This history of African motherhood over the longue durée demonstrates that it was, ideologically and practically, central to social, economic, cultural, and political life. The book explores how people in the North Nyanzan societies of Uganda used an ideology of motherhood to shape their communities. More than biology, motherhood created essential social and political connections that cut across patrilineal and cultural-linguistic divides. The importance of motherhood as an ideology and a social institution meant that in chiefdoms and kingdoms, queen mothers were powerful officials who legitimated the power of kings. This was the case in Buganda, the many kingdoms of Busoga, and the polities of Bugwere. By taking a long-term perspective from c. 700 to 1900 CE and using an interdisciplinary approach – drawing on historical linguistics, comparative ethnography, and oral traditions and literature, as well as archival sources – this book shows the durability, mutability, and complexity of ideologies of motherhood in this region.

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A History of African Motherhood

The Case of Uganda, 700–1900

RHIANNON STEPHENS
Columbia University
In memory of my father, Dafydd ap Glyn
Son of Doris Keturah Harry
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I have had the good fortune to receive the support, generosity, and friendship of many people as this book has meandered along its way to fruition. It would never have even been started, however, were it not for the teachers who first introduced me to the vast treasury that is African history: Gunvant Govindjee at Atlantic College and David Anderson, Michael Brett, Wayne Dooling, Richard Rathbone, and Andrew Roberts at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Were it not for Richard’s guidance, in particular, I doubt I would have ended up at graduate school at Northwestern University.

At Northwestern I have left a large intellectual debt, and my biggest creditor there is David Schoenbrun. He guided me through my PhD with rigour and enthusiasm in equal quantities and managed all the while to let me take my own path. I am very grateful to him too for his support in the years since I left Evanston and most especially for the conversations we continue to have about the field of early African history. A number of other mentors helped me along the way, notably Jonathon Glassman, Caroline Bledsoe, Rae Moses, and Stefan Kaufman. And I am grateful for many good conversations with and feedback from my fellow graduate students, not all of them at Northwestern: Pamela Khanakwa, Neil Kodesh, Kathryn de Luna, Karl Gunther, Carole Emberton, Emily Callaci, Jeremy Berndt, Andreana Prichard, Joe Lapsley, Jana Measells, Katy Burns-Howard, Elizabeth Prevost, Jennifer Tappan, and Marina Pyrovolaki, among others. Wasswa Ddamulira took on the task of teaching me Luganda in Chicago, for which I thank him.

Northwestern provided me with financial as well as intellectual support, which made my initial research possible: a Northwestern University
Graduate School Presidential Fellowship enabled the writing, while a Graduate Research Grant and a Research Year Fellowship made the research possible. Various awards from the Program of African Studies also facilitated my research: a Hans Panofsky Award, a Melville Herskovits Field Research Award, a Jane Guyer and Akbar Virmani Award, and a Morris Goodman Award. The Department of History generously awarded me several travel grants.

It is, of course, in Uganda that I have accumulated the largest debts. These include to the many people who patiently answered my many questions about their languages, cultures, and histories, and those who opened their homes to me as a guest and to whom I am intensely thankful: Mary Bageya, Aisha Baluka, Hamidah Ddamulira, Wowali Ephraim, Isabirye Eriasa, Kalatu Glady, Betty Okot Gonza, Tazenya Henry, Mangusho John, Helen Kagino, Ernest Kanya, Zewulesi Kantono, Veronica Kanyana, Lukoowe Kaseenene, James John Kavere, Chimendwa Kawuke, Joyce Kwuleddle, Richard Kayingo, Joy Kisule, John Kunena, Margaret Kyaita, Samsom Luvunya, Steven Kaza Magaja, Henry Maganda, Tom Masaba, Denis Medeyi, Joseph Medeyi, Margaret Medeyi, Madete Mohammed, Henry Mongo, Joram Mpande, Abuna Mujwi, Peter Michael Muloit, Esther Mulowooza, Sarah Musana, Yokarasa Mutegwa, Yokolamu Metemere, Sam Mwigo, Rehema Nakaima, Harriet Nakibanda, Mwiriam Namusoso, Mary Namwano, Noor Namwebya, Maliseri Namwoyo, Manjeri Nasibo, Kalulu Paulo, Mbasalaki Mastuula Saidi, Ephraim Talymbiri, Philemon Taseula, Rachel Wadaga, Edison Waiswa, Rebecca Waligita, Abnere Wanakomon, Abel Wanzige, and Gertrude Yang. I also thank Faith Damali Kanyago and Alice Nabire for working alongside me as research assistants on the project, and Professor Livingston Wulumbi, Professor Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo, Dr. Nakanyike Musisi, Rose Nkaale Mwanja, and Professor Mahmood Mamdani, for their support and interest in my work.

The staff at various institutions in Uganda, through their professionalism and willingness to help, made research easier than it might have been. These include the Africana Library at Makerere University; the Uganda National Archives in Entebbe; the Department of Land and Surveys in Entebbe; the Church Missionary Society Archives at Uganda Christian University; the Bishop’s House Archives and the Cultural Research Centre in Jinja; the Archives of the Kampala Archdiocese in Rubaga; and the Lugwere Bible Translation Project at the Summer Institute for Languages in Entebbe. At the last of these I had the pleasure of meeting Samuel Mubbala who has remained a friend and fount of knowledge since. The
Acknowledgements

Makerere Institute of Social Research and the Uganda Museum at different times supported my applications for research clearance, which the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology granted with approval from the Office of the President. I extend my thanks to all these institutions for making my research possible.

Elsewhere too, I have benefitted from the professionalism and enthusiasm of librarians and archivists: at the Archives of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) in Rome; the Archives of the Mill Hill Missionaries of the St. Joseph's Missionary Society then held at Mill Hill in London but now in Freshfield, Merseyside; the British Library; the Library and Archives of the School of Oriental and African Studies; and the Library of Africana Studies at Northwestern University.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Ron Atkinson, who shared with me his research on Bugwere from some forty years ago and for his enthusiasm throughout. I also thank him for reading a draft and for his comments and suggestions. Another debt of gratitude is to David Cohen for sharing his Collected Texts of Busoga Traditional History and for our conversations. Chris Ehret has consistently supported and encouraged me, while offering valuable criticism and suggestions, for all of which I am grateful.

The Past and Present Society gave me a post-doctoral fellowship for 2008–09 at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, which allowed me to return to Uganda for additional research and begin the process of turning my dissertation into this book. Teaching at SOAS from 2009 to 2011 was both a pleasurable return to my academic roots and the ideal place to continue writing. I very much benefited from presenting my work at seminars there, as well as at the University of Sussex, the Institute of Historical Research, the Centre of African Studies at Cambridge University, the University of Birmingham, the Centre d'Études des Mondes Africains at Université Paris I, the former Institute of Languages at Makerere University; and at various meetings of the African Studies Association, the African Studies Association UK, the Third International Conference on Bantu Languages, and the Sixth World Congress of African Linguistics.

During my time back in the United Kingdom, I received support and insightful comments on parts of or the whole manuscript from several people, especially Ceri Ashley, Teresa Bernheimer, Paul Betts, Shane Doyle, Saul Dubow, Graham Furniss, John Giblin, Toby Green, Matthew Hilton, Philip Jagger, Lutz Marten, Tom McCaskie, Henri Médard, John Parker, Derek Peterson, Andrew Reid, Richard Reid, Pauline von Hellermann,
and Megan Vaughan. At Columbia University, I have enjoyed the support and friendship of several colleagues in the Department of History and in African Studies. I am particularly grateful to Gregory Mann and Mamadou Diouf for reading the whole manuscript and for their insightful and useful comments. In addition, I received feedback and mentoring from Carol Gluck and Pamela Smith. I would also like to thank the African Studies librarian Yuusuf Caruso for all his efforts in helping me get hold of obscure dictionaries.

I thank Cambridge University Press, especially Eric Crahan (who has now left), Scott Parris, and Kristin Purdy, and the editors of the African Studies Series. I am especially grateful to the anonymous readers who offered valuable suggestions to improve the manuscript. I thank Damien Bovlomov for creating the maps that appear here. Parts of the book were published in different form in “Lineage and Society in Precolonial Uganda,” Journal of African History 50, no. 2 (2009): 203–221, and in “Birthing Wealth? Motherhood and Poverty in East-Central Uganda, c. 700–1900,” Past and Present 215 (2012): 235–68. That material is reproduced here with permission from Cambridge University Press and the Past and Present Society, respectively. I am grateful to the Melville J. Herskovits Library of Africana Studies for permission to use an image from The Humphrey Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, ‘Native women, Kampala, Uganda,’ on the cover of this book, and I am especially grateful to David Easterbrook, Patricia Ogedengbe, and Cassandra Harlan for their help in obtaining the image. I thank Andrea Greengrass for the index.

Unfortunately this book will appear a few months too late for my father Dafydd to read it in print, but it remains inspired by his enthusiasm for studying the past, for dusty books, and for travel to faraway places. My mother Janig’s passion for linguistics infected me a long time ago and helped make this research possible, while her encouragement helped get the book done. Jarod Roll has accompanied me since before this project began and while I am grateful to him for all manner of reasons, with regards to this book I am especially grateful that he has been willing to read seemingly countless drafts and always find ways to improve what was written. Finally, Menna’s awe that her mother might actually write a book that she could find on a library shelf has inspired me to get it finished.
Note on Language

This book, for the most part, tells the story of people who spoke Bantu languages. In these languages nouns have prefixes that change the meaning of the stem. For nouns describing people, the places they live, and the languages they speak, I have retained those prefixes. So Bagwere, Basoga, Bashana, and Baganda are people who live in Bugwere, Busoga, Bushana, and Buganda and who speak Lugwere, Lusoga, Rushana, and Luganda. Elsewhere, for adjectival purposes, I use only the stem: Gwere, Soga, Shana, and Ganda. But these people did not inhabit a land bereft of people speaking other languages. Some of those they lived alongside spoke Nilotic languages. Where I discuss people from non-Bantu groups, I have retained the forms in those languages as spoken in modern times: Iteso people speak Ateso, Joluo people speak Dholuo, and so on.