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Women's Autonomy, Children and Kinship: A Case Study of Uganda

"... We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development reflexes and echoes of this life process." (*Marx and Engels,* 1970:47)

"... Certain social structures prevent women from having access [to land, labor, money, education, and extension services] equal to that of men. These structures termed patriarchal operate primarily at a practical level through the organization of production and distribution of resources, but their main tenets are supported ideologically by patriarchal values which operate at the general level as well as in women's minds." (Bukh, 1979:52)

"... Agriculture everywhere is much more organized around the institutions of property than around those of occupation. Unfortunately, our current theory and research on stratification is built to fit an urban environment and is conceptually organized around the idea of occupation." (Stinchcombe, 1961:165)

This paper examines the interplay between women's quest for autonomy and the ideological paradigms of kinship within the crises-ridden situation in Uganda. The erosion and, in some cases, the breakdown of public institutions has affected the interrelations between kin, friends, and neighbors. Kinship as a determinant of material relations has remained important as the public climate of opportunities has deteriorated, but kinship as a metaphor that united people through social sentiments designating lines of autonomy has been greatly eroded. This paper's central conclusion is that *work* and *parenting* matter in Uganda as they do in the rest of Africa in general. In the process of performing these two activities, changes are confronted, incorporated or rejected depending on the structural roles of the actors. However, most often the changes are beyond the manipulations of the individual actors who then become transformed into a state of tolerance and resigned acceptance.

This paper poses the specific problem of whether women are controlled labor in Uganda and through what mechanisms this is achieved. There is no question that women are independent decision-makers who allocate and manage their time and produce responsibly. Both men and women would agree to that. However, are there material constraints that channel the directions of women's work decisions? The pertinent questions centre around who benefits from women's productive and reproductive labor; do kinship relations define work and resource allocation; and, what is the relationship between work, reproduction, and womanhood. The answers to these questions provide some clues to the processes and structures that perpetuate women's subordination during different stages of socioeconomic transformation.[1]

The central idea in this paper is that in order to understand and interpret social actions, utterances and silences, it is important to examine the institutions through which property and power relations are allocated. Each of the above quotes underscores this general contention. Marx and Engels suggest that both structure and process must be incorporated in any meaningful analysis of people as social actors and generators of change. Bukh, with reference to Ghana, stresses that certain social structures generate and promote tendencies that circumscribe attitudes towards, and access and control over, resources, along gender lines. Thus the forces that shape the actors' negotiations of social reality are vital to an understanding of how men and women are rewarded for their contributions in society. Lastly, Stinchcombe highlights the cliché that the real African farmer is a woman although officially she is perceived as a He. Defining agriculture in terms of occupation rather than property relations has promoted men (in official records) to the economically active status while footnoting the contributions of women which are essential both to subsistence and market needs.

The economy of Uganda is primarily agricultural. It depends upon the produce of small farms for subsistence and export. It is a peasant economy heavily dependent on women's, men's, and children's labor. Peasantry as an occupational category defines production and the family in a special way. By definition, adult men are singled out as income-earners who are assumed to stand for all members of their families. The women and children are regarded as dependants who do not count for much because they do not carry on an occupation. Occupation, based upon capitalist definition, is understood as something adult males engage in for payment of wages. The regular pursuits

of women do not qualify as such even if they are salaried. The man's occupation is regarded as the family occupation irrespective of the work done by other family members. The family is conceived as a hierarchical, closed unit whose only relevant member is the man. This overestimation of men's doings while universal, does create problems for women who live in the system and researchers trying to understand changes taking place in peasant societies. In Uganda, the women's activities and endeavors in coping with the crises have been over-looked, and the goings-on of men over-reported. Perhaps with no female farmers, the crises in Uganda would not have dragged on for so long. The continuity of coffee and of food production meant that the regimes were assured of foreign exchange, and people were fed and could not riot over food and threaten the government, as happens elsewhere.

The analytical framework that is relevant for our present purposes is suggested in the quotes above which call attention to the structural and processual dimensions of social relations. In this paper, gender is linked to class because they are both demarcated by exploitation and material interests. The application of the concepts of class and exploi-tation of gender issues may be perceived as problematic because gender-stratification in Africa has been regarded as unproblematic. The structural dimensions (the cultural evaluations of the relative desirability of social positions) need to be analyzed within the context of the fundamental material interests objectively tied to the rights and positions defined by gender. Certain statuses within the social rela-tions of production enable people to make claims on the social surplus through mechanisms tied to different aspects of relations of produc-tion. The important point here is that one group or category of people is apparently culturally sanctioned to exercise control over the resour-ces and the labor products of another category of people. Cultural sanctioning operates through three systems: the ideological, the sym-bolic, and the pragmatic. The ideological system lays out in broad terms the ideal values regarding control and distribution of resources, and the institutions or organizational framework through which this will be achieved. The symbolic system props up and rationalizes the ideological system by rewarding or sanctioning the actions taken by individuals at the pragmatic level. This is the structural dimension that influences the people's actions.

The processual dimensions can be elucidated, for example, by exa-mining and construing how people learn their roles and acquire their social identity. The enculturation and socialization processes integrate

new experiences into the framework of their past experiences. Failure to do this can lead to emotional difficulties, mental disturbance or suicide. However, people who have successfully acquired a certain social identity soon learn what their interests are and how to pursue them (Wright and Shin, 1988:59-60). All this suggests that a meaningful analysis of social conflict and social change in class or gender relations must deal both with its processual and structural dimensions (Wright and Shin, 1988:58).

One of the major achievements of gender studies in the third world has been to integrate analyses of the sexual division of labor with changes in the systems and relations of production within the context of differing patterns of incorporation (national and regional) into the world economy. Despite numerous studies of kinship and marriage and the gender ideologies they embody, there has been a reluctance to analyze these institutions in relation to ongoing socioeconomic and political changes in Africa. The persistent gender inequalities in Africa cannot be adequately explained away by invoking women's assertions of their subjective experiences, nor by pointing to the privileges and influences historically and currently enjoyed by a minority of women. It is, however, important to analyze how changes are experienced at the subjective level and how they are manifested at the objective level in different communities. In other words, the personal interpretations and cultural meanings of what is taking place within a social setting must be juxtaposed against the economic, political, and cultural realities of women's lives.

Kinship as a Social Structure and Process

The systems of kinship and marriage as modes of recruiting people into groups occupy a central role in social ideologies. Schneider has cautioned against assumptions that kinship is everywhere culturally distinct, distinguishable and a highly-valued entity (1984:198). He asserts that often the entities and categories called kinship are misclassified and the boundaries, value, and meaning are arbitrarily imposed by researchers using Eurocentric models of kinship to construct, analyze, and interpret reality (ibid: 5: 193; 196). When, for example, kinship is identified as "blood" or pervasive ideology or ways of talking about land, are those -emic or -etic models? Schneider suggests that instead of assigning concrete, supposedly valued functions to kinship, examining the multiple realities of life would be useful (ibid: 196). Schneider's criticisms of the structural functionalist studies of kinship by Evans-Pritchard (1940), Fortes (1949) and Leach (1961),

were a continuation of an ongoing self-criticism within anthropology. Earlier, Fortes (1979:17) had made similar criticisms of the spurious concreteness created by the neo-Marxist Terray's (1972) presentations of the lineage mode of production. Keesing (1981:246) has been critical of both structural functionalists and neo-Marxists because he claims that in their discussions of lineages, clans, and even households, the -emic conceptual categories can be "refined" into a fundamental model of production (ibid:250). Keesing felt that anthropologists can avoid the pitfalls by describing "how people talk about what they are doing which is grounded in the world of real human events and not in the world of abstract concreteness" (ibid). Needham, whose criticisms of the study of kinship are similar to those of Keesing and Schneider, suggested what he called a polythetic classification for describing descent systems (1975:350-51). He reminded anthropologists of Wittgenstein's (1934) solution to the problem of classification. Wittgenstein had argued that entities consist of a complex network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing. Sometimes the similarities are overall and sometimes only in detail (1958:87). Entities shared "family resemblances" (Needham, 1975:350). The relative clustering of features provided the basis for distinction.

In a re-examination of Nath agnation, Southall (1986:15) has furthered the theoretical debate over lineage, non-unilineal and alliance theories; and the lineality of kinship. He has pointed out that while residence and descent can be distinguished analytically, the spatial divergence between descent and residence does affect the nature and significance of descent. Conceptually and ideologically, Nath social organization was based on localized groups, recruited by cognate and affinitive bonds, linked together by genealogical charts; but in the long-term it was generated out of the material productive interests that form the basis for an ideological alliance (1986:16). Southall concluded that while the former appears clear and concise, it is misleading. Sorting out the ideological material aspects of the productive relationship can be "cumbersome" but in the long-run "correct" and "intelligible" (ibid). Human kinship, like Nath agnation, was the interpretation of relationships (ibid:17).

Notwithstanding the problems associated with classifying, analyzing and conceptualizing social institutions like kinship, this study will take the following as its point of departure: kinship plays a key role in social, economic and political organizations; it is a crucial element of ideological reproduction and it critically defines relations of domination and subordination within local groups and society as a whole

(Katz, 1983:251-253). Kinship as a cultural artifact, I would argue, appears to embody three operational systems: the ideological, the symbolic and the pragmatic. In the ideological system, the dominant ideals and theories about the design for living are articulated. Kinship lies at the institutional and ideological core of society (Katz, 1983:253). Godelier has argued, for instance, that productive forces and relations of production are distinct phenomena but never exist separately. They always exist in some combination of "mode of production" and "social forms of production" (1978:264,763). Godelier (ibid:763) conceded to Marx's (1958:13) assertions that "these relations of production taken together form the economic structure of society." According to Godelier, social relations of production assumed one or more of the following three functions: determining social forms of access to resources, and control of the means of production; allocating the labor force of society members among the different work in processes which produce its material base and determining the social form of redistribution of the product of individual and collective labor; and, consequently, the forms of circulation and non-circulation of these products (ibid:763).

Lineages became very important in settled communities because they are important vehicles for transmitting patrimony and allocating usufructuary access to societal resources of land and livestock. In localized corporate land-owning lineages (among the Luo), loss of patrimony serves as a deterrent against divorce by women and disobedience by young people. In these localized lineages, a woman is responsible for the subsistence of her husband and children. The husband can, however, have another wife who may cater to him. A woman in such a situation faces a predicament if she wants a divorce. In this subsistence economy, divorce means withdrawing her productive labor and losing usufructuary rights in resources. However, her husband can acquire another wife who is entitled to usufructuary rights in resources, and thus inheritance claims for her children. While daughters of divorced women can be married off, the sons are expected to inherit from their father; but a man may disinherit the sons of a divorced wife. The women then find themselves caught between pragmatically doing what they feel is right for some reason, the ideological determinants of resource distribution through inheritance, and the symbolic system that brands them as "bad" mothers who would deprive their children of their patrimony by divorcing.

Even among the Baganda who have non-localized lineages and clans where the majority of people have no desire to live on clan land (and be subjected to the authority of the clan leaders), women find it expedient

to keep in touch with their former in-laws, their potential in-laws, and their current in-laws to enhance their children's inheritance opportunities. Incidences are common of outside children inheriting from their natural fathers or his childless relatives. Mothers, whether unmarried, married, or divorced, play an active role in ensuring that children are enabled and encouraged to know their relatives to avoid incest and endogamous marriages with certain categories of relatives. Most importantly, during their visits, the women help with many agricultural chores such as clearing fields for planting, weeding, harvesting, pruning banana trees, etc. A mother's labor increases the child's potential claims. Women work on the maintenance of relationships by contributing their labor.

The Dynamics of Women's Work

While at the pragmatic level women seem to be in charge of what they do, close examination reveals that women are manipulated by utterances and restrictions imposed through the symbolic system to ensure the proper ideologically defined gender roles (Obbo, 1988). In Africa work and parenting are two main sites of female activities that correspond to female consciousness or the way women see themselves. Work and parenting matter because they are for life. The social label "mother" encompasses the bearing and raising of children. Women are expected to be (and they see themselves as) "carers" who foresee and cater to the material and emotional needs of other family members. Ugandan societies expect parents to ensure the physical, social, and economic well-being of the children. These three are interrelated areas, but can also be examined discreetly. Below is an attempt at sorting out some of the issues and practices each involves. Physical well-being requires that pregnant women take care of themselves so as to bear healthy children. Women crave good food, and consult traditional as well as western trained medical experts whenever it is possible. The high rate of infant mortality causes a lot of anxiety and distress for women. This explains why in non-state as well as state societies, the commonest issue on which women regularly co-operate is child health. Advice and herbal remedies and assistance are readily exchanged and dispensed. Women care for children whose mothers are away at hospital with an ailment, a pregnancy or sick child. As children grow, mothers worry about the reproductive health of their daughters. When a couple is childless it is assumed that the woman is barren. In one instance, an athletic secondary school student, who enjoyed running and playing hockey caused her mother and female maternal relatives

endless worry because she was 14 years old and was "breastless," and had not menstruated. The problem was corrected eventually when she was sixteen years old; she grew up to bear four healthy children.

Social well-being ensures that individuals receive education that prepares them to be successful members of their societies. Success here means respect for authority and fulfilling the life-cycle roles expected of societal members. Again mothers worry when their daughters are not socially well adjusted because women are blamed and held culpable when a daughter fails to marry or becomes pregnant out of wedlock. It is assumed that men will always find wives, but it is deemed difficult for women to marry if they are lazy, brazen-faced or promiscuous. Laziness means that the woman is sloppy in appearance and her children and home look unkempt; it means she gardens for short periods and may not take an interest in her husband's cash crops. This is perceived as a consequence of poor motherly training. (Interestingly, all the women who are actually identified as lazy spend more time on their appearances than on agricultural production and say they are merely retiring from the hard work they were made to do as little girls.) Abortion is women's secret weapon against accusations of promiscuity. Girls will tell their mothers or best friend about an unwanted pregnancy. If it is decided to keep the child, arrangements are usually made to stay at a distant dwelling of a close friend or relative of the mother. The child can be fostered there until the mother is ready to come for it or it may grow up calling someone else mother. This shows that in both social and economic well-being, networking with relatives and friends is an asset to parenting. Friendship, gifts, and the labor of women and children are the glue of the networks.

Economic well-being is a complicated aspect of parenting. Parenting requires not only overt training and care, it requires setting examples for children. Apparently, mothers who respect and obey their husbands also raise children who respect authority. In the previous section divorce by women and children's inheritance were shown to be aspects of obedience and respect and, ultimately, economic well-being. One often hears mothers exasperatingly ask disobedient, untidy or slow working daughters, "Who will marry you?" The implication in this socialization message is that women's work matters to the husband. This point is underscored by the unease experienced and sometimes unwittingly blunted out as jokes in arguments over women's right to earn and control their incomes. It is a change in the villages that men develop yearning for beer and cigarettes as soon as they see women with money. Men want to share (some lust to control) the

women's earnings because of the assumption that they are generated by labor which rightly belongs to them as husbands. Women, on the other hand, rarely express such claims over the husband's incomes because there is no presumption that they control men's labor and automatically the ensuing benefits. The only labor women control is that of their small children who are helping and learning before they start school; after that their labor is for the community. One man always referred jokingly to the incomes of his grown-up daughters not living at home as "that is my money," but the sons' incomes were "their own." This man, a civil servant married to a farmer, has in fact never demanded money from his daughters and most likely he would not get it depending on how such demands were interpreted. However, the issues being raised by the case are worth examining. The husband legally owned the land, paid the taxes and represented members of his family to the outside world. He worked off the farm so in fact his wife assumed many of the *de facto* duties in the community, and her labor in coffee production (with the help of the children during the weekend) generated the money which paid for school fees, clothing, income tax, etc. His income bought the radio, bicycle and sewing machine. However, he was *de jure* head of the household, and by sending his daughters to school had invested in their education and thereby lost their labor contribution to household prosperity had they lived at home.

Because women's work is perceived as indispensable, when symbolic sanctions through negative labels fail to deter women who are wilfully withdrawing their labor from production, market economy sanctions are applied.[2] The husbands will withhold the purchasing of consumer goods or withhold paying the female children's school fees. These things affect women directly because they cannot entertain without certain commodities, and they want their daughters to be educated and escape the fate of most women in Uganda. When daughters do not want to work hard at school, grandmothers are quick to ask them, "Do you want to be the slave of a slave?" This refers to the fact that unschooled women become wives of peasants in the countryside where drudgery is the way of life. Apparently, women perceive the peasants to be an exploited class, and they see themselves as doubly exploited.

Parenting and Women's Autonomy: Questions and Problems

Many scholars have observed that in Africa parenthood matters (Goody, 1978:227; Fortes, 1978:22-23; Mogey, 1978:6,8). Parenthood is a status which takes precedence over other statuses. Children meet a

diversity of social needs. Children confer upon their fathers special status in the community. For mothers, children represent the achievement of adulthood. Women are particularly under great pressure to bear and rear children (Mogey, 1978:6). The natal family statuses of daughter, sister, niece, and grandchild, or the matrimonial statuses of wife and in-law, or the community statuses of neighbor and friend, are all generally perceived as subordinate to the mother role. It has been argued that parenthood is much more than individual fulfilment. Parenthood fulfils fundamental kinship, religious, and political obligations. It represents a commitment of the parents to transmit the cultural heritage of the community. Parenthood thus extends to all social relations defined by rules of kinship and descent which determine each person's status in, claims on, and responsibility to society (Fortes, 1978:23). Most importantly, children represent continuity for lineages (Mogey, 1978:8).

There have been changes in child-rearing customs and practices. Fostering is widespread in Africa, but some societies practice it more than others. The parental role used to be shared by the domestic and community groupings. There were duties and obligations that dictated the distinction of parental roles. The most common obligation kin had was to foster children during crises when a disruption in the family occurred either due to divorce, death or illness. This is generally regarded as crises fostering (Fiawo, 1978:276). Another practice that was strong among the Buganda of southern Uganda was the sending of wards to homes of important men by parents who were ambitious (Roscoe, 1911:79-80; Mair, 1934:60). This was a kind of apprenticeship to enable the children to develop skills as craftsmen, politicians, and diviners-curers. With the introduction of the market economy and Western formal education, the children were fostered in the homes of chiefs and teachers. In most cases, these new parental roles were being played by non-relatives. This has been termed educational and nurturing education fostering, as opposed to apprenticeship, wardship, and housemaiding (Goody, 1978:258). The latter category is interesting because it was the first to be incorporated into the money economy. Children did not have to labor for nurture, education, and upward mobility, they could be paid in cash which their parents could share directly. This does not mean that prosperous homes do not have poor relatives providing labor in return for the above mentioned benefits; it means, however, that poor relatives can seek wage labor in the homes of non-relatives. Housemaids are often made to work long hours for meagre pay because they are still regarded as someone else's poor rela-

tives. The point being made is that money introduced a new dimension to parenting and fostering. There have been many changes in the traditional customs and practices. There are many uncertainties and there is a need to protect and safeguard the children. The institution of multiple co-parenting has run into problems because the general economic climate encourages the mentality that one's immediate nuclear family comes first and then only, if possible, does the extended family deserve consideration. Thus, parents who send their schooling children to stay in towns or in homes near schools must provide them with school fees, clothing costs, bedding and occasional "gifts" of food. When rural children come into towns to acquire formal education, they may sleep in homes where they receive little parenting or affection (Andama, 1988:71). The children harbor resentment.

The Baganda condone the co-parenting of children between relatives, and even with perfect strangers by stressing the fact that the children would be unable to lead better lives than their parents did; that children are prone to be spoilt by their natural parents and they needed someone else to instil discipline in them. Undisciplined children were characterized as having stubbornness (emputtu); they were willful, and they could develop emotional and sometimes even mental problems (Orley, 1970:47).

However, a closer examination of the fostering practice from the children's perspective reveals that their labor is easily controllable by adults. The children provide free exchangeable labour which the adults use to maintain kinship, neighborly and clientship relations. Discipline can sometimes be enforced through considerable allocations of work tasks and corporal punishment. However, pregnancy is a perennial worry of rural mothers with young daughters staying and working for relatives or friends in the city. The unwarranted sexual abuse of young girls in East Africa has been vividly underscored in a poem by Majorie Oludhe Macgoye about a ten-year-old Luo babysitter, (Japidi) Atieno, who performs household chores, shops for food, babysits and is forced to service the sexual needs of the male guests. The husband and wife were usually absent at night working and upgrading skills respectively. Atieno died of post-partem bleeding and it was doubtful that her baby would live. The sugar and meat consumed at her funeral were more than she had consumed all her life. Atieno was soon replaced by another babysitter (1977:34-35). However, even here the symbolic sanctions do not escape her. The husband reasons that Atieno was a bad girl who stayed too long at the market (ibid:34). The implication is not that she had a lot to buy (which seems

most likely), but that she was brazen-faced[3] and the culprit could have been anyone. It is also an implicit reflection upon the mother who had not succeeded in teaching Atieno to stay at home and to avoid strange men. This case also underscores the reluctance by even the most enlightened élites to contemplate doing something about the lot of the young servants at large. The attitude seems to be that the poor will always be with us to exploit. The rationalization for underpaying housemaids is that "they eat, sleep, and wash—and all these now take money."

During the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a climate of increased economic opportunities which encouraged women to question their role as generators of men's wealth in property and people, and the attitudes and conditions that sometimes relegated them to the role of men's property. Female-headed households underscore the fact that when women sought autonomy, they were challenging the social norms surrounding marriage and not the social norms of parenting. Older women, who decades ago had advocated women's autonomy, sought income-generating activities and raised their children with the help of relatives, friends, and neighbors because co-parenting was an accepted norm, are currently reluctant to co-parent other peoples' children. Apparently they are worried about the current rebelliousness of children. Interestingly, these women have persistently rejected the stereotypes that rebellious children who end up as school dropouts, as thieves, or as unwed mothers, are products of female-headed households. However, like everyone else in Uganda, these women are gravely disturbed by the unruliness of children who grew up during the 1970s. They seem to have internalized the pervasive aggression and violence perpetuated by the state against the citizens and the citizens against one another (Obbo, 1988). The children, on many occasions, slept with their parents in the bush so as to escape the harassment of soldiers. The children witnessed deaths due to personal vendettas, due to envy for a house, a wife, or position. They heard of the murdered or imprisoned victims of false accusations of subversion—some even turned in their parents. Recent research found that children described "conflicts, quarrelling, and violence within family to such an extent that it is clear that the topic is not taboo" (Raundalen et al., 1988:88). Other writers see this as due to the erosion of respect of authority (Andama, 1988:58) when street kids declare "My Mother is war and violence is my life."[4] The figures previously accorded the greatest respect—the parents, the teachers, the priests, and the neighbors, were commonly described by the children as corrupt (ibid). As survival

became the primary principle for people, parents bought stolen goods at low prices because it made life easy (ibid:60). In fact, the children described the family as "a happiness-creating unit" (Raundalen et al., 1988:88). The teachers and priests misappropriated donations and development funds. Neighbors killed, looted, and burned each other for property (Andama, 1988:60-61). The children also learned "from their experience of murder and terror, from witnessing the exploitation of the nation's wealth by the arrogant few" that those in power were not worth respect (Andama, 1988:81). What constituted "good manners" was dishonesty in never speaking the truth but always complimenting and developing network relations with those in power (ibid:78). While mothers teach compassion and honesty, those in power are offended by honesty which could cause one to lose channels of work, become unable to support one's family and become generally despised (ibid:76). Bribery was the accepted way of getting things done (ibid:58). It can be suggested that the rebellious youths who quit school after threatening or even committing acts of violence against the teachers and schoolmates, who drifted away from family into black marketeering and who joined the army of uneducated thugs—*Bayaye* (whom Amin's government idealized) (Mamdani, 1973:53) were reacting against an ambience of double dealing, duplicity and passivity (Andana, 1988:81).

In the 1960s and the early 1970s some women were optimistic about working and supporting the alternative lifestyle to marriage, i.e., being unmarried and mothers. By the mid-1970s, the worsening political economic situations in Uganda made single women precarious. They were targeted for scapegoating by the military government that portrayed them as sexually loose and immoral; and by the general population that perceived the sexual liaisons of some with soldiers as proof of spying or betrayal. While children in both male-headed and female-headed households became "wild," threatened teachers, clashed with and betrayed their fathers to the soldiers as subversives, the public perception was that the unruly children were from female-headed households. The real issue, why the youth were rebelling against their parents and other kinds of authority, has not been addressed.

As more women became widowed, women in general became sexual objects to be displayed and preyed upon or molested by decrees supposedly intended to do away with imperialistic cultural influences, but in fact, focusing on female dress codes, which invited new forms of male harassment (Mamdani, 1973:53). Single women panicked and wanted to restore a male-dominated system partly because they were

horrified at the signs of breakdown of authority and partly because
they were disconcerted by finding themselves scapegoated. Distress
resulting from poverty and diseases have put mental stress upon
women. Like other people in similar circumstances, displays of hyster-
ical behaviours, bodily paralysis, "playing sick" and rebellion were the
symptoms of stress. It is the women of Uganda who have enabled the
nation and its children to survive: through their capacity to withdraw
to effective traditional methods of food production and subsistence
living; with their dogged determination to go on living and reproduc-
ing life. This highlights two contradictory aspects of the situation:
women's demonstration of their capacity for autonomy in carrying on
life effectively on their own, and their drawing upon the traditional
strengths of family and kinship, which had in fact subordinated them.
One author on the crisis has noted that while women can criticize with
discretion, they are merely watchers of events because as mothers and
wives, "We are victims in our homes, our communities, and our
nation" (Andama, 1988:74).

There is a limit to co-parenting. The women in Uganda assume
heavy emotional and financial burdens and their children in turn are
subject to financial and emotional deprivation. The women have to
cope because the extended family as a support institution has wea-
kened. Widows, for example, instead of getting assistance have to fend
off in-laws from dispossessing them (Andama, 1988:72,73). The
scourge of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is
adding further strain as women continue diligently to nurse the
afflicted. There are, however, suggestions that the AIDS orphans are
being stigmatized, shunned, and even neglected by relatives. While the
state has hitherto rightly concentrated on economic recovery as the
major development issue, the building of institutional foster care needs
to be a priority on the national budget agenda.

Rural urban migration, wage employment and success in the market
economy generally enables individuals to achieve autonomy from the
constraints of kinship and community obligations. Female urban
employment manifests three tendencies related to existing forms of
gender subordination: intensification, decomposition, and recomposi-
tion (Elson and Pearson, 1981:157). Intensification occurs when
skilled or unskilled women are under the supervision of males who can
make the workplace unpleasant unless the women accord them certain
authority privileges. Decomposition occurs when employment accords
women economic independence which enables them to choose lovers,
husbands; to choose marriage or singlehood; and the freedom to

dispose of the income. Recomposition occurs when women's recently acquired autonomy becomes restricted as women retreat to protect themselves against threats to their jobs, their dignity, and reputation.

This suggests that changes in gender roles and social status depend upon economic opportunities and changes in social paradigms (Parkin, 1978:311). The pertinent question is whether it is easier to articulate alternate models to challenge the traditional paradigm in times of prosperity or during declining economic opportunities. The latter is evidence in the increase in female-headed households "common in situations of migration, urban poverty, and chronic insecurity" (Harris, 1981:60).

Concluding Remarks

Uganda has endured twenty tumultuous years of political upheaval, economic breakdown, social disorganization and widespread suffering. Deprivation and suffering have brought many changes, some of which accelerated forces generally operative, others compelling a desperate recourse to earlier forms of local solidarity, as official institutions of government ceased to operate or functioned only as channels of corrupt extortion and oppression. In this paper, the structural and processual changes have been examined with particular emphasis on interpersonal relationships as they pertain to kinship, women's autonomy, parenting, and work. Parenting is doubly difficult when respect for authority has been eroded. The agricultural economy of Uganda and the violent political climate are reflected in the issues examined.

NOTES

1. This paper is based on my ongoing research interests among the Baganda (Ganda) and Joluo (Luo) in Uganda, and Kenya.
2. These are not as vivid as the instances studied by Madsen (1984:36737) in a Tanzanian Ujamaa village purportedly running on modern democratic organizational co-operative principles. While providing help for a brick-making project relying on free village labor and generating profits, the women developed back pains because they were doing all the heavy work of pounding the mixture of soil and water, fetching the water, and carrying the heavy loads to the oven. They paid a common fine to the village fund in order to be released from the participation in the project. They were replaced by the paid labor of hired young men. The coffers of the village fund were further enriched by the high license fee the women had to pay from beer sales. This dramatically underscores the different assertions regarding women's labor as belonging to men.
3. Epstein (1981:58-91) reported that in the Zambian copperbelt towns, husbands complained that their wives took too long at the shops. They equated window-shopping with trying to

pick up men. Men thus did most of the shopping for food, forbade their wives from working with strange men, and insisted upon their wive's "obedience," "respect," and "fidelity."

4. Raudalen et al. (1988:88). The authors interpreted this remark by a Kampala youth they interviewed, or who had included it in an essay, as a humorous way of describing conflict and violence in the family. To this author the remark suggests the extent to which women's authority over the youth had been eroded.

Although figures are difficult to pin down in my research area, the number of female-headed households appears to have tripled since 1974. Many of these women are widows. The increase in female-headed households is a world-wide phenomenon (Bovinic, 1978; Gregory and Kaplan, 1983:1-2; Sacks, 1988:19; Nelson 1977).

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