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SCSL-04-16-T
(18856-18881)

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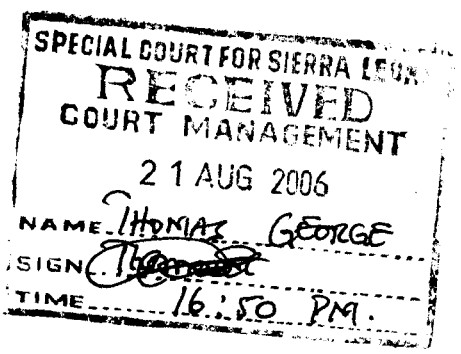
SPECIAL COURT FOR
SIERRA LEONE

Case No. SCSL-2004-16-T

Before: Justice Richard Lussick, Presiding
Justice Teresa Doherty
Justice Julia Sebutinde

Registrar: Lovemore G. Munlo, SC

Date filed: 21 August 2006



THE PROSECUTOR

against

ALEX TAMBA BRIMA

BRIMA BAZZY KAMARA

and

SANTIGIE BORBOR KANU

PUBLIC

JOINT DEFENCE DISCLOSURE OF EXPERT REPORT ON FORCED MARRIAGES BY DR. DORTE THORSEN

Office of the Prosecutor:
Christopher Staker
Karim Agha

Defence Counsel for Kanu:
Geert-Jan A. Knoops, Lead Counsel
Carry J. Knoops, Co-Counsel
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Defence Counsel for Brima:
Kojo Graham
Glenna Thompson

Defence Counsel for Kamara:
Andrew Daniels
Mohamed Pa-Momo Fofanah

1. Pursuant to Rule 94*bis* of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, the Defence hereby discloses the report and curriculum vitae of the Defence expert on the subject of forced marriages Dr. Dorte Thorsen of the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden. The report is entitled: "Expertise on West Africa in Case before the Special Court for Sierra Leone," dated 26 July 2006.

Respectfully submitted,
On 21 August 2006

Geert-Jan Alexander Knoops Kojo Graham Andrew Daniels

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CURRICULUM VITAE **July 2006**

Dr. Dorte Thorsen

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Personal Data

Date of birth: 20 September 1966
Place of birth: Denmark
Nationality: Danish

Main Research Areas

My research on rural livelihoods in West Africa in the past decade has mostly focused on women's position in rural societies and more recently lead to a focus on rural children and youth's work and migration. The topical fields of my research include gendered relations of production and reproduction, decision-making processes, food security, life cycles and intra-household behaviour in rural areas as well as intergenerational relationships, gender relations, migrant and youth identities, youth employment in the informal sector and rural-urban linkages. Methodologically and theoretically, I work within anthropology, feminist theories of household economy and post-structuralism. Although my field research has been limited to Burkina Faso, I have read widely on West Africa and have taught an undergraduate course focusing on this region.

Education

2005	D.Phil. in African Studies, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.
2003	Associate Teacher in University Education, United Kingdom.
1999	M.Sc. in Human Geography, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
1997	Diploma in Women's Studies in Agriculture, Wageningen Agricultural University, The Netherlands.
1996	B.Sc. in Geography, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Languages

Native	Danish
Foreign	English (fluent), French (near fluent), German (good), Dutch and Bisa (halting)

Recent Employment

2005- Research fellow, the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

2004-05 Research fellow, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

2002-04 Research & teaching assistant, Anthropology Department, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

2000 Social worker, Refugee Centre Tårnby, Danish Red Cross, Denmark.

1999 Research assistant, Institute of Geography, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

1992-95 Social worker, Refugee Centres Sandholm and Birkerød, Danish Red Cross, Denmark.

Research Projects & Grants

Youth's Independent Migration from Rural Burkina Faso to Ouagadougou

2005- Focusing on rural youngsters' experience when they migrate to urban centres in Burkina Faso to take up wage labour, this project explores youth's social networks, working lives and strategies to get by and get better. The project aims to increase our understanding of what goes on in the everyday lives of youth with small incomes, little education and frequent employment changes or very small businesses.

Child Migration, Poverty and Livelihoods in Burkina Faso

2004-05 Aiming to increase our understanding of the complexities underlying children's migration in settings characterised by high mobility, this research unpacked the incentives for children to migrate, for their families to allow them to leave or to send them to kin elsewhere, and the household negotiations preceding children's migration. The research also explored child migrants' actual experiences and the links between child migrants, their families in the village and kin based at the destination. This project was funded by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, University of Sussex and DfID.

Husbands, Sons, Mothers and Brothers. Finding Room for Manoeuvre in rural Burkina Faso

2000-04 This research focused on rural women's exercise of agency in the dryland savannah zone in West Africa. Based on an ethnography of the social arenas in which women strategise, choose and make decisions, my thesis offered an empirical critique of economic theories on decision-making and household behaviour. The research also brought to the light many invisible facets of the multiple social arenas that are important sources of symbolic and material resources as well as sites of obligations for women at different points in their life. My doctoral research was funded by a three-year Internationalisation Scholarship for Doctorate Research awarded by the Danish Research Agency.

Female resource use and conjugal contracts. A case study among the Mossi and Bisa in Burkina Faso

1997-99 Study for the Degree of Masters of Science. The research mapped women's access to agricultural resources, the use of their crops and discussed normative discourses on conjugal rights and obligations vis-à-vis the actual practices.

1998 One-month study grant at the Nordic Africa Institute.

1997 Research grants from *Kronprins Frederiks Fond* and *Nord-Syd Iniativet*, University of Copenhagen to do fieldwork in Burkina Faso for Master's programme.

1996 Study grant from *Axel Nielsen og Hustrus Mindelegat* to study at Wageningen Agricultural University for one year.

Professional Experience

Evaluations and consultancies

2006 Short consultancy for DfID aiming to produce an alternative policy document and bring together extensive case studies - told by child migrants - from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana and India. Coordinated by Prof. Ann Whitehead.

2006 Evaluation of applications for travel grants and short-term scholarships to the Nordic Africa Institute.

2005 Evaluation of research proposal to ESRC-DfID funding scheme.

2005 Evaluation of applications for the Nordic Guest Researcher grant to the Nordic Africa Institute.

2005 Examination of a Dissertation for the Degree of Master of Science in Research Design and Methodology, which also served as the research outline for a proposed doctoral research on adolescent female child migrants.

Organisation of workshops and seminars

2004 Organiser of a research afternoon focusing on West Africa, University of Sussex.

2003-04 Organiser of an interdisciplinary, bi-monthly seminar series for doctoral students working in West Africa, University of Sussex.

Recent Public Lectures & Conference Papers

2006 *Junior-senior linkages in migration.* Lecture presented to Kulturwissenschaftliches Forshungskolleg, 22 June 2006, Bayreuth University, Germany

'If only I get enough money for a bicycle!" A study of child migration against a backdrop of exploitation and trafficking in Burkina Faso. Lecture presented to Centre for African Studies, 25 April 2006, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Cosmopolitan dreams among young rural migrants in the city. Paper presented to the panel 'Youth and Cosmopolitanism' at the diamond jubilee conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists in the UK, 10-13 April 2006, Keele University, United Kingdom.

Youth migration against a backdrop of crisis discourses. A study of rural-urban mobility in Burkina Faso. Paper presented to the Swedish Association of Anthropologists, 24-26 March 2006, Stockholm University, Sweden.

2005 *Gender difference and the shaping of life courses: reproductive strategies as exercised in rural Burkina Faso.* Paper presented to the African Studies Association's 48th Annual meeting, 17-20 November 2005, Washington, DC, United States.

In the pursuit of own desires. A case study about young women in rural Burkina Faso. Paper presented to the Nordic Africa Days, 30 September–2 October 2005, Uppsala, Sweden.

Children in transit. Strategies to become adult in rural Burkina Faso. Paper presented to Children and Youth in Emerging and Transforming Societies International Conference, 29 June-3 July 2005, Oslo University, Norway.

2004 *Centripetal forces of marital cycles: Theorising conjugality in rural Burkina Faso.* Paper presented to 'West Africa Research Afternoon', 10 June 2004, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

Tread carefully! Implications of researching female migrants. Presented to a workshop on Ethical Challenges in Child Migration Research, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation & Poverty, 31 March-1 April 2004, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

2003 *(Re)acting within patriarchy. Married life in rural Burkina Faso.* Paper presented to the African Studies Association 46th Annual Meeting, October 30 - November 2 2003, Boston, United States.

'Local Land Use Strategies in a Globalizing World: Shaping Sustainable Social and Natural Environments', 21-23 August 2003, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

2002 *Disconcerting encounters in the field.* Paper presented to the conference 'The meeting between researcher and the field - methodological and ethical issues in qualitative studies', 9-10 December 2002, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

2000 *Dividing or sharing responsibilities? Intra-household budgeting among the Bisa and Mossi in eastern Burkina Faso.* Paper presented to African Studies Association's 43rd annual meeting, 16-19 November 2000, Nashville, United States.

Publications

Co-authored report (forth-coming) *"A better understanding of how life is": Voices of child migrants.* Research Report, DfID, London.

Thorsen, Dorte (in print) Child migrants in transit. Strategies to assert new identities in rural Burkina Faso. In: Christiansen, C., M. Utas and H. Vigh (eds) *Navigating youth, generating adulthood. Social becoming in an African context.* Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Thorsen, Dorte (2003) *Sustainable livelihoods, household dynamics, women's land use. A case study from Burkina Faso.* Conference proceedings "Local Land Use Strategies in a Globalizing World: Shaping Sustainable Social and Natural Environments", 21-23 August 2003, Copenhagen.

Thorsen, Dorte (2002) 'We help our husbands!' Negotiating the household budget in rural Burkina Faso, *Development & Change* 33: 129-146.

Thorsen, Dorte & Reenberg, Anette (2000) Marginal producers or breadwinners: Women's cropping strategies and access to agricultural key resources in Boulgou province, Burkina Faso. *Geografisk Tidsskrift, Danish Journal of Geography* 100: 47-59.

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Uppsala, 26 July 2006

Expertise on West Africa in case before the Special court for Sierra Leone

In response to your request of 13 June 2006 for carrying out a short research on the concept of forced marriage in the West African region, of which the purpose was to outline the history and practice of forced marriage in the region and possibly also the way in which this practice is embedded in local culture and practice, I regret to inform you that I decline to undertake the research in the requested form.

My response is founded on a deep concern with the longer-term consequences of making straightforward links between complex social practices of arranging marriages between kin groups, international conceptualisations of 'forced marriages', and the coercion of women into being 'bush wives' during the civil war in Sierra Leone. Not only does such a simplification deny women - and young women in particular - agency in decisions related to their own or their daughters' marriage, it also describes social practices as static and unresponsive to processes of economic, social and political change. Most importantly, I am worried that the requested research with its focus on 'forced marriage' in West Africa endorses a general view on rural populations as backwards and on their diverse social practices as the primary source of malevolence, sexual abuse and war atrocities. Having done long-term field research focusing on rural households, and in particular on women's exercise of agency throughout their life cycle and in different spheres, this is not a view that I would want to support.

A detailed explanation of my objection to the simplifications mentioned above is provided in the following, where I first discuss the notion of 'forced marriage' and then elaborate on social practices and negotiations related to the process of marrying and to conjugal relationships nested in large households. Finally, I briefly look at the notion of 'bush wives' and young women's strategising during the conflict.

The origins of the notion of 'forced marriage'

In its use to describe cultural practices, the notion of 'forced marriage' derives from colonial records and early anthropological work that often was carried out by Christian missionaries. Although these texts did not always use the terminology 'forced marriage', their representations of African women as "oppressed beasts of burden, subject to drudgery and degrading marriage practices" (Cornwall 2005: 2) left no doubt about women's subordination to patriarchal structures and their vulnerability to being married off at an early age by their fathers. Representations that were profoundly shaped by the colonial civilising mission embedded in the Enlightenment discourse and aimed to repress what was labelled as customary practices, amongst others the social practices of bridewealth and polygyny.

> Many missionaries proclaimed that women were being sold against their will to husbands who treated them as no more than slaves or chattel. [...] Many argued vehemently against the degrading consequences of polygyny. Women engaged in such marriage practices were believed to have little opportunity to rebel or improve their condition.
>
> (Beoku-Betts 2005 [1976]: 22)

Across Anglophone and Francophone colonies, bridewealth payments from the husband's kin group to his wife's kin group were reduced in the European representations to a simple economic transaction playing on the imagery of slave trade, and polygyny was depicted either as slavery or as African men's sexual promiscuity (Hunt 2005: 54-55).

The European anthropologists carrying out extensive fieldwork in Africa in the 1930s and 1940s shifted the focus away from the moral panic of colonial administrators and missionaries and concentrated instead on expositions of kinship ideologies and domestic organisation in different ethnic groups. The theoretical focus was primarily on the way in which social practices related to marriage and succession reproduced the existing structures of local societies (structural-functionalism) or on the maintenance of social relationships between kin groups through the exchange of women (structuralism). But in line with the earlier representations of African societies modelled on Euro-centric notions of gender hierarchies, these anthropologists were preoccupied with the local political-jural relationships among men, while women were relegated to the domestic sphere as wives and daughters (Yanagisako & Collier 1996). It should be noted however that neither of these paradigms allowed individuals agency to make choices and pursue their own preferences, hence they did not address theoretically the question of whether marriages were forced or not.

Feminist anthropologists, on the other hand, have challenged the passivity and victimisation of African women in colonial representations. A number of archival studies from both Anglophone and Francophone Africa demonstrate that women had leverage vis-à-vis their husbands. Beoku-Betts, for example, quoted

a British administrator in West Africa who wrote about women's refusal to cook for their husband.

> ... a crossed woman will torment her husband in a galling manner by refusing to prepare food for him. He may resent the treatment by becoming furiously angry and by vigorous corporal punishment, but neither satisfies his appetite and he feels keenly the insult of having to return to bed supperless.
>
> (Basden 1921 cf. Beoku-Betts 2005: 22)

Mbilinyi (1989) traced numerous court cases in colonial Tanganyika in which men attempted to reclaim their deserted wives and daughters who had escaped a marriage arrangement to which they did not agree. The frequency of these cases, argued Mbilinyi, suggest that divorce and remarriage were more or less the norm at the time. Women usually left a marriage to marry a man of their choice who was willing to pay adultery damages and repay the bridewealth, since they rarely had the means to do so themselves. These points resonate with evidence from West Africa, amongst others from Nigeria where Byfield (2001) collected eleven cases related to marriage disputes brought before the colonial railway commissioners in Abeokuta between 1900-04. Six of the cases were submitted by men and five by women. While the majority of men wanted their wives back, the female plaintiffs wished to end a concluded or proposed marriage. Evidence from Upper Volta illustrates the extent of women's resistance.

> Honoured Judge, I don't ask you to punish my wife but to oblige her lover to send her back to me, to oblige my wife to come home. I am not the one who refuses her, she is the one who refuses to return to her marital household.
>
> (Nikyema 1968: 845, my translation)

In Tanganyika, women made strategic use of the courts to leave marriage.

> Wife beating was a common accusation, which reflected the level of male violence against women. It also reflected women's success at manipulating the courts system however. Extreme wife beating was one of the few grounds for divorce for women that was acceptable in the courts, and some women undoubtedly manipulated that fact. Several women got divorce without damage payments after their accusations were accepted in court.
>
> (Mbilinyi 1989: 223)

These examples from the early 20th Century indicate firstly that even in the cases where young women had been under severe pressure from their seniors to enter an arranged marriage, they did not endure such marriages, and secondly that women did not accept to suffer in marriages where force was used excessively. The changing focus in anthropology over time has affected the use of particular concepts and while the term 'mariage forcé' is still used in Francophone anthropology, Anglo-Saxon anthropologists have since long referred primarily to notions like 'arranged marriages' and 'customary marriages' without making implicit assumptions about the degree of force involved.

Nonetheless, the notion of 'forced marriage' is commonly used in studies from a rights-based perspective which rarely describe the particularities of such marriages or the actual experiences of the women entering them. Despite the fact that an increasing number of anthropologists engage in debates on human rights, Messer (1993: 224) pointed out that in the early 1990s most articles on human rights in a cross-cultural perspective were written by political scientists, legal scholars and philosophers, to which health-related disciplines can be added today. None of these disciplines have a tradition for dealing with the nitty-gritty details of cultural particularities and local practices at community-level. So despite the fact that anthropologists' fine-grained historical analyses of the impacts on West African women and men of social, economic and political changes could inform and sharpen the questions raised in these disciplines, the link is rarely made.

In parts, this is rooted in anthropologists' rejection of universalism and in human rights proponents' perception of anthropology as inherently cultural relativist. However, Messer (ibid: 239-40) opposed to the emphasis given by others to cultural relativism in anthropology and argued that the grounding of abstract human rights in particular community situations, would facilitate a better understanding of how these rights are conceptualised by different stakeholders and of the factors shaping their respective conceptualisations. Ten years later, Merry (2003) pointed out that the key divergence between anthropological and rights-based analysis derives from the theorisation of culture and custom. While the human rights perspective, as it is applied in the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), tends to see a number of cultural customs as harmful traditional practices, and culture as an obstacle to women's realisation of equality, contemporary anthropology provides a more nuanced view. Not only are different elements of culture e.g. beliefs, values and practices perceived to be subject to contestation and negotiation, they are also considered to underpin *both* constraints *and* opportunities for individuals to pursue their own choices. Moreover, local changes are conceptualised as dynamic and disjointed processes that are influenced by processes of change at the national and transnational level and as processes that impact differently on different categories of people (ibid: 16-22).

In line with Merry's conceptualisation of culture and diversity, I provide a more nuanced view on contemporary social practices related to marriage in rural West Africa in the following sections. Here, I wish to underscore that despite the fact that people belonging to the same ethnic group may uphold similar values and norms about marriage, their interpretations of these values and norms frequently vary due to differences between localities, social and economic standing, gender, levels of education and information, political leanings, etc. At the same time, many of the abstract issues at stake in marriage processes are similar across ethnic groups, even when the particularities differ.

Complex social practices of marriage: processes of marrying and of choosing suitable marriage partners

The level of detail required to get a deeper understanding of the extent to which girls and young women are coerced into marriage by their seniors and how the degree of coercion has been shaped by institutional and economic changes requires long-term fieldwork that allows for building up personal relationships with women and men with whom such sensitive issues can be discussed. Mbilinyi's study of court cases in colonial Tanganyika quoted above suggested that women strategically moulded their accounts to the values that would make possible their goal. There is no reason to think that people being interviewed by researchers or activists should be less subjective or less strategic in portraying themselves in ways that guard their secrets, aim to shape the outcome of their accounts and suit their aspirations to particular identities, life-styles or representations of their culture (Caplan 1997, Lather 2000). Therefore participation in and observation of everyday life and exceptional situations is important for validating information gathered during field research and for understanding generalities and diversity within the setting.

To get a window on the abstract issues underpinning the processes of marrying and of choosing suitable marriage partners I use my doctoral research on the Bisa ethnic group in south-eastern Burkina Faso as a point of departure. This research was based on 12 months' fieldwork in 2001-02 in a small village with around 1,000 inhabitants and on already established relationships in this village from a 6-month research in 1997-98.

The Bisa made in 2001 a distinction between two types of marriage, the *halkalɛ* and the *yarsalɛ*, onto which religious and civil ceremonies could be grafted. Catholic missionaries had already described the two customary marriage types in detail in the 1950s and 1960s. Then the *halkalɛ* was sketched as a marriage arranged by the bride's and groom's kin - typically while the girl was still very young - and because bridewealth payments changed hand before she became of age to marry she was perceived to have little chance to get out of the arrangement except by eloping. The *yarsalɛ*, on the other hand, was depicted as a marriage chosen by the young couple and, accordingly, as the girl's own choice of marital partner. However, this marriage was a gradual process where the groom and his kin offered bridewealth prestations in kind and labour to the girl's parents during the courtship. Girls' seniors had therefore a material interest in drawing out the courtship, but the girls frequently defied this interest by eloping with the suitor (Prost 1950, Sœur Jean Bernard 1965). It is worth noting that the missionaries' descriptions of Bisa customs included the practice of girls' eloping to follow their own preferences regarding their marital partner.

Although the literature set up a dichotomy between the two types of marriage, it was no longer sustained in 2001. Both the *halkalɛ* and the *yarsalɛ* marriage carried expectations of gift- and labour prestations in the last one or two years before the marriage was consummated, implying that both a *halkalɛ* arrangement and a courtship of the *yarsalɛ* type involved a large circle of people who invested in or gained

from the union. Moreover, girls chose to enter *yarsalɛ* marriages with absent migrants despite the fact that the future husband's father or brothers performed the courtship. Nevertheless, people still spoke about marriages in terms of *halkalɛ* and *yarsalɛ*. An important aspect of this distinction related to the ideological content. To refer to a marriage as *halkalɛ* implied parental control of the process while referring to *yarsalɛ* emphasised individual choices. Few women liked to admit that they had had limited ability to pursue their subjective preferences and they thus stated that they had chosen freely unless they wanted to narrate some problems they had experienced.

(Summary of Thorsen 2005: 82-84)

The general description of the practices in customary marriages among the Bisa illuminates a number of issues that in an ethnographic analysis and thick description become multifaceted. In this context however I limit myself to a brief overview.

The complexities of family relations and family organisation imply several people may have an interest and a say in the marriages of young women and men, not only among the Bisa but also more generally in the West African region. Firstly, kinship relations frequently give preference to certain relationships, e.g. between children and their grandparents or between children and their parents' siblings, that in turn are linked with particular set of rights and obligations and with emotional attachments. Secondly, households often consist of more people than the two parents and their children; practices such as polygyny, the cohabitation of several generations and of siblings and cousins and the support of members of the extended family increase the size of households and thus the number of people who may strike up emotional and material relationships with children. Finally, the high rate of mobility amongst other linked with labour migration and trade activities means that families often are spread over several geographical locations and that their views on marriage may be influenced and shaped by experiences of and reflections on practices elsewhere, memories of their origins and the degree of closeness they share with their children. All these aspects shape individuals' perceptions of their right to influence the choice of marriage partner and their keenness to do so. Consequently, marriage arrangements - and the use of force - are not a matter between a unified group of male and female seniors or the father and an adolescent girl but between a number of relatives with diverse interests in the marriage and the girl.

Another issue concerns the evaluation of the suitability of possible marriage partners and the importance ascribed to social networks and intergenerational relationships. When elders, be they fathers, mothers or close relatives, assess the suitability of a potential marriage partner, they often have broader concerns about alliances between two lineages and, especially, between their own household and households where members of their kin group live. While they may have self-interested objectives such as the material and symbolic resources they gain from marriage prestations, they are also concerned with their juniors' fu-

ture well-being, not least because children and grandchildren are symbolically and materially important in their very old age. This point contrasts the implicit assumptions underlying the concept of 'harmful traditional practices' to which many reports focusing on human rights refer, namely that parents are not concerned with the well-being and best interests of their children. Both within anthropological and rights-based analyses, it has been pointed out that in patrilineal societies only boys are important for their parents' and seniors' long-term security because girls are married out of the kin group. This view is however countered in practice by valuing women as care-givers and by leaving them room to travel to assist elderly or ailing kin (Goody 1958).

Juniors, on the other hand, may be more concerned with the potential partner's personality, looks and charms than with alliances between kin groups. Nevertheless, adolescent girls and potential bride-givers frequently take similar things into account, that is, whether they know the groom's family or not, whether the family is capable of providing for the bride and whether his kin - or the bride's kin married into that household - will ensure her well-being and intervene in marital disputes. Notwithstanding these shared concerns, adolescent girls and the range of seniors with an interest in the marriage assess the possible spouses from fundamentally different perspectives because their social positions and responsibilities in the lineage and household differ. In the case of disagreement juniors, and especially the girls, balance their own preferences for a marriage partner against potential punitive measures, as well as against the moral support and mediation in marital quarrels their elders may provide. Along these lines, girls may consent to marriage for reasons spanning from plainly liking the future spouse or his family to complying with a senior's wish. Even if they disagree to the marriage, they may not be in a position to counter a powerful senior or create other options at the consummation of the marriage. However, they may be able to bond tactically with kin who support their preferences.

An interesting point in the representations of customary marriages among the Bisa is the option of eloping, be it to escape a *halkalɛ* marriage or to avoid a lengthy *yarsalɛ* courtship. This was, and still is, a way for adolescent girls to act out their choice in a social system that bestows very little power on girls compared to that of their elders. Among the Bisa overt face-to-face opposition to an elder's preferences was still a rare occurrence in 2001 and adolescent girls were subject to intense pressure and often also threats of being abandoned by their kin group if they moved to the household of the suitor they preferred against the wish of their kin. The choice was therefore a difficult one to make and many Bisa women linked their acquiescence to a *halkalɛ* marriage with the importance to them of their kin. Under those circumstances, girls' choice of marriage partner is constrained, not because they lack agency but because they reflect on their options and make decisions accordingly.

A comprehensive examination of the social practices shaping customary marriages in one particular context indicates the key areas in which processes of social and economic change may impact on, diversify and creolise mainstream practices not only in that setting but also in other settings. My study of marriage practices among the Bisa suggest that, when looking at customary marriages as they are practiced among the numerous ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, it is crucial to unpack who may be involved in such marriage transactions, the concerns underlying these people's decision-making about a marriage and how inequalities in power shape negotiations and the issues open to negotiation between juniors and elders and between women and men. Only when we have information about these issues, is it possible to get a nuanced assessment of the degree of force involved in these marriages, and at the changes they have undergone over time.

Social practices of marriage in Sierra Leone: A brief overview

To find out about who may have vested interests in young people's marriages and thus who may want to influence the arrangements and negotiations we need to look at the different forms of marriage that are practiced in Sierra Leone. Although Richards et al. (2004: 2) mention that the specificities of family and marriage arrangements differ among ethnic groups in Sierra Leone they argue that the broader patterns of social practices are similar and embedded in the changing political and economic situation in rural areas. This view was already expressed in 1962 by D'Azevedo who noted that variations in the pattern of social organisation in the borderlands of Sierra Leone and Liberia was local adaptations rather than 'tribal' particularities (D'Azevedo 1962: 505). In this brief overview I therefore use a limited number of ethnographies to sketch out the most common forms of marriage.

Based on a study carried out in the 1970s of Kpelle women's strategies to accumulate wealth and power, Bledsoe (1980: 84-94) observed that in the areas where cash incomes were scarce young women and men were, by and large, constrained to marry legally, that is, in traditional marriages that involved kinsmen's recognition and acceptance of the union, their advice on marital matters and their control of negotiations and bridewealth transfers. However, a number of more informal unions were practiced by Kpelle, ranging from 'trial marriages' where young couples co-habited before all formal bridewealth transactions had been transferred to 'night loving' or 'hidden loving' where, as the terms suggest, kin did not know about the relationship. One decade later, Hardin's (1993: 62-63) fieldwork among the Kono suggested that where in the past long courtships were initiated when the girl was very young either by the groom's mother or by his first wife, these forms of marriage had become rare. This is, argued Hardin, in parts because the increasing monetisation and substitution of bridewealth in kind for cash has made it too costly for the majority of people but also because it has become more common that the couple choose themselves. Similar changes have taken place among the Mende it seems. In her

study of the Mende in the late 1980s, Ferme (2001) observed that although the outcome of a child betrothal was perceived to be a stable marriage, the most widespread marriage form was one involving choice for both the husband and the adolescent girl. This did not imply that the girl's parents and kin were excluded from the decision-making; men still invested in the courtship and regularly paid for their future brides' initiation into the Sande secret society prior to the consummation of the marriage (ibid: 88-91).

The latter point about kin's continued involvement in many a marriage indicates that even in the cases where young people are better able to exert their preferences, their kin may still shape the choice. Hardin's (1993: 60-62) ethnography illuminated that in traditional courtships a number of people were involved in the gradual process of marrying. The first person to be approached when courting a girl was the mother's brother, who symbolically was the girl's husband until she was 'released' by a suitor's bridewealth prestations. Mothers were enlisted to guarantee their support of the marriage and thus their constructive advice to their daughters, and the girl's brothers to initiate the relationship which in the future would be of importance for the suitor's progeny. Finally, at the stage when presents were offered to the girl's parents, i.e., to her mal seniors, she was asked whether she accepted the suitor. Ferme's (2001) description of rural Mende households in terms of their complexity and impermanence suggests that many of the nuances related to potential bride-givers discussed above for the Bisa also apply in rural Sierra Leone. Consequently, a number of classificatory mothers and fathers may advice both the girls and their future spouses and possibly compete among themselves and with the kin who traditionally were involved in marriage negotiations over who has the final say.

These ethnographic examples show firstly that many close relatives on both the mother and father's side have had a say in traditionally arranged marriages. Even if girls were only asked symbolically at the very end of the courtship, they might well have had a chance to articulate their preferences directly or indirectly to some of their relatives at an earlier stage. Secondly, they show that marriage practices *have changed* in the course of years. Such changes, argues Bledsoe (2000: 118), were driven primarily by pragmatic adaptations to social and economic change. Hardin (1993: 68-70) highlighted the inconspicuous conflict between young men's reluctance to invest their meagre resources in their in-laws, and young women's perception of such investments as paying respect to them and their families and as consolidating the relationships. This implies that even though adolescent girls and young women have gotten more power within their own lineage to exert their choices of marriage partners, these changes have not altered significantly the evaluation of what qualities make a man a suitable marriage partner, with the exception perhaps that adolescent girls often choose younger men. Finally, the ethnographies show that the fact that the young girls break with kinship alliances through finding lovers is not as new as Richards et al. (2004) seem to suggest. The so-called 'trial marriages'

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appear in many ethnographic descriptions and Bledsoe (1980, 2000) claims that girls often enter such relationships with their parents' implicit permission because they believe that a subsequent marriage will be more stable.

Being a wife in composite rural households

Apart from the lack of attention given in rights-based analyses to the abstract matters underpinning social practices of marrying, they do not take into account the impact of the socially embedded nature of rural economies or of the household organisation on conjugal relationships. As a result, they tend to reinforce the Euro-centric perceptions of gender hierarchies advocated in the colonial era and ignore the broader base of women's and men's power which feminists, and in particular African feminists, have stressed (amongst others Amadiume 1987, Ekejiuba 1996, Kolawole 2004, Oyewumi 2001, Sudarkasa 1989). Men are therefore conceptualised as household heads and breadwinners and women as mothers, domestic slaves and passive victims of (elderly) men.

The plethora of feminist critiques grounded in historical analyses of the long-term processes of change in West Africa and in theorising different aspects of household relations make obvious that conjugal relationships are nested within larger complexes of mutual rights and responsibilities in the household and extending beyond it to other households belonging to the same kin group (Whitehead 1998). These complexes are shaped by cultural variations that determine who belongs to the domestic group and the implications of this membership regarding claims on resources, privileges and responsibilities (cf. Bledsoe 1980; Carney 1988; Guyer 1988, Jones 1986; Şaul 1993; Whitehead 1984). As household economies commonly are segregated along the lines of gender, age and marital status, women and men have both material and symbolic resources that, on the one hand, determine their individual bargaining power vis-à-vis their spouse and vis-à-vis other household members and, on the other hand, are subject to negotiation and contestation.

To understand better the kind of issues underlying women's evaluation of their marriage, their perception of suffering a violent or unreasonable husband and their willingness to remain with him, I again turn to my study of the Bisa in south-eastern Burkina Faso.

A Bisa household represents the social relations between successive generations of male agnates and their spouses within a minimal lineage, and in rural settings it is the resource base for nearly all livelihood activities. In the village where I lived, composite households consisting of two to four generations and 10 to 25 household members were common in 2001. Usually they consisted of two male elders who managed each their collective household farm in which their dependants worked every morning from around 8 am to 2 pm. In these farms the mainstay of the millet and rice for household consumption was produced. Furthermore, the male elders allocated land to each wife, married son and daughter-in-law and frequently also to unmarried adolescent children which they cultivated very early in the morning and

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in the afternoon. The crops of rice, groundnuts, beans and millet from these farms belonged to the person who had grown them but were often used for household consumption, especially if the farm belonged to a woman with children.

Although the dominant ideology of conjugal responsibilities was linked symbolically and materially with husbands' provision of millet and health and with women's child-bearing and labour contributions, the division of resources and responsibilities was shaped by the nesting of conjugal relationships in large composite households. Most adolescent girls married into a household as the wife of a junior man who did not head a collective production unit. While he had no claims on her labour during the morning where she worked in the elder's household farm just as he did, he also did not bear the responsibility for providing her millet. Despite the fact that marriage served as a marker of the transition into adulthood, young couples did therefore not shoulder the same responsibilities as their seniors did. They were incorporated into the social reproduction of the household at the everyday level as suppliers of labour, and in the longer term as suppliers of new labour through their procreation, while the overall responsibilities for immediate material and symbolic welfare were in the hands of senior household members, and especially of the male elder. Another aspect that influenced the organisation of households was the high frequency of migration. Many young men migrated with or without their wives and thereby compelled elders to work more and women to provide staple food from their personal farms to make ends meet.

The common division of resources and responsibilities curtailed the claims young women could make on symbolically important household resources because they did not have the same leverage in negotiations with a senior father-in-law as in negotiations with their husband. Older women, on the other hand, were often married to the head of a collective farm and therefore had stronger claims on household resources because they knew him better, they had a sexual relationship and children with him, and they could take recourse to refuse to cook, refuse indirectly to have sex or withdraw their labour from his farm temporarily. But younger women were not without leverage vis-à-vis their senior in-laws. The inroads made on their personal crops and incomes to feed their children also enabled them to negotiate even more time to activities of which they controlled the returns.

(Summary of Thorsen 2005: 175-90)

The fundamental social structures underlying conjugal relationships among the Bisa are informative at the abstract level about the questions that need to be examined. Once again the complexity of family relations and household organisation play a significant role in as much as the different positions of young and mature conjugal units nested in large composite households influence the expectations women have of their husband.

Firstly, it is necessary to look at the cultural variations in the norms about residence at marriage. In settings where virilocal or uxorilocal residence is common (living with the husband's or the wife's kin respectively), one of the young spouses starts married life as a stranger among his or her in-laws, while the other spouse remains with his or her kin but takes on a new social position. The way in which they consolidate their respective positions within the household

is shaped by the social relations of production that bestow one of them with a different set of claims on material and symbolic resources from the claims conferred to an in-marrying wife or husband (Fortes 1949, Roth 1996: 68-70). The advantage of remaining with kin with whom relationships are already established may afford one spouse more leeway for deviating from their seniors' preferences and for defaulting on their claims on juniors without too many repercussions while an in-marrying spouse can be subject to threats of eviction from the household and thus from the marriage (Thorsen 2005). When neo-local residence is common, that is when a married couple lives outside their kin's households, the dynamics of their relationship depend on how their household is embedded in the social setting and on their access to resources to make a livelihood.

A second key issue is the way in which expectations of a marriage partner are constructed in the first place and how they change in the course of marriage. Dominant views on marriage and conjugal relationships usually provide an elusive sketch of the claims and responsibilities of wives and husbands respectively. This sketch is rife with inconsistencies and absences that are used in more or less concealed ways of negotiating (Schroeder 2001). My study illustrated that the degree to which an individual is sensitive to these reinterpretations and negotiation affects his or her expectations. Dominant ideas are not just reproduced or internalised without some modification. The making of a woman's expectations of her husband is an outcome both of social processes involving other women with whom she identifies or mirrors herself, and of constant individual adaptations to the impressions deriving from many sources and from her own experiences as a wife (Thorsen 2005).

Furthermore, a young woman's evaluation of her husband's, and possibly of his kin's, success in meeting her expectations early in marriage is likely to depend on the conditions under which she married, ranging on a continuum from an arranged marriage that she could not avoid to having chosen the husband herself. Even if her initial expectations of the husband are the same, a woman who has chosen her husband herself is more likely to accept that not all expectations are met as long as she is generally happy in the marriage. This acceptance is to be contrasted with that of a young woman who has been forced into an arranged marriage to which she did not consent. She is more likely to draw attention to failures to meet responsibilities that are perceived imperative in the dominant views, since such failures may enable her to leave the marriage with the bride-giver's sanction. Likewise, women's expectations are shaped by the type of household that they enter at the consummation of the marriage and by the material and social position of their affines.

In the course of marriage, women's expectations of the husband are modified by their actual experiences, and by their changing relative positions within the household. A wife's expectations may rest on her husband's success, his attitudes towards her and her general well-being in the conjugal household. It is

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therefore important to see conjugal relationships in a longer term, as women may balance their current expectations of the husband against future prospects. Moreover, individual acts of appreciation or challenge are not necessarily based on current issues but may relate to events in the past (Whitehead 1994).

The feminist anthropological critiques, my own included, of the way in which intra-household behaviour has been modelled especially in economics but also in other disciplines draw attention to three fundamental sets of questions that need to be addressed when trying to understand the relations and interactions between wives and husbands elsewhere and the kind of expectations they have of one another. The first relates to the resources that are key sources of livelihoods, be they urban or rural, and the examination of who controls them, the degree of competition, how they are negotiated and how these aspects affect women and men in different age brackets not only within households and local communities but also at the macro-level. Another very important issue is the kind of life styles and living standards people aspire to and the way in which such aspirations influence claims on particular resources. Finally and interconnected, it is utmost important to look at the social and economic structures that shape the alternatives to the present situation and the hopes for improvement.

The cultural roots of young wives' position in the light of change in Sierra Leone

Corresponding to the range of marriage forms and the variations in kin's influence in the choice of marriage partner for adolescent girls, we need to look at the actual practices of residence after the marriage to get a window on how marriage affects the girls. Here the socio-economic standing of different lineages and households play a significant role. Richards et al. (2004: 3-5) argued that a distinct class-system in rural Sierra Leone divides people in three categories; the land-owning elite, commoners and former slaves, which in turn shapes the ability of men to marry and of women to influence the choice of husband. The emphasis on class and on alliances between lineages, be they between elite lineages to reinforce their power or between a wealthy and a poor lineage to create, or buttress, a patron-client relationship, is in line with Marxist functionalism and thus with Meillassoux's (1981) theorisation of control over labour in rural communities. This perspective stresses the importance of wife-exchanges as a means to control young men's labour but reveals little about the impact on young women.

And yet, economic stratification may have profound bearings, not only in negative terms of constraining their choice of marriage partner but also in positive terms of determining the post-marriage residence. D'Azevedo (1962) noted that in spite of a preference for virilocal residence in the Gola forest, practices of post-marriage residence varied and the actual marriage negotiations set out whether the young couple should live with the groom's kin (virilocal residence) or with the bride's kin (uxorilocal residence). Among the wealthy, the two kin groups competed to accommodate the young couple and their children, while

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among the poorer families uxorilocal residence was seen as an investment in a valuable alliance at the level of both the kin group and the individual. Although D'Azevedo concentrated on the grand principles and not on gender differences, his insights about flexible residence arrangements draw attention to the different situations in which a newly married woman could find herself. Whether she became a stranger in her husband's household or took on a new position at home was not an outcome of traditional practices only but of seniors' claims on juniors' labour, of seniors' ability to provide junior men with the necessary resources or squeeze them into dependency, and with juniors' ability to exert their preferences.

The ethnographic accounts do however mostly deal with the dominant principles of patrilineality that also tend to give preference to virilocal residence in those societies where biological and social reproduction is still closely interrelated. Nonetheless, they illustrate that claims on various resources do not hinge entirely on the residence but also on the life-long relationships established through marriage that oblige men to contribute labour and other resources to their in-laws even if they live with their own patrilineage. In line with Kono women's conceptualisation of these contributions as paying them and their families respect (mentioned above), Richards provides two interview excerpts which highlight that while junior men talk about their obligations to in-laws as prohibitive and exploitative, junior women are less concerned about their immediate effect.

> [Excerpt from interview with a young man] But the brideprice is not reasonable. You will be required to do all sorts of physical jobs for the bride's family, like brushing and making a farm for the family ... sharing the proceeds of your own labour, harvest or business ... You will be forced to give them 70% (of your drum of palm oil), or you will lose your wife and be taken to court ...
>
> [Excerpt from interview with a young woman] Of course it is preferable to have a young husband, but it would be hard for (such a) husband to get his own farm. Because of bride service 'he will work for my father and brothers for many years to come ... in fact, for the rest of his life (laughing)' ... Yes, he will remain poor, but my daughters will marry, and my husband can rest on the bride service the daughters attract.
>
> (Richards 2005: 579)

In fact, the quotes fall within the principles of patrilineality inasmuch as junior men seek to retain their individual resources for themselves and perhaps also their kin, while junior women are concerned about their own patrilineage and about the leverage their strong ties with their own kin offers them in negotiations with the husband and his kin. In the case the husband neglects his wife he is likely to neglect his obligations to his in-laws as well and thereby undermine their willingness to make the wife return to him should she choose to remarry. This is indeed another key aspect of the divergence between the views of junior women and men. All the ethnographies stress ambiguities and flexibility in so-

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cial practices and point out that this gives individuals space for manoeuvre. Bledsoe (1980), for instance, found that in spite of the dependence on kinsmen's recognition and acceptance of a marriage, marital status was frequently subject to manipulation, especially in the less formal unions characterising remarriages where kin had not been involved.

> Men, for example, usually insist that women with whom they are living have been 'turned over' to them, but they may swear that troublesome wives are only girlfriends whom they can discard with no legal penalties. Married women, on the other hand, may try to prove they were not 'turned over' to poor men or men they have come to dislike, but may try to hold on to wealthy men even though they are not yet 'turned over' to them.
>
> (Bledsoe 1980: 8)

This brings us to consider what kind of aspirations young women have to their adult life that shapes their expectations of the husband and informs their evaluation of his performance. For most, marriage is about having children since they are the foundation of both symbolic and material wealth. The real divergence in women's expectations is their imaginations of what constitutes a good marriage. For some it is a monogamous union while others find it advantageous to share the workload with a co-wife. An important and changing quality of conjugal relationships is the ongoing replacement of distant formality between spouses by ideals of love and companionship, at least in private (Bledsoe 2000). What exactly love and companionship mean is an empirical question that is bound to differ regionally and between different classes. Hardin (1993: 65-66) drew attention to the cautionary stories told by Kono about relationships based on love, in which women were blamed for failing to preserve the customary complementarities between themselves and their husband because they accepted that he did not respect their rights and therefore endured hardship beyond what could be expected. In short, the changing views on what qualities of conjugal relationships are preferable are not necessarily advantageous to women, just as traditional, or customary, practices are not harmful *per se*.

Furthermore, it is imperative to elucidate women's strategies to pursue their own aspirations, as well as the alternatives they choose between. The colonial records from elsewhere in West Africa and the ethnographic studies carried out Liberia in the late 1970s (Bledsoe 1980) and in Sierra Leone in the 1980s (Ferme 2001, Hardin 1993) discuss divorce and remarriage as strategies open to young women especially. Where Richards (2005) refers to the high levels of adultery and subsequent charges for damage already in the colonial courts and the continuous pursuit of such cases today to make a case about the persisting inequalities in rural Sierra Leonean economies, the number of these cases also witness about women's agency both in the past and in the present. Despite the fact that rural women may not be able, or wish, to remain unmarried like some town women, they are able to remarry, with or without their kin's acceptance, if the initial bridewealth payments were never settled, if such payments are reimbursed or if having had children compensate for the payments.

Coercion of women into being 'bush wives'

In this final section, I briefly look at the notion of 'bush wives', which in the Human Rights Watch 2004 World Report was depicted as follows:

> During armed conflict, combatants routinely abduct women - for long or short periods of time - and force them to become 'wives', essentially obliging women to cook, clean, wash clothes, and have sex (and often as a consequence to bear children), all of which are stereotyped, gender-specific forms of labour. Such relationships, of course, mimic relationships during peacetime, especially peacetime situations in which forced marriage and expectations of free female labour are common practice. This stereotyped perception of women persists in wartime and puts them at great risk for abduction and violence.
>
> (Jefferson 2004:332)

It is important to note that 'wives' are in inverted commas to emphasise, I presume, that no marriage transactions have been made and no ceremonies held. The position as 'wife' in this context is completely determined by the work these women did and by the sexual relationships into which they were coerced. Jefferson does however claim that the relationships are replications of customary marriages and thereby reduces them to situations of exploitation and degradation on a par with the representations of women in the colonial era. In my opinion, it is highly problematic to make such rudimentary links between broad cultural practices and practices that developed in the social landscape of civil war. Taking the discussion and ethnographic examples in the previous sections into account raises questions about in which arenas the stereotyped perceptions of women persist.

In a more nuanced use, the terms 'bush wife' and 'bush husband' relate to the bundles of obligations and rights inherent in implicit conjugal contracts. Consequently, when a Sierra Leonean man told (an abducted) girl that she would be his wife, he forced her into the relationship but also indicated that he was willing to take on (some of) the responsibilities ascribed to a young husband. Whether he then fulfilled these responsibilities and whether he succeeded in overcoming the girl's contempt due to his initial use of force is a different question but may give an indication of why some women have remained with their 'bush husbands' and others have not. Along this line of inquiry we also need to raise questions about adolescent girls' and young women's ability to strategise during the civil war.

Utas (2005: 9), for example, drew attention to moral and economic issues underpinning youngsters' representations of themselves as victims in a study of child and youth soldiers in Liberia and in another study of Sierra Leonean refugee women in northern Liberia. Firstly, it was difficult for the young soldiers to explain and justify their actions if they had participated in the war voluntarily and thus to avoid to be stigmatised locally and internationally because of the atrocities committed in the course of the civil war. Secondly, the social position

as victim enabled child soldiers and women refugees to make claims on humanitarian aid both during and after the war and, they hoped, it could help them to re-integrate and be accepted in their communities. Statistics of abductions and rapes are therefore insufficient to depict the complexities of adolescent girls' and young women's location in the war.

Through the life story of one Liberian girl, Utas (ibid) sketched the way in which many girls became involved with soldiers and commanders as a choice, albeit a choice on a continuum from a free choice because they aspired to the middle-class liberated life style that these men offered their girlfriends, or simply liked the man, to a strategic but constrained choice to safeguard themselves or their families. Some of these girls also became fighters in whatever army their boyfriend was involved. Mazurana & Carlson (2004) made a similar observation and pointed out that not all the young women were captives; some joined because their husband asked them to, others because the Paramount Chief of their area made it mandatory that each family contributed with a member, others agreed to join or to become 'wives' to survive. The degree of freedom in such choices is impossible to estimate since they depend both on the situation in which girls find themselves and on the alternatives available to them (McKay 2004).

Given that 'bush marriages' are embedded in cultural understandings of implicit conjugal contracts and the bundles of obligations and rights they outline for husbands and wives respectively, the position as a 'bush wife' was not only drudgery and sexual abuse but also the base of power.

> Captive 'wives' of commanders exerted substantial power within the RUF compounds. [...] When the commander was away, they were in charge of the compound. They kept in communication with the commander and would select and sent troops, spies, and support when needed. [...] In the absence of the commander, when food and loot were delivered to the camps, it was brought to his captive 'wife'. She would then decide how these goods were to be apportioned among those in the compound.
>
> (Mazurana & Carlson 2004: 14)

Commanders' 'wives' thus took the position of the first wife of a powerful man, something that few junior women would ever be in times of peace. Moreover, the loot gave some of the 'wives' and 'girlfriends' access to commodities on which they would otherwise never have laid their hands. As Utas (2005: 415) reasoned, being in a relationship with a high-ranking commander offered an attractive base for marginalised young girls of up-ward social mobility. However, the studies focusing on the multi-faceted roles of girls and young women during the war also point to their vulnerability and the ease with which they were discarded as girlfriends and pushed into insecurity if their partner was killed.

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