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Rhiannon Stephens, *Poverty and Wealth in East Africa: A Conceptual History*. Durham NC: Duke University Press (hb US$104.95 – 978 1 4780 1619 9; pb US$27.95 – 978 1 4780 1882 7). 2022, ix + 312 pp.

What do Ugandans mean when they talk about poverty and wealth, and how has that meaning changed over the last 2,000 years? Stephens provides answers drawn from historical linguistics. In her conceptual history, poverty has referred to many related concepts over time – kinlessness, a lack of livestock, hunger. Similarly, wealth has referred to many objects, including crops, livestock, land and people.

But how can we understand the history of concepts without written records? Stephens begins with a crash course in historical linguistics. Languages are classified into trees based on cognates (words with common ancestry). For example, the words for 'white' in Lubukusu and Lumasaaba sound similar but do not sound like the words for 'white' in Lugwe and Lusaamia. And so, while all four languages are on the Greater Luhyia branch of the Proto-Great Lakes Bantu tree, Lubukusu and Lumasaaba are on the North Luhyia sub-branch, while Lugwe and Lusaamia are on the Gwe Saamia sub-branch. Glottochronology suggests that languages mutate by about 14 per cent every 500 years, making it possible to approximately date the divergence of descendent languages from parent protolanguages, such as Proto-Great Lakes Bantu. Using the sounds that are similar between the descendent languages, one can reconstruct an approximate phonology of the protolanguage. Using these sounds, one can build lists of synonyms and homonyms. Knowing which sounds have many meanings, one can identify the common ideas behind these meanings. For example, **omutambi*, meaning both 'poor person' and 'bereaved person' in Proto-Greater Luhyia, connects poverty with bereavement.

Many historians may be uncomfortable with the extrapolation involved here; asterisks, for example, are used for sounds, stems and words that have been inferred rather than recorded. Stephens, therefore, cross-checks her claims against evidence from archaeology, oral tradition, ethnography and documentary sources.

So what did 'poverty' and 'wealth' mean in eastern Uganda 2,000 years ago? For the Proto-Greater Luhyia north-east of Lake Victoria, words such as **omutaka* (poor person) and **obutaka* (poverty) used the root *-*tak**. This root denoted 'lack' and was inherited from the proto-Bantu perhaps 3,000 years earlier. Roots such as *-*yaandu* and *-*hind*- demonstrated complicated notions that wealth was inheritable, related to authority, and related to gendered concepts such as bridewealth. The Proto-West Nyanza, located west of Lake Victoria, connected poverty with softness using the root *-*jolo*. Terms existed for debt, clientship, heritable wealth and the notion of women as wealth. Proto-Nilotic languages, stretching to Sudan, used *-*can*- as a root relating to both poverty and suffering. Despite the importance of herding, Proto-Nilotic languages had few words for wealth.

About 1,500 years ago, Proto-Greater Luhyia split. Descendent languages included Proto-Lunyole, Proto-North Luhyia and Proto-Gwe-Saamia. How did concepts of wealth and poverty change? Some developments were shared: the root *-*manan*-, for example, was adopted through contact with other languages and connected poverty with kinlessness. Other changes were localized. Proto-Lunyole continued to connect poverty with bereavement, developed a more elaborate

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vocabulary of poverty and wealth, used the root *-gad-* to suggest that the poor could be deceitful, and connected poverty with hunger and wealth with satiety. Proto-North Luhyia connected poverty with selfishness and an unwillingness to share food. The root **-kác-*, related to hardness, connected wealth with status and power. Proto-Gwe-Saamia linked wealth, power and age together using the root **-hul-*.

Concepts of poverty and wealth were gendered in Proto-North Nyanza and its descendants, Luganda and Proto-South Kyoga. The root **-yaandu* applied to widows as a form of inheritable wealth and to women and girls abducted during warfare. Proto-South Kyoga restricted their use of **-yaandu* so that the only wealth it signified was bridewealth. Among the Lusoga, the root **-gaig-*, which had previously referred to wealth and the rich, also came to apply to a man rich with many wives.

As the Proto-Nilotic language split into Proto-Kalenjin, Proto-Ateker and Proto-Southern Luo, speakers of these languages associated poverty with kinlessness, thought of the poor as disruptive, and perceived of wealth as a means to gain status. Among the Proto-Kalenjin, the root **-panan-* applied to the poor, orphans and beggars. The Proto-Ateker used **-jak-* to describe both wealth and power. The Proto-Southern Luo, by contrast, used the root **lim-* in words relating to wealth, visiting and gift exchange.

And then everything got worse. The nineteenth century intensified the trade in slaves and ivory and brought with it catastrophic drought, Christian missions, and ultimately colonial rule and its associated taxes. With new ways of life came new ideas and new words. Wealth came to include currency. Clothing came to signify status. The same root, *-dooba*, refers in Lunyole to both abject poverty and to loincloths.

Closing with a Banyole prayer for wealth from the 1970s, Stephens argues that words today for poverty and wealth have a long history behind them – a history grounded in indigenous meanings. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of poverty and wealth in Africa, in the history of poverty and wealth as ideas, or in language as a source of historical data.

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Erik Bähre, *Ironies of Solidarity: Insurance and Financialization of Kinship in South Africa*. London: Zed Books (pb £22.99 – 978 1 78699 858 3), 2020, 216 pp.

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, financial services and insurance companies increasingly targeted their products to previously ignored and predominantly poor Africans in South Africa. Erik Bähre's *Ironies of Solidarity: insurance and financialization of kinship in South Africa* provides a powerful ethnographic account of the expansion of insurance, and its impacts on solidarities at the family, neighbourhood and state levels. This work builds on manifold ethnographic material collected primarily in one of the world's most violent and unequal places, Indawo Yoxolo, a squatter camp in Cape Town, supplemented by popular music and survey data. Bähre mobilizes Richard Rorty's philosophical approach to *irony* in an attempt to reveal contradictions

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