Marriage as a Connector: A Conversation about Spatial and Temporal Scales of Partnership and Self-accomplishment in Kenya and Uganda

Anna Baral, Valérie Golaz, Norah Kiereri and Nanna Schneidermann

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/eastafrica/1484>

DOI: 10.4000/eastafrica.1484

ISSN: 2790-1076

Publisher

IFRA - Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique

Electronic reference

Anna Baral, Valérie Golaz, Norah Kiereri and Nanna Schneidermann, "Marriage as a Connector: A Conversation about Spatial and Temporal Scales of Partnership and Self-accomplishment in Kenya and Uganda", *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review* [Online], 56 | 2021, Online since 15 December 2021, connection on 15 December 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/eastafrica/1484> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/eastafrica.1484>

This text was automatically generated on 15 December 2021.

Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review

Marriage as a Connector: A Conversation about Spatial and Temporal Scales of Partnership and Self-accomplishment in Kenya and Uganda

Anna Baral, Valérie Golaz, Norah Kiereri and Nanna Schneidermann

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Funding statement: the research behind this paper was generously funded by the DANIDA consultative committee on development research grant no. 17-07-AU in the Imagining Gender Futures Project and by the ANR-FNS research programme on Self-Accomplishment and Local Moralities in East Africa (SALMEA, ANR-18-CE93-0009).

Introduction

- 1 East African families are heterogeneous institutions, fluid and in transformation. The region is home to a range of competing and sometimes contradictory value systems, with a variety of ethics, codes and practices regarding such matters as marriage, divorce and bridewealth. This, together with demographic shifts, economic reforms, interethnic and interracial marriages and dynamics of internal and international migration has a fundamental bearing on an expanding array of family configurations.
- 2 This paper highlights common trends as well as local specificities of marriage in Kenya and Uganda. While marriage as an institution is changing, and in Uganda in particular is declining and gradually being replaced by more informal partnerships, marriage as a concept remains a normative ideal for many. As our data show, the word 'marriage' is

used to describe a variety of relationships, less formally regulated but which also play a key role in relation to social and personal accomplishment, as well as to child affiliation and inheritance. We argue that the ideal of marriage is persistently narrated as the fulfilment of the life trajectories of fully gendered persons—grown up men and women—even if in reality such subjectification may never be complete. In particular for men, marriage confirms the rights to children (and children's rights to inheritance), and allows an individual to fully inhabit the position of breadwinner. However, as illustrated by copious literature on African masculinity and reflected in our data, structural adjustment policies, unemployment, together with an increased sensibility to women's rights have made this process precarious, forcing men to find new avenues to confirm their gendered identity (see for ex. Wyrod 2016; McLean 2021). For women, marriage similarly provides social status and legitimation, but separations and divorces are progressively becoming arenas for alternative ways of expressing one's agency and identity, especially among the middle classes (James 2017).

- 3 In the following pages, we point at how marriage is changing diachronically and how local practices vary, in Kenya and Uganda. We do so by proposing ethnographic entry points that help to expand the conceptual breadth of the term 'marriage', paying particular attention to its spatial and temporal ramifications. Based on both quantitative and qualitative data, our contributions show that marriage is a placeholder for longer processual dynamics involving a before and an after partnership, and for material and imaginative connections between various geographical scales, such as the family, the ethnic group, the nation and even the transnational scene. As a specific form of relatedness—a concept recently revamped by Africa studies research—marriage not only structures society but locates individuals and kin in processes that extend globally (Manderson and Block 2016). Marriage, we suggest, is thus a temporal and spatial connector.
- 4 The paper is organized in the form of a round table discussion between the authors.
- 5 Valérie Golaz' comparison of Uganda with Kenya, based on broad quantitative surveys, contextualizes the paper within the diachronic decline of marriage. Her analyses bring to light dissimilarities between age groups and countries, which may partially be explained by the respondents' expectations, upheld values and representations of marriage. The ethnographic material that follows leads into an exploration of representations and perceptions of marriage, starting from the very material of earlier research that shows the sensitivity of bridewealth and marriage among the Gusii in Kenya (Golaz 2009; 2014). The interlocutors' hesitations and contradictory answers seem to confirm that marriage is always imagined and negotiated, yet hardly defined or achieved once and for all.
- 6 Nanna Schneidermann's and Anna Baral's ethnographic material speaks precisely to the open-ended nature of marriage. Schneidermann illustrates the negotiations that initiate marriage in Gulu, and the different phases a couple must walk through in order to be *recognized* as married. At the same time, couples often address each other as husband and wife well before any ceremony, thus revealing the disconnect between ideal and practice. Baral's material from the touristic and industrial town of Jinja recounts how marriage projects people towards the future, thus imbuing life-projects of directionality and intentionality; and towards an elsewhere, thus working as a connector between geographically distant ideas and communities.

- 7 Lastly, Norah Kiereri's ethnography looks more specifically at the end of marriage, which once again appears as a process that mobilises specific relations within the families, along gender rather than along descent lines.

Conversation

Can general trends be traced in marriage in contemporary East Africa? And what are the methodological and analytical challenges in studying such a large topic?

Valérie: A brief analysis of the Kenya and Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys (KDHS and UDHS) available since the middle of the 1980s (Kenya: 1989, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2016; Uganda: 1988, 1995, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2016) regarding marital status gives us elements of comparison. DHS are harmonised surveys and individual questionnaires—used both for men and women—that systematically include a question about marital status. Although the questions slightly differ in the way they are formulated over the six consecutive surveys organised in both countries, a series of three closed questions leads the interviewee to state whether he/she is currently married or living with a partner without being married; whether he/she has ever been married or living with a partner without being married; and whether he/she is separated, divorced or widowed. The current marital status is then reconstituted in a single variable in the dataset, presenting six modalities: never married, married, living together, widowed, divorced, separated/not living together. Unfortunately, the results presented in the survey reports cannot be directly compared over time. In the first surveys, some parts of both countries were deliberately excluded from the samples for cost and security reasons (North Eastern Province and a few other districts in the northern part of the country in the first three Kenyan surveys, parts of Northern and Eastern Uganda in 1988, Kitgum District in 1995 in Uganda). Moreover, although the age groups in the samples surveyed are consistent over time, in the published results age ranges for men differ: 15-54 up to the beginning of the 2000s in both countries, 15-49 (the same age bracket as provided for women) thereafter.

We can however use these results without risk to compare the trends in both countries from 2005 (Figure 1). Whereas the proportion of men and women stating that they are married looks rather stable if not slightly on the increase in Kenya between 2008 and 2014 (54% of women and 48% of men), it seems to have been steadily declining in Uganda over the past 15 years (from 50 to 35% for men, from 48 to 30% for women). These results are difficult to interpret because this general trend in marriage is sensitive to age structure and because with longer education, it is expected that people marry later.

To go further, we can narrow down the age group considered in order to have a more homogeneous group of men and women, in terms of both age and mortality history, by looking at the men and women of 30 to 39 years old (Figure 2). Although the proportion of married men and women are then higher than when considering the whole sample, similar trends can be observed: marriage rates remain stable over time in Kenya, and decrease steadily in Uganda. The decline in Uganda corresponds to an increase in informal unions (from 7% of men in their 30s in 2006 to 29% in 2016, from 14% of women in their 30s to 29% in 2016). The proportion of people who have never lived with a partner, within marriage or not, remains low: 4-6% of men in this age

group gave such a statement, as did 3% of women. In Kenya informal unions are lower than in Uganda and stable over the last surveys: 3% of men and 6% of women, and ever living alone seems more prevalent than in Uganda (7% of women, 8-9% of men). Men and women in widowhood who are not in a new relationship are few in both countries (4 to 6% of women, 0 to 2% of men) but separated or divorced men and women now living on their own are more numerous (12 to 15% of women and 6 to 4% of men in Uganda, 9 to 10% of women and 7 to 8% of men in Kenya). These last figures are—as expected—higher for women than for men, as men start new relationships at these ages (30 to 39 years) more easily.

Figure 1 & 2. Percentage “married” among women and men 15-49 y (left) and women and men 30-39 y (right)

Sources: author's computation from KDHS 2008, 2014 and UDHS 2006, 2011, 2016 data.

These first results raise many issues. Is the decline of marriage observed in Uganda related to bridewealth or formal marriage organisation issues? Why is the marriage rate not decreasing in the same way in the survey data collected in Kenya? Why do men declare being married more often than women in Uganda?

To better interpret the results, it is important to recall that any survey question is embedded in a social context. The survey results are declarative, and likely to reflect the representations of surveyed people and surveyors as much as the actual characteristics of the sample. Men might not want to assert that their relationship is not yet a full marriage, because it would be equivalent to stating that they do not intend to fulfil social expectations in the future. People might feel married and act married, however much the marriage process in itself lies still a long way ahead. Some informal unions might have been declared to be marriages, all the more so when social norms push the respondents in that direction. Some surveyors might consider all couples married because it seems inconceivable that they are not, or that they should claim they are not. The national figures presented here hide spatial variations within both countries. The fact that men were more often married than women in the 15-49 years old samples probably just shows how strong the norm is for men to be considered married, how important it is for their respectability, in some parts of Uganda as well as in Kenya.

The spread of informal unions can in part be understood as a response to economic changes initiated by the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, and a limited ability to meet the social prerequisites of legitimate family-making (marriage costs, bridewealth). However, individuals and couples from different generations also actively reimagine the future of marriage beyond bridewealth, increasingly questioning the meaning, role and validity of marriage payments, wedding requirements, and separations.

Against this uncertain background, the word “marriage” has become a floating signifier which gestures towards an ideal that is seldom achieved, and at the same time stands for a myriad of different forms of partnerships. We are confronted, first of all, with the problem of defining when, and where, marriage starts, and when and where it ends. How do your ethnographies speak to this point?

Nanna: I like the idea of thinking about marriage as a process in Eastern Africa. Radcliffe-Brown observed this in the introduction to *African Kinship* “To understand African marriage we must think of it not as an event or a condition but as a developing process” (1950, 49). This is evident in narratives of “Acholi marriage” *nyom Acholi* / *nyom tekwaro* (Acholi marriage / cultural-customary marriage) among my interlocutors in Gulu in Northern Uganda, where I did fieldwork among wedding videographers and their clients in 2019-2020. Both those who had married and those videographers who filmed them would describe in detail the ideal processes by which a marriage should happen among Acholi people. The perceptions of the exact structures and the emphasis on what is most important, what the exchanges are called and why they occur varied in the stories the respondents told. Yet all describe a series of both formal and informal visits between families, claims made for exchanges and different categories of exchange, according to the situation of the couple. The customary marriage ceremony itself is a ceremony spanning three days in which the families of the bride and groom negotiate the bridewealth, consisting of customary items and goats and cows or their monetary value, conduct the exchange and celebrate the agreement. One might assume that this marks the final exchange as the bride now “belongs” to her husband’s homestead and family. But there are contingencies for when claims are disputed or relationships go wrong, and mechanisms for mitigating problems and disputes exist along the way. A few men suggested that in fact, bridewealth should never be completed, as that would sever the connection to the bride’s family in some way. Some part should “remain” (called *tyen dyang*, meaning the leg of the cow in Acholi), as it could be bad luck to pay everything at once. As Porter observes, bridewealth exchanges among the Acholi is commonly expressed in terms of individual property rights, rights over women’s bodies, but might more accurately be understood in terms of social belonging for both families in the exchange in terms of “social order, identity, entitlements, protection, and responsibility” (Porter 2016, 168). Stories of ideal couplehood seem to support the idea of marriage not as an event or rite of passage, but rather as the evolution of relations within wider kin networks, that Porter called “social harmony” (Porter 2016; 2020).

In addition, we also need to consider “marriage-as-process” as varying with Church influence. In Northern Uganda, customary marriage typically precedes a church wedding (*nyom maleng*). In Gulu, the majority of the population are Catholic (as opposed to the Anglican Church being historically more dominant in the southern part of Uganda), though Pentecostal congregations are also popular. Both Catholic

and Pentecostal churches emphasise church marriage as central for religious practice and membership, yet wedding in church without first holding the customary marriage is considered impossible or at least very problematic. Alava observes similar dynamics among Catholics in the neighbouring town Kitgum. She notes that the Catholic church insists on church weddings and that partners who are not married are excluded from full participation in religious life, while most believers, and even church employees, find customary marriage to be sufficient and foundational for adult social personhood (Alava 2017, 39). There is an “exclusionary violence” to the ideologies perpetuated by religious institutions (2017, 42) which instils an expected sequence of marriages that are for many impossible to achieve.

Peter, a senior civil servant in Gulu, told me of the trouble that this sequencing of marriage had caused in his family one afternoon while hanging around in an upscale bar in Gulu, waiting for a wedding planning committee meeting to begin. His cousin, John, had been cohabiting with his partner for many years and they had several children. But they could not afford to marry. The partners were devout Catholics and wished to be wedded in church in order to be closer to their faith and take Holy Communion. The priest at their congregation had suggested the possibility of participating in a “mass wedding,” organised by the church to encourage members to get married without the exorbitant costs of wedding celebrations. The woman’s family agreed to this union without bridewealth and customary marriage - and without the expenses associated with a conventional white wedding. But the man’s family had refused it. Peter said, “I felt so embarrassed. This man is my cousin, how would people look at me and the entire family?” He suggested that a wedding without a preceding *nyom tekwaro* (customary marriage) would cast shame on the wider kin network and clan. The absence of bridewealth would indicate a rupture in Acholi ideals of social harmony. If indeed John’s family had been too poor to support him in his efforts, perhaps the Catholic mass wedding could have been acceptable. But since Peter was a prominent person with a high-status job in Gulu, and a man who had undergone both customary and church marriage, it would appear as if John’s extended kin networks had refused his desire to marry and thus also refused ideals of social reproduction. Peter described how he and his brothers had pooled their resources to give “a cow” (its monetary equivalent) to John for the bridewealth.

The story of John’s wedding both confirms and complicates the process of sequencing marriage ceremonies. Indeed, John’s plan to wed in church without a customary marriage first was unusual. Though the ritual structure of the church wedding might resemble a one-off rite of passage, it becomes embedded in marriages-as-process through the sequencing of marriage rites and exchanges. Beyond this, the story about John’s wedding also points to this sequencing as a possible space of negotiation. The mobilization of resources to marry is complicated and plays out in hierarchical kin networks, where poor relatives may have relatively little bargaining power—until a mass wedding occurs. Cases like John’s long cohabiting, where the couple may refer to themselves as husband and wife for years without marrying (see also Mark Hunter 2016), also raise the question of what specific exchanges take place between these couples and between their families. This is particularly interesting in case children are born and the woman’s parents may demand the payment of a “fine” (sometimes called *luk*) for impregnating their child without the appropriate exchanges to initiate the relationship.

Valérie: The fieldwork I did in rural Kenya among the Gusii shows that 20 years ago, many couples already lived together as married without having formalised their unions (Golaz 2014). Customary marriage was then still the most common form of marriage, a religious ceremony being considered too costly for most as it involved not only having settled bridewealth but also organising a celebration open to all. Only a few families, mostly Adventist or Pentecostal, would actually go for that. Civil marriage, considered as costly as a religious one and less prestigious, was totally disregarded. The idea of marriage as a process that Nanna has documented in Northern Uganda was there, but in most cases only the first step of the process was reached during the couple's lifetime.

From the studies done during the colonial period, we know that people could remember the process of marriage among the Gusii as a set of rituals spread out over a number of weeks, from the first discussions between the relatives of the couple, to a last ceremony, the most important symbolically when the wife would wear rings called *enyangi* around her ankles. Bridewealth was negotiated and settled after the first step and given before the last one. These marriage ceremonies, well described by Philip Mayer (1950), have not been taking place for more than 50 years. In Gucha where I did my fieldwork, they had started disappearing at the end of the 1930s (Håkansson 1988). Although the nature of the gifts as well as the time span of the exchanges have changed over time, customary marriage is still perceived as unequivocally related to bridewealth. Men and women would consider themselves married from the time when bridewealth had been discussed, but their relative rights, and in particular, the right for wives to access her husbands' land and for husbands to be recognised as the father of their wives' children would only be fully secured by the last part of the bridewealth. At the end of the 1990s I collected quantitative data representative of two sublocations in what was then Gucha District. Whereas about 10% of bridewealth exchanges in the 1940s or 1950s formalised unions that had started a year or more earlier, 25% of the bridewealth exchanges occurring in the 1990s concerned partnerships that had started 11 years earlier or more, and about 40% 6 to 10 years (Golaz 2014, 198). People talked of cases when bridewealth had been discussed after the burial of the husband, and cases of women and children finding themselves landless when a separation took place before bridewealth had been discussed. Globally, from generation to generation, men and women were still entering their first regular union at about the same age as before, or just slightly later (17 years old to 19,6 years old for women; 23,8 to 24,3 for men on average from those born before 1952 to those born after 1968) but the first bridewealth discussion and gifts occurred much later than they used to (Golaz 2014, 196–197).

It is worth underlining that bridewealth was one of the most sensitive issues I had to delve around during this fieldwork, when speaking with both men and women. Men would either pretend they are single to try their luck with their interlocutor or claim bridewealth was paid long ago. Some women would feel ashamed, as much as men did, of their situation and try to hide it while others took the opportunity of our visit to complain. This again was not new at the time, as Margrethe Silberschmidt (1991, 17, 60, 66) had already noted it for both men and women in the early 1990s. In the 1970s Sarah Le Vine (1979) stated that women were so obsessed with the issue of bridewealth that they would have nightmares about it. These elements could explain why people actually tend to say they are married rather than in an informal union in

the Kenyan national survey data, and as a consequence why “marriage” rates are so high, and not decreasing: local moralities still converge towards early bridewealth payments although in reality they are rather rare.

Norah: While Nanna and Valérie have dealt with the beginning of marriage, so to say, I have focused on its end. I will attempt to show how, just like the achievement of a marriage, the end of a marriage is a process too. It leaves room for ambiguities in one's status as well as provides opportunities to navigate social norms. In my ongoing study of divorced women in Nairobi, I have found that my interlocutors define variously formed and dissolved unions as marriage and divorce. There are also ambiguities in some of the women's marital statuses mostly due to how they achieved or ended their marriage.

While the Marriage Act 2014 recognizes and distinguishes five types of marriage (Parliament of Kenya 2014), many Kenyans use a hybrid version to get married (Bledsoe & Cohen 1993, 55). For example, for many Kenyans, the process of marriage can include marriage making elements of Customary, Christian, and Civil marriages. Usually a couple that intends to marry will start with the customary marriage which involves the bridewealth ceremony, followed by a church wedding that incorporates the signing of the civil marriage certificate. In this case, it would seem that the couple has married two times in different forms. It might be important however, to note at what point the individuals getting married recognize themselves as officially married. I asked some of my interlocutors this question, and one, who I shall refer to as Sarah, mentioned that she felt truly married after signing the marriage certificate from the Registrar of marriages despite having had a customary wedding and a church ceremony.¹ Four years after physically moving out of her matrimonial home, she filed for a divorce in a court of law. Ending the marriage in a customary manner was not an option, for her, a civil divorce signified a definite end of her marriage.

Diana, a recently divorced mother of 2, explained that although her former husband and his family had not paid any form of bridewealth and neither had they performed any legal ceremony as a couple, she became truly married on the day of her father's funeral.² Her in-laws were stopped at the gate of her family's homestead when they arrived to attend the funeral. After negotiations between her in-laws and her family's elders, her in-laws were allowed to enter the homestead and they were directed to sit in a tent designated for in-laws and most importantly, they were served food as in-laws according to custom which involved Diana serving them herself. She insists on the fact that because there were negotiations at the gate that led to her in-laws being allowed into her family's homestead as in-laws and given privileges specific for in-laws, her marriage and belonging to her in-law's family cannot be disputed even in a court of law. However, when Diana and I discuss her divorce, she is adamant that she was not really married and so there is no need for a divorce process of any kind. She emphasizes this often when speaking about her freedom to date and remarry if she so chooses. She also mentions that she often has friendly banter with her brothers-in-law with whom she is still in touch and who refer to her as “their wife.” She, on the other hand, reminds them that they never gave bridewealth for her and so she never belonged to them and more importantly, she is no longer in a marriage-like union with their brother, her former husband. Although friendly, the frequency with which the banter happens, as Diana explains, may be a reminder and assertion of “ownership” by her in-laws because her assumed marriage has not been dissolved.

For Diana, her assertion of freedom is based on the fact that hers was never a marriage because her in-laws have never visited her home to meet her family and officially marry her and/or give bridewealth. It is not unusual for Kenyan women who have been in cohabitative unions to switch between the narrative of being married and never being married (Clark & Brauner-Otto 2015). For Diana, the ambiguous nature of her marriage makes its termination similarly ambiguous and possibly problematic.

My last point on divorce demonstrates how divorce, like marriage, can be ambiguous. The law regarding divorce for the different types of marriages is clearly stipulated in the Marriage Act 2014. However, just like in marriage, many couples end their marriages outside of the law or unofficially. This may result in various entities including the individual concerned, contending his or her marital status and claim of being a divorcee to be specific. Jay, a separated mother of three, narrates how lately her mother has been talking to her about the importance of forgiveness and specifically Jay's need to forgive her ex-husband.³ It seems that in this call for forgiveness, Jay's mother is pushing for Jay to reunite with her husband. This is against the backdrop of Jay's mother revealing that she and Jay's mother-in-law recently had a conversation that lasted more than an hour. Jay suspects that they discussed her reconciliation with her husband, yet she is very clear that her marriage is irrecoverable. I ask her in what way her marriage can be said to be over, she replies that she intended to file for a divorce in a court of law, but the Covid-19 pandemic destabilized her financially. She emphasizes the fact that she is separated awaiting a divorce process in a court of law to end her marriage. It seems that her actions, taken so far to achieve an end of her marriage, have not been taken seriously and there is an expectation that Jay will go back to her ex-husband once she cools off. It is also probable that the slightly more than one year of separation is not long enough to establish that the marriage has ended. As Jay's mother suggested, some married couples usually separate for a period of time and get back together. Without a definitive divorce process and the relatively short period of her separation, it seems that Jay will have to contend with her being viewed as still married, her separation temporary, and she can expect even more pressure from family members to reconcile with her ex-husband.

The voices from Kenyan women undergoing processes of separation, as well as men's opinions around marriage in Gulu, and the variability of answers among the Gusii, raise the question of gendered positionalities within and around marriage. Gender has an impact on the way marriage is experienced by the couple, or their kin. What can we say about these gendered perspectives?

Norah: Silence, quietness, and softness are key aspects of behavioural norms associated with good women in some Kenyan communities, as in other communities in the continent (see Ondicho 2013; Pietilä 2014; Hodgson & MacCurdy 2005). These are opposed to loudness and indiscretion which are associated with improper feminine behaviour. Women who follow the ethos considered appropriate are discreet and not loud, subtle and not direct, which is seen as aggressive and stubborn. In many cases the loud women seem to stand out as deviations to the norm and their behaviour is viewed as unacceptable. In my study, some of my interlocutors expressed their disapproval of the Kenyan women who have shared their divorce stories on YouTube. My interlocutors share their concern for the children who are inadvertently exposed and might have to deal with scrutiny, questions, or stigma due

to the publicizing of detailed family matters. Some of my interlocutors questioned the YouTube women's decision to "tell all" rather than share their divorce story while keeping specific details secret.

As I consider the difference in attitude of the quiet and the loud divorced women, I remembered instances when my silent interlocutors have shared moments when they have been loud in regard to their marriages and divorces. I realised that although these women had not been to a television station or a YouTube channel and had not publicized their divorce, there are moments in the process of their divorce when they were loud.

My first example is Diana, introduced in the previous section, who narrates that she frequently called for family meetings at her mother-in-law's place to demand that her mother and brothers-in-law help her and her husband resolve their marital problems. In these meetings she was "loud" and put her mother-in-law on the spot for constantly supporting her husband despite her complaints. On the day she physically left her matrimonial home, she called her mother-in-law and told her that she was leaving to go to her own mother where she would also find support like her husband had in his mother. Diana also declared that she would not call her "mother" again and that was the last time she would hear from Diana. She assures me that she has not spoken to her mother-in-law since then and does not pick her calls.

My second example is Jay, who announced to her mother-in-law that she was leaving the marriage months before she actually did so. Her mother-in-law asked that Jay not leave her matrimonial home until she (the mother-in-law) came to the city from her rural home, to meet with the couple and try to save the marriage. However, Jay's mother-in-law did not come despite several phone calls to her from Jay saying she was "drowning" and could not last much longer. On the day Jay physically moved out of her matrimonial home, her mother-in-law called asking why Jay was leaving when she was supposed to stay until when her mother-in-law came as promised. Jay responded by saying she had waited long enough and it was clear that her mother-in-law did not take Jay's marital problems seriously nor did she care about Jay's well-being. Jay stated that she was justified in leaving her husband and ending the marriage since she had not only suffered enough but had also shown restraint and patience.

In both cases, the women seemed to establish an end of relations and their marriage by confronting their relationship with their mothers-in-law while they were married. The women also challenged the relationship their mothers-in-law had with their sons (the ex-husbands), that seemed to condone the men's disruptive behaviour and reflected their mothers' unwillingness to help. Diana's and Jay's failed marriage could not be solely their responsibility nor their husbands', but also their mothers-in-law's. This could be a strategy of securing or establishing a narrative that absolves the divorced woman of the usual blame of failing to keep her marriage. This direct verbal accusation of one's mother-in-law may be seen as a loud, rude behaviour that would not occur under normal circumstances since there is a level of respect a husband's mother is accorded. It might be significant that the women mentioned above confront their mothers-in-law as they are leaving their marriages; significant because at this point the marriage and the relationships that come with the marriage are ended or as is often the case, change, especially in unions that bore children. This

exchange may also be important to how the story will be retold by the in-laws and the mother-in-law in particular. Whichever way one's mother-in-law describes the seemingly hostile conversation, she may not be able to avoid mentioning the accusations levelled at her by her outgoing daughter-in-law. Which might make the hearer of the tale consider the fact that the failed marriage was not entirely the divorced woman's fault, if anything, they might sympathize with her and how untenable her situation was.

Anna: In addressing the issue of gender, I would also like to connect to what Nanna has said above, about marriage as “process.” In my fieldwork, I have rather seen marriage as a “project,” and one in which women and men are differently positioned. When I say “project,” I mean that while marriage remains unattainable for many, it still maintains a performative power, as it infuses lives of women and men with intentionality and directionality. It is maybe not surprising that, in a country where the “projectification” of society (Meinert and Whyte 2014, 83) by NGOs is rife, marriage is also talked about in these terms. For my interlocutors in Jinja, Eastern Uganda, marriage requires planning, resources (erotic art, affection, fertility, and of course money) and clear goals, like a development project or intervention. “Developing the home,” an expression that Parikh (2015, 92) has recorded in the same region, implies both emotional and material commitment.

I was struck however by how the experience of self-formation and temporal projection afforded by marriage played out differently in men's and women's lives. In Jinja, young men talked about marriage as a *step towards* personal accomplishment: “Marriage helps you settle down with one person,” I was told by Joshua, for example, who drank with his male friends every evening on the buzzing Iganga Road. “It also makes you responsible, because you have someone to caution you, if you're not doing right.” Whatever the background to the partnership, men would insist on the importance of “being focused,” to “plan” and to “organize” themselves through marriage (or partnership). Chris, a Ugandan in his early thirties in a distant relation with a British girl (a common pattern in Jinja, tourist town), loved her dearly, but started resenting the absence of projectuality in their relation. Some days he would tell me that he wanted to leave her, in order to “plan” his life in Jinja. “I am growing and I need to plan. I have decided to plan here, anyway; business mainly, and have a family... All these phone calls every day are ok, but they take time and energy, I cannot be focused.” In more optimistic moments, he took instead the same relationship as a chance to work harder and to focus more strongly on his sugarcane plantation business. “For the [money for the visa] I am planning to extend the land to 38 acres. I am forced to work more, but it's ok, it helps me to be in focus.” Within partnership projects, it was important to identify all possible resources that may help the “development” of the couple happen. My friend Thomas, an Iteso (from Eastern Uganda) married with a Munyankole (from Western Uganda), openly talked about how he capitalized on the ethnic diversity between them, which he strategically employed to start his partnership on a safe side. Since the transport of the cows (highly valued in the Ankole marriage as a bridewealth payment) was made hard by the distance, he proposed to pay the equivalent of their value in cash and managed to pay the Iteso price, which was cheaper. He took this as “one good thing of intermarriages,” thinking of his interethnic household in entrepreneurial terms. In

both cases, affect and materiality inevitably go together and entering a relationship helps the man become more focused and judicious in handling them at once.

When I look at how women enter intimate projects, however, I find resonance with what Norah observed in her fieldwork. Women enter partnership projects with cautiousness, knowing that they will lack support to *stay* in the project, so to say. Particularly in Jinja, where labour migration and tourism make couples form “on the move,” far from their respective homes, women are often left alone to face the risks that entering a partnership project implies. Female interlocutors described marriage more as a “gamble” than as an investment. While men told me how marriage “organized” them, women thought that one should rather organize him/herself *before* getting married, in order not to make mistakes. “I see many problems in marriage, I’m rather single... Men disturb a lot. I wish [my children] to have a prosperous life: they should marry at the right time, when they are organized,” Barbra told me, echoing many others, as she recounted her separation. The frustrated stories about the lack of *mukwano*, of love, often referred to the lack of material support by the man in their lives, despite the obvious presence of affection and erotic attraction in many relationships. It was hard for women to imagine their future in “developmental” ways when they had barely enough to eat. Some women however have proudly told me of their own “marriage projects”: Betty, a Muganda (from Central Uganda) brought to Jinja by her husband, separated after years of domestic violence and entered a relationship with a new man, from Karamoja (North-East Uganda). She insisted on turning the names of her kids into Karimojong names, and in so doing, she managed to access the support of a local NGO working for the integration of Karimojong immigrants in Jinja. She liked her Karimojong partner, plus she managed to send her kids to school. Women have to be focused and good planners as much as men, but most of my women interlocutors thought that such judiciousness should be a precondition, rather than a result, of marriage.

The material gathered in this paper is the result of research carried out in at least four different locations, between Uganda and Kenya. There seem to be large overlapping and commonalities between these areas in terms of the precarity of marriage bonds, the disconnect between ideal and practice and the anxieties raised by such a fundamental institution as marriage. However, these broad trends are understood and incorporated differently in different localities, as testified in the previous pages by local vocabularies, by the role of local religious communities, or by the role of ethnicity in the negotiation of bridewealth.

This brings us to our last point, that is the relevance of studying marriage on, and across, different scales: do marriage and partnership formation have something to say about national, international and transnational scales?

Anna: Thinking in scale is important. Marriage obviously exceeds the couple, and involves vertical lines of kin, horizontal networks of friends, neighbours, and a larger community, which sometimes stretches across regions and countries - even continents. As Valérie has pointed out in the opening section, comparing on a national, or even regional scale invites important questions on the past and future of marriage. In my research, marriage functioned as a “connector” of national and international scales. Looking at how projects of marriage and partnership are informed by mobility and migration, how relationships start and develop “on the move” so to say, helped me contextualise partnerships in a broader landscape, quite literally. The region around Jinja provides a privileged position to observe this: characterised by high mobility and migrations since precolonial times (Fallers 1956),

it has repeatedly been depopulated and repopulated as a result of pressure on land, outbreaks of sleeping sickness, or the establishment of Christian missions and colonial headquarters. The local sugar plantations and factories have attracted intra-regional trade since the times of the Protectorate, and the recent tourism boom has only amplified local diversity. Kinship relations in the area have necessarily been fluid ever since, with partnerships emerging across ethnic and racial borders: “mixture [was] the rule” already for Fallers (*ibid.*, 59).

If on one side, mobility raises anxieties for the lack of rooting (see Parikh 2015), on the other it represents a chance for imagining one’s future beyond the *maka* (the family household) and the village, on a different scale. In the accounts of my interlocutors aged fifty and above, places like the Owen Falls Hydroelectric Dam and factories like Nyleti or Tip Tap were quasi-mythical destinations of coming-of-age journeys from poorer areas of the country, towards “development”—urban development, economic development, and personal development as well. Paul, now in his sixties, migrated to this industrial town in the 1970s. After living some years as an immigrant bachelor, he felt that he should share his migratory project with a woman of his own “tribe,” one that he could trust would share the hardship of town life. He was ready to undertake “the journey” that would temporarily take him back to his home village to choose a suitable wife. In the midst of Idi Amin’s wars, he thus bought a bus ticket for himself and a friend and risked his life at the checkpoints on the road connecting Jinja to Paliisa, in another epic journey that he remembers as foundational of his adult manhood. In his experience, labour migration and marriage migration intersected, and ultimately were reconciled when Paul decided to settle in the rural periphery of Jinja and take more wives from different ethnic groups.

To younger generations, Jinja offers less security, but its urban glow is still charming. In my field in the peripheral settlement of Kikaramoja, whose name derives from the high number of immigrants from Karamoja, both men and women are constantly engaged in short and long mobility cycles, both with their distant homes and with the close-by town, where they daily “go for eats,” looking for small jobs or picking reusable waste. Karimojong are a nomadic society, and women have entered the local imaginary as those who “never stay still”: while literature highlights the negative connotation of the *nakyewombekeire*—the woman who has many partners and has not settled down—in Eastern Uganda (for example, Parikh 2015, 21), in Kikaramoja women’s mobility is the norm rather than the exception. Many women prefer living alone, attempting small business in the slum (something that enabled them to maintain their independence, even during a hard period like the Covid-19 lockdown), or daily walking to town to find day-to-day jobs. They have children with men from other ethnic groups living in the area, and I have encountered more than one case in which the father (or a neighbour) looks after the child, while the Karimojong woman moves back and forth, being “strong and energetic” as the nickname of one of them, Kabode, indicated.

Despite hiccups, intimate and sexual mobility represents an asset for the couple but also for Uganda, according to the interlocutors I interviewed in my fieldwork between 2019 and 2020. The racial and ethnic Other embodies fantasies of pleasure and desire, as well as economic improvement: this was expressed by the giggles of interlocutors that told me how they “found real love in the other tribe,” or by the commitment of the “*muzungu* [white people] hunters” hanging in the town’s bars to

attract NGO workers and tourists, hoping for a “passport love” that would take them abroad. While partnerships in the “melting pot of Uganda” cross regional and international borders, the national scale remains however relevant in the couple’s imaginary. This is the case for the interethnic couples I interviewed, who perceived themselves as role models for a future free from intertribal tensions: “How do you expect me, if I have a relationship *on the other side*, to go and massacre people there?,” one man in an interethnic couple asked me rhetorically, concluding, “you should marry from another tribe.” Interracial couples aspire to contribute to a better future for Uganda, with biracial children (called “cappuccino children” in a town where white tourist sip cappuccino in fancy cafés) being taken as a gift to a post-racial nation. In this sense, mobility informs marriage and partnerships projects both by projecting far away and by reinforcing the awareness of belonging. This is an aspect that the gender and sexuality turn in migration studies has highlighted in the past decade.

Finally, looking at migration and mobility helps overcome what Groes has called a “methodological conjugalism,” or “the tendency to focus on marriage, couples, and dyads within the largely Eurocentric framework of the nation-state” (Groes 2016, 193). Marriage stretches across and beyond the state and intersects variously with mobility projects: getting married is not always the ultimate aim of the journey, while conversely, migration plans may be disrupted by unexpected partnership hiccups on the way. Will the journey in which a young woman embarked from Karamoja to the industrial periphery of Jinja end up in a paid job and in a stable relationship? Will the ethnic differences in the couple reinforce the household, or make it loose and stressed by conflicting demands? Will local networks compensate for the distance from the homeland? Thinking in terms of mobility and scales should help overcome a static view of marriage and appreciate it as “a driver of change, innovation or even disorder,” to put it with Pauli and Van Dijk (2017, 258). Despite uncertainties, the experience of migration, in my observations, is often narrated as preparatory to, or resulting from, an important experience of partnership. These journeys become therefore both emotional pilgrimages towards self-accomplishment as adult, gendered beings, and precarious paths to approximate an ideal of marriage that may never be fully achieved. As such, marriage connects different scales and brings an *elsewhere* inside the household in disparate ways. I like the way the eighty years old Francis, a man who has travelled a lot and who was unsure of the number of children he has fathered, described the condition of people loving, and living, in Jinja: “We are seasonal birds. It is hard to tell where we will be tomorrow.”

Nanna: While marriage declines in Uganda, customary marriages and church weddings have become not only processes, as I suggested before, but also events (see also Pauli 2019). The marriage ceremony and the church weddings, in Gulu, have over the past decades, especially after peace in 2006/8, become markers of marriage and the legitimacy of unions. I see Anna’s perspective on love or marriages as a project in my own material as well, where the marriage ceremonies become a central form of self-accomplishment, but also that this self-accomplishment is scalable. Where Anna’s interlocutors see love as a way of pursuing difference and mobility, and suggest that this mobility is part of a national project to build a better future for Uganda, my interlocutors in Gulu related the project of marriage to questions of mobility and belonging in almost opposite terms.

I want to approach this idea of marriage as a connector between different scales through wedding videos and weddings songs. I found that these cultural forms enable circulation and expressions of belonging to an ethnic, Acholi community across scales, and that they have been the social and cultural glue of a post-war ethnonationalist cultural revival in urban Acholiland and its diaspora. While I cannot fully unfold these connections here, I will make a sketch to show this different dynamic of scale and marriage.

During the 20-year conflict in Northern Uganda (1986–2006), almost the entire population experienced displacement in different waves. The majority were internally displaced living in camps under conditions of “social torture”—as victims of multiple forms of violence from both the rebel army Lord’s Resistance Army and the army and government in the Uganda People’s Defence Forces (Dolan 2009; Finnström 2008). While post-conflict re-settlement has been far from straightforward (Whyte et al. 2014), Gulu has been the site of a bustling post-war economy. At the same time, the discourses of the peace process emphasising “traditional” forms of justice (Branch 2014), resettlement and “return home” also, I think, has shaped a shift in popular culture. During my fieldwork in 2009/10 in Gulu, the city soundscape was dominated by American and local hip hop. Today CD-cutting shops more often blast *lakubukubu*—digitally produced traditional Acholi beats—into the streets. *Lakubukubu* originally refers to a particular beat and drum used in marriage celebrations. The contemporary music genre originated from young men performing electronical-hybrid songs at weddings from 2005 onwards. Today several music studios in Gulu specialize in *lakubukubu* as a genre, and the recorded songs are not necessarily wedding music. But many singers who do *lakubukubu* are also wedding singers, as performing at weddings is much more lucrative than performing in Gulu’s nightlife. In this way marriage culture and marriage music have been at the centre of a cultural revival and a mainstreaming of what my interlocutors call “traditional Acholi culture” in Northern Uganda.

This cultural revival and sort of invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1993) with marriage at the center, also plays out at a transnational scale. While most people in Northern Uganda were at some point internally displaced during the war, some were also resettled abroad or in other parts of Uganda (Kampala and Entebbe, notably). While I have not found quantitative measures of how many Acholi people from Northern Uganda live abroad, my friends in Gulu describe diaspora communities in several cities in the UK, Australia, USA, Canada and Scandinavia. Both wedding singers and videographers in Gulu listed the Acholi diaspora as important clients and significant sources of income.

In Gulu, wedding videos and wedding songs are at times paid for by relatives abroad as a way to allow them to participate in the marriage ceremonies and celebrations, and a way of reinforcing belonging and participation in Acholi culture and community. That wedding videos are significant for migrants and diaspora communities is also noted by Deneva, working among Bulgarian Muslim migrants to Spain (2019). She notes how the shift from VHS tapes to digital formats has transformed wedding videos from media that are exchanged between relatives to media that circulate more easily across communities working to sustain a “transnational village community” (Deneva 2019, 73, 79). Further, digital wedding videos by their wider circulation have become not only a representation of the

wedding, but part of the wedding ritual in a sense, as the “wedding does not become fully real, until every important kin member has seen it” whether they are at home or abroad (Deneva 2019, 79). Both of these uses are also noted by videographers in Gulu. Wedding videos are in this way popular devices for imagining social order, space and belonging in transnational social fields, and maintaining and performing ties of belonging between diaspora and home communities.

Beyond this, people from Northern Uganda living abroad also engaged the wedding industry in Gulu, when they themselves were getting married. Several of the wedding singers I interviewed considered diaspora Acholi among their best clients: they would commission wedding songs or wedding music videos recorded in Gulu to be played at their own wedding celebrations abroad. Docky, one of the few female singers in Gulu, described how she recorded music and videos that emphasised traditional culture in order to attract diaspora clients. “I do most of the work online. Maybe they have seen my songs on Youtube or Facebook. They send me a message on Facebook and then they get me from there.” One of the prominent born-again singers in Gulu, also a wedding singer, has twice been on tour to perform at weddings in Australia and the UK. The desire of first and second-generation diaspora Acholi to stay connected to “real Acholi culture” as one videographer termed it, also shapes the meaning of marriage celebrations in Gulu.

These ethnographic sketches serve to point to how the notion of scale is useful as a lens to understand the making and unmaking of marriage. Marriage in Gulu plays out as a project of cultural revival in a transnational field in the wake of war, displacement and continued political and economic marginalisation within the Ugandan political landscape.

Conclusion

- 8 In this paper, we have addressed the resilience of the ideal of marriage in East Africa as a social, geographical and gendered connector—despite the apparent statistical decline of the institution. Our conversations here are far from comprehensive discussions of what this means for individuals and communities, but they indicate some areas of interest that can be useful points of departure for further investigations.
- 9 Firstly, it seems that comparison and a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods are useful starting points for understanding better what in public and political discourses often appears as a moral panic over the decline of marriage in Eastern Africa. The demographic, comparative perspective here shows that marriage landscapes are heterogenous across Eastern Africa and that national and regional histories shape both who and how people consider themselves married, as well as the ways in which marriage and self-accomplishment are related in cultural terms. The case studies from Kenya and Uganda begin to shed light on how these differences are meaningful spaces of negotiation of value and belonging. Our ethnographic sketches illustrate some of the ways that “marriage” might be a “floating signifier” but also retains stable forms and ideals, though they are perhaps rarely achieved.
- 10 Secondly, it seems that there is a useful tension in considering marriage as both “process” and “project.” As famously coined by Radcliffe-Brown, it would indeed seem that it is still useful to consider marriage as a process, as Nanna and Valérie’s cases

show, but also that these processes are spaces of negotiations of social recognition, power and kinship relations which are non-linear and open-ended. Here, Norah's work on divorce is particularly illuminating in that it focuses on processes and negotiations of ending marriages. "Divorce" appears to be as diverse as "marriage," and presents an important but somewhat overlooked aspect of partnerships. Anna's work extends this idea of marriage as something that is not given, but rather a question of becoming that is posed to individuals and communities. Considering marriage as a project, she shows the gendered dimensions of self-accomplishment that play out in the aspirations for and experiences of partnerships in the multi-ethnic town of Jinja. In a context of mobility and migration, and on a geographical scale that appears highly variegated socially and culturally, partnership formation occurs through a constellation of rituals and processes enabling the formation of fluid communities.

- 11 This leads to the third point, thinking about marriage on, and across distinct spatial scales. Where marriage as process and project somehow emphasizes temporalities of partnerships and relations, our material also speaks to other kinds of scales, and in particular national, international and transnational spaces. The cases from Jinja and Gulu in particular show how colonial pasts and conflict within the same country shape how marriage differs in the way it works as a connector across scales. Our ethnographies of partnerships across East Africa only scratch the surface, but indicate an analytical potential in thinking about scale, and marriage as starting points for, and embedded in the imaginations of regional and global mobilities and belonging.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alava, H. 2017. "Homosexuality, the Holy Family and a Failed Mass Wedding in Catholic Northern Uganda." *Critical African Studies* 9(1): 32–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2016.1245104>.
- Branch, A. 2014. "The Violence of Peace: Ethnojustice in Northern Uganda." *Development and Change* 45(3): 608–630. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12094>.
- Bledsoe, C., & Cohen, B. 1993. *Social Dynamics of Adolescent Fertility in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/2220>.
- Clark, S., & Brauner-Otto, S. 2015. "Divorce in sub-Saharan Africa: Are Unions Becoming Less Stable?" *Population and Development Review* 41(4): 583–605. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2015.00086.x>
- Deneva, N. 2019. "Phantasmic Devices: Wedding Videos and the Creation of an Imagined Transnational Community by Bulgarian Muslims in Spain." *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai Sociologia* 64(1): 65–88. <https://doi.org/10.2478/subbs-2019-0003>.
- Dolan, C. 2009. *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986–2006*. Human Rights in context, 4. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Fallers, L.A. 1956. *Bantu Bureaucracy: A Study of Integration and Conflict in the Political Institutions of an East African People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Finnström, S. 2008. *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Golaz, V. 2009. *Pression démographique et changement social. Vivre en pays gusii à la fin du xx^e siècle*. Paris: Karthala-IFRA.
- Golaz, V. 2014. "Le déclin du mariage en milieu rural gusii (Kenya)." In *Le mariage en Afrique. Pluralité des formes et des modèles matrimoniaux*, edited by P. Antoine and R. Marcoux, 187–205. Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Groes, C. 2016. "Men Come and Go, Mothers Stay": Personhood and Resisting Marriage among Mozambican Women Migrating to Europe." In *Affective Circuits: African Migrations to Europe and the Pursuit of Social Regeneration*, edited by J. Cole and C. Groes. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Håkansson, T.N. 1988. *Bridewealth, Women and Land. Social Change Among the Gusii of Kenya*. Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology.
- Hobsbawm, E. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hodgson, D., & S. Mac Curdy. 2005. *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- James, D. 2017. "Not Marrying in South Africa: Consumption, Aspiration and the New Middle Class." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 40(1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2016.1237295>.
- Le Vine, S. 1979. *Mothers and Wives. Gusii Women of East Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Manderson, L., & E. Block. 2016. "Relatedness and Care in Southern Africa and Beyond." *Social Dynamics* 42(2): 205–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2016.1218139>.
- Mayer, P. 1950. "Privileged Obstruction of Marriage Rites among the Gusii." *Africa* 20(2): 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3180569>.
- McLean, K.E. 2021. "'Post-crisis Masculinities' in Sierra Leone: Revisiting Masculinity Theory." *Gender, Place & Culture* 28(6): 786–805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1825214>.
- Meinert, L. & S.R. Whyte. 2014. Epidemic Projectification. AIDS Responses in Uganda as Event and Process. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 32(1): 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ca.2014.320107>.
- Ondicho, T.G. 2013. "Domestic Violence in Kenya: Why Battered Women Stay." *International Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences* 1(4): 105–111 [archive].
- Parikh, S. 2015. *Regulating Romance: Youth Love Letters, Moral Anxiety, and Interventions in Uganda's Time of HIV*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Parliament of Kenya. 2014. *The Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 62* (pp. 31–69). Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Pauli, J. & R. van Dijk. 2017. "Marriage as an End or the End of Marriage? Change and Continuity in Southern African Marriages." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 39(4): 257–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2016.1243451>.
- Pietilä, T. 2014. *Gossip, Markets, and Gender*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Porter, H. 2016. *After Rape: Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda*. The International African Library, 53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316841297>.

- Porter, H. 2020. "Moving Toward 'Home': Love and Relationships through War and Displacement." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33(4): 813–831. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa014>.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., & D. Forde. 1950. *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. London; New York: International African Institute, Oxford University Press.
- Silberschmidt, M. 1999. "Women Forget that Men Are the Masters": Gender Antagonism and Socio-Economic Change in Kisii District, Kenya. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Elanders Gotab.
- Whyte, S. R., S. Babiiha, R. Mukyala, & L. Meinert. 2014. "Urbanisation by Subtraction: The Afterlife of Camps in Northern Uganda." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52(4): 597–622. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X14000457>.
- Wyrod, R. 2016. *AIDS and Masculinity in the African City: Privilege, Inequality, and Modern Manhood*. Oakland: University of California Press.

NOTES

1. Interview with Sarah on 27 Feb. 2021.
 2. Interview with Diana on 13 Feb. 2021.
 3. Zoom interview with Jay on 01 March 2021 and WhatsApp chat 05 March 2021 and 17 March 2021.
-

ABSTRACTS

East African families are heterogeneous institutions, fluid and in transformation. The region is home to a range of competing and sometimes contradictory value systems, with a variety of ethics, codes and practices regarding such matters as marriage, divorce and bridewealth. The intertwining of multiple value systems, together with demographic shifts, intermarriages, dynamics of internal and international migration and new professional avenues have a fundamental bearing on expanding the array of family configurations.

The spread of informal unions can in part be understood as a response to economic changes initiated by the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, and a limited ability to meet the social prerequisites of legitimate family-making, like wedding and marriage costs and the payment of bridewealth, i.e. the transfer of wealth from the groom's to the bride's kin. However, individuals and couples of all generations actively re-imagine the future of marriage beyond bridewealth, increasingly questioning the meaning, role and validity of marriage payments, wedding requirements and separations.

Changing family constellations and new interpretations of non conventional family-making, where marriage is not officially sanctioned, cohabitation is not an option, or patrilinear ties are less important than matrilinear, may pave alternative pathways for achieving upward social mobility, especially in the context of mobility and migration through kinship networks. In this chapter we wish to address the diversity of marriage in East Africa from a local and gendered perspective. After a quantitative overview on marriage in Kenya and Uganda, we will be focusing on marriage ceremonies, the meaning of divorce for social status and self-accomplishment and finally, the role of mobility in making and unmaking marriage.

INDEX

Geographical index: Kenya, Uganda | Ouganda

AUTHORS

ANNA BARAL

Department of Anthropology, Århus University. anna.baral@cas.au.dk

VALÉRIE GOLAZ

Institut national d'études démographiques (INED); LPED, IRD-Aix-Marseille Univ.
valerie.golaz@ined.fr

NORAH KIERERI

Aix-Marseille Univ., LPED, IRD-Aix-Marseille Univ. norahwawira@gmail.com

NANNA SCHNEIDERMAN

Department of Anthropology, Århus University. nanna.s@cas.au.dk