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6 Types of Marriage and Marital Stability: The Case of the Moba-Gurma of North Togo

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Whereas anthropological research has documented considerable diversity and complexity of marriage systems in African societies, demographic studies of marriage have fallen short. Demographers are particularly handicapped because their concepts and methods were developed for European populations and the kinds of marriage they recognized were quite limited in scope. Because European marriage is monogamous, for example, such studies did not need to distinguish among the statuses of wives or children in polygynous households.

As a result of more diverse research on the family, the study of marriage has drawn renewed interest from demographers. Our study, conducted among the Moba-Gurma of Togo, builds on this increasing interest in marriage trends. It also builds on a series of projects concerning the populations of Togo. In his study of the populations of the Dayes plateau, for example, Vimard recorded marital ruptures by type of marriage: traditional, consensual union, religious, and civil marriage (Vimard, 1983). And Locoh's (1984) work on south-eastern Togo developed a typology for unions, particularly taking into account the fact of separate spousal residence. The findings presented here stem from a rural demographic survey done in 1985 among the Moba-Gurma of north Togo. The data come from retrospective questionnaires which attempted to retrace the marital histories of men and women of all ever-married men and women present in the sample households (896 men and 1,501 women).

This article aims to show the importance of taking specific characteristics into account for studying marriage and marriage change: in particular, type of marriage and dissolution, whether the union is the first for the individual, and whether the woman has the status of first wife. After presenting the different types of marriage observed and examining their positions in the marriage system taken as a whole, the paper will focus on their distribution and how it has changed. Describing the different ways in which unions may end, the article then attempts to shed light on how marital stability can be

affected by the type of marriage and whether a woman is the 'first wife' in a polygynous marriage.

Ethnographic Background

The Moba and the Gurma are concentrated in the extreme rural north of Togo. At the 1981 census, 88 per cent of those in Togo resided in the Prefecture of Tône, where they comprise most of the population. The Moba, generally recognized as the prior group, live predominantly in the western part of the district; the conquering Gurma, who began arriving in the eighteenth century, live largely in the east. Though conquerors, Gurma seem to have adopted many of the social and religious practices of the Moba, and together these groups became sufficiently homogenous that we can safely speak of them as one.

Moba-Gurma society is patrilineal and patrilocal. The only visible grouping in space is the residential compound (*naag*), a focus of production and consumption. Living in domestic groups with an average size of nine people, people farm collectively under the authority of an older male head.

Fertility is a central value. Numbers bespeak the power of one clan *vis-à-vis* another. The system of production, relying on human work, requires an ample body of kin to assure the subsistence of the group and later of parents. Social status for the woman therefore rests on her fertility. For men, prestige rests on the number of wives and children. A man, if his descendants are numerous, will be guaranteed the status of a revered ancestor whose name will be pronounced often (Agounké *et al.*, 1991). Male status and well-being ultimately depend on gaining dependants. Men, therefore, need wives who can bear children. Marriage is based on the principle of exogamous exchange among clans and polygyny. Polygyny is extremely important (Pontié and Pilon, 1990). Early female age at marriage, almost inevitable remarriage among still-fecund widows and divorcees, virtual non-existence of unmarried women, and the practice of polygyny all lead to a high fertility rate among both men and women.

Since the beginning of French colonization, the Moba-Gurma area has seen temporary labour migration directed essentially towards Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and involving mostly young men and single people (Pilon and Pontié, 1991). For those who remain, extensive subsistence agriculture continues to occupy more than 90 per cent of the population. Principal crops include millet, sorghum, and beans. Although cash crops such as groundnuts and cotton constitute a small part of the crop, they also constitute the principal source of monetary revenue, particularly for women and young men, who cultivate them on their personal fields. The combined effect of a rapid demographic increase and the absence of an actual agricultural intensification

leads to an increasing imbalance among population and resources (Pilon, 1991*b*).

Marriage Types among the Moba-Gurma

The logic of exchange of women, the rule of clan exogamy, the practice of polygyny, and the levirate determine the basic structure of marital life among the Moba-Gurma. Several types of marriage may be identified:

marriage by exchange, *puokpedu*
brideservice marriage, or marriage by work, *puokuul*
child betrothal or marriage by promise, *puopaab*
marriage by 'abduction' or consensual union, *puotugnu*
leviratic marriage, *pekual fallu*
marriage by reimbursement/payment, *taalon* (or *puoton*)
bridewealth marriage

Marriage by Exchange (or marriage by work). For various reasons (friendship, alliance strategies, etc.), two heads of domestic groups or lineages (*yaamul*) not belonging to the same clan may decide to exchange young women. This is reflected in the formulaic statement: 'I give you my sister, you give me yours.' The principal justification for marriage by exchange, generally voiced by the elders, is that it enables all men, most notably physically handicapped men, to obtain a wife, as long as they have a woman to exchange (Pontié, 1978). This system of exchange might seem to pose a problem for groups with more eligible males than females. However, the system is in fact quite flexible. Although the woman being exchanged should be in the clan of the man who exchanges her, their kin relationship can be classificatory. Eligibility may extend therefore to many members of the same lineage; there may also be a generational difference between the two members; and the exchange may be simultaneous or deferred.

Brideservice Marriage. For a man who does not have an actual or classificatory sister to exchange, another means of getting a wife entails going to work each year in the fields of a family from whom he eventually expects to obtain a wife. It is said that this is 'a wife earned by the hoe' (*puokuul*). The completion of such a marriage can take years, depending on the age of the girl when the prospective husband begins to work and the length of time her parents can draw out the labour requirement. Though in-laws obviously value this route to marriage, it is the most costly for the suitor in terms of his labour, gifts of millet to the woman's mother, and even financial assistance.

Child Betrothal or Marriage by Promise. In gratitude for services rendered (agricultural work, financial assistance, loans of land, etc.) or in witness to a friendship, a head of a family or lineage may decide to make a gift of a woman to the man. To do so, he may promise a young daughter (either

actual or classificatory) in marriage or perhaps even one not yet born. The middle class translate this practice in French as 'marriage by promise', though we use the phrase 'child betrothal' here, the more common referent in English. *Tigpuo* designates one particular kind of such promise: if a healer manages to cure an infertile woman or one whose children all died young, the first girl to be born to the woman may be promised to him or to someone in his family, as long as he is not of the same clan.

Marriage by 'Abduction', or Consensual Union. Translating this kind of union as 'abduction' sounds quite archaic. Hence, some explanation is in order. First, this type of marriage must not be confused with a real practice of abduction of women (*puosuolu*), which has now disappeared, in part because of colonial influences. Previously, certain clans had the reputation of being 'woman stealers'. The abduction of a woman took place during armed conflicts, which were themselves often brought on by 'women's affairs'.

Second, the term nowadays is largely metaphorical. *Puotugnu*, 'to take away a woman', now refers to consensual unions, the only situation in which a woman has a decisive say in choosing her husband rather than having her marriage arranged by her family. To retain the flavour of the literal expression, however, we translate it as 'marriage by abduction'. More importantly, this translation, rather than 'consensual union', more aptly captures the sense, as we will see, of a woman being taken, usually from an arranged marriage, by another man.

A woman who is 'abducted' may be a single woman, already promised in marriage or not, or she may be married. The two parties agree to meet one day in an arranged place; and the woman lets herself be 'abducted'. Particularly in the past, when this form of marriage was considerably more frowned upon, the couple might leave the village and go to live in neighbouring Ghana, to avoid the anger of their parents and to wait for feelings to be soothed before returning to 'negotiate the affair'.

As we can see, the term 'abduction'—a literal translation of the Moba word used by the educated class—seems inadequate since the woman is consenting, and willingly leaves the conjugal or parental home to join her new partner. But in Moba-Gurma society, which is both patrilineal and patrilocal, and where power resides very much with men, people have difficulty attributing this initiative to the woman's own will: it is not the woman who leaves; it is the man who takes her away. It is from him or from his family that recompense will be demanded for the act. Compensation may be made in two ways: either a girl is given to replace the one who was taken away, or the pledged fiancé or former husband is reimbursed for what he paid for the marriage.

For a married man, abducting a woman can be an expeditious means of acquiring a new wife. For women, getting abducted is the only way to have a clear voice in choosing their own husbands. Yet marriage by abduction is

also important for young men. For a single young man who should ideally wait to marry until all his older brothers have been wed, access to women is, in effect, controlled by the fortunes of his older siblings. Hence, abduction brings flexibility to a rigid marriage rule which can necessitate a long period of bachelorhood.

In economic terms, marriage plays a key role. For the head of a domestic group, the marriage of his dependants can enlarge the amount of farm labour available to the family, but it also poses a risk of segmenting the unit of production. Yet for a young man, such segmentation is advantageous. In effect, marriage allows him to escape a situation in which his labour is used by his father or older sibling, and to create his own household, in his turn, as the head of an independent economic unit.

Leviratic Marriage. The levirate, a common practice in Africa, requires that when a husband dies, his wife (or wives) be inherited or taken in by his younger brother or another family member. Women who have passed menopause are commonly allowed to stay with one of their sons; widows who are still in their reproductive years sometimes refuse to marry the designated agnate and marry someone else instead. But in such cases, the husband's family usually pressures them to continue to fulfil their conjugal duties by expanding the family of the deceased, depending on the age of the widow and the importance of her own family line.

Marriage by Reimbursement. Although I have described the exchange of women as a discrete type of Moba-Gurma marriage, women are exchanged in a larger systemic sense as well. Thus, even when a man obtains a wife by brideservice or by child betrothal, he (or his family or clan) are expected to give back a woman to the clan of his wife at a later date to replace the one taken. Similarly, in exchange for a widow who has left to remarry into another clan, the family of the new husband is expected to give back a widow.

No matter what form the original marriage took, families enter exchange relationships, all of which are expressed in terms of a 'woman-debt to repay'. Such a debt may take years to pay back, and may be passed on to subsequent generations, but in principle it will be honoured. According to our survey, only 8 per cent of men married by brideservice or by gift declared that they would not give back a woman from their family or lineage after taking one from another group.

This exchange process follows a logic of reciprocity or equilibrium, which forms the basis of social, economic, and political life of Moba-Gurma society. A proverb says that 'the clan that is great in number is also great in strength'. Through her fertility, a married woman contributes to the growth of her husband's clan; thus it is necessary that a woman from his clan come to replace her to re-establish the equilibrium. When an extant marriage is broken by an abduction, the husband's family will seek to re-establish equilibrium by creating a new marriage through a 'replacement woman'. When an exchange relationship already in place is upset when one of the two women who was exchanged returns to her own family, the injured husband's family has the right to take back the woman it originally gave in exchange or 'reimbursement' (the term *puopiidi* is used). In this case, the equilibrium is re-established by the annulment of the exchange relationship.

This logic of 'reimbursement' or 'replacement' places considerable pressure on women. A woman who marries but for whom no replacement is given is perceived badly because her departure has created a demographic and political imbalance between clans, to the detriment of her own. Ritual measures can give her family ways of pressuring her husband's family to provide a replacement. When her child becomes ill, the diviner or soothsayer (*jaba*) may be consulted to determine the origin of the illness and the appropriate curative measures to carry out. These may include acquiring *tigban* (personal protective medicine) for the mother, which can be given only by her father or an older sibling. So when a woman without replacement has an ill child, her family may refuse to give her *tigban*, trying to force the husband's family to provide the replacement if its sick child is to survive.

The logic of marriage exchange is thus observed in the four following types of marriage: marriage by exchange, by brideservice, by child betrothal, and by reimbursement. Each of these consists of an arrangement between families, where the future bride must accept the husband chosen for her, without her input. Although marriage by abduction can also result in establishing an exchange relationship, this type of marriage is different from the other types in that the bride gives her consent, and thus escapes active control of the older siblings and of the families. Though I do not want to overemphasize this distinction, the term 'consensual union' may be used in place of 'abduction', and the four other types of marriage may be regrouped under the rubric of 'arranged marriage'.

Bridewealth Marriage. In Africa, the term bridewealth (translated by francophone middle class people as 'dowry') applies to marriages for which the families arranged, beforehand, the amount, the composition, and the payment schedule for what some call the 'price of the fiancée'. If a man can produce an adequate bridewealth, in theory his obligations towards his in-laws end.

This type of marriage did not traditionally exist among the Moba-Gurma. Certainly, except for levirate and marriage by abduction, the suitor will have to make a certain number of outlays (gifts of millet to the mother, animals, kola nuts for the ceremonies, eventually financial aid), even aside from the labour he may have been required to perform before the woman was delivered. One may even hear it said that a man has 'dowried' his daughter, although situations vary tremendously. Moreover, marrying by bridewealth does not replace the exchange relationship. The future husband or his family is still expected eventually to give a woman to his wife's family, thus 'replacing' her.

TABLE 6.1. *Types of marriage by marriage order and sex, for marriages entered during 1980–1985 (%)*

Types of marriage	Marriage order						
	Men				Women		
	1	2	3	Total	1	2	Total
Exchange	35.8	26.9	24.1	30.9	34.2	14.9	30.0
Brideservice	4.2	2.3	10.8	4.9	5.8	—	4.6
Child betrothal	17.2	25.4	27.7	21.7	26.7	7.4	22.6
Reimbursement	8.8	13.1	4.8	9.3	11.3	—	8.9
Abduction	31.2	20.8	13.3	24.6	22.0	31.9	24.1
Bridewealth	—	0.7	—	0.2	—	1.1	0.2
Levirate	2.8	10.8	19.3	8.4		44.7	9.6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(No.)	(215)	(130)	(83)	(428)	(345)	(94)	(439)

The rare Moba-Gurma men who practise marriage by bridewealth are often those who marry women of other ethnic groups (most notably the Koussasi of Ghana, the Mossi and Boussance of Burkina-Faso) by offering four or five bulls to the bride's family. Sometimes in Moba-Gurma land one hears of problems of bridewealth repayment, an expression which may confuse the issue (Lare-Kombate, 1982). This concept usually applies only in the case of divorce or the abduction of a woman who is already betrothed or married. The reimbursement mentioned in such cases refers to all that the husband (or fiancé) has spent to acquire and maintain the woman who left him, and is therefore cast as a compensation for the 'suffering' he has endured.

The Current Distribution of the Types of Marriage and its Change over Time

Table 6.1 displays the actual distribution of types of marriage and their change in prevalence through time, as measured through the sequences of marriages for individual men and women. It reveals enormous diversity, particularly in terms of order for the two sexes. For men, the proportion of all marriages that are arranged remains approximately the same, whatever the temporal order in which they were contracted. Yet within this broad category, the internal distribution is quite different, according to order. The frequency of marriage by exchange decreases with order, while those of marriage by brideservice and by child betrothal increase. Marriage by abduction is common especially for the first marriage (31.2 per cent of the total), its frequency

declining for higher orders. Leviratic marriage is the opposite: very low for first marriages (2.8 per cent), but comprising nearly one in five (19.3 per cent) marriages of order three or higher, as men's mortality risks increase.

For women, the situation is very different. For their first marriages, nearly 80 per cent of women entered arranged marriages, the rest marrying by abduction. Subsequent marriages (in case of widowhood or dissolution) in contrast, are dominated by the practice of levirate (44.7 per cent of the total). Next comes abduction, making up nearly a third (31.9 per cent) of remarriages; and arranged marriages constitute the minority (22.3 per cent).

If the way of starting married life differs little by sex (except in the case of the levirate, since women cannot inherit a sister's husband), ways of remarrying vary considerably. (The practice of polygyny creates the potential for even more diverse marriage histories for conjugal partners in terms of experiences and strategy.) For men, marriage by abduction is done mostly by single men; for women, by contrast, it is more common among those who are remarrying. It is certainly more difficult for a young woman to refuse an arranged marriage, because it is, to a certain extent, forced. Instead, a common strategy for a young woman and her parents is to collude: in order to avoid putting her family in an awkward situation, a young woman will accept the chosen (that is, imposed) husband; then after just a few months, get herself 'abducted'. Her family is thus relieved from any obligations, and the burden of settling on compensation is shifted to her husband and the man who abducted her. It is clearly very difficult to have a statistical measure of this type of situation.

The current distribution of types of marriage seen in Table 6.1 also suggests changes that have occurred over time. I do not have access to any statistical knowledge of this distribution or evolution during the precolonial period, though considerable changes undoubtedly accompanied colonization. As mentioned earlier, for example, marriage by real abduction disappeared in part as a result of the colonial influence in the country.

In any event, taking all the marriages recorded during the most recent period, between 1980 and 1985, we can make the following observations:

- The first four kinds of marriage taken together, which constitute 'arranged' marriages, make up two-thirds of the total, with a net predominance of marriage by exchange (about a third) and by child betrothal (a bit more than one-fifth); brideservice marriage is the least likely to be recorded (a bit less than 5 per cent).
- Marriage by abduction (that is, consensual union) represents nearly a quarter of the total, which shows its importance in contemporary marriage.
- The practice of leviratic marriage makes up a bit less than 10 per cent of marriages.
- Bridewealth marriage is very marginal indeed; only one case was recorded. For this reason, I eliminate this category from subsequent tables.

The data from the 1985 survey, which retraced the lifetime marriage experience of men and women, permit us to look more systematically at changes over time in the types of marriage, at least for the most recent decades. Table 6.2 illustrates this by looking at first and second marriages of men. Since the type of union entered may vary according to its order, taking this into account is necessary to avoid the risk of bias in the data, which overrepresent first marriages.

While the table dates changes only in relative terms (from men's first to their second marriages), it suggests the following trends: a decline in the levirate and of marriages by brideservice and reimbursement, a stabilizing of marriages by child betrothal, a recent increase in marriage by abduction, an increase in marriage by exchange, and a decline in the overall proportion of arranged marriages.

Men are now more hesitant to initiate a long period of brideservice in hopes of marrying, because young women increasingly refuse to have husbands imposed on them. This type of marriage is the most costly for the man, and many years may pass before the marriage actually takes place. Men do not want to risk 'suffering for nothing', in the local parlance. For these same reasons the inverse may be true for marriage by exchange which is now quite desired: it is more quickly concluded if the young women are willing, and it requires fewer expenses.

The declines in all types of arranged marriages and the levirate and the parallel increases in marriage by mutual consent or abduction support the informal observations by local people that the rationales of the old marriage system are being set aside. At least at an individual level, changes are assuredly taking place in the direction of greater personal freedom, especially for women. Although one cannot measure the real impact, Togo's legal code of 1980 concerning individuals and the family is probably intensifying this change by requiring the mutual and free consent of the future spouses and by discouraging monetary payments for women at marriage.

A parallel analysis by marriage order for women (not shown here) supports similar conclusions. The increase in marriage by abduction—that is, consensual unions—is more marked among young single women: from a level of 10 per cent before 1960 (and only 4 per cent before 1950), its relative proportion rose to 22 per cent in 1980–5.

Impact of Type of Marriage on Marital Stability

Standard demographic analyses of marital instability generally limit themselves to two ways marriages may end—the death of one of the spouses, or divorce—with no distinctions among the causes and forms that might reveal some important patterns specific to men and women and about marital dissolution in general. Our survey recorded only the type of dissolution and the

identity of the person who claimed to have made the decision or to have taken the more active role. From these data, however, we were able to create a typology reflecting four forms of dissolution:

The husband sends the wife home (*puonyanu*). For various reasons, the man may decide to repudiate his wife, whatever the type of marriage, declaring that he owes nothing to his in-laws. Interestingly, a wife's sterility is not a legitimate reason to send a wife away since polygyny is seen as a means of solving this problem. (By contrast, the Togolese Code on individuals and the family recognizes sterility, either the woman's or the man's, as legitimate cause for divorce.) If the man himself is sterile, his wife is seen as justified in becoming pregnant by his brother, but she usually does so without the husband's knowledge. As in most African societies, 'social fatherhood' is more important than 'biological fatherhood'.

The wife's departure to her family (*u tun u baa nag*). In this case it is the wife who leaves her husband and returns to her parents. The causes may be many: mistreatment by the husband, lack of support for her and her children, rivalries between co-wives, or sterility. The latter is seen as especially justified because of the high value of fertility for both women and men. A woman without children is poorly regarded; when she dies she will not have the right to a normal burial. Leaving a sterile husband, therefore, is considered legitimate; but even when the soothsayer (*jaba*) attributes sterility to her, the wife, in her desperation for children, may prefer to leave and take her chances elsewhere. In either case, her family must give compensation in the form of money or another wife.

The wife's departure for another man (*u nyi jab*). This usually falls under the category of abduction.

The wife's family takes her back (*puopiidi*). This form of dissolution is linked to the logic of marriage exchange. If a woman involved in a marriage exchange leaves her husband, her in-laws are considered justified in 'taking back home' the woman they had previously given to her family in the initial exchange. Since this dissolution is the direct consequence of another dissolution or abduction, carrying it out is beyond the control of the spouses, who may thus even find themselves separated from one another against their wishes.

The data in Table 6.2 on men's and women's reports of how their unions dissolved, taken from individuals' marital histories, reveal relatively consistent reports between the sexes. One interesting difference, however, emerges when we compare men's versus the women's reports of the dissolutions that result from the man sending his wife home and those resulting from the wife's decision to leave. Women are more likely to declare that they left than men are to admit that their wives left (47 versus 32 per cent); by contrast, men are more likely to declare that they sent their wives home than women are to admit being sent (16 versus 7 per cent). Although such ambiguities pose obvious problems for interpretation, this disagreement is not surprising.

TABLE 6.2. *Forms of marital dissolution, by sex* (total marriages, %)

Form of dissolution	Men	Women
Sending wife home	16	7
Wife leaves	32	47
Abduction	15	14
Family takes wife	37	32
TOTAL	100	100
(No.)	(99)	(131)

TABLE 6.3. *Dissolved marriages, by type of marriage (excluding marriages ended by the death of one spouse)*

Type of marriage	%	(No.)
Exchange	8	(862)
Brideservice	12	(134)
Child betrothal	8	(531)
Reimbursement	8	(328)
Abduction	11	(584)
Levirate	6	(241)

We would expect individuals to prefer to say that they rejected the spouse, rather than admit being rejected.

Besides determining the frequency of various types of dissolution, we also need to ask how likely it is that marriages of various kinds will dissolve. Marriages by levirate, as Table 6.3 shows, are the most stable. Since these are not first marriages for women, they generally involve older women, many of whom may be beyond their fertile years. Although her dead husband's family may pressure a widow to stay among them (particularly if she is still fertile), marrying her dead husband's brother allows her to remain in an environment that is already familiar to her, probably near some of her children. Many of these women, indeed, are regarded as burdensome; many leviratic 'marriages' consist of little more than charitable caretaking for old women. Still, such unions are extremely stable because these women have few other marital options at this point.

The fact that the greatest instability is found among marriages initiated originally through abduction seems to run counter to common sense since these unions reflect mutual consent of the partners, when compared with the rigidity imposed by the collective family will in arranged marriages. Yet their instability is not surprising when we realize that the same liberty and flexibility that brought them into being also facilitates their dissolution. Dissolving

TABLE 6.4. *Type of marriage by forms of dissolution (%)*

Type of marriage	Action by husband	Action by others			%	(No.)
	Wife evicted	Wife abducted	Wife left	Family took wife		
Men's reports						
Arranged	9	23	28	40	100	(77)
Abduction	25	7	29	39	100	(31)
Women's reports						
Arranged	5	16	46	33	100	(71)
Abduction	17	9	44	30	100	(33)

contractual marriages, that is, involves breaking political alliances as well as the loss of heavy financial investments by two families, while conjugal partners who marry by abduction find it easier to break a union that only they themselves created. Moreover, a man who has spent less on behalf of an abducted wife worries less about parting with her. As for the woman, unless her abduction is followed by reimbursement to her family, she is not subject to the family pressures that would loom large in other cases.

For men, of course, marriage by abduction does not preclude a subsequent contractual marriage or even polygyny. A married man can always become polygynous by abducting another woman. And if his first marriage was created by abduction, there is nothing to prevent him from obtaining subsequent wives through contractual marriage. Thus, for men aged 50 and over, the retrospective rate of polygyny[1] (that is, the maximum number of spouses a man has had simultaneously at any point in his life) is higher among men who have been married at least once by abduction (80 per cent) than among those who have entered only contractual marriages (61 per cent). The mean numbers of marriages entered are 2.85 and 1.99 respectively.

One of the most important findings of the study is that how unions begin is related to how they end. Because of the small sample size, I focus only on the distinction between marriage by abduction and the various marriages that I have classified as arranged (marriages contracted through exchange, brideservice, child betrothal, and reimbursement). This distinction, shown in Table 6.4, thus reflects two quite different kinds of marriage: marriages by the partners' mutual consent and those controlled by the families. The reports of men and women, though shown separately, are quite similar. For facility, we will describe only the figures that reflect the men's reports.

To be sure, type of marriage and type of dissolution are not wholly independent of each other. A couple whose marriage began with abduction generally will not go through a formal 'divorce' procedure—for the simple reason that there was no state of official marriage from which to divorce, unless the

arrangement was later legitimated or reimbursed by the families. Yet this fact makes the following results all the more significant.

Table 6.4 helps us to discern whether having an arranged marriage or a marriage by abduction affects how the marriage ends. The first thing to notice is that whether a man began with arrangement or abduction seems to have little effect on whether the wife left or her family took her back (the two variables on the right). Whether the man sent the wife home or another man abducted her do seem to have important effects, though. Reading down the first column, we see that a husband is much more likely to send his wife home if he acquired her by abduction than if he acquired her by formal arrangement. A likely reason is that a man who married his wife formally but later sends her back does not in principle have the right to reimbursement by her family. Hence, the small number of cases of eviction among arranged marriages may reflect the fact that a man who married a woman formally ('arranged' marriage) risks the loss of a substantial investment by evicting her. Clearly, a man who initially paid nothing for a woman has less to lose by evicting her.

The second column shows, by contrast, that a marriage that begins by arrangement is much more likely to end by another man abducting the woman than a marriage that itself began by abduction. Three factors probably explain this result. First, as we saw above, a husband is reluctant to evict a wife he acquired through a formally arranged marriage. Second, a man who wishes to marry a woman who is already married through a formal arrangement would be expected to provide a heavy reimbursement to the husband. Seeking to escape this obligation, he may elope with her. Finally, women are increasingly resistant to having husbands imposed on them in arranged marriages. Since 1972, when a 'colloquium on the social problems of the district of Dapaong' brought local leaders together, arranged marriage has comprised a topic of much public debate, and the term 'forced' marriage has often been used in such contexts (Collectif, 1972), a phrase probably introduced by the Catholic missions during the colonial period. A woman, therefore, may be anxious to escape such a marriage by agreeing to elope with—that is, be abducted by—a lover.

Somewhat ironically, then, while marriages that begin by arrangement are likely to end in abduction, marriages that begin by abduction are likely to end in eviction.

Marital Stability and the Status of the First Wife

Type of marriage not only influences marital stability and dissolution type among all couples, it also appears to have a great deal of impact on marital stability among polygynous wives. As in other societies that practise polygyny, a Moba-Gurma 'first wife' (*naakpel*)—or, perhaps better, 'head wife'—

TABLE 6.5. *Women in polygynous unions who became 'first wives', by type of marriage (%)*

Type of marriage	
Brideservice	43
Reimbursement	20
Child betrothal	14
Exchange	9
Levirate	5
Abduction	2

enjoys a privileged status in the household. When the husband is absent, it is she who represents him. She plays a central role when ceremonies take place. It is to her that the husband gives the daily ration for the whole household to divide among all the wives. And she organizes and delegates the collective work for which women are responsible in the household.

However, the woman who becomes *known* as the 'first wife' is not necessarily the first to be married. Indeed, among women who were the first to contract a marriage with a particular man and were followed by other wives, about one in five (21.5 per cent) do not become the first wives. Conversely, among those who marry a man who is married already, 14.2 per cent obtain the status of first wife. Appointment to the privileged status of 'first wife' depends on the type of marriage, for these types imply a hierarchy. A woman obtained by brideservice has priority over all the others: she will be the first wife even if she is her husband's second or third wife, and even if she is younger than her co-wives. Next in the hierarchy of eligibility for 'first wife' status come women married by reimbursement, then those by the other kinds of contractual marriages (exchange and gift), and finally those by abduction and levirate.

Our survey data on women's marriages do not allow a complete assessment of how rigorously these customary understandings are applied. None the less, there is a hierarchy among the types of marriage, as we can see by examining Table 6.5, showing the proportions of women married by different kinds of arrangements who became 'first wives'. (The distribution is independent of the sheer number of marriages of each kind.) The list is restricted to women who wed men who were already married.

The most accurate measure of the relationship between the status of the first wife and marital instability focuses on the proportion of marriages that end because the woman appears to take the initiative: she leaves for her parents' home or gets herself abducted.

As Table 6.6 shows, whether a woman becomes the first wife clearly influences marital stability. Marital dissolution is nearly three times as common among women who did not become first wives as among those who did (8 per

TABLE 6.6. *Dissolved marriages by access to first-wife status for women who were polygynously married**

	%	(No.)
Woman was monogamous then polygynous in the same union:		
Total women who actually married first	4	(309)
Became 'first wife'? yes	2	(242)
no	9	(67)
Woman married an already-married man:		
Became 'first wife'? yes	6	(70)
no	8	(418)
Total women who became 'first wife'	3	(312)
Total women who did not become 'first wife'	8	(485)
Total women who married an already-married man	7	(488)

* Excluded are dissolutions resulting from a death, the husband's act of sending a wife home, and the woman's family taking her back.

cent versus 3 per cent; $p < .01$). Moreover, taking into account the order of the wife, independent of whether she became the first wife, we see more marital instability among women who married an already-married man (7 per cent versus 4 per cent; $p < .05$); these would most likely not be first wives. Marital instability is highest (9 per cent) among women who were displaced as first wives although they were married first. This, obviously, is the most difficult situation for a woman to accept. In contrast, the most stable marriages are those in which the women who married first remained first wives.

Type of marriage and the status of first wife in polygynous marriages, then, have a strong influence on marital stability. While these results demonstrate that it is important to take into account the characteristic features of a marriage system in order to understand marital stability, it is also necessary to place this understanding in a temporal perspective.

Elements of Stability and Change in the Moba-Gurma Marriage System

Elsewhere, increasing levels of education have been found to be associated with rises in the age at first marriage, and with greater freedom of partner choice and greater likelihood of marrying monogamously.[2] In 1981, the year of the last population census, the Moba-Gurma area had one of the lowest rates of school attendance in Togo, 28 per cent versus 51 per cent, the mean rural national level. School enrolment is particularly low for women (15 per cent for women versus 39 per cent for men). Yet levels of school attainment have remained low among Moba-Gurma women precisely because of marriage.

Marriage is the principal reason given by parents for not sending their daughters to school; and for those few girls sent to school, marriage is the main reason given for withdrawing them from school before they have finished: 'It is to avoid her getting a hard head which will lead to her refusing a husband later on', say many fathers.[3] Over time, of course, such attitudes may diminish as increasing education influences behaviour.

We must point out, however, that although imposed marriages would seem to be anathema to women, women actually have quite different opinions about imposed or forced marriages depending on whether it is they or others who are to marry. A young single woman is considerably more opposed to an imposed marriage when it involves her, rather than someone who must marry in her place. She is also more opposed to the practice than a mother who needs a son-in-law and tries to impose a husband on her daughter to obtain one.

A conversation with an older Moba-Gurma woman, aged about 60, yielded a complex combination of these positions. F. relates that she refused to marry the husband selected for her and arranged to have herself kidnapped instead by the man she really wanted to marry. In response, the man originally chosen for her asked for and received another woman in her place. For the second woman this meant a 'forced' marriage, but F. was unconcerned since the second woman was from another clan. F. is a mother today, and has daughters who are still not married. She would like very much to arrange their marriages to men who would perform brideservice, since the future sons-in-law would be obliged to come regularly to help her and give her millet. The economic advantage of obtaining sons-in-law is uppermost in the mother's thinking in this instance, rather than the marital constraints such an arrangement would impose on her daughters. Such desires are so strong among older women that men sometimes accuse their wives of trying to arrange marriages secretly, promising their daughters to young men who will come and work in their fields.

Refusing to marry men imposed by their families, then, does not mean that women necessarily reject the marriage system as a whole. It may simply mean that one option within the entire cultural array of options is better for a woman under some conditions than other options. Still, there are clear signs of change in Moba-Gurma marriage, as observed, for example, in women's increasing refusal to accept 'imposed husbands', the rise in marriages by abduction, and the diminution of expensive marriage ceremonies.

The 1980 Togolese Code on individuals and the family may be contributing to this process of evolution, since it is biased against 'imposed husbands' and bridewealth. The district chiefs in theory occupy a pivotal place in its execution. But while the judgements of some rely heavily on the Family Code, those of others remain closely tied to customary law. (For an analysis of matrimonial conflicts and the ways in which they are set right among the Moba-Gurma, see Pontié and Pilon, 1990.) Furthermore, the Code is not

applied systematically—many verdicts are determined by who pays the most. And most marital conflicts are resolved not through district-chief's courts but through reconciliation by heads of family, clan, or district. The heads of many of these bodies play only a limited role in enforcing national laws. Only if a marital dispute cannot be resolved at these levels will it be taken to the tribunal by one of the parties, where it is tried under civil law and where the national family code may be invoked. A young woman who refuses a husband imposed on her might in theory have an advantage in this court. Still, few women even now dare to bring their cases to this level because the costs are quite steep, and they often include bribes. Women also fear family reprisals. These are particularly likely since a dispute judged under the tribunal is not necessarily resolved that way once everyone returns home to the village.[4]

Conclusion

Like those of other researchers, these results have confirmed the need to examine the characteristics and logic of a particular marriage system to understand marital dissolution. Among the Moba-Gurma, the types of the logic of marriage exchange remain important particularly for women, on whom pressures to stay out of school and marry remain very strong. On the other hand, the increasing practice of marriage by 'abduction' indicates an increasing tendency to exercise freedom in choice of partners as well as mutual consent. It is important to stress, however, that individuals' refusal to conform to certain rules of the marriage system does not reflect a more global rejection of the marriage system. Changes are coming about in individual strategies, but a real break with the logic and force of the system is not in evidence.

One point of methodological interest is the study's effort to combine quantitative methods with a sensitivity to qualitative issues of meaning. Certainly it is important to measure the real importance of a certain phenomenon by looking at its prevalence in the population. Doing so gave us, for example, a more precise idea of change over time in the relative importance of the different types of marriage and marital dissolution. Another important quantitative finding was whether women married under different types of union become 'first wives', and the resultant effects of this factor on marital stability.

Yet as this study has shown, applying standard categories of marriage and divorce in a superficial way can mask many complexities. The definition of marriage, the identification of different types of marriage and marital dissolution—all pose problems that require in-depth qualitative methods which the demographer is not particularly inclined to employ. On the other hand, of course, qualitative methods are not perfect; they suffer problems of representativeness. For such reasons, closer collaboration must be developed between demographers and anthropologists to develop new methodologies

that are better suited to the issues that scholars in the two disciplines now find of mutual interest.

Notes

1. For a more detailed presentation of this index, see Pilon (1991*b*).
2. See on this subject Chs. 1 and 7, and Antoine and Nanitelamo (1991).
3. In the past, people claim, there was an extreme treatment for rebellious girls. A husband rejected by a woman who was meant to be his wife could put her in *condi*: to hide her away in a cell for several months. She became the responsibility of an older person in the family who administered drugs to her to 'break' her or 'make her docile'. The husband could take advantage of this period to try to make her pregnant. Although undoubtedly rare nowadays, the fact that this practice existed underscores the importance attached to marriage.
4. For an analysis of matrimonial conflicts and the ways in which they are judged among the Moba-Gurma, see Pontié and Pilon (1990).

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CLARENDON PRE