, sometime after I had been treated by Min Owiny.

My first lady [girlfriend] is married now. Her family requested the usual things. I could not afford. So, they decided to take away their daughter. I had stayed with her here for one month peacefully. Only when there was no payment, there was a problem. But she was consoling me. She told me: 'No worry, let me first go [when her parents would come to pick her], I'll come back'. But that was only a consolation. She did not fulfil her promise. She did not come back. It hurt me. I was of course missing her. After she left, I thought I first needed to get some means before I would look for another lady. I dreamed of being settled with a married wife.

Eloping for love and imagining a good life

I went to Bweyale, where I met Atim […] One day, we ran away to Guru-Guru. Her mother wanted me arrested for getting involved with her [under-aged] daughter.[4] When she found out where we were, she followed us. However, Atim refused to return with her to Bweyale, but insisted on staying with me as her husband.

My hope is to have a home [family] with Atim. Those days, when I was alone [without a partner], I used to live a life full of things like playing pool and running around in the trading centres. I even fell sick [became mentally ill]. Now I want to leave that life behind. I appreciate Atim for always being concerned about me and asking where I am going and telling me what's right. She doesn't like me to move aimlessly.

I want my neighbours to refer to me positively, as a good man that parents are proud of. I also want to start an exemplary family in this village – a family that is admired by many people, well-mannered, generous and able to share. The way people treat me now is different from when I was still taking medication. People now look at me as somebody who has recovered. They see me as a responsible person and expect a lot from me.

I would not want to be a drunkard, and I pray that I don't get a relapse [mental illness]. My brother [who also experienced mental health challenges] once had a relapse, and his woman went away. A wife may not help [in the same way] as a mother does.

One wife is enough for me. So, you will not need a big budget [for paying bride wealth]. All will be for one woman and the family. The way I see it, the bride price should be there. As a man, you need to consider how much the parents of the girl have invested. But the payment should be reasonable, it should not be too much. It is a form of appreciation, because the parents of the girl took good care of her and prepared her for you as a man [husband].

The difference between my parents' and other elderly people's relationships and that of us [young people] is that these days, young people tend to like their women more than their mothers. Their partnerships even tend to limit the support they give to their mothers and fathers. All is concentrated on the woman. For young people, the [feeling of] love is much stronger. But for older persons who have been in a relationship for a long time, I believe they are tired now. They don't seem to be so intimate.

Turning points: victim of circumstances *and* active agent in one's own life

The story of Oloya shows his struggle of becoming a man, finding a partner and fulfilling traditional gender roles, which at times has led to extreme mental reactions, but also paved the way out of illness. The turning points he found worth mentioning reveal his subjective conception of changes in his life.

His narrative is embedded in a specific time, place and social setting that matters for social practice and change (Gieryn 2000). The story demonstrates how life reflects sociohistorical influences, and it shows that life is lived in interdependence with others, i.e. networks of social relationships that go beyond family ties, such as friends or neighbours

(Black, Holditch-Davis and Miles 2009), who provide a 'distinct orienting context' (Marshall and Mueller 2003: 11, quoted in Black, Holditch-Davis and Miles 2009). Oloya tells us how some of the turning points that had caused tangible change in the direction of his life had either blocked or opened opportunities for him. We can see that his actual seizing of opportunities was largely determined by his perceptions of the extent of choice and control over a situation (Black, Holditch-Davis and Miles 2009; Rönkä, Oravala and Pulkkinen 2003). Lastly, Oloya's timing of his transition from a single youth to a married man as a strategy to change his status, identity and role, and to free him from the stigma and clutches of mental illness, had proven successful for him for a while, although it had to some extent violated 'normative social timetables' (Mitchell 2003) by occurring too early. It therefore remained to be seen whether this strategy would continue to be effective.

Time and place

Oloya's journey of becoming a man unfolds within the specific sociohistorical context of war-torn and post-war northern Uganda and represents a journey that his peers (or cohort) in northern Uganda may have walked in a similar way. Growing up in a camp for IDPs during the war, the death of the father of the four-year old boy, the family's experience of land disputes after returning home – all these were stressful events that were certainly accompanied by feelings of insecurity, fear and worries about the future and may have triggered mental illness in the adolescent.

These feelings were most likely perpetuated in the immediate social situation Oloya found himself in when he was admitted as a mental health patient to Gulu Regional Referral Hospital, accompanied by his mother as his caregiver. Both were not informed about the envisioned length of Oloya's stay and therapy. They were not even told his diagnosis, but had to follow what the highly medicalised mental healthcare system in Uganda dictated; otherwise, there was punishment. When Oloya refused to take his medication, he was locked up in the seclusion room. This was what made him not refuse to take the psychiatric drugs, despite the side-effects that brought him nightmares. Thus, Oloya – and his mother who stood firmly by his side – found themselves in a place and state of limbo, where they experienced powerlessness and loss of control.

Linked lives and agency

While Oloya was in the psychiatric ward, he had no real choice but to submit to the decisions and plans that others had made for him. Coming home, despite many challenges, meant that he was now free from the control and conflict with the staff of the psychiatric unit. With the support of significant others – his mother and brother, a traditional healer and the spirit of his late father – he gradually regained control of his life. The traditional healer made him understand the cause of his strange behaviours, something that the mental health workers had not explained to him. Freed from mental illness, he thought about what he would strive for in life.

His thoughts revolved around women who could become his partners, and he became active. When he was still in the ward, he had already hoped that a kind nurse might one day give him his medication 'from home'. Later, he brought a former classmate to his hut, where they stayed for a month before her parents took her back home. Then, he eloped with a young girl who he wanted to become his wife. For him, having a female partner telling him what to do and what was right seemed conducive to improve his mental health. However, he was also aware that no wife would take care of a husband with mental health challenges the way a mother would, so he had to take good care of his mental health himself.

Timing of life

Oloya found that his mother's care and his partnerships with supportive young women helped him stabilise his mental state. He experienced that being mentally fit proved to be a condition for being respected in his community. The status of a properly married man would even earn him more respect. Thus, he was ambitious about progressing from a state of socially ambiguous co-habitation to becoming the accepted husband of a woman, in line with traditional role expectations. He was, however, aware that his timing of transition might decrease his chance to become properly married. He could not yet afford bride wealth and other marriage payments; and a marriage at this time was also not considered particularly appropriate because of his young age.

Vital conjunctures and suspended future

In 2020, when Atim started living with Oloya, he seemed to be well on his way to realising his aspired gender future as a mentally fit and respected married man and father in Acholi society.

In the years before, Oloya had been able to free himself from the constraints of mental illness and had begun to think about the potential alternatives of a future life. This period seemed to turn out to be a particularly important 'vital conjuncture' for him, a 'zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life […] a temporary configuration of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential' (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 871). The decision he made at this critical point in his life was in line with Acholi social aspirations when he chose marriage as the trajectory of his future.

In 2022, Oloya and Atim had their first son. Two years later, another baby was born. With the arrival of the first child, Atim's mother started to put a lot of pressure on Oloya and put his aspirations off course. She requested payments for eloping and living together with her daughter without parental consent and for wasting her time and money when she had to search for her daughter, for her daughter's dropping out of school and non-completion of education, for having children with her co-habiting daughter, for a proper introduction, and much more. A letter was sent to his older brother, who was addressed as 'elder'. He had to step in, since Oloya's father had died a long time ago and there was no other senior male relative who was willing to take up the role of a go-between. The total amount demanded was more than 5 million Uganda shillings (UGX). In the previous two years, Oloya had already paid around 1 million UGX in several instalments, but money was never enough. Oloya knew that bride wealth usually came in the form of continuous payments. He had worked very hard to save part of his income from farming, while Atim's mother was never satisfied. It is not clear what exactly drove her. As a widowed woman struggling to make ends meet for her family, she may have seen the exchange of bride wealth for her daughter as a survival strategy. In early 2024, she came to the village and took her daughter and the two children away. She then sent a message that she would need another 200,000 UGX immediately for Atim to return. When Oloya brought the money to Bweyale, he was told to be patient; Atim would return in two weeks' time. So, he left and waited. But she did not return. Instead, her mother suggested that Atim would stay with the newborn baby in Bweyale while Oloya could take the two-year-old firstborn son. Oloya felt distressed, but he was still

determined to bring his wife back home. His mother advised him to let Atim go and find another wife. They would never be able to raise that much money. He refused. He insisted that he wanted to be with Atim, with whom he already had two children. And, indeed, after a while, he was able to bring her home again. However, the uncertainty about how to fulfil Atim's mother's high financial expectations continued. So, Oloya's story has yet to find a happy ending.

Oloya shares the experience of being unable to fulfil the external and internalised expectations of being a husband and father, provider and protector, inherent in the Acholi model of masculinity, with many men of that generation having grown up during the war. For them, these expectations, and particularly their economic implications, have been onerous and stressful in times of war (Dolan 2003: 9) and continue to be so in the context of post-war poverty. Young men, however, cannot afford to not try to live up to these expectations, because social acceptance and influence necessitates conforming to the norm. The war and post-war periods have seen increasing polarisation between men who have been able and others who have not been able to attain the markers of masculinity. These have become even more desirable, 'as they appear to provide anchors and points of leverage in the midst of economic, social and political uncertainty created by war' (Dolan 2003: 15).

For Oloya and many of his historical generation (Mannheim 1928), the uncertain present and suspended future seems to expand indefinitely. Thus, what was once a vital conjuncture that offered possibilities of change, but was then dilated in time, has become more of a 'waiting in a state of suspended action, of interstitial pause, of persistent temporariness' (Johnson-Hanks 2016: 9,15). However, 'waithood', this 'prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood', which seems to have become the new normal for African youth (Honwana 2012), has transformative potential, as young people like Oloya question their 'waithood status' and strive to not only reproduce but also change their social world and living conditions (Honwana 2013). Their waiting is not just a one-way street that makes adulthood 'elusive' (Durham 2017). Far from being a passive attitude, it can be a wilful act (Eisenstein 2021: 460), a deliberate choice (Masquelier 2013; 2019). Oloya was forced to wait and see what happened. But the future that he envisioned was clear to him.

Displacement, poverty, mental illness and thwarted masculinity: struggling against all odds

Oloya is a child of war who grew up in an IDP camp in northern Uganda and later in a remote rural area under conditions of abject poverty. The war and post-war situation, and the constant stress associated with it, must have taken their toll, as recent studies on the impact of war and forced displacement on children's and adolescents' mental health suggest (Attanayake et al. 2009; Bürgin et al. 2022; Frounfelker et al. 2019). Young people are generally more vulnerable to immediate and long-term effects on their mental health than the general population and frequently suffer from PTSD, anxiety, depression and psychosis (Attanayake et al. 2009). These disorders have a lasting impact on their development, are likely to affect family interactions, peer relations, educational outcomes and general life satisfaction and may persist far into adulthood (Frounfelker et al. 2019).

Oloya, at the age of just 12 years, suffered a severe mental episode that was to last for a couple of years. During this time, he struggled to become a man in the difficult, impoverished post-war environment of northern Uganda that he and his family had to navigate, which encompassed both 'the assessment of the danger and possibilities of one's present position as well as the process of plotting and attempting to actualise routes into an uncertain and changeable future' (Vigh 2009: 425). Oloya did not return to school but developed an interest in farming, working hard to cultivate the family's fields. In the process of growing up, he reflected and decided on the values that he believed would help him to be accepted in society, to contribute to that very society and to get to where he wanted to be as an adult. The decisive factors here were lived expectations of masculinity, contained in the hegemonic and normative model of what constitutes an Acholi man – with marriage and fatherhood and men as providers and protectors of their wives and children at its centre (Dolan 2003). When Oloya met Atim and had two children with her, he had already taken some steps towards becoming an Acholi man. People no longer looked at him and thought about his mental illness. He himself had stopped worrying about a relapse. But then he encountered obstacles associated with the social expectations he was trying to fulfil as a husband and man.

Oloya's particular challenges with marriage and masculinity point not only to his mental health issues, but also to the overall changes in marriage and partnership norms and expectations in northern Uganda. The problems of not being able to afford bride wealth, not having sufficient family support, and being forced into waithood, are general problems that

so many other young men in Uganda are facing (see Ejang and Meinert, this volume; Meinert, this volume). Furthermore these problems echo tendencies across Africa (Pauli 2019; Pauli and van Dijk 2016).

On Oloya's path to mental health, gender mattered significantly. In the earlier phases of growing up, his 'significant others' were all women. Oloya had lost his father when he was four years old. From then on, he grew up in a female-headed family. It was women who gave his life a positive turn: his mother, who replaced the care of his father who had died in the IDP camp; the psychiatric nurse at the hospital and the traditional healer; the first girlfriend who could imagine a life with him; and, lastly, Atim, who stood by him despite all the adversity and pressure from her mother. These gender relations were therapeutic. However, it was also a woman, Atim's widowed mother, who threw his life off course again. In this later stage of his becoming a man, with the increasing importance of 'generalised others' (Aboulafia and Taylor 2023) defined by the social norms of manhood and internalised by both sexes, Oloya would have needed support from elderly male relatives to conduct his marriage and bride wealth negotiations, as is customary in the Acholi tradition. Lacking this support, he 'struggled along' (Desjarlais 1994) with his only slightly older brother, who had not yet been socially granted the necessary authority.

Thwarted masculinity, or 'the inability to sustain or properly take up a [male] gendered subject position, resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation or evaluation' (Moore 1994: 66, quoted in Dolan 2003: 9), comes with feelings of fear, intimidation, humiliation, frustration and anger. These feelings can manifest in violence towards other men and women, and towards self, including suicide (Dolan 2003; Kizza et al. 2012). These feelings have frequently been attributed to relationships with intimate others and their responsibility for evoking bitterness and anger (Whyte and Oboke 2022). They can be reinforced by recalling war experiences and the conditions of post-war hardship, and can develop into mental illnesses, such as depression or anxiety disorders (Amone-P'Olak and Omech 2020). So, what will happen if Atim, who has stabilised Oloya's mental health and helped him to become a man, is taken away again and not allowed to stay with him in the future? Oloya is in a weak position because of his age and history of mental illness and having no senior male relative he can trust and rely on. The possibility of relapse is an ever-present concern, but Oloya continues to fight against all odds and hopes that things will work out. It is evident in Oloya's case how marriage norms and expectations matter for his mental health, and also vice versa how his mental health matters for the practice of marriage.

Conclusion

Oloya is a 'case' of broader issues. His case epitomises a generation of young men born during the war in northern Uganda and finding themselves in a post-war context where poverty and uncertainty concerning social, economic and political life are the norm, and mental illnesses have reached an unprecedented rate. Also, their identity of 'being men' according to Acholi social expectations is at stake. They seem to be trapped in the category of youth but nevertheless make their way as they struggle along, while they balance expectations to gender and marriage inherited from older generations with their new experiences. Like them, many young Africans elsewhere live in 'waithood', a state of limbo between childhood and adulthood. Waithood forces them to make choices, to 'improvise livelihoods and conduct their personal relations outside of dominant economic and familial frameworks'. Young African men like Oloya do not simply wait and hope that their situation will change on its own but are 'proactively engaged in serious efforts to create new forms of being and interacting with society' (Honwana 2013).

Notes

1   The chapter is based on selected findings of my IMAGENU sub-project 'Mental health, gender and partnerships in northern Uganda: realities, expectations and hopes'. To investigate individual lived experiences of people with mental health challenges and their social worlds, I employed qualitative methods including unobtrusive and participant observation, narrative/ life story or life trajectory interviews, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Cohler and Hostetler 2003; Harrison 2008; Robson 2002). Besides the case of Oloya, I followed other cases of people with different ages and gender, which I will present elsewhere so as not to go beyond the limited scope of this chapter.
2   A similar situation applies to girls and young women, who – as a result of the lack of bride wealth – also lose a certain degree of protection and social status (Schlecht, Rowly and Babirye 2013). However, this will not be further considered here, as the focus of this chapter is on men. Regarding women, see also Baines and Gauvin 2014.
3   All names appearing in Oloya's narrative are pseudonyms.
4   According to the Ugandan Penal Code, section 129 1, any person who engages in sexual activity with a person under the age of 18 commits the offence of defilement, which is punishable by life imprisonment or death, depending on the severity (JCU 2021).

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7
Genealogy of romantic love in Acholi: constructs, movement and temporality

Daniel Komakech

There is love and loving in Acholi
A Love that touches hearts
And whispers in the ear
Something we smile and cry for
But not exactly audible, and yet felt

Through ancient paths and modern streams
Acholi love is more than it seems
Traced through time,
In structures of feeling,
What is Acholi love's romantic rhyme?

From whispered secrets
Covered underneath mount Paimol
To movements into love in broad daylight
Exercises to remain fit
You used me, then you dumped me

In supermarkets in the city
With colours that resemble a Zebra
Thingification that look like a Mercedes Benz
It is my body, not your body
An endless journey that continues to flow

Introduction

This chapter contributes to a growing literature on romantic love and, more broadly, the study of affect by analysing genealogies of love in northern Uganda through the concepts of structures of feeling and movement. Moving beyond the binary of comparing structures of feeling in dominant discourses on love in 'the West' and 'the Acholi', the chapter potentially shows how 'structures of feeling' (Williams and Orrom 1954) in romantic love are fluid, with similarities and differences. This focus moves the analysis beyond 'Acholi romantic love' as being derivative of 'Western' romantic love, and opens up an analytical space for movement and fluidities in Acholi understanding and practices. This chapter therefore argues that the phenomenon of romantic love is universal, although always in a state of fluidity in temporally, spatially and historically dynamic cultural and lived experience. Inspired by Holly Porter's (2020) analytical frame of movement in spatial and moral geographies of romantic love in camp and home among the Acholi, the chapter deploys this approach to elaborate on genealogy, constructs, movement and temporality to reread and reimagine Acholi romantic love.

Porter (2020) creatively uses the analytical category of 'movement' to appreciate fluidity and dynamics on ideals and practices of love and romantic love. Her central theme is on movement in relationships between public and private spaces in the internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps in northern Uganda at the time of the northern Uganda insurgency between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group of Joseph Kony, which only worsened with civilian internment from 1996 to 2006, and the shifting of the spatial moral geography of camp to home. Porter correctly observes a sense of moving and being-in-movement. She noticed how the spatial dynamics of camps disrupted 'normal' orderings of life and how 'home' has been reconfigured in the post-war period, impacting ideals and practices of romantic love among the Acholi in northern Uganda. In this sense, 'movement' as encompassing everyday forms of motion and its attendant subjectivities, disrupts 'normal' order or adapts to 'changing' order (Nicholas 1973), creating what Porter alludes to as tension between order and displacement, emergence and possibility in a movement-space.

This approach elucidates the dynamic shift from Acholi cultural ideals of loving quietly, reservedly and symbolically to loving intensely as new forms of temporal instances brought about by post-camp 'modernity' after the war in northern Uganda. The chapter uses Porter's analytical

category of 'movement' to elaborate on the dynamic and fluid ideals of romantic love in Acholi. Particularly, how movement in space and time created a liminal space in which boundaries of traditional authority on romantic love ruptured or dissolved as simultaneously as resistance to a meta-narrative on romantic love. This, furthermore, has created spatial and temporal distance to pursue personal moments of affection and romantic relation, imbricating or collapsing what was traditionally considered profane or correct forms of affection and romantic relationships.

Critical love studies first emerged from discourse and analysis in popular romance in the 2000s, with the establishment of journals, for example, the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, in 2010. Gratzke (2017: 2), in his article, 'Love is what people say it is: performativity and narrativity in critical love stories', characterised romantic love as a 'love act', a sexualised intimate love, different from categories such as parental love or romantic love of a nation. In this sense, romantic love has been theorised in critical love studies as closely interlinked with intimacy, passion, sexual desire, feelings and emotions (Anderson and Shmuley 2018). However, although its expressive capabilities are often idealised, they are actually unstable and, therefore, fluid. This fluidity or instability in the regimes of romantic love is what we call the romantic turn, an expressive change in the moral geography occasioned by notions of movement and genealogy.

Consequently, I explore how romantic love, with its varying expressions and practices, is both universal and deeply rooted in the everyday lives of people. While love can be defined differently depending on time and place, it is also constantly evolving and changing. This view emphasises the idea of romantic love as a fluid and changing phenomenon, shaped by both time and cultural context. By examining the ways romantic love is experienced, expressed and understood among the Acholi, we can gain valuable insights into its adaptable, evolving nature and how it exists within a broader continuum of time and space. The goal here is to highlight how romantic love in Acholi is a dynamic and ever-shifting concept.

Methodological and analytical framing

This chapter presents an analysis of Acholi love in the form of philosophical meditations and case studies, based on ethnographic engagements with urban life and popular culture in Gulu in a time just after gaining status

as a 'city'. Observing and participating in the novel kinds of spaces, movements and cultural ideals emerging, opened for kaleidoscopic perspectives on how moral geographies are changing. My observations are complemented with informal conversations in these spaces; with patrons in the coffee shops, gyms, bars, and in movements between them with *boda-boda* (motorcycle taxi) drivers and others working in these spaces. The jokes, remarks, and the less structured and therefore, casual interaction, were very fruitful sources of knowledge. Similarly, the opportunity offered by informal engagement, allowed for asking and clarifying questions, making the perspectives on romantic love and its fluid nature, clearer or deeply reflected upon. In addition, I draw upon insights from ethnographic fieldwork in Acholi rural villages of Bungatira and Awach in Gulu district, and from urban settings in Kanyagoga B and Pece, in Gulu city. Most interlocutors were youths between 18 and 35 years, with 11 men and eight women in the rural areas, and seven men and five women in Gulu city. The three central cases of Anywar, Lagen and Okello I have followed over time to elaborate on the emergence of a new turn and movement in romantic love practices in Acholi.

The methodology thus draws from a range of formal and informal engagements.

To be able to appreciate and understand the field data, the chapter sought interpretation and translation from the local area setting. In the same vein, the listening, observations and understandings were reinterpreted in the context in which the behaviour, actions, words and voices were performed. The Acholi sub-region was not simply a geographical place in the sense of being located, but also a space to read, interpret and learn.

To protect informants, their identities have been anonymised by using pseudonyms. Lastly, the study makes no claim to total insights. Rather, it tries to capture a number of insights. The limitations of the study are as follows. It did not cover the whole of Acholi but is rather specific to the case locations mentioned.

Drawing on Porter's (2020) idea of mundane, everyday durable and transmutable dimensions, what she calls 'movement', in romantic love as a temporality domain within a history-specific continuum, the chapter draws upon a second general theoretical domain: Michel Foucault's *Genealogy*. Foucault's genealogy as method situates Porter's 'movement' in a radical departure from the tradition of linearity. It is this shift in linearity and a more dynamic framing of a phenomenon, as Porter observes, that led Foucault (1971) in 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history' first published as an essay in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, and, in

his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969 [1972]) to introduce genealogy as a methodological tool to analyse the historical development of ideas, institutions and practices. Foucault sought to understand the contextual factors, the fragmented and discontinuous nature of history.

Genealogy then, like Porter's movement, provides a tool to explore moments of ruptures, discontinuities and the contingent nature of historical events. This in turn culminates in historical specificity, what Paul Rabinow (1984: 80) calls, 'Foucault's idea of descent and emergence'. Here Foucault employs several key analytical points to reinforce his genealogical method. Porter focused on a mobile moral geography of romantic love as a result of a disrupted, and therefore fluid, post-war Acholi public and private space that was traditionally idealised as static and regulated. Foucault, in a similar tone, looked for a more nuanced and critical understanding that instead co-constitutes contingencies and complexities of historical events without assuming a linear end. Foucault acknowledges the need to situate a phenomenon within specific historical contexts and particular conditions giving rise to certain forms of knowledge and practices (1991: 83).

The implication of Porterian movement and Foucauldian genealogy is that both show us how discourses surrounding love and the idea of romantic love have evolved over different historical periods and have been shaped by broader social and cultural forces. It challenges, therefore, the idea that there is a singular, universally valid conception of romantic love by acknowledging the existence of diverse, alternative narratives and practices. Consequently, like Porter, Foucault frowns over the essentialist views of love by highlighting that love is not a fixed and universal essence, but contingent to historical processes. Foucault's insights prompt a critical examination of the power dynamics embedded in love discourses and which shapes are considered acceptable or unacceptable in romantic relationships.

Foucault's genealogy offers us a lens through which to explore how the discourse around romantic love has evolved over time and how social norms regarding love and relationships have been established and reinforced. This includes examining the ways in which power relations shape what is considered 'normal' or 'deviant'. Also, it allows for how individuals or groups challenge normative discourses, redefine or engage in practices that subvert dominant expectations on romantic love. What is both implicit and explicit here is how we should identify key historical periods during which discourses and practices of romantic love have gradually moved and changed; in other words, trace shifts in the 'system of thought transformation' (Foucault 1966 [1994]),

understanding practices of romantic love, highlighting moments of rupture and transformation, while at the same time, identifying durability and continuity.

The objective is to elaborate on how the dynamics and fluidity characterise not only Western romantic love subjectivities, but non-Western as well, making both intersect and intertwine at the core. In the subsequent section, the chapter unravels the ideas of Porter and Foucault, profiling and articulating the fragmented, mobile, ruptured, discontinuous and contingent ideals, while also pointing to durable discursive formation and practices of romantic love in Acholi, and occasionally drawing comparative insights from perspectives in the Western world.

Similarly, the chapter also uses the concept of 'structures of feelings' deployed by Williams and Orrom (1954) as an analytical tool to provide insight into affective procedures of love, romance and relationship in a triadic complexity of the sensorial, imaginative and practical. It is considered a 'structure' because it is influenced by a collective, a value and a culture, yet it is also a 'feeling' as it reflects individual subjectivities (Williams 2015). Highmore (2016: 145) describes this as the 'formation of feelings' in the world of things inducing specific moods and atmosphere. A felt world, a synaesthetic experience that is mundane, as well as a spectacular activity of 'worlding' – a *this life* at *this time* (Highmore 2016: 146).

Acholi romantic love

In the section that follows, I deploy an analytical category of Porter's *movement* and Foucault's *genealogy* to investigate the dynamic and fluid imagining, idealising and negotiation of subjective feelings, affection and practices of romantic love in Acholi. As it were, this movement and genealogy implies a temporal movement, entailing a temporal, specific investigation. Accordingly, the section makes an analytical plotline of 'traditional', 'conflict and post-conflict' and 'modern/contemporary' temporal and spatial zones to provide insights and elaboration on the fluidity of the phenomenon. Consequently, it enhances an elaboration on the shift from idealisation, desire, admiration and passion, to a more cautious, independent subjective feeling with dynamically, multiple practices of romantic love. The first part of the section is temporally defined as 'traditional', depicting romantic love in Acholi with its core registry, while the second part is elaborated as 'modern', and the final part as 'contemporary', each with their specific registries.

Foucault's *genealogy* and Porter's '*movement*' are important as forms of thought and social critique in articulating Acholi romantic love and provide insights into the complex co-constituted intersections and tensions. Throughout the following, I scrutinise the idealisation of romantic love and show the genealogical shifts and decentring structures of feeling romantic love with its aesthetic bodily practices and forms of self-portrayal. Consequently, I have two plotlines to constitute. The first is to remark that, although I try to provide what constitutes 'tradition' and how it viciously idealises Acholi romantic love, entailing a registry of stasis, we nevertheless see that a particular idealisation of love has been established as typical of that specific period. It is this latter rereading that this part adopts, one which appreciates the nuances of what was typical. I use this perspective to discern subsequent change and what has stalled in the phenomenon of romantic love in Acholi traditional time and in the present.

The notion of 'traditional' as used here is less debated but also not used as a censure. Instead, it refers to consciousness of the past (Eliot 1919: 30). Here, the term 'traditional' is used not as a critique, but as a way to describe an awareness of the past. This is not about seeing the past as an ideal or unchanging order. Tradition here is not understood as rigid habits or rituals, but rather as a deep awareness woven into the everyday lives of individuals.

Romantic love in traditional Acholi

Like classical, Western romantic love, Acholi traditional, romantic love integrates similar sublime and idealised affective feelings with multiple fantasies. This idealisation appears in the stories (both factual and legendary), music, art, craft, dances, riddles and poems. However, this ideal romantic love does not often end with a tragedy like classical Western portrayals, but with a happy ending in marriage and procreation.

In Acholi love plotlines are typically created, crafted and unfolded like this: a young girl, normally in the company of other young girls, is on her way to a spring to fetch water, or in the forest to collect firewood, and she meets a boy. The classic Acholi writer Okot p'Bitek uses the analogy of 'shooting' a girl, when a boy is pointing at the exact girl, if she is among a group of girls, exchanging glances and telling a friend in the company of boys about the one he desires (p'Bitek 1964: 182). Even when identified and he reaches out to her to propose (*cuna*), she has to decline (*adegi*); she must decline and not say 'yes', since it is not expected that she says 'yes' immediately or even after a long time. Otherwise, if she accepts,

she will be taken as 'cheap' (p'Bitek 1964: 182–3), which in Acholi is considered *lakwele* (loose). A 'yes' is therefore unfamiliar in the Acholi tradition of romantic love. She is expected to not say 'yes', and she should continue to suggest that she does not want this 'stupid' thing called *cuna*. This does not in any way mean she has rejected *cuna*, but that it entails a cycle of love-debate or love-conference. The following depict this love-debate by the women:

> *An pe amiti do laco ni.*
> *An pe amari do laco ni.*
> *Awaci ni adegi do laco ni.*
> *Cit cen! Dok cen!*
>
> [I don't love you this man.
> I don't want you this man.
> I told you that, I hate you this man.
> Go away ! Get back!]

<div align="right">(p'Bitek 1964: 183–4)</div>

The central theme here is the 'pursuing–distancing' love mocking, in which, for example, a man pursues and the woman creates distance. Distancing is not about being emotionally unavailable, but about being romantically available to be longed for and for the imagination, while also possessing a feeling of being valuable when being pursued. Pursuing (*alopi*) is therefore a language that is spoken or uttered much more than the words 'I love you'. It is the heart with legs occupying a temporal zone that is not timed or timeable, but within the pursued time and timing, in which, at her discretion, she can stop or pause the distancing. It is this pursuing and distancing that is romantic and continuously regenerates the emotional feelings of being loved, while calling off the pursuit and distancing is the case for a situation of 'unloving'. The constant forward and back, advance and return (Brooks 1984), in a gradual rhythm and continuous expectation of a romantic future, is playfully called *make* or *kamake* (to get 'caught'). It is a temporality of *the-almost*, where erotic and romantic love almost happen, but in suspense (Amaral 2018). This, in the traditional sense, complements the love-debate as a suspenseful, gradual strategy for continuous deferral, making a happy ending, not necessarily too late, but simply timely or timeful.

However, even then, with a 'no' or 'I don't want anything to do with stupidity [meaning love]', the boy is not supposed to listen to this. Instead, one has to consult the eyes of the girl, her breathing, her timidity and slight

resistance (p'Bitek 1964: 184). Distancing is not about being emotionally unavailable. It is a kind of availability that distance offers for romantic longing and for romantic imagination. It is at this point of distance while being pursued that the young man and woman feel the intense love for each other. The whole point is to see the man's stamina and whether he is genuinely in love or if it is infatuation or lust, and whether he is patiently trustworthy with a state of emotional balance and maturity. The point here is how emotionality has reinforced male domestication, away from brute sex and towards a stable relationship. This entails a sublime capacity beyond sex towards love and a metaphysical togetherness beyond confluent love whose end or contingency is sex. It is ultimately the deciphering of the elusiveness of love, and the deception encountered therein, and whether it is love (*mar*) or lust (*miti*) (p'Bitek 1964: 184). This therefore provides insights into both the phenomenon of romantic love as well as what underlies it.

Sexual encounter is therefore delayed for as long as the love-debate enhances romantic love. It is only after he informs the woman's mother and aunties that she is pressured to go to the man's hut (*otogo*) to confirm if the man is 'alive' (p'Bitek 1964: 185). But this is not always an encounter of being beautiful, tender and delicate. Instead, the practices of romantic love are turbulent, relentless and naughty (p'Bitek 1964: 184). That evening in the man's hut, the turbulence of the love-debate and distance-pursuer heightens. She 'resists' and 'fights' the man, as the man tries to 'subdue' and 'overpower'. As the man seems to give up, she encourages the man by slowing down her fight. When the man collects his strength together, she heightens her resistance again. This goes on for up to four to six hours, until both are ready for sexual encounter. The anticipated effect and affect of this is that, despite all her straining, wrestling, and striving to break free from the man's embrace, it was clear that her true intent was to multiply points of contact with him (p'Bitek 1964: 185–6) – an observation that Havelock (1963: 253) similarly made.

The material form of romantic love and its aesthetic sites that enhance negotiating such romance, for example under a tree, bush or forest, firewood collection and water points, temporal zone of night or evening and youth social gatherings, are spatial points and mobile spaces on one side. On the other side, physical and emotional attraction embodied in multiple sites like the body, character, values, level of respect, how to cook, dressing practices and wearing of particular beads are expressive practices with reciprocal forms of visualising a romantic flirtation and imagery, which reproduce themselves in a particular way. For example, beads (*Tiko*) as lingerie that rattle as 'love letters' in different rhythms are normally worn

around the waist for ladies and across the chest and shoulder for men. It is said to be an enduring symbol of romance and flirtation to invoke beauty, affection, feelings, longing and love. Observing these beads as an item that plays an additional role of body-shaping (Anena 2023), Patricia (2019) plainly puts it that most African men love to see their women's waist beaded. They have admitted that seeing a woman with waist beads gets them thinking of her capability to handle seduction and her sexuality. In any case, Patricia (2019) pleads, beads improve a woman's curves, shape her body and maintain her figure. In other words, we see how beads are appropriated and experienced as a sensory object of intimacy, as one's self-extension and ecology of body and pleasure, generating a double effect of fantasy and reality, with coded narratives of romance.

Consequently, after a long period of distancing and pursuing, a lady finally accepts the man's proposal not by saying 'yes', but by granting him special and particularly coloured and well-made beads. It is these beads that the man takes to his father and uncles as an indication of a relationship, sparking off a long process of negotiating marriage. It is a kind of a 'wedding ring' that suggests that they (the lovers) are already booked, taken and not available to other suitors. They are also instrumentalised in sexual intimacy, to elevate sexual intensity for herself and her lover (Achebe 2019: 123). In the section that follows, the chapter provides insights into the transition from the traditional modes and practices of romantic love that entail a culturally defined *loving quietly, reservedly* and *symbolically*, to a modern movement and genealogy of *loving intensely, raw* and *unscripted*, with *open possibilities to explore*, as new temporal instances of complex elaborations of Acholi romantic love in modern-day Acholi.

The current Acholi love

During colonial (around 1900–62) and post-colonial times (Kanyeihamba 2010), the Acholi in northern Uganda experienced the immense influence of colonialism and capitalism (industrialisation, globalisation and urbanisation). This was followed, from 1987, by war (Branch, 2005) and displacement, and then, from 1996 to 2006, by camp life (Branch, 2013) and return to 'homes'. These influences have entailed markers of 'movement' or, in Foucauldian genealogy, *a turn* in Acholi imagining of love and romantic love. Consequently, the chapter conflates all these into a grand episode to elaborate on the multiple complexities and nuances in underscoring the movement and genealogy.

Colonialism created a durable entanglement in the representation of the African female body and bodily archives in the colonial period, which persisted in post-colonial Africa. bell hooks (1981: 30) refers to this imagination of a colonial African woman as *biologisation*. Achille Mbembe (2006) refers to this as the eroticisation of the African body, particularly an obsession with a woman's breast and bottom as markers of a particular African feminisation (Steen 1941: 319), which was largely unremarked on in Acholi traditional imagination.

Here, an African woman's body became a visual representation of an eroticised body anatomically elaborated in the flesh for a colonial voyeuristic sight. This eroticisation elated the eyes and senses of the colonial master, trespassing into the female body, and normalised in the various social and discursive relations (Baisnee 2012: 12). It furthermore established new futures and contemporary African negotiation of different valences in the visualisation and translations of the various body images. Capitalism for its part created a new social and economic order. In turn, love and loving in socially and economically diverse social processes have shaped structures of feeling, returning ultimate satisfaction to the desiring subject, with one's private interest superseding concern for the public (McGowan 2016: 21–53).

Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) theory of 'bifurcated state' is useful to think with here. He points to a rift in the post-colonial state into two spheres – the civil and the customary spheres – each with its own logic, creating two publics. The civil sphere in this case is comparable to the sphere of the emancipated Uganda women and feminists, what Ugandan writer and gender activist Tumusiime (2012) calls, 'new women', while her counterpart Alex Baine (cited in Tumusiime, 2017: 64–6)) refers to the non-domestic, who are freer and more assertive. At the same time, there is also the customary sphere comparable to a space where women are still largely defined and subjected to cultural authority and scrutiny. These two spheres have since been in a constant struggle and renegotiation, creating both ambivalence and ambiguity, which we see in the various Ugandan films: *Ngudde mu Nsobi*, *Super Glue*, *Omukyala*, *Zalwango*, and many more. It is in this light that, in 2019, State Minister for Tourism Godfrey Kiwanda proposed a beauty pageant, dubbed 'Miss Curvy Uganda' (Akena 2020), to identify voluptuous bodies of Ugandan women as a strategy to attract tourists. This was met with criticisms from the more conservative society while applauded by a section of the open and progressive members of the society.

The post-colonial experiences of displacement during the LRA rebellion in Acholi land against the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in Uganda between 1987 and 2006, and the

subsequent return to homes around 2007 (Porter 2020), further reshaped construction of 'home' that was traditionally a space of regulating and navigating love and 'shaping intimate gendered life' (Porter 2020: 813) – a moral geography of romantic love. Porter observes that the everyday reality of congested camps, the proximity of strangers and restricted private spaces disrupted imaginations of romantic love as well as norms of sexual and affinal relations. Whereas public accountability was valued in traditional, socially-sanctioned moral spaces (Porter 2020: 818), camp life shrunk traditional authority as proximity to strangers undermined traditional mediation and instead enhanced sexual secrecy outside the socially mediated space (Porter 2019).

This created what Mergelsberg (2012), as cited in Porter (2020: 823), observed as a situation in which space is experienced as chaotic, unstructured and out of control. Initially, the idea of space in 'traditional romantic love' was provided for, where couples had to meet and spot each other at the well or in the bush. However, the disruption of this spatial world materialised in the camp space profoundly impacted the moral world of love and romantic love in Acholi. As a result, the post-conflict Acholi moral geography and, therefore, ideals of love and romantic love have since tended to dislodge traditional authority and scrutiny and become dispersed towards a more dynamic state of flux.

The *Song of Lawino* (p'Bitek 1966) and *Song of Ocol* (p'Bitek 2013) present this tension. In the *Song of Ocol*, Ocol rejects Lawino for being traditional and therefore not beautiful. Instead, Ocol takes a more 'modern' Clementine whose lips were dipped with lipstick, which Lawino argues are anti-tradition (p'Bitek 1966: 37). This is followed by detailed abuse from Lawino (p'Bitek 1966: 44):

> They dance inside a house and there is no light
> Shamelessly, they hold each other
> Tightly, tightly, they cannot breathe.
> You kiss her on the cheek
> As white people do.
> You kiss her open sore lips as white people do.
> You suck slimy saliva from each other's mouth as white people do.

Okot p'Bitek's dialectics, in the use of contrast here alluded to above, does not just display tension between tradition and modernity (Wanjala 2021: 141), but also an idealised choreography and a utopia of the traditional

aspect of romantic love within imagined timeless ideals. This suggests a deep problem of naivety and stasis of cultural forms, even in the face of actual transformation as a result of colonialism and subsequent dissipation of many cultural values. This has, since Okot p'Bitek's time, created a temporal tension between eternal and finite temporality (Liu 2021). Love is therefore imagined and negotiated with specific subjective feelings, fluctuating between nostalgia or an imagined past and current disruptions in the disengagement strategy by placing boundaries on feelings such as 'men of these days' (*coo ma ikom kare*) and detachment processes of multiple love relationships. These strategies are deployed to prepare in advance when love decays. This is not necessarily because of the war, as Porter (2017) emphasises, but more so the changing nature of the economy, creating a more complex emotional regime.

With new and enhanced aesthetic beauty ideals, the female's body that was once in the private sphere is now in the public sphere. The female body is expressed in its sensual material form and enhances the material turn to beauty and romantic love expressions. Touchy and sensitive, sensual and a production of intensities, this creates a new exposure turn, a regime of tangibility of a life lived by the beloved and, in essence, solidifying love. Consequently, love is bound up with the material world, rendering the distance between subject and object increasingly opaque and, therefore, questioning the boundaries of love reality and altering the earlier assigned sense of love. The visual material marks and forms of romantic love, therefore, enhances insights on the co-constituted production of the material world and how objects embody a level of romantic love (Barthes 1977; Nicholson 2011), as much as how the material world enhances love and romantic love (Illouz 1997).

In this case, the 'body turn' (particularly the bums – *adyeny*) or contours of body as material may be referred to as a sexualised *thing-power*, affectively entangled with the transactional relationship of money and love (*mar ki cente*). The sexualised body and material forms of care reintroduce and deploy traditional patriarchal forms of men as suppliers of material forms of care (masculinity). How the body (corporeality) distinguishes itself as *this-is-my-body* (*man koma gira*) (Nancy 1992), is insightful. The idea that 'I am not the body, and the body is something the "I" (*an*) possesses, so the "I" (*an*) is not in itself the body (*kom*), but rather the "I" and its body (*koma gira, ento an dano*)'. It seems, therefore, that the 'I' (*an*) and the 'body' (kom) rest in the tension between the nature of consciousness and the tangible reality of corporeal existence. While the body provides the vessel for the 'I' to navigate the world, the body seems not to be synonymous with the 'I'. In other words, the subject and body

are discreet but also interlaced or interspersed – in an assemblage. The question is, then, is the body more than the material flesh (mute facticity and devoid of agency), or its very characteristics of being in the world? In the section that follows the chapter explores the new Acholi notion of body in an attempt to situate this question.

Cases

In this section, we follow three cases of Anywar, Lagen and Okello to elaborate the emergence of a new turn or movement in romantic love practices in Acholi.

Double love, double living

Anywar, a university graduate, aged 28, has a young wife Milly, who is a high school teacher; her monthly salary is about 100 USD. Milly and Anywar have two children. The elder is in primary one in a private primary school in Gulu city, where they pay about 200 USD per term as fees. The younger is about to turn three and ready to go to kindergarten. Anywar recently finished his degree. For about two years now he has been looking for a job, but they are hard to come by. Before going to university, he was employed in one of the NGOs. Given his busy schedule at work, Anywar could not study full time and so opted for a weekend programme. However, in his second year of study, the organisation he had been working for could no longer pay his salary, since their sources of funding dried up. Since then, it is his wife who has paid his fees and upkeep, as well as those of the rest of the household.

Anywar not only has no job but also no money, and life in Gulu city is pernicious for him and Milly. Milly has, since his loss of a job, been taking care of the children and Anywar as well. This weighed down on her but also provoked a sense of insecurity that comes with the cultural construct of a man as the breadwinner for the household. In this reality, Anywar refuses to get stuck. He searches for alternatives in the city, listening to the city gossip in the makeshifts (small grass thatched huts or small rooms made of rusty iron sheets where young men hang out to eat pork, gossip and watch football). He notices a sector of people in the dense city, a sector whose interests and hanging points are most times in the coffee shops. According to the gossip, this sector, the white people who come to Gulu as NGO workers, researchers, missionaries and volunteers, are considered rich, but also (particularly the white women) open towards engaging in casual relationships with 'local' young partners. And sometimes, when

one is lucky, the gossip goes, one is taken in as a partner for the time she is in Uganda or one ends up getting married to her. Either way, she pays for the upkeep of her new partner.

But, the gossip continues, one has to look a certain way to enamour a white woman. One has to keep the hair untidy or uncombed, wear fairly worn-out clothes, shoes or sandals, and walk with a certain rhythm that portrays one as imposing, unique and flattering. Anywar listens to the gossip and thinks it over and over to gain some insights. Would he be able to try out his luck for money by tapping into this segment and get a young white woman for himself?

Anywar negotiates with his wife to add another 'wife', a single, young white woman who works in the NGO sector. To 'add a second wife' in this unconventional way, Anywar changes his clothes and, soon after, he 'hooked' a white woman. But he tells her he is 'single', with no partner. This second 'wife' becomes the family's breadwinner, and is also a resource for the family should there be an emergency like sickness and school fees. Anywar recounts moments when the first wife insists that he visits the white 'wife', especially when supplies at home seem to dry up. Feeling pushed, and noticing the shortage of supplies for the daily family routines, Anywar would retort, 'I will go. What is your problem now?' I inquired about his wife's reply. Anywar tells me that the wife just smiles and sometimes, when there is real shortage, she would even encourage him to spend the whole night at the house of the white 'wife'. Anywar confirms that his sexual engagement with the white 'wife' pays off, as he is given a large number of Uganda shillings and sometimes dollars as his transport money back home and some items to cook or feed on, since to the white 'wife' he is single.

In a sense, Anywar, by appearing single, stays true to his love by employing a tactic of invisibility, making Milly and their family disappear. But he also produces love's 'double' as he proclaims his love for his new white 'wife', which results in her supporting him – and his family. For the white 'wife', love appears singular; for Milly it is double, as the white woman is visible and both of them are sharing Anywar.

This inviolable double love characterises Anywar. His dressing in a particular way and eager attention towards the white woman is to enhance his survival. Indeed, as he tells the story, the white woman is happy with him and gives him dollars and some presents to live on. As Anywar is able to contribute more at home, he is able to reclaim his provider masculinity and life goes on pretty well. In case of scarcity in the household, Milly sometimes asks if Anywar has left the white woman. Is it not soon time for him to visit her again?

In the section that follows, we case study Lagen, her insights into a 'worthy man' and how to notice, attract and retain until no longer worthy, in a serial 'monogamy'.

Serial 'monogamy'?

Lagen says that she is unemployed but life moves on. Visiting her progressive saloon, one concludes that life is indeed moving on for Lagen – but, of course, without a clear source of income. Lagen is tall, slender, brown-skinned with well-maintained curly hair and an admirably curvy bottom (*Nyash* as locally known). On weekends, she visits well-established upscale bars and night clubs in Gulu city for a drink and a good 'hunt' for a 'worthy' man. Lagen dresses in clothes that show her figure and skin when she goes out, to allow herself to 'feel the fresh environment', she says. According to her, it also keeps the conversation going with her potential 'hunt' – the men she goes out to meet on the weekends. If a man appears wealthy and well-groomed, she might accept a drink. After drinking and talking, and the 'hunt' admiring her sexy appearance, they exchange phone numbers on WhatsApp and wish each other well as she drives off. She never goes off with a man from the bar. Normally, she observes, the man WhatsApps her to find out if she reached home safely, to which she replies promptly. Then endless chats ensue with repeated flirtations. Lagen will at some point also ask for material support, and shares faceless sexy photos that assures the drink-mate to support her as much as she needs. The promise, the potential of Lagen's love, keeps her afloat in the city as a successful business owner. After a while, and noticing that the help is dwindling, she finds excuses to terminate the chat, without ever 'giving in' to the drink-mate, while also sorting her business needs.

Lagen deploys sensory experiences and non-verbal cues to intersect sensuality, anxiety of commitment and hyperreal representation of affection in an outward display and performance of affection – while constantly negotiating how to 'fall in', 'fall out' or 'stay in' love when the hunt is still 'worthy'. To her hunt, she could appear to be enhancing the elusiveness of love and its deception. Consequently, the well-manicured body is seemingly available for male exploration as a seduced body, desired and priced. But, as it turns out, it is for Lagen also a site of useful delight, economic advantage and confidence. With the WhatsApp images of faceless bodily displays and emojis, sending kisses with a heart, this love is like a flying kite, without passion (Haque 2014). Yet both Lagen and her 'hunt' participate.

Digital romance, the practices of flirting on WhatsApp, is particularly instructive, as an online space to explore and negotiate expectations. Particularly, 'sexting' by sending sexy or revealing real-life photos of nudity or innuendo emojis were central strategies Lagen deployed to attract and retain her 'hunt' for a while, while accessing the required money from him, to stock her saloon.

In the section that follows, I look at the case of Okello and his motivation for going to the gym.

Gym for bed fitness

Okello, a young man, expresses himself to me and often complains by means of laughter. His girlfriend, Akot, demands that he proves himself as a 'manly man', and now he experiences a new form of uncertainty and distress. Okello is forced to constantly prove being a 'manly man' in bed, to avoid the situation of *turu gamente* (overthrowing the government) – meaning the risk of being 'overthrown' as a sexual partner by a more 'manly man'. Akot wants great sex and a lot of it. Okello now often finds himself in a gym, as he says it is his 'fuel station to get more gas [energy] for another successful drive up the hill [performance in bed]'. In the gym, Okello quietly goes through the stressful pain of muscle building and work-out to remain fit. He wonders what this life is, and whether all women are as active and unsatisfiable as his girlfriend. But, as he ponders in the gym, he points at the right corner, about 10 metres away, where a male colleague is trying to enhance his bed fitness by gym fitness, just like he is.

Okello's case points to the ideals of masculine physicality (a man must be physically strong to satisfy the woman, otherwise the relationship is in jeopardy), and how, in the city, the gym becomes a new site to work on the self to enhance performance to sustain a romantic relation. Here, Okello deploys 'laughter' as a last resistance against feeling objectified, perhaps a sign of emotional fatigue, reimagining what actually romantic love is.

The case elaborates how these feelings have created a double impact of uncertainty – firstly, in the form of bitter laughter and, secondly, in the form of male flight to a gym as an attempt to renegotiate one's manliness, therefore willingly objectifying oneself in submission to a female partner. Stated in another way, it suggests how the woman occupies a central position in the 'house' and her gaze determines whether the 'house' is going to perpetuate itself or collapse. Confronted with this and reinterpreted as a tenacious task, the flight to the gym is not only a site for physical fitness, but a new corner as well to negotiate and make intricate decisions on how to survive romantic entanglement.

The man works on his body to recreate himself in the image of a 'manly man' with a fairly huge chest, tiny buttocks with thinning legs that are to support effectively the sexual desire in bed. This is important because, as the case shows, there is a deconstruction of the dual issue of romantic love as physical and non-physical affection, into a complex intertwining and co-presence. It is in this regard that we begin to see the practices and things people do with their bodies in order to have emotions or be loved.

This-is-my-body: the 'I' and its 'body' in Acholi love

These three cases present marked tensions, and radical uncertainty, in the once cherished Acholi traditional ideals of romantic love relationship (p'Bitek 1964), rerooting changing patterns (Allen 2019; Paine 2014; Porter 2013; 2020). We see a more pragmatic mundane sensual production and practices of love anatomically elaborated in the flesh, as more valuable – an eroticisation to elate the eyes and other senses. This is not by any means a 'crisis of romantic love' but rather an emergence of new forms of romantic subjectivity and a new social order and a new economic system with its discursive and behavioural relations, unmarked in the traditional imagination.

Earlier in African thought, the body was often viewed as a vessel through which one interacts with the world and expresses one's connection to the broader ontological and cosmological communitarian life. It was not merely a physical entity but imbued with spiritual significance and symbolic meaning (Tempels 1945). In short, the body existed in multiple layers of identity beyond the physical body in addition to the life force and consciousness. In this context, the 'I' was not viewed in isolation from the body and other cosmological reality, but was intricately connected. However, as I observed earlier, in current Africa, and Acholi in particular, we live in a transforming time and space, challenging this integration and crafting a new consciousness of a dual co-existence. Consequently, to say 'this is my body' asserts an autonomy over one's physical form. It implies that the individual has agency over one's body and can make decisions regarding its care, actions and boundaries. It challenges dictating norms and beauty standards that intervene on how bodies should look and be perceived. Conversely, in relation to love, romantic love and sexuality, there seems to be a disconnect or conflict between the 'I' and the body, providing us with insights on the difference between physical embodiment and subjective experience. The expression 'this is my body'

plays, therefore, a crucial role in shaping body images, bodily sensations and physical pleasure in romantic and sexual encounters, grounding romantic relationships in the physical world.

Expressed as *kom* (body), or *koma* (my body), distinct from *an* (I), or *man an* (this is I) most modern Acholi youths seem to separate the 'I' and the body, intensifying their bodies as the significant site for insights and expression of romantic love. This is so because sex, and especially transactional sex, is now seen more as bodily and, therefore, with little intersection with the 'I'. That is, the body is more involved than the 'I' and, as such, production of bodily enhancement and expressions are heightened, while processes suppressing the 'I' to give way to the body, such as drinking alcohol and other techniques, are simultaneously deployed. This separation of *koma* from *an* is, in a sense, to liberate the body and bodily forms of romantic expressions from shame, and other limitations of fixity and, instead, coming as you are. Expressions include: '*koma, pe komi*' (it is my body, not your body), '*ibutu keda ka i bola calo yugi*' (you used me and now you dump me). While the male counterpart observes that, '*apuk odiko ka lyeto koma wek agwoki*' (I wake up in the morning for physical exercises to remain fit for purpose to the woman), and '*mon ikom kare ni pe gi yeng*' (women these days are hard to satisfy), and so forth. This shows that the centrality of the body makes it both a negotiating space but also a site of intense uncertainty and emotional breaks.

In this new context of uncertainty and the challenging experience of 'proving' one's manliness to a female partner, we observe a shift from the usual focus on masculinity to a more woman-centred view of romantic love. Here, masculinity becomes intertwined with this feminised perspective on love.

The race for being a 'manly man' is compared to being a government, and the risk of being overthrown, '*turu gamente*' (overthrowing government), and 'taken over' by a more 'manly man'. One observes a complex race where the male partner is both consciously and unconsciously in the female's 'house'. In this 'house', the scope of love is less emphasised, but its details are. The very details are not easily verbalised but expressed in complex materiality and physicality and elaborated in bed. It is only its consequence that is verbalised by the female partners in the saloons and markets, and at beer and coffee tables, as 'gossip' platforms. On their part, the male partners express it in laughter while concentrating in a gym as a new 'fuel station' to get more 'gas [energy]' for another 'successful or enhanced drive up the hill'. In other words, the results are communicated in words or body

language. In either situation (good or bad performance, pass or retake), both require consistency and hard work, sending both to the gym with an equal measure of determination.

This new ideal has novel materiality of romantic love, sending 'worthy men' into the physical world of the gym and pharmaceutical supplements to renegotiate and enhance the state of a 'worthy man'. Deploying a vocabulary of, 'in my wife's house' as a metaphor for emotional fatigue, men reimagine what love and romance have actually moved into, becoming denaturalised as merely '*cam kwaro*' (ancestral food) – the thingification of romance and sex by both genders becomes an issue of laughing-at and laughing-it-out.

Conclusion

A state of flux and fluidity characterises the current moral geography of Acholi love and romance. What was previously observed as traditional regulated modes have changed significantly, even though, in some quarters, customs and traditions still have a say. Largely, love and romance in current times have established a new moral geography – a turn towards greater freedom, self-imagination and a bolder material expression and practice, and a new turn in the structures of feelings. Foucault's concept of *genealogy* and Porter's ideas about *movement* have provided insights to explore and understand these changes and fluidity. The Acholi region is in a time when traditions have changed as a result of historical processes and events as elaborated earlier in this chapter, which have altered the moral geography of love and romance. The purpose of this chapter has not been to evaluate normative dimensions and become judgemental, but rather to empirically document new and ever-changing moral geographies of love and romance.

The chapter has shown how both so-called traditional and new moral geographies of love in Acholi intersect in many ways with Western categories of romantic love. In other words, love and romance are equally expressed in Acholi, although not in similar measures. This means, at the core, expressions and practices of love and romance intersect. It is largely this intersection that has occasioned this study, which, as highlighted, has a keen interest in detailing the contemporary movements and imagined futures of love and romance in Acholi.

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8

Recognition in church weddings

Stephen Langole and Susan Reynolds Whyte

Wedding Recognition

Man and wife
Pronounced as one
Til death do them part
Affirming together

Proper church members
Marriage certificate
And Holy Communion
Fully belonging

Gowns and limousines
Tents and speeches
High style or modest
Valuing community

Scientific or mass,
Spectacular or simple
Weddings confirm
Recognising regard

The wedding launch

On a sunny Saturday, 2 March 2024, Stephen received an unusual visitor, a man who had never before stepped inside his house despite the fact they are neighbours. Here is his account:

'Sir' the visitor said, 'my wife and I have made up our minds to wed this coming May. We have the launch meeting at Comboni Samaritan this afternoon. You and your wife should come'. I honoured the invitation knowing that, in this kind of thing, there is no boundary between Catholicism and Protestantism, reflecting on the support I also received from Protestants during my own wedding in 2015. When we joined the meeting, we found the priest, who had been delegated by the bishop to bless the launch, just concluding the opening prayers. Close to a hundred people squeezed into the rather small room, with the bride's family on one side and the groom's family in the centre facing the improvised dais where the couple was seated in ceremonial chairs. On a big interactive screen, members from the diaspora were following the meeting.

The master of ceremonies set the spirit of the occasion when roasted groundnuts were passed round to all invitees. 'The groundnuts we are giving you are for practice. You pick and drop in your mouth, pick and drop in your mouth. In the same way, to support the couple, we expect you to keep picking from your pockets and dropping in the fundraising baskets that will keep going round'. Members burst out laughing at the fun. The good humour continued as men not wearing suits, Arsenal fans, former classmates from secondary school and university, neighbours, Great Sisters who are friends of the bride and those joining on the screen were challenged as categories to 'pick and drop' or make pledges.

The groom made a speech about how he had been planning for five years: 'but this year I said this must be the year. I kept it secret from my wife until a few days before this event and she could not believe it'. The bride spoke too, remembering how he had courted her long ago: 'I did not take it seriously, but he kept on insisting and here we are, we have children together'.

But it was the father of the groom who made the most striking speech. 'You have come in big numbers, the Reverend is available. You have collected cash and the couple seem ready. Reverend, why don't you step up and we complete the wedding right now?' The house seemed stunned by his suggestion, but apparently saw the point. Was it really necessary to continue with more and more elaborate preparations, when the reverend, the couple, the family and friends, and the money were assembled that afternoon?

On reflection, it was an impossible idea. All the paraphernalia for which money had been contributed had yet to be purchased. Invitations had

not been sent. The reception with its entertainment was not arranged. And a fundamental assumption was ignored in the father's proposal. Those assembled were not in a church. Yes, a reverend was present, he had prayed, he was authorised to conduct weddings. But in Uganda, with rare exceptions, weddings must take place in churches.

The churchiness of weddings

Scholars have often emphasised that marriage in African societies is a process (Hunter 2016; Radcliffe-Brown 1950: 49; Shipton 2007:120). Couples might be more or less married depending on where they are in a long string of interactions, sometimes punctuated by rituals and formal exchanges. The Christian missionaries to Uganda, both Anglican and Catholic, introduced a church ritual that was meant to be decisive. The church could definitively declare a couple husband and wife. Thus, while marriage is a continuing endeavour, weddings are events. The ecclesiastical framing of weddings persists today. Even the spectacular displays of consumption that characterise lavish white weddings in Ugandan cities must be anchored in church settings. But how significant is the church in contemporary wedding celebrations? Formalised marriages are declining (Baral et al. 2021). In vain, clerics exhort congregation members to wed. Even those who wed have lived together for years – weddings are most often an achievement of middle or old age. The weddings that do occur and capture public attention are extravagant and seemingly beyond the reach of most people. Priests decry the commercialisation of weddings and the way that business and consumerism seem to overshadow the religious significance of church weddings.

In this chapter, we examine the social meaning of church weddings, with an eye to the various concerns at play. What are the religious dimensions and how do they relate to the economic aspects of church weddings? What forms of sociality are mobilised? What variation can be seen, beyond the hype of high-end weddings? How does it matter to be married in church?

We will argue that church weddings matter because they provide the opportunity for different kinds of recognition. To begin with, we understand recognition in the dictionary senses as: 'the identification of someone or something or person from previous encounters or knowledge'; 'the acknowledgment of the existence, validity or legality of something'. Recognition is related to confirmation and appreciation. Any kind of

belonging involves acknowledgement – recognition on the part of others and on the part of oneself. This holds whether partners belong to one another, couples belong to a church, or persons belong to communities of relatives, neighbours and friends.

Recognition is a fruitful way of understanding domestic partnerships: 'Framing conjugal relationships in terms of recognition […] avoids the limitations of considering them in terms of either exchange or love, as either collective processes of social reproduction or strictly personal projects' (Reece 2022: 142). In her study of kinship in Botswana, Reece uses the concept of recognition in the emic sense of seeing, speaking, hearing and knowing; in enactment, these have inter-subjective effects for self-knowledge and moral personhood, with both positive potential and negative risks. She writes of the 'uncertain process of marriage […] intimate relationships become kin relationships through a gradual and carefully managed process of *recognition*, whereby they become visible, speakable and known' (Reece 2022: 264), often through negotiating conflicts.

Our concern with the event of wedding rather than the process of marriage leads us to another aspect of recognition: the public expression of worth and social validity as a person in a particular role, as suggested by Honneth and Margalit (2001). 'Recognition … make(s) clear publicly to the person in question that she has been accorded social approval, or possesses social validity, in the role of a specific social type […] an evaluative perception in which the worth of persons is "directly" given' (Honneth and Margalit 2001: 119, 125). A person may be assessed as worthy of love, respect or solidarity; all of these values are at play in weddings, as we shall see.

Church weddings matter in three ways. Firstly, couples recognise one another and the bond they have; confirming that they belong together provides a sense of personal security. This dyadic bond extends to each other's families. Secondly, Christians recognise their belonging to the church and are recognised by church authorities and others as virtuous Christians. Weddings confirm identity as members of a church community. Thirdly, church weddings are occasions for appreciation *of* others and *by* others. The couple recognises and appreciates kin, family, colleagues, friends and neighbours by inviting them to participate. Those who gather recognise and appreciate the couple, attributing to them respect and prestige. The social value that is confirmed depends partly on the qualities of the celebration, especially in the case of the lavish urban weddings with their conspicuous consumption.

Studying church weddings

This chapter is the combined effort of two older researchers, one from Gulu and one from Copenhagen – for the record, both married in church to partners of many years. Stephen systematically assembled material using a case study approach (2016–23). With the aid of semi-structured interview guides, he talked with 15 couples (30 individuals) – 11 from the urban and four from the rural area. The study included people who married from Gulu city's St Joseph's Cathedral and Holy Rosary Parish (Catholic) and St Phillips and Christ Church (Anglican) as well as the rural Pamin-yai and Langol chapels of Alero (Catholic). He made observations of wedding plans as part of the study. Importantly, he also drew on his own knowledge and experience of weddings in the Acholi sub-region, articulated in conversations with Susan. For her part, Susan drew on her long-term ethnographic work in eastern Uganda to pose comparative questions. The primary empirical material is mostly provided by Stephen, but there are occasional examples from Susan's work to support the points we want to make.

Our chapter focuses on the Anglican Church of Uganda and Catholic weddings, these two denominations being predominant in northern Uganda. Pentecostal and Muslim weddings raise somewhat different issues, which are not covered here. Neither do we discuss civil weddings executed by a magistrate, which are very rare.

Essential elements

While weddings vary, certain pieces are required to put together a church wedding. When the couple declares their intention, the church demands the consent of the woman's parents. In northern Uganda, her parents may stipulate bride wealth payments and the completion of parts of traditional marriage before agreeing that the church wedding can go ahead. Traditional marriage may therefore happen shortly before a church wedding, requiring expenditure on two counts at the same time. In this way, churches reinforce practices and aspects of gender relations that one or both of the partners may find difficult or undesirable. Magee (2021) asserts that weddings are magnifying glasses that blow up issues and amplify aspects of personal history. Having to deal with family demands and family histories of marriage payments is one example of such magnification. Others follow.

The couple must prove that they are true members of the church by presenting their baptism and confirmation certificates. If these cannot be traced, they may have to undergo the rituals again. Such certificates must

also indicate the parents' names, causing awkwardness when the father is hardly known (see Baral, this volume). The marriage banns are read in church on Sundays preceding the wedding. Any person who knows of an impediment to the marriage is invited to make it known, and there are occasional objections that prove embarrassing to the couple.

Once these hurdles have been cleared, the couple must undergo counselling or instruction about married life (Alava et al. 2022). Adherence to Christian values, expressions of love to the partner, sex life and child upbringing are commonly covered. Given that nearly all couples have been living together for years and have children, sometimes even adult children, some of the instructions might seem redundant. Perhaps we may see this element as a ritual restatement or recognition of ideals and an opportunity to ponder upon the relation between ideals and reality.

The liturgy is the essence of a wedding. The bride is presented to her husband by her father or brother, the groom and then the bride vow to one another. The priest blesses the rings, and the couple places them on the left hand. They are declared husband and wife, and they sign the papers that may later on, at the discretion of the couple, be taken to the Uganda Registration Services Bureau to make their marriage official in the eyes of the state. There are hymns, offertory and a sermon by the priest.

Then comes the reception, which takes place outside the church. Guests who neglect the church ritual will not fail the reception with its speeches, gifts, entertainment, food and drink. The party often extends far into the night.

Institutional demands to wed

The early Christian missionaries to Uganda were appalled by the polygamous practices they found, and worked to encourage monogamous unions blessed in church weddings. These efforts were accompanied by dilemmas about the relation between imported principles and African social realities. The demand to wed in church was often at odds with longstanding commitments between husbands and multiple wives. Church and colonial authorities did not always agree about the regulation of marriage and, even among the clergy, there were questions and different opinions about who should be allowed to take communion as a proper Christian under which domestic circumstances (Hansen 1984: 260–79; Kyomuhendo and McIntosh 2006: 68–72).

Prominent men who were allies of colonial and mission authorities were married in church amid elaborate celebrations. The British official who attended the 'very grand wedding' of the great Semei Kakungulu in 1894 described the important role of the Church Missionary Society Archdeacon who solemnised the marriage (Twaddle 1993: 105–7). Those with institutional links to the missions and churches were supposed to wed if they had a partner. During the years when education was managed by religious bodies, monogamy, preferably ensured by a church wedding, was a necessity for teachers in Catholic-founded or Anglican-founded schools (Whyte 1997: 46). In the same way, church employees and those with designated positions in the congregation were expected to wed. Since education and church work were an important foundation of elite formation, it followed that church weddings and social prestige were intertwined (Selhausen 2014; Selhausen et al. 2018). This pattern held in other African settings. In Botswana, Christian weddings became the norm for elites by the early 1900s (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 385). So, even in colonial times, church weddings were matters of recognition and status in the wider community.

Bases for high social standing have shifted radically. Being wed in church is no longer a requirement for having a good job. But, even today, devoted Christians may be sanctioned for failure to achieve a church wedding. In the Catholic church, these may be prayerful people who do not miss church services or masses but cannot partake in the Holy Eucharist sacrament, which is supposed to be mandatory for a proper Catholic. One such polygamous believer on the outskirts of Gulu city was exceptionally good at composing hymns for the church. Some of his hymns were much acclaimed during Pope John Paul II's visit to Gulu on 6 February 1993 and on 3 June, Martyr's Day at Namugongo in 2003, when Gulu Archdiocese was, for the first time, assigned to lead celebrations at the Namugongo shrine. The question was, what to do with the believer who had contributed so much to the church, attended church regularly, but was already sickly and risked dying as an incomplete Christian? The solution was for him to choose one of his wives and wed her in church, which he did. The old man died a complete Catholic who had partaken in all sacraments of the church.

A confidante of Stephen's claimed he could not be ordained a priest because his father, a devout Catholic, and even employed by the church, was polygamous. He claimed that he was advised to persuade his father to wed one of his wives in church and divorce the others. 'I could not. I even liked my stepmother perhaps more than my own mother, so how could I advise my father to wed one of them'. Ultimately, the man was ordained in a foreign diocese. His father died a polygamist, though he had still retained his job at the church.

Failure to wed in church can become a barrier to realising certain dreams. One of Stephen's respondents, on realising that his daughter could be denied entry into the novitiate, and that he himself, a choir member in church for over 20 years, was not an exemplary Christian, got prompted to finally wed. This opened the possibility of his daughter joining the convent.

During a funeral service, Stephen heard a reverend from the Anglican church describe how he became a reverend when he still had his two wives. He kept praying to God that one of them should leave. Finding himself in a mess, he was comforted in the fact that Jesus once said, 'Come to me the way you are!' Still, polygamy was not a good way to be. 'God listened to my prayer and indeed, now I remain with one wedded wife', he said. He explained that one of the wives simply chose to quit the relationship.

In principle, those who are co-habiting but not wed in church should not take communion in either the Catholic or Anglican church. When Stephen began to live with his wife, he refrained from taking communion for 18 years until their church wedding. He could have gone to a priest to confess the sin of staying with an unwed partner and gain pardon so he could take holy communion. But that would mean severing sexual relationships with the spouse with whom he was already living in order to regain the qualification for the holy eucharist. Stephen and his wife chose to live in sin for 18 years, and the couple were already blessed with three children by the time they finally wed. Such awkward scenarios are common among many believers in Acholi.

High style at the cathedral

Time check is 10:20 a.m. The groom's team arrives first for the church wedding in a motorcade of seven vehicles. Apart from the photographer's pickup truck, two C-class Mercedes Benzs lead the way, followed by two sleek BMWs, then a Volkswagen Touareg and an odd Nissan X-Trail at the rear of the convoy. The groom steps out of the Volkswagen Touareg in the company of the best man, both of them clad in black Giorgio Armani classic tuxedo suits. The groom's team, totalling six men in contrasting cloud grey Dolce & Gabbana suits, also step out amid ululation from relatives and friends welcoming them from the main entrance of St Joseph's Cathedral, Gulu. They are let into the cathedral with solemn music and allowed to wait for the bride to join them. Meanwhile, an excited congregation is already in church waiting for the main event to unfold.

About 20 minutes later, the bride's team arrives in a convoy comprised of vehicles with bigger wheels; a black Mercedes station wagon is the lead followed by four similar black Toyota Harrier cars, and a station wagon BMW in the rear all decorated with green and white ribbons. The bride, matron, maids and accompanying relatives step out of the vehicles amid another round of ululations from friends and relatives in the congregation. Shortly after, they are ushered into the cathedral. The veiled bride has a rare wedding gown, white, decorated with knots and baubles and a long train that has to be hoisted. The matron has a maroon dress, and the 15 or so maids are all dressed in elegantly designed green and white dresses, apparently the colour chosen by the couple for the occasion. Videographers and photographers are busy documenting the fashion show.

Minutes later, the couple pair up, the groom on the right and bride on the left, and move to the altar in the company of flower girls, peg boys, groom and bridal teams. Slow church music synchronises the marching steps. There the priest asks the parent of the bride to present her to the groom, stating before the congregation that he has assented to the wedding. The main wedding ceremony begins with the key elements of unveiling the bride, taking the vows and signing to the effect. The unveiled bride reveals the meticulous craft of a beautician. Stephen could not believe she was the same person he had known. Her face shone with makeup, and she wore a golden necklace with matching earrings.

Meanwhile, a sumptuous meal, music, dance, cake cutting and speeches await guests at the reception venue. Gifts comprise live animals, furniture, bedding, cooking utensils, food items and more.

City weddings and the neoliberal economy

Neoliberal theory posits that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). Bronson (2009) asserts that weddings tend to be tied to the proliferation of neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism makes goods available and reiterates the notion that happiness is found through the consumption of goods (and services). The impact of the neoliberal economy on weddings has been well-documented in southern Africa. The introduction to a special issue on marriage points out:

[A] range of new – largely financial – structures, ambitions and obligations […] have come into play […] This is partly the result of an economy of desire in which, as Illouz (1997) aptly called it, a commodification of romance and a romanticisation of commodities has taken place. Marriage has thereby become the object of consumer-driven appetites of conspicuous consumption, such as for the 'white wedding', in terms of the resources required to create glamour, grandeur and prestige.

(Pauli and van Dijk 2016: 262)

None has so far analysed the neoliberal economies at work in the Ugandan wedding industry more carefully than Whitesell and Faria (2020). Using GIS, they trace out how wedding apparel and other wedding paraphernalia find their way into the Ugandan market. They illustrate this phenomenon on maps and conclude that the wedding industry in Uganda reflects the use of transnational space for vibrant and dynamic consumption with the wedding commodities coming from the US, China, UK, Dubai, India and elsewhere across all continents. 'Uganda's vibrant wedding scenes present a fascinating and instructive case study of globalisation – one that requires us to link global power-laden networks of business with intimate, embodied and everyday practices of self-presentation' (Whitesell and Faria 2020: 1276). The study is limited to Kampala, but Gulu being a new city seems to reflect much the same patterns in the wedding industry. One is tempted to ask, where is the church in all this?

Table 8.1 shows the budget for a couple to be wed at Holy Rosary church in December 2022. The detail is impressive, from video coverage down to toothpicks and socks. The total is nearly 24 million UGX, of which a modest 825,000 UGX (less than 3.5 per cent) was earmarked for the category 'liturgy'. The strictly church-related expenses included an allowance to the choir, wine for communion, money for the offertory, printing of the order of service and a contribution to the church. Consumerism is not evident here, apart perhaps from the printing of the programme, which is managed by a local firm.

Such a budget, amounting to about 6,500 USD, is very hard to realise for an average Ugandan with a middle-class wage of barely 200 USD per month. A large portion comes from contributions organised by wedding committees. Yet those who go for weddings are ultimately asked by the central organising committee to declare what they themselves can contribute. In most cases, it is almost a must that the groom and bride foot the bills for their costumes and all related costs besides providing a bull for the occasion. This means the couple should be ready to declare

Table 8.1 Summary of the budget for an urban wedding

No.	Committee	Items	Sub-total (UGX)
A	Catering	Bull, goats, beans, peas, groundnut paste, shea butter, chicken, boo, eggs, rice, Irish potatoes, posho, millet flour, onions, tomatoes, cooking oil, Royco, tomatoes, beef masala, chicken masala, pilao, sweet potatoes, matooke, salt, magadi, soap, dental sticks, paper serviettes, charcoal, firewood, soda, water, beer, sugar, tea leaves, carrots, catering service	4,406,500
B	Protocol	Invitation cards, pledge contribution forms, public address system, tags for officials, Master of Ceremonies	1,380,500
C	Bride	Gown hire, changing dress, shoes for matron and bride, handbags, necklaces, flower for bride, gloves for bride, bridal crown, ring, handkerchiefs	1,786,000
D	Flower Girls	Dress, shoes, body socks, handkerchiefs	244,000
E	Maids	Dresses, shoes, necklaces, earrings, handkerchiefs	1,136,000
F	Beauty Salon	Bride, matron, flower girls, maids	500,000
G	Cakes	Champagne, cakes	950,000
H	Groom and Party	Suits, shirts, ties, shoes, socks, handkerchiefs, peg boys	4,838,000
I	Entertainment and Audio-Visuals	Video coverage, still photos, cultural troupe	1,350,000
J	Transport	Fuel, service vehicle, bridal and groom's cars, parents' cars	3,000,000
K	Construction	Tents, chairs, mats, strings	850,000
L	Decoration	Silver package	2,000,000
M	Security	Block figure	150,000
N	Gifts	Committee gifts	500,000
O	First Aid	Block figure	75,000
P	Liturgy	Church contribution, choir, wine and host, offertory, order of mass	825,000
	Grand total		**23,961,000**

As adapted from an actual budget for a wedding that took place at Holy Rosary parish, 6 December 2022

at least 3 million UGX. One ostentatious wedding of a UN employee cost a whopping 60 million UGX (16,000 USD). Fundraising is aggressive and some realise contributions even beyond the budget, while others have to make budget cuts in order to accomplish their wedding (see Schneidermann and Otim, this volume).

The stakeholders who gain from these weddings include events management businesses – suppliers of tents and chairs, decoration packages, photography and videography services, car rental businesses, catering services, dealers in cakes and confectionery, dealers in wedding apparel and ornaments. Most of these lack local content, meaning the whole chain has connections to the global economy. Bridal and grooms' wear and ornaments imported from abroad are favourites – the more exotic the better. A Google search for wedding events service providers or wedding cakes provides a flood of sites, evidence of the aggressiveness of advertisers. The service providers package their services in very impressive ways to get customers. One such site is 'Imported Tuxedos: Suits Avenue' with contents described as 'Imported from Turkey'. The wedding business is vibrant and competitive in urban areas, thriving on appearances and entertainment, with almost no relation to the actual ritual in the church, except perhaps for the video recordings of the ceremony.

Vows and church life in rural weddings

The elite distinguish themselves with their glamourous weddings; in Namibia the non-elite struggle to wed with far fewer resources (Pauli and Dawids 2017). In Uganda, it is not only the case that rural non-elite weddings are far more modest; they also seem more closely connected to the life of the church. They are more firmly rooted in relations to the church leaders and other members of the congregation. (In this they resemble one version of urban couples, the charismatic Christians, who supported one another in preparing for weddings and held their committee meetings at the church.) In the rural areas, priestly persuasion is more effective than peer pressure or following friends' examples. Church leaders try to organise weddings of several couples at once, and they use church occasions to celebrate weddings. Visits from clerical officials such as bishops or archbishops are occasions for multiple weddings. Being married by a church official of higher rank confers special value on the wedding.

One such wedding was at St Paul Chapel in Pamin-yai in February 2022, where three couples were wed. In a service that lasted for over two hours, couples took vows, one after the other – husbands first, followed by

their wives. The marked difference with the middle-class wedding in town was that the kind of ostentation displayed in town was not a feature in the rural wedding. No flashy suits, or elegant gowns, no procession of bride's and groom's teams. Only one groom had a new-looking suit, two making do with old blazers and trousers of different colours from the blazers. The brides wore second-hand gowns. They had matrons of honour specially dressed up, but only a handful of Catholic Women's Association members with their usual Sunday uniforms assisting as maids. It appeared that the main thing was undergoing the rituals: attending the prayers to the end, taking the vows, placing the rings on partners' fingers, signing the marriage certificates and receiving the blessed bibles and rosaries as gifts.

The three couples who conducted their weddings in rural St Paul Chapel, Pamin-yai, exhibited similarity in profile with others who had their wedding in the neighbouring St Joseph Chapel Langol in 2016. On that occasion, which was timed to coincide with the archbishop's visit, 17 couples, all peasant farmers, had their collective wedding. Stephen attended mass and a reception for one of the couples in 2016 and celebrated the mass in the 2022 event. Although Covid-19 was still of concern in the 2022 ceremony, there was not much difference in the size of the congregation in attendance and the rituals involved, except that face masks were a feature in the latter event.

Receptions feature importantly in rural weddings as in urban ones, but they are held at the home of the groom rather than in rented venues. Rural homes are taken as social spaces and 'real homes' unlike urban residences (Langole 2016), which are often small. Thus, rented venues for urban receptions seem to make more sense. Even a joint wedding ceremony is followed by individual home celebrations. Since the February 2022 multiple wedding coincided with the opening of the new church, there was a grand reception organised by the central organising committee for the bishop's visit, which also served as a reception for the wedded couples. Still, the Acholi are festive people, and in each of the couple's homes there were more receptions characterised by celebrations overnight to the following day.

Stephen joined a cousin's wedding reception organised after the mass wedding involving 17 couples at St Joseph's Chapel in Langol in 2016. Here is what he observed:

> The couple gets transported from the chapel in a vehicle that is offered by a relative. They are ushered into their home compound where tents have been erected for the guests. A hired music system is blaring local music in the background as the couple arrives,

and the master of ceremonies [MC] makes some announcements, directing guests where to sit, where places of convenience for male and female are located and which big guest has arrived. The couple dance to the music a bit and are given time by the MC to change from the wedding dress to a 'changing dress'. This takes a while. Cooks are in the meantime preparing a meal for the guests in a makeshift kitchen. Music continues to blare, interrupted by the MC announcements. The couple settles and speeches begin. There is a hierarchy: the family head speaks first, followed by the Local Council 1 chairman, then a representative of the groom and later of the bride. Finally, the groom makes a thank you speech followed by the bride.

Meals are served preceded by a short prayer to bless the food. Guests queue and get their platefuls of beans, posho, rice, maybe a piece of cassava or sweet potatoes, a piece or two of meat and a plastic bottle of soda. Local spirits may not be part of the budget, but they somehow become visible, and the tipsy people begin dancing and partying until the following day.

Rough budgets for four rural weddings are shown in Table 8.2. They do not show the costs of the liturgy, but these were modest since they were shared with others who wed at the same time. These budgets are indeed small; none exceeds 3 million UGX. They would not cover an average expenditure for the bridal team alone in the middle-class budget. Some of the comments the peasants made in respect to the expenditures were that: 'Weddings depend on interest, not budget'. 'Wedding can be modest, but people are interested in fame'. 'Now people think wedding is possible, having seen us [who are not rich] go through it'.

Interestingly, of the four rural couples interviewed, only one of them had completed the traditional marriage, though all had obtained the wife's family consent in clearance for the wedding to proceed. This suggests that indeed weddings are possible without completion of traditional marriage that, if mandatory, would have caused delays and attracted additional costs.

The mode of fundraising in the rural setting is quite different from the ones popular in urban settings. For instance, Geoffrey told his children to contribute 100,000 UGX (27 USD) each and sold a huge tree for timber at 200,000 UGX (54 USD). He asked his son who is a *boda boda* taxi operator to borrow 500,000 UGX (135 USD) from their association (though in the end he opted to borrow only 300,000 UGX (81 USD)). The offer of vehicles came from the sister-in-law. There are some significant

Table 8.2 Estimated expenditure for rural wedding

S/N	Family	Items in kind	Estimated expenditure (UGX)
1.	Geoffrey	1 cow, sodas contributed by neighbours, 3 fuelled vehicles as offer from sister-in-law.	3,000,000
2.	Charles	1 cow, 3 goats, 1 chicken, public address system.	2,500,000
3.	George	10 kgs of beef, 2 goats, 3 chickens, 10 cartons of soda.	2,800,000
4.	Quirino	Contribution of chickens and drinks.	3,000,000

NB: These were estimates since there were no budget documents kept by the rural respondents.

contributions from friends; for example, for Charles, friends contributed up to 500,000 UGX (135 USD). Quirino too admits relatives and friends contributed quite significantly. So social capital is indeed important to support both urban and rural weddings.

Alternatives and choices

To be valid, weddings must take place in a church licensed by the Ugandan Registration Services Bureau mandated by the Ugandan state to legalise marriages. In 2018, there were 2,662 churches listed, mostly Catholic and Anglican (Buule 2018). By 2021, the list had grown to include more Pentecostal and other churches (Uganda Registration Services Bureau 2021).

The place of weddings is mostly influenced by proximity and where the couple attends prayer as well as the quality of preachers from the churches. The choice of months for weddings are mostly during the dry seasons following harvests. The statistics indicate that December is the most popular month for weddings. Christmas is the season for giving, so couples can hope for generosity from family and friends. This is when most people have taken breaks from their work and when relatives and friends living far away come back home for holidays and are therefore able to attend to the weddings, reflecting the importance of social capital in wedding decisions.

For middle-class weddings, the choice of church for the wedding was influenced by size, quality of the preaching and denomination. Cost and proximity influenced the choice of wedding reception location, with

the more endowed preferring expensive venues. For rural weddings, choice of venue is more to do with proximity and festivals such as the opening of the church and the archbishop's visit, with receptions held at the groom's home, as we saw.

For those who wish to wed formally, a simple civil ceremony at a government office has long been a possibility, but one that very few couples have chosen. Another simple alternative was pushed by the president at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. He warned against what he called 'hexagonal' weddings, the crowded assemblies of hundreds of guests. Instead, he urged 'scientific weddings' with 10–20 participants in congruence with the 'standard operating procedures' of the lockdown. Stephen found an increase in church weddings at two Gulu churches in 2021, and indeed several interlocutors noted the welcome possibility of a church wedding that was far less expensive. But many asserted that discouraging big gatherings led to a fall in the number of church weddings (Mwaka and Ochola 2021). People who had planned a big wedding postponed it, rather than hold a minimal event. One newspaper article about the postponement of festivities quoted a 'mindset and change management specialist' about the desirability of a big celebration:

> Every individual connected to you in some way expects an invitation to your wedding as an expression of your appreciation to them. From your kindergarten teacher to the LC1 chairman who has stamped your document. Also, the more people one is able attract to their function, the more respect he/she commands in the community. (Batte 2020)

The suggestion is that a small-scale wedding simply cannot provide the recognition that is more important than the exchange of vows itself.

In contrast to small-scale weddings, another alternative is the collective ceremony, where more than one couple are united at the same time. These range from multiple weddings of two or three couples to the mass weddings that capture newspaper headlines (e.g. Kamugasa and Ssejengo 2004; Shaban 2019) and are available for the world to see on YouTube. Mass weddings were first favoured by Pentecostal churches but have since been adopted by the mainstream Catholic and Anglican churches (Monitor 2012). The Kitgum Catholic Mission planned to wed 500 couples at once, as part of the church's centenary celebration in February 2015. In the end, only 27 couples celebrated their wedding together, but still, as Alava (2017) emphasises, this was a substantial number compared to the usual low rate of weddings at that church.

Mass weddings are organised by churches at a cleric's initiative. They appear as an easy, inexpensive alternative to an individual wedding. One bishop who united 57 couples at once, in a newly established diocese in south-western Uganda, explained that he wanted it for those who could not afford to wed and those who did not have time to organise a wedding (Monitor 2012). But they are also a highlight in the life of a church. Like the one planned in Kitgum and the rural Alero mass weddings, they are often part of the establishment of a new church, an anniversary or a visit from a high church official. They are celebrated as a confirmation of Christian commitment and reflect well on the church and its leader, even garnering publicity in national media. It is not only the couple who recognise, and are recognised for, their belonging to the church. The church itself gains recognition for its success in solemnising good Christian marriages.

How does it matter?

In trying to understand how it matters to be married in church, we can consider people's stated reasons, but we must also reflect more broadly on the values that people seek to realise in church weddings. These are of three kinds: personal security; Christian virtue; and social recognition.

Personal security

Both rural and urban people said that a church wedding would secure their marriage: 'Wedding enhances spousal love and unity'. It secures a partner and helper. Commitment is seen as important for the children, as well. 'One needs to become more committed as the children grow'. Perhaps the implication is that one should give an example to the children that 'ours' is a family, sealed by a religious rite and unshakable, something to emulate for your own family when you get one. Indeed, two rural interlocutors claimed they married in church because they were inspired by their own parents, who were themselves wedded.

Couples who receive instruction preceding the wedding know each other well, having lived together for years. The instruction urges *re*cognition in the sense of appreciating the partner again, knowing the person and the relationship in a deeper way. In the Catholic church, holy family ideals are stressed. The theme of loving each other as couples runs through the instruction. 'If you have a listening ear, there is no way you can turn your back on your partner', said a respondent. The instruction about love, of course, is not just restricted to the couple; it is about the

family, which means love that exudes to the offspring and dependents as well. 'A family that prays together, stays together' is one of the popular sayings, and the prayer, a time for recollection on how to live with love, is not just restricted to prayers on Sundays. Ideally, prayers are held in the morning, during meals and in the evenings before retiring to bed (*lega me otyeno*).

The personal security that ideally is enhanced by a church wedding is just that: security and not certainty, insurance not assurance. Love and faithfulness are not guaranteed. Although wedded women may have outside affairs, the far more common risk to a marriage is that the man may have lovers or even bring another wife. Susan remembers that, in the past, the status of 'ring wife' distinguished a church-recognised partner from others the husband might acquire. She once attended a wedding which was said to have been required by the bride as a condition to agreeing that her husband could bring a second wife. Today, legal recognition of the union is important as a source of security, especially for women. 'A wedded woman would not have much problem laying claim to the deceased husband's property; actually, she should be the legitimate successor with the letter of administration to her late husband's estate', said a respondent. It would be hard to contest inheritance rights of a wedded woman as opposed to one who is not wedded. The Succession Act as amended in 2022 defines a spouse as 'married in accordance with the laws of Uganda' (Government of Uganda 2022).

Christian virtue

While Christian institutions impose negative sanctions against those who are not wed, churches also have positive ways of encouraging people to sanctify their marriages. These depend on forms of recognition that acknowledge wedded couples as virtuous members of the church. In the Anglican church, two organisations, the very respectable Mothers' Union and Fathers' Union, are reserved for those who are wedded in church.

During Catholic church services, Stephen hears the priest asking those who have completed their weddings to raise their left hands showing their wedding rings. He exhorts others to follow suit and asks who has plans to wed within the year. At one Anglican wedding Susan attended, a catechist addressed the crowd. 'Whose hand looks like this?' he challenged, holding up his hand with its wedding ring. Failure to adhere to the church virtues can also lead to shaming. Stephen attended masses where the priest asked: 'Members of the Holy Family, raise up your left hands!' The members raised up their hands, flashing wedding rings.

'You see! Those who have not raised their hands, what are you waiting for? When are you coming so that you as well join the Holy Family?' This may be embarrassing to the laggards, but it serves to appreciate publicly those who have wed.

A couple enters a different category when wedded in the Catholic church. They are recognised as members of the Holy Family. Year in, year out, there is a special session for the wedded couples to renew their vows during the Feast of the Holy Family, a Sunday following Christmas. The Holy Family portrays the family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus of Nazareth as the ideal family from whom all families should get inspiration. It is a day of pomp for those with wedding rings and sets them apart from the other believers, many of whom may still be living in sin as unwedded husband and wife. Most importantly, it is a day when the couple renew their commitment to each other by repeating the matrimonial vows.

As it happens at the Catholic cathedral in Gulu during the feast day, the Holy Family members take the lead in reading the gospel of the day. They have a special session for church offertory. Usually specially dressed for the occasion, the couples are asked to step in front, in pairs, close to the alter to renew their vows. Beginning with the husbands, the incantation goes something to this effect: 'I promise to love you, honour you, comfort and keep you. I pledge to be by your side in sickness and in health; in times of want and in times of plenty; for better or for worse, for the rest of our lives'. The wives repeat the same vow. This perhaps is something envied by those not yet wedded and prompts them to join the Holy Family fraternity as well. Indeed, one of the interlocutors from rural Pamin-yai confessed that he assisted as a catechist, which enabled him to attend several meetings of the Holy Family from where he got the inspiration to wed his wife.

Even at death, it matters that one has wed in church. Stephen attended burials where the deceased passed on without making the wedding vows. In such cases, the priests usually offer religious services but not full mass. They do not mince words, pointing out that the deceased passed on in sin and so does not qualify for a full mass. They tell Christians to do the bidding, wed and have a befitting burial when they die, a befitting burial where a full mass is held, and the holy eucharist sacrament can only be enjoyed by 'prepared' Christians who attend the burial. On some occasions, we heard about 'bedside weddings', a situation where someone is either too sick or too old and wants to pass on as a complete Christian, having achieved this important church virtue.

People are moved to wed through these means of encouragement, but some of Stephen's respondents mentioned other sources of inspiration. They accepted the priests' encouragement, or they jumped on the occasion of the bishop's visit to their parish because it is a privilege to be wed by a person of such stature. Some said simply that 'It is the way of Christians and the bible'.

Social value

For both urban and rural residents, a wedding is an achievement, valued by others and satisfying for the protagonists. It is an accomplishment that remains an unreachable ideal for many, but nevertheless continues to serve as an ideal, if not an expectation, for people when they reach a certain age. 'It is the right thing to do at our age', said a rural respondent. 'We are ageing and we have gathered the resources. It is a sign of maturity, you gain respect', said some of the urban interlocutors.

During traditional marriage, the popular caution is: 'Do not think you have finished, proceed and put the ring' (*Pe itam ni dong ityeko, yube iket lagit*). This is a common desire, also on the part of in-laws who have received marriage payments. No wonder, when asked for reasons why he decided to wed, a respondent answered, 'to appreciate the wife's family'. By fulfilling the family's request to 'put the ring', he gets recognised and appreciated as a proper son-in-law.

A wedding is a social prestation where hospitality is distributed to guests. On what they would do differently about their weddings if they were given a second chance, some respondents expressed the view that they would have devoted longer to planning, making the day more colourful and giving back to friends. It is in some sense a gift to the couple's community, however that community might be defined. It is a recognition and appreciation of suspension in a web of social relations; otherwise, a couple could go to the magistrate for a small private affair or follow the president's advice for a 'scientific' wedding with few participants.

Of course, a wedding is also an opportunity for others to recognise the two people, as individuals and as a couple. Whether as relatives or colleagues and friends, they acknowledge the bride and groom by contributing and attending. But they also assess the way in which the wedding is performed. A couple gains recognition by a well-executed ceremony, and may lose appreciation if it does not meet the standards of the community involved. This is abundantly clear in the case of the extravagant urban weddings, where style is performed to the appreciation of middle-class friends and colleagues. As we have seen, a lengthy checklist of elements ensures that

the event is excellent in every way. The guests are knowledgeable judges of smartness. Recognition as appreciation and esteem is at stake. Prestige accrues to the choreographed performance. That is why the proposal at the wedding launch that opened this chapter was impossible. The wedding could not just be done on the spur of the moment.

However, it is not only the opulent urban weddings that are submitted to assessment. Rural, more modest ones are also appreciated. 'People only fear they may be laughed at if the wedding is not well done', said an interlocutor from rural Alero. Susan remembers a rural wedding when the bride tried on the three gowns that a local woman was willing to rent at a modest cost. None of them fitted and the bride, in annoyance, declared that she would just wear her own *gomesi*. A relative sniffed derisively: 'If she weds in a *gomesi*, I'm not coming'. A rural church wedding brings recognition too, and that means it must include certain elements.

Conclusion

In addition to their religious convictions, the Anglican and Catholic missionaries who brought the practice of church weddings to Uganda were animated by a 'civilising mission'. Their assumptions about what was proper included: 'the capitalist ideology of the desirability of hard work, competition and the possession of material goods [… and] a specific model of that foundational European socio-political organisatory system now termed gender' (Harris 2017: 1). In some ways, both of these themes are evident in practices of church weddings today. Certainly, the elaborate urban weddings celebrate capitalism, material goods and competition. All weddings, urban or rural, affirm a model of gender based on monogamy and lifelong commitment. Yet to stop with this view of what church weddings are about would be to ignore the ways in which they matter in terms of recognition – if not as an upwardly mobile couple appreciated by friends and colleagues, then as virtuous church members and respectable partners of long standing. It would remove the social interaction and inter-subjectivity that are the essence of social life.

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9

The future tense of marrying: time and tensions in bride wealth and education in Kwapa and Ik

Lotte Meinert

Many futures

Future *Simple*
Future *Continuous*
Future *Perfect*
Future *Perfect Continuous*

I will not be able to marry
Too many cows at high, high speed
I tried my level best
But babies now and hearts are broken

Is there a *future simple* form in real, real life?
As in: 'I will marry the one I love'?
Life is not simple, my friend
That *future simple* life has gone

For me I made my choice
A man will wear me out
Education will be my husband
That is my *future perfect,* perfect

Daughter, my daughter, I tell you
Just accept the man
From there it is *future continuous*
You will be enduring forever

Introduction: how are we going to marry?

Paulo sat in a white plastic chair in the shade of a lush mango tree in his family compound in Kwapa in eastern Uganda. He leaned forward towards me, turned his palms upwards, and said:

> We are the coming generation … so we will have to marry, but how are we going to marry? … I will be marrying, I want it of course, but so far, I have tried my level best, even twice, but there is no way I can meet those high expectations [of bride wealth] … Her parents are requesting too many cows and, moreover, at high speed. I gave one cow, but could not manage more at the time … so the parents called her back to their home and the children are here with me now, without a mother, and I am without a wife.

As I conversed with Paulo who, at the time of writing, was 36 years old and a long-time friend, in the compound where I had done fieldwork when Paulo was about 10 years old, I was struck by how he has continued to talk about his plans of marrying in the future tense. He had already attempted to marry twice and failed to meet bride wealth expectations. The ideal and hope of marrying resounded through his use of the grammatical future tense, which seemed to erase the failures of the past and clear space for new possibilities. At other times, the future tense held heavy disappointment and a form of cruel optimism (Berlant 2011). Paulo and I had been in contact over the years by phone and WhatsApp, and during my visits to Kwapa about every other year since 1997. I had followed the ups and downs of Paulo's partnerships and his children's movements between parents. Naively, I kept expecting that he would permanently settle with a wife and children, but it did not happen. This was the case for many of the young men and women in the cohort I had been following in Kwapa since they left school in 1998. For this group of young adults, the future tense of marrying seemed to become a permanent tension.

When we talk about the future, we use grammatical tenses, such as: *future simple* – we will marry; *future continuous* – I will be marrying; *future perfect* – they will have married; and *future perfect continuous* – we will have been marrying. In this chapter, drawing on the inspiration I have gained from conversations with Paulo and others, I use tense as a heuristic tool to consider women and men's concerns about marriage and bride wealth – along with the temporalities and tensions these practices create – in two areas of eastern and northern Uganda where I have done long-term fieldwork. Based on 62 interviews and six focus

group discussions, conducted in English, Ateso and Icetot, with younger and older women and men in Ik county and Kwapa sub-county, carried out between 2018 and 2023, I describe different temporalities in terms of time practices and time emotions regarding marriage, bride wealth and bride service. The chapter considers how gender experiences and expectations were projected into anticipations, worries, hopes and speculations about future partnerships. How the future tense of marrying was imagined and experienced varied greatly across the two contexts, and depended on generation, gender and educational background. To tease out these diversities, I employed comparison as a method. In Kwapa in eastern Uganda, young men were increasingly expected to bring bride wealth in terms of cows and cash. In the Ik context in northern Uganda, men were supposed to provide bride service in the form of labour over time, supplemented by gifts of hoes, goats, honey and other items, replicating exactly what their fathers-in-law did and gave. This diversity in customs and changes had far-reaching implications for both young men and women, as well as their parents' generation and their (future) children. Schooling possibilities in the two areas varied greatly, and, I argue, these divergent education experiences influenced future marriage temporalities profoundly, with consequences for young people, their parents and children.

I explore the future tense of marrying in these two contexts, not to analyse grammar in the languages, but to point out the differences these variations made in terms of everyday concerns, social tensions, cohesion and time practices. In Kwapa, some of the trends include: fewer people getting married, bride wealth expectations inflating wildly and many young men and women focusing on formal education. In Ik county, marriage rates are unusually stable, bride service and bride wealth exchanges have been modest, pre-set and stretched over long time periods, and only very few people have gone to school. This comparison highlights some of the changes and concerns about marriage and bride wealth in relation to economy and education, as well as gender and generational transformations in these two places. Specifically, I discuss what difference various temporalities of bride wealth practices and expectations have meant, and what difference education has made in relation to social cohesion and the future tense of marriage.

Marrying in these two contexts has meant being in the process of creating social cohesion in terms of love and family relationships, which were often full of tensions. Marrying has entailed making a conjugal relation socially recognised between families, through communication, acknowledgement, giving bride wealth and, in Ik county, doing work for

in-laws. Conjugal relations have rarely been formally officialised in state bureaucracy, but some couples hope to eventually have a church wedding in the future. Marrying has entailed a process of social recognition (Carsten et al. 2021; Reece 2019), and, I argue, adding to other scholars' work on time and marriage (Baral et al. 2021; Bourdieu 2002; Carsten et al. 2021; Comaroff and Roberts 1977, 1981; Kriqe and Comaroff 1981; Kuper 1982; Livingston 2003; Pauli and van Dijk 2016; Solway 2016), an ongoing time practice especially oriented towards the future.

The practice of future time in this process of creating social cohesion is remarkable – it stretches over long periods, often lifetimes, and beyond lifetimes, towards the future. This time practice stitches two people and their families together across generations over time, with the purpose of sticking together in the future. This is not only about ideas and visions for the future; it also entails a practice of anticipating the future. Actions in the present point towards the future; working in the gardens of the parents-in-law as a son-in-law 'to be' proves how well the young man will be able to take care of a family in the future, and simultaneously provides labour and care for the parents-in-law in the present with the future harvest. Giving of bride wealth – often partly and gradually – also holds a future orientation as a promise that the son-in-law will provide and care for the family, including the parents-in-law, also in the time of crisis.

Yet, time practices of the future often create friction and frustration when resources are scarce and when parties disagree. Relationships – between lovers and between families – are often frail and sometimes break. This occurs, I show, when parties are on different timelines, have different paces and hold different temporal versions of the future: How far is the future and how fast should something happen? Future time practices are obviously not the only reason why some marriages fail or succeed, but here I hone in on the future time practice aspect that shines a light on the hopes and fears of young couples and their families.

Schooling, temporality and generations

Schooling and formal education are major transformative processes in many young people's lives, not least in relation to acquiring and embodying specific ways of structuring time and thinking about the future (Bourdieu and Passeron 2000; Meinert 2009; Serpell 1993). Ideas about scheduling and progressing acquired through schooling carry a different orientation towards the future, compared to ideas acquired through farming about cultivating through circulation, or through business about investment, speculation and profit (Marchetta and Sahn 2016).

Close to a century ago, Evans-Pritchard (1939 [1951]) showed how the Nuer had two parallel conceptions of time: an ecological calendar that followed nature, i.e. 'the cattle clock', and a social structural time that regulated people's relations and actions. Evans-Pritchard focused on how the two conceptions of time worked together. With schooling, religion, business and many other changes, other conceptions of time (e.g. terms and school fees, weeks and working days) have also become part of the social time sphere. At times, these different perceptions and time practices have clashed when people were not in the same 'time regime', not least when different time regimes were brought together and practised in relation to love and marrying. Time entails not only a question about ideas and perceptions; time is closely related to resources, money and care.

Local economies have changed profoundly over the decades spanning the last three generations, especially in Kwapa. Education has contributed significantly to this change. The standard of living has gone up for many, but expectations have increased much further, along with inequality. Many families have experienced forms of poverty they did not expect. For some parents, acquiring bride wealth and other resources has become a matter of urgency. The rhythm of giving bride wealth in Kwapa used to follow a sibling dynamic: what comes in for the sister is used by the brother. This time rhythm has accelerated or even ceased to be followed, and other more urgent time regimes, based on parents' critical needs, have been forwarded to (future) sons-in-law.

In Kwapa, the rate of marriage has decreased, and exchange of bride wealth has nearly collapsed in practice. Instead, families have invested in education for their future. Yet, most potential spouses and their parents still regarded giving bride wealth as an ideal and aspired to practise this. Unfortunately, aspirations were far from economic realities, and tensions arose. As a consequence, relationships often collapsed amid this tension between expectations and possibilities: What are the temporal and generational consequences of these changes? The parent generation, who were mostly married themselves and used to expect and be part of the general exchange of bride wealth, had invested in their children's future but were not socially entitled to reciprocation in the way they used to with bride wealth. However, they often still expected some kind of reciprocity for the school fees they paid. Children who were born in relationships that were not formalised posed questions about filiation. These new uncertainties created questions and tensions between generations.

In Ik county, the situation was different. Almost all adults still married, and bride wealth was mainly given in the form of bride service (labour), supplemented by gifts of hoes, goats, honey and, ideally, concluded with a bull. Almost no women had gone to school, and only few men had, but education landscapes were beginning to change rapidly. In this part of the country, marriage rates and bride wealth practices had not changed significantly, but practices of arranged marriages were declining as most young people wished to choose their own partner, changing generational dynamics.

In both places, the temporality and sentiments of bride wealth were regarded as essential: the manner in which expectations were presented between generations; the words used for bride wealth as 'payment', 'gifts', 'recognition', 'care', 'offerings' or 'work'; the tempo with which this was given; and the implications of knowing about the other party's life situation. The ideal of a continuous long-term recognition through exchange and care relationships between sons-in-law and families-in-law was hard to realise smoothly. When expectations and realities clashed, tensions became increasingly intense with anticipation and disappointment suspended into the future. As pointed out by Reece (2022) in Botswana, marriage, bride wealth and kinship are often experienced as forms of conflict and crisis; but these are not simply destructive, they are also constitutive of kinship and other relations.

Marriage and love as time practices

This discussion is linked to current as well as older debates on marriage and temporality in the anthropological literature. In particular, I am inspired by the edited volume on *Marriage in Past, Present and Future Tense* (Carsten et al. 2021) as a lens to analyse ethnographically the future tenses of marriage, and to listen into and highlight the double *entendre* of the term tenses: as both orientations in time and as social tensions.

The temporality of marriages and bride wealth has long been discussed in the literature from various African situations (Comaroff and Roberts 1977, 1981; Evans-Pritchard 1939 [1951]; Radcliffe-Brown 1950). Comaroff and Roberts (1977) have pointed out how marriages are long-term processes rather than statuses, and how people in Botswana, even the elderly, often responded to questions about being married with a 'not yet', because bride wealth prestations had not been finalised. More recently, Solway (2016) has described the changing temporality from 'slow marriages' in the past to 'fast *bogadi*' exchanges in contemporary

marriages and weddings in Botswana. Rituals and exchanges that used to occur over decades are now expected within narrower time frames. Marriage used to be a long-term process of 'becoming' through continuous gift giving and wide-ranging exchange. The marital status was indeterminate but gradually gained solidity with public recognition (Solway 2016). Accompanying the speeding up of marital prestations, the debt that used to be socially productive for creating relationships had turned disruptive. We see some of the same changes in Ugandan middle-class marriages, where the emphasis has been placed on the collection of funds in wedding committees at a faster pace than bride wealth gifts (see Schneidermann and Otim, this volume; and Langole and Whyte, this volume).

As mentioned, I use the grammatical tenses as a heuristic analytical tool to consider and articulate women's, men's and different generations' concerns about marriage and bride wealth, and the temporalities and tensions these practices create in these two areas in Uganda. If we consider marriage and bride wealth as a form of time practice, what sort of analytical possibilities appear? Can the replication of former generations in Ik county's bride wealth practices be considered a possible approach to contain the flux of political economy and history? Temporal terms such as endurance, perseverance, hope, patience, expectation, speculation and long-term care stand out in the interviews. If we think about love as a social time practice, what emerges?

Many young men in Kwapa wished and 'tried to marry', but were under pressure to provide amounts of bride wealth (six to eight cows – or the equivalent in cash), which they could not manage, due to changing livelihoods, declining income opportunities and increasing expectations. Young women in Kwapa often felt squeezed between their parents' expectations of bride wealth, their own hopes and their boyfriends' capabilities of providing. Not all, but many young men and women hoped for a *future simple*: 'We will marry'. They longed for a *future perfect* at some point in their lives, and in the eulogies at their burials: 'We will have been married'. But these future forms seemed increasingly unreachable for the young generation in Kwapa; thus, fewer adults married, compared to their parents' generation. They said that they 'would have been married' if circumstances were different, but realities found them in non-formalised relationships that often broke up. The 'would-have-been' marriages and ideas about lives that 'could-have-been' lingered as imaginations just next to, and part of reality (see Louw, forthcoming, about realities that 'could-have-been').

Some of the relationships of the younger generation were very long-term, even though there was no formal agreement, while others were short-term and changing. Most of those relationships were serial monogamous, with some occasional overlaps between one lover and the next. The status of children who were born within these relationships and their future affiliation were often uncertain (see Whyte, this volume). Considering the many expressed concerns about bride wealth in Kwapa, it might seem surprising that all persons (except one young man) in Kwapa – despite position, gender, context and education – were in favour of bride wealth systems to continue in the future. Giving bride wealth was a valued practice of showing respect between families and across generations. Yet most agreed that expectations as to bride wealth sizes had become too high and needed adjustment for marriages to be possible for the majority of young people in the future.

In Ik county, bride wealth payments, due to the generational replication system, had not inflated as they had in Kwapa sub-county. Young men did bride service work in the gardens of their parents-in-law and often continued to do so for many years (see our short film about this: Meinert, Lochul and Segera 2024). The bride service (and other contributing factors) meant that some couples ended up living with the wife's family (uxorilocal), because the husband had to provide labour in their gardens. The system of bride service stressed long-term temporalities and ideas of continued sharing and reciprocity – compared to bride wealth paid as an exchange with more finitude. Bride wealth was open-ended as well, in the sense that it was supposed to be concluded with a final bull (*Nyamburo*), but this was rarely realised. Sometimes, the bull was given at the woman's burial as a final concluding gift, but it was supposed to be an ongoing debt that could be requested in case of crisis or emergency. Other forms of bride wealth – hoes, goats, honey, etc. – could be postponed too. There is an interesting distinction between the nature of work – bride service as a practice and bride wealth that is presented as material goods. Bride service is not something that can be easily returned, which makes it potentially more binding than material exchange; hence, this produces a strong emphasis on continuity over time.

The grammatical tense of marrying for young men in Ik county seemed to be *future continuous* – 'I will be marrying'. In this sense, men made a continuous effort to provide labour to their families-in-law. Young Ik women's concerns regarding marriage were mainly about not having a full say in whom they would marry. They felt pressured by parents to take a man, so their parents would have a son-in-law and access to labour. Ik women stressed that tensions over bride wealth, bride service, food and

resources often caused domestic violence. Some Ik women, who would like to get out of violent relationships, felt double pressure from their family-in-law and their own family, due to bride wealth and bride service: 'They tell you that they have already given or received, so you will have to endure'. Older women in Ik county were concerned about being taken care of by their families in case their husband died – *the future perfect continuous*, but often with a question mark at the end: 'I will have been marrying, but will they continue to look after me, when I am old?' In the following, I present four cases and discussions with men and women in Kwapa and Ik county.[1]

Young men in Kwapa: 'how are we going to marry?'

The economy in Kwapa sub-county has been dominated by a mix of farming and herding. It is located close to the Kenyan border, so there has been a lot of trade in the area. Schooling has had a long history in the region (the first schools were established about 100 years ago). Education institutions have been stable, and most young people have attained some level of primary or secondary education. The family settlement pattern has been virilocal, and migration for work has become frequent in the younger generations for both males and females. Polygyny has been common, mostly in better-off families, and more often in the older generation than the younger.

Sentiments about 'these days' and the future have largely been dominated by disappointment and disillusionment. Especially young, educated men have become frustrated about not being able to find salaried jobs. Their hopes of progress and social mobility have often been disappointed. Young women have expressed fewer frustrations, but many have also felt caught between expectations for the future and possibilities of realising dreams. Older generations – especially among men – have often sounded nostalgic about the past and frustrated about the prospects of not receiving bride wealth from sons-in-law in the future.

Paulo, who I introduced in the beginning of this chapter, lived in Asinge in Kwapa sub-county in a relatively large rural home with his aging parents, some of his brothers and their families. He has four children, and he has tried to marry two potential wives. They have both left him, because he failed to pay the full amount of bride wealth their parents requested. Paulo recounted:

> I married my first wife when I was in Senior 2 and got a son with her. It was not a planned pregnancy, but I wanted to marry her …

She also wanted that. But her parents got very harsh with me. They were talking of defilement, police, fines … I managed to pay the fine to them – one cow – but they were asking for more and they could not be patient. I was still a student in school trying to beg her parents to be patient. 'Let me finish school first and get a job …', but the parents called her home when our son was not even one year old. She took the boy with her. He was still breast feeding, and they left like that … It was not her wish to leave, but her parents forced her to come home … After some time, they returned the boy, and I am taking care of him alone.

After Senior 4, I got a second wife, and I have three children with her. But she is also not with me. She has gone to their place because of the same – *akituk nu emanyit* – cows for marrying. Her parents, they asked for six cows, plus cash, ropes and dresses. I have managed to pay two so far but remain with four cows. This is what has made her leave … This thing has brought a problem. The woman decided to steal some of my property because of that dowry pressure. While I was bathing, she stole money I had in my pocket for a driver's license, and she left immediately without my knowledge, leaving the children behind. She went all the way to Arua, where her parents live, to give that money to them. The pressure of the parents is what brings conflicts.

In Kwapa, young men all had unique stories about marriage and 'trying to marry', but the time pressure of bride wealth was a common theme in all of them. There was a feeling that the parent generation was blocking their futures, and that young men constantly had to realign their practices and expectations. They experienced the expectations and demands of parents-in-law as very short-term and explained by general economic pressures. According to them, education played a role in relation to bride wealth; parents who were educated, or had educated their daughters, were less likely to demand high dowries.

However, the young men in a focus group discussion pointed out that, in their experience, it was the other way around. Emoding, one of the young men, said:

You can marry a woman who is educated, and so the parents of that girl could expect to get from the daughter, because she will be earning. But they will argue that they made an investment, paid school fees for many years, and now they need to see the return of that money.

Martin argued:

> These are parents of the past, who are not educated. As a parent of the future, I will not demand like that. I will educate my children and I will not ask for extra dowry, because my daughter is educated. Just some small gifts, but not something that will kill a young man.

The others in the group liked Martin's future intentions, but reminded him that his perspective might change with time. 'Parents can become greedy just because of poverty … They grow old, and if they don't have anything, dowry is a way to get something', Emojong added.

The young men all seemed to long for a *future simple* form of marriage ('We will marry') and for a *future perfect* ('We will have been married') to formulate this in grammar terms. But these futures seemed increasingly unreachable due to the cross-pressures of increased bride wealth and reduced possibilities of livelihoods. Accessing land for farming became increasingly difficult in eastern Uganda and, even though many were educated, only a minority managed to get a paid job. They have reluctantly stayed in the rural areas, and eventually tried their luck for a job in town, but few have succeeded. However, as previously mentioned, despite the fact that all the young men expressed these tensions and stresses about bride wealth, all – except one – were in favour of keeping bride wealth systems in the future.

Many young men in Kwapa aspired to marry using bride wealth but often began relationships while still in school. Lacking a steady income, they relied on money to navigate these commitments. Yet they were often under a time pressure by the girlfriend and the girlfriend's parents to start providing for the girl, start introductions and provision of bride wealth. As a consequence, many relationships collapsed due to these expectations and (lack of) opportunities.

Women in Kwapa: 'education is my first husband'

Namonday was 32 years old when we last met. I have known her since she was 16 years old and in her last year of primary school. She was now married and had two children with her husband. Their daughter sadly passed away when she was only two years old due to malaria. The older son was attending secondary school and doing well. Namonday completed a diploma in development studies, but she had been working as a teacher for five years in a primary school:

After my course, I was hoping for a job in development, but I never succeeded. It has been difficult. You know there is discrimination because of my disability [she has a short leg and narrow hips due to polio]. People might think I cannot do a job, even though I can. But, overall, I am happy not to be sitting at home.

Namonday's husband Peter was a self-employed truck driver. They met when he was visiting a sister in Kwapa, where Namonday grew up:

We exchanged contacts and started relating. I went to college, but we communicated, and after I finished, he went to my parents and told them he wanted to marry me. They gave him a go ahead, even though he had not paid anything. We stayed for five years, and then he took dowry to my parents, as they had requested: Six cows, six goats, small items, clothes, cooking oil, sugar, paraffin. He is a good son-in-law; my parents like him. He does not mistreat me, he does not beat me, in fact, he respects me.

When the bride wealth was paid, Namonday's parents gave the couple their blessing to wed in church: 'We will wed, but not yet. We first want to finish building our house in the village and take our son through education. Maybe if he does well, he will go to university … being the only child, we can support him well'. Namonday explained that in her family the mantra had always been 'education first'. Her father was a teacher, and he had always emphasised education as the most important and primary investment: 'You can give your child money or land, but someone can take it away from them, but no one can take education out of your child – it will always be hers or his own'. Namonday had followed her father's advice and went to school and university before doing much about partners and marriage.

Some young women in Kwapa said 'Education is my husband' and indicated that they would not get married but would take care of themselves. Others used education to postpone marriage and said: 'Education is my first husband, the other husband will come later'. The timing of schooling, having children and marrying was something young women thought about and had to manoeuvre carefully, just like the women in Cameroun that Johnson-Hanks (2006) wrote about and how they navigated these 'vital conjunctures'. In regard to Tanzania, Stambach (2013 [2000]) wrote about senior secondary female students who also indicated that, 'Education is my husband'.

Returning to Namonday's story in eastern Uganda, losing a daughter was extra painful, because the daughter was the last child she would ever conceive. She was concerned that this would influence the stability of her marriage:

> I had to have both children with c-section because of my disability. So, my husband was worried about my life during the last c-section, and he told the doctors to tie my tubes, without my knowing. Now when the second child passed on, the parents and sisters of my husband told him, 'You cannot just stay with only one child. You better marry another woman, so you can have more children'. That was a very big blow for me. But my husband stood his ground and responded: 'If that is what God has planned for us, let us be blessed with that one child'. He has not taken another wife despite a lot of pressure from the parents and sisters. You see, many here think that if you have many children, you will be wealthy … they can even think about the bride wealth they think they are going to get in the future.

From Namonday's point of view, giving bride wealth is a good and responsible practice: 'It can make you feel good as the daughter of the home to see something given to the parents who took care of you'. The problem, according to Namonday, is if parents start speculating about how much bride wealth they can acquire for daughters and take advantage of it.

The payment of bride wealth in Namonday's case was unusual in the sense that it was given in one go and finalised. It was also unusual since the parents were patient in the beginning and did not put pressure on the young couple. Some of the older women we spoke with had their bride wealth given in entirety over the years (three to seven cows), but none of the younger women had theirs concluded (their parents asked for six to eight cows, but had only received between one and two). Almost all the other women said that the price and pressure of bride wealth had become too much – also from the point of view of their positions as daughters, wives and mothers: 'It is not good when your husband is pressured to pay more by your parents, and you get caught in the middle as a daughter and a wife'; 'It is painful as a mother when you see your son struggling and cannot help your son pay, and the wife leaves him'. Despite the pains and difficulties of paying bride wealth, in the opinion of the women in our discussions, the bride wealth system should continue: 'Bringing up a child is not easy. Parents should also be rewarded, but the expectations and number of cows should not go too high'.

Many of the women from Kwapa wished for both education and a husband. They were longing for a *future simple* and a *future perfect* of marrying, but experienced many difficulties due to increased bride wealth. Some thought that one of the reasons for increased bride wealth was education: because many parents had invested in their daughter's schooling, they expected some return. Young women in Kwapa were often in school when they started their first serious relationship. Most of the young women I spoke to had hoped for the ideal of marrying with bride wealth and to eventually also have a white wedding. Yet very few felt they would be able to realise these hopes and ideals. Young Kwapa women often felt squeezed between parents' expectations of bride wealth, their own hopes and their boyfriend's capabilities.[2] This was particularly difficult if the young women got pregnant while still in school, before their boyfriend had been introduced to the family. Girls' parents sometimes threatened or pressed charges against the boyfriend under the defilement law[3] and expected monetary compensation where the girl was pregnant. Expectations from all sides often seemed unreachable. As a result, many were in temporary and unstable relationships, some with children and often with tense relationships with the parents.

Contexts of political economies, education and relations to time

In the following sections, I turn to cases from Ik county in northern Uganda. These cases show quite a different context and political economy from Kwapa, as their time regimes and practices have been more influenced by agriculture than schooling. The two contexts of Ik and Kwapa differ not only in relation to their social and political economy, along with their educational ideals, but also in terms of temporality.

Ik county is located in the remote mountains and dominated by subsistence farming, gathering, some hunting, and an overall sharing economy ideal. Schooling institutions had only very recently been established, and just a small elite of mainly men had gone to school and pursued further education. Settlement patterns have been semi-nomadic, and families have been both virilocal (about 70 per cent) and uxorilocal (about 30 per cent). This has partly been due to boys who perform bride service for their parents-in-law who at times have settled near or with the family. This settlement pattern has had implications for both gender and generational relations and dynamics. In some respects, women and men seemed more equal than in other parts of the country. Monogamy has

been the Ik ideal, and there have been very few polygynous marriages. Wife inheritance by a brother, in case of a husband's death, has been considered an issue of care, and women could decide if they preferred to stay with the brother or find their own way. Arranged marriages used to be very common in the grandparent and parent generation and, while less frequent now, they still occur among the young generation.

Women in Ik: 'you will just have to accept the man …'

Namoi was 20 years old and lived in Lokinene village in Timu parish when we met. She stopped schooling after grade two in primary school because there were no teachers in the school. She had big dreams of being a nurse, but would have to go to town for schooling, and no one could take her. When she was 17, she learned that her parents had started negotiating marriage with the parents of a young man, and she was told, 'We want you to marry this man'. The young man was 18 years old, and Namoi had not met him before. At the time, Namoi had a boyfriend whom she wanted to marry, and they were considering eloping. Namoi explained:

> I did not appreciate the arrangement of the parents … It was hard, and it took me seven months to accept my husband. I wanted to go to Kampala, and I begged the MP's [member of parliament] wife to take me. My father warned me that, 'If you don't marry the man, I will kill you'. I tried to make plans to escape with my friend, but my father also threatened my friend. My father talked to me again, and said, 'We are seeing others are having in-laws, and they are getting something, so we want you to be with this man. If you are staying alone or go to Kampala, you will be wasted and there is no way we can benefit from you' … There was no way, so I thought I will just have to accept the man. Now we have a child of one and a half years … The relationship with my husband is good, because he likes staying at home, he plans with me, and we agree on things. He went to school for some years in Kaabong, and we go to church together.

Namoi's husband's clan gave *buka* (bride wealth) of 20 hoes and four jerrycans of honey. In terms of *terek* (bride service), the husband and his peers had to cultivate nine gardens for his relatives. So far, he had finished three gardens, and he would need to finish six more, which would take some years. Namoi relates:

It is much work, but my parents are following exactly what they did for my mother. That is how we Ik do it and it is okay … Until he has finished this work, we are living in my parent's home … Then we shall move to his home, and we build our house there … When all *buka* and *terek* is done, they are supposed to conclude with a *nyakuma* bull … but it is still far in the future.

One third of the Ik women I talked with had experienced an arranged marriage. This was more common among the older women, but still happened for the younger generation as for Namoi. Others met each other on the road, at the borehole or in other places. Women talked about being followed and pressured by boys to have a relationship, and how the morally right thing to do for a girl was to reject the boy and tell him, as Kunume did, 'You are lying about beauty and marriage. You just want to play with my life and body. I don't believe you. When you enter my parents' gate, I know you are serious'. After Kunume's boyfriend's parents went to see her parents, and her parents told her, 'This is your husband', she accepted him. Her husband and his two elder brothers then started *terek* by digging her family's gardens for two years. They were told to give 30 goats and 10 cows, because this was given for her mother. This is an unusually high bride wealth, which was introduced because her mother had married a Dodoth herder. Kunume's parents accepted that it would take a long time to give this bride wealth. There were still debts, and they might never be paid entirely.

The majority of Ik women agreed that forced marriage and beating – domestic violence against women – were the most profound problem they experienced in their marriages. Some of it was related to bride wealth issues and relatives arguing that women should share their property with the family. If women had serious problems in their marriages and were mistreated, they felt they had few options to leave or divorce, because they would be rejected from both sides. At their parental homes, their parents would also chase them, saying, 'They gave us what we wanted. You endure'. One of the women said, 'You can think about suicide, but then who will take care of the children?' The future form women employed when talking about marriages in the future was often, 'I will have to accept', along with the *future continuous,* 'I will be enduring'.

Men in Ik: 'you will continue working for your in-laws'

Lokwang was 22 years old when we met and had a child with his wife. They lived in Lokinene village and was from one of the few families in the

area where most of the boys had gone to school for some years. Lokwang and his wife first met near the army barracks when they were young. He admired her and snatched one of her clothes and took it home. When she later tried to sneak into his home to get her dress, Lokwang took the chance to tell her about his intentions. After this, he went to secondary school in Awach, Gulu district, for four years, but they kept sending messages. When Lokwang came home and spoke about his girlfriend, his parents tried to talk to her parents, but the girl's mother refused to acknowledge the engagement. He then speculated that the only way to gain their acceptance of the relationship was to get his girlfriend pregnant. When she conceived, her father came to Lokwang's home with a lot of sticks, saying, 'If you go any further, we will call all clan members'. Both sides – Lokwang's and the wife's parents – refused the engagement and wanted to beat the young couple. Lokwang fought hard and said, 'If you separate us and your daughter hangs herself, don't blame me. I will also kill myself'. In the end, the parents agreed, and Lokwang was given a long list of items to bring, including 30 hoes, six goats, four guards of honey pasted with white ants, one Masai sheet, two pouches of tobacco and other items. This was the exact same list that Lokwang's father-in-law was given when he married Lokwang's mother in-law. The in-laws also requested Lokwang to build a house for them and work in the gardens of nine relatives. He managed to get contributions from friends and relatives for the hoes and goats, and he is still working on providing other items. He has worked in the gardens of three of the in-laws so far, and said, 'I will continue to work in the gardens of my in-laws'.

All the young Ik men I spoke with pointed out how giving bride wealth and doing bride service required significant resources and energy, but it was not considered an impossible task: 'You have to mobilise your friends and family to succeed'. They felt that in the past, families would support young men more, because the parents arranged the marriages, 'These days our parents say, "You are just marrying by yourselves; you will also provide for yourself"'. For these young men, the fact that the kind and amount of bride wealth and bride service had to replicate the kind and amounts given by the former generation 'prevents inflation and parents from getting greedy'. Yet, they also pointed out that, 'If parents-in-law see that you spend a lot [your economy is good], you will also have to give a lot. You have to share some of that wealth …You continue giving for many years … You have to support the in-laws throughout'.

Etyang was 21 years old when we spoke, and had married when he was 18 years old. He had started engaging a girl and came to an agreement with her about each of them approaching their parents. Their

parents agreed to meet, and Etyang started meeting the girl secretly. Her parents told Etyang's parents that he had to be prepared to do a lot of work, and they gave him a list of items to be provided. Before taking the girl home, he had to start working in the garden of her parents while staying there. Etyang's friends and clan members helped him do some of the work. He had to sacrifice a goat for the in-laws, because his wife got pregnant. After six months of work, Etyang and his wife moved to his home. He had still not taken the bride wealth of six goats and 15 hoes to her parents, but his plan was to take the bride wealth in one go, and he hoped to get help from clan mates and friends.

Okol, 24 years old, had two children with his wife. They met each other at the borehole, and Okol reported about the relationship to his father, whereafter his father went to tell the parents of the girl, 'Our children have engaged themselves'. Her parents cautioned Okol's family and told Okol to start *terek* immediately – all the work from cultivation to harvest in two gardens. When most of the work was done, Okol's father went back to her parents, and they told him, 'You can carry your girl home'. But the garden work had continued. Okol was asked to give four goats, 20 hoes and two axes. So far, he had given 11 hoes. The rest remained outstanding, but his in-laws were patient.

Older men I spoke with talked with pride about how they had managed to provide bride wealth and bride service. They emphasised the exact number of hoes, jerrycans of honey, pieces of timber, goats and other animals they had given to their in-laws, and the amount, kind and periods of work for the wife's family: clearing gardens, digging, building and roofing houses and mending fences.

The bride service work (and other contributing factors) meant that young Ik men spent a significant amount of time at the home of their parents-in-law, with some couples living permanently with the wife's family (uxorilocal). The system of bride service stressed long-term temporalities since the garden labour was time-intensive and required presence over several seasons and often many years. This physical proximity promoted ideals of continued sharing and reciprocity between the generations. The bride wealth, mostly in terms of hoes, goats and honey, was given as an exchange during a ritual with a sense of finitude. A bull was supposed to finalise the bride wealth prestation, and this was almost always outstanding and not realised. The ideal was to finish with a bull, but the norm also stressed the idea of being in social debt to parents-in-law; in other words, they were always ready to help them if they were in need.

Not very many, but an increasing number of boys and girls went to school, and most educational institutions were far away from Ik county. For some young men who were in school and in the process of marrying, this meant that they hired peers to do their bride service while they were away at school. One of the consequences of this was that the sons-in-law and the parents-in-law did not get to know each other as well as when the son-in-law himself was spending time in the gardens near the parents-in-law. In my interviews with elders, they said that, in these cases, they were doing their duties, but they did not get to know each other's problems. However, with an educated son-in-law, they were hoping for more support in the future.

The future tense of marrying for young Ik men was often one of confident *future continuous* ('We will be marrying'), as well as a satisfactory *future perfect continuous* ('We will have been marrying'), emphasising the temporality of providing bride wealth and bride service as a continuous process.

Conclusion: the idea of not reaching a conclusion

When considering marriage by comparing the two areas in northern and eastern Uganda, regarding young men and women's different positions, those with education and those without, as well as the perspectives and interests across generations, a wealth of diversity and divergence stand out. Additionally, well-established points from the literature about marriage and bride wealth in Africa become clear: the differences in power over sexuality and bodies between men and women, young and old, are confirmed, even though relationships are clearly also changing.

However, what is most striking – across all the differences – is the urge to continue to relate in this way, despite all the trouble with marriage and bride wealth. It seemed unthinkable not to want to relate to others through partnerships and marriage, not only in terms of sex and love, but also in ways that created societal cohesion across generations, clans and other segments. This cohesion across differences seemed imperative as an ongoing practice, and not meant be concluded. Just like 'the last bull', which was supposed to linger on as a reminder of continued relations, as a future tense of cohesion: we will be together (through thick and thin). Occasionally, at the burial of a woman, the last bull, or remaining part of bride wealth was given to the family of the late woman from her husband's family. In some cases, it was given with anger and bitterness, because her family demanded it in order to release her body for burial. In other cases,

it was given in a friendly way to conclude a marriage and relationship between families. But even when words of conclusion were used in burial speeches, it was simultaneously pointed out that relationships between the families would continue in the future through the children. The point in marriages, relations, love and cohesion was to not reach a conclusion. The idea was to remain in the future tense.

Considering women and men's concerns about marriage and bride wealth with grammar tenses as a heuristic tool in this chapter has helped to articulate some of the temporalities and tensions these practices created. In Kwapa, bride wealth expenses had increased significantly over recent generations, while livelihood opportunities had dwindled. Young men tried to provide bride wealth, but seldom succeeded. Young women felt pressured by their families to bring in bride wealth, and often ended up leaving men who could not provide. As a consequence, children were stranded with uncertain filiations in the future. Both young men and women were frustrated about this impasse. They wished for *future simple* forms of marriage ('We will marry'), and longed for a *future perfect* ('We will have been married'). But these future forms seemed insurmountable due to high bride wealth expectations that were out of sync with economic possibilities. As a consequence, fewer adults in Kwapa were married with bride wealth, but they were in relationships that often broke up. Giving bride wealth was still a valued practice of showing respect to in-laws and to women, but all interlocutors in Kwapa agreed that expectations to bride wealth sizes had gone too high and needed adjustment if marriages were to be a possibility for the majority of the young generation in Kwapa in the future.

In Ik county, the level of both bride wealth and bride service was stabilised by the custom prescribing that the bride wealth of a woman replicated exactly what was given for her mother, grandmother and so forth. The practice of bride service was commonly carried out as men's garden work for families-in-law over many years. This *future continuous* ('We will be working in the in-laws garden') and *future perfect continuous* ('I will have been married to this home') stressed the temporal aspect of marriage and bride wealth as a long-term process of exchange and sharing socialities, rather than a finite process. In Ik county, these customs of marriage and bride wealth provided for stability and conservatism, and almost all young people married – most of them according to their own choices and timing, but some marriages were still arranged by parents. Some girls were forced by parents to marry early, because parents were impatient and felt they needed the labour that bride service provided. A number of Ik women experienced that it was practically impossible to get

out of marriage, even when relationships were violent and abusive, and they ended up staying for the sake of the children and endured the *future continuous* of marriage.

In both Kwapa and Ik county, young and old, men and women struggled to imagine and realise their hopes for partnerships in the future. It was complicated to reach a *future simple*, *future continuous*, *future perfect* and *future perfect continuous*, not in grammar terms, but in life worlds that were impacted by poverty and changing social norms.

Notes

1 Some of the cases are based on long-term fieldwork, other material was collected over shorter periods of fieldwork and with families I do not know as well.
2 There also seems to be a future tense that the parents are speculating with. This dimension of speculation is striking, especially in a context where marriage rates are low. There is a sort of counting-your-chickens-before-they've-hatched afoot. These are attempts to secure highly insecure futures, but as a sort of gamble because parents anticipate bride wealth they might get by having more girls, but they do not anticipate the bride wealth they might have to help a son give.
3 The Ugandan Penal Code Act defines defilement as 'unlawful […] sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 18 years' and makes the offence punishable, in the most serious cases, by death. Young couples under 18 years have to be extremely careful not to get pregnant because the young man risks being accused of defilement.

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Afterword
How marriage matters: in comparison and belonging
Koreen M. Reece

What is change made of? And what do people make of it? *Marriage Matters* invites us to consider these questions from the compelling, fraught, and relatable perspective of family-making in contemporary Uganda. Drawing on rich ethnographic material from the north and east of the country, and on a range of research perspectives and positionalities – Danish and Ugandan, male and female, of different ages, career stages, disciplinary backgrounds, and more – *Marriage Matters* offers a deep and diverse account of how Ugandans manage their histories and imagine their futures through their partnerships, marriages and children.

In this afterword I reflect on one method and one 'matter' that prove key to the practice of marriage and the anthropology of marriage alike: comparison, and belonging. The themes of belonging and comparison have long genealogies in anthropology, and both are experiencing something of an analytical revival – much like the topic of marriage. The essays collected here offer a novel Ugandan twist on these subjects that readers working in quite different contexts will find both thought-provoking and generative.

Marriage Matters appears in the midst of rapidly-growing anthropological interest in marriage after many years of neglect. It is perhaps no coincidence that the path-breaking contributions to this rediscovery of marriage have, like this volume, emerged from ethnographic work in Africa (see the collection of essays on marriage in southern Africa in Pauli and van Dijk 2016). Taking perspectives from the 'new' kinship studies back into the heart of the 'old' kinship studies, this emergent literature attends both to practices and processes of kin-making in everyday life and relationships, and the implications kinship

and marriage practice have for property ownership, law, economies and political life on local, national and global scales. It borrows productively from well-established work on non-normative modes of relatedness – from queer kinship to assistive reproductive technologies and transnational adoption – to denaturalise assumptions about what kinship or family is, and about what marriage is, demonstrating how contested, inventive and creative this supposedly traditional, conservative institution has always been. And it demonstrates the persistent relevance of marriage to shaping political worlds not only in 'small-scale societies', but in avowedly 'modern' societies as well (Carsten et al. 2021; McKinnon and Cannell 2013).

As is so often the case, this growing anthropological preoccupation tracks similar preoccupations in the places we live and work. In recent debates on the legalisation of same-sex marriage in contexts as diverse as the US, Taiwan, Ireland and Costa Rica, and in more long-standing debates on 'arranged' or 'forced' marriage, the immigration rights of foreign spouses, and miscegenation, the question of who should be able to marry whom, how, with what implications, condenses social concern with rights, power, access, 'tradition', and desirable forms of social change. Across southern Africa, as in Uganda, public discourse fixates on the decline of marriage and purported increases in rates of divorce as signs of a poisoned modernity, all while – in some cases, at least – an apparent uptick in weddings seems to be afoot (Pauli and van Dijk 2016; Reece forthcoming; Schneidermann and Otim, this volume). And commentators are explicit about what is at stake: not just traditional practices and ways of being, or the viability of families, communities and nations, but the future as such. Marriage matters, in other words, because it tells us something about how the world is changing – and offers ways of both responding to and shaping that change.

On comparison

It was a long drive from the IMAGENU annual workshop in Gulu, northern Uganda, via Kampala, to the retreat in Jinja where this book came into being. Out the window, the landscape shifted from the dry, flat northern shrublands via sweeping, low-lying swamps, through the hectic, hilly roads of the capital, to the lush forests that catch the mists of the Nile.

Out of mutual curiosity, and to pass the time, my Danish and Ugandan colleagues and I indulged in a continuous running comparison between Uganda and a place I am more familiar with: Botswana. I have lived, worked, and conducted research in Botswana on and off for 20

years – first as an NGO volunteer, later as an advisor to the Botswana government, and latterly as an anthropologist (see Reece 2022). I was amazed by how arable Uganda was by comparison to the desert nation that had become my second home; the spaces between houses were filled with crops, which often came right up to the verge of the road.[1] We were soon comparing crop capacities, staple foods, hunting histories, land use policies, and experiences of climate change. We all had a shock when we realised that Uganda is less than half the size of Botswana, but home to over 43 million people – where Botswana has just over two million inhabitants. We compared histories of British colonialism, experiences of the AIDS pandemic and the Covid-19 pandemic, the management of mining and of public education. Often the comparisons extended further, taking in our experiences in Denmark, the UK, Canada and Germany, where we discovered surprising similarities in farming practice, and mused over differences in how people react to strangers or engage in banter. Frequently enough, the comparisons broke down altogether: is it possible to compare policies for land management or social welfare provision between countries of such different sizes, populations and histories? But these temporary setbacks did not stop us from running still more comparisons, all the while expressing our amazements, reassessing possible explanations, and realising new things about each country from the perspective of the other.

It is perhaps no surprise that a busload of anthropologists should become so consumed by comparison, one of our discipline's hallmark methods. But notwithstanding our disciplinary training, there was something familiar, even inevitable, about a group of newly-met people making these comparisons – as a way of getting to know one another, and our shared world, in all its diversity and flux.

Comparison runs as a constant theme through the chapters in this volume, methodologically, ethnographically and analytically. And in the same spirit as our bus journey, these comparisons disrupt our established assumptions and explanations, generating new possibilities and perspectives – and suggest new ways to think about comparison in turn.

Marriage Matters sets out with the explicit methodological aim of comparing communities in northern and eastern Uganda and, in its focus on marriage, invites a broader regional and global comparison with the current outpouring of ethnographic material on the subject. What struck me first was how similar public concerns with marriage and trends in wedding practice were, both within Uganda and across sub-Saharan Africa. Here again there is a marked public preoccupation with declining rates of marriage (Pauli and van Dijk 2016), supposedly

skyrocketing rates of divorce, inflated expectations of bride wealth, and the commercialisation of weddings. And here again these questions mark zones of intergenerational conflict, and of intervention on the parts of churches and governments, as well as novel constellations of friends and colleagues. At the same time, popular explanations for these shared trends – whether in public discourse or anthropological analysis – vary with place and context: difficulties marrying in Acholiland are linked to a recent history of violent conflict, for example, where in Namibia (and elsewhere in southern Africa) they are linked to inequality and class differentiation (e.g. James 2017; Pauli 2019; see also introduction, this volume). The continuities evident between these very different historical contexts invite us to read against the grain of prevalent explanations, and look for more subtle and counterintuitive readings of what is afoot – some possibilities for which the chapters of this volume provide.

Comparison also features in these chapters as something Ugandans routinely do in their everyday lives, as well as something anthropologists undertake in their analyses. And these comparisons are manifold: they run between regions of Uganda, across historical periods and generations, between parents and children, mothers and fathers, men and women. Urban lifestyles, livelihoods and wedding preferences are compared to rural (Langole and Whyte); houses are compared to homes (as in Mogensen and Obika), or homes to camps (Lenhart; Komakech). Wives are compared to mothers (Lenhart; see also Reece forthcoming), and DNA is compared to identify fathers (Baral). Vying perspectives on the purpose, practice, and content of bride wealth are compared and negotiated across genders and generations (Ejang and Meinert); and comparisons run between families of different and mixed class backgrounds (Langole and Whyte; Schneidermann and Otim). Birth families are compared to in-laws, and both are compared – often unfavourably – to friends, workmates, and churchmates (Schneidermann and Otim). Past practices of romantic love are compared to modern expectations (Komakech), as are different paths to gendered personhood (Lenhart). Rules and ideals are continuously compared to the pragmatic realities of everyday life (Whyte); and strategies for negotiating the disjunction between them are compared for their relative efficacy, effects, and ethics in turn. And many of these comparisons are undertaken in times – and in terms – of crisis, invoking an implicit comparison between a dangerous present, a threatened future, and a more stable, idealised past (Langole and Whyte; Lenhart; Meinert).

Like the running comparisons we undertook on the long drive across Uganda, these comparisons are not simply diverting, but purposeful. In *Marriage in Past, Present and Future Tense* (Carsten et al. 2021), my

colleagues and I argued that comparison was a key practice of 'ordinary ethics' (Lambek 2010) in marriage. People compared potential spouses, compared their marriages with their parents' and grandparents' marriages, or compared their weddings with those of their friends – and in all cases, undertook a sort of 'comparative time travel' that enabled ethical assessments of their relations (Carsten et al. 2021: 24). In reflecting on *Marriage Matters*, I would add that comparisons also involve *forming* relations – logical and ethical relations, temporal relations, and social relations alike (Strathern 2020). These comparative relations are largely experimental, ways of opening and testing possibilities; and, in this sense, comparison becomes a ground and a practice of not only ethics, but imagination, a sort of moral laboratory (Mattingly 2014).

Comparison risks reification into categories, and evaluative judgement – and, indeed, those are precisely the purposes to which it is often put in everyday life. But what this collection makes clear is that comparison is always already multiple: it is undertaken on several intersecting planes or axes at once. And each of these comparisons shifts, unsettles and refigures the others. Gendered experiences and expectations of marriage are compared in intergenerational terms, where past, present and future are compared as well; and both demand attention to the tensions between expectations and reality, public discourse and lived experience. Marital strategies invite comparison with strategies of filiation, which in turn invite comparisons among the theoretical frameworks deployed by anthropologists, contemporarily and in the past (Whyte). Comparison, in other words, is seldom about juxtaposing two variables; it is rather about mapping a field of multiple variables, which continually extend and compound themselves. The process of this mapping brings out more than what is normal or what is unusual: it brings what *matters* into relief. What emerges are not only patterns of similarity and difference, but connections – and, perhaps above all, possibilities.

In this sense, comparison is also a practice of producing and shaping time: a means of refiguring and reinterpreting fraught histories through the frame of precarious presents, and of juxtaposing pasts and presents to imagine alternatives for the future. Comparing past, present and future is not simply a question of telling them apart, or evaluating which might be better or worse; it is not simply a practice of charting what has changed or stayed the same, or of producing genealogies that track change (though it does all of these things). Drawing various 'nows' and 'thens' together *produces* them, and the changes and continuities we seek in and through them. On our cross-country journey, comparing colonial pasts to pandemic presents among Uganda, Botswana, Denmark,

Germany, the UK, Canada and the US opened new perspectives on each of those places and eras, but also changed our experiences of those histories and contemporaneities, and expanded our ideas about what the future could bring. As a mode of categorisation or judgement, seeking fixed and immutable truths, comparison may attempt to place itself outside of time; but as an open-ended process undertaken with a diverse variety of constantly-changing variables, it is both inevitably time-bound and a crucial form of time work (Flaherty et al. 2020).

What role, if any, does all this complex comparing play in making marriage matter, for Ugandans or for anthropologists? Reflecting on our bus journey across Uganda, I suggest comparison is also a mode of experimenting with, establishing, challenging and reworking belonging. And, as the chapters of this volume demonstrate so eloquently, comparison and belonging together mark critical practices of both managing and making sociopolitical change through everyday lives and relationships, perhaps above all in times of chronic crisis.

On belonging

As familiar as some of the stories in this volume have become, perhaps especially in the anthropology of contemporary Africa – stories of frustrated filiation, burdensome bride wealth, and waylaid wedding negotiations – the chapters gathered here cast them in a new light: in terms of *belonging*. The theme pops up persistently in both the stories interlocutors tell of their lives, and in the analyses offered by the contributors to this book, as both an emic and etic framing. The Ugandan examples here make a clear ethnographic and theoretical case for the relevance of belonging to rethinking marriage – particularly in contexts of ongoing, overlapping crisis. I want to briefly pursue that case here, as a frame that may encompass all the creative ways in which marriage matters.

Uganda provides an apt context for pursuing this question, with a history that produces particular problems of belonging. Whether in terms of recent experiences of violent conflict, dispossession, and internal displacement (especially in the north), or in terms of pressures on land use and policies that tie distribution to patrilineal recognition and relationships (especially in the east), belonging to specific places and people in Uganda is a deeply fraught, existential question. Where things, people and places that belong to one – or that one belongs to – have or can be taken, and where even the modes of intergenerational transmission by

which one might expect to acquire them are unpredictable or interrupted (e.g. Victor and Porter 2017: 593), the terms, means and possibility of belonging are all thrown into doubt. Indeed, in contexts of ongoing and overlapping crisis – a context in which much of the world finds itself, now – the question of how to live, well, with others, in the world is thrown sharply into relief, and our former answers require reinventing. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, marriage is a key site in and through which that reinvention is sought: by government agencies, churches and people in their everyday lives alike (see also Reece 2022). And in these chapters, belonging appears to be one of the key terms in which those possibilities of recovery are tested and contested. Changes in marriage practice, then, do more than reflect changes in belonging, or in the sociopolitical world; they offer opportunities to experiment with producing those changes.

Analytically, 'belonging' creates room enough to engage a wide range of social experience, while remaining precise enough to tell us something new about how those experiences are lived and understood. Perhaps above all, it straddles the categorical and everyday ways in which Ugandans experience family life, as structure and as practice, rules and reality (Whyte, this volume), enabling us to understand these modes of relating as they inform, transform and truncate each other. 'Belonging' makes room for the importance of securing recognition (Langole and Whyte, this volume; see also Reece 2019) – whether between spouses, between families, by the church, or among wider communities – and for the different forms it can take, from church rituals to names given by father's clans that in turn secure access to land. It likewise makes room for the ways mothers mediate and enable recognition of their children, while building alternative forms of support and connection where that recognition is not forthcoming. It makes room for both the persistently rigid rules of bride wealth (Ejang and Meinert), and the novel, creative ways marrying spouses seek to circumvent them (Schneidermann and Otim). And, as Susan Whyte suggests, the capaciousness of belonging allows us to productively rethink the analytical histories and predispositions of anthropology as a discipline: reminding us of the continued relevance of structural ideas about kinship in people's everyday lives, for example, or raising questions about a long-standing tendency to separate 'kinship' from 'marriage' in spite of the ways they shape and rework one another.

At the same time, belonging makes room for rethinking the economies and materialities of family life. In these pages, both pregnancies and property have owners, or belong to someone, and produce new

possibilities of, demands on, and threats to familial and political belonging. The negotiation, mobilisation and long-term reciprocities of material and monetary belongings as bride wealth both asserts and challenges the ways men belong among their kin (sometimes in contrast to groups of friends or colleagues, as Schneidermann and Otim note), as well as securing complex shifts in belonging – and attendant claims to homes and land – for brides and their children (Ejang and Meinert; Whyte). The making of homes might rely on the labour migration of their owners, which demands such movings in and out that the notion of home itself – whether as a site of belonging, or as something that belongs to its owner rather than its maker – begins to shift (Mogensen and Obika). And these economies bring out the gendered dimensions of belonging. Men have access to ancestral land through their patrilines, but may have to rely on their mothers to secure that access, or on their wives to sustain it by making homes for them in their absence (Mogensen and Obika) – and indeed, may not be considered men at all unless and until they have married (Lenhart). Women have few rights to land or the homes they make, except through their children, and are often caught in tenuous circumstances where they risk being sent – or taken – back (Lenhart; Whyte). Materialising these claims – whether through DNA samples to prove paternity (Baral) or by embodying selves and love (Komakech) – becomes a key means of securing them. Existential and economic forms of belonging, to borrow Tine Gammeltoft's terms from her analysis of belonging and subjectivity in Vietnam (2018: 88), cannot be distinguished, and prove to be co-constitutive – much as they are in Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern's (2000) account of belonging in the English 'Alltown', where interpersonal, political and epistemological modes of association are all connected to an idiom of ownership.

As these examples suggest, the question of who belongs to whom, and how, is high-stakes and highly contested – making room for fresh perspectives on ethics and affect as we find them in these ethnographic accounts. Not only is 'belonging […] suffused with morality and emotion' (Gammeltoft 2018: 89), it provides new ways for us to think morality and emotion together. As Whyte points out, '[t]o ask someone's clan is to ask what kind of person he or she is'; belonging is a site of ethical assessment, of selves as well as relations. The profound challenges that attend marriage, filiation and home-making throughout this book demonstrate that such questions and assessments are seldom as simple as they might seem: they are in continuous flux, subject to constant contestation and re-evaluation by a wide and sometimes unpredictable range of actors, and they frequently involve outright conflict (see also

Reece 2022). As difficult as it may be, the ability to assess someone's ethical position, orientation and authority are particularly pointed in navigating or recuperating contexts of crisis, as for example in post-conflict Acholiland (Victor and Porter 2017). On this reading, it is perhaps no surprise that churches, as well as families and friendship groups, have deeply vested interests in enabling and managing marriage (Langole and Whyte, this volume).

But these conundrums are unique for their affective loadedness and potential as much as their ethical complexity. The chapters here give ethics a creative twist, by drawing it together with love in ways that prove mutually explanatory. Love, in the example of this collection, becomes a means of mobilising and assessing people and relationships, and of rendering the accumulation and redistribution of money among friends and class-based networks ethical (Schneidermann and Otim). Contributing to the wedding committees of friends, for example – in contexts of a plethora of similar, competing claims on one's resources – becomes an act that not only signifies but produces love. At the same time, this affective and ethical investment is always tentative and tenuous, subject to reinterpretation and re-evaluation, making it a site of both risk and hope – and perhaps, above all, of experimentation. Love is a contingent moral geography (Komakech, this volume, drawing on Porter 2020) that both reflects and generates change.

Strikingly, this collection also makes clear that belonging is a problem of time: of navigating complex pasts, negotiating possible presents, and cultivating hope (Whyte) and indeed faith (Langole and Whyte) in the future. Many of the chapters here are saturated with time language: expectation, speculation, process, deferral, patience, perseverance and waithood (see especially Meinert; Lenhart). Marriage has a mixed and paradoxical time signature, simultaneously an event and a process. Notably, time here is not simply context, something to be endured or navigated; here time, too, becomes something to be acted upon, and both marriage and child filiation emerge as practices of temporal experimentation. If, as Laura Bear argues, the multiplying and divergent rhythms of modern time 'thicken […] with ethical problems, impossible dilemmas, and difficult orchestrations' (Bear 2014: 6), attempts to negotiate child filiation or marriage situate those problems and dilemmas in everyday kin-making practice, becoming a key 'labour in/of time' (Bear 2014). Pasts, presents and futures are subject to refiguration; and interpersonal awareness, effort, and exploration can open not only new interpretations of time, but new experiences of it.

By drawing together unfolding histories of political disruption, vertical and lateral modes of kin-making, economies and materialities, ethics, affect and time, the framework of belonging offers a capacious way to understand the complexities of contemporary everyday life in Uganda. More than a matter of seeking agency through subordination (*pace* Gammeltoft 2018), belonging provides both emic and etic ways of conjoining, moving between, and distinguishing key 'domains' of social life: kinship, economics, politics, religion, health, and more (McKinnon and Cannell 2013). In doing so, it disrupts persistent ideological assumptions about modernity that underpin much analytical work in the social sciences, and that have long encouraged us to think the global North and South – especially Africa – separately, rather than together.

The framework of belonging is also a reflexive framework, one that brings into relief a perpetual preoccupation for many anthropologists: the question of where, how and with whom *we* belong. This volume invites us to consider that question not only in terms of how foreign anthropologists seek, build and experience belonging in Uganda, but in terms of how Ugandan anthropologists do – and to interrogate how belonging figures in and is refigured by the anthropological project. Beyond belonging in the places we study, we are invited also to consider how we experience and create belonging (or otherwise) in the discipline of anthropology, in the institutions we work in, and in academia broadly. How does anthropological research create opportunities for new forms of belonging, and disrupt or rework existing forms, for our selves and relations as much as for the selves and relations of those with whom we conduct research? How does belonging, unbelonging, or the spectrum between inform the ways we come to know the world and what we have to say about it? *Marriage Matters* may not offer unequivocal answers to these questions, but it makes rare and welcome space for us to ask them.

In all of these linked spheres, belonging is a problem – which is to say, it is a site of ethical reflection and evaluation, both in everyday life and at 'vital conjunctures' (Johnson-Hanks 2002) like marriages or the birth of children. Belonging is persistently partial, incomplete and contested; it generates friction and conflict, and requires navigation; and it patterns exclusion as much as inclusion. But belonging is not, notably, a problem that can be fixed, so much as one that is generative and creative in its perpetuity. The question of belonging is not so much a question of right and wrong, as about how to be a person and how to have relations in particular contexts. It requires and enables continuous reassessment of the past, and the imagination of alternative futures; it is a site where both

histories and hope are cultivated. In this sense, it both shapes the space in which change is made and provides the social 'stuff', or relations, for making it.

Having drawn this line of thinking from the chapters collected here, I also want to challenge it a little, by drawing yet another comparison. Is what appears as 'belonging' in these pages – and elsewhere in contemporary anthropological work – so different from what some of us are accustomed to calling 'kinship'? Many of the chapters here sidestep a kinship framing, while engaging some of the sub-discipline's defining and most long-standing themes: child filiation, marriage and bride wealth, houses and homes, gender and relatedness. Like belonging, kinship also saturates, animates and provides the terms and practices by which we merge or distinguish domains of social life (McKinnon and Cannell 2013); it enfolds questions of structure and practice, economy and materiality, ethics and affect, time, and the ways in which we respond to history and attempt to shape change (Carsten et al. 2021). And it makes space for the reflexive assessment of anthropologists' positionality and relations in turn. Attempts to separate kinship sorts of belonging from other sorts are often hard to sustain: while, for example, Gammeltoft (2018, inspired by Stasch 2009) describes kinship belonging as 'intersubjective' and distinguishes it from territorial and political belonging, Edwards and Strathern (2000) connect 'Alltown' belonging to place and people to kinship, just as Borneman (1992) ties political or national belonging in Berlin to feeling at home (*zu Hause*), or among kin. Similarly, describing kinship as a form of belonging 'nested within other forms of belonging' to communities, states, nations or society (as Johansen and Grøn suggest in exploring novel forms of relatedness between migrant families and the Danish state; 2022: 2), assumes distinctions between the public and the private, and encompassments of the domestic by the political, that the very practice of managing relatedness with and through the state calls into question (see also the contributions to McKinnon and Cannell 2013). Not only are the different sorts of belonging that emerge in analysis tightly connected to each other, then, they are all tied specifically to kinship. And indeed, the ethnographic examples deployed to make these arguments – like those deployed in this volume – are almost all linked to emic experiences of family and kinship as well.

As the chapters in this volume suggest, belonging is perhaps more easily extensible to friendships, work relationships, relationships established through neighbourhoods, church, or school than kinship, and allows all of these modes of relating (and their linked subjectivities) to be thought together. While this reach is analytically useful, it makes it

difficult to identify the limits of and distinctions between these relations, and the different weights and values attached to them, which are equally crucial to the way people experience, understand and evaluate them. It may be that intersecting modes of belonging work to limit one another, when taken together. But, as Edwards and Strathern have pointed out when making a similar argument, this self-limitation may itself be an extension and feature of kinship thinking (2000: 158–9). Substituting the frame of belonging also has the unfortunate side-effect of downplaying what remains an essential and enduring feature and experience of social life, including in the 'modern world': the family.

At the same time, the framework of belonging pushes us to think of kinship in more precise ways. Both 'belonging' and 'kinship' emerge here as imaginative practices of managing time – and specifically, an attempt to reproduce selves and relations *without* simultaneously reproducing histories of crisis and violence. And, in this sense, they provide an unexpected inspiration for contemporary anthropological practice – which, at its most ethical, is also a relational practice seeking imaginative futures that do not reproduce its problematic histories of colonial complicity and violence, but acknowledge, challenge and disrupt them.

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Note

1   I learned later that 45 per cent of Uganda's land is arable, compared to 0.5 per cent of Botswana's land (Destatis 2019).

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'This creative and original volume, the product of a rich collaboration between African and European scholars, illuminates marriage in myriad new ways. Emphasising multivocality and comparison, and engaging with emerging forms, this is a stunning collection – a model for studies of changing patterns of marriage and family life across time and cultures.'
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Statistics show steep declines in formal partnerships in Uganda. Yet marriage, commitment, love and relationships still matter profoundly to individuals, family, generations, friends and wider society. What does it mean to be married or not married in contemporary Uganda?

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