

BRIDEWEALTH IN TORORO, UGANDA

By

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This thesis represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim Aden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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For my mother

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Introduction

“Is it because of your cows that you are torturing (me) and doing all this?! I would ask those such questions and...there was nobody to pay back, so I had to endure, and it is what women this way have to endure...the cows, and even if your father is alive, he will tell you, ‘I’ve eaten the cows and there is no way I can take back. So please, my daughter, I did not choose for you that man or even if I told you to marry him, you accepted. So go back, because I do not have anything to pay back.’”

Jessica Okoth emphatically said these words to me one afternoon in February 2010 in a village outside of Tororo, Uganda. She was recounting arguments with her late husband and father. Jessica was extremely unhappy in her marriage, but she could not divorce her husband because her father was unable to refund the bridewealth he was given when she married. African feminists and western activists protest husbands furnishing large gifts as they marry because of cases like Jessica’s. They claim the practice restricts the agency of married women, equating women to property, trapping them in dangerous marriages, and neglecting their ability to influence household decisions. Africa’s cultural conservatives, however, boast bridewealth payments promote healthy, life-long marriages, yield incentives for parents to raise their daughters to the best of their ability, and provide an avenue for the younger generation to appreciate those that raised them. For the first time in recent history, Africans, specifically

Ugandans, are challenging the merits of the practice in a major way. The following pages will examine those arguments in part but will dwell largely on bridewealth's historical and contemporary effects on marriage. How did bridewealth begin and why does it persist in Africa? How does it shape family networks? Does it produce domestic violence? Does it limit the agency of women? Did Jessica's husband torture her because of her cows? This work will attempt to answer these questions.

In countries where it is practiced, bridewealth is one of many factors shaping individual marriages and marriage demographics. It pervades the power dynamics in relationships and impacts marriage rates, age of marriage, divorce rates, polygyny, human capital, childrearing, economic productivity, and a host of other categories of importance on national and international levels. Its existence has important effects on the transfer of property, exploitation for production, social organization, and the economy.¹ These effects will be touched upon later, but it is important to note that bridewealth, particularly because of its large scale in some societies, is more than a mere symbolic gesture.

Bridewealth is defined as "a customary gift before, at, or after the marriage from the husband and his kin to the wife and her kin."² Brideprice and bridewealth are often used interchangeably, but some who engage in the custom protest the use of brideprice, because they do not consider it a commercial transaction in which a man purchases his wife as a piece of property. Matrimonial gifts that flow from the male to the female side of the family are compensation for the woman's companionship and labor. Moreover, it often legitimizes the membership of the children to their father's descent group. In light of this, the term progeny

¹ Goody, J. (1973). *Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia*. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

² Kottak, C. P. (2009). Cultural Anthropology. New York City, McGraw-Hill.

price is also used, emphasizing the transfer of the children rather than their mother to the father's lineage.¹ Bride-service is similar label for such marriage services. Bride-service involves a husband working for his future in-laws at their patrilocality for a set period of time; after which, he is able to return home with his wife. Bride-service is common in horticulture societies, particularly in the Amazon.²

These terms are not to be confused with dowry, in which the wife's kin provides gifts. It would be incorrect to label bridewealth the opposite of dowry. While bridewealth involves an exchange between the groom's kin and the bride's kin, dowry is better described as pre-mortem inheritance for the bride rather than the same transfer in the opposite direction. The important distinction to be made is that dowry is a gift made to the bride (sometimes to the husband for safekeeping or jointly to both), but bridewealth is a movement of wealth from the groom's kin to the bride's. Thus, bridewealth and dowry are not simply opposites.³

It is also worth noting distinctions regarding the specific beneficiaries of marriage payments. Brideprice or bridewealth is at times used to refer specifically to payments made to the bride's kin as opposed to dower in which the gift is directly bestowed upon the bride herself. In the same vein, groomprice, payments made to the groom and his family, is used to distinguish from dowry, a gift to the bride as pre-mortem inheritance often with the groom as caretaker. In this context, both dower, most commonly found in Muslim marriages, and brideprice often serve as insurance in the event of death or divorce.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Miller, B. (2009). Cultural Anthropology. Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall.

³ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 21(4): 151-174.

For the purposes of this work, brideprice and bridewealth will be used interchangeably. Though for some, brideprice has negative ideological connotations, in scholarly work the two are often synonymous. When progeny price is used, it will be to emphasize the descent rights of a particular lineage. Lastly, dowry will indicate a general transfer from the female line of descent to the male, without a distinguishing the direct recipient. Unless explicitly noted, bridewealth or brideprice will refer to a transfer from the groom and his kin to his wife's kin.

A surprising number of marriages involve either bridewealth or dowry. In George Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas*, a sample of over one thousand preindustrial cultures for over one hundred variables, more than two-thirds of pre-industrial societies are reported to require some form of bridewealth in marriage. Dowry affects more people in terms of population. It is particularly common in areas with large populations accounting for more than seventy percent of the world's people, particularly in Europe and Asia. Though Anderson (2007) claims brideprice is particularly an African phenomenon, her emphasis on Africa should not be taken in a manner that understates the contemporary prevalence of the tribute elsewhere, particularly in the Middle East, nor should one underestimate the practice's historical frequency. She claims that more than ninety percent of sub-Saharan African societies traditionally make marriage arrangements akin to bride price. Though this is not to say that brideprice is currently as prevalent as ninety percent of sub-Saharan marriages.¹ Even given its historical context, Anderson's estimate seems high and is largely unsubstantiated in her work.

Despite the virtual non-existence of marriage transactions in industrialized nations, the practice dates back centuries and is still popular in the developing world. Records of brideprice can be found as far as 3000 BCE, and the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Aztecs, and Incas all

¹ Ibid.

participated in some form of bride price.¹ Given marriage payments were once a common practice the world over, their disappearance is an interesting phenomenon. It is possible that marriage payments in Africa will fade as they did in industrialized nations. My recent conversations with men and women in Tororo, Uganda suggest the practice is slowly adjusting to modernity though it is unclear whether bridewealth will be accommodated as the nation industrializes. An explanation of the practice's historical evolution and specific progression in Tororo follows.

¹ Ibid.

Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted between January 25, 2010 and February 3, 2010 with Ugandans from the Tororo district in order to develop an understanding of marital relationships. Generally, I aimed to interview both men and women in three categories: young and unmarried; middle aged and married; elderly and married or widowed. In total, 11 women were interviewed. Four of the women were widows and over the age of 50, three of the women were unmarried and under the age of 35, and the last interviewee was in her thirties and married. Of the 13 men interviewed, two were in their twenties and unmarried, five were in their late forties or above and married, and the rest were between 30 and 45 and all married. Only one man and one woman were involved in polygynous marriages, reflective of eastern Uganda where less than 13% of married men have more than one wife.¹ With the exception of one man and one woman, all of the married individuals reported some significant bridal gift exchange at the time of their marriage or shortly thereafter. Most of the younger, unmarried men and women suggested dissatisfaction with the practice and did not have a desire to involve a bride price in their marriages.

The interviews were framed as a discussion about each individual's personal marriages and the experiences of those close to them. Respondents guided me through their lives from the

¹ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. (2007) *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey*. 2006. Calverton, Maryland, USA: UBOS and Macro International Inc.

time they met their spouses, through their introduction and marriage ceremonies, their time raising children, and their current status. Bridewealth was discussed in all of the interviews, but it was not always the central focus of conversation nor was it ever used as a starting point.

In addition, three interviews were done with individuals whose professions focus on the intersections of bridewealth and gender equality, particularly domestic violence. Two attorneys and three domestic violence counselors were interviewed: Ladislaus Rwakafuzi (co-counsel for the plaintiff in a recent Ugandan Constitutional Court hearing on bride price) and Henry Otte (an attorney based in Tororo, specializing in domestic violence cases). All three of the domestic violence counselors were employees of MIFUMI Uganda, a non-governmental organization working towards eliminating instances of domestic violence.

Rwakafuzi and Otte agreed to have their names linked to this work. Since their comments here are the same as those they often make publicly in Uganda, they were not given pseudonyms. Kenneth Obam Okolla, the Prime Minister of the Padhola Cultural Union is treated the same for the same reasons. The names of all other interviewees have been changed. All but one interviewee agreed to have the conversation taped on a digital voice recorder. After conducting the interviews, I reviewed and transcribed them. A few excerpts are reproduced later. They have been edited slightly for readability, with an aim towards an honest representation of the speakers' thoughts. Little was deleted from the edited excerpts, and additions are marked by parentheses. Most of the excerpts were chosen because they were representative of the sentiment of other interviewees though there were people whose opinions strayed from the norm. Such cases are noted.

I conducted all of the interviews in English when possible and in Dhoupadhola¹ when necessary with the assistance of a translator. Over the course of the interview schedule, I was aided by two interpreters, one male and one female, who also facilitated my social entry in a number of cases in which the cultural barrier proved to be too great. Though both of my parents are native to this particular region in Uganda, I have spent most of my life in the United States of America. At first glance, it is likely that most potential respondents would grant necessary trust for this type of ethnographic work, but my American accent and sensibility did create a barrier in some cases. The translators in cases like these significantly reduced the cultural obstacle.

My outsider status may have limited full disclosure of information as sensitive and personal as bridewealth payments and marriage relationships. Further study should anticipate this in conducting ethnographic and quantitative work. Unfortunately, little work of the later form exists. The interviews conducted in Tororo illuminate only a small section of those that practice bridewealth. The input of professional and urban individuals is particularly limited; given most people interviewed were subsistence farmers in villages on the outskirts of the Tororo District. Thus, a broader sample is needed to better understand the Jopadhola and bridewealth globally.

The work was done in Tororo, a small town in southeastern Uganda with approximately 40,000 residents. Tororo serves as the capital of Tororo District, claiming the town as its namesake. The large town of Malaba and the Kenyan border are approximately ten kilometers to the east, and Kampala, Uganda's capital city, is 211 kilometers west, a three to four hour drive. The district has about 500,000 inhabitants of mixed ethnicities, Jopadhola being the largest. Tororo has a town center, approximately one square mile, with small shops and restaurants, and the district expands in all directions with small farming villages. There is a large cement industry

¹ Dhoupadhola is the language of the Japadhola, the dominant ethnic group in Tororo.

in the district, but the vast majority of people are subsistence farmers. The Jopadhola and most of the surrounding ethnic groups are patrilineal and maintain patrilocal residence after marriage.

Respondents were all from Tororo and the surrounding villages. Interviews were carried out at interviewees' homes, places of work, and popular local meeting place. The interviewee, at times an interpreter, and I were usually alone when interviews were conducted. A few of the conversations occurred in groups and in public places; though there was no indication such settings markedly changed how interviewees responded. The nuanced settings of each interview will be noted where appropriate.

In Uganda, as in most places, the manner in which a marriage begins is largely dependent on the location, education level, socio-economic status, and ethnicity of the individuals involved. This deeply personal experience, however, is not without trends able to be generalized for the Jopadhola in and around the Tororo district, Uganda, the African continent, and marriages the world over.

Marriage in Tororo, Uganda

Few of Tororo's contemporary marriages are arranged, though this was not the case a generation ago. In most instances, spouses met in school or by virtue of close proximity in small villages. The majority of interviewees reported meeting their spouse and the wife's relocation to the husband's home within a month, though for some there was up to one or two years between meeting and cohabitation. Under ordinary circumstances, this step would not happen without the consent of the woman's parents and some agreement over the bridewealth payment. If, however, a woman moves into her husband's home without the knowledge or consent of the parents, it is expected that a fine, ranging from a goat and/or a cow to up to 200,000 Ugandan Shillings, will be paid by the husband and his kin for the cultural transgression. The median age of first marriage in Uganda is 17.8 years of age for women and 22.3 for men.¹ In Eastern Uganda, men marry slightly later and women slightly earlier.² None of the Tororans interviewed were significant outliers from these trends.

Given parents consent to their daughter leaving the home, within a month, a ceremony – called an introduction – occurs in which the husband is introduced to the family of his wife. The introduction ceremony legitimizes marriage for the family and community. Introductions are large proceedings of around fifty family and community members. It often begins with a large banquet and speeches from important family and community members. During the introduction, bridal gifts are exchanged or contractually agreed upon. The stakes are high, particularly with the

¹ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Macro International Inc. (2007) *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey. 2006*. Calverton, Maryland, USA: UBOS and Macro International Inc.

² Ibid.

exchange of gifts. If a husband and his family fail to make a satisfactory offer to the family of the bride, the union is immediately terminated, and any gifts brought to the ceremony remain property of the bride's family, regardless of the marriage continuing at this stage.

From independence until the end of last year, a local ordinance in the Tororo district explicitly defined what gifts were necessary to legitimize a marriage. One was required to pay a total of five cows, five goats, and 50,000 Ugandan shillings¹. While most bridewealth payments did reach this level in the past and some continue to do so, most are negotiated at the introduction, using the ordinance as a guide. Joseph Okech, a substance farmer in a small village outside of Tororo's center, gave his wife's family one cow and two goats at the time of his marriage. Later, he added two additional cows and one goat. The five cows, five goats, and 50,000 shilling standard would still be in place for another half decade when he was married in 2004. At the time of the interview, he was the owner of only one cow and one goat, and the payment he made to his in-laws primarily came from his father and one of his paternal uncles. On October 23, 2009, a new local ordinance was passed in Tororo stipulating that bride price payments were no longer a requirement for a marriage but rather an optional gift.

The final stage in the marriage process for those Tororans that are willing and financially able is a formal church wedding. This ceremony occurs anywhere from a few hours to a few years after the introduction. Again, parental consent is a prerequisite to confirming a nuptial in this manner. Pastor Cephias Ochieng informed me that his Pentecostal church, just outside of Tororo, and most churches in the country will not marry a couple without the consent of both parents. Ochieng claimed that these requirements were common because without the consent of the parents, marriages tend to be significantly less stable.

¹ On 21 April 2010, the exchange rate was 1 Ugandan shilling to 0.000485 United States Dollars (USD). 50,000 Ugandan shillings would thus represent 24.25 USD

Bridewealth almost always becomes an issue between nuclear families again in the event of divorce or early death. There is a requirement in instances of divorce for the parents of the wife to refund the marriage payment to the husband. From Uganda's independence until the 2009 ordinance was passed, bride price payments were de jure refundable; it was not legal for a woman to leave her husband without her parents refunding the bride price payment. Ordinance 4 altered the codified existence of bride price, stipulating in Section 5 Article 1 that "A person shall not demand for the refund of bridal gifts as a condition precedent to the dissolution of a marriage," and in Article 2, "A person who demands for the refund of bridal gifts as a condition precedent to the dissolution of a marriage commits an offense." One who breaks this law in Tororo is subject to a fine of up to two currency points¹ and/or a prison sentence of up to six months.² Despite the existence of this law, the social necessity of refunding bridewealth still exists. Most of the men and women I spoke to had little knowledge of the ordinance, and those that did still insisted in the event of a divorce a bride's family was required to refund bridewealth gifts. Most men I spoke to claimed this reality was the way the practice ought to be. John Ndira, a 39 year-old radio personality, recounted a story, demonstrating how and why a Local Council Chairman, charged with upholding the law, decided to ignore the ordinance.

"Just the other day I was in the village somewhere. I had gone to work on some stories, but in the process, I...overheard two people talking about refunding certain brideprice, because it looked like the daughter had actually left the marriage, so after (one) man had

¹ One currency point is equivalent to 20,000 Ugandan Shillings.

² Tororo District Council (2009). *Local Governments (Tororo District) (Regulation of the Exchange of Bridal Gifts) Ordinance*.

left I asked the (other) gentleman...the chairman, LC3, of Magola sub-county, 'That man what has he talked about?' He said, 'ah...we have been telling him to refund the brideprice to the son-in-law.' And I said, 'just last January, there was an ordinance that came in force with affect 1st January.' He said, 'yeah that ordinance came into force, but there were certain situations where you cannot go by that ordinance.' He said, 'there (are) situations when the man will chase the lady. The man has been asking the lady to come back, but the lady doesn't want to come back. What do we do? We say he has to refund the thing.' And I said, 'isn't it in contrary to this thing?' Then he (responded), 'No!'...This was his observation that although the ordinance was good, it didn't take care of a situation in which you have not chased the woman (and) you have not quarreled with the woman. The elders have seen that you want the woman to come back so he says it didn't take care of that situation...but to a general opinion, people still need to understand the ordinance... Although some of them, when they appreciate it's about harmonizing at a time of a refund or domestic difference, they see, but they still need a lot of sensitization on that. You know the problem here is that people say that I can't educate my girl, my daughter up to a certain level and then you come and take free, but I say it's not about taking free it's about the two things together and they give you a better gift"

New laws regarding burial procedures are ignored similarly to the way Ndira described. The same penalty in the same ordinance was extended to those who sought bride price payment as a requirement for burial in the event of an early death. If a woman dies in her partner's home before a bride price has been paid, her body must remain above ground until bridewealth is completed. Section 7 Article 1 of the 2009 ordinance says, "A person shall not demand for bridal gifts to be paid as a condition precedent to the burial of a deceased woman who at the time of her death was cohabiting with a man who had not paid bridal gifts." The next article continues, "A person who demands that bridal gifts be paid as a condition precedent to the burial of a deceased woman who at the time of her death was cohabiting with a man who had not paid bridal gifts commits an offense."¹ Delaying burial until bridewealth is fulfilled, like refunding gifts, remains a de facto requirement for most people in and around Tororo. Thus bridewealth is formally and informally a consideration in Tororo's marriages from beginning to end.

¹ Ibid.

The Social Necessity of Bridewealth

Bridewealth correlates with a particular type of society. Places where brideprice is practiced tend to be patrilineal agrarian, and cattle keeping.¹ Anderson says, “the general pattern seems to be that brideprice exists more frequently in primitive, tribal, and often nomadic societies. Several scholars have even contended that dowry marks a transition to more complex social structures.” Anderson bases this characterization on historical trends towards dowry from brideprice. She claims the distinction was important in Greece and Rome, where the move from brideprice to dowry reflected the complexity of Greco-Roman civilizations in comparison to Indo-Europeans (the Germanic tribes) and the ancient people of the Mediterranean, given the legal and religious accounts like the code of Hammurabi and the Bible indicate brideprice was practiced and later disappeared. Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hebrew, and Chinese societies all appear to have followed the same trend, particularly as they began to divide labor, urbanize, develop formal educational structures, and stratify their societies.² Brideprice is heavily favored in agrarian societies that rely on light tools and a strong female role, whereas dowry is prevalent in places where heavy plow is dominant and there is little female involvement in agriculture. Thus as making a livelihood becomes more mechanized, bridewealth becomes less prevalent.

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

² Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives **21**(4): 151-174.

Peoples that practice dowry tend to inhabit societies that exhibit more substantial socioeconomic differentiation and class stratification in comparison to brideprice societies.¹ This phenomenon suggests that brideprice reflects a relatively high value on a woman's economic contribution. "Girls are valuable workers in a land where survival is scratched from the grudging soil of a half-acre parcel. In her parents' home, a girl can till fields, tend livestock and cook meals. In her husband's home, she is more useful yet. She can have sex and bear children,"² says Barry Bearak.

There are a number of reasons given for the existence of bridewealth practices. One motive, as alluded to above, is a payment for reproductive capabilities and labor. The gift is also traditionally a demonstration by the husband to be that he is capable of providing for his fiancé. A rejection of the bride price signifies rejection of the marriage by the parents. This is a shift from ancient brideprices in which payment was for a bride's virginity.³ Brideprice also serves the purpose of allying kinship groups. The difference in size of bridewealth across cultures is related to services bought rather than wealth involved. Differences in bridewealth payments from ethnic group to ethnic group are commonly based on what rights the gift transfers (progeny price, relocation, etc) rather than the differences in wealth available to the groups.⁴ The variability of bridewealth payments will be discussed in detail later, but it is worth noting now that variations in the size of individual payments at times serve as a socio-economic ruler. The ability to pay a large bride price is a symbol of wealth, and the amount received is a measure of "social esteem

¹ Ibid.

² Bearak, B. (2006). The Bride Price. The New York Times Magazine.

³ Esen, U. (2004). "African Women, Bride Price, and AIDS." The Lancet **363**(9422): 1734-1734.

⁴ Anderson, S. (2007). "*The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice*." The Journal of Economic Perspectives **21**(4): 151-174.

of the family and the moral (or sexual) integrity of the bride.”¹ Bride price is an especially integral part of Tororo’s social milieu for many of the reasons above.

Tororans suggested its original intention was both a show of appreciation for a woman’s upbringing and a demonstration of economic ability, so one could trust a man and his family with his or her daughter. Though bride price has and still does serve these functions, it is also an important social mechanism for a number of other reasons.

A bridewealth gift solidifies a marriage with respect to the surrounding community. In terms of establishing legitimacy, paying a bride price is more important than a church ceremony, living in the same space, or having children. All of the Tororans who identified themselves as married had participated in a bridewealth transaction. There were, however, people who were married and perceived as such by the community who did not have a church ceremony or share a home.

The introduction, the ceremony at which bridewealth is transferred and/or negotiated, is the time in which a man and a woman become husband and wife. Peter Otunnu, a young man in his early twenties, was married for three months to a school teacher and insisted on this claim. He met his wife through a friend soon after he took over his father’s farm and she finished school. At the time, Peter and his wife had been through the process of a traditional marriage and an introduction. They had not yet finalized the bride price payment but hoped to complete it in the near future; they hoped to be married in church some time beyond that. The following excerpt is from our conversation.

¹ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

“We shall call the parties and see what can be. That is the most important thing. You go for the introduction and within that introduction...most of the relatives from the lady’s side will get to know the person that has taken the daughter and whatever you have taken there.”

Ed Kony, a village chief in his late fifties lived with his wife before being introduced or paying a bridewealth. Below is part of his explanation for giving bridewealth in order to legitimize his marriage. Kony and his wife had very little, but they managed to raise the bridewealth for her. He also later saved enough to give a bridewealth payment for his second wife.

“Because with us, (in) our culture, (if a woman is to be respected at home) as a whole woman or to make her feel that she is really at her home, fully independent, you have to take something as dowry¹,”

The introduction, and bridewealth by extension, was similarly described by almost all of the Tororans interviewed.

Failure to produce a bridewealth or account for the fine almost always means the marriage is illegitimate. If a couple were to live together prior to an introduction or elope, for lack of a better word, the easiest and most significant way to mend their tarnished image and

¹ Dowry and brideprice were used interchangeably in this conversation. Here ‘dowry’ corresponds to the definition of bridewealth given in the introductory chapter.

avoid the wife's forced repatriation to her parents is to pay bride price. This cultural transgression is accounted for with the fines mentioned above. These fines are another means of assuring parental and communal consent of a marriage before it proceeds. In the event bridewealth is never produced, the new couple, particularly the wife, may be subject to marginalization by the family. Lisa Mbusa, a widow in her late sixties, describes how family is shunned below:

“And in case (we) are not paid...we're also tortured. (Say) we are four sisters and they paid (bridewealth for) Patricia. They never paid Jenrose, they never paid (the other two) and they also never paid me. In case they're doing (a) certain ceremony, we are not going to get (a share). Those who are not paid in that home they are not going to get share. We call (them) batyan or rugrudia¹. So it is these girls who were paid who will get (the best) part and they will just tell you that ‘if you are asking for meet, what has your husband brought me? What have you brought here?’ You remain like that you will have to go crying because your husband has not paid. So, such thing it makes even a woman...dig hard to work hard so that (her husband) should also buy something to take to their what? Their home. She will not be real daughter in that home. And even the fellow sister will say you are also nothing here

¹ ‘Batyan’ and ‘rugrudia’ are derogatory slang terms.

what have they brought to you...They call you malay¹. They don't respect you in that home. So you don't have voice anywhere, in your home and in your family's home."

This form of ostracism indicates bridewealth is an important link between adult children and their parents. Both men and women also suggested the practice strengthens the bond between a wife and husband. Born in 1967, Janet Otte was in the sixteenth year of her marriage when her husband died. She held mixed feelings about the impact of bridewealth on her life and marriage. Towards the end of their relationship, she felt trapped by her bridewealth, but early on, she was desperate for her husband to make the payment. Her words below demonstrate this was not the result of demanding parents; rather, she wanted the payment made as a result of her own insecurities and pressure from her peers.

"You see by that time I had to pressurize my husband to pay the dowry, because my co-wives, the brother's wives were all the time saying...for us (our husbands) also have to honor us because they have paid bride price, but yours, you're just free. Your husband can do anything he wants, but at least for us now we are firm that we are married here, so I was also asking him, 'when are you taking the dowry?'"² Until he took. After that, we started living together."

¹ 'Malay' is a derogatory slang term

² Dowry and bridewealth were used interchangeably in this interview, but the meaning in the case and the rest of the interview was in line with the definition of bridewealth given in the introduction.

Bridewealth in this example gave Janet a greater sense of security, knowing her husband valued her and stood to lose a large investment in the event of a divorce. Men are almost never refunded for their bride price payments if they leave their wives, but many of the men I spoke to still praised the lasting obligation created by bridewealth, like Ed Kony the village chief quoted earlier who had little as a bachelor but saved the necessary funds to marry twice.

“(Bridewealth) strengthens the power of the woman to stay in her home and also makes the husband of this girl feel as if he has done something good to marry his wife. Because if the marriage is not there, anybody can come and go with your wife...you will have no say. ‘After all, did he marry me anything? Did he give to my father anything? I am free to go and move whatever I can do.’ So that also brings some tension. It makes the husband to have that ownership of the wife. And makes other people to fear that wife loves such and such a person, as if it is a wedding ring. It works as if it is a wedding ring when you have wedded a wife, they have given her a ring to show that this is actually the wife of someone.”

Though a husband will not be refunded if he leaves his wife, the inverse is not true. If a woman divorces her husband, her parents and closest kin are obligated by custom to return the bridewealth in full. Bride price, then, especially when its value is high, serves the social function of keeping a wife committed to her husband. The bride’s parents will make use of the bridal gifts, including use as gifts for their sons’ bridewealth payments, meaning few parents retain

their daughter's bridewealth as insurance for a potential divorce. Daughters are thus subject to heavy pressure from their parents to stay in their marriages, especially if the bridewealth is high. (High) bridewealth represents an agreement by parents on both sides to preserve the marriage: the wife's side because they would not want to refund the gift they will almost inevitably make use of and the husband's side because their willingness to make a large payment is itself a demonstration of faith in the marriage. Thus (high) bridewealth transactions are commitment contracts aimed at minimizing the risk of divorce.¹ The entire community has a stake in a marriage's longevity. Many times, it is also much more expensive to marry a second wife, either following a divorce or in a polygynous marriage but particularly in the former case. In the event of a divorce, the groom and his kin will have to return what was originally paid, despite women entering their second marriages garnering less of a bridewealth than those entering their first marriage.²

Creating an alliance between kinship groups is a central purpose of marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, described by John Ndira below. This, in part, explains why bridewealth gifts are the responsibility of the entire lineage, not just the groom. Similarly, this accounts for the shared responsibility of accumulating gifts for marriages, particularly the tendency of receiving parents to share gifts bestowed at the time of their daughter's wedding with others.³

"Here (marriage) is such that the girl actually arranges to take

her husband to be in their home. Now it is a big occasion you know

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

² Kressel, G. M. (1977). "Bride-Price Reconsidered." Current Anthropology **18**(3): 441-458.

³ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives **21**(4): 151-174.

here...in Africa, marriage is between families, the family of X and the family of Y. So you find that during this introduction ceremony, a big celebration is made which involves all the family members and relatives...They (all) come and attend. It involves sometimes more than twenty or thirty people...”

The practice ties together younger and older generations, making young men of a lineage dependent on elders for cattle to produce bridewealth and provides an incentive for the older generation to take an interest in raising young daughters.¹ It follows then that bridewealth is an integral part of the Jopadhola's lineage rites. The ethnic group is patrilineal, and traditionally, when a woman marries, she joins the clan, a family group that claims one common ancestor, of her husband. Marriage payments underscore the merits of this practice, giving ownership to the clan that pays for the new wife.

There was a double standard apparent in many of the conversations I had in Tororo regarding why marriage payments extended to daughters but not sons. The interplay between bridewealth and lineage patterns explains why raising sons and raising daughters are conceived of differently. The literature and interviewees suggested that the payment maintained a certain economic equilibrium. Subsistence farmers are given cattle as their daughters marry to replace the lost hands on a farm. Tororans also said the gift appreciated parents for raising their daughters. The fact that women leave their home at the time of their marriage explains why the rite does not work in the reverse direction. Kenneth Obam Okola is the Prime Minister of the Padhola cultural union; the position is culturally significant rather than politically. His comments

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

below reflect the common sentiment of most older, rural Tororans who felt the need to maintain economic stability after the loss of a daughter, given Tororo's patrilineal reality means a daughter, but not a son, will leave her parents' home.

“You see that has been the tradition. The tradition has been that okay, here is my daughter. I've stayed with my daughter up to 25 years or something...I have spent so much on her and so on and so forth, and she's now going to leave my home to go to another home very far away, maybe another country even, which means there's going to be family loss of this person's contribution, direct contribution. See? So, the tradition was that because of that loss, direct contribution of the daughter to the family, and she's now not going to be under direct control of the parent, then it is because of that loss that the husband normally...does what? Pays something in appreciation, because she's going to do the work for me, she's going to produce for me children and so on and I'm now going to (have) direct control of her and all the assistance and probably all the contributions she was going to do there. I'm now depriving you of that (so) let me in the form of appreciation give you certain things. But as I said that was traditionally what has been.”

Below, Ed Kony echoes Obama's comments and adds some thoughts on bridewealth as progeny price, in which bridewealth justifies the membership of children to their father's clan rather than their mother's.

"The boy is just there. Concerning the cultures, these people are the people to inherit us. A boy-child is the one to stay there with you, to take care of you, to do whatever for you. It used to be like that, but maybe with this modern world now, you can find things changed. This one goes there, this one goes there, but formally, those things were not there. If someone has only girls, he feels as if he has missed a certain chance, because it would be better if he has a boy also which will inherit him or if by luck he will have children (that) will actually bear his names, protect the home or protect the others there. That's the thing. There is a great difference.

Also someone, a woman, a girl, will come and begin staying at home there with her children. Her children (do) not belong to this clan. Her children should stay at the parents of their father,...now for me here, I have boys if I have a girl that girl if she gets married her children will stay at their father's home not at my home here. If they come they will just come as visitors. It is the children of my boys who are the children of this home. "

John Ndira expressed the same sentiment. He suggested that men and women like him, despite maintaining the life of an urban professional physically removed from their clans, are still prone to contributing to their family in accordance with the Jopadhola's traditional lineage patterns.

“A son never leaves the family. A son, even if he's educated, will come to stay there. (He) is still a member of the family and will be in that family, but maybe a daughter they assume that she's leaving her family and going to another family or if she has been educated all the benefits of her education will go into building the husband's home.”

Bridewealth in Tororo also ensures men marrying multiple wives are able to financially support them, and the practice provides an avenue for men in need of sons to produce them. The patrilineal nature of the Jopadhola creates a condition in which a man, in order to ensure the continuity of his lineage, is inclined to desire at least one male child, if not more. In the event a man's first wife does not yield a son, the best option is to marry a second or third wife and hope for a better outcome. In a society in which bridewealth is a part of marriage customs, a man is more capable of marrying multiple wives under such circumstances, because he will have accumulated bridewealth gifts from his daughters.¹

¹ Ibid.

Social Economic literature on bride price suggests that the practice balances asymmetries in the marriage market. This explanation is especially sound in societies that practice polygyny. Since men marry multiple women, there will be a shortage of marriageable women in comparison to men, and bride price serves as an expression of the heightened demand for women.¹ A man will offer a high bridewealth as incentive to marry, allowing him to marry a second or third wife. Thus, increased rates of polygyny correlate to high bridewealth.² Bachelors with undesirable traits, like sexual promiscuity, can overcome those deficiencies in a marriage market that incorporates bride price by offering a generous gift to potential wives' parents.³ As previously noted, bridewealth contributes to a system in which there is a large age gap between spouses, with men entering marriage much older than women. This is commonly perceived as a prerequisite to polygynous societies.⁴

Bridewealth payments limit polygyny to only the very wealthy and financially capable. Historically, it was a necessary demonstration of financial stability by a potential husband. In much of East Africa, bridewealth for the first wife is paid by the parents and kin of the groom, and for the second wife, the payment usually comes solely from the groom.⁵ Thus, in second or third marriages, bridewealth ensures the groom is financially stable. Ed Kony was no exception. He came from very poor means and had to raise most of his first bridewealth on his own. He

¹ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

² Becker, G. S. (1991). *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

³ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

⁴ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. *Bridewealth and Dowry*. London, Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Mulder, M. B. (1995). "Bridewealth and its Correlates: Quantifying Changes Over Time." *Current Anthropology* **36**(4): 573-603.

eventually rose to the level of village chief and was able to secure the bridewealth for a second wife as well. When his second relationship failed, his financial stability allowed him to separate from her while supporting her financially. Kony was the only male I interviewed involved in a polygynous marriage. It is possible that the dearth in polygynous marriages I encountered was a result of limited means among the respondents. In the absence of bridewealth, it is likely a greater number of men would enter into second or third marriages without the means to support a divorced spouse.

Bridewealth has thus become an important tool for regulating Tororo's marriage practices. Historically marriage payments have adapted to the societies that make use of them though they have tended to disappear. Societies compensated for the social functions marriage payments serve. The next chapter will address the global historical changes in bridewealth and their implications for Uganda. The differences in size, donors, and recipients have created situations in which marriage payments affect different cultures in different ways. For Tororo, bridewealth is a way to connect old and young generations and different clans to one another. It connects wives and husbands and reduces the risk of divorce by involving entire communities in individual marriages, though the fairness and merits of this are still to be examined.

Declining Payments

Marriage payments are not created equal. There are vast variations depending on the time and space of a society. In Tororo, I spoke to neighbors with marriages beginning in the same

year but markedly different bridewealth gifts. Historically there has been a trend away from bridewealth through dowry and eventually to a marriage market that does not involve payment. It is possible Uganda is beginning to follow this trend. An examination of bridewealth payments at different stages will yield an understanding of bridewealth's trajectory in Tororo.

On an individual level, the scale of bridewealth reflects the rights transferred and not the wealth of the family. The size of payments is constant in polygynous marriages regardless of the rank of the wife. Brideprice varies depending on the space between lineages, with those marrying from distant lineages expected to give more.¹ Even within a country as small as Uganda, the products given are very different. Uganda's largest ethnic group, the Buganda, customarily give *mwenge* or banana wine, traditional drinks, and other food items. The Bugisu and Jopadhola, however, use goats and cattle for bridewealth as is the case in most northern and eastern ethnicities in the country.²

Across cultures and time, variations in the importance and size of marriage payments are linked to other cultural practices, particularly lineage patterns. As noted before, patrilineal societies tend to move property in the event of marriage from the groom and his family to the bride and her family in the vein of a bridewealth. When the transaction occurs in the same direction in a matrilineal society, gifts tend to be considerably smaller. In part this is a reflection of the rights associated with the payment, particularly reproductive benefits, granted to a woman's natal lineage in the case of matrilineal societies and a man's lineage in a patrilineal society. Matrilineal ethnic groups tend towards dowry over brideprice. The former society as

¹ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 21(4): 151-174.

² Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." African Journal of Reproductive Health 13(1): 147-158.

noted above tend to be virilocal and the practice of bride-service is almost non-existent in the latter.¹

Patrilineal clans are also more vulnerable in the event of a divorce. In such societies, a divorce means the mother will leave the home and her children. Patrilineal childrearing is often the primary responsibility of the mother; thus, the individual responsible for socializing children will be absent. In a matrilineal society, the father leaves in the event of a divorce. Although the father is at times the primary breadwinner in the nuclear family, his absence is more easily offset by older children and extended family.² Given the shared nature of the responsibility for payments and the benefits for receiving gifts, the size of lineage groups corresponds with higher payments. Since there are more people to contribute to and benefit from gifts, it follows that the size of the gifts are larger.³ Historically, bridewealth payments in East and Southern African rose during the colonial period, particularly from the 1930s to 1960s at which point they stabilized. Researchers attribute this to the commoditization and privatization of the practice as cash was more commonly used. In addition, there was a boost in agricultural production and value, making women's roles in agriculture more valuable. Many of sub-Saharan Africa's poorest people went from subsistence farmers to cash croppers during this period, putting wives' labor under the control of their husbands, stimulating polygyny, and raising bridewealth payments.⁴

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

² Kressel, G. M. (1977). "Bride-Price Reconsidered." Current Anthropology **18**(3): 441-458.

³ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Mulder, M. B. (1995). "Bridewealth and its Correlates: Quantifying Changes Over Time." Current Anthropology **36**(4): 573-603.

Kamuli Ojolowo was married in 1982. He has spent most of his 49 years in the village where I interviewed him. He farms the land he inherited from his father to make a living. Ojolowo's father paid the traditional five cows, five goats, and 12,000 Uganda Shillings to Ojolowo's mother's parents. Ojolowo tried but did not manage to replicate his father's gift in his own marriage. He paid four cows, four goats, and 12,000 Ugandan Shillings. He had three cows at the time. He sold one for the cash and 'borrowed' the remaining two cows from his father. Though he emphasized the difficulty in acquiring the gift and the hardships he and his wife endured in their young marriage, Ojolowo still demanded a bride price from the man that married his daughter.

The trends in bride price alluded to above were characteristic of most interviewees; Ugandans, particularly those in rural areas, are bequeathing significantly less cattle as marriage payments than their parents and grandparents. What are the reasons for this trend, and does it reflect a change in relationships between husbands and wives?

Payments are decreasing in absolute or nominal terms. There is a global, historical trend towards less bridewealth in terms of the number of marriages involving the gift and the amount which is given. Payments have declined and then eventually disappeared in the face of industrialization, urbanization, and the end of colonialism. In Europe, Latin America, and Africa, brideprices have slowed first in urban areas then spread to rural areas. Historically, the drift began as men and women live alone away from their clan and men provide a larger proportion of bridewealth on their own in the form of cash. This changes the practice from an inter-lineage transfer to an intergenerational transfer, historically a trend that precedes a shift to dowry, followed by the cessation of marriage payments.¹ In sub-Saharan Africa, the post-colonial period

¹ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21(4): 151-174.

witnessed an increasing number of people choosing civil marriages over traditional or customary marriages. The latter requires bridewealth; the former does not.¹

Modernity has also opened new avenues of economic investment, meaning funds are moving away from the marriage market to opportunities for socioeconomic advancement in business, trade, or professionalism through education.² The men and women in Tororo's rural villages often said bridewealth was in the order of two to three cows, two to three goats, and 20,000 to 50,000 Ugandan Shillings. This is considerably less than the five cows, five goats, and 50,000 shillings legal requirement their parents met.

It is possible that the decline in nominal payments is due to a decrease in scarcity of marriageable women, particularly in villages. Men are more likely than women to leave their respective villages for urban areas or opportunities abroad. However, many of these men return to their native land to marry. The "marriage squeeze" theory suggests that a country with high levels of population growth will inevitably have a higher proportion of young citizens.³ Since men tend to marry younger women, there will be fewer men than women in the marriage market at any given time. Along the same lines, women nearly universally live longer than men, suggesting again that more women will be available for marriage, particularly those that are seeking a second marriage.⁴ Polygyny further decreases the amount of women available relative to men.

¹ Ibid.

² Mulder, M. B. (1995). "Bridewealth and its Correlates: Quantifying Changes Over Time." *Current Anthropology* **36**(4): 573-603.

³ Platteau, J.-P. (2007). "The Perverse Effects of High Brideprices." *World Development* **35**(7): 1221-1236.

⁴ Ibid.

I would argue, however, the decrease in nominal bride price payments in Tororo's villages is not a result of bridal scarcity and weakened demand. Rather, it is a reflection of the practice's slow accommodation to modernity. The cattle that is available to Tororo's contemporary bachelors is considerably less than what was available to their parents. Subsistence farming is not as common as it once was, forcing many to compensate for their lack of agrarian production elsewhere. Thus, while individuals may give less in nominal terms, the real value of bridal gifts seemed to be of considerably higher than the last generation, given the ease people indicated their parents had in accumulating bridewealth juxtaposed to their own difficulty. Ojolowo's inability to match his father's bridewealth confirms this explanation.

“(My parents) had the cows and the goats to pay. As time kept on and I was paying, my father only had fifteen cows and there were five sons, so I couldn't pay like my father did, and because of poverty growing and cows dying, you can't compare what my father gave to what I did, and for my daughter, it's a task to get these cows now, because the cows have died... When I went to my daughter's home, they only had four cows. The father-in law to my daughter only had four cows and four boys, so I really saw that I couldn't get what I wanted or as much as I paid when I was marrying my wife, so I said what I can be given is okay, because I can't take this from my family. And my daughter now has four boys and there isn't much at the home, so I'm also wondering how these boys will get their cows.”

It may appear that his comments reflect bridewealth is decreasing as a result of resource constraints. It is not, however, the case that resources are dwindling, rather they are shifting. The following quotation from Peter Otunnu is telling.

“When you consider the economic situation now prevailing more so at the countryside it is very, very difficult for one say to raise animals. When you look at that, at the end of the day, there are other factors also prevailing within, say issues of fees, issues of health, feeding, and whatever all compound,...I feel really...no fees should be set. Like when you have taken my daughter I should say maybe according to your own feeling if you have it in mind that I’ve taken say Peter’s daughter and as a way of appreciating him for having raised me a wife, I should get something to take. Not necessarily animals or whatever, even some other gift can be used as a token of appreciation for settling that. That’s how me I look at it.”

As mentioned before, Peter is a subsistence farmer. His wife is a school teacher and earns most of the household income. Bridewealth payments in Tororo do not allow for alternative forms of payment, like tutoring from his wife. In villages like his, it is rare even cash will substitute for cattle. Such farmers have more income earning options than their parents who were dependent on the land, and the livestock sustained on Uganda’s small farms is different than it

was a generation ago. In the 1980's and early 1990's, Uganda, like many African countries, adopted an economic restructuring policy that favored commercial farms over subsistence farms. As land and cattle were co-opted, fewer people had fewer cattle, another reason bridewealth in its previous form is decreasing.

The large cattle used in bridewealth payments are used for dairy but rarely slaughtered for food. It is more difficult to exchange cattle for cash and items of value than the reverse. The food is only equal to love, and the primary means of obtaining the animals used for bridewealth is through marriage.¹ “Money spent on wedding expenses, like money indirectly contributed by the groom to the endowment of the bride, serves different ends from the circulating pool of resources we speak of as bridewealth. Bridewealth is not to be consumed in the course of the celebrations, nor is it handed to the wife; it goes to the bride's make kin (typically brothers) in order that they can themselves take a wife.”² Alternative payment options are thus also limited because bridewealth is not a normal means of wealth accumulation. Rather, it regulates marriages and is maintained as such, illustrated by Ojelowo's most recent excerpt.³ “Every father fears being left in the lurch by finding that the bridewealth which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get him a daughter-in-law; therefore he is always on the look out for any signs of a rise in the rate, and tends to raise his demands whenever he hears of other fathers doing so. This means in general terms, that *individual* cases of over-payment produce a *general* rise in the rate all round.”⁴ Intuitively, the same holds for under-payment.

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

For the same reasons bridewealth is disappearing, polygyny in the area is as well. “A variety of alternative targets of expenditure (both consumption and producer items) have begun to compete with bridewealth as commercially produced clothing, furniture, agricultural equipment, and increasing number of cheap exotic items such as bicycles, radios, and watches appear at local markets.”¹ In some cases, particularly in urban areas, these goods are beginning to substitute for bridewealth. What is important here are instances in which men devote their purchasing ability to alternative targets rather than marriage gifts. In some cases, bridewealth is not paid because of poverty, but in others, modernizing tastes lessen the priority of cattle for bridewealth payments.

The interviewees of marriageable age seemed especially concerned over the volatility of bridewealth in this respect, though their concern was in anticipation of both potential in-laws and spouses seeking a competitive bridewealth rate. This sentiment is demonstrated by the exchange between Patricia and Cado that follows. Patricia is a 28 year-old office administrator. Cado is a 30 year-old bartender. Both of them are originally from Tororo. Cado now lives in Kampala full time, and Patricia splits her time between the capital city and Tororo. This interview took place one afternoon in the hotel bar where Cado works in Kampala. There were two female hotel staff members just outside of the bar, but no one else was present.

Cado: “So they might say, ‘maybe we want a sofa set. For us, maybe we want these dining tables, fridges.’ You know now things have gone modern. They no longer want small, small things, they want big things.”

¹ Mulder, M. B. (1995). "Bridewealth and its Correlates: Quantifying Changes Over Time." Current Anthropology 36(4): 573-603.

Patricia: *“They want these kinds of things where everyone will say the girl has really been introduced.”*

Cado: *“AH! AH! It is expensive. And if you marry from a family (in which one daughter has already been” introduced, still it becomes (more) expensive, because that woman, if I am marrying her, and her family (has already had an introduction), she will want...”*

Patricia – *“She will want the same or something better”*

.

Cado: *“So, she will take that opportunity to show the previous ceremony that (hers) is superior. You get it? So she will tell me to ask for more things, because maybe it was a sofa set then. Now what? It might be a car now, because now the sofa set is there then we have to ask another alternative...”*

Patricia: *“Something which is not there, which is better or more expensive, but you just don’t consider where is this man (financially).”*

Further evidence of shifting bridewealth thus comes from changes in urban environments, in which gifts are starting to take the shape of large cash gifts and other goods not present before,

cars and furniture for example. The ability to compensate for changes in economic resources in Kampala is not the same in Tororo's villages. Though the tendencies of Patricia and Cado are not necessarily reflective of everyone in the city, they both also suggested they would resist bridewealth in their own marriages and their children's marriages. Patricia went as far as to say parents ought to provide resources for their children as they start their new lives. If intentions of this young urban dweller become the norm, bridewealth may take its course through dowry and eventually disappear.

Assuming bridewealth is compensation for a woman's reproductive ability, its scale is also affected by a woman's capacity to have children. "For example, a divorced woman who already has children will receive a lower brideprice, whereas women who reach puberty earlier receive a higher brideprice."¹ Indeed, a woman unable to have children may receive no bridewealth at all, as was the case with Keko Malaba. Keko's in-laws refused to give any sort of bridewealth, because she and her husband were together for some time and failed to have children. Her husband was committed to her, however, and raised the bridewealth on his own without help from his clan.

"But what maybe made me unhappy somehow (was) by the time we were taking the dowry, I had no child and his parents were saying, 'now we are going to take our cows but will this woman give birth here?' And now it was only because my husband loved me that's why he paid. And it was because it was his cows. He bought it himself, but if it was his parents, they wouldn't have paid, because

¹ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 21(4): 151-174.

they were saying, 'this one is fruitless. How do we take our cows for a barren woman?' But after the payment, God blessed me with those children. So they said, 'so maybe she waited for the (bridewealth), because...it was like that.'"

Bridewealth sometimes reaches levels high enough to affect the welfare of women and a society's distribution of wealth. In South Asia, brideprice payments may be as high as six times the average household income, and in sub-Saharan Africa, that number is similarly high, at four times the average annual household income. In Uganda, from 1960 to 2001, the average payment was equivalent to 872,601 shillings, fourteen percent of household income.¹ At times, these exchanges, though painful, are extremely practical. Barry Baerek describes this practicality during periods before the United States' recent campaign in Afghanistan. During times of draught, fathers were especially eager to marry their daughters. They could at once free their daughters from hunger and stave off starvation for the rest of the family. Indeed, under circumstances as pressing as these, it is also not unlikely to see sons sold into slavery as well.²

Women are ostensibly absent from bridewealth negotiations and direct benefits. "In Africa," Goody says, "bridewealth does not go to the bride, but to her kin; we recognize this when, rightly or wrongly, we speak of terms of compensation or recompense."³ Indeed, Tororan women do not give, receive, nor negotiate portions of the bridewealth at an introduction. That is not to say women receive nothing during a traditional wedding in Uganda, but in terms of the

¹ Ibid.

² Bearak, B. (2006). The Bride Price. The New York Times Magazine.

³ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

most substantial items exchanged, bridewealth, women have little to gain. Patricia protests the absence of women below:

“The last time I attended an introduction, when they were talking about the bride price, I saw a fleet of men. They were all men! Maybe seven or more, and there was only one woman. And she did not have a say, surely. She almost had no say, but she just had to say yes. Actually the wife isn’t even there. They are talking about you, but you’re not there. It’s some people elsewhere that talk about you and say whatever they want and do whatever they want. So these people come and they argue on the price and the amount of money your husband has to pay and for you they just carry you and say here have this woman and go.”

Jenrose Odinga, a woman in her late sixties, echoed Patricia’s comments:

“Because the father of the girl can end up eating maybe one cow and then the mother of the girl she doesn’t taste anything, being denied even by the time they are negotiating all of this. She’s not there. She’s not allowed to be there, because she is a mere woman.”

Bridewealth gifts resemble investments more than goods for immediate use. Many societies that incorporate bridewealth into marriage customs make little use of cattle as currency outside of marriage transactions. Cattle play a large role in subsistence and are a major determinant of wealth, but they are rarely exchanged outside of the tribute. Other items of value can be exchanged for cattle, but people rarely make the transfer in the other direction. Thus, the primary method for obtaining cattle for bridewealth is through marriage. Balancing the bridewealth a daughter brings to a family with that a son loses “can best be achieved if the items have little exchange value outside marriage transactions...If cattle transactions are largely confined to marriage, then the dependence of the groom on a similar transaction is overwhelming... The effect is to reinforce the authority of the father and emphasize the tie with the sister.”¹ Bridewealth’s implications for familial relationships will be examined in the following chapter.

The decrease in bridewealth of the current generation indicates it may cease to exist in Uganda. This is a result of an inability to co-exist with modernity. Subsistence farmers dealing with the squeeze of commercial agriculture have found supplements to their livelihood. They no longer have the cattle necessary to match their parents’ bridewealth, but it is not a result of increasing poverty. The same farmers lacking the cattle for bridewealth payments are diverting their resources towards cell phones, televisions, and other goods. Their counterparts in urban areas are more able to give alternative gifts, but this does not mean bridewealth is eternal. The decline follows marriage payments’ historical trend.

¹ Ibid.

Women's Agency

Existing scholarly work on bridewealth suggests the practice is detrimental to the welfare of women. Bishai (2009) claims, for example, the practice increases the risk for HIV by limiting a woman's ability to negotiate her abstinence, faithfulness, or condom use.¹ Most of the existing literature examining a relationship between bride price and female welfare, many times measured by instances of domestic violence, is based on qualitative analyses, particularly focus groups. Criticisms characterize bridewealth as a practice that equates women to property and ties women to unhappy, unhealthy, and unsafe marriages because of the necessity to refund gifts in the event of a divorce.

In 2005, Dan Kaye led a research group that explored the implications of bride price on gender relations. The team examined bridewealth's motivations, meanings, and reproductive health implications in the Wakiso district in Uganda. Using ten single-sex focus group discussions and fourteen in-depth interviews, the group concluded bridewealth reduced a woman's role in household decision-making. The focus groups consisted of twelve people purposefully selected to diversify age, marital status, and socio-economic backgrounds. Fourteen in-depth interviews were also conducted with people identified in the community as key sources of information: civic leaders, local council members, religious leaders, heads of nongovernmental organizations, and health workers. Participants suggested that a woman was

¹ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

'bought' into her husband's household. The practice "limited women's independence and perpetuated unequal gender power relations, especially regarding health-seeking behavior."¹

The younger participants, particularly the young women, expressed a desire to abolish bridewealth on the basis that it limits the rights of women and makes them objects for sale. According to Kaye, "to acquire wealth from bride price, participants noted that girls are forced to marry at a young age, and many are forced to leave school for marriage. Such girls may develop low self-esteem and lack knowledge about sexuality, which is often taught during formal education."² Kaye deduced from the study that the practice leads men to perceive themselves as superior to the women they marry. This was especially true about older men who felt "compelled to exercise their authority in the home with the justification they paid a bride price."³ Kaye claims that this sentiment was less evident among young men but not completely lost. Bridewealth also makes women in families dependent on economic support from their husbands. The perception in this district of Uganda is since women are bought, the man who makes the purchase controls all financial and social resources, including the wife. This absence of negotiation according to Kaye and his team is followed by high fertility rates, low contraceptive use rates, and poor women's health. A number of restrictions on marriage termination are created as a result of divorce necessitating repayment of bridewealth. Fear of stigma, social vulnerability, and lack of financial independence all contribute to keeping women in dangerous relationships.⁴

¹ Kaye, D. (2005). "Implications of Bride Price on Domestic Violence and Reproductive Health in Wakiso District, Uganda." *Africa Health Science* 5(4): 300-303.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Between January 2008 and June 2009, Ravi K Thiara and Gill Hague conducted another bridewealth study in Eastern Uganda. The pair had four goals: investigating the “capabilities of women, children and families in terms of development, quality of life, health, decision making and community participation; investigating possible relationships between brideprice, poverty, and domestic violence; developing policy recommendations for Uganda; and developing a grassroots dissemination plan.”¹ Thirteen local community-based interviewers were recruited to conduct 257 interviews of four groups of people: members of the public with experiences with brideprice; members of the public who had experienced domestic violence, widows, and Bagandan women; and professionals linked to issues of marriage, brideprice, and domestic violence. 65% of interviewees proposed that the impact of brideprice is primarily negative, 35% suggested the effect was equally positive and negative, and less than 1% concluded its consequences were positive.²

The pair found a number of negative consequences of brideprice repeated in the interviews they conducted. According to Thiara and Hague, the practice serves to create disparities in marriage relationships by “commodifying human relationships.” The two linked bridewealth and domestic violence, claiming “the vast majority of interviewees in all the datasets believed there was a connection between brideprice and domestic violence.” They acknowledge, however, that bridewealth is a contributing factor to a much larger social problem.³

¹ Thiara, R. K. and G. Hague (2009). *Bride-Price, Poverty and Domestic Violence in Uganda*, British Academy.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The studies done by Kaye, Thiara, and Hague are among the few existing examinations of the implications of bridewealth on female welfare in Uganda or elsewhere in the world. There are little to no quantitative examinations in existence; thus, there is a need for further quantitative work on the subject.

Beyond ethnographic and qualitative work, a number of theoretical examinations of bridewealth exist. Gary Becker (1991) developed one such model, a marriage market paradigm to analyze marriage transfers. Men and women both come to a marriage with varying qualities in his model, and marriage is the venture that joins them to offer greater efficiency in production. Men and women choose partners in the interest of maximizing utility, and the marriage market then assigns partners and distribution of returns. Bridewealth compensates for human discrepancies.¹²

It is possible to use Becker's model as an indication that bridewealth will enhance the welfare of women, because one may view the practice as an explicit recognition of the value of a woman's contribution to a marriage and productivity.³ Junsen Zhang and William Chan (1999) take the opposite course, using the economic model of marriage transfers to suggest if dowry is given, women will fare better in marriage, and bridewealth has no effect on brides' wellbeing. The study examined data from the 1989 Taiwan Women and Family Survey, an island-wide survey of single and married women between the ages of 25 and 60. Taiwanese brideprices and dowries are composed of cash, jewelry, furniture, bedding and other gifts. The two concluded that a dowry increases the resources available to a bride's new family, increasing her bargaining

¹ Becker, G. S. (1991). *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

² Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21(4): 151-174.

³ Ibid.

power. Their study suggested that brideprice, on the other hand, has no direct economic affect on the welfare of either the bride or the groom. By examining the probability a husband will help with the household chores from the micro data in Taiwan, Zhang and Chan suggest a larger dowry increases the probability that the husband will be helpful in household chores, and brideprice has a negligible effect.¹ Depending on the size of the gift demonstrated later, however, bride price may significantly handicap young couples as they begin new lives.

Following the expectations of Zhang and Chan, women are responsible for a larger proportion of household duties than men in Tororo, and many respondents suggested that bridewealth was at times used as a justification for the imbalance. There was an early indication of this sentiment with Ed Kony. He is responsible for making purchases and his wife is responsible for much of the housework and agricultural duties in conjunction with her children.

“If there is something going wrong or she wants something, she just tells me that today we are lacking such and such a thing... Whatever she wants, she tells me. And myself even, if there is something (that) I feel she can do or is related to her as a housewife, I just berate her that ‘you do this, do this, do this, do this.’ Like that. So, we’re just together. We’re quite comfortable. There is no problem. If there is any misunderstanding in our house, we just discuss (it) and (solve) it amicably without fighting (or) quarrels.... It has (been) years without me or her (abusing)

¹ Zhang, J. and W. Chan (1999). "Dowry and Wife's Welfare: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis." The Journal of Political Economy **107**(4): 786-808.

each other...This one you've given a dowry¹(for), you have given a dowry, and the woman has just stayed at your home maybe four or two or even five years but eventually the woman will get stubborn and will go away. After going away, she will get married somewhere (else) or will begin just staying somewhere (else) in the village...or (she will get) married with someone again now, digging for that one, enjoying with that one and yet you (or) your son (are here where she left you as a bachelor)....”

At the end of this excerpt, Kony was expressing his worry for those struggling through divorce. Kony's denunciation of divorcees “digging” for a new lover is worth noting, particularly because he chooses to list it first. His emphasis on the labor brought into a household through marriage and the subsequent loss of labor at the time of divorce was not uncommon among those interviewed. This conversation and the literature above suggest that bridewealth is in part payment for agricultural production. Marriage, in part an unavoidable economic interaction particularly when combined with bridewealth, thus creates a situation in which women are “bought” for their services, sanctioning the unequal household labor division.

Becker's model does not anticipate strategic parents, an important factor given the social realities of bridewealth. Tactical, economically stable parents will request bride prices that are lower than the ‘economic value’ of their daughters, evidenced by research in the Senegal River Valley. Strategic parents, wary of the financial duress a high bride price may cause for a potential husband and the likelihood that such a marriage payment may cause strains in the

¹ Dowry and bridewealth were used synonymously in many of the interviews. Here, the meaning is bridewealth as defined above.

relationship leading to divorce, “internalize...indirect effects, because of their own understanding or because of the pressures exercised by their daughters... (The) strategic approach predicts that brideprices are likely to be influenced by the anticipated probability of divorce.”¹ It is worth noting that considerate parents who underestimate the value of their daughter in bride price negotiations are not always acting selflessly. As mentioned above, divorce is often contingent on a refund of bridal gifts.² Thus, it is in the parents’ best interest and the interests of their other sons, likely to reuse the gifts for their own marriages, to avoid divorce.³ This strategic approach accounts for a decrease in brideprices occurring in Senegal since the early 1990s.⁴

Fueled by a substantial economic incentive, husbands and parents go to extreme measures to prevent divorce. Bridewealth thus traps women in unhappy if not unsafe marriages. Bridewealth is one of many originating, promoting, and facilitating factors that promote a culture of violence in Uganda.⁵ Violence results when social integration mechanisms break down. Of importance here are instances in which the family’s role in socializing individuals is weakened.⁶ Kaye suggests the prevalence of domestic violence increased as Uganda modernized. Men seemed to have “lost identity and their position was weakened by altered gender relations following modernization, resulting in gender antagonism regarding perceived

¹ Platteau, J.-P. (2007). "The Perverse Effects of High Brideprices." World Development **35**(7): 1221-1236.

² Ibid.

³ Kressel, G. M. (1977). "Bride-Price Reconsidered." Current Anthropology **18**(3): 441-458.

⁴ Platteau, J.-P. (2007). "The Perverse Effects of High Brideprices." World Development **35**(7): 1221-1236.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kaye, D. (2005). "Implications of Bride Price on Domestic Violence and Reproductive Health in Wakiso District, Uganda." Africa Health Science **5**(4): 300-303.

roles.”¹ Furthermore, domestic violence occurs when it is used to solve problems in the absence of peaceful means of conflict resolution.² That being said, the final and perhaps most important mechanism for conflict resolution, divorce or lack thereof, is especially important. “One of the chief concerns in Uganda is the custom of bride price refundability in which a husband who is displeased by his wife can return her to his father in law. This sets up power imbalances which can be abused by husbands.”³

Jessica Okoth described how bride price bonded her to an unhappy marriage because of this requirement for divorce. She originally persuaded her late husband to urgently make the payment, because his brother’s wives were insulting her. They ridiculed her, saying her husband was delaying his bridewealth obligation because he did not appreciate her. She also desired a certain sense of stability she imagined bridewealth provides. Their relationship broke down, however, and she eventually regretted persuading her husband to make the payment.

“Anyway, in marriage there are ups and downs. At times I was saying, ‘if not for the dowry I would leave this man. Is it because of your cows that you are torturing (me) and doing all this?!’ I would ask those such questions, and...there was nobody to pay (him) back, so I had to endure, and it is what women this way have to endure...the cows. And even if your father is alive, he will tell you, ‘I’ve eaten the cows and there is no way I can take (you) back, so

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

please, my daughter, I did not choose for you that man or even if I told you to marry him, you accepted, so go back, because I do not have anything to pay back.’”

Women in Jessica’s position are forced to endure and have no place to turn despite recent changes in the law. It is still very much expected that the parents of women who leave their husbands repay bridewealth in full. Even if parents desire the safety and happiness of their daughter, the animals and cash are often not available at the time of the divorce. As noted in the second chapter, just as bridewealth payments are substantiated by various extended family members, the spoils are dispersed when a woman marries. Though some families will go to great lengths to remove their daughters from undesirable situations, not everyone is willing and capable as the conversation between Margaret and Onduri demonstrates below. Margaret and Onduri, two women in their early sixties, were interviewed together.

Margaret: “Animals are being paid to the father of the girl. After it has been paid, the paternal uncle of the man will take a share, and the maternal uncle of the woman will take a share, and then the grandmom, and the mother will take a share. And when it comes time of refunding, these people they never give anything to support. Because the father of the girl can end up eating maybe one cow and then the mother of the girl she doesn’t taste anything, being denied. Even by the time they are negotiating all of this she’s not there. She’s not allowed to be there, because she is a mere woman.

And then you find that this man struggles around to refund. If he tells one of the uncles or the brothers of the girl, 'please (my daughter) has left her marriage, they want bride price,' that will cause a problem of curses. (The uncles and the brothers will curse the father and the daughter.) There is nothing you (can demand) from me, you're daughters will end up walking like that. You'll never get anything...

Even if me, with my age, I decided to leave, I had very many children. (I am) old. They would divorce me. The man would chase me. He would not (allow) me to go with anything, and then he would need his cows to be refunded and then maybe he uses it to pay for another woman and then where do they take me with my age? No one is going to pay for me...you are (even) denied your own cloth you have bought because you bought it in your father's home."

Onduri: "At times after paying that brideprice even if a woman is being battered and she runs to her parents they also chase her (and she goes) back to her husband. (The parents would say) 'why should we return the animals? they have already paid for you so you have to be there...until you die or if there is (another) way you can come out of it...' You have been denied your rights

everywhere parents, brothers, and you find that curse is there. If my brother Otheno took some cows of mine and he has already paid his wife and I go back Otheno (and say) 'you took my cows, your children should also suffer like I suffer,' so it creates (an) environment of cursing."

The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB), a potential solution to the problems arising from bridewealth in the event of a divorce, has been stalled in Uganda's Parliament for two decades. The law seeks to set minimum age requirements for marriage, condemn coercion, violence, and rape within marriage, and protect women's property rights. The bill would also nationally remove any form of legal necessity for bridewealth, and illegalize repayment of marriage gifts should a couple divorce. Disagreements over restrictions on polygyny and permitting wives to inherit the land of their husbands are preventing the measure. The DRB would limit the number of wives a man could have to four and require a man to demonstrate in court his financial ability to support his wives. In terms of property rights, it would open avenues for co-ownership and allow a wife to inherit her husband's land. In patrilineal Uganda, this would complicate how a lineage maintains its property.¹

The comments of a few interviewees, including Margaret's excerpted again below, also suggested a large gender gap exists in Tororo's inheritance practices, linked to its rigid patrilineal customs and perpetuated by bridewealth as evidence for its fairness.

¹ Ibid.

“Because a woman has been paid for, she is being denied her rights of ownership of property, even her children...even if me, with my age, I decided to leave, I had very many children they are old, they would divorce me, the man would chase me, he would not accept me to go with anything, and then he would need his cows to be refunded and then maybe he uses it to pay for another woman and then where do they take me with my age. No one is going to pay for me...even you are being denied your own cloth you have bought because you bought it in your father’s home.”

On its face, her situation seems to be one dictated by the patrilineal society rather than the bridewealth paid in her marriage. Goody suggests that these woman’s circumstances would be worse if a dowry was given in their marriages rather than bridewealth. “The position of women under such a system is in some ways better than under one of dowry; for the disabilities of the daughters in terms of patrilineal transmission of property and office are mitigated by what they bring to the family at their marriage. Their bridewealth can be used to obtain a wife for a brother, and in some societies even their father can employ that property to marry himself another wife...”¹ This claim is correct only in that a woman can provide an avenue for another son to inherit a name and property. She, however, does not add to the wealth of the family she is joining at the time of her marriage; instead she detracts from it. Women in Tororo do not immediately benefit from this transaction.

¹ Goody, J. (1973). Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia. Bridewealth and Dowry. London, Cambridge University Press.

Similarly, as Ed Kony notes below, widows in Tororo can and do remarry, but their agency in the process seems to be dictated by the Jopadhola's patrilineal nature rather than bridewealth.

“(A) widow can marry, but usually for us let this woman, this widow, get married with a certain boy or some person with the very same clan, because this man will (understand) that (he is) now occupying the house of (his) brother ... These children will fear this man like the brother of their father. They will call him just their father, because the feeling (is the same as) when this man was still alive. This man used to go there, used to stay there with them. (Now) if this one died and a certain man from somewhere else comes and begins to inherit this woman (or) to stay with this woman (what) are these children going to call this man. Is he also their father? There's not even a single relationship between this man which this woman has now brought in their family and (their biological father.) If I'm not mistaken (he) will not have to take great care of these children. If you inherit your brother's house it is okay because these are your children. It is your house.”

Brown (2003) also uses Becker's model to prove that dowry payments will increase the bargaining power of a wife in a marriage. Bargaining power, particularly in regards to how income is spent, is often used by social scientists to rate the level of equality in marriage.

Brown's work concludes the income a wife brings into a marriage via dowry increases her bargaining power.¹ It follows that bridewealth, seen in this context as a removal of income from the couple, will have the inverse effect and decrease the bargaining power a wife has in a marriage. An excerpt from my interview with Jenrose Odinga follows:

“and then you find that she is a slave in the home because she has been paid for: the five cows, five goats which was paid for her, so you find that they're using her as a tractor or a slave at home to do everything in family and then everyone in the family honors her as a slave... She doesn't have rights, time to rest or what...it's (the) kitchen where she has her space. They deny her rights of movement... because when a man has paid brideprice (for) a woman, the woman has no control at that home, because that is how men remove power and control from women. Sometime(s) when a man wants to sell something like (a) cow (or) land, you as a woman, you have nothing at all. You can't talk. You just leave him and (let him) sell anything, whatever he likes.”

Testing the correlation between bride price and infidelity, David Bishai (2009) posited that a higher brideprice would cause higher instances of infidelity. He theorized that in order to compensate for deficiencies in character, like promiscuity, a man would pay a higher bride price. Furthermore, the decreased marital fidelity leads to an increased risk of HIV. Bishai and his team

¹ Brown, P. H. (2003). Dowry and Intrahousehold Bargaining: Evidence from China. William Davidson Institute Working Paper Number, William Davidson Institute.

used a survey focused on the demand for a hypothetical AIDS vaccine to determine that in relationships in which bride price was paid, men were fifty percent more likely to report having a sexual partner other than their spouse, a statistically significant figure. Women who reported a bride price were 78 percent less likely to have a sexual partner other than their spouse, also statistically significant. The team also found that the difference in age between spouses did not have a significant effect on extra-marital relationships.¹

Early marriages in the developing world occur at an alarming rate. The Population Council, an international research group, estimated that sixty million girls under the age of eighteen were married in 2009. In addition, one hundred million girls will be married in the new decade before they reach adulthood.² “Tens of millions of girls,” Barry Baerek (2006) says, “are having babies before their bodies are mature enough, increasing the likelihood of death from hemorrhaging, obstructed labor and other complications.”³ In East Africa, bridewealth is higher for women who reach puberty at a young age, because it indicates a longer reproductive lifespan.⁴ The substantial monetary gain from bridewealth is of particular concern, because it creates a situation in which it is beneficial to marry a daughter early, given the parents’ herd will increase. In the same vein, it forces men to marry older, because they must accumulate enough cattle to deflect the cost of marriage.⁵ I interviewed a group of three women in their late sixties

¹ Bishai, D. (2009). "Bride Price and Sexual Risk Taking in Uganda." *African Journal of Reproductive Health* **13**(1): 147-158.

² Horzepa, C. (2009). "*Despite Laws, Too Many Girls Marry Early*." *Population Briefs: Reports on Population Council Research* **15**(3).

³ Bearak, B. (2006). The Bride Price. *The New York Times Magazine*.

⁴ Mulder, M. B. (1995). "Bridewealth and its Correlates: Quantifying Changes Over Time." *Current Anthropology* **36**(4): 573-603.

⁵ Goody, J. (1973). *Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia*. *Bridewealth and Dowry*. London, Cambridge University Press.

and early seventies who expressed concern over what bridewealth means for young girls. An excerpt from the discussion is reproduced below:

Margaret: “In the past when our parents were born, when a girl is six years old, they start counting their hands. This hand five goats, this hand five cows, and (at) that time even if there’s an old man he may come with something we call aminda, like this (she points to a string attached to her dress) and tie on that girls hand. ‘This is now my wife. I’m going to pay something when she grows up.’ Then that girl will stay there (and) when she reaches ten years old, the man (will) come and pick that girl.”

Onduri: “Of those cows, by then in (the) old period, the parent(s did not) allow children to go into school. I’ll give the example of my mother. You know they used to go for catechism...My mom was saying that they have to attend that instruction for two years. Then after two years when there are bad times and they have (taken) first communion, then they have to fix them with class one, but now the parents will not agree. Momma was saying that she was just twelve years (old), but the father managed to sell her to my father when she was just twelve years. Now when she reached there as she was still young, she was kept in her mother-in-law’s house up to when she was fourteen years old. That is when they took her to

my daddy's house, because by then they thought that she was a bit mature. Then she stayed there for again two years and she managed to get her first born..."

The conversation took a different turn but eventually returned to the early realities of Tororo's gender stratification.

Jenrose: "Girls, they are not educated, because, parents, they are just selling girls to educate boys... They take girls as property to educate boys because they have (no rights) at home. They think that girls... just go somewhere else and just start there and that (is the) home they are going to benefit."

Theoretically, bridewealth encourages parents to cultivate children with high levels of human capital, perhaps including an education, because they will yield a higher marriage payment.¹ The merits of this are limited in a system like Tororo's in which bridewealth payments are largely standardized. The comments of these Tororan women are representative of a system of bridewealth that existed in Tororo decades ago, when payments were considerably more uniform. Uganda's universal, and most often compulsory, primary education means that girls are rarely denied a basic education for the sake of a parent's bridewealth. A few of the Tororans I spoke to did indicate that they married as they prematurely left secondary school or soon thereafter. The conversations led me to believe that this occurrence was not uncommon in

¹ Becker, G. S. (1991). A Treatise on the Family. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

Tororo. Marriage in more recent times seems to be the best option when faced with unaffordable secondary school fees.

Women in polygynous relationships marry approximately 5 years earlier, have 2.2 more children, and have more than double the difference in age with their husbands, from 2.8 years to 6.4 years.¹ Furthermore, in nations with significant levels of brideprice payments and polygyny, investment rates and capita-output ratios are about half that of nations with the opposite characteristic. Those nations that tend toward monogamous relationships and brideprice have a per capita output that is roughly two and a half times as high.² According to Michele Tertlilt, monogamy lowers fertility, shrinks the age gap between spouses, and eliminates if not reverses the direction of marriage payments. Polygyny has the effect of creating a system in which women are 'rationed.' Buying wives and selling women is, for lack of a better phrase, a good investment strategy. For Tertlilt, polygyny decreases the value of women in society in relation to men. She says, "polygyny creates an asymmetry between the number of children a son and daughter can have, which if men care about the number of grandchildren they have, induces fathers to favor sons over daughters." There is a theoretical gap in her reasoning; although parents would favor men because it allows for more children, it is the women from whom they will receive a bride price. Logically, since polygyny creates a higher demand for brides, it suggests there is a higher demand for bridal services. In Sub-Saharan Africa, brideprice is more often found in polygynous societies and the amount given tends to be higher.³ It is unclear

¹ Anderson, S. (2007). "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice." The Journal of Economic Perspectives 21(4): 151-174.

² Ibid.

³ Platteau, J.-P. (2007). "The Perverse Effects of High Brideprices." World Development 35(7): 1221-1236.

whether the rewards from the brideprices of grandchildren are more substantial than those from children.¹

The word brideprice has interesting implications for Uganda's marriage discourse. Only two people I encountered, the most culturally conservative, argued that the word is a misnomer. "I would rather it be called a gift," they said, aligning themselves with those who prefer the term bridewealth over brideprice. Despite this distinction, my conversations with them, as with all of my interviewees, were carried out with a language that equated women with property. The previous excerpt from my interview illustrates this point. In this part of our conversation, reproduced verbatim below, Kony was recounting the merits of bridewealth as a means of maintaining marriages. Bridewealth does, as noted above, serve that social function, but the practice and what it contributes to the marriage discourse creates a situation in which women are linguistically synonymous with property. Language thus functions to limit the agency of Tororan women.

Ed Kony: "Because if the marriage is not there, anybody can come and go with your wife...you will have no say. After all, did he marry me anything? Did he give to my father anything? I am free to go and move whatever I can do. So that also brings some tension. It makes the husband to have that ownership of the wife. And makes other people to fear that wife loves such and such a person, as if it is a wedding ring. It works as if it is a wedding ring

¹ Tertilt, M. (2005). "Polygyny, Fertility, and Savings." Center on Democracy Development and the Rule of Law Publications - Stanford University 113(6): 1341-1371.

when you have wedded a wife, they have given her a ring to show that this is actually the wife of someone.”

Pinto Adhola: “Does it work the other way around too? Does it make the wife have ownership of the husband?”

Ed Kony: “Yeah. The wife says this is my home. I’m married here. I’m a woman of this home. My parents know. Rather than just stay with her. If you stay with her then she decides to go away she’s a free woman. She’s free. That is why I feel at least there is something small to be paid or if it not, let it be even one cow.”

At another point in the interview, I asked for clarification on the size of bridewealth in his marriage. “So you gave two cows,” I asked. His response, “Yes, I paid two,” illustrates the subtle, powerful effect the practice has in Tororo. Though I phrased the question neutrally, he transformed it to suggest it was a payment rather than a gift, despite later concluding the interview by expressing a desire for Tororans to interpret marriage transactions as the latter. Kony was not the only person whose language was impacted by this discursive formation. Brides were “bought” or “paid for” after which their parents “gave” them to their husbands who “took” them home. The discourse of marriage in this case is used not as a simple matter of speech or writing but rather, as Stuart Hall (1996), describes a way of representing something, enabling its construction in a particular way and limiting other constructions. The language people use to

represent something, like marriage via bridewealth, produces knowledge and truth.¹ Thus, if when talking about marrying a woman, men use the language presented above, the effect is to linguistically construct women as property.

This construction is the basis for the harm bridewealth does to Tororo's women. Previous research and my conversations suggest that women are in some ways equated to property because of the practice. Bridewealth's dehumanizing nature creates a situation in which women have less room to negotiate in marriage and more than a fair share of household duties. These consequences are solidified further by the young age of first marriage for women and large age gap cultivated by bridewealth. Lastly, the difficulty women face in leaving marriage is the greatest hindrance to their agency.

¹ Hall, S. (1996). *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*. S. Hall. Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers.

Conclusion

Bridewealth is a declining cultural practice in Tororo and elsewhere. Decreasing amounts of bridewealth at the time of marriage may be a precursor to the end of bridewealth in Tororo. Fewer people have the cattle necessary to match their parents' customary gifts. At first glance, it may seem poverty is the explanation, but capital that was once in the form of cattle is now held in other forms. Existing literature suggests modernization makes its disappearance inevitable. Though marriage squeeze and unaccommodating population growth are reasons bridewealth is dwindling, its conflicts with urbanization and economic development are primary reasons fewer people practice bridewealth.

Bridewealth, as a function of Tororo's patrilineal customs, limits the agency of women. Female voices are ostensibly absent in bridewealth discussions from the introduction ceremony until death or divorce. Their absence is reflected by Tororo's gender biased marriage discourse, heavily influenced by the centrality of bridewealth to marriages. In turn, the discourse is used as one of many tools that create an unequal balance of power in Tororo's marriages. That power balance positions women under the authority of men, meaning women often take on a greater share of household duties and agricultural responsibilities and have less input in household decision making. Comparisons with marriage payments in the opposite direction and justifications by Tororan men and women suggest that these discrepancies are largely influenced by bridewealth. Most significantly, bridewealth payments, because of their refundability, trap women in unhealthy relationships.

Human rights pressure and economic incompatibility suggest bridewealth is on the decline and will eventually disappear. Bridewealth connects distant clans to one another, it connects young generations with their ancestors, and perhaps most significantly, it limits divorce. Assuming the practice is discontinued, the Jopadhola and other ethnic groups that engage in the practice will need to compensate for the social functions that bridewealth serves. Societies have accounted for these practicalities in the absence of bridewealth in the past; it will be interesting to see the ways in which Tororo maintains its family structure.

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