"It's not Normal But It's Common": Elopement, Marriage and the Mediated Recognition of Youth Identity in Harare, Zimbabwe

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An analysis of 'African youth' is quite simple, really—once you decide what you mean by 'Africa' and 'youth'. *That*, unfortunately, proves to be a good deal more complicated. Take the first term: Africa. On one hand, it refers to a physical entity, a mere land mass. On the other hand, we know that certain meanings are predicated on it, and certain histories ascribed to it (Mudimbe 1988). Colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial experiences are mapped onto its face, and decidedly social matters like race, subjection, and religion find in it an apparently solid ground. The presumption in the phrase 'African youth', then, is that this geographical and epistemological space is a good one for comparison; that somehow, the experience of 'youth' therein will be comparable. This presumption may be correct; I am inclined to think so. Yet there may be other, equally valid comparisons to make, and there is always a lingering question as to just how much, say, the children of South Africa's rising black bourgeoisie share in common with the child refugees in Darfur. 'Youth' presents similar problems, as the literature on the matter has slowly come to realize (Honwana and de Boeck 2005). While there is a growing consensus that it is a 'social shifter' (Durham 2000; Durham 2004)—which is saying something more interesting than that it is conceptually shifty—it is hard to get beyond the apparent links to biological facts of age. Afterall, part of what seems to have thrust youth into the theoretical limelight is the demographic (i.e. age-based) dominance of young people on the continent. On top of that, youth is also deployed as a comparative term, one which presumes that some other way of dividing the social sphere (e.g. in terms of social class) is not equally or more relevant. By contrast, for instance, comparatively little attention is given to patterns of violence or consumption amongst African seventy year-olds *qua* African seventy year-olds (cf. Cole and Durham 2007). We might call them 'gerontocrats' (Bayart 1993) but their behaviour is not often analyzed in relation to their being 'elderly'.

None of this is to say that the notion of 'African youth' is a chimera or unworthy of discussion. It is merely to point to the difficult task of theoretical composition that is required of any comparative project. Indeed, it would be unfortunate to look back and see that all we were really comparing was our own assumptions. It is in that spirit that I have chosen to examine what I take to be a crucial, but relatively under-theorized part of studies of African youth: 'marriage', and 'household'. Does this apparently 'domestic' life of youth matter, theoretically speaking? Surely, there is more to it than commodity aesthetics and furtive sexual encounters. Do African youth marry, and when they do, are they still youth? How do youth *actually* fit into households and kin networks, and how does this compare to how they are purported to fit in? What, in the end, is a 'household'? My entry into this conceptual tangle is the oft-heard claim—and complaint—that African youth are failing to reach social adulthood (Hansen 2005; Honwana and de Boeck 2005). On its face, this a purely empirical claim, but answering it properly requires a definition: in what does 'social adulthood' consist? In many accounts it seems to be measured by marriage and the formation of 'independent' households, both of which are said to depend on the financial status of the young man in question. Blocked financial capacity leads to an inability to marry and form an independent household, which leads to postponed social adulthood (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Masquelier 2005). Is this actually true of most youth, though? My sense—taken in part from my own work—is that it is not true, at least not universally. Far from being blocked, African youth are actually forming new households quite rapidly. In fact, unless we spuriously argue that Africa's population growth either stems from long-established households (for instance, via polygyny), or from single mothers living under the purview of their elders, the claim simply *cannot* be true.

The source of the contradiction, of course, lies in the 'social' aspect of 'social adulthood'. Here, the question is not whether one is an adult, but whether one is somehow a 'proper' or 'normal' adult. Much the same can be said of marriage and household: not just any conjugal union will do. Clearly, these normative judgments are deeply gendered—a fact that is too often brushed aside. As one young Zimbabwean man quipped to me, *apropos* of the low marriage age of his female compatriots: 'girls don't have a problem becoming adults; they have a problem staying youth'. But I want to argue that gender-blindness is only one manifestation of a broader conceptual error, whereby we take local discourses about 'social adulthood' as statements of fact rather than as statements *about* facts. The problem is not listening to what people say but that, as a tool for analyzing 'youth', social adulthood and its domestic entanglements mask a host of deeply consequential assumptions about social order—what it is, what it should be, and how it is to be maintained. It tempts us as analysts to follow the bulk of the public in assuming that that present reality is a negative departure from norms that supposedly held in the past. The result is a discourse on social adulthood that is structured so as to be almost inescapably nostalgic.

Nostalgia is not a crime, of course, nor is it peculiar to Africa. But it is striking that our discussions of youth seem to be somewhat mired in that theoretical rut. The legacy of Durkheim looms large in the African social sciences (Kuper 1973).[1] If, as he and his followers would have it, society is a set of enduring *sui generis* institutions (like marriage and household) (Durkheim 1933), any failure to reproduce those 'traditional' or 'customary' institutions must constitute a social crisis. More specifically with regards to youth, if ordered households are taken to be the seed of proper social order, the apparent position of youth between households (their own and that of their parents) makes them problematic by definition. This ten-

dency is obviously resisted in a number of contemporary accounts of youth, and my grouping them together in what follows must be understood as a rhetorical device rather than a critique *per se*. I want to thematize a larger conceptual problem: how to come to some *other* account of social order, one that does not repeat Durkheim's problematique of social reproduction. This seems to be a particularly difficult task in the African empirical context, where societies are under continuous and systematic strain (be it from the legacies of colonialism, the continuing experience of neocolonialism and dictatorship, war and ethnic conflict, or mass unemployment and poverty). The old Marxist anthropology arguments about the kinship mode of production (Meillassoux 1981) are too deeply wedded to the Durkheimian project of mechanical reproduction. Recent efforts to bridge the gap between 'elites' and the masses (a lumpen-proletariat?) with 'cultures of corruption' (Olivier de Sardan 1999), or 'traditionalization' (Chabal and Daloz 1999) or 'conviviality' (Mbembe 2001) are all interesting, but tell us very little about the contemporary realities of marriage and household. What is left? What sort of conceptual units can we use in our descriptions of social order, and how do youth, marriage, and household fit in?

Clearly, the predicament will not be resolved in a short paper. What I would like to do below is simply test some of our assumptions about youth, marriage, and household using material gathered from young people in the 'high density' townships of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. I hope that will help illuminate the stakes of our continuing to say that African youth are failing to reach social adulthood. In Harare, as it turns out, most young people are *not* failing in that regard—not, at least, if marriage is seen as the key marker of the transition. A majority of them are married in one way or another by the time they are twenty-five, many are parents, and the majority consider themselves to be somehow 'adults' as a result. It is the stuff in parenthesis, the 'in-some-way-or-another', that must be further considered. It is from here that I take my title: 'common…, but not normal'. Many youth marry via a process of elopement that is paradoxically both culturally recognized and publicly repudiated, both 'traditional' and a sign of tradition's failure. By outlining these marital experiences, I hope to bring to the fore two key facts about marriage and household that are masked by the discourse on social adulthood. First, the very fact that youth *are* marrying and forming households—only not in normative fashion. Second, the fact that marriage and household are not just composed by rituals reproducing social order *sui generis* (namely, the exchange of bridewealth), but also by highly gendered everyday acts of exchange that provisionally stand in for 'proper' tradition. Ultimately, I speculate that a deeper exploration of this provisional quality, and indeed, of the category 'provisionality' more generally (Simone 2004a, 2004b), may promise to pull us out of the doldrums of ever-failing reproduction.

Let me begin with the story of Okocha.[2] I have known him since he was in grade school, but we also lived in the same house in Chitungwiza, Harare's largest 'township' suburb, for several years during the late nineties. At the time, I was working with his older brother, a long time friend, and he in turn was supporting Okocha's secondary schooling.

In 2006, Okocha and I began meeting again in the local market where I was doing research. Now a young man of about twenty, he was given to wearing a baseball cap (worn slightly askew), timberland-style boots, baggy jeans and a variety of 'bling' belt-buckles. One day, we started reminiscing about old times. 'You were a real *tsotsi*' (a thug, thief, dishonest or flashy person, etc), I observed, recalling how on several occasions he had broken into my room to steal my cassettes and cd's. He just laughed, 'Yeah, well I was drinking a lot then. I liked your stuff, especially that little radio you had, but I was afraid to ask to borrow it. So, eh, uh…sorry about that.'[3] Besides drinking and smoking marijuana at the time, he admitted, he was also quite promiscuous:

> When I was at school I had *so* many girlfriends…, at least one in each of the twelve divisions of the class. Girls sometimes like boys like me just because they are mischievous [*vane musikanzwa*], I guess. I was known for it: 'that guy is a *hure* [i.e. a promiscuous person, 'whore', normally a term reserved for loose women],' people said. Even the male teachers knew it. Some asked me, 'help me arrange something with that girl', you know, the ones in our class.

This collection of untoward behaviour saw him being shuttled between relatives as each progressively grew tired of his antics. Eventually, none wanted him around and he was forced to sleep at a friend's house while scrounging for food during the day. Having 'learned a lesson', as he said, he returned to his mother's home in the rural areas (his father died when he was a child). He quit drinking and smoking and temporarily joined an apostolic church. Visibly reformed, he returned to town, renegotiated his relationship with his brothers, and began his 'A' level studies. When the brother sponsoring him lost his formal sector job, though, he was forced to stop, and he subsequently began informal trading in earnest. He specialized in selling cell-phones that were, as he put it, 'probably stolen…*but not by me*!'—his mother seems to have prophesied that a life of theft would lead to his death. By 2006, wage labour was increasingly looked down upon in Zimbabwe—'you pay more in bus fares than you earn in a month'. 'Those who are a bit older', he observed:

> …they prepared [*vakagadzira*] their lives long ago, so that even if they don't have work, they have somewhere to start. A house, whatever. They just need to look for money for food. But our 'age' [English], we have nothing to start with, nowhere to even begin. Nothing. Really.

In the months to come, Zimbabwe's fast expanding parallel economy exposed young people like Okocha to unexpected possibilities. First, diamonds were discovered in an area within walking distance of his rural home, and he followed many of his friends and relatives to join in the burgeoning illegal trade. He did not dig, choosing instead to engage in an elaborate barter system whereby he would source consumer goods in town, trade them for diamonds, immediately sell those diamonds, then use the money to begin the cycle again. By late 2007, the diamond fields were becoming increasingly dangerous, fewer people were managing to find diamonds, and his profits were drying up. He briefly tried his hand at smuggling used clothes, shoes and basic commodities from Mozambique, but quickly grew tired of that as well. He then returned to Chitungwiza where he became an illegal dealer of foreign currency. This trade yielded reasonable profits—though not nearly as much, he claimed, as some people thought.[4]

Like most young people in the area, Okocha was a nominal supporter of the opposition, but he paid scant regard to

party matters. Nonetheless, in the run-up to the presidential run off in June, 2008, he was repeatedly threatened with beatings, and was robbed of nearly US$300 (his 'capital') by thugs hired by the ruling party. The 'black market' in foreign currency was repeatedly denounced as a weapon of 'sell-outs' seeking to effect 'illegal regime change'. In one encounter, Okocha got into an argument with a female government supporter who threatened to kick him out of his 'workplace' (which was actually just a parking lot). A melée broke out, and a crowd beat up the woman. Concluding quite reasonably that there would be police/militia retaliation, Okocha ran away to a relative's house and spent the next two weeks in hiding. When he told me the story a month later, he did so in a whisper, and he furtively handed me a 'diary' of events that I had asked him to keep. 'After the first few days of writing, I was afraid to write anymore,' he said, adding that he had hidden the papers in the roof rafters, in case somebody came to abduct him (as they had recently done to his brother). In his diary he writes of the fight with the woman:

> How could she say that kind of shit [i.e. threaten to eject him from his 'workplace']? She thinks people like us, young as we are, would like to stand on that fucken open space, bad or good weather, [carrying] big [satchels] with [heaps] of cash which does not even buy a 14 inch colour TV.[5] We are just people left with nothing to do but work for food only (*sic*).

This is a striking distillation of youth and blocked accumulation. In many ways, Okocha *is* the paradigmatic African youth we read about. Twenty-four years old, perched between desires for a better life and the hard realities of 'this fucken open space', every day he wakes up and sets about navigating the perilous struggle for survival. He has smuggled goods, jumped borders, participated in the bush economy in illicit minerals, made his money from illegal foreign currency dealing, and fought in violent political battles. He has, by his own account, led a life of sexual promiscuity and drunken misbehaviour. He has dabbled into popular religion, has been alienated from, then reconciled with, extended family. He has gone hungry, knowing that his education will prove useless in securing a decent job. He lives hand to mouth in a deeply troubled economy, at the margins of the margins.

Only one detail does not fit the 'African youth' mold: Okocha is married, to a high-school sweetheart. And he has a baby son, on whom he dotes. Back in 2006, I had asked if he had given up his promiscuous ways after high school. 'I have a girlfriend now', he replied, somewhat dodging the question, 'and I love her. She's doing form four.[6] I even want to marry her.'

'So what's stopping you?', I asked.

'Well, maybe in a few years, when I've managed to get something'.

'What do you mean, 'something'?' I pressed.

> Something like money, you know. And steady work. A room of my own. And the basic things in a house. How can you get married if you don't even have your own two plate stove? Or a bed?

I had to remind him of this plan two years later, when, right there in the middle of his street 'workplace', he told me he had been a 'run away to' [*kutizirwa*], i.e. he had eloped with his girlfriend, who was pregnant. Although his foreign currency dealings had provided him with enough money to buy a number of household assets, he was still living with relatives, and did not plan the marriage. 'Yeah, well, I knocked her up [*kumumitisa*],' he admitted, quickly adding that it was the same girl that he had always wanted to marry, so he was not too worried. 'It was just fast-tracked', he joked, referencing the accelerated pace—and perhaps the barely managed chaos—of the Zimbabwean government's post-2000 'fast-track land reform'. His trading partner, looking on, paused in the middle of counting a stack of several thousand local Zimdollars, then blurted out: '*Marriage?* Marriage just falls on you [*zvinongokuwira*].[7] There's nothing you can do about it'.

Whether this confirms the supposed 'fatalism' of African youth is difficult to say. It clearly does not confirm the claim that they are failing to marry. On the contrary, marriage is just 'falling' on them. In fact, this sort of *fait accompli* marriage, established in the wake of an unplanned pregnancy, is so common for township residents that it is arguably the statistical norm. Still, it is not taken as 'normal'. I will discuss the complicated ethnographic context in greater detail below. To begin with, I simply want to note that a reading of the African youth literature certainly would not prepare one for such a messy reality. An extreme reading might come to the conclusion that African youth are no longer marrying or forming independent households at all. This unmarried status, moreover, seems to be the source of many of their problems.

Take, for instance, the Donal Cruise O'Brien's seminal discussion of West Africa's 'Lost Generation' (1994). 'A generational contrast,' he notes:

> …can thus be made between those who grew to adulthood in the first two decades of African independence (1960-1980) and their successors who see their 'youth' as something which is at risk of becoming indefinitely prolonged. This contrast has its material definition: economic independence, to have enough resources to marry and set up one's own family, is the fundamental aspiration of youth, in West Africa as elsewhere in the world (p. 58).

Already, here we have connections being drawn between generation and an economic predicament that mirror Okocha's commentary: youth lack a 'place to start' when it comes to starting their own households, and in a strong sense, their own lives. O'Brien continues:

> …there is often to be heard a contrast of today's hard times with the relatively prosperous circumstances in which one's parents grew to adulthood—and set up their independent households…With a shrinking number of viable new independent households, however, anchored in some sort of secure employment for the head of the household, one must see the future as dark enough. This would appear to be a liminal generation, on the edge of what can become a social collapse, as in Liberia and a number of other state situations where violence tears at the fabric of social relations (p.57).

Marriage and the creation of independent households by his account are not only the lynchpin for youth futures, but for societal stability more generally. It is the inability of youth to fulfill these sorts of normative transitions that makes them liminal and dangerous. It is almost as if the whole contemporary predicament of youth could be solved if those transitions were made possible once again.

A disturbingly similar point is made by Robert Kaplan, in his infamous 1994 article, 'The Coming Anarchy' (1994):

> Every time I went to the Abidjan bus terminal, groups of young men with

> restless, scanning eyes surrounded my taxi….In cities in six West African countries, I saw similar young men everywhere—hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting….Most… [were said to subscribe to] animist beliefs not suitable to a moral society, because they are based on irrational spirit power. They were from 'extended' families, with a mother in one place and a father in another. Translated to an urban environment, loose family structures are largely responsible for the world's highest birth rates and the explosion of the HIV virus on the continent. Like the communalism and animism, they provide a weak shield against the corrosive social effects of life in cities.

Cruise O'Brien would no doubt shudder at the mention of 'irrational spirit power' and 'loose family structure'—both well-worn racist canards—and he would likely deplore Kaplan's charged language of 'hordes' of unstable young men. Still, in his own rabid way, Kaplan pushes some commonly-held positions to the fore, and Cruise O'Brien's argument runs dangerously close to repeating them. First, the metaphors of 'instability', 'looseness' and 'igniting' point to widely-held perception that African youth are not just dangerous, but dangerously under-socialized (i.e. dangerous because they are undersocialized) (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). It is not only dowdy armchair critics like Kaplan who think so. Popular rhetoric on youth is constructed in much the same terms across the continent. Second, it is quite clear that the real target of analysis is young, *unmarried men*. They are the 'African youth' in question, and being unmarried is a crucial piece of the puzzle. This is clear in Cruise O'Brien as well. When he says that 'secure employment for the head of household" is needed for it to be 'viable', it is not likely that he has market women in mind. After all, it is not unmarried young women—or women of any sort—who threaten society with violence. Third, one again gets the sense that the proliferation of violence and undomesticated sex and consumption might be stemmed by (re)creating a particular form of household organization. Kaplan goes on, for instance, to suggest that all of these tensions of youth are greatly lowered in 'genuinely' Islamic countries,[8] where 'education and indoctrination' confine young men (and young women, of course) to ordered domesticity.

The quality of Cruise O'Brien's analysis clearly cannot be equated with that of Kaplan. Several factors separate them, not the least of which is the fact that the former's knowledge of West Africa exceeds that of a frightened tourist. They do, however, both come to similar conclusions about the relationship between African youth, marriage and household, and social order. And they are not alone in doing so. We know that many Africans share the sense that disordered households are to blame for the current problems of both youth and society more generally, and they voice this complaint in a variety of religious, 'traditional', or even secular registers. This presents a scholarly problem: how to capture these anxieties without allowing our work to take similar form. Consider what I take to be three excellent discussions of the contemporary state of African youth. First, Adeline Masquelier, writing of Niger (2005):

> There is a growing sense that today's youth are facing a crisis of unprecedented proportions. This 'crisis' centres on their inability to marry and achieve full social seniority. Marriage in Mawri society is a critical rite de passage indexing the transition from childhood to maturity…To become adults, both boys and girls must marry: non-marriage is simply not an acceptable option…Before a boy and girl can tie the knot, however, bride-wealth…must be exchanged…In today's circumstances of dwindling economic opportunities and ever escalating inflation, young men without the means to marry find themselves condemned to a kind of limbo life. In this situation of prolonged immaturity, they are defined as superfluous and non-adult… (p. 59).

Then take Karen Tranberg Hansen's discussion of 'compound' life in Lusaka (1992):

> I suggest that…young people are not so much a 'lost generation' as they are a segment of the population of whom many in fact might never become adult in a normative social and cultural sense. As in much of the rest of the southern African region, for men in Zambia, the attributes of adulthood include a job, a house or flat of one's own, and a spouse and children—in short, the ability to be in charge as household heads. Adulthood for women is differently constructed: it revolves around childbearing and is not necessarily linked to cohabitation or marriage. Thus, men remain young much longer than women…What does it mean for the reproduction of the social order if a considerable proportion of young people remain 'youth forever'? (pp. 4-5).

Finally, note the position of de Boeck and Honwana in their general introduction to studies of African youth (2005):

> …a growing number of children and youth in contemporary Africa are excluded from education, healthcare, salaried jobs, and even access to an adult status, given their financial incapacity to construct a house, formally marry and raise children in turn (p. 9)

I could multiply examples. All of these accounts exceed even Cruise O'Brien in their depth, and none even approaches the race-baiting of Kaplan. Yet, all suggest that the inability to marry and form households is crucial to any proper understanding of contemporary African youth. The first two even suggest that in the places of which they write the formation of independent households (in the wake of marriage) is seen as constituting the end of youth. This is clearly very important to our subject. And again, Okocha would no doubt agree on all counts. But what are the stakes—and the dangers—of our continuing to make these claims as scholars? Although few accounts come out and say it, it seems that the nagging question of social order still lurks in the corners of our analyses.

I want to suggest that we are still beholden by degree to two major assumptions. First, the household is often taken to be the source of social value, which is then encompassed and managed by the public sphere. This is, in fact, a very old idea, dating in the West at least as far back as Aristotle.[9] As feminist scholars have repeatedly shown, it is both inescapably gendered in theory and distinctly *non*-universal in historical terms (Amadiume 1997; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Oyewumi 1997). It is, in short, a folk ideology of 'Western' society. This is not to say it is not constantly invoked or reworked in other places. Indeed, it seems quite clear that capitalism writ large operates on a very similar model: a public sphere of 'work' composed of men, and a domestic sphere of reproduction composed of women and children. Wherever capitalism travels, some might say, it carries the seeds of a particular view of household with it (see Collier and Yanagisako

1987). More importantly, it continues to inform our theories of capitalism and 'modernity' more broadly. That makes its reappearance in our own work more difficult to avoid. Having said that, these universalizing pretences of household formation have been repeatedly disproved. For instance, James Ferguson (1999) has convincingly demonstrated that assumptions about proletarian household formation on the Zambian Copperbelt were both misplaced and inaccurate. African households there as elsewhere were rarely, if ever, made up of a nuclear family with a male breadwinner and female homemaker. Any conceptual apparatus that starts with that model of marriage or household, he argues, is bound to fail in its efforts to capture the reality of Copperbelt life. Much the same, I think, could be said of position of the household in the youth literature: left underspecified, it reproduces a picture of domesticity that is ideologically wrought. In fact, it is likely that the proletarianizing population that Zambian colonial officials fretted about is the very same 'youth' population we discuss. All that separates them, really, is a wage.

The second assumption, tied to the first, has to do with the question of social persistence. Here, the spirit of Durkheim reigns, and with it a mythography of society as a set of enduring institutions through which new individuals must continually cycle, lest the 'whole damn thing' fall apart (Fortes 1970). Although the classic structural-functionalist literature on Africa is a key site for this sort of idea, there are also well-attested Marxian and structuralist variants (Meillassoux 1981; Lévi-Strauss 1970, see discussion of latter in Mudimbe, 1988) . The reproduction of social institutions from this perspective is 'mechanical', to borrow the Durkheim's terminology (Durkheim 1933). Society *sui generis* is constantly acting to perpetuate itself, and the social action of real live agents is ever-geared towards that end. This approach has been endlessly critiqued, but here it is particularly useful to revisit Bourdieu's assessment, which tellingly also begins with marriage and household (Bourdieu 1977). The language of structure, Bourdieu argues, promotes a 'synchronic illusion' that effectively eliminates real duration from our accounts. Matters that are in practice unidirectional and dependent on the movement of time—like marriage and household formation—are made to seem 'timeless' and reversible. This illusion has an important effect on perceptions of youth. Youth is most often considered in temporal terms, as one phase in the progression of an individual life—from childhood to youth to adulthood to senescence. But in the Durkheimian model, this progression is spatialized, turned into a structure that can be glimpsed in a single chart or graph, and social adulthood is made its core, the pinnacle from which one ascends or descends. In that structure, youth are almost always seen to lie in the spaces *between* households: their own, through marriage, and that of their parents. This makes their status as 'people in the process of becoming rather than being', as Honwana and de Boeck (2005: 3) put it, over-determined, because they are quite literally 'between' categorization and therefore liminal by definition. The gap is all the more glaring when it cannot be filled by further transcendent institutions, like school or religion (as is the case in much of Africa).

On one hand, this positioning makes it inevitable that young people's inability to reach the institutional permanence of household and marriage will be seen as a crisis: if society is taken as the reproduction of enduring institutions, it *has* to be a crisis. They never actually reach the state of true being. On the other hand, it also explains why the presence of young people in public evokes moral panic: they have entered it through the back door, without having first been domesticated (literally) by a stable household (Diouf 2003; Biaya 2005). A good comparison might be the 'floating population' [*population flottante*] that has so vexed colonial and postcolonial west African governments (Roitman 2005). As with youth, the 'problem' is as much epistemological as real. It consists of an inability to pin a population down to a proper place, to find a handle on them that exceeds the ephemeral actions of individuals. Such a population threatens not just social order, but the very *notion* of social order, and with it a whole model of governance, intervention and control.

This takes us into deep theoretical water, and I think it bears exploring further the manner in which household formation holds an entire theoretical apparatus together. For now, though, my point is more specific: how do these assumptions distort our understanding of African youth? What is lost if we slip into analyses premised on a synchronic illusion? Next, I want to come back to Okocha and youth marriage in Zimbabwe and discuss two key oversights/absences. They are difficult to catch in part because the ideology of 'tradition' is built on very similar assumptions.

As I noted, despite conforming to many stereotypes of 'African youth', Okocha is also married and a father. He even has an 'independent household', or what passes for one in a Zimbabwean township. Together with his wife and child, he rents a single room that serves simultaneously as a bedroom, a kitchen, and a place for receiving guests. Prior to marriage, his wife lived with a maternal aunt. Her parents divorced long ago, and her father, who lives elsewhere in the country, has played little role in her life. Her mother immigrated to the UK nearly ten years ago. These circumstances, which are not unusual, presented Okocha with a number of challenges. Upon learning that his girlfriend was pregnant, he was expected to notify her family with a small payment (see below for detail), but he was not sure who to give it to. In the end, he gave it to the aunt, even though as a member of the mother's lineage, she had no official standing. Similarly, he struggled to figure out to whom to give bridewealth. He wanted to pay, as is the case with the majority of young men I spoke to: 'you can't just stay with someone else's child [*mwana wemuridzi*] for free', he explained. By the time he figured out how to split payment in a manner that was amicable to all parties, though, his job of selling illegal foreign currency suddenly disappeared, and his accumulated savings were soon exhausted.[10] That means that nearly two years on, he has only provided a few small token payments of bridewealth, and has no real plan as to when the process will go forward. Yet to him, and most of the people he meets on a daily basis, he is 'married'. He has good relations with his wife's family; in fact his mother-in-law (in the UK) provided him with the start-up capital he used to begin dealing in foreign currency, and they regularly pay for his wife's medical costs. Is all of this 'typical'? Statistically, yes. Nothing in this story would come as a shock to residents of Harare's townships. Normatively, though—that is the question that will detain us here.

Before I give an account of what is often *said* to be 'typical', let me be clear: this is a description of an ideology, as any description of laws or rules would be. It is noteworthy, however, that many local,

everyday accounts of 'Shona' marriage proceed as if there is some stable group called the 'Shona' (Ranger 1989) and as if widely recognized forms of Shona marriage describe reality and *not* an ideology built on top of it. People insist that certain ways of marrying are characteristic of *chivanhu chedu* or *ChiShona chedu*.[11] These categories have deep institutional roots, many of which stem directly from colonial attempts to create order and/or anthropological attempts to find it. As has been discussed in contexts elsewhere on the continent (e.g. Chanock 1985), 'customary law' is a key site for this sort of ideological reproduction, and in that sense, government officials have long been particularly concerned with matters having to do with marriage and household. In Zimbabwe, ideology of this kind is also deeply entrenched in the vernacular language school curriculum, which is premised on a Herderian identification of a language with a clearly demarcated population and their shared practices, i.e. 'culture' (Kuper 1999; Bauman and Briggs 2000; Bakare-Yusuf 2004). In a sense, then, if scholars of today confuse the ideology of marriage and household formation with its reality, they are only following local practice.

So: 'Shona' marriage, ideologically rendered.[12] The Shona are organized into exogamous patrilineal descent groups marked by shared clan names (a 'totem' symbolized by an animal or part thereof). Marriage to anyone sharing the totem of either parent is considered incest (although ritual means can be used to overcome this rule where an actual relationship cannot be traced). Cousin marriage of any sort is not allowed. Clans/totems do not have a political function *per se*, though they may be seen as autochthonous in particular political/geographical regions. Effective decisions are made by more local lineage groups—often no deeper than three generations, and generally limited to relatively 'close' cognates. Certain regions—rather than clans—are associated with particular patterns or practices of marriage, but all are generally considered to fall under the 'Shona' umbrella. Marriage (a man marries, *kuroora*, while a woman is married, *kuroorwa*)[13] is considered to be the joining of two families, not just a couple. The phrase often used is *kubatanidza ukama*, that is, 'putting together' kin relations. Wife-givers are taken to be superior to wife-takers, and this hierarchy holds in perpetuity. It is built into forms of address, and a man is supposed to defer to any and all of his male in-laws (including those of his own and following generations). Particularly strict relations hold with his mother-in-law (as well as classificatory mothers-in-law). A wife, on the other hand, maintains the patriline of her father, and is something of a 'foreigner' in the house of her husband. In rural settings, residence is most often patrilocal.

Marriage can take one of five forms: marriage by request, pledge-marriage, service-marriage, and two forms of elopement: planned and unplanned. The first is the norm from which the others depart. It begins with a boy and girl exchanging love tokens, which may later be taken as proof of intent.[14] Then the girl's paternal aunt is informed. She is expected to act as an intermediary, conveying the message to the men of her lineage. The boy likewise informs his father and chooses his own intermediary (or intermediaries). The girl's family sets a date, and the boy and company proceed to her father's home, where the bridewealth exchanges take place. Often, these are carried out without the presence of either the boy or the girl, who are only allowed in a specific junctures. There are a number of initial 'token' payments—paying to sit, to open one's mouth, to say who one is, to request a bowl in which payments are made, etc. These are relatively small in value, and are always paid in cash. Larger payments follow, though the order and composition may vary. First is the payment of *rutsambo* (literally a type of basket). Customary law considers this to be payment for conjugal rights. In the past, this may have been a hoe or some other material object. Now it almost always consists of cash; amounts of several thousand US dollars or equivalent are not uncommon. Next is the payment of the mother's cow (*mombe youmai*). This is supposed to be a real cow, not money, though it is left to the mother to decide. It is surrounded by a good deal of mystical sanction. Not giving it will cause the mother to haunt the son-in-law after her death. Equally, no members of the patrilineage may lay claim to it. After that comes the '*danga*' (the kraal), a payment denominated in cattle (whether actual or in cash form) to the girl's father. *Danga* is considered to confer rights to the children of a marriage. As such, it is rarely paid in full before there is proof of the girl's fertility. Indeed, it is rare for a son-in-law to pay all of the different aspects of bridewealth in one sitting, and to try to do so would be considered rude. Each is expected to leave with a debt to the father-in-law (*chikwereti chababa)*. Finally, at a later date, when the first child of the marriage is about to be born, a further payment is made—*kusungira* (tying). This payment is normally a goat or its monetary equivalent. It is intended to cleanse the girl's parents of the pollution of having foreign blood introduced into their house.

The other forms of marriage alter this central exchange process in one way or the other. In the case of the pledge-marriage, a female child (born or unborn) is pledged to a family (not necessarily a particular man) in exchange for material support of some kind, or otherwise in order to cement an existing relationship. Service marriage, on the other hand, entails a sort of payment in kind: instead of establishing his own home or other patrifocal residence, as is the norm, a man moves to his father-in-law's home and works for him for a period of years before being given a wife. In both cases, token payments may still be exchanged, but there is no exchange of *rutsambo* or *danga*. Then come the two forms of elopement. The first, called *kutizisa* (causative, 'make run'), involves the planned abduction of the girl from her home, with her consent (and often with the knowledge of her mother or aunts). Shortly afterward—one to two days—a messenger is sent by the groom to inform the girl's family of her whereabouts with a small token payment (called variously *tsvagirai kuno*—'look for her here'—and *svevedzera*—to call, notify). Although the marriage may in theory be rejected, it is normally taken as *fait accompli* and the girl's family will open up negotiations that follow the pattern outlined above. The second form of elopement, called *kutizira* ('run away to') is considered an 'act of desperation' on the part of the girl. Normally, she is pregnant and 'runs away to' the person she considers to be the 'owner' of the pregnancy (*muridzi wenhumbu*). Again, if he accepts responsibility (the majority of the cases?), he then sends a messenger with *tsvagirai kuno/svevedzera*, and the exchanges follow the normal model—with the exception that he is charged 'damages' (the English word is often used) for having 'broken the law' (*kupara mhosva*) and made the girl pregnant. In all of the different forms, the *kusungira* payment (before first birth) is expected.

In cases of inter-ethnic marriage, a Shona man will defer to the demands of his non-Shona in laws, and conversely a non-Shona man will be expected to follow *chiShona* procedures. In all cases, I should note, civil or church marriage plays an accessory role. Most churches, even the most hardcore of the Pentecostals, allow or even encourage the payment of bridewealth, although they may try to regulate the form that it takes and the amounts that are paid. Even those churches that do not allow it (some apostolic groups, for instance) seem to only enforce the ban when both families belong to the same church. Many church marriages take place years after the customary one, even after children have grown up and left home. Sometimes, an additional payment must be made before such a marriage takes place. Zimbabwean law caters for two types of registered unions: civil and customary, the former of which can be done in a church or a court. These have different legal implications, particularly with regard to inheritance and the practice of polygyny. Nonetheless, many if not most marriages go entirely unregistered (Ncube 1997).

So much for the ideology. As is clear, it repeats quite thoroughly the form of the Durkheimian model: enduring institutions, cemented by ritual (ritual payments in this case), through which generations of people are intended to cycle. It is an ideology that is widely accepted, even by young people. Now, something closer to reality. What does this account prevent us from seeing?

1. Young people are getting married, but their marriages are seen as non-normative.

Very few contemporary marriages follow the normative model of request. As one woman put it to me, 'you actually get shocked [*kurohwa nehana*] if you hear of someone marrying "properly" these days.' In my long-time dealings with married young men, no more than one in ten have followed the 'proper' procedures of request. Those that do are generally avid church-goers (creating the somewhat ironic situation whereby churches are the most consistent enforcers of 'tradition'). Two of the above marriage types are essentially moribund: pledge-marriage, technically against the law, still operates clandestinely, particularly in some apostolic religious communities, but it is relatively rare, while service-marriages seemed to have disappeared from the realm of possibility with the spread of wage labor; one would be hard-pressed to find anyone (in urban areas especially) with a living memory of the practice. This leaves elopement. In point of fact, few young people consistently distinguish between *kutizira* and *kutizisa,* and I have never heard of anyone who followed the elaborate staged kidnapping procedures that supposedly characterize the latter. *Kutizira* is the most commonly used term (or *kutizirana,* the reciprocal, lit. 'running away to each other'), and it carries with it a suggestion of desperation.

To what does such desperation owe? Amongst those living in 'townships', pregnancy-induced elopements like that of Okocha and his wife are the most common.[15] This does not necessarily mean, however, that they are acts of shame-avoidance. Many young men even assert that they are unlikely to agree to a marriage unless there is proof of their wife's fertility. As one young man put it:

> If a guy marries by properly requesting, you know, paying everything then having a church wedding, people here in the 'hood' laugh at him. "How could you take and pay for a woman who hasn't made a kid for you yet? What if she can't conceive? Plus, you know she's going to get half of your stuff." That's the way people actually talk.[16]

When asked, on the other hand, whether a young man suffered any negative reaction from his peers if he made a girl pregnant, young men typically answered that as long as he was out of school and the girl was not a known 'whore' [*hure*], or too old (which amounts to the same thing in the minds of many men),[17] he would actually be congratulated by his peers. If they are desperate, then, it is more likely to be for financial reasons: can they support a wife and child, playing the 'bread-winner' role (see below), and can they manage to pay bridewealth 'properly' before the pregnancy is detected by his in-laws, as such a discovery will add a substantial fine to the final price. For the girl, of course, reactions depend a great deal on whether she can force the hand of the child's father. If she cannot find a man to both accept responsibility for the pregnancy and take her in as a wife, her social status will drop considerably in many eyes. If she manages to marry, however, she loses little unless she had some other very concrete plan for the immediate future. Having a child is actually an important part of being seen as a real woman. Pregnancy is not the only reason for eloping, though. For instance, women and girls claim that they may '*tizira'* in order to escape a bad home situation. Poverty tops the list, but they also mention sexual and physical abuse, being overworked, or simply lack of space (having to share a single room with their parents and all their siblings, a common township experience). It is also quite common for a girl to be chased from her house by male relatives (fathers, brothers, uncles) if she returns home 'late' or is rumoured to be with a man. Finding herself in such a predicament, she 'runs away to' the house of the man in question. Whatever her reason, the elopement may or may not be done with the foreknowledge and consent of the partner. Girls are rumoured—even amongst themselves—to target men with money, someone who can 'support' them and get them 'nice' things. If they see that his attentions are flagging, they may allow themselves to get pregnant in order to force their position. Young men often set about eloping with similarly material matters in mind. Sometimes they do it intentionally to avoid the immediate payment of bridewealth (although not necessarily its eventual payment, as I said). 'It's like Nyore-Nyore [literally 'easy easy', a well-known Zimbabwean purchase-hire shop]' one young man commented, 'you get what you want now and pay later'. What they want, aside from sexual access and the status that goes along with being married and/or a father, is often quite simple: someone to cook and clean for them. There is also a measure of protecting one's turf. Many young men claimed to have eloped in order to prevent a girl that they loved from being stolen by some other man. Competition for girls still in high school can actually be quite fierce, particularly if they are considered beautiful, thoughtful, and 'well-mannered' [*ane tsika*]. Getting her pregnant is an almost certain way to ensure no one else takes her. Finally, of course, there are those cases where star-crossed lovers elope purely out of what they consider desperate love. Indeed, 'love' [*rudo*] and mutual understanding [*kuwirirana*] cannot be dismissed in many instances of elopement, but as I will discuss below, it is a mistake to separate these sentiments from material considerations.

Nearly everyone I spoke with claims that although elopements occurred in the past, the practice has become 'too much' [*kunyanya*] these days, particularly in

town (although many add that the situation is no different in rural areas). It is difficult to know what to make of this assertion. Lacking statistical proof—and that is not forthcoming, given that up till today surveys reduce the intricacies of local marriage forms to a simple yes or no—one can only speculate. The historical literature shows that both 'disordered' marriages and anxieties about them have been a key part of the Zimbabwean landscape since the onset of colonial rule. Moreover, some people recognize that the practice of elopement is not 'natural'; rather, it is learned from the environment in which one lives and grows up. Thus, people often remarked that 'you learn about the levirate by seeing others do it' [*kugara nhaka kuona dzavamwe*], a proverb suggesting that young people learn about the possibility of elopement from their elders. Moreover, the very fact that elopement is included in ideological accounts of marriage suggest that at least some people practised it long ago. Still, it is received ambivalently, as somehow both 'traditional' and new, proper and improper. One young man summed up the contradiction nicely by saying, 'it is the common way here in the township for a girl to elope, but it is not the normal way to marry'.[18] Another claimed in one breath that the prominence of elopement these days showed that 'our traditions are dying' [*chivanhu chedu cha'kupera*], but then in the next insisted that, no, elopement was a part of tradition [*aiwa, chirimo muchivanhu*]. Many believe that elopement brings shame on the families of those who do it, and particularly on the mother of the girl. When asked how they would advise their own children about marriage, everybody said that they would tell them to marry 'properly'. When asked whether marriages that started with elopement were less stable than others, though, people claimed that they actually tended to be *more* stable.

How do we explain this incongruity? In one way, it can be ascribed to the fact that elopement blends almost imperceptibly into other forms of domestic and sexual union that *are* new. A number of scholars, for instance, have discussed the development and practice of '*mapoto'* marriage (Barnes 1999; Rutherford 2001). This term literally refers to the illegitimate use of the woman's domestic and reproductive services, i.e. literally her 'pots'. It has a long history of practice in towns, commercial farms, and mining compounds. Essentially, it is a temporary marriage, where both partners enjoy the various perks of marriage without there being any premise that the union will ever be officialized. Typically, no bridewealth payments at all are made, and oftentimes the male partner remains unknown to the female's kin. Young urbanites tend to associate the term with older men who were married in a rural area but kept another household in town. Another more recent form, the 'small house'[19] is also associated with urban life—more specifically the monetary economy. Men with money keep 'small houses', paying the rent and expenses of a [typically younger] woman. Unlike in *mapoto* relationships, the couple do not usually live together for any extended period, but there may be children from the union. In both cases, *mapoto* and small house, space remains for the relationship to be 'legitimated', either through divorce of the first wife and remarriage, or through the practice of polygamy. In that sense, they are similar to *kutizira*—the intent to marry often taken to be as important as the actual practice.

The larger factor making elopement seem improper, however, is the manner in which 'tradition' itself is framed. First, tradition as normally invoked admits no ambiguity: cultural hierarchies and procedures must be reproduced exactly. Elopement troubles this imperative by forcing a post-facto reassessment of actions that constituted a 'crime' [*mhosva*] at the time they were committed. Especially if there is a pregnancy involved, it is clear: the man broke the law [*kupara mhosva*]. He must pay [*kuripa mhosva*] for his actions in order to realign himself with tradition and re-establish temporal continuity. Second, tradition is always said to be dying; we might even say that it is traditional to say that tradition is dying. This is an idea that completely saturates cultural discourse. It is built into vernacular media—music, novels, ritual speech forms, political rhetoric—as an almost incontestable proposition. Historical consciousness is structured in such a way that each generation is seen as departing from the traditions that were supposedly upheld by previous one, which in turn reflected timeless principles. Youth of yester-years, we hear, were not sexually promiscuous, and did not marry without their parents' consent. The truth of this contention is less important than the version of history it seeks to buttress. It is certainly not unique to Zimbabwe; indeed, certain theorists might insist that it is the very ideological structure of modernity and/or capitalism. Its links to colonialism are patent. That it should be applied to marriage and household is no surprise, given that both figure so crucially in life trajectories, interpersonal relations, gender identities and the construction of meaningful action. In short, young people are getting married, but they are doing so in a way that typical constructions of 'tradition' find difficult to absorb, even if it is itself 'traditional'. Hence, their marriages do not 'count' normatively, even if they add up very quickly in a statistical sense. Amongst my friends and study informants, for instance, the number of men who are not married by their late twenties can be counted on one hand, but again, almost all of them begin their marriages by eloping.

Marriage is Composed by Ritual Exchange

It is well known that, together with 'law', Durkheim considered ritual to be a key site of social reproduction (Durkheim 1912). Not only does ritual endure, exceeding the life of individuals, it actually creates the ground for endurance by effecting functional integration and/or structural alignment. It operates in a performative fashion to ensure that relations are maintained and contingent tensions are absorbed and rechanneled to serve the social whole. With that in mind, discussions of marriage in Africa have long focused on marriage ritual (e.g: Radcliffe Brown and Ford 1950; Fortes 1969), seeing in it the ingredients for guaranteeing reproduction of the wider social order. The movement of bridewealth constitutes a telos of traditional society, establishing relations and roles within and between groups. Other conceptual approaches have followed this lead. Lévi-Strauss (1970), for instance, famously argued that marriage exchange constituted the very basis of culture, and Marxist anthropology made bridewealth payment the fulcrum of relations of exploitation in the so-called 'kinship mode of production' (Meillassoux 1981). Given their penchant for viewing society like organic Durkheimians, it is unsurprising that many Zimbabweans see the exchange of bridewealth in quite similar terms. It is often discussed in terms of the perceived clarity of relations; that is, payment is seen to be constitutive of both a particular social order and knowledge thereof. By paying bridewealth, a man effects an epistemological shift, effectively bringing

the whole social realm into focus (be it in terms of rights, roles, or expected trajectories, his own or others') (Comaroff 1980, 1987). In that sense, it is the ritual of bridewealth exchange that dissipates the ambiguity I just spoke of: without it, the ambiguity persists.

This is precisely the problem: people agree that aside from being more numerous, contemporary elopements alter the 'traditional' timing of payment. Even if there is intent to pay, most such marriages operate for months or years in a grey zone of recognition, where very little or no bridewealth has been paid. In the interim, social relations are muddled. The initial token payment of *tsvagirai kuno* is generally given, normally within a few days, although sometimes it takes much longer. This payment—as little as a dollar—is made together with a letter that details the suitor's name and address. Then, if the correct people can be called together—and as Okocha's case demonstrated, this is often problematic—a list of further demands will be given to the young man. Far from sitting down to pay it at one ritualized event, though, most young men either send payment in dribs and drabs, starting with the initial token fees, or put off payment to an unknown and distant date. Token payments are not considered adequate to cement relations, even if they are viewed positively as signs of good intentions. Until a certain threshold is surpassed, the status of the marriage remains uncertain: as a practical matter, the couple is known to be married by all of their kin; but in terms of customary 'law' [*mutemo*], the son-in-law remains a 'stranger', unable to interact with his in-laws as family.

Having said that, it is not as if people who have eloped wake up every day uncertain of who they are or whether or not they are married. The uncertainty is normative. For most people I talked to, matters of outstanding bridewealth payments are not the object of daily concern. They do think about them, and sometimes even discuss them with their partner, but for all intents and purposes, they consider themselves married and proceed with their lives as if that were the case. Only on certain occasions or with certain people do they feel otherwise. It is not just a matter of opinion, though. Rather, the strength and or status of a relation is also judged on exchanges that are more mundane than those associated with bridewealth: the exchange of food, services, money, clothes, and sex, to name only the most prominent. This is true of all marriages, actually, and aptly describes a more general attitude people hold about kin relations. As a common proverb has it, kinship is like a half-cup; it is filled with food [*ukama igasva; hunozadziswa nekudya*], i.e. kinship is as much constructed by everyday reciprocity as it is by transcendent matters of ritual and blood. The difference, perhaps, with elopements is that these sorts of exchanges are more than just 'half of the cup': without blood or payment to bind the relation, the give-and-take of daily life must take on a greater role.

These daily matters are voiced in two key areas: the negotiation of the breadwinner role and the management of household finances. Both are rendered largely in the language of gender: what a man as a husband and father is supposed to do, and what a wife as a woman and a mother is supposed to do. In the absence of tradition writ large, gender roles are the tradition that remains. Ensuring that they are followed becomes a major area of negotiation and contention. The male role as 'breadwinner' is considered 'traditional' in spite of the fact that it owes largely to the practice and imagination of wage labour.[20] Similarly, it persists in spite of the fact that such labour is at this point a distant dream for the vast majority of young township men (Jones in press; cf. Simone 2006). It is simply something that men expect and are expected to do within the context of a marriage. The 'bread' in question entails the provision of all basic necessities for the home (food, clothes, hygienic items, and rents/fees), as well as the purchase of larger assets like furniture, appliances, etc. Provision is understood by all involved to create a power relation: the one who gives has a degree of power over the receiver. The resultant hierarchy is not imagined as a challenge to love, though. Quite the opposite, many see 'love' as both thoroughly hierarchical and material: those on top show love via provision, particularly of material goods, and those below show love by obediently supporting their efforts (Cole and Thomas 2009, cf. Zelizer 2005). Consider the entry in Okocha's diary that directly precedes the one in which he details his violent political confrontation:

> Today I'm happy becoz I've made a profit of R50.[21] It's so pleasing becoz I can now buy better food for me and my wife. I can now afford to get her hair done at the hair salon. Something she had several asked 4 but I couldn't afford (sic).

This hierarchy does not go unchallenged though. In fact, although most people say that the management of household expenses should be handled openly and honestly between partners, fights over various forms of provision are extremely common. Young women often complain that their husbands either do not make enough money, or channel it to non-household ends, for instance alcohol-consumption outside the home (also a distinctly gendered activity) or support for other girlfriends. As one woman put it, men make an art of lying about where they spend their money. As a result, urban food budgets and other household expenses have long been supplemented—or outright paid—by the market or agricultural activities of women. Young men, on the other hand, are anxious about their wife's desire for consumer goods, and seek to control it by limiting her movement. 'If you have a wife', one commented:

> you face peer pressure. If she hears that so and so had real tea, you know, with proper bread and margarine and milk and sugar, she's going to want that too. And if some guy says "I can get you that", she can even go with him. Those are the ones we call men, those ones buying sausage. So that's why you can't let your wife move around too much.

It is often suggested that women lack financial judgment as well. 'If someone comes down the street selling knives,' one complained to me, 'she'll buy it even though there's already a perfectly good one in the house'. Another observed:

> If I have, say, five hundred dollars, I give her two to buy vegetables and cooking oil, then I keep two, then there's another hundred that I hide because if a woman of today sees it, it's a problem. She'll say, "oh, look at my hair, oh, I need new underwear, oh face cream, oh and the one for my legs"….Today's women look too much next door. They don't have focus or vision. They only see today.

Most galling, perhaps is wives' practice of channeling money or goods to their kin without their husbands' assent. In fact, many marital disputes over money centre on kin: how they should be received in the home, how much his should get, how much hers should get, etc. Matters of bridewealth, I should note, appear to be of secondary importance in such calculations and fights, if they matter at all. In-

deed, the everyday status and workings of marriage and household have little to do with 'transcendent' social structure or ritual, and everything to do with what we might call *practical* social structure and *interaction* ritual, following Bourdieu (1977) and Goffman (1983) respectively. 'Tradition' is a consideration, as is the imperative to reproduce it, but that reproduction cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, it never could.

The general picture I have been trying to paint is this. First, a methodological complaint. The normative demands of social adulthood are clearly important to the lives of youth, but they must be properly situated in a wider picture of how practical relations are formed on the ground. There, insofar as adulthood is made to hinge on marriage and household formation, many 'youth' have already 'graduated'. They just have not done so normatively. The problem for us, as analysts, arises when we emphasize the rules of social adulthood, without grasping that the persistence of those rules in the face of ongoing change is very much part of what has to be explained. Bourdieu (1977) terms it the 'tyranny of the rule', that is, the conceit that social order is composed of laws that can be studied and manipulated in a positivistic fashion. One corollary of abandoning that approach is that we have to reconsider whether 'tradition' was *ever* that stable. In a way, the paradigm of reproduction is impossible: contingency will always thwart efforts at exact mimesis of past procedures. Moreover, 'Shona' custom, if we can still call it that, is quite flexible to the ex-post-facto redefinition of events, suggesting that disorder of various sorts has long been a part of lived experience. It is likely, too, that the everyday components of youth marriages differ little from that of their parents and grandparents. The major difference is economic, not cultural.

Of course, the economic difference *is* substantial. This brings me to the second point: social order. I have tried to show that such order is really what is at stake when social adulthood is pegged to marriage and household formation. It is well and good to critique this somewhat parochial Western notion, but what is left in its place when we are done? The problem, as I see it, has two levels. First is an analytic challenge: if we cannot look to the household as a necessary unit of social composition, where should we look? What sort of model of society remains? Tied to this is a further challenge: can normal people (like African youth) count on marriage and household as unit composing their own lives? I do not have the answer to either of these questions yet. There are several alternative views of social order. The old Maussian alternative to Durkheim—a society composed of group and individual exchanges—seems to be wearing thin. De Boeck (2005) suggests that everyday intra-household exchange like that which I discuss above has begun to crumble in contemporary Kinshasa, with troubling effects for children and youth. Social class, on the other hand—either as an analytic or as a reality—is difficult to apply to non-European contexts. Even where it does apply, it is hard to say exactly how youth might fit in. Do they comprise a class, as Marxist anthropology would have it? In truth, a good number seem to be nothing more than lumpen-proletarians, mere potatoes in a sack full of them, as Marx might put it. If we are actually interested in their lives, this dismissal will not take us far. On the other hand, it is troubling to say in Weberian fashion that society is just an amalgamation of individual actions, be they of youth or anyone else. Some discussions of Africa appear to try and bridge the gap by arguing that whereas African societies were Durkheimian and collective in the past, now they are Weberian and individualistic.

What remains? Following Abdou Maliq Simone (2004b), I suggest that the answer may lie in a reconsideration of provisionality itself. Simone acknowledges that youth face a difficult predicament:

> Employment, marriage, raising a family are foreclosed for increasing numbers of youth. As such, the incessant provisionality of actions, identities, and social composition through which individuals attempt to eke out daily survival positions them in a proliferation of seemingly diffuse and discordant times. Without structured responsibilities and certainties, the places they inhabit and the movements they undertake become instances of disjointed histories—i.e. places subsumed into mystical, subterranean or sorceral orders…prophetic or eschatological universes, highly localized myths that 'capture' the allegiances of large social bodies, or daily reinvented routines that have little link to anything… (p. 518).

At the same time, those very difficulties are turned into resources, not just for individual, day-to-day survival, but for the creation of a more lasting order:

> Not only do individual residents circulate amongst each other, but the very meanings of their various points of anchorage—household, networks and livelihoods—must perform a kind of circulation as well. It is often unclear just who has the right and ability to do what. Once relied-upon forms of authority are increasingly unable to put their stamp on how daily life is to be enacted and understood. As a result, there is a pervasive anxiety on the part of urban residents as to who they can live and work with, who they can talk to and what kind of collective future they can anticipate (p. 519).

Where once there were 'relied-upon forms of authority' that determined a range of possible and impossible actions and personal/group trajectories, now there are temporary social formations, forged out of a mix of necessity ('survival positions') and ongoing desires for a better life for oneself and one's intimates, whatever that might entail. Can this model move us to a new level of analysis?

Notes

1. The literature is vast. For just some of the more famous accounts, see Evans Pritchard 1940; Fortes and Evans Pritchard 1940; Radcliffe Brown and Forde 1950; Radcliffe-Brown 1968; Fortes 1968; and Fortes 1970.
2. A pseudonym, though he does use a nickname from a famous African footballer.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all dialogue is translated from the original ChiShona (or more properly, a township lingua franca of Shona, English and slang). The marriage practices I will describe are also largely 'Shona' (Ranger 1989) and are hegemonic in and around Harare, despite the fact that a significant minority of township residents are of not of 'Shona' extraction (Yoshikuni 2007).
4. He claimed that for a street-level trader like him, an outright profit of R100 (US$8) a day would be a stunning windfall. Other street traders provided similar figures. The profits were substantially higher for those further up the scale of the foreign currency trade.
5. The reference, of course, is to the sheer bulk of Zimbabwean cash, which for much of the past 3-4 years was counted in 'bricks' of 100 notes each.
6. Making her approximately 17-18 years old
7. This might also be translated as 'it just happens' i.e. without you having planned for

it. 'Love' [rudo] is also often said to simply 'fall' on a person. As a much quoted proverb has it, *moyo muti unomera paunoda*—the heart, i.e. the center of love and emotion, is like a tree; it just grows wherever it wants.

8. The 'genuine' example he gives is Turkey. West African countries, though nominally associated with Islam, are far too inhibited by communalism and animism to be truly Muslim.

9. Aristotle's views on 'natural production' and the evils of using money to make money stem from the same domestic/public divide; only the 'natural' sphere of the household (from whence we take our word 'economy') could produce legitimate value (Bloch and Parry 1989).

10. Zimbabwe legalized the pricing and purchase of all items in foreign currency in early 2009. This made the black market redundant, as very few people had any further dealings in Zimdollars.

11. The translation here is a bit tricky. *ChiShona chedu* might be translated as 'our Shona-ness', in the abstract. ChiShona is literally the term for the language, Shona, showing the degree to which a language and a people have come to be seen as the same (Kuper 1999). *Chivanhu chedu*, or simply *chivanhu*, literally refers to a form of shared humanity (*vanhu* being the plural 'people'). In everyday conversation, it is understood as referring to the ways or customs of 'Shona' people (which are sometimes prefaced *tsika nemagariro*, figuratively ways and customs, but derived from words for walking and sitting), including negative ones like witchcraft. See the development of a similar categorization amongst Tswana speakers in Comaroff and Comaroff 1992.

12. The following account is derived from a number of anthropological sources: Holleman 1952, Gelfand 1965; Kuper et al 1954; and Bourdillon 1987. Several vernacular language accounts seem to draw directly from these earlier works. Meekers 1993 offers a critique of certain aspects of the received model. In addition, there are several historical accounts that show the rise of particular forms of marriage and domesticity: Jeater 1993; Barnes 1999; West 2002 and Kaler 2003. For more on domesticity, see also Hansen 1992.

13. A similar linguistic pattern holds with synonyms like *kuwana* (lit. 'to find'): a man 'finds' and a woman is 'found'.

14. Following the standard literature, I use 'boy' and 'girl' intentionally here. The reality of cross-generational marriages is patent, and even amongst 'youth' the male tends to be at least several years older than the female

15. Many of them insist that the situation is no different in rural areas but I cannot corroborate that claim.

16. The second reference is to inheritance procedures (see Ncube and Stewart 1995). A legal marriage provides the woman with a right to inheritance, whereas so-called 'non-registered customary unions' tend to grant inheritance to the patriline.

17. A woman who reaches her mid-twenties without being married is considered suspect, perhaps even by her own relatives, although there are important class differences to take into account. Put bluntly, older women are expected to have had more sexual partners.

18. 'Common' and 'normal' are in English in the original, viz 'It's the common way *muline kuti muskana atizire* yet it is not normal way *yekuroora*.'

19. The English is normally used, although the vernacular *imba diki*, a direct translation, is also used. The origin of the term and practice are both unknown, but it should be noted that an institution with the same or similar name has existed in many other places. Cf. *la casa pequeña* in Latin America (Gutmann 1996).

20. Such labour is 'traditional' only in the sense that it has been a part of the Zimbabwean landscape for a hundred years or so (Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni 1999). It is clearly not timeless, though people quite often read its structure back into precolonial history, as if precolonial men went out of the house every day to search for money or food. Notably, the English term is always used. While breadwinning is often considered the responsibility of the head of the household (*musoro weimba* or, alternatively, *samusha*) this position was not always concerned with the provision of food, nor was there a pre-wage labour monetary economy of such a size as to warrant an ideological role of that sort.

21. Fifty (South African) rands, worth approximately US$8 at the time.

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