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# Motives and Agency in Forced Marriage among the Urban Poor in Tanzania

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## ABSTRACT

Using the method of third-person elicitation and 171 interviews in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, I examine one form of forced marriage, ‘marriage on the mat’ (ndoa ya mkeka). In it, girls’ parents use the normative pressure of Islamic norms to circumvent the groom’s lack of consent to the marriage and promote their daughter’s future economic security. Premarital sex and forced marriage, rarely examined together, are often causally linked and provide strong motives for parents to resort to ndoa ya mkeka. In an urban context where girls’ and women’s income-earning possibilities are limited to transactional sex, marriage at a young age is often the only way to embody the culturally approved behaviours of both economic self-sufficiency and sexual modesty. Findings indicate that coercive practices do not necessarily rule out the agency of those coerced; similarly in forced marriage parents are not always oppressors and daughters are not always the victims.

**KEYWORDS** Africa; forced marriage; agency; transactional sex; poverty

## Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines forced marriage as a conjugal union into which one or both parties enter against their will or under duress which can be physical, psychological, financial, sexual or emotional (Sabbe et al. 2014; Bunting et al. 2016). Forced marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa has become a major human rights concern, giving rise to international attention both within and outside of Africa (Bunting et al. 2016).

As part of an ongoing study of gender and urban poverty carried out between 2010 and 2018, I interviewed 171 persons about early and forced marriage in two low-income, predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods in Tanzania’s most populous city, Dar es Salaam. In Tanzania, the policy focus has generally been on child marriage rather than forced marriage because Tanzania has one of the highest rates of under-

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18 marriage in the world.<sup>1</sup> However, Tanzanians over the age of 18 are also coerced by parents<sup>2</sup> into marriage.

In this paper I examine one form of forced marriage, *ndoa ya mkeka* ('marriage on the mat') in urban Tanzania. I examine the most important motives behind *ndoa ya mkeka* in the neighbourhoods studied, which are poverty, gendered economic inequality, and widespread premarital sexual behaviour. Although premarital sexual behaviour and early/forced marriage are usually discussed separately within the research literature, in my data these two topics are closely intertwined. I further address whose consent and agency are constrained in *ndoa ya mkeka*, finding that in many cases it is the groom and his family who are coerced. Finally, I ask what insights can be gained from *ndoa ya mkeka* for understanding gendered agency within patriarchal cultures, arguing that in this practice, the bride and/or her parents maneuver to improve her agency and status. They seek to gain the male partner's relatively greater access to income by appealing to both communal acceptance of the moral authority of Islam and cultural expectations that Tanzanian men should provide for wives and children.

## New Approaches to Agency and Consent in Forced Marriage

In recent decades, forced marriage has been viewed as a form of violence against women (Gill & Anitha 2011: 3). Legal and human rights discourses on forced marriage draw upon an historically-specific Western ideology of individualism (Bunting 2005; Anitha & Gill 2009; Gangoli et al. 2011: 26), and efforts to legitimise universal claims for the rights of women have created a tendency to portray Third World women as 'victims of deviant and essentially misogynous cultures' (Ertürk 2011: xv). The complex range of experiences within forced/child marriage has been obscured by the repeated use by the media and human rights campaigns of oversimplified and emotionally-charged rhetoric in which violators are clearly distinguishable from victims, and patriarchy is clearly distinct from empowerment (Mahmood 2006; Archambault 2011; Bunting et al. 2016). More probing questions regarding consent and the motives of the parties involved have likewise gone unasked in the research literature while international organisations working against forced marriage complain that research on the topic neglects women's realities and is 'fraught with Western-centric assumptions on coercion/consent, ideal family structure, and life-worlds ...' (Women Living under Muslim Laws 2013: 40; see also Bunting et al. 2016). More nuanced approaches could facilitate efforts not only to reduce the number of forced/child marriages in Africa, but to understand the lives of the women involved whose aspirations have been shaped within patriarchal and non-liberal traditions (Mahmood 2006: 33).

Saba Mahmood criticises the tendency in feminist scholarship to see agency only in terms of resistance to oppression, based on the assumption that all women have the desire to be free from structures of male domination (2006: 38). As Mahmood shows in her case study of Egyptian women's search for deeper Islamic piety, key to understanding the enduring structures and logic of patriarchal relations is the recognition that patriarchy's social mechanisms do not merely oppress women but carry far more complex, and include more positive prospects, for women. The structures of

social life that constrain agency, including familial patriarchy, must also be recognised as enabling actors to maneuver strategically within them (Giddens 1976; Bourdieu 1977). In a similar vein, Deniz Kandiyoti (1988, 1998) points out that women engage in ‘patriarchal bargains’ when they choose to accept constraining gender frameworks within which they can strategically maximise their agency in areas that are important to them. To dismantle patriarchal systems without recognising the totality of women’s experiences within them, therefore, is to expect women in non-liberal societies to give up much that they value, including resources that enable them to shape themselves into active subjects. Unlike Mahmood’s research, my study focuses on unequal structures within patriarchal heterosexuality rather than within Islam. Mahmood’s point is nonetheless applicable to familial patriarchy in Tanzania and its core institution of marriage. Women in interviews told me of values they used to fashion themselves as respected persons in society, values transmitted and made meaningful within a system they acknowledge as being heavily skewed toward male power. My findings support the arguments made by Mahmood and Kandiyoti according to which institutions and practices (such as forced marriage) that are rooted in patriarchal gender arrangements do not preclude the possibility of women exerting agency. More specifically, when it comes to complex cultural practices involving multiple parties and their interests, coercion does not necessarily rule out the agency of those coerced.

### Setting, Sources, and Methods

Until 2016, marriage for girls under 18 was not opposed by Tanzanian law. However, the consent of spouses, freely and voluntarily given, has been required for a valid marriage since the Law of Marriage Act of 1971. In Tanzania, legally recognised marriages are usually either registered in the courts or recorded by Islamic or Christian religious authorities, as customary marriage is practiced by only a few rural ethnic groups. Court-recorded marriages were reported to occur primarily between interfaith couples. Marriages between Muslims in the areas I studied were usually legitimised by a local imam who presided over the marriage rite, recorded the marriage and provided the marriage certificate signed by both bride and groom. Marriages recorded by religious authorities do not necessarily come to the attention of local government officials, however, and even local imams do not have the marriage records for all Muslim residents in their area due to the high volume of out- and in-migration in low-income areas.

### Research Data

I conducted 171 semi-structured interviews in two informally settled neighbourhoods within the port city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania’s largest city and home to an estimated 4.36 million residents (National Bureau of Statistics Tanzania 2013). For the sake of anonymity the neighbourhoods were renamed *Kijito* (population 16,000) and *Mahalikavu* (population 12,000). Residents in Dar es Salaam’s informal settlements live in poverty,<sup>3</sup> and the neighbourhoods I studied fulfilled the UN-Habitat’s (2010: 14–15) criteria for ‘slums’ as they lacked secure tenure, sufficient living space, sanitation

infrastructure, easy access to safe drinking water, and durability of dwelling structures. Although no official census data exists on religious affiliation in Tanzania, Kijito's local government estimated that Sunni Muslims comprise 75–90% of the residents living in Kijito, and Mahalikavu has a similar demographic structure.

Interviews were conducted in Kiswahili with the assistance of female interpreters and female key informants who had first-hand familiarity with the socio-economic circumstances of those interviewed. As an individual researcher conducting university-affiliated academic research, I found key informants and interpreters through local non-governmental organisations. Key informants pre-selected persons to be interviewed by me, and decided in advance that only 'safe' persons (not well-known drug users or thieves) would be invited to interviews. Otherwise participants were chosen by them at random and not excluded on the basis of gender, age (if over 15), or other criteria. All names were changed in this study to preserve the anonymity of the informants.

Three-quarters of interview participants were women, due to my decision to interview during daylight hours for safety reasons. Most men, by contrast, tended to be working or seeking work during the day and were thus absent from neighbourhoods. Seventy-eight per cent of those interviewed were Muslim and 19% were Christian. Among female informants, 70% had only a primary education (age 7–14) or less; for male interviewees this number was just 27%. Eight women self-reported as having no education at all.

## Urban Context of the Data

Most historically and ethnographically-based studies on Tanzanian marriage focus on specific ethnic groups in rural areas or historical contexts that are very different from current urban life. This study, by contrast, is situated within the recent local-historical context of the field site. For many youth in Dar es Salaam, older ethnic practices and beliefs have become only minimally relevant to their life choices. These young persons have never visited their parents' rural villages and have never learned their parents' ethnic languages or traditions. Inter-marriage across ethnic lines is more common in Tanzania than anywhere else in Africa (Nyang'oro 2004:38–39; Deutscher & Lindsey 2005: 165), and many young persons in Kijito and Mahalikavu not only have parents but also grandparents who were born into different ethnic groups. Interviewed participants self-identified with 37 different ethnic groups, reflecting the ethnically heterogeneous demographic makeup of this urban neighbourhood. The steady influx of migrants from diverse parts of Tanzania to Dar es Salaam has resulted in ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhoods in which expressions of ethnic and cultural identity from the countryside are suppressed in order to maintain social harmony and neighbourly cooperation. While certain norms and expectations are familiar across ethnic groups, marriage practices are currently negotiated within multi-ethnic urban spaces characterised by high unemployment and resource scarcity.

Many of the long-term home owners I interviewed had moved from rural areas to the city during the 1960s and 70s. They first accumulated wealth in the city centre as traders and then bought small parcels of farmland in Kijito and Mahalikavu on

which to build homes. These unplanned areas soon became haphazardly crowded and polluted, and real estate values have declined relative to the cost of living, leaving residents unable to buy homes elsewhere. Residents' quality of life and income-earning opportunities have also declined: whereas older residents held factory jobs in the city in the 1970s and 1980s, most of their children and grandchildren have never received a regular income.

### **Interview Method of Third-person Elicitation**

From interviews it was clear that in the studied neighbourhoods, sexual behaviour and sexuality are not in themselves taboo; rather what can be experienced as socially disapproved *is talking about sex* outside of a close group of same-age peers. Sexual behaviour in East African societies is closely related to concepts of respect and shame (Heald 1995), and for young unmarried women who had never become visibly pregnant and who still hoped to marry, it was often surrounded by discursive secrecy (Haram 2005). In fact, most young unmarried women told me only that they 'stayed home' in the evenings and did not seek relationships with men or boys. Forced and under-18 marriages were also potentially sensitive topics, since they were illegal or opposed by local governments in Tanzania at the time of interviews. Many participants, however, were ready to speak of the sexual behaviours of their (anonymous) neighbours. In order to facilitate the ease with which research participants spoke of intimate relationships and forced marriage, I developed the method of *third-person elicitation* in which interviewees were asked to talk about what they had heard *other* people say, or events they had heard or seen happening to their relatives or neighbours (Stark 2018).

This method allows participants to withhold information regarding their own behaviours that may be socially disapproved and therefore damaging to their personal reputations. At the same time, it provides the researcher with information on the culturally shared and socially negotiated aspects of human behaviour existing in the contexts familiar to the research participants. In interviews, such information was given in the form of opinions and descriptions of marriage practices, sexual practices, values and attitudes, clarifications of issues I had not previously understood, and narratives about events and other people's behaviours. In fact, much of the data was in narrative form, and these circulating stories appeared to serve as the basis for individuals and families to form expectations, orient themselves and make decisions regarding future marriages. When discussing in the third person, interviewees sometimes chose to illustrate a point with their own personal experiences. In my interpretation of the interview data, participants' explicit and/or spontaneous statements were given extra weight. Although diverse perspectives were offered by interview participants, the conclusions presented here are based on opinions and ideas expressed by the majority of interviewees.

### **'Marriage on the Mat'**

Forced marriage in the neighbourhoods I studied can take at least two different forms. On my first visit to Kijito's local government office in 2010 (a single concrete office

containing a few chairs and a battered wooden desk), I asked the male secretary about the challenges faced by residents within his office's jurisdiction. I was told that in the previous year and a half, there had been five cases of attempted forced marriage in which the local government had been asked to intervene. The potential brides (said to be roughly 15 years of age) had come to complain that their parents wanted them to marry a man the parents had chosen upon completion of primary school (at roughly age 14–16). According to the local government secretary, the majority of parents who seek to arrange such marriages for their daughters are members of ethnic groups from the predominantly Muslim Swahili coast of eastern Tanzania such as the Zaramo, Kwere, Zingua, Sambaa, Digo, Ndengereko and Luguru. In this type of forced marriage, daughters are pressured by parents to marry a man not chosen by or necessarily known to them. He may be an older, wealthier man willing to pay to her parents the customary brideprice (*mahari*) of 50,000 to 500,000 Tzs [= approx. 20–200 euros]. Both male and female interviewees mentioned daughters being 'forced to marry' or 'giving in' to their parents' plans for them to marry a man who could help support the family (Stark 2018).

As I conducted more interviews on the topic of marriage, however, it became clear that the most commonly described form of forced marriage represented a different practice: *ndoa ya mkeka* (literally 'marriage on the mat'). This takes place when parents become aware that their daughter has a secret boyfriend or male lover, and attempt to catch the two of them together. Having summoned two witnesses and the local imam (*shehe*) to the scene, they ask the *shehe* to conduct a marriage ceremony on the spot. Thirty-five-year-old Sharifa<sup>4</sup> described how, circa 2000, her parents nearly caught her in her room with her boyfriend, where her parents had been prepared to perform *ndoa ya mkeka* if she had been found with him:

It almost happened to me but I ran away. I was 20. My family wanted me to get married, but I knew that if someone loves me, they should come to my home and pay the brideprice. When my parents came with the *shehe* to marry me, I ran out a back door to escape. When I came back, my parents and the *shehe* were gone, but other family members said, 'where were you? They were planning *ndoa ya mkeka*.' The man they wanted me to marry was my permanent boyfriend. My boyfriend was there, and my parents saw him but could not find me, so they were searching everywhere in the room for me. So, if I had not run away, I would have had to marry him. I didn't know they were trying to marry us, I just reacted because I knew we had been caught.

Sixty-three-year-old Mwajuma described how she had organised her daughter's *ndoa ya mkeka* marriage as follows:

This happened to my own daughter, there was a specific time when the girl went out and we could not find her, so people said, 'if you want to find your daughter she is there. So I told my husband about it and my husband said, 'if you find them together, marry them.' So I took my adult son and son's friend and caught my daughter and the boy. We called the *shehe* to marry them ...<sup>5</sup>

In some cases, an older brother took the initiative to arrange a sister's *ndoa ya mkeka* marriage. Hassan, a 31-year-old teacher in a local Islamic school (*madrasa*), explained his experience as follows:



- M ... It is usually the woman's family who forces the marriage, because they are the ones who feel bad for the girl. It happened to my sister and I was the one who forced the marriage to happen. And I arranged also this kind of marriage for my niece.
- Laura What happened, exactly?
- M I saw my sister [being physically intimate] with a man and I tried to say to the man, 'just come visit my home and we can arrange the marriage'. So the man promised he would come but never did. Then I caught my sister and him in bed, and I said, 'you go now', and the man said 'ok, I'm going home [to my village] to prepare for the marriage'. Then a month passed with no news from the man. I wondered why the man was keeping quiet. Then I found my sister with the man again, together in bed, so I said, now you cannot lie to me again, today you will marry my sister. So I fetched my parents and looked for the *shehe* and for the witnesses – two are needed.

At this point in the interview, I asked Hassan if the groom's parents had been present for the marriage rite. I assumed that the man in question was relatively young (16–30), since this is the usual pattern of sexual intimacy in this neighbourhood. Hassan explained that he did not summon or inform the man's parents, since 'in Islamic law, a man can get married without permission from his parents or family'.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest case of *ndoa ya mkeka* I was told about occurred in 1989, and the most recently occurring case was said to have happened in 2013, with the majority having occurred between 2001 and 2011. From numerous stories about *ndoa ya mkeka*, it seems that young persons rarely attempt to flee or actively resist the brief marriage ceremony overseen by the *shehe*. Instead, such marriages were said to frequently end in the divorce or the abandonment of the young woman. Persons with whom I spoke perceived this form of marriage to lack the voluntary consent of either or both parties: 'parents force them to marry whether they like it or not',<sup>7</sup> and the potential groom is sometimes threatened with violence by the girl's family in order to gain his compliance. *Ndoa ya mkeka* thus fulfils the general definition of forced marriage as a marital union carried out against the will of at least one of the partners.<sup>8</sup>

What distinguishes *ndoa ya mkeka* from marriages arranged by relatives with an older or wealthier groom is that the relationship between the coerced bride and groom in *ndoa ya mkeka* is not decided by the parents but is initiated by the couple themselves. In this respect, it is comparable to the form of forced marriage described by Mulumeoderhwa (2016) for a Swahili-speaking area in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. If both partners in *ndoa ya mkeka* are Muslim, the actual changes forced upon the couple are their shift in status from an informal to an institutionalised union, as well as the concomitant expectations of cohabitation, female domestic labour, and the man's economic provision for his wife and children.

If the boyfriend is not Muslim, however, he can reportedly come under pressure or threat of violence by the girl's family to convert to Islam on the spot:<sup>9</sup>

There are two people who are lovers, they don't want to get married. When other people try to talk to them about marriage, they escape, so the parents advise them that if they really love each other, they must marry. If they don't listen, the parents look for the *shehe* and the witnesses. But before that, if one of the lovers is Christian, he or she may convert [at that moment]. They use force: 'you have to marry my daughter so you have to convert.' These marriages never succeed.

After two or three months they get divorced. The boy might say, 'I didn't love you, but your father forced me. So don't blame me.' It happened that there was a boy and a girl, the boy was a Christian, he was forced to marry the girl, the boy converted to Islam. So when he left her, he said, 'I don't love you, I was forced to marry you and in my heart I am still a Christian.'<sup>10</sup>

Sixty-four-year-old Ibrahim,<sup>11</sup> who lives in Kijito and works as a paralegal for a Tanzanian NGO, explained in 2012 that young women sometimes lodge complaints about *ndoa ya mkeka*:

I see here [in this neighborhood] that people try to force their children to marry, I had two cases in the last year of this, [...] and three cases of *ndoa ya mkeka* since 2008 or 2009. They all tend to end in divorce because the young man often agrees under duress, he can be threatened with knives or axes (Cf. Mulumeoderhwa 2016: 1055). The girls were 15–16 years old.

In addition to the threats of violence mentioned by Ibrahim, interview participants told that the girl's parents can also threaten to accuse the young man of statutory rape in order to force his compliance in *ndoa ya mkeka*.

Although some interviewees felt that Islam permits the practice of *ndoa ya mkeka*, the Muslim secretary of Kijito's local government was adamant that the practice 'is not part of the law of Islam'. The *shehe* of the local mosque also expressed his disapproval of *ndoa ya mkeka*, saying that it did not constitute a real marriage because it involved coercion. In addition, he condemned the practice because it is a consequence of pre-marital sexual behaviour:

[*Ndoa ya mkeka*] still happens in Kijito, less than in previous years. In my opinion, it is not good, it is not a marriage. In marriage, two people accept each other, marriage is not forcing someone to accept another person. I had one case in which a boy and girl were doing fornication (*zina*) and the father came here to complain that he wanted *ndoa ya mkeka*, but I used my wisdom and went to talk to the boy, saying, 'do you really want to marry her? You are still young. On the other hand, do you want to continue and make her pregnant? The Islamic religion says that when you grow up, you are allowed to have a wife. The father of the lady came to me and the father says the girl says the girl wants to marry you.' So the boy accepted. So this was a good marriage, because both accepted each other. But if you force a boy or a girl to marry someone, then it is hard for them to live together. This *ndoa ya mkeka* marriage is not a real marriage, because they have committed fornication (*zina*), they should have been punished. God knows what kind of marriage it is.<sup>12</sup>

The *shehe*'s statement confirms a point made in other narratives about *ndoa ya mkeka*, namely that the *shehe* is never the person to initiate the *ndoa ya mkeka* proceedings, but is brought in to legitimate them after the decision to marry the couple has been made by the girl's family. However, the *shehe*'s role in the rite is vital: in the eyes of the families and local community it is his presence and recitation from the Quran that jointly constitute the illocutionary performance transforming the couple's status to that of husband and wife. As 23-year-old Mariam explained to me in English:

[...] later if [the groom] refuses that he did not get married because it was not officially announced, then those who witnessed him getting married [in] *ndoa ya mkeka* can say that he is lying, he is married and a certain *shehe* was the one to marry them.<sup>13</sup>

Parents thus always depend on the cooperation of the local Islamic leader in *ndoa ya mkeka*, and this gives the *shehe* the possibility to intervene and discuss the situation before the marriage rite with the different parties if he chooses.

Non-family members such as neighbours and tenants renting rooms in a family's house can also assist the family of a girl in 'catching' the couple in acts of sexual intimacy in order to force them to marry. Nineteen-year-old Hadija explained that if parents notice that their daughter suddenly has nice things that could only have been bought by a boyfriend with whom she is assumed to be sexually intimate,

... the parents decide on *ndoa ya mkeka*. So they catch the two of them, call the *shehe*, and marry them. There was a girl staying in a family house here in Kijito, she had her own room, she brought her boyfriend inside, so the father said to the renters living [in separate rooms of the house] on the same end of the corridor as the daughter, 'if you see the boyfriend, come and call me.' So when the renters saw the boyfriend inside the girl's room, they locked the girl and boyfriend inside and went to call the father, who called the *shehe* and two other witnesses. They came, opened the door and said, 'today you will get married. And you, young man, the brideprice you must pay is 5000 Tzs.' So they accepted and got married. [...] This happened this year [2013].<sup>14</sup>

### Forced Marriage as a Response to Widespread Premarital Intimacy

Nearly all the parents I interviewed emphasised how parents want both daughters and sons to receive as much education as possible. Pressure on daughters to marry rather than continue their education arose instead from parental perceptions linked to practical and structural constraints over which they felt they had little control (Archambault 2011).

Foremost among these were the high costs of secondary education in Tanzania and the prevalence of girls' sexual intimacy given in exchange for money or gifts given by boys and men (Haram 2005; Maganja et al. 2007; Wamoyi et al. 2010; Deane & Wamoyi 2015). Most interviewees felt that men are the most important source of money for women living in their neighbourhood, and that nearly all unmarried girls had begun to engage in transactional sexual relationships by age 16. Men within the same neighbourhood can persuade girls to engage in physical intimacy by offering them 2000 Tzs [= 1€] for sex the first time, and if rejected, offer 5000 Tzs the next time, and finally 10,000 Tzs, nearly enough for a girl to buy herself food for a week. Premarital sexual activity can begin in primary school (roughly age 7–15) among students, and is sometimes motivated by peer pressure from other boys or girls (Stark 2017).

According to Islamic teachings, any sexual activity occurring between persons not married to each other (*zina*) is not permitted, yet many interviewees in Kijito and Mahalikavu described premarital sexual activity as both 'normal' and 'everywhere' in their neighbourhoods, due to the 'hard life' (*maisha magumu*) of residents. Many interviewees blamed the perceived increase in transactional sex on the spread of what they called 'globalization' (*utandawazi*): new ideas and images conveyed through television, videos (Setel 1999: 96–97) and more recently, Internet and mobile telephones (Stark 2013). Visions of material comfort, wealth and style seen on billboards, television, in

films, and in music videos have contributed to the aspirations that motivate young women's sexual behaviours and hopes for a 'good life' that a male partner might give them.

Some girls become pregnant from sexual relations *begun in school*, after which they are usually expelled from school and are abandoned by the child's father. These girls usually cannot return to school due to school fees, the incidental costs (uniforms, books, etc.) of schooling, and the practical and financial burden of caring for a child (also Setel 1999: 115; Haram 2000). Faced with the prevalence of transactional sex, parents fear that a daughter's pregnancy will reflect badly on them and/or create a financial burden on their family (cf. Mulumeoderhwa 2016).

The school fees paid by families represent substantial sums for the poor, and if a girl becomes pregnant before finishing school, this sum is considered to have gone to waste. A daughter who is discovered to be in a sexual relationship is usually therefore told by her parents that she must now decide between schooling and early marriage (also Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005). If she continues seeing her lover, she can expect her parents to refuse further investment in her school fees and demand that she marry him right away, as 16-year-old Rehema explained:

For example myself, if I am at school and if I have a relationship with a man, my father or my guardian might ask: do you want to study or do you want to get married? If I say 'study' but I continue to see that man, then my guardian will try to force me to get married. I have heard about my father's friend's daughter. She had a boyfriend and she was in school. She was stubborn. So her parents made her do *ndoa ya mkeka*. She was eighteen.<sup>15</sup>

An important motive for parents to insist that sexually active daughters marry is that marriage is expected to provide greater security for any children that might result from a sexual liaison. In a context of chronic urban poverty, fathers of children born out of wedlock frequently deny paternity. By catching the couple 'in the act' and calling upon the *shehe* to authenticate the union through *ndoa ya mkeka*, the young woman's parents reduce the likelihood that the male partner will later avoid responsibility. At the same time, the marriage rite puts pressure on the groom's family to consider themselves under future obligation to help provide for children born to the couple, even if the groom himself ends the marriage, abandons his wife, or dies. A mere relationship of sexual intimacy does not carry such an expectation of support from the male partner's extended family (Stark 2018).

### Consenting Parties and Reasons for Aspiring to Marriage

Consent is fundamental to notions of forced marriage and has been defined as the ability to make choices, not just between actual alternatives but also between alternatives *perceived* to exist (Kabeer 2005). In other words, consent depends on the capacity to imagine oneself acting differently (Bunting et al. 2016), and this capacity for imagining is shaped within specific life circumstances. Depending on perceived alternatives, consent may take forms that disrupt Western assumptions regarding rights and empowerment, assumptions that frame consent as resistance to patriarchal oppression. Not only do some parents see early and forced marriage as the only realistic option for

their daughter's future provision (Archambault 2011), but also *daughters'* perceptions and desires play an important role in the continuation of these practices.

Whereas the impression I received in 2010 from speaking with the Kijito local government was that adolescent daughters were being coerced into marriage by parents, a different picture emerged later during the same visit when I spoke with a group of youth in neighbouring Mahalikavu. Eighteen-year-old Reuben spontaneously suggested: 'let's now speak of our sisters in Mahalikavu. There are no jobs, so they just want to get married.' When I asked whether early marriage was desired by parents or the girls themselves, Reuben claimed that girls themselves wanted to marry. Two young women in the group conversation, 19-year-old Neema and 20-year-old Sofia, agreed with Reuben's statement:

Sofia	Yes, because she gets independence.
Reuben	She can more easily get things like food, <i>kanga</i> [= brightly coloured cotton wrap used as clothing], [girls] think it's a good thing to get married.
Neema	They have a hard life so they think that at least if I get married then things will improve. [...]
Reuben	There is a wedding celebration, the girl gets gifts, so she thinks 'if I get married I can have that shit.' <sup>16</sup>
[Sofia and Neema nod in agreement].	

Interviewees told that the ideal in Tanzania has long been for men to financially support their wives and families in long-term conjugal relationships (Silberschmidt 2004, 2011; Hunter 2010; Wamoyi et al. 2010; Plummer & Wight 2011), and that most women seek a man to provide for them in marriage or a long term relationship (Stark 2013; 2017). Annamarie Kiaga (2007: 57) writes that it is 'an unwritten conjugal contract' within the urban Tanzanian household that the husband is expected to provide all goods necessary for the household's functioning and reproduction. Although in the context of severe unemployment<sup>17</sup> it has been impossible for many African men to provide for female partners in the long term (Silberschmidt 2004; Chant & Evans 2010: 354), nevertheless even chronically poor Tanzanian men have greater access to low-skilled informal wage labour than do women, according to interview participants (also Plummer & Wight 2011: 378; Wamoyi et al. 2010; Archambault 2011). Women have difficulty accessing the capital to establish vending businesses, and are not hired for jobs in construction, according to many female interviewees. Other jobs as housemaids or assistants to roadside cooks are few in number and are only found through relatives and neighbours.

For these reasons, girls were described as sometimes desiring marriage at age 15 or 16. Many interviewees explained that a girl might think she is 'going to start a better life with the husband',<sup>18</sup> or 'after the marriage I can do whatever I want, eat whatever I want, dress as I want'.<sup>19</sup> This context of early marriage as a material aspiration explains why narrators occasionally mentioned young brides being content with the outcome of *ndoa ya mkeka*. The practice was described as advancing the bride's aims especially when she was willing but the groom was less than enthusiastic about entering into matrimony, as 46-year-old Salma described:

It happened to my brother's daughter. She had a man who wanted to marry her and he had paid the brideprice. But the girl did not want to marry that man. The girl had another boyfriend whom she loved. So while the family was arranging the marriage, the girl was out from morning to evening and the parents began to fear that something was going on, because they didn't understand why she was out, previously she did not have that behavior. One day her father was coming from the mosque and saw his daughter standing with a man in a secret place. He was shocked, but when he got closer, he saw that it was she. So he went home and told his wife, 'I saw our daughter standing with another man', so she said, 'let us call the *shehe* and family members together and go and surround the girl and boy who are standing together'. So the family went there and surrounded them, caught them and took them home, and told the girl, 'you know we have already accepted another man's brideprice for you. Why are you doing this?' She answered: 'because I don't love that man. The one I love is this one.' The parents asked the boy, 'why are you doing this when you know she is promised to another man? You will marry her today.' The boy said 'no, I cannot. I am still in school.' The parents said 'we don't care. Because of you, she will not accept the other man. You have to marry today.' So they married. After that, they took the girl and the boy to the boy's family and said to the boy's parents, 'these two are already married'. [His parents] were shocked: 'how can this be? Our son is still in school'. The girl's parents said 'we don't care, these two love each other and ...' they explained the situation. After a long conversation, the boy's parents accepted it. And the couple is still together and the brideprice was paid back to the first suitor.

- Laura Are young people who are in relationships scared they will be caught and forced to marry?
- Salma Most of the time, the family of the girl is the one who is feeling pain about this because they think that the girl might get pregnant and the father of the baby might abandon her. Most of the time the girl wants to get married, but the boy not yet. Sometimes the boy is just doing it for the pleasure, he is not in love with the girl, but she is in love with him.<sup>20</sup>

There were reported cases, however, when *ndoa ya mkeka* could be in the interests of the groom, if he were unable to pay brideprice or financially provide for a wife. Parents who knew that their daughter was sexually intimate with a poor man might be willing to forgo the brideprice if he married her. Sixty-one-year-old Tausi and 62-year-old Aziza explained this in a joint interview:

- [Tausi:]<sup>21</sup> It happened to my brother's daughter, around 1990. She was caught with a man. And my brother decided to marry her off through *ndoa ya mkeka*. The man did not have enough money to provide for [my brother's] daughter, so my brother decided to take them to [live in] his house. They are still together. [...]
- [Aziza:]<sup>22</sup> If he [= the boyfriend] can take a girl and makes fornication (*zina*) [with her] and the mother is a good believer [of Islam], then she will force the marriage, it is easy for him, he does not have to pay brideprice.

Parents' motives for arranging *ndoa ya mkeka* were described as genuine distress over their daughters' premarital sexual intimacy. When emotional experiences were highlighted in narratives of *ndoa ya mkeka*, they were nearly always those of the girl's parents, who were said to 'feel bad for the girl', 'be shocked', or 'begin to fear that something is going on'. To 'feel pain' (*kusikia uchungu au maumivu*) was a particularly common phrase used to describe the reactions of the girl's parents:

Nowadays, I am not hearing about [*ndoa ya mkeka*], but years ago it happened many times because the parents of the girl are in pain because they see their daughters going out with the boy before marriage, it means shame for their family. So they took a decision to marry them through *ndoa ya mkeka*.<sup>23</sup>

This narrative emphasis on the pain experienced by girls' parents can be interpreted as underlining parents' moral entitlement to coerce other parties in *ndoa ya mkeka*. The fact that parents' pain was accentuated in narratives that circulated among neighbours and relatives indicates that parental decisions to initiate in *ndoa ya mkeka* were largely understood to be justified by others in the neighbourhood and kin group. Such narratives portrayed the girl's parents as suffering victims and legitimised the steps they took to rectify a moral transgression.

### Positive Aspects of Male Provision for Women

In historical terms, forced marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa has been seen to arise from families' interests in controlling female productive and reproductive labour (Bunting et al. 2016). In agrarian regions where women carry out much of the farm work, the potential groom and his parents have often stood to benefit from the bride's labour. However, in low-income, highly monetised urban settings this is generally not the case, since male labour is understood to be the most important source of income. For young men in Dar es Salaam, marriage means that he or his natal family must provide for a wife and children in a situation where wages or profits from any sources are difficult to access. Most accounts of *ndoa ya mkeka* make clear that marriage is rarely in the interests of the young man and his parents, who are understood to be the reluctant parties. His parents may wish instead for him to continue his schooling, thereby obtaining a return on their investment in his school fees and increasing his future earning power, which could benefit his natal family. Thus in contrast to most current international policy and human rights assumptions, forced marriage does not necessarily involve the willing consent of either the groom or his parents.<sup>24</sup> *Ndoa ya mkeka* can be seen instead as a strategy by which the girl's family strives to appropriate the *male partner's* labour and earning power.

Women and their families, however, do not seek provision by a groom solely for economic or subsistence purposes. Through male provision, women reported feeling loved and valued (Cole & Thomas 2009; Hunter 2010). These feelings are part of an 'economy of affect', that is, communicative behaviours that involve economic transactions and produce perceptions into which young people in urban Tanzania are socialised regardless of their ethnic affiliation (Stark 2017). Both male and female interviewees spoke of the money given by men in intimate relationships as 'solving her small problems', and thus as an expression of men's concern over the difficulties faced by women in everyday urban life. In the words of 50-year-old Mwanaisha, 'if a woman is not given money, she feels like she is not being loved'.<sup>25</sup> Men, too, understood giving money to girls and women as expressions of 'love' and as fulfilment of their responsibilities as intimate partners (Stark 2017). Forty-six-year-old Farida,<sup>26</sup> mother of six children, illustrated these understandings with a hypothetical scenario:

If a husband is coming back with some gifts or extra money in his pocket, his wife is suddenly very charming and snuggling up to him. But if he comes with nothing, she says, ‘ahh! Don’t touch me’ [she pantomimes this by slapping an imaginary man’s hand away in annoyance]. So men want to save up all their money and spend it on women. [...] It’s a custom in Tanzania that most women stay home and don’t have work and are looking for the men who have money to give to them to support their needs. So men go to work and bring the money home and give it all to the women [...]. For example if you, Zakia [she turns to the young female interpreter] don’t have a job and stay home, how can you have a relationship with a man who has no money? You are taking another person’s problems to yourself, increasing your problems [...] For most women, if their husband comes home several days in a row with no money, because he is no help to you, so you do not feel like sleeping with him.

- Laura     So for women in Tanzania, when you get help from him, it makes you feel love for him, you want to be close to him.  
 Farida    Yes, and it makes women feel like they are loved by him.

What Farida describes above has been termed for South Africa ‘the sexual economy’, through which much of men’s income is channelled through sexual exchanges to women (Hunter 2010: 105, 110). Selemani, aged 18, emphasized the ‘trickle-down’ nature of this sexual economy:

Women have more money [than men] because they take it from the men. I use the money my parents give me which is meant for bus fare, for food at school, I give it to my girlfriend. She uses it to pay for school shoes, perfumes, cosmetics, high priced food like chips – men are not afraid to eat low-priced food like cassava at school.<sup>27</sup>

Through long-term male provision, women can gain ‘self-sufficiency’ and thus respect in the eyes of neighbours and relatives. Many Muslim girls in the neighbourhoods I studied learned cultural values and behaviours from older women in a puberty rite known as *unyago*, *mkole* or *msondo* (Swantz 1995; Caplan 2000; Halley 2012; Stark 2018). After the age of *unyago* (usually by age 16), girls in especially poor families were seen to be independent adults, able to ‘depend on herself’. If a daughter did not pass the primary school exams that might enable her to continue secondary education at an affordable government-run school, or if she had no job or small-scale vending business, then ‘doing nothing’ and relying financially on her parents was not an option, according to many interviewees. In these situations, other girls at school and even some parents were said to explicitly urge daughters to seek a male provider and thus find the quickest path to autonomy and status in the eyes of others (also Plummer & Wight 2011; Mulumeoderhwa 2016):

I have a friend whose mother told her, you are old enough, I cannot support you anymore, so find a man, be with him, give the men what they want, satisfy his needs, and he will give you some money. [At roughly age 14–16] your family considers you an adult, so you have to support yourself, you have to find a man that you will satisfy, and he will give you money to support your needs.<sup>28</sup>

Other parents arranged marriages for their daughters with men they expected would provide for her:



Some families push the daughters into the marriage because they are poor. And if the girl doesn't want to marry, the family might say, okay, now you will know, now you have to take care of yourself, find your own food, money, etc.<sup>29</sup>

Twenty-nine-year-old Khadija was 18 when her parents pressured her to marry the brother of her uncle's wife, who paid 300,000 Tzs [between 100 and 200 euros] in bride-price (*mahari*) to Khadija's parents. Khadija explained:

Khadija: I felt bad [about marrying] because I didn't love the man, but I had quit the housemaid job and had gone back to the village with nothing to do, and my parents told me I had to marry him. [...] (Laughing). Now I love him because I have three children with him, it's no use to say I don't love him when I am still living with him (laughing, gives a high-five to her female neighbor seated across from her).<sup>30</sup>

Interviewees told that young women are discouraged from relying on relatives for their material needs, or borrowing from friends (Stark 2017). Married women, too, were expected to demonstrate independence from their parents by not asking them for money. Having a male partner was crucial for their sense of self-respect in order to project an outward image of dignity and independence (Plummer and Wight 2011: 204). Especially with neighbours who were considered to have 'bad hearts' (*roho mbaya*) and might spread pernicious gossip, an adult woman had to take care to appear self-sufficient, as Jamila and Zainabu explained:

... our life depends on men. They come to you and lie to you and get you pregnant and go away. We do that because we need money. And that is how we raise our children, by using the money of the men. In Dar es Salaam, it is hard to go every time to a neighbor to ask for help, 'please give me salt.' They might be talking about you in certain way, that you are always going and asking for help. Here they start talking about you if you ask twice or three times. Even if you just need salt, so you have to start looking for money.<sup>31</sup>

For me, it is shameful to ask [for something] from a neighbor [...] I have never gone to ask to borrow anything. I fear that if I go there, they will start to talk that I don't have any money today, and so forth.<sup>32</sup>

In *unyago* many women learned that to earn respect from others, one must internalise true self-respect (*kujiheshimu*), meaning sexual modesty, premarital chastity, and fidelity to one male partner (Stark 2016). Poor women were thus expected to display to their female neighbours and friends both modesty *and* an economic self-reliance that could often only be obtained through sexual links to men. In fact, early marriage was one of the few ways in which girls could embody both of these values. When asked why girls in his neighbourhood married at age 17 or younger, one 21-year-old man<sup>33</sup> explained that girls married early because they 'are scared they will become prostitutes' if they are unemployed and not attending school. Interviews revealed that for older women as well, marriage gave them respectability in the eyes of others (Stark 2018).

## Results

In *ndoa ya mkeka*, a marital union and accompanying expectations were forced upon one or both partners in a pre-existing intimate relationship by the bride's parents or

brother. In most international and Tanzanian media and human rights discourses on forced marriages, girls are depicted as marrying against their will due to patriarchal attitudes. In contrast to this portrayal, *ndoa ya mkeka* was most frequently described as involving pressure on the young groom without the agreement of his family. Not only the bride's parents but also the bride might wish the marriage to take place, but the boyfriend could be hesitant or reluctant to enter into a conjugal union. *Ndoa ya mkeka* could thus represent a strategy whereby the girl's family appealed to Islamic and cultural norms of premarital modesty to appropriate the groom's future labour and earning power for the bride. This strategy was motivated by the lack of economic opportunities for women in urban Tanzania as compared to those for men. Social acceptance of *ndoa ya mkeka* was reflected in the ways in which only the girl's family was depicted in narratives as suffering emotionally. Others in the community were reported to occasionally assist the girl's family in catching the girlfriend and boyfriend together. The local imam or *shehe* was never described as initiating the marriage, but only as acquiescing to the wishes of the girl's family by legitimising it.

Targets of coercion in *ndoa ya mkeka* in the narratives were nevertheless situation specific. A groom who wished to marry but was unable to afford payment of brideprice to the bride's family might engage in sexual relations with his girlfriend, hoping to force the issue in a way that would make her parents willing to forgo brideprice.

Consent means the capacity to imagine oneself acting differently. This imagination is constrained by the deep inequalities faced by girls and their parents living in the lowest-income areas of Dar es Salaam, where envisioning a viable future of outside of marriage or cohabitation is difficult. A key constraint was the relatively high cost of secondary education in Tanzania, which placed severe limits on the ability of children from poor families to receive schooling. Forced marriage is often thus an indirect consequence – not a cause, as some human rights discourses maintain – of girls being unable to continue their education to secondary school.

An important contributing factor to the practice of *ndoa ya mkeka* was the prevalence of premarital sex. The topic of premarital transactional sexual behaviour in many Sub-Saharan African societies has generally been addressed in the research literature separately from forced/child marriage.<sup>34</sup> However, these two phenomena are often inextricably linked and need to be studied together. In an urban context of poverty where young women's income-earning possibilities are limited, widespread transactional sexual activity puts pressures on parents to arrange girls' marriages at a young age. Pregnancy out of wedlock can mean for parents the loss of their investment in her education and the financial burden of providing for a new baby. By pressuring or forcing couples to marry, parents seek to ensure the daughter's financial security and that of her future children in a situation in which pregnancy would almost certainly mean an end to her education in any case. Marriage, by contrast, makes it more likely that the husband or his family will provide for the mother and baby.

## Discussion

*Third-person elicitation* was developed in this study to access information on women's and men's agency that could not be obtained by asking persons directly about their own experiences. Persons who participate in situations of inequality such as familial patriarchy or acts of illegality such as forced/arranged marriage must often avoid explicitly articulating their resistance or violation of rules, since this could provoke an unwanted response from those in power who patrol the boundaries of normative behaviour. In this study, third-person elicitation produced responses indicating that some forms of forced marriage offer potential avenues to agency for women. This information would have remained undisclosed if participants had only been asked about their personal life histories, perceptions and experiences.

Forced marriage practices provide a useful case for re-examining assumptions about agency and consent in cultures with non-liberal traditions and significant forms of gender inequality. Women in patriarchal and non-liberal communities do not always use their agency according to Western expectations, that is, they do not always choose to reject patriarchal institutions and values. They may instead maneuver within them to attain positions and modes of comportment esteemed in their culture. This gendered maneuvering is different in urban and rural areas. The intense monetisation of social relations in city life and the everyday channelling of this money from men to women through heterosexual intimacy and pair-bonding have contributed to new gendered power dynamics, and to new consequences for gendered agency within sexual relations and marriage practices.

The most important root cause of forced marriage in low-income neighbourhoods in Dar es Salaam was day-to-day economic dependency by women on intimate male partners. This dependency, while recognised by girls and women, was not experienced by them as entirely negative. Male provision was often described as an expression of love that enabled wives and girlfriends to 'solve her small problems' and feel valued by her male partner. Support by a male partner also allowed women to display a self-sufficiency that earned respect from relatives and neighbours. In addition, women's sexual modesty and monogamy were framed as elements of self-respect and positive feminine values taught in puberty rites. When a girl had internalised these values, she was recognised as a responsible adult in the eyes of the community, but the only way that girls or women could embody these multiple values simultaneously was to marry. Some female interviewees expressed a desire to marry young, or marry any man who could provide for them. Thus, practices that involve coercion do not necessarily rule out the agency of those coerced.

Contrary to most media and human rights discourses, the roles of parents and daughters in forced marriage practices are not always those of oppressors versus victims. Instead, parents and daughters can maneuver – together or separately – for the enhancement of the daughter's social status and agency through marriage. Ethnographic approaches that include third-person elicitation are thus vital for obtaining more nuanced understandings of the dynamics behind early/forced marriage and

other practices in the developing world for which categories of violator and victim are commonly taken for granted.

## Notes

1. In urban Tanzania during the years 2000–2011, 22.5% of women had married before age 18 (UNFPA 2012: 23, 74).
2. The term ‘parent’ in this study is coterminous with ‘guardian’ and can include grandparents, aunts, uncles or older brothers who have taken on the role of caregiver, for example in the event of the death of a biological father or mother.
3. Fifty percent of the city’s population live on an average income of roughly 1 USD per day, well below the United Nation’s international poverty line of 1.9 USD per day (Ndezi 2009: 77–78).
4. Sharifa, 32-year-old Muslim mother of children, primary school education, Zigua ethnic group.
5. Mwajuma, 63-year-old Muslim widow and mother of four living children, Yao ethnic group.
6. Hassan, 31-year-old married Muslim father of one child, primary school education, Makua ethnic group.
7. Zawadi, 33-year-old Muslim mother of four children, primary school education, Kwere ethnic group.
8. For instance FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) (2014).
9. Interviewees reported that informal marriages commonly occur between Muslims and Christians, so that conversion is not a prerequisite for a conjugal union, although it was seen to be required in order for it to be sanctified by the *shehe*.
10. Farida, 42-year-old Muslim mother of six children, primary school education, Kwere ethnic group.
11. Ibrahim, 64-year-old married Muslim father of four children, secondary school education, Nyamwezi ethnic group.
12. Fifty-year-old imam of local mosque, married with four children, primary school education, Yao ethnic group.
13. Mariam, 23-year-old Muslim woman, university education.
14. Hadija, 19-year-old unmarried Muslim woman, no children, secondary school education, Luguru ethnic group.
15. Rehema, unmarried 16-year-old Muslim girl, no children, student in secondary school, Ngendereko ethnic group.
16. Reuben’s responses were given in English rather than Swahili.
17. In 1978, 84% of men in Dar es Salaam had formal employment, but in the 1980s large numbers of workers lost their jobs and by the early 2000s only a small fraction were employed in the formal sector (Silberschmidt 2004: 237).
18. Selemani, 37-year-old Muslim male, secondary and vocational training, Kwere ethnic group.
19. Bahati, 28-year-old Muslim female, mother of 2 children, secondary education, Pare ethnic group.
20. Salma, 46-year-old Muslim mother of four children, married, primary school education, Zigua ethnic group.
21. Tausi, 61-year-old Muslim widow with seven children, four years of colonial education, Makonde ethnic group.
22. Aziza, 62-year-old Muslim widow with one child, four years of colonial education, Makonde ethnic group.
23. Halima, 26-year-old Muslim mother of two children, primary school education, Makonde ethnic group.
24. Mwajuma, 63-year-old Muslim widow and mother of four living children, Yao ethnic group.
25. Mwanaisha, 50-year-old Muslim mother of two children, primary school education, Kwere ethnic group.

26. Farida, 46-year-old Muslim mother of six children, primary school education, Kwere ethnic group.
27. Selemani, 18-year-old Muslim male, no children, secondary school education, Digo ethnic group.
28. Asha, 22-year-old unmarried Muslim female, no children, primary school education, Makonde ethnic group.
29. Ali, 16-year-old Muslim male, no children, primary school education, Zaramo ethnic group.
30. Khadija, 29-year-old married Muslim mother of three children, primary school education, Kwere ethnic group.
31. Jamila, 29-year-old Muslim female, mother of one child, no education, Bondei ethnic group.
32. Zainabu, 28-year-old Muslim married mother of four children, Pare ethnic group.
33. Roland, 21-year-old Christian man, primary school education, Gogo ethnic group.
34. An exception is Mulumeoderhwa (2016).

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