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Title: Cohabitation in Botswana : challenging methodological nuptialism in anthropology

Issue Date: 2017-12-14

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 METHODOLOGICAL NUPTIALISM IN THE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced cohabitation as a growing phenomenon with more couples in cohabiting unions than in marriage worldwide. The chapter explored the trends in adult sexual unions in Africa, from a period when marriage was ubiquitous and polygamy was an economically viable form of marriage. The chapter introduced the effects of Christianity and colonisation on Setswana procedures and processes for establishing and defining marriage, such as the rise of monogamy, female-headed households, childbirth outside marriage and non-marital unions like cohabitation. The chapter further questioned the way the scientific study of relationships has been shaped by public opinion.

This study distinguishes between marriage and the study of marriage and relationships. While marriage may be, or may have been important in Botswana, this does not explain why the study of relationships should have developed such an explicit focus on marriage, often to the neglect of a variety of other forms of relationships, in this case cohabitation. Why is it, for example, that until 1991 the Population and the Housing census of Botswana failed to capture cohabiting unions?

Anthropologists studying relationships in Southern Africa have focused on marriage (Schapera 1939; Kuper 1970; Matthews 1940; Townsend & Garey 1994). For instance, Comaroff and Roberts (1981) discuss examples of disputed marriages but do not discuss other unions. Indeed, it is not clear from their research whether the unions in question were marriages or cohabitation. In one such case (see Comaroff and Roberts 1981), a young man called Molefe, who had been cohabiting with Madubu for twenty years, developed an interest in another woman for whom he paid *bogadi*. In the process, he neglected Madubu and argued

that no *patlo* had taken place and therefore no marriage had ensued. This implies that these anthropologists were aware of couples who are living together but not married. However, their works generally lack further discussion of these unions. Where these relationships are discussed they are generally negatively compared to marriage.

Using the term methodological nuptialism, this study questions, for the case of Botswana, this over-emphasis on marriage. It argues that the study of other relationships mainly from the perspective that they are a 'deviation' from marriage may have been caused by the dominance of Christianity and the cultural conventions of Botswana.

This chapter explores how methodological nuptialism is evident in the study of relationships (Schapera 1939; Kuper 1977; Cheal 2008; Manting 2004; Mokomane 2005; Nukunya 1969), which have taken marriage as a starting point in discussing sexual relationships. This has had a negative effect on the understanding of other adult sexual unions that are not marriage. Why is it that the study of patrilineal and matrilineal kinship structures has attached so much importance to marriage? (Radcliffe-Brown 1950). Why has marriage been seen as tightly related to reproduction? Why has so much attention been devoted to the study of the demise of polygamous marriage in various parts of Africa with the introduction of Christianity and colonialism? (Falen 2008).

Christianity and colonialism introduced a kind of colonisation of consciousness (Comaroff & Comaroff 1989; Peter 1997) by imposing new (and often rigid) dichotomies determining which relations are to be perceived as 'marriage' and which relations could not belong to that sanctified category. In the process, it also began to declare 'cohabitation' deviant of the model of holy matrimony. In addition, while this perception of cohabitation as a label for certain relations emerged, these relations were declared 'immoral', as being against biblical teachings and as contradicting the strictures of colonial and post-colonial systems of law. The question is, how is this reflected in social science? Equally, did the

anthropology of relationships in Africa superimpose certain categorisations whereby 'marriage' came to be qualified in such a manner that a range of other relations were labeled as 'non-marital', including the category of 'cohabitation'? And, if so, what are the implications of this methodological nuptialism for a better and more balanced understanding of relationships that do have some structural and recognised features, yet do not fully qualify under Christian and law-based rulings as 'matrimony'?

Based on a sequence of census reports, we can conclude that in present-day Botswana marriage has become an exceptional relationship (Kubanzi 2013) and that cohabitation has become a dominant form of relationship. Only around 18% of the population that is of marriageable age in Botswana is married. This means that by far the majority is unmarried and that for those not married the likelihood that they will marry at a point in the future has become doubtful (Gulbrandsen 1986). Therefore, cohabitation has become established, whether Christianity or public morality likes it or not. As shall be demonstrated later, Christianity and colonisation (money, economy, and formal education) have contributed to the re-defining of what marriage is, with particular reference to the timing of the giving of *bogadi*, thereby reducing some relationships that were traditionally regarded as marriage to mere cohabitation (see, for instance, Schapera's work among the Bakgatla). To argue that cohabitation is a recent development demands a re-examination of our definition of both cohabitation and marriage. If the difference between cohabitation and marriage is the absence of the doing of *patlo* and the giving of *bogadi*, then in Botswana cohabitation is as old as marriage. If this is not the case, then Christianity has made a great contribution to the rise of cohabitation, by excluding the poor from participating in marriage. As shall be demonstrated later in this chapter, cohabitation is a cultural tradition as well, since many socially accepted arrangements can be made to form a relationship, which questions the premise that cohabitation is a recent phenomenon. In the process of the introduction of Christianity and

colonialism to Botswana and perhaps Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, however, a moral landscape was created in which marriage became free of the social labels that cohabitation and other non-marital relationships acquired. The question then becomes whether the social science of relationships reinforced the process that Christianity and colonialism commenced in which relationships other than marriage were studied as a deviation from marriage.

2.2 Social issues in the study of relationships

As described above, the general perception by Batswana of cohabitation is negative and the perception of marriage is positive. But is it really this clear cut for people on the ground? Though the society may preserve certain terms and notions for marriage (faithfulness, trust, love) and certain for cohabitation (lack of trust, promiscuity), is such a dichotomy a true reflection of such relationships in the way cohabitees themselves experience these? The field data presented in this work suggests that, in fact, faithfulness in cohabiting relationships is expected. This is because some men involved in cohabiting unions feel that their relationships are at a double risk: from the partner herself, who might terminate the relationship without much consequence, and from other men who may feel free to court their partner since she is not married, i.e. technically she is still available. These risks arise precisely from the absence of *patlo* and *bogadi* in the process of the formation of a cohabiting union. Marriage has become contested due to many factors: emancipation, feminism, secularisation, the improved position of women in the labour market, independence in reproduction and also HIV/AIDS. The prevalence of cohabitation in Botswana is largely attributed to poverty (Mokomane 2005b), with the idea that cohabitation will go away when the social status of individuals changes and they eventually get married. However, given that Botswana has become one of the middle income earning societies in Africa, why is it a place where cohabitation has become the dominant form of relationship? I would argue, therefore,

that cohabitation in Botswana cannot be exclusively explained by poverty; as will be discussed in Chapter 5, the situation is much more complex. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to discuss all these factors, but I will illustrate the point using just one: gender.

2.3 Gender and marriage: Is marriage perfect?

Despite existing general negative perceptions of cohabitation, research indicates that marriage is not always a safe haven for couples either (Agot, Stoep, Tracy, Obare, Bukusi, Ndiya-Achola, Moses & Weiss 2010; Carter, Kraft, Koppenhaver, Galavoti Roels, Kilmarx, & Fidzani 2007; Ntozi 1997; Smith 2007; Clark 2004; Adetunji 2001). These works show that though marriage is portrayed as being an ideal institution, it simultaneously poses a threat, especially for women. This is because the ideals of faithfulness and trust, though expected, are not always fulfilled in marriage. Since trust and faithfulness are expected in marriage, this can be leading to serious complications whereby in cases where women suspect that their husbands might be cheating on them, they cannot use condoms in this era of HIV/AIDS (Smith 2007). Self-protection from HIV/AIDS for married women using condoms becomes almost impossible. 'For women whose husbands cheat, protecting themselves through condom use is difficult, if not impossible' (Smith 2007: 1002). This suggests that it is easier for a single woman to negotiate for safe sex than a married woman. Feminist scholarship opposed marriage long ago, saying it is a patriarchal institution that keeps women in bondage and dependency, limits their opportunities for self-development and growth, and legitimises the exploitation of women for their labour, sexuality and their reproductive capacities.

Carter et al. (2007) conducted a study in Botswana aimed at 'describing sexual concurrency and related norms and behaviours among a sample of 807 participants' (2007: 822). The study found that there are beliefs and norms that support or can be associated with

concurrent sexual behaviour. The study further found that infidelity is rampant in marriage. Their findings reveal that 'concurrency was not confined to the narrow sub-groups (like cohabitation and singlehood), it was reported across different education level, areas of residence and marital status' (*Ibid.*). This implies that, marriage cannot be excluded in a discussion of multiple sexual partnerships as a contributory factor in fighting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Therefore, since unfaithfulness is found in both, the negative connotations should apply to the marriage in the same way as it does to non-marital relationships like cohabitation.

High HIV prevalence is also reported among widows (Smith 2007; Clark 2004; Adetunji 2001). This again indicates that marriage poses a danger for women in the face of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Agot et al. (2010) carried out a study on 'Widow Inheritance and the HIV prevalence in Bondo District, Kenya' and found that many widows are infected with HIV by their late husbands. In other words, these women were infected while married. On the same note, Smith (2007) adds that '[f]or women in Nigeria, as in many settings, simply being married can contribute to the risk of contracting HIV [...] Married women's greatest risk of contracting HIV is through having sexual intercourse with their husbands.' If all relationships are studied objectively, then, in the case of HIV/AIDS prevention more relevant intervention programmes could have been produced.

These are the questions that this work tries to engage with. This work argues that methodological nuptialism compromises the understanding of cohabitation. This has led to an umbrella approach in the study of all cohabiting unions, which are labeled as deviant and against the authority of parents, Christianity and colonisation. By advocating for the ideal of a monogamous marriage, these factors have led to the current elevated status of marriage at the expense of other adult sexual relationships. The question is, therefore, that while the general public's views have developed in this manner how does social science negotiate a different

perspective that avoids such a dominant focus on relationships, questioned, problematised and balanced against an interest in other forms of relationships?

This chapter explores the centrality of marriage in some classical studies on relationships. It then discusses the emerging alternative relationships to demonstrate how, over time, marriage has been challenged by other forms of relations that ultimately question its central role. The chapter will then address the work of Carsten (2000), which explores how kinship studies have been challenged by a perspective on alternate ways of relatedness, moving away from a place where relatedness has always been understood through marital and blood ties. There is an overwhelming view in family studies that to be related one has to trace a relationship through blood/lineage or through marriage. Kinship in anthropology has been largely defined through blood and marriage, but such an approach has been challenged by advances in human reproductive science and other emerging ways of relatedness. I now explore how methodological nuptialism has frequently dominated studies of relationships.

2. 4 Classical kinship studies and methodological nuptialism

2.4.1 Meaning of family

Studying what families are and how they are formed has been a principle domain of anthropological study of African societies. These studies perceived and understood kin relations as being primarily based in terms of blood and marriage (Kuper 1977; Matthews 1940). For instance, Kuper describes the basic element of social structure as the family and he describes the family as ‘[...] the group formed by a man and his wife and their children’ (1977: 131). This definition of ‘family’ asserts that marriage, as in ‘a man and his wife’, and a blood relation, as in ‘parents and their children’, is the basis of any social structure. Such a definition perceives as deviant any relationship in which marriage has not taken place. Kuper explains that a family involves three individual groups: parents and children; children of the

same parents; and parents of the same children (*Ibid.*). Again, such a definition of family excludes any form of relationship that is not marriage. The absence of a detailed discussion of non-marital relationships like cohabitation has led to the exclusion of the said unions in the anthropological definitions of what constitutes a family. This approach has created a knowledge gap, over time, concerning those relationships in which marriage has not taken place. Some scholars in their work among African societies have observed that there were some relationships that were not marriage. However, in most cases, such relationships were simply mentioned and hardly discussed in any meaningful detail (Schapera 1939; Nukunya 1969). For instance, Schapera conducted his studies among the Bakgatla in Botswana (then Bechuanaland), and acknowledged in his studies that some non-marital relationships existed. However, he does not elaborate on these, nor does he conceptualise exactly how the relationships differed from marriage or how they functioned.

Nukunya (1969) carried out fieldwork between June 1962 and April 1963 among the Anlo Ewe in Ghana. Among other things, he discovered that among the Ewe there are certain restrictions to spouse selection or marriage propositions, including incest or adultery. Like Schapera (1939), he observes in his study that not all relationships among the Ewe are marriage and he writes that Ewe society '[...] prohibits marriage and cohabitation between relatives of certain categories, they also approve and even encourage marriage of relatives of certain categories' (1969). The same applies to Botswana, where, among many ethnic communities, there was (and, to an extent, still is) a preference for cross-cousin marriage. There is, however, no preference for same-sex marriage. Though cohabitation was found to exist, it was not further explored. For instance, Nukunya observes that:

[...] not all women go through the proper ceremonies [...] the interference of parents and relatives in the choice of partners often resulted in the disagreement between the

girls and their parents. This gives rise to some cases of elopement and open revolt against the parental authority (Nukunya 1969: 67).

Elopement is not a recognised marital relationship. However, though having observed this non-marital phenomenon, Nukunya (1969) does not discuss it further. This pro-marriage approach to the study of adult sexual relationships has led to a trend in anthropology of failing to provide further analysis of non-marital sexual relationships.

2.4.2 Meaning of relatedness

Another way that (family/sexual) relationships have been studied was to ‘study terms used to denote relatives’ (Kuper 1977: 131). Such terms normally place one in relation to the other in either marriage or blood relations and, where such relationships were established outside marriage, and then derogatory terms were used to describe individuals in such unions. According to Kuper:

The difference, (between consanguinity and kinship) if we consider an illegitimate child in our society, such a child has a genitor (physical father), but has no pater (social father). Social fatherhood is virtually determined by marriage [...] kinship therefore results from the recognition of a social relationship between parents and children which is not the same thing as physical relationship and may/may not coincide with it [...] for it is not sexual intercourse that constitutes marriage either in Europe [...] or among the savage⁵ people. Marriage is a social arrangement by which a child is given a legitimate position in the society determined by parenthood in the social sense (Kuper 1977: 190–191).

⁵ The term is used with caution since it is a direct quotation. The author acknowledges that the term is problematic today and out-dated

What I discern from Kuper's study is that marriage and blood relations formed kinship. That he is able to describe children born out of wedlock as 'illegitimate' alludes to the fact that such relationships existed and within which he so called 'illegitimate' children were born. This begs the question, why were such situations not explored further, i.e. why they were ignored?

Pauli (2010) carried out studies in Fransfontein in Namibia and found terms that differentiate between children born in and out of wedlock: these children were differentiated as 'marriage children' and 'out of marriage children'. In one Protestant church, 'out of marriage children' are called 'sin children'. Such derogatory terms are also found in studies in Botswana, as reflected by the title of Molokomme's *Children of the Fence*. The term 'children of the fence' is a translation of a Setswana saying '*bana ba dikgora*.' The term 'fence' is used to refer to the fact that the father of the child 'jumped the fence', i.e. used an un-gazetted entry point to have a child. The only gazetted entry would be after the giving of *bogadi*. If the study of non-marital relationship is not objective then individuals in these relationships will continue to be marginalised.

What has anthropology lost by not delving into such study of relationships? Various early anthropological scholars worked among different peoples in Africa on the development of marital and non-marital relations: Schapera (1939) among the Tswana, Evans-Pritchard (1945) among the Nuer, Mair (1953) in central Africa, and Colson (1962) among the Tonga. All these studies placed marriage central to defining relationships by emphasising the importance of bride wealth in marriage. In his work among the Nuer Evans-Pritchard points out that:

Until a man is married and begets children, he has not reached full manhood, and that a man desires children who will keep his memory green and to whom he can make his wants in dreams (Evans-Pritchard 1945: 6).

Such sentiments about marriage became central to most studies on African societies. For instance, in his work among the Kgatla (Bakgatla) in Botswana (then Bechuanaland protectorate), Schapera draws the same conclusion about the importance of marriage when he observes that, among the Bakgatla, marriage is so important that the question is purely when and who to marry, rather than whether to marry or not (1939).

Acknowledging the centrality of marriage among African societies, Phillips (1953) has attributed a number of factors that might have given the institution of marriage an elevated social position in relation to other sexual relationships in society. Phillips argued that the centrality of marriage, especially a polygamous one, was influenced by a number of factors, including the need for labour to till the land and herd cattle, i.e. marriage was a way to organise and maintain labour. The same is expressed by other scholars (Mair 1969; Schapera & Comaroff 1991; Schapera 1939; Kubanji 2013). The point is that polygamous marriages were important. Polygamous marriages ensured the birth of many children, therefore the 'the larger the cooperating group, the greater the possibilities, wealth and defense against enemies (Phillips 1953: 1). Philips further justified the existence of polygamous marriage because 'the more children are born to any group the greater are its hopes of expansion', (*Ibid.*) what Guyer (1995) refers to as wealth in people. Thus, polygamous marriage became the ideal relationship for agrarian African societies, since within marriage 'legitimate' children are born and wives obtained who contribute to the general accumulation of wealth for the patriarchal family.

It can therefore be argued that marriage, as expounded by classical research and writing, was perceived as the most important relationship in most African countries and was interpreted as playing a fundamental role in the life and substance of the communities. This centrality of marriage was then positioned in anthropology as an already structured

institution, which can, comparatively, be more convenient to study compared to non-marital relationships. That is, since marriage was interpreted as a social structure with practical functions in society, it then became studied more than relationships such as cohabitation, which appeared to lack functionality in the structures of society. The theoretical paradigm of structural functionalism, which proclaims that institutions, rituals, etc. are all functionally located in society, sees institutions like marriage as performing important functions in and for society. This has led to more studies related to marriage than non-marital relationships.

2.5 Methodological nuptialism and structural-functionalism

Structuralism as a guiding theory in understanding human relations in society was formulated by Levi Strauss. Structuralism holds that people perceive the world in binaries and that every culture can be understood in terms of these binary oppositions (Strauss 1963: 138–161). Structuralism then provides ways through which these opposites hang together. These binaries are overcome, for example, through initiated relationships of exchange. In these reciprocal relations of exchange, structuralism emphasises the importance of social structure and minimises the importance of the action of the individual in society (Haralambos 1996). Marriage is seen as a fundamental form of relationship through which reciprocal arrangements are made between families or social groups, often taking the form of the exchange of women. Structuralism leaves little room for the exploration of individual agency or free choice, as marriage provides a way for an elementary structure for the reproduction of society to be arranged that is not open to the individual expression of free will. As it is families that marry, marriage then becomes a factor of exchange between these groups. In such structural interpretations, the significance of marriage lies in the ways in which an exogamous relationship between two families is established, more than between the two individuals that are being married. Thus, marriage is based on a notion of reciprocal

exchange; in Southern Africa women are circulated in conjunction with the reciprocal circulation of cattle. This exchange and circulation forms a basic, structural form for the organisation of society. On the other hand, cohabitation appears to be more than just a reversal of structuralism. It is also a negation of structuralism in the way that it emphasises not the reciprocal structure between families, but rather individual choice. It seems fundamentally lacking in the aspect of binary reciprocal exchange. What, then, are the social implications of cohabitation?

The structural functionalist approach argues that society is comprised of different structures that are recognisable in particular social patterns. A point that is poignantly captured by a recent study by Pauli and van Dijk when they observe that ‘For long, structural-functional approaches emphasised the centrality of the institution of marriage for the anthropological understanding of kinship systems, socio-economic relations, ethnicity and religion, and for the functioning of political systems’ (2016:257). These structures require certain functions that are important for the maintenance of order and stability of society as a whole. At the level of perceiving the necessity of functions, a community becomes one in which ‘all parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency without producing persistent conflicts’ (Layton 1997: 35). This is why some studies began talking of the ‘African Marriage System’ (Mair, 1953), as if it is a single integrated system that is essentially different from marriage in Europe or other parts of the world. Newman (2010) defines structural functionalism as a theory that perceives society as a complex system composed of various elements that work together to keep society alive. Structural functionalism addresses the social structure as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements, namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. Thus, any relationship that does not conform to a prescribed pattern becomes difficult to study, and is therefore ignored.

The structural functional approach renders the individual powerless. Boas describes the powerlessness of an individual thus: ‘none of these people are free from conventional proscriptions and rules’ (1940: 663 in Layton 2006). Malinowski emphasised the same point when he asserted that ‘natives followed the forces and commands of the tribal code without comprehending them’ (1922: 11 in Layton: 2006). To what extent does cohabitation, which does not seem to confirm these elementary forms of kinship, contest the view that the individual has little to no agency? How powerless is the individual when it comes to forming relationships? And how powerful is the force of the structure against the individual?

Structural functionalism has largely been ‘criticised for accepting social arrangements without examining how they might exploit or otherwise disadvantage certain groups or individuals within a society’ (Newman 2010: 18). This is because the approach elevates the needs and interests of the society over those of the individual. This approach to the study of human relationships emphasises a society’s dominant cultural patterns at the expense of individual interests. It leaves little room for understanding how individuals may act against society’s structures. Structural-functionalism has difficulty with acknowledging that, occasionally, the interest of an individual can be in conflict with those interests of the rest of society. What then makes the individual act against the expected cultural norms to pursue their own interests? While structural-functionalism perceives the ‘existence of a deep structure that would render predictability of a social behaviour possible’ (De Bruin, Van Dijk and Gewald 2007: 7), the theory fails to explain those behaviours, like cohabitation, that seem to be unpredictable and that refuse to conform. This theory tends to obliterate a perception of individuals and their abilities as rational beings (*Ibid.*), and therefore makes it difficult to explain and appreciate instances where individuals or groups act contrary to structural expectations.

From a structural-functionalist perspective, the study of relationships should

necessarily study marriage. It is the structure that defines what is acceptable or not as far as relationships are concerned. In terms of sexual relationships, marriage conforms to society's norms. This has resulted in the production of an extensive literature that explores the function of marriage for kinship-structures in society (Kuper 1970; Matthews 1940; Comaroff & Roberts 1970). Kinship has also been used to study intimate relationships.

2.6 Methodological nuptialism and kinship

Kinship is about the structure of relationships, i.e. how people relate to one another. Different scholars have studied kinship (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde 1950; Maconis & Plummer 1997; Parkin & Nyamwaya 1987). The focus of studies about how people relate to one another, in anthropology and other related fields like sociology, has predominantly been through blood and marriage. While Radcliffe-Brown & Forde (1950) introduced the perception of kinship and marriage as belonging to an essential African system that defined family and relationships in structural-functional terms, Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987) were critical of and deviated from this model, highlighting important transformations that could not have taken place if the system had been completely 'closed'.

Biology and marriage have been applied as factors determining and establishing how people relate to one another. 'Most families have been built on kinship, a social bond based on blood, marriage and adoption, that joins individuals into families [...] throughout the world families form around marriages, a legally sanctioned relationship involving economic as well as normative sexual activities' (Maconis & Plummer 1997: 436). Kinship structure has been important in understanding how social roles are being defined in family systems, such as the roles and positions of the father, the mother's brother, the cousin, etc., in the sense that structure produces particular roles and positions that are independent of the people who

perform them. For those who perform these roles, there are patterns of expectations regarding what people are supposed to do and how.

Seen in this way, marriage is the way in which relationships are established and maintained. In the patrilineal system, wives marry into the family of the man in an exchange and a bride wealth is given (such as in Botswana). In a matrilineal system, the man marries into the family of the wife, usually in exchange for bride service (such as in Malawi and Ghana). Though in matrilineal societies the man marries into the wife's family, her mother's brother is a very important figure. For this study, I will focus on the patrilineal system as Botswana is a patriarchal society.

Patriarchy is a male dominated social system, with men having authority over women and children. Patriarchy also refers to the dominance of men in social or cultural systems. It may also include social titles being traced through the male line; that is, the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male lineage (Matthews 1940; Kuper 1970). It is a social system in which the father or a male elder has absolute authority over the family group; a form of social organisation in which a male is the head of the family, and descent, kinship and titles are traced through the male lineage. Patriarchy can be associated with patrilineal marriage relations, but also with matrilineal ones, since in both cases the control over the relations and their exchanges may rest firmly in the hands of the (elderly) men of the families involved.

In a patrilineal marriage system, the desire often is to seek how the institution of marriage serves the interest of the patriclan. In this respect, studies have focused on how the understanding of the purpose of the payment of bride wealth has been interrogated and conclusively positioned as structurally serving the interests of men. Kuper (1970) and Matthews (1940) argue that, in fact, bride price serves the purpose of transferring child-bearing powers from the family of the woman to that of the man and his family.

Cohabitation presents a difficulty as it does not seem to conform to the ideal relationship, from patriarchal and patrilineal perspectives in the case of Botswana. For this reason, cohabitation has escaped the interest of many scholars on family life in Africa, especially in Southern Africa. This work argues that by removing all pre-conceived perceptions about cohabitation, as we shall see later, there is much we can learn about this form of union. Failure to study cohabitation in its own right has created a knowledge gap that has resulted in the treatment of cohabitating unions as homogenous. Such approaches are largely informed by studying social sexual relationships through the lens of structural-functionalism.

2.7 Marriage and social positioning

From a structural-functionalist perspective, the study of the meanings and functions of marriage payments become central. For instance, on the importance of the meaning of marriage payments, Comaroff says that '[...] it is often asserted that bride wealth is necessary to affiliate the progeny of a union to the man's agnatic grouping and his heirs' (1980: 171). This view is also shared by Kuper (1963), who carried out a study among the Tswana in South Africa. He found that marriage, facilitated by the exchange of cattle, plays a central role in Tswana society. He states the importance of bride wealth and explains that it has been sustained due to its central role in defining the social status of individuals:

The exchange of cattle for wives, taking a variety of organizational ideological and ritual forms, pervaded traditional, social and cultural life in the region...despite radical changes in the economy and the frontal assault of the missionaries, bride wealth institutions proved to be extremely durable, adapting to varied and indeed revolutionary new circumstances (Kuper 1963: 3).

The role that bride wealth plays in the social positioning of individuals, especially children, arises from the payment of bride wealth as a social structure with a function, i.e. that of defining relations. This has contributed to marriage becoming central in the study of relationships, to the extent that those relationships that had not fulfilled or undergone the exchange of bride wealth were then seen as deviant relationships. For example, as discussed by Nukunya (1967), cohabitation is usually presented as a negative relationship. Nukunya explained the existence of cohabitation in terms of a failed marriage, because, in this case, the parents and their daughters failed to agree on spouse selection. The exchange of bride wealth was so central that:

The transfer of the rights of children was permanent. Children could not be claimed by the wives' relatives even in the event of divorce or in any other circumstances. Moreover, even after the death of the husband the widow was expected to bear children in his name; specific leviratic or seed-raising arrangements were made for the widows of child bearing age (Kuper 1963: 26).

Another contributing factor that has, over time, positioned marriage as the ideal relationship is the function it has performed in defining the status of men and women in society. Many scholars have observed, in different societies, (for example, Schapera studied Bakgatla and Nukunya studied the Ewe), that matrimony gave a new and respectable status to those who got married. Nukunya writes that 'to pass from the category of child to that of adult a girl must go through a full marriage ceremony' (1963: 103). Though I do not dispute the important role played by marriage, the problem is that the sole focus on marriage has led to a way of studying relationships that ignores any other form of relationship in which no bride wealth has been exchanged. For instance, Nukunya also mentions in his study that it was not

always the case that all women of a marriageable age would actually get married. In a similar vein, Dyson-Hudson and Meekers (1996) conducted a study among Turkana males in which they question the universality of marriage.

On this note, Nukunya writes that '[...] the procedure of first becoming a wife has now tended to be reversed and some girls aim at first becoming pregnant and then considering how to make a man marry and maintain them [...] many young men sure wish to make sure that their girlfriends are capable of bearing children before embarking on marriage' (1963: 109). This implies that marriage was not a prerequisite for childbearing. This notion is also expressed in the lyrics of a song by the South African musician, Jonny Mokhali '[...] *ntsholele ngwana ke tle ke go itsise gae, ntsholele ngwana ke tle ke go nyale*' ('give me a child so that I introduce you to my family; give me a child so that I can marry you'). Nukunya further explains the role of sexual intercourse '[...] as the prerogative of married life, and whenever it occurs before marriage or outside marriage, the reaction to it depends on the question whether it can lead to marriage' (*Ibid.*: 67).

However, despite an increase in alternatives to marriage, matrimony is still held as the ideal by which other relations are evaluated. Kuper explains the importance of bride wealth thus: 'the fundamental bride-wealth rule was that the marital rights in women were transferred against the payment of cattle [...] the transfer of rights was permanent' (Kuper 1977: 26). This perception of the rights conferred through marriage has led to a proliferation of studies centred on this particular function of bride wealth in different African societies. The role of marriage in legitimating different categories of individuals according to their rights and obligations has therefore contributed to more studies on marriage than other relationships.

Phillips (1953) captures well the role of the payment of bride wealth:

Legitimate children are secured by marriage in due form, and the importance of securing legitimate descendants accounts for the most characteristic feature of African marriage law (Phillips 1953:1).

It was indeed important to have legitimate children, and this legitimacy was defined by society and was directly related to inheritance, of both property and social position, such as who were the heirs to a chieftaincy. Molokomme (1991), in her book, *Children of the Fence* in which she discusses the legal status of children born out of wedlock in Botswana, shows how the fate of children born to unmarried parents is tied to that of their mother, who cannot inherit intestate, simply because she is not married to their father and is therefore not entitled to his inheritance. She demonstrates how, in Botswana, Christianity and colonialism, with their emphasis on the ideal of a monogamous relationship, have contributed to the view that marriage was the ideal relationship also from a customary standpoint (which had always allowed for many types of marriages) as well as from a colonial and post-colonial perspective. Any woman involved in a non-marriage relationship has not been through the exchange of bride price, which would position any children with their father's kin. This non-performance of the exchange of bride wealth positions such children as illegitimate. On the same note, Colson (1962), who worked among the Tonga in what was then Northern Rhodesia notes that children in African societies have always been valued and cherished. She comments that:

The birth of children provides a new insurance to marriage. The interest of the group which may be at odds over the conflicting rights of husband and wife are joined together in the children of the marriage who bring the groups together (Colson 1962: 147).

She further explores how a Tonga woman, who is unable to have children, laments her infertility: 'when I am old no one will take care of me' (Colson 1962:147). Among the Tonga, it is common to desire children, and especially so within marriage. This inevitably gave marriage an advantaged social position. A transaction involving the rights of the individuals takes place through the exchange of bride price, '[...] by the act of marriage the father and agnatic kindred surrender a greater part of these rights over the daughter to her husband and to his agnatic kindred' (Radcliffe-Brown & Forde 1965: 41). Radcliffe-Brown and Forde state that:

[B]ride wealth also guarantees the husband custody of all children born by his wife [...] bride wealth also helps stabilize a union by dissuading a wife leaving her husband's home at will or at a slight provocation, since bride wealth should be refunded in full upon divorce, it is to the advantage of bride's parents and relatives to try to settle disputes and re-establish cordial relationship between the couple (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1965: 41).

The emphasis placed on the importance of bride wealth therefore presupposes that relationships where bride wealth has not been given are not as significant. This work further demonstrates that, among the Batswana, some cohabiting unions are certainly intended to endure, since provisions are made (as we shall see later) to ensure their longevity. Evans-Pritchard (1990), who studied the Nuer, said of the importance of children, marriage and bride wealth that:

Children are attached by payment of bride wealth to the lineage of their father. They are 'children of the cattle' and therefore of the man in whose name they are paid, and

they become joint in his branch of descent. The man in whose name the cattle were paid is always their pater, the legal or lineage father, whether he is their genitor or not (Evans-Pritchard 1990: 98).

The importance attached to marriage in most African societies influenced the focus of early anthropologists who studied relationships in the continent. I argue that while there was a focus on marital relations, other relations remained under-studied. Even when other forms of relationships were acknowledged, as in the case of Schapera, marriage still took precedence. Thus, early anthropologists deprived their readership of an understanding of other relationships and their place in the 'structure' of society as compared to formal marriage.

I acknowledge, here, Evans-Pritchard's (1940) work among the Nuer, which recognised other forms of marriage. What I found interesting in his work is that the Nuer do not treat relationships within marriage as homogenous. There are multiple marriages that are socially recognized, including what he describes as ghost marriages⁶ and levirate⁷ marriages which are common in some African societies (Schapera (1939) among the Batswana). He also discusses rare marriages in which a woman can marry another woman (not a homosexual marriage since no sex actually takes place between the two women) (Evans-Pritchard 1940). The only accepted condition for such a marriage is that at least one of the women marrying must be infertile and has reached the menopause. This woman, who is unable to have children, then counts as a man and is then, afforded certain privileges that are usually reserved for men. For instance, she can inherit cattle. Evans-Pritchard adds that a woman who is infertile:

⁶ A ghost marriage is a marriage where a deceased groom is replaced by his brother. The brother serves as a stand in to the bride, and any resulting children are considered children of the deceased spouse. [...] Among the Nuer, a ghost marriage is nearly as common as a marriage to a live man.

⁷ Levirate marriage is a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow, and the widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother

Practices as a magician or diviner and thereby acquires further cattle and if she is rich, she can marry several wives. She is their legal husband and can demand damage if they have relations with other men without her consent (Evans-Pritchard 1990: 108–109).

However, it should be noted that, although the Nuer acknowledge such relationships, these relationships are ‘proper’ marriages, since bride wealth is given. Likewise, by studying cohabitation for its own sake, this study argues that cohabiting relationships need to be disaggregated to have a clearer picture of what they actually are. Evans-Pritchard’s (1945) discussion of non-marital relationships was in a way exceptional in examining relationships that seem to be outside the norm. Writing about non-marital relationships, Evans-Pritchard pointed out that a woman in such a relationship is derogatorily referred to as having no ‘cattle on her back’ (*Ibid.*: 119). He also talks of a relationship in which a poor man can only afford half of the bride wealth. His in-laws accept this, but this does not free the woman from the social stigma arising from the incomplete payment, and she is referred to as ‘half concubine, half wife’ (*Ibid.*).

Such intolerance towards these kinds of relationships can be interpreted as arising from the elevated status of marriage. Has this social reality influenced social science in the study of these processes in such a way that marriage is made the standard by which other relations are being interpreted? It is important to acknowledge that societies have their own norms and values, i.e. marriage as the ideal relationship, yet there is need to understand where these values come from, who the protagonists are and how such values often work to the exclusion and marginalisation of those who appear not to live up to such expectations. This study argues that, in order to avoid methodological nuptialism, we must firstly understand where and how prescriptions and a pursuit of monogamous marriages came from.

Who in society is advantaged and disadvantaged by this? And how did such relationships develop? How and why did the social science of marriage and kinship preference the view that marriage is the ideal focus for research on relationships in Africa? How can this perspective on the centrality of marriage as the starting point for exploring relationships be de-centred? This study argues that making a particular relationship central to the study of other relationships is influenced by and influences how these other relationships are understood and perceived. I contend that, since society, anthropologists and other social scientists working in the society in question have given so much emphasis to marriage and bride wealth, any relationship lacking these characteristics are often treated as trivial and insignificant.

Literature on studies of African kinship reveals that marriage and, in particular the exchange of bride wealth, has been the focus of scholars and anything that does not fit into the prescribed form of relationship is treated as trivial and consequently given derogatory names. The undisputed fact is that such relationships exist. As we shall see in this work, it is not the failure to get married that is problematic, but the methodologies that have been adopted in the study of relationships that have placed marriage as central.

This study reveals that cohabiting unions are not homogenous and the couples in question are not always 'hopeless about their situation'. The social status of marriage and the extensive literature on marriage has, over time, placed marriage as a starting and reference point when discussing, understanding and engaging with other social-sexual relationships.

In Botswana, as elsewhere in Africa, marriage has increasingly been challenged as the ideal form of union by the rise in alternatives to marriage, the availability of alternative sexualities such as homosexuality and advances in the protection of human rights. In the following section, I will demonstrate how similar arguments have been raised in kinship studies, where defining relatedness through marriage and blood ties are being challenged by

advances in bio-medicine. The purpose of the next section is to demonstrate that in the same way that advances in medical sciences have proven that relatedness can take different forms, relationships, too, can be created in different alternatives.

2.8 Developments in family formation

This section diverts focus from the structural-functionalist approach to alternatives to relatedness in order to demonstrate and explore other ways that relatedness has been established. This will demonstrate the importance of the study of cohabitation in its own right. Studies have questioned marriage and blood as the basis of relatedness; likewise, marriage as the basis for family formation is questioned by the rise of alternate family formations such as cohabitation.

2.8.1 Alternatives to kinship

Carsten's (2000) *Cultures of Relatedness*, questions the long-standing prescriptions of relatedness that place marriage and blood relations at the center of how people form ties. The purpose of exploring the Carsten's study on relatedness is to demonstrate that if the definition of relatedness through blood and marriage has been successfully challenged by advances in bio-medicine, then this could be a cue for social science to avoid a primary focus on marriage as the dominant form through which kinship is established.

In her preface, Carsten says that:

Our understanding of what makes a person a relative has been transformed by radical changes in marriage arrangements and gender relations and by new reproductive genealogies. We can no longer take it for granted that our most fundamental relationships are grounded in biology or nature (Carsten 2000, preface).

Carsten mentions that we are always conscious of our connections to other people, and that these connections carry different weights, be it socially, materially or affectionately. She then points out that these connections can be described in more than just genealogical terms (Carsten *Ibid.*: 1). However, such an approach to explaining how people become related is ‘deceptively simple’ (*Ibid.*: 2), since there are some forms of relatedness, such as friendship, that are not necessarily genealogical, but which are very meaningful and important. A particular and restricted way of understanding society, marriage, relatedness, role allocation, etc., becomes a challenge when alternative ways emerge. Developments in bio-medical science, including the increasing ability to control and arrange reproduction have produced ‘fictive kinship’ (*Ibid.*). This is also strengthened by adoption, fostering and other models of kin relations that are becoming part and parcel of society today.

2.8.2 *Development of bio-medical science*

Children have always been central in African life (Schapera 1939; Mbiti 1975; Kuper 1977) and most societies in Africa have always had ways of dealing with childlessness. For instance, Mogobe (2005) carried out a study in Botswana among women who were infertile and found that they preferred to embrace bio-medical rather than traditional options. The traditional way of addressing childlessness was by adopting a child of a relative (Boschow, 2012). However, with advances in medicine, women are shunning such adoptions also because of the disadvantages that are associated with the traditional options:

The identity of the biological parents is never a secret, as a result as the child grows up, people are likely to tell them that this woman is not your real mother [...] the child may eventually return [...] (Mogobe 2005: 33).

Mogobe demonstrates above how the traditional ways of defining family are challenged by advances in bio-medicine as they give infertile women better and more fulfilling options. For instance, women with fertility problems would rather seek medical assistance than adopt a child of a close relative. Traditional social structures like polygamy can no longer adequately solve problems of infertility. On this point, Pishigan (2009) says that, over the course of centuries, polygamy has served as a solution to infertility in the absence of effective technological or medical solutions. With advances in the bio-medical field, other solutions have emerged: surrogacy, adoption, in-vitro fertilisation and human cloning. These alternatives have resulted in new types of families not tied by biology and blood. For instance, human cloning, despite its ethical concerns (see Burley & Harris 1999; Harris 1999), cloning is gradually becoming an option to address the issue of infertility for infertile couples and helping homosexuals to have children who are related to them. Strong (2005), in favour of cloning, states:

Cloning combined with genetic modification can be ethically justifiable when out by infertile, lesbian and gay couples as a means to have children with a genetic relationship to both members of the couple (Strong 2005: 654).

Theoretically, these bio-medical ways of establishing kinship extend the range of circumstances under which relatedness can be established. We can no longer argue that kinship and biology are the only factors important in defining how relatedness is created. The idea here is to demonstrate how paying particular attention to each has led to a better understanding and appreciation of relatedness, so that these alternatives have, over time, become accepted, both socially and legally, as alternatives to 'family'.

Different contributors to the Carsten's volume *Cultures of Relatedness* (2000) demonstrate how the understanding of relatedness through biology is inadequate for defining relatedness in contemporary society. They 'reject a highly formal analysis, emphasising local practices and discourses of relatedness, and demonstrating how these impinge on and transform each other' (Ibid.:14). A classic case in Carsten's work is one in which a terminally ill patient, lying in a coma, had his sperm taken from him and placed in a sperm bank. There was a heated debate when his widow wanted to be artificially inseminated with the sperm of her dead husband. This is because the idea of a man 'conceiving' a baby posthumously contradicts our everyday understanding of how people make babies. What would the relationship between the baby and the dead man be? How do we explain the nature of the relationship that exists between a child that was adopted at infancy with that of her biological kin? Do they feel related? These developments in reproductive medicine: sperm and egg donation, surrogacy, in-vitro fertilisation and cloning have shaken 'our most fundamental assumptions about kinship as a domain in which relationships are given rather than produced through technological intervention' (Carsten 2004: 163). Such studies demonstrate, without discrediting marriage, how other developments are competing with marriage in the social arena. The new bio-medical techniques are relevant as they question the natural ways of relatedness. This strengthens the argument that cohabitation can and should be studied independent of marriage.

2.9 Conclusion

The argument is that though marriage and blood relations are important in the understanding of how families are formulated and relations defined, other ways of becoming related have emerged. New developments question blood and marital relations and the fragility of marriage is reflected in the high rates of divorce and the growth of alternatives.

The rising number of divorces worldwide epitomise how even relations based on marriage are vulnerable. In her 2004 publication, Carsten demonstrates the complexities of relatedness. She argues that though it is true that kinship is ‘part of the given, natural order of things,’ it is also true that relatedness is ‘shaped by human engagements’ (2004: 6). She further explains that kinship may be viewed as something that is determined at birth and is unchangeable; or, it may be seen as something shaped by the ordinary, everyday activities of family life, as well as the scientific endeavours of geneticists and clinicians involved in fertility treatment or prenatal medicine (*Ibid.*).

Carsten then concludes that such works demonstrate that kinship is no longer a given that is defined through ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ facts. She questions the traditional assumptions in kinship studies that took as a starting point for understanding relationships that ‘sexual procreation was universally perceived as the basis of kinship’ (*Ibid.*: 164). The advances in medical technology have become strong alternatives to or substitutes for procreation through sex.

This work does not disregard the relevance of marriage in anyway, but calls for a more objective discussion of other relationships. Non-marital unions run the risk of being marginalised, ignored, and problematised. Yet, there is a historical and cultural record of cohabitation that may tell us much about the strength of marital ideology. Therefore, this work argues that such an approach has led to the glossing over issues that might have led to different conclusions about cohabitation in Botswana.

The next chapter explores methodological nuptialism and fieldwork, highlighting how the ‘individual,’ a researcher, is part of the data that they collect and analyse.