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LINEAGE AND SOCIETY IN PRECOLONIAL UGANDA*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the changing nature of patrilineality in east-central Uganda from the sixth century. While traditional anthropological models of lineality have been largely dismissed in recent scholarship, the problem remains that patrilineages and patrilineages have played important roles in the lives of the Ganda, Gwere, Soga and their North Nyanza ancestors. By carefully examining changes and continuities in the form and content of patrilineality it becomes possible to understand it as historically contingent. In North Nyanza, patrilineal descent was the norm for inheritance and for household formation, but relationships formed through mothers were also crucial in the creation of new communities and in the legitimization of political power. This was not static: as communities negotiated their changing circumstances, so they adapted the form of their particular patrilineality to serve their needs.

KEY WORDS: Precolonial, Uganda, family, kinship, lineages, linguistics.

WHEN Kintu and Nnambi, the founding father and mother of Ganda society, left Nnambi's home in the sky to build their family on earth, they were followed by Nnambi's brother Walumbe (Death). After Nnambi had given birth to three children, Walumbe – their maternal uncle – asked Kintu to give him one of them. Kintu refused. Walumbe replied that he would, then, kill all the children. Nnambi gave birth to several more children and Walumbe returned. He reminded Kintu that he had asked for a child to raise in his home and that Kintu had refused him. Now that Kintu and Nnambi had many children, Walumbe asked, as their mother's brother, for his share of them. Kintu again refused, explaining that it was Ggulu, Nnambi's father, who had the right to demand a share of the children. If Kintu gave a share of them to Walumbe, he would not be able to give Ggulu his share when he asked for it. After Kintu's second refusal, Walumbe made good on his threat to kill the children, thereby bringing death to Buganda.¹

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¹ This is an extract from the foundation myth of Buganda based on the version of the story in H. Le Vaux, *Manuel de langue luganda comprenant grammaire et un recueil de contes et de légendes* (Algiers, 1914), 456. For other versions, see H. H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate*, vol. II (London, 1902), 700–5; A. Kagwa, *Engero za Baganda*

This story revolves around lineality, and directs our attention to the need to historicize debates over this issue. Maternal kin held a particular sway over their daughters' and sisters' children, despite Buganda being a patrilineal society, and despite many challenges to their role in social organization. Indeed, maternal kin have held pivotal positions in the social organization of otherwise patrilineal North Nyanza societies since the late first millennium CE. This was neither an unchanging nor a monolithic feature of North Nyanzan kin governance. Neither did it unfold everywhere in the same way, as North Nyanza gradually diverged into its descendant societies of Buganda, Busoga and Bugwere.² In Buganda, for example, the relationship between a maternal uncle and his sister's children remained but became increasingly fraught, while in Bugwere a woman's children grew in importance for her clan.

In writing a long-term history of lineality in precolonial Uganda, this article, like other recent work in the field, demonstrates both that such social processes can be historicized in the *longue durée* and that this can be achieved in the absence of conventional archival sources.³ Written sources date only to the mid-nineteenth century in Uganda. I use historical linguistic, ethnographic and oral historical evidence to uncover the history of kin governance from the late first millennium. In so doing, I show that it is possible to use these sources to write surprisingly rich histories that stretch well beyond material and economic developments and into the intellectual and ideological worlds of historical actors whose individual lives are lost to us.

Patrilineal descent is an ancient social practice in the Great Lakes region, which can be traced back to the Great Lakes Bantu-speaking communities some 2,500 years ago.⁴ While men and women retained their membership in their natal patrilineal throughout their lives, women's clan and lineage ties became increasingly complicated as they married and had children.⁵ In nineteenth-century Buganda, Busoga and Bugwere, membership of the patrilineal determined much that was important in a person's life, in spiritual, material and social terms. Yet, the foundation myth of the Ganda – their social charter – includes a clear reference to the rights maternal grandfathers and maternal uncles held in their daughters' and sisters' children. This article argues that applying the label of patrilineality to these societies elides as

(London, 1951), 1–8; J. Roscoe, *The Baganda: An Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs* (London, 1911; reprinted Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints, n.d.), 460–4. For a detailed discussion of the story of Kintu and Nnambi, see N. Kodesh, 'Beyond the royal gaze: clanship and collective well-being in Buganda' (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2004), 100–26.

² The fourth language descended from North Nyanza is Rushana, but so little evidence for the language and its speakers is available that it is not explored here in any depth.

³ It is possible to go substantially further back in time on these issues than I do here. J. Marck and K. Bostoen, 'Proto Oceanic society (Austronesian) and Proto East Bantu society (Niger-Congo), residence, descent and kin terms ca. 1000 BC' (unpublished paper for the 105th Annual American Anthropological Association Meetings, 'Kinship and Language: Per Hage (1935–2004) Memorial Session', 2006).

⁴ C. Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400* (Charlottesville, 1998), 154–5, 253; D. L. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the Fifteenth Century* (Portsmouth NH, 1998), 94–7.

⁵ Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 101.

much as it illuminates, because they and their ancestors, to varying ends and degrees, also gave importance to kin networks created by mothers.

Wyatt MacGaffey has recently argued against the existence of matrilineal and patrilineal societies in Africa.⁶ He does not argue that matrilineal and patrilineal descent do not exist or have not historically existed. Indeed he shows how powerful men in Kongo were able to use different models of descent to their advantage during the turbulence of the eighteenth century. What he is arguing against is the determinism that accompanies the labelling of a society as patrilineal or as matrilineal. MacGaffey is not alone in his discomfort with the wholesale application of models of lineality onto societies; neither is this discomfort limited to Africa. Medievalists have taken issue with the depiction of eleventh- to thirteenth-century France as a place where family structures and inheritance practices 'restricted property to the line of the eldest male', thereby eliminating aristocratic women from political power.⁷ There is substantial evidence to show precisely the contrary: aristocratic women, if not their commoner counterparts, inherited property and wielded political power alongside and in the place of their husbands and sons.⁸

One of the problems with lineage models is their 'just-so' nature. This emerges from the fact that they are, as with kinship systems more generally, 'emic models of reality at the same time that they channel the behaviour of men and women'.⁹ Any discussion of lineality needs to navigate between these two spheres. Because lineage models are supposed to determine behaviour – e.g. who inherits what – it can be difficult to avoid deterministic arguments. One way to get at contingency is by looking closely at how people have navigated institutions like patrilineality. By paying attention to the particular meanings of the words used, Naomi Tadmor has shown that people in early modern England had much more fluid understandings of family, household and kinship than scholars had previously allowed for.¹⁰ Another approach is to look carefully at the specific ways in which people managed issues of descent and inheritance at different moments in time. Even for precolonial Uganda, where we do not have the rich written sources available for early modern Europe, it is possible to examine the ideal descent structures and the tensions within them in ways that extend far beyond the simple labelling of a particular society as patrilineal.¹¹

For MacGaffey the lineage model in Kongo is fundamentally political. It is not 'a true description of what exists in real life now or at any time in the

⁶ W. MacGaffey, 'Changing representations in Central African history', *Journal of African History*, 46 (2005), 197–201. MacGaffey, as he acknowledges, is not the first to express anxiety about the use of lineality in the study of the non-Western world. See D. M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor, 1984).

⁷ A. Livingston, 'Aristocratic women in the Chartrain', in T. Evergates (ed.), *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France* (Philadelphia, 1999), 46–7.

⁸ K. Lo Prete and T. Evergates, 'Introduction', in Evergates (ed.), *Aristocratic Women*, 4.

⁹ K. O. Poewe, *Matrilineal Ideology: Male–Female Dynamic in Luapula, Zambia* (London, 1981), 4.

¹⁰ N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001).

¹¹ This is not limited to patrilineality. M. G. Peletz, *A Share of the Harvest: Kinship, Property, and Social History Among the Malays of Rembau* (Berkeley, 1988).

past. Nor is it an idealized or approximate description'. Rather, 'the model is an agreed formula for making political claims'.¹² This allows us to explore how and why people chose one descent system over another (or even any descent system over none at all), rather than attempting to corral all aspects of a particular society into a social scientific model. The 'historical question' then becomes 'in what circumstances can groups hope to expand by retaining reproductive capacity rather than by exchanging it?'¹³ In the Kongo, 'matrilineal descent is an unstable and relatively superficial phenomenon' which emerged 'in the eighteenth century in response to new opportunities for competitive accumulation of women'.¹⁴

MacGaffey dismisses efforts by historians of Central Africa's deep past to trace matrilineality back beyond the eighteenth century.¹⁵ And yet, societies have followed one or other of the descent systems over several generations. Because each generation was born into a kin network of reciprocal responsibilities, there were necessarily constraints on the extent to which any individual could switch from one descent system and start making claims on the basis of another. Societies have, however, changed their models of descent and communities have developed specific forms of those models to serve their needs (or the needs of influential groups within them), and the evidence from North Nyanza shows that such changes occurred over long periods. By looking at the historical contingency of lineality over the *longue durée*, I argue for a recognition of the complexity and diversity of lineal systems labelled 'patrilineal'.

Historians writing about Africa's deeper past argue that communities have moved between models of lineal descent,¹⁶ and anthropologists have been able to describe these transitions as they unfold, such as in the contemporary Gwembe valley in Zambia, where communities are changing from matrilineal to patrilineal descent in a context of environmental degradation and new economic opportunities.¹⁷ In all these contexts of flux and complexity, an important point remains: lineality does exist. Critics of kinship theory tend towards dismissing it wholesale and argue that Western scholars have imposed, through faulty translations, their worldview on other societies.¹⁸ Neil Kodesh has recently noted, however, that we need to be as wary of universally dismissing phenomena such as lineality and clanship as we are of universally discovering them.¹⁹

NORTH NYANZA AND THE HISTORICAL RECORD

Like a great many other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and indeed of the world, the Great Lakes region, of which North Nyanza forms part, does not

¹² MacGaffey, 'Changing', 198.

¹³ *Ibid.* 199.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 200.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 200.

¹⁶ Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 154–5, 253; Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 94–7; J. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison WI, 1990), 106–14.

¹⁷ L. Cliggett, *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa* (Ithaca NY, 2005), 65–7. See also Poewe, *Matrilineal Ideology*.

¹⁸ Schneider, *Critique*. MacGaffey makes a similar point. 'Changing', 189.

¹⁹ N. Kodesh, 'Networks of knowledge: clanship and collective well-being in Buganda', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 197–216.

have a long documentary history. It does, however, have a long history. We know from archaeological data that the region has been inhabited for several millennia, with human activity becoming more marked in the archaeological record from 1000 BCE.²⁰ We know from linguistic data that the people living there before 1000 BCE spoke Eastern Sahelian and Central Sudanic languages and that it is only in the last 3,000 years that Bantu-speakers settled there and came to completely dominate the linguistic and cultural landscape.²¹ In order to write the rich *longue durée* history of this and other sub-Saharan African regions that lack written documents for the precolonial past, historians have turned to a range of different methods, including the 'words-and-things' approach, which is grounded in the methods of comparative historical linguistics.²²

Just as the words we speak today name and describe not only the physical world we inhabit, but also our spiritual and ideological worlds, the words spoken by those in the past did the same. By reconstructing the vocabularies of now-dead ancestors to languages spoken today, we can uncover the material, spiritual and ideological worlds inhabited by the speakers of those languages. The first step in reconstructing such vocabularies is a genetic classification of the languages to establish a historical framework in which to place those words. It is then possible to trace when new words were coined or borrowed by particular speech communities and use these etymologies to make arguments about historical change.

North Nyanza is the proto-language of four languages spoken today in east-central Uganda: Rushana, Lugwere, Lusoga and Luganda. The genetic classification of these languages reveals that they form a sub-group of the West Nyanza branch of Great Lakes Bantu (Fig. 1).²³ Proto-North Nyanza

²⁰ Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 35–53; M. R. Maclean, 'Late Stone Age and Early Iron Age settlement in the interlacustrine region: a district case study', *Azania*, 29–30 (1994–5), 296–302; Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 32–7; D. Taylor and R. Marchant, 'Human impact in the interlacustrine region: long-term pollen records from the Rukiga highlands', *Azania*, 29–30 (1994–5), 283–95.

²¹ Traces of these languages have survived in the Bantu languages spoken in the region today. Ehret, *African Classical Age*; D. L. Schoenbrun, 'We are what we eat: ancient agriculture between the Great Lakes', *Journal of African History*, 34 (1993), 9–22.

²² K. Bostoen, 'Pots, words and the Bantu problem: on lexical reconstruction and early African history', *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007), 173–99; Ehret, *African Classical Age*; E. L. Fields-Black, 'Untangling the many roots of West African mangrove rice farming: rice technology in the Rio Nunez region, earliest times to c. 1800', *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 1–21; R. M. Gonzales, *Society, Religion, and History: Central East Tanzanians and the World They Created, 200 BCE to 1800 CE* (www.gutenberg-e.org/gonzales, 2008); K. A. Klieman, *The Pygmies were our Compass: Bantu and Batwa in the History of West Central Africa, Early Times to c. 1900 C.E.* (Portsmouth NH, 2003); D. L. Schoenbrun, 'Violence, marginality, scorn & honour: language evidence of slavery to the eighteenth century', in H. Médard and S. Doyle (eds.), *Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa* (Athens OH, 2007), 38–75; J. B. Shetler, *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present* (Athens OH, 2007); J. Vansina, *How Societies are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville, 2004). For a Europeanist perspective, see D. L. Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley, 2008).

²³ For the supporting evidence for this classification, see R. Stephens, 'A history of motherhood, food procurement and politics in East-Central Uganda to the nineteenth century' (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2007), 30–58, 239–55. See also

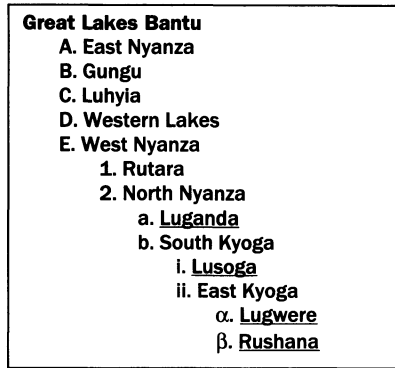


Fig. 1. The sub-classification of North Nyanza languages and their place in Great Lakes Bantu.

gradually diverged from West Nyanza and became its own language, no longer comprehensible to speakers of Rutara, the other West Nyanza dialect, in the second half of the first millennium. North Nyanza broke up in three stages. The first, which occurred in the early second millennium, resulted in Luganda and South Kyoga. The second split, around the middle of the second millennium, saw South Kyoga give way to Lusoga and East Kyoga and, finally, within the last 500 years, East Kyoga split, leaving Lugwere and Rushana. Language divergence tends to proceed slowly over generations as sub-groups have decreasing contact and dialects gradually become mutually incomprehensible and so can be described as languages. It is thus impossible to pinpoint a moment in time when dialects of a single language become distinct languages. As a result the dates derived from glottochronology can never be more than approximations but, especially when used in conjunction with correlations from the archaeological record and pollen studies, they give us the time-frame within which particular ancestral languages were spoken.²⁴

While the reconstructed vocabularies for proto-North Nyanza and its offspring provide the historian with the basis for writing history, we cannot tell from words alone the contexts in which they were used. Drawing on the

M. J. Mould, 'Comparative grammar reconstruction and language subclassification: the North Victorian Bantu languages' (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1976); D. L. Schoenbrun, 'Great Lakes Bantu: classification and settlement chronology', *Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika*, 15 (1994), 91–152.

²⁴ Glottochronology is a persistently controversial aspect of historical linguistics. Recent studies which have made correlations between dates from radiocarbon-dating on objects, flora and fauna named by linguistic groups inhabiting the area have tended to confirm dates from glottochronology. See C. Ehret, 'Testing the expectations of glottochronology against the correlations of language and archaeology in Africa', in C. Renfrew, A. McMahon and L. Trask (eds.), *Time Depth in Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 2000), 373–99. For the Great Lakes region, see Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 46–7. For critiques of glottochronology, see T. Crowley, *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics* (Oxford, 1997), 183–6; C. Renfrew, 'Introduction: the problem of time depth', in Renfrew *et al.* (eds.), *Time Depth in Historical Linguistics*, ix–xiv; Vansina, *How Societies are Born*, 8 fn. 17.

ethnographic record allows us to reconstruct some of those contexts.²⁵ The use of ethnography to write precolonial history can cause some unease, for ethnography is the study of the present. It has been noted that ‘pursued by itself, the comparative study of contemporary cultural practices harbors anachronism’.²⁶ But when we anchor comparative ethnographic data with independent evidence in the form of reconstructed vocabulary it becomes possible to mine the rich source that it is without yielding to ahistoricism. By relating ethnographic descriptions to specific words that we know were used by proto-North Nyanza-speakers, or one of the speech communities descended from them, it is possible to develop a richer and more nuanced picture of the meanings given to those words and thus to acquire a greater understanding of the past.

The third principal source that I draw on to write the *longue-durée* history of North Nyanza peoples is oral traditions. The use and abuse of oral traditions and oral history in the writing of African history has preoccupied many people and filled many pages. Scholars who sought to find an ‘original’ version²⁷ were criticized by those who sought to make oral traditions equate to archival sources,²⁸ while asserting that they could not be used for creating chronologies.²⁹ Later scholarship has challenged the search for ‘historical truth’ in early work using such traditions and has led to an emphasis on colonial and postcolonial history, with an implicit suggestion that these traditions cannot be used to write about the deeper past.³⁰ Historians, however, have continued to produce work that demonstrates the importance of such sources in writing about precolonial events.³¹ Kodesh shows that we can make effective use of oral traditions to write about precolonial history by incorporating insights about performance and sites of memory into our approach.³² The oral traditions that exist for Buganda, Busoga and Bugwere are particularly helpful in reconstructing the history of more recent centuries as state formation became a central political feature in the region, but they also shed light on wider and older social features.

²⁵ For detailed discussions of using comparative ethnographic evidence, see Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 52–5; Stephens, ‘History of motherhood’, 61–5; Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 17–31.

²⁶ Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 55.

²⁷ J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985); B. A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo, I: Migration and Settlement* (Nairobi, 1967).

²⁸ D. P. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London, 1982).

²⁹ D. P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Traditions: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford, 1974).

³⁰ L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, 2000).

³¹ S. P. Blier, ‘The path of the leopard: motherhood and majesty in early Danhomé’, *Journal of African History*, 36 (1995), 391–417; R. L. Tantal, ‘Verbal and visual imagery in Kitara (Western Uganda): interpreting “The story of Isimbwa and Nyinamwiru”’, in R. W. Harms (ed.), *Paths Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina* (Atlanta, 1994), 223–43.

³² N. Kodesh, ‘History from the healer’s shrine: genre, historical imagination, and early Ganda history’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 493 (2007), 527–52. On the renewed recognition of the role of oral tradition and oral history in writing African history, see T. C. McCaskie, ‘Denkyira in the making of Asante, c. 1660–1720’, *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007), 1–25.

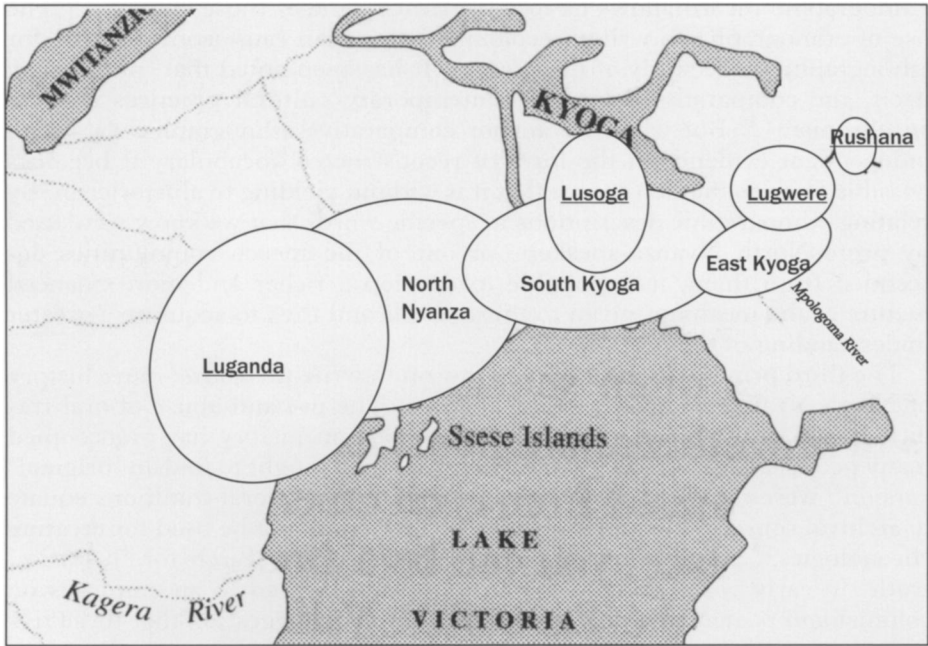


Fig. 2. Historical geography of North Nyanza, its sub-groups and present-day languages.³³

NORTH NYANZA, MID FIRST MILLENNIUM TO THE
MID SECOND MILLENNIUM

Living on the north-western shore of Lake Victoria-Nyanza in the second half of the first millennium, speakers of proto-North Nyanza inhabited a changing world (see Fig. 2). This was a time of technological transition from the early Iron Age to the late Iron Age, of agricultural change as North Nyanzans increasingly cultivated bananas, and of political innovation as power bases came more and more to be centred in royal families. Towards the beginning of this period, North Nyanzans would have placed a premium on the creation of secure communities as they gradually expanded across the landscape, creating new settlements with each generation. As they did so, they used the relationships and alliances created through marriage and motherhood, among other strategies, to protect the current and future well-being of their communities. People speaking proto-South Kyoga, from the early second millennium onwards, slowly settled to the east and northeast of the North Nyanzan heartland. In so doing, they not only created new, and at times precarious, settlements, but also interacted with people who spoke different languages and practised different cultures. The latter was particularly the case towards the end of the South Kyogan period and into the centuries during which Lusoga and East Kyoga were spoken. On this ongoing internal

³³ Adapted from Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 23.

frontier,³⁴ South Kyogans and their descendants used maternal networks to ensure the social health of their communities and to negotiate their interactions with Luo-speaking immigrants. The Ganda, by contrast, faced different pressures and opportunities, which centred on growing political centralization and increasing competition for the most fertile agricultural land. In dealing with these challenges, they gave a greater prominence to patrilineal ideology in social and political organization.

People speaking proto-North Nyanza and the languages descended from it, formed a borderlands world. From about the sixteenth century, the Soga came into increasing contact with Luo-speakers. The history of the Luo shows a pattern of interaction with existing populations.³⁵ While in some places such interactions led to the integration of existing populations into Luo culture,³⁶ in Busoga this was largely reversed as the Luo adopted Lusoga.³⁷ At the same time, interactions between Luo and Soga peoples led to changes throughout Soga society, including in marriage patterns and child fostering. To the east, speakers of East Kyoga also adopted aspects of Luo social and cultural life. More recently, the Gwere came into contact with Ateso-speakers and incorporated elements of this new culture into their own.

The interactions of the ancestors of North Nyanza-speaking peoples with other linguistic and cultural groups are fairly well documented, especially in the economic fields of cultivation and herding.³⁸ More recent political connections between (once) Luo-speaking groups and speakers of Great Lakes Bantu languages have been studied, especially with reference to Bunyoro and, less convincingly, Buganda.³⁹ These studies emphasize immigrant elites introducing centralized governance. Writing about Soga states from the seventeenth century, David Cohen has shown how immigrant Luo-speakers formed new states or took power in existing ones by creating networks of relationships with the indigenous population through exogamous marriage

³⁴ I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington, 1987). See also Klieman, *Pygmies*, particularly 69–78; Schoenbrun, *Green Place*.

³⁵ D. W. Cohen, 'The River-Lake Nilotes from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century', in B. A. Ogot (ed.), *Zamani: A Survey of East African History* (2nd ed., Nairobi, 1974), 135–49; Ogot, *Southern Luo*, 1.

³⁶ D. W. Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu* (Oxford, 1972), 126.

³⁷ D. W. Cohen, 'The face of contact: a model of a cultural and linguistics frontier in early Eastern Uganda', in R. Vossen and M. Bechhaus-Gerst (eds.), *Nilotic Studies: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Languages and History of the Nilotic Peoples, Cologne, January 4–6, 1982*, vol. II (Berlin, 1982), 341.

³⁸ Schoenbrun, 'We are what we eat'.

³⁹ The Luo origin of the Nyoro rulers was first described by the missionary J. P. Crazzolaria in his work *The Lwoo*, vol. I (Verona, 1950), 91–3, 101–4. Cited in R. L. Tantala, 'The early history of Kitara in Western Uganda: process models of religious and political change' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1989), 14–15. An early overview of the argument of the Luo influence in Buganda, Bunyoro and Nkole, by one of its most prominent proponents, is R. Oliver, 'The traditional histories of Buganda, Bunyoro, and Nkole', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 85 (1955), 111–17. See also C. Wrigley, *Kingship and State: The Buganda Dynasty* (Cambridge, 1996), 202–6.

and by sending sons to live with their non-Luo maternal kin.⁴⁰ Working from the linguistic and comparative ethnographic evidence, it is clear that the ongoing roles for maternal kin in this patrilineal society had implications for the populations of both elite and commoners. It is those wider social interactions which facilitated the maintenance, if not the seizure, of power by an 'outsider' elite. Mothers and motherhoods were at the very heart of those interactions.

MOTHERS, MARRIAGE AND PATRILINEALITY

Women and girls in North Nyanza, and mothers in particular, found themselves at the centre of intersecting webs of patrilineages and patrilines. They were born into their father's lineage or **ssiga*,⁴¹ and to his clan or **-ka* (noun class 7/8) [2],⁴² but their mother's patrilin also had rights in them. As adults, it was taboo for them to marry someone of either their father's or their mother's clan. When they married into a third clan and became pregnant, they had to follow the avoidances and taboos of the husband's clan.⁴³ Their children belonged to that clan, again with the mother's clan retaining certain rights in them. The patrilineage and patrilin, however, had particularly strong interests in the children born to its sons. In the moral world of North Nyanza, motherhood was supposed to occur within the confines of matrimony. This was because many people beyond the biological parents held interests in the children born to a woman. Those various interests were physically represented in the form of bridewealth given by the lineage of the man to the lineage of the woman. And the economic ties created by bridewealth were part of what activated kin interests in a lineage's offspring. North Nyanzans inherited a word from their Great Lakes Bantu-speaking ancestors to describe the action of the man and his relatives bringing bridewealth to his fiancée's family: **-kwa* [4]. This term is derived from the verb **-kó-* which has been reconstructed to proto-Bantu with the meaning 'give bridewealth'.⁴⁴ According to this analysis, North Nyanzans used a word inherited from their proto-Bantu-speaking ancestors to talk about the payment of bridewealth.

⁴⁰ D. W. Cohen, 'The political transformation of Northern Busoga, 1600–1900', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 22 (1982), 465–88; Cohen, *Mukama and Kintu*, 1. See also D. W. Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu: A Study of Authority in a Nineteenth-Century African Community* (Princeton NJ, 1977).

⁴¹ D. L. Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary: Etymologies and Distributions* (Cologne, 1997), 85, Reconstruction Number (RN) 117. Asterisks denote reconstructed words.

⁴² The numbers in square brackets refer to the reconstructed vocabulary in the appendix.

⁴³ R. R. Atkinson, 'Bugwere Historical Texts', Text 24 (n.p.) (hereafter 'BHT'); D. W. Cohen, 'Collected Texts of Busoga Traditional History', Text 41 (n.p.) (hereafter 'CTBTH').

⁴⁴ Y. Bastin and T. Schadeberg (eds.), 'Bantu Lexical Reconstructions 3' (hereafter referred to as 'BLR 3'), Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, www.metafro.be/blr (accessed 28 Aug. 2007), RN Main 7240. See also M. Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to the Comparative Linguistics and Prehistory of the Bantu Languages*, III (Farnborough, 1970), 287, Comparative Series (CS) 1092; 304, CS 1176; 305, CS 1177.

The practice of giving bridewealth as part of the marriage contract is an ancient one among Bantu-speaking and other communities. In North Nyanza, a marriage which followed the giving of bridewealth was the ideal sphere within which motherhood should occur, because it connected all those with an interest in the offspring born to the marriage. As Cohen has noted for Busoga:

the goods paid over as brideprice would have been circulated through the lineage of the bride, with the understanding – in fact it is a highly durable contract – that if the marriage should break up a reasonably equivalent mix of goods would be returned to the lineage of the husband.⁴⁵

Through the distribution of the bridewealth among the patrilineage of the bride and their commitment to return it (or its equivalent) should the marriage fail, the two patrilineages – that of bride and groom – became enmeshed in economic as well as social relationships. Claude Meillassoux asserts that the ‘kinship relations resulting from marriage’ are ‘relationships that form around the reproduction of individuals’. While such relationships also result from birth, birth is subsumed within marriage because it is ‘only an event regulated by rules fixed at marriage’.⁴⁶ For Cohen the relationship between ‘kinship relations resulting from marriage’ and those resulting from birth is more complicated, for the latter outlive the former. Even if a marriage failed, had children been born to it the *bako*, or in-law, relations formed would continue through the interests of the two lineages in those children.⁴⁷ This better reflects the importance of relationships formed through the mother, which shaped much of North Nyanzan social life.

Aside from the bridewealth given to the father and brothers of the bride, her mother also received special recognition. In Bugwere this took the form of a goat which was given to her after the wedding night.⁴⁸ Ganda grooms gave their mothers-in-law clothing in recognition of the taboo of avoidance that existed between them. They also gave them 1,000 cowries.⁴⁹ While the use of cowries may be a relatively recent development, the underlying practice of giving such a gift is probably older. Because there are similar practices of giving a gift of appreciation to the bride’s mother in both Bugwere and Buganda, we can reconstruct the practice back to North Nyanzan times. For North Nyanzans, the gift would have marked both an appreciation of the work of mothering and a recognition of the taboos created by the marriage between the groom and his mother-in-law.

Ganda mothers were prominent in the preparations for and rites associated with marriage. It was they, and not the paternal aunt or any other woman, who had to wash the bride on the last day of her prenuptial seclusion.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Womunafu’s Bunafu*, 51.

⁴⁶ C. Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money Maidens, Meal, and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge, 1981), 38.

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Womunafu’s Bunafu*, 99. See also A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, ‘Introduction’, in Radcliffe-Brown and C. D. Forde, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London, 1950), 49, 51.

⁴⁸ GW-ETH-BUL-F-27/10/04, interview by author, 27 Oct. 2004, Bugwere, digital recording and transcript in possession of author.

⁴⁹ L. P. Mair, *An African People in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1934), 82.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 84.

Similarly it was the bride's mother who, together with her father, performed the cleansing rite, known as *kukuza*, immediately after the bride left her childhood home and on her first return visit with her husband. Mair noted that 'only her actual parents could do this, and to this day if the mother has left her husband she is expressly fetched back for it and may stay with him for the whole period between the two occasions'.⁵¹ The *kukuza* rite consisted of a man stepping over the outstretched legs of his wife and symbolized sexual intercourse.⁵² It was also performed in relation to fishing and hunting practices and in several other contexts, and can be understood as marking moments of both danger and creation.⁵³ In this particular context, it marked the moment of becoming the parents of a married daughter: a moment which changed the status of the parents and entered them into a new set of relationships with their son-in-law and his kin. The ceremony points to an ongoing recognition of the importance of the mother as the link between her natal kin, her children and her daughter's marital kin. It supports Cohen's argument about the enduring nature of *bako* relationships even after the failure of marriage, if children had resulted from it. The mother of the bride remained the central nexus of those relationships and, as such, had to perform the rite, because her daughter's marriage in turn created a new layer of *bako* relations. In addition to the *bako* relations, a daughter's marriage and her subsequent motherhood created a new set of inter-lineal relations that were of great importance to healthy social reproduction.

MOTHERHOOD IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Speakers of North Nyanza lived in a society that they organized patrilineally, and yet the evidence shows that the connections formed by and through mothers were also important to them. Mothers were the essential link between their clan and lineage members and their children. North Nyanzans had a specific term (*-*ihwa* [noun class 1/2] [1]) to refer to the children of their female clan members. In addition to that relationship, a mother's brother had a particular interest in his sister's children: he had rights in and responsibilities towards them. This is not to say that North Nyanza followed bilateral descent or that there were matrilineal clans. It is quite clear that all the clans and lineages were patrilineal. However, depending on the particular circumstances at different moments in time, North Nyanzans changed the form of their social organization in order to serve varying political, economic and social needs.

North Nyanzans did not innovate the term *-*ihwa* to describe their sisters' children, but inherited it from proto-Bantu speakers.⁵⁴ Schoenbrun notes that, for Great Lakes Bantu-speakers, what is important about *-*jìpúá*, the Great Lakes Bantu form of the noun, is that it describes 'the new member of the group, lost to the group which gave the wife and gained by the group which received the wife'.⁵⁵ It is true that *-*ihwa* in North Nyanza were 'lost'

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 88–9.

⁵² *Ibid.* 247–48; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 357 fn. 1.

⁵³ See Stephens, 'History of motherhood', 166, for further discussion of *kukuza*.

⁵⁴ Bastin and Schadeberg (eds.), 'BLR 3', RN Main 3498 *-*jìpúá*. See also Guthrie, *Comparative Bantu*, IV, 188, Comparative Stem (CS) 2091.

⁵⁵ Schoenbrun, *Cultural Vocabulary*, 86–7, RN 120.

to the patrilineage, but the relationship between a mother's kin and her children demonstrates a continued importance of **-ihwa* to their maternal kin. It was these children who washed the bodies of their aunts and uncles in preparation for burial and who assisted in the special ceremonies for twins and at other ritual occasions.⁵⁶ Furthermore, when an **-ihwa* succeeded to political office, his maternal kin could expect to benefit from their connection to power.⁵⁷ So while **-ihwa* did not belong to their mother's lineage or clan, they were not entirely 'lost' to their maternal kin group. Indeed it was the very distance created by their belonging to another lineage and clan that permitted them to carry out many of the ritually dangerous duties required of them. The continued connection between a mother's kin and her children was a strong feature of North Nyanzan social and political life.⁵⁸

The concept of **-ihwa* continued to play a similar role in South Kyogan social organization. After the break up of South Kyoga, however, there was significant innovation in the institution and role of **-ihwa* in Bugwere and Busoga. Among the Gwere, *baiwa*⁵⁹ had a number of ritual duties that their Soga and Ganda counterparts did not share. In addition to performing burial rites and playing a central role in twin ceremonies, they were involved in rainmaking ceremonies and the new millet ceremony – both of which were intimately connected with fertility.⁶⁰ A *mwiwa* would eat the first harvest from a banana plant under which a placenta had been buried, and participated in the *kulya embenenwa* ceremony which was performed when a new baby was first brought out of the house in which he or she was born.⁶¹ *Baiwa* also played a prominent role in the purification rites that took place if two members of the same clan had sexual relations with each other.⁶² And *baiwa* could turn to their maternal uncle for assistance should they encounter the

⁵⁶ Atkinson, 'BHT', Texts 37, 47, 48; Miss Laight and Y. K. Lubogo, 'Basoga death and burial rites', *Uganda Journal*, 2 (1934/5), 120–44 (this was initially erroneously published as by E. Zibondo; a letter rectifying this was published in *Uganda Journal*, 2 [1935], 255); Mair, *African People*, 46–8; SO-ETH-BUG-F-20/01/05 interview by author, 20 Jan. 2005, Busoga, digital recording and transcript in possession of author. Tantala lists some of the ritually dangerous tasks Nyoro **-ihwa* were expected to undertake for their mother's brothers. 'Early history of Kitara', 297. See also J. H. M. Beattie, 'Nyoro marriage and affinity', *Africa*, 28 (1958), 19–21.

⁵⁷ R. L. Tantala, 'Community and polity in southern Kigulu' (Makerere University, Kampala: Department of History Research Seminar Paper, 27 Nov. 1972 [n.p.], 12; Tantala, 'Gonza Bato and the consolidation of Abaisengobi rule in southern Kigulu' (Makerere University, Kampala: Department of History Research Seminar Paper, 21 Aug. 1972 [n.p.]), 18; Roscoe, *Baganda*, 191.

⁵⁸ Tantala's work on Bunyoro-Kitara notes that there too 'matrilateral links were recognized and were fairly significant as part of the *bwihwa* relationship (the mother's brother/sister's son relationship)'. It is quite possible that North Nyanzans' recognition of matrilateral ties was inherited from their West Nyanza-speaking ancestors, but an in-depth exploration of the broader range of this relationship lies beyond the scope of this work. 'Early history of Kitara', 90.

⁵⁹ This is the plural reflex of **-ihwa* in both Lugwere and Lusoga. The singular form is *mwiwa*.

⁶⁰ Atkinson, 'BHT', Texts 37, 48, 47, 45.

⁶¹ GW-ETH-IKI-F-16/11/04a; GW-ETH-IKI-F-16/11/04b interviews by author, 16 Nov. 2004, Bugwere, digital recordings and transcripts in possession of author. *Kulya embenenwa* literally means 'eating *embenenwa*'. As far as I have been able to ascertain there is no meaning for *embenenwa* outside of this specific context, where it describes a mixture of roasted seeds and nuts.

⁶² GW-ETH-BUL-F-11/11/04.

social disaster of being expelled from their paternal clan.⁶³ There does not seem to have been a stigma attached to Gwere *baiwa* living in their maternal uncle's household, in contrast to the situation in Buganda, as we will see below. In Bugwere, then, there was not only a continued importance for the connection between a woman's children and her kin and clan but, in fact, an increased emphasis on this relationship. That this increased emphasis was expressed by the involvement of *baiwa* in ceremonies associated with fertility serves to underline that Gwere did not see them so much as being 'lost' to the clan, but rather as a central part of healthy social reproduction. As was the case in North Nyanzan society, it was their very distance from the clan which allowed Gwere *baiwa* to perform tasks that were ritually dangerous for clan members, but which were essential to the well-being of the clan.

A major change in the institution of *baiwa* among the Soga was that many of the patrilineal clans (*bika*) innovated specific names for them. These names, particularly those for girls, often reflected the name of the eponymous founder of the clan. For example, the abaiseIhemula clan named their female *baiwa* 'Naihemula' and the abaiseIruba clan named their female *baiwa* 'Nairuba'.⁶⁴ While it is not yet possible to conclusively date the start of this practice, Cohen's work on how Luo-speaking immigrants took power in Soga states is suggestive. Writing about the Owiny Karuoth Luo, he notes that, while the sons of Karuoth men were raised in the households of their Lusoga-speaking maternal kin, daughters tended to remain in their father's household. He goes on to argue that 'the daughters may have been crucial in the cultural exchange between Karuoth and non-Karuoth ... and oriented toward a bilinguality and a cultural education in two different worlds'. This cultural straddling was intensified through their marriage to non-Karuoth, i.e. Soga, men.⁶⁵ By giving particular names to their daughters' children, Owiny Karuoth and others living in Busoga marked the ongoing connection with them and reinforced their role as cultural intermediaries.

As in North Nyanza-speaking communities, Soga *baiwa* had central roles in ceremonies and rites associated with the birth and naming of twins and with funerals and successions.⁶⁶ The connection between a *mwiwa* and his or her maternal kin was strong in Busoga and a grievance committed against a powerful *mwiwa* could lead to warfare, as occurred between Busiki and Nkono in the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ For the Soga, *baiwa*'s ritual connections with their mothers' kin groups led to strong political ties between them. Because a clan benefited greatly from the accession to the throne of a *mwiwa*, powerful clan members got involved in succession disputes.⁶⁸ Indeed, while members of a mother's kin group stood to benefit from a *mwiwa*'s success, the *mwiwa* was often dependent on his maternal kin for that success. There was, then, a situation of mutual dependence which served to reinforce the connections between *baiwa* and their maternal kin.

⁶³ Atkinson, 'BHT', Text 16.

⁶⁴ Cohen, 'CTBTH', Texts 95 and 125. ⁶⁵ Cohen, 'Political transformation', 473.

⁶⁶ Cohen, *Mukama and Kintu*, 10; Laight and Lubogo, 'Basoga death and burial rites'.

⁶⁷ Y. K. Lubogo, *A History of Busoga*, trans. Eastern Province (Bantu Language) Literature Committee (Jinja, 1960), 9–10. This contrasts with the relationship between *baihwa* and their matrilineal kin in Bunyoro where a *mwiwa* could be called to go to war for his mother's kin, but the converse could not occur (Beattie, 'Nyoro marriage', 20).

⁶⁸ Cohen, *Mukama and Kintu*, 14–16.

The Ganda, too, placed the concept of *bajjwa*⁶⁹ at the heart of their social organization. *Bajjwa* retained their ritual role, particularly in ceremonies marking the birth and naming of twins.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the maternal uncle or *kojja* had particularly strong rights to his sister's children, unless their father gave him compensatory payment for each child. And, should a *mujjwa* prince succeed to the throne, his maternal clan benefited greatly from their connection to him.⁷¹ Despite this, the Ganda had a complicated relationship with their *bajjwa*. A *kojja* could abuse his rights in them. Indeed any *bajjwa* who lived with their *kojja* because they had not been claimed and compensated for by their father were treated with disdain in the household. As Mair noted, such a child 'had none of the advantages of belonging either to his father's or his mother's family ... but ... he was not his uncle's child either, and in the latter's household he had no rights'.⁷² There was in Buganda a growing tension at the heart of the *mujjwa-kojja* relationship that led to the dominance of the *kojja*'s rights over his responsibilities towards his nieces and nephews. This coincided with the growing power of the Ganda state which led to an increased emphasis on patrilineality over any maternal ties, as older ideologies of motherhood were co-opted and transformed by the state.

The developments in the relationship between **-ihwa* and their maternal kin, from the time North Nyanza was spoken to the period when all the descendant languages were well established, were paralleled in the evolution of the specific relationship between a maternal uncle and his nieces and nephews.⁷³ Speakers of proto-East Bantu (or Eastern Savanna Bantu) innovated a word for 'maternal uncle', **máá-dÚmè*, which had the literal meaning of 'male mother'. North Nyanzans inherited this term, but shifted the meaning so that the word referred to 'male-in-laws'.⁷⁴ They then innovated a new noun, **koiza* (noun class 9/2) [3], to describe a mother's brother. The etymology of this noun remains unclear. There is a Nyoro verb *-koija* with the meaning 'to be greedy or gluttonous' and it is common for nouns to be derived from verbs. Thus it is possible that there was a West Nyanza verb **-koija* from which North Nyanza speakers derived the noun **koiza*. If this etymology is correct it reflects the right of the maternal uncle to make demands of his nephew.⁷⁵ However, because the verb is found only in Nyoro and in no other Rutaran or North Nyanzan languages, it is possible that the Nyoro verb was derived from the North Nyanza noun for maternal uncle. The Nyoro verb may thus reflect the perceived greed of maternal uncles among a neighbouring people.

⁶⁹ *Bajjwa* (sing. *mujjwa*) is the Luganda reflex of **-ihwa*.

⁷⁰ Mair, *African People*, 46–8.

⁷¹ H. Médard, *Le royaume du Buganda au XIXe siècle : mutations politiques et religieuses d'un ancien état d'Afrique de l'Est* (Paris, 2007), 227; L. D. Schiller, 'The royal women of Buganda', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23 (1990), 460.

⁷² Mair, *African People*, 62. The Ganda situation has some parallels in the role of *baihwa* in Bunyoro where there was 'a manifest ambivalence in the *bwihwa* relationship' (Beattie, 'Nyoro marriage', 18).

⁷³ The maternal uncle – sororal nephew relationship is not, of course, exclusive to North Nyanza and there is an extensive literature on this topic.

⁷⁴ Marck and Bostoen, 'Proto Oceanic', table 1; Schoenbrun, *Cultural Vocabulary*, 97, RN136.

⁷⁵ Schoenbrun, *Cultural Vocabulary*, 93, RN 130.

Irrespective of its etymology, the fact that North Nyanzans innovated a new noun to name the maternal uncle suggests a change or evolution in his role during the time that North Nyanza was spoken as a language. From ethnographic evidence we know that it was not only the maternal uncle who had rights in his sister's children, for the maternal grandfather could also make claims on them. It appears that, at least initially, it was the latter who could demand compensation from his son-in-law for some of the children born to his daughter,⁷⁶ though this right may well have passed to the **koiza* on the grandfather's death. Yet, it was only the maternal uncle who was renamed. One explanation for the renaming lies in the political developments of the period, which opened up new possibilities for power. The North Nyanzan period saw the continuation of a political evolution that was initiated by West Nyanzans, namely 'the emergence of instrumental kingship' with at least 'some control over land'.⁷⁷ This manifested itself in the consolidation of power by what became royal families. It is most likely that the institution of the queen mother emerged along with early states in North Nyanza⁷⁸ and thus that ideologies of motherhood were at the heart of political complexity. This meant that an **ihwa* relied on his maternal kin to support his claims to power and, in turn, his **koiza* benefited from his **ihwa*'s political success. In this analysis, the **koiza* of a politically successful man would have wielded considerable authority in the region's early polities.⁷⁹ All of this suggests that the maternal uncle as a power broker may have grown in importance at this time.⁸⁰

After Luganda had emerged as a distinct language, the *kojja*⁸¹ became the most important relative on the maternal side. In addition to the benefits he could expect to derive from his adult nephew's political success, a Ganda *kojja* could claim his sister's children, particularly the first-born girl, unless their father paid a further gift for them.⁸² We saw above that a child not redeemed by her or his father faced an uncertain future in the *kojja*'s household, for while this right of the *kojja* derived from maternal ties it was the patrilineage that marked a child's place in society. Should a *mujjwa* be

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu*, 27–8; Le Veux, *Manuel de langue luganda*, 456; W. H. Long, 'Notes on the Bugwere district', J. R. McD. Elliot Papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford, 459; J. Roscoe, *The Northern Bantu: An Account of Some Central African Tribes of the Uganda Protectorate* (Cambridge, 1915), 217; Tantalala, 'Gonza Bato', 15; Tantalala, 'Community and polity', 12.

⁷⁷ Schoenbrun, *Green Place*, 194, but see 184–95 for an overview of the whole process.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 193; Stephens, 'History of motherhood', 189–90.

⁷⁹ Maternal kin were an essential 'non-royal' support base for competing princes and their mothers at a time when lineage ties dominated North Nyanza polities. It seems most likely that it was only later that rulers created multiple sources of non-royal support by creating alliances (frequently on the basis of marriage) with unrelated commoners. According to Cohen, the kingdom of Luuka is one example of a more recent polity following such a pattern (*Womunafu's Bunafu*, 29).

⁸⁰ Médard argues that the most plausible explanation for the move from collateral to filial succession in Buganda was as a result of mimesis (*Royaume du Buganda*, 233). The argument is applicable here too: the growing power of the maternal uncle in the political system could have been reflected in society more generally.

⁸¹ This is the reflex of **koiza* in Luganda.

⁸² H. Le Veux, *Premier essai de vocabulaire luganda-français d'après l'ordre étymologique* (Algiers, 1917), 546; Mair, *African People*, 61–2.

properly compensated for by his father, however, he 'was entitled to ask for anything he liked in his mother's brother's house and, if his request was refused, to help himself'.⁸³ This derived from the shift in Ganda society to emphasize patrilineal descent to the exclusion of maternal connections, while retaining some elements of the older system. In Bugwere, *baiwa* who were expelled from the paternal clan could turn to their *koiza* for assistance and be accepted into his household. In Buganda, only a *mujjwa* who had been publicly recognized by his patriclan could rely on his *kojja*'s support. A *mujjwa* who was expelled from his patriclan could not expect to be accepted as an equal by his mother's kin. The shift towards a male-dominated ideology in Buganda may have resulted from centralization of wealth in immobile banana gardens, alongside the emergence of an increasingly centralized state which co-opted and distorted older ideologies based around motherhood.

As we saw in the opening story, the right of the maternal uncle to claim some of his sister's children is enshrined in the foundation myth of the Ganda, the story of Kintu and Nnambi. By refusing to recognize his brother-in-law's right to his *endobolo* (share) of his nephews and nieces, Kintu broke an ancient social more and thus brought death into his land. And yet, the moral of this tale is more complicated. The maternal uncle is the one who brought death and his behaviour reflected growing tension within Ganda society between the recognition of patrilineal descent and the rights of maternal kin – a tension which grew out of the changing economic and political landscape. In addition to highlighting the rights of the *kojja*, this story points to a conflict between the rights of the *kojja* in his *bajjwa* and the older rights of the maternal grandfather in them. In the historical texts of Busoga and Bugwere, there are several examples of maternal grandfathers raising their daughters' children,⁸⁴ and so the shift in favour of the *kojja*'s claims over the children of the female lineage members in Buganda must have occurred after the break-up of the proto-North Nyanza speech community.

The emphasis on the relationship between a Ganda maternal uncle and his *bajjwa* was particularly marked within the royal realm. A prince was unlikely to succeed to the throne without the assistance of his mother (who would become queen mother on his accession) and her relatives.⁸⁵ The role of his maternal kin was recognized by the successful prince who would appoint his *kojja* to the important chiefship of *ssaabaganzi*.⁸⁶ The connection between the king and his *kojja* continued into the next generation as each of the king's sons was introduced to the *ssaabaganzi* immediately after being weaned. The *ssaabaganzi* in his turn gave each of his great-nephews 'a well-dressed skin to wear'.⁸⁷ Those great-nephews would have been of a different clan again from their father, for the children of the *kabaka* belonged to their mother's clan, in as much as they belonged to any, and yet there remained a connection with their paternal grandmother's clan.

⁸³ Mair, *African People*, 63.

⁸⁴ Long, 'Notes on Bugwere', 459; Tantala, 'Gonza Bato', 15; Tantala, 'Community and polity', 12; Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu*, 27–8.

⁸⁵ Médard argues that this was decreasingly the case after the reign of *kabaka* Semakookiro (c. 1800–c. 1812). *Royaume du Buganda*, 429.

⁸⁶ Schiller, 'The royal women of Buganda', 460.

⁸⁷ Roscoe, *Baganda*, 73; see also 104–10 for a description of the role of the *Ssaabaganzi* in the preparations and rites following the death of the king.

South Kyogans and their descendants did not give the **koiza* as much power within the kin group as their Luganda-speaking neighbours. But the special relationship between a maternal uncle and his *-*ihwa* that had led to North Nyanzans innovating the term **koiza* continued in these societies. In Busoga the benefit a *koiza* could accrue from the political success of a nephew was significant. If the nephew succeeded to a chieftainship or kingship he would award his *koiza* the post of *katikkiro* or prime minister.⁸⁸ This was very much a reciprocal relationship, just as in Buganda, for a *mwirwa* was unlikely to win the succession to his father's throne without his maternal kin's assistance, even though there was a preference for the successor to be the son of the senior wife.

The renewed and durable connection between a woman's children and her kin and clan in what are consistently described as patrilineal and even patriarchal societies challenges the conventions of this labelling. Meillassoux argues that, in a patrilineal system, 'a married woman[']s ... *descent relations are always subordinate to her conjugal relations*'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, women are 'deprived of actual rights over their progeny' and so 'the relations women maintain with their children do not involve obligation, as do those between children and their father'.⁹⁰ But, as we have seen, a mother's father or brother could claim at least some of her children if they were not compensated for their loss. Even when compensation was paid, children performed ritual functions for their mother's lineage and clan. And the mother of a prince who succeeded his father to the throne could and did make significant claims based on her motherhood. So, while fatherhood was the central ideology around which kin networks (including fictive kin networks such as clans) were organized, motherhood was also key to the organization of social relationships in North Nyanza and its descendant societies.

CONCLUSION

The North Nyanza speech community responded to the particular challenges it faced in building sustainable societies along the lake shore by placing motherhood at the heart of its social organization, despite following patrilineal descent. In so doing, North Nyanzans created seriated networks of kinship and obligation that reached outside of the patrilineage and the patrilan. These networks centred around mothers, who served as bridges between their own patrilineages and those of their children. As their children married, the networks extended to yet more patrilineages. As the Luganda and proto-South Kyoga speech communities diverged, their attitudes towards the roles of mothers and maternal kin in social organization also diverged. Luganda-speakers came to emphasize the male line, to the growing exclusion of social ideologies of motherhood. This manifested itself in an increasingly tense relationship between maternal uncles and their *bajjwa*, but it did not result in the total exclusion of maternal uncles from kin governance. For South Kyogans and their Lusoga- and Lugwere-speaking descendants, the premium on creating enduring communities, first in new lands

⁸⁸ Tantala, 'Gonza Bato', 18.

⁸⁹ Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money*, 76. Emphasis original.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 77.

and later alongside people speaking distinct languages, meant that the connections formed by and through mothers were, if anything, more important than in North Nyanza times. The many and varied tasks that **baiwa* performed for their maternal kin reflect their importance to social reproduction. It was in Bugwere that children of female members of a patrilineage played the greatest roles in that lineage's social reproduction. The situation here differed from that of growing tension between patrilineal ideology and the roles of maternal kin in Buganda. The reasons why this was so remain speculative, but probably lie in the lower degree of centralization of political power and wealth and in the more tenuous nature of Gwere communities in an ethnically diverse landscape. This multi-layered picture of patrilineality in North Nyanza demonstrates the complexity of social organization. While the labels of 'patrilineality' and 'matrilineality' are valid and useful, exploring the specific content of these models in different societies across time demonstrates the importance of recognizing their historical contingency.

APPENDIX: RECONSTRUCTED VOCABULARY⁹¹

1. **-ihwa* (noun class 1/2) 'child of female clan member'
Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, Rushana
Proto-Bantu noun, but with some semantic shift in Great Lakes Bantu.⁹²
2. **-ka* (noun class 7/8) 'patriclan'
Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, Rushana
Derived from proto-Great Lakes Bantu **-ka* (5/6) 'household'⁹³ with noun class change to 7/8 for augmentation from immediate family to clan.
3. **koiza* (noun class 9/2) 'maternal uncle'
Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere
North Nyanza noun. Possibly derived from hypothetical West Nyanza verb **-koija* 'be greedy' but this needs further confirmation. There is areal spread to Luhya languages.
4. **-kwa* (v.t.) 'pay bridewealth'
Luganda, Lusoga, Lugwere, Rushana
Possibly of Eastern Savanna Bantu (East Bantu) origin, although the preponderance of Great Lakes Bantu suggests that the Pende and Nyamwezi attestations might be areal spreads of a proto-Great Lakes Bantu innovation. Derived from proto-Bantu **-kó-* 'give bridewealth'.

⁹¹ See also Stephens, 'History of motherhood', 274–5, 277–8, 280–2.

⁹² Schoenbrun, *Cultural Vocabulary*, 86–7, RN 120.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 89, RN 123.