

Bride wealth as trade-offs, security or exploitation? Multiple generation and gender perspectives on marriage. *Marriage Matters: Imagining love and belonging in Uganda*

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Despite significant social shifts in customary marriages and partnerships, bride wealth provision remains a longstanding ideal for many in Uganda. Yet, the ideals and expectations towards bride wealth seldom fit the economic realities, creating social tensions and disappointments. The tensions often appear between family members holding different generational and gender positions. This chapter thus focuses on generational and gendered positions and perspectives on bride wealth trade-offs, marriage security and exploitation in relation to Lango customary marriage in Lira district in northern Uganda. According to the Ugandan Customary Marriage Act, marriage is referred to as a contractual union between a man and a woman who decide to live together as husband and wife for the rest of their life (Government of Uganda 2021). In customary marriage, the ‘contract’ is essentially proved by the negotiation and provision of bride wealth; hence, the fundamental reason for bride wealth presentation is to cement the relationship socially and publicly between the spouses, their families and clans to ensure some level of mutual agreement between the parties. In this way, marriage with bride wealth communicates sociability between families and partners as mutual recognition, but it also, consequently, establishes family-based hierarchical social orders where women and children are dependent on men, and where the older generations hold power over the younger generation. By marriage security, we refer to partners having a high degree of confidence that their spouse is committed in the marriage on a long term and full-time basis, and partners share and stay together through struggles and fears. Marriage security is largely perceived to be initiated and communicated socially with bride wealth provision in marriage. The provision of bride wealth is customarily meant to create a bond of mutual recognition between not only the partners, but also the partners’ families. Yet, these bonds in marriage relations can be, or turn, exploitative. Bride wealth may be a form of exploitation if, for example, a father marries off a daughter early in order to gain bride wealth for his personal gain or exploits the situation of the young man who would like to marry