

Fluidity and Hybridity of Customary Marriage Traditions in Contemporary Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The ideology that customary marriages are celebrated according to ancestral traditions and customs is rife in Africa. There is however continuous invention and evolution of institutions associated with customary marriage rendering it burdensome to trace the visibility of ancient ‘traditions’ therein. This argument is anchored in the theoretical perspective of ‘invention of tradition’, to analyse the extent to which the celebration of customary marriages in Uganda has maintained the ancestral ‘traditional’ status quo owing to the influences of colonisation, westernisation globalisation and modernisation. Busoga, a predominantly Bantu ethnic society, is used as a representative case for this analysis. Using a historical and ethnographic approach, it was established that there is a lot of fluidity and hybridity of contemporary traditions upon which these marriages are celebrated. The notion that customary marriages are celebrated based on past traditions is a fallacy, although at best, efforts have been invested to dramatise past traditions in contemporary settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Customary marriage also referred to as ‘traditional marriage’, is a type of marriage celebrated according to the rites of an African community in Uganda.¹ It boasts of diversity as the marriage ceremony varies from one culture to another.² It is the most prevalent type of marriage in Uganda due to people’s firm grip on ancestral traditions. The subject of traditional marriage in Uganda has trended not only from legal studies,³ anthropology and sociology but also history and African theology. The classical writers on this subject were predominantly colonial historians and administrators as well as western anthropologists who set out to trace marriage systems in specific Ugandan societies but fell short of acknowledging the ceaseless evolution in the marriage routine. It was taken for granted that Africans permanently observed ancient marriage traditions throughout the colonial era despite the

¹ Sarah Musubika, ‘*I Feel Proud, Honored and Valued*’ - *Changing Trends, Empowering and Disempowering Aspects of Bride Price Among Urban Based Baganda of Central Uganda*. (University of Bergen: Masters Dissertation, 2019).

² Twebaze Bemanya, “Why you should secure your customary marriage,” *Daily Monitor*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/why-you-should-secure-your-customary-marriage--1770470>.

³ Jamil Ddamulira Mujuzi, “The Ugandan Customary Marriage (Registration) Act: A Comment.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 30 no. 1, (2013): 171-191. Date Accessed May 12, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45198804>

immense influence of Christianity, Islam and colonial law.⁴ These were influenced by their philosophy about Africa as a unified continent with a static culture. The initial documenters also never configured and contextualised the limitless interactions among pre-colonial societies that eventuated into borrowing as well predisposing traditions rendering the investigated marriage traditions not authentically of the ancestors.⁵ Using a western lens, colonial historians deduced that traditional marriages were typical of the cultures of non-literate societies of Africa.⁶ They held to their conclusions in spite of over a century of Christian and Islamic penetration in Africa which brought noticeable changes in the marriage traditions. Indeed, by the turn of the 20th century, Busoga had no unified traditions on marriage.⁷ Most of the publications were written towards the end of the British colonial period, yet Arabs and Europeans had for about a century interacted with native Ugandans, which could have grossly affected the native cultures.⁸ By the time authors got interested in researching about pre-colonial traditions of the colonised, so much had altered and still much forgotten, especially so, that they mostly depended on oral sources of evidence.⁹ Above all, their in-depth survey of Busoga was overly superficial.¹⁰ Scholarly works by native Africans on pre-colonial Basoga traditions emerged in the late 1960s, and these were heavily influenced by materials produced by western authors.

However, there exists several scholarly and non-scholarly information on traditional marriage in Busoga in contemporary contexts, including newspaper articles and internet blogs which have availed rich information to evaluate not only the processes of evolution of traditions on traditional marriage but also discern elements that have contributed to this evolution. African Cultural Anthropology and Religious Heritage studies romanticised the traditional marriage system as the foundation of African society and that the celebratory rituals were rooted in African traditional religions.¹¹ Other contemporary authors present the traditional marriage system in Busoga as though pure and unadulterated by modern influences.¹² On one hand, non-scholarly articles including personal accounts are commonplace in newspapers and internet blogs, usually praising the allure of Busoga's traditions on marriage and sustenance of such for ages,¹³ although there are contestations from cultural leaders and the wider public against distortion of the marriage traditions as transmitted from the past.¹⁴ All of the above postulate the seemingly static nature of customary marriage traditions in the face of westernisation, modernisation and religious change.¹⁵ An ethnographic study on traditional marriage in Busoga and Buganda provides its contemporary context. However, its failure to provide a historical context of the marriage practice led to an inaccurate conclusion that the two societies have unified traditions of marriage which have been kept intact until recent times. Contrary to the justification for

⁴Lloyd A. Fallers, *Bantu Bureaucracy: A Century of Political Evolution among the Basoga of Uganda*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

⁵Rhiannon Stephens, "Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out": The Complicated History of Marriage in Uganda." *African Studies Review* 59, no. 1 (2016): 127–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24805946>.

⁶David William Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

⁷Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 139.

⁸Frederick Nayenga, "The History of Busoga, [Review of Womunafu's *Bunafu: A study of Authority in a Nineteenth - century African Community*, by David William Cohen]". *The International Journal of African Historical studies* 14 no. 3, (1981): 482-499. <https://doi.org/10.2307/217701>

⁹Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu and Cohen's Busoga Reviewed Work(s)*, 484.

¹⁰Nayenga, *The History of Busoga*, 482.

¹¹Ogoma, D. Ebon, "Reflection on an African Traditional Marriage System." *Journal of social sciences and public affairs* 4, no. 1 (2014): 94-104. <http://eprints.Imu.edu.ng>

¹²Stephens Kaduuli, *Kwandhula: Cultural Engagement and Marriage in Busoga and Buganda* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2006). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=985246>.

¹³Esther Nantambi, "What 'omutwalo' really is and why you must pay it before marrying her". *My Wedding*, December 20, 2018. <https://www.mywedding.co.ug/kwanjula/201812/bride-price-is-as-important-in-religion-as-it-is-in-culture.html>;

¹⁴Justine Mirembe, "The Trendy Kwanjula: A Case of Cultural Evolution or Degeneration". *The Observer*, October 28, 2015. observer.ug.

¹⁵Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 139.

the study then; ‘A need to document the institution before it dies away’¹⁶; this article demonstrates that it is part of the evolving nature of traditions in which there are continuities and discontinuities as well as innovations and ruptures of practices which make scholarly interest in any tradition a great concern.

Nonetheless, more recent literature on traditional marriages in post-independent Uganda is pre-occupied with the singular aspect of bride price,¹⁷ its legality, and potential gender discrimination against women.¹⁸ Subsequently, these authors have called for reforms to its practice.¹⁹ This provides clues to the notion of possibility of a change in traditions with time since some pre-colonial marriage traditions are seen to be antagonistic with modern-day trends. Amidst these profuse schools of thought, the argument of this article is situated in a cultural analysis framework which views cultures not as fixed, bounded, stable and discrete entities but as constantly interacting and changing sets of practices and processes. In this analysis, the ‘invention of tradition’ theoretical perspective is at the forefront of explaining the changing practices of customary marriage in Busoga. The article demonstrates that traditional marriage has over centuries undergone a lot of invention and re-invention often influenced from within and outside Busoga.

Busoga is both a geographical entity and a cultural society. As a geographical entity, Busoga is usually referred to as an island because its land mass is surrounded by rivers and lakes which detach it from other geographical regions of Uganda. In the west, Busoga is cut off from Buganda (central Uganda) by River Nile, also called *Kiira* by the Basoga. Busoga lies on the eastern side of *Kiira*. In the east, Busoga is free-standing from Bukedi because of River *Mpologoma*. In the North, Busoga is pulled apart from Teso and Lango sub-regions by Lake Kyoga. In the south, it is separated from parts of Buganda on one hand and Tanzania on the other by Lake Victoria. Busoga is a cultural society because of its defined cultural identity from her neighbours, only synonymous with Buganda, another Bantu ethnic community. Although Busoga has been construed to have common traditions and culture with Buganda, Busoga's historical records differed from those of Buganda whose traditions were well known.²⁰ As a cultural society, however, Busoga has been an invention by assorted groups of people including the Baganda. The people of Busoga are called Basoga. They speak a language called *Lusoga*. Much of the primary data for this article was collected using *Lusoga* as the medium of communication and later translated.

The Theory of ‘Invented Tradition’ in Perspective

The theory of ‘invented tradition’ was propounded by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in their scholarly piece titled ‘The Invention of Tradition’.²¹ The theory was a rebuttal to prior theoretical postulations of ‘unchanging traditions.’ The theory was expounded by numerous scholars who equally watered down the earlier perception of tradition being static.²² Theorists of the ‘invented tradition’ argue that ‘traditions’ are not static but dynamic which calls for frequent reassessment.²³ They further argue that it is inaccurate to assert that traditions are of the past yet they are usually recent in origin and most cases simply invented.²⁴ Whereas certain values, practices and symbols pass the test of time,

¹⁶ Kaduuli, *Kwandhula: Cultural Engagement and Marriage in Busoga and Buganda*, 9.

¹⁷ Musubika, *I Feel Proud, Honored and Valued*.

¹⁸ Henry Asiimwe, “The Changing Dynamics, Trends and Perceptions in the Bride Price Custom in Uganda and the Implications- A Feminist Perspective A Case of Banyakitira Ethnic Group in Western Uganda” (Institute of Social Studies-Hague: Masters Dissertation, 2013).

¹⁹ Jamil Ddamulira, Mujuzi, “The Right to Equality at the Dissolution of a Marriage in Uganda”. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 33, no.2 (2019): 204–227. <https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebz005>

²⁰ David Newbury, “Womunafu's Bunafu and Cohen's Busoga Reviewed Work(s): Womunafu's Bunafu by David W. Cohen”. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 14 no. 2, (1980): 327-334

²¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²² Jocelyne Linnekin, “Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity.” *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 2 (1983): 241-252. Accessed <http://www.jstor.org/stable/643910>

²³ Dan Ben-Amos, “The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies”. *Journal of Folklore Research* 21, no.2/3 (1984): 97-131. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814548>

²⁴ Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, 1-14.

their meaning shifts to reflect society's norms and values, to meet changing circumstances.²⁵ The invented tradition theorists attempt to make a link between social formations derived from the past with social actions of the present such that tradition is perceived as an active interpretive process in which representations of the past are forged through present discourse.²⁶ Tradition is hence delineated as a deliberate model of the past upon which people construct their own identity in the present.²⁷ What then constitutes tradition is framed in the present as the content of the past is modified and redefined to suit contemporary demands. This however does not mean that 'old' traditions are being duplicated or replicated but it rather involves an adaptation to a new interpretation of the 'past' traditions to render them relevant to the current generation.²⁸ The present generation picks up certain aspects of cultural practices that are relevant and redefines them with symbolic values to concur with their current demands. This however does not denote that there is total adoption of the past, rather in constructing the present using the past, some deplorable elements and narratives are disregarded in the resultant tradition.²⁹ The invention of tradition theorists reckon tradition as a cultural construct subject to change from within and without. The invention of tradition can arise from either society of earlier cultural stages involving perceptive changes from within the same society over time,³⁰ through self-conscious interpretation;³¹ or imported practices from neighbouring societies which diffuse into the trending traditions.³² Still, powerful society's external discourses like colonialism, imperialism and missionary activities bring in new discourses on African traditions and cultures.³³

This theory is significant as it facilitates acknowledging, discerning and appreciating the evolution of customary marriage traditions in Busoga. Using the theory, the researchers argue that practices associated with the celebration of traditional marriage in contemporary contexts are inventions of the present rather than the past. The argument that whereas past marriage traditions have not been completely outlawed, they have been redefined to meet changing circumstances in Busoga is also laid bare. It is worthwhile to note that the present-day customary-marriage traditions are not historical but have had recent influences from within and outside Busoga. The impact of external brainwashing upon customary marriage traditions in Busoga emanating from the Baganda, Arabs, Indians and Europeans has been espied.

METHODOLOGY

This article is a result of partly a historical and ethnographic study carried out among the Basoga, a Bantu ethnic society of eastern Uganda. It was partly a historical study because of the interest in analysing the evolution and sources of traditions of traditional marriage since pre-colonial times. The study was ethnographic because to analyse patterns of change, participant observation was crucial in the celebration of traditional marriages in contemporary contexts. Both primary and secondary sources provided useful information which aided in configuring Busoga's traditional marriage system during the pre-contact era. Secondary sources of information include published books and journal papers about pre-colonial, colonial and post-independent Busoga.

²⁵Karen Flint, , *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948*. (South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).

²⁶ J. West Turner, "Continuity and Constraint: Reconstructing the Concept of Tradition from a Pacific Perspective". *The Contemporary Pacific* 9, no. 2 (1997): 345-381. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23706865>

²⁷Alexander Isiko, *Gender Roles in Traditional Healing Practices in Busoga*. (Leiden: PhD dissertation, 2018).

²⁸ Linnekin, *Defining Tradition*, 241; Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, 3.

²⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Knopf, 1993).

³⁰ Ben-Amos, *The Seven Strands of Tradition*, 99-101.

³¹Richard Handler and Jocelyne Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious". *The Journal of American Folklore*, 97, no 385 (1984): 273-290. doi: 10.2307/540610.

³² Linnekin, *Defining Tradition*, 241-244.

³³Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the order of Knowledge*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

To enhance the authenticity and reliability of secondary information, primary sources were resorted to, firstly, oral sources,³⁴ including listening to personal accounts of people with traditional marriage ceremonies. Secondly, through personal contact with some members of the councils of the clans in Busoga. Lengthy conversations were held with six male clan leaders about their experiences and memories of traditional marriage in Busoga. Clan leaders are usually among the most influential elderly members of a specific clan. Clan leaders are drawn from families with a robust history and influence in the cultural institution of Busoga, the *Kyabazingaship*. They usually descend from families with great cultural attachment to the clans they lead. These are the chief custodians of oral traditions which they transmit from one generation to another. Goodson and Anstead posited the unique significance of oral evidence from such categories of people as capable of providing any information which can hardly be found in historical publications.³⁵ However, due to their elderly status, some being over eighty years of age and with a degenerating memory, they could not effectively reminisce. They at times described disconnected past experiences of traditional marriage.³⁶ Nonetheless, they provided immeasurable information which sped the filling of missing accounts. Still, in-person attendance of traditional marriage ceremonies was a pivotal source of data. Six ceremonies were attended through contacts with the informal network of Masters of Ceremonies for traditional marriage ceremonies in Busoga. This enabled witnessing the ceremonies firsthand amidst the full expression of the unsuspecting participants. The challenge was that a one-sided total observation was possible (that of the liaising Master of ceremonies). Still, it was impractical to observe practices prior to the day of the marriage ceremony.

In addition, six interviews were held with the ‘Spokespersons’ of either family procuring customary marriage. These are locally called *Abogezi* (literally meaning ‘those who speak’). In the real sense spokespersons are the ‘Masters of Ceremonies’ for traditional marriage. Ideally, each ‘Master of Ceremonies’ (singular - *Mwogezi*) whose ceremony was attended was a previous informant. These Masters of ceremonies are not only spokespersons for the families but also a knowledgeable group about the marriage traditions of Busoga. They take centre stage in the celebration of traditional marriage and their prowess in directing the ceremony determines its level of success. The challenge with spokespersons is that their approach is comical and entertainment-g geared. They play to the gallery even about the most serious issues. Therefore, differentiating truthful from hyperbolic displays was mind-boggling. The researchers could have overlooked key information taking it for granted that it was part of the entertainment expected at such a ceremony. In both interactions with clan leaders and Masters of Ceremonies, an audio recorder was used to record the interviews with their permission.

Finally, critical viewing of a television show called ‘*Gwensiimye*’, literally translated as ‘The one I have chosen/preferred’ provided key information. This show is aired on *Basoga Bainho* Television, popularly known as *BABA TV*, a privately owned television situated in Jinja City, the capital of Busoga. ‘*Gwensiimye*’ is a televised production of marriage ceremonies, especially customary ones, for couples with the ability to pay for the telecast. The show is televised once every week, on Sunday between 16:00 and 17:00 Hours, East African Time. Eight traditional marriage ceremonies were purposely watched for three months. Telecasting one’s customary marriage ceremony (popularly known as *Kwandhula* among the Basoga) on television is considered modern and classy. Televised *kwandhula* is usually for the middle class, educated and urbanised whose rationale for such functions is different from that of ordinary persons. Also, a one-hour TV production for a function which lasted between three to five hours means that TV producers select to screen what they think is captivating to their audience leaving out so much content and activities which would better illuminate the traditional marriage ceremony. The TV production does not cover pre-*kwandhula* aspects in which major negotiations and decisions between the two families are made. However, the show significantly

³⁴ Andrew, Roberts, “The Use of Oral Sources for African History.” *Oral History* 4 no. 1, (1976): 41–56.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40178447>

³⁵ Ivor F. Goodson and Christopher J. Anstead, “Chapter Four: Collecting Oral Sources”. *Counterpoints* 423, (2012): 27–35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42981774>

³⁶ Goodson and Anstead. “Chapter Four: Collecting Oral Sources”, 28.

portrays the glaring influences of modern broadcasting, globalisation and urbanisation on the traditional marriage customs of Busoga.

TRADITIONS OF MARRIAGE IN PRE-COLONIAL BUSOGA

Pre-colonial Busoga is presented here as that traditional society before its contact with non-Africans. Although a scan through the writings of previous authors about traditional marriage in Busoga presents its homogeneity,³⁷ new evidence suggests that this was an erroneous view because innovations and alterations differed according to clans, family status and geographical location. Traditional Busoga society was grossly inclined toward a clan system and there existed slightly different influences, demands and expectations of marriage for different clans. The northern parts of Busoga which were more pastoral than the southern demanded a higher bride price in terms of cattle and goats than the cultivating clans in the south.³⁸ This is however not to discredit the notion that there were marriage traditions which cut across traditional Busoga which are to be discussed in this section. It is also worth noting that the celebration of traditional marriage in Busoga was a whole rite of passage, which took slightly a longer process than it is in the present. These traditions evolved within Busoga society as a result of the different socio-cultural formations as well as influence from surrounding societies especially Buganda due to the latter's political domination. The following subsections, discuss the processes and institutions which defined traditional marriage in pre-colonial Busoga.

Solicitation for a Marriage Partner

The marriage process started with a search for a marriage suitor. Oral tradition from clan leaders revealed three different mechanisms through which a wife would be solicited in pre-colonial Busoga. These included a choice made by elders through an arranged form of marriage; a personal choice made by the boy and elopement which ended in a formalised marriage. The three occurred exclusively of each other requiring slightly different processes. It should be noted that elopement though a common practice then and now in Busoga, is against the marriage norms of traditional society. Formalisation of marriage after elopement took a somewhat different approach punctuated by a seemingly strained relationship between the two families. Therefore, the practices analysed below relate to the first two means of finding a marriage partner. Elopement is discussed towards the end of this section.

Arranged form of marriage was the commonest and ideal way of finding a marriage suitor in precolonial times. It was the responsibility of elders and relatives to search for a well-intentioned wife for their male relative. Such elders included the boy's father, paternal and maternal uncles, elder sisters and rarely the paternal Aunt (*Songa*). Marriage negotiations and preparations were not between the couple but their families. In this case, marriage was largely an arranged affair, though the long process towards solemnisation of the marriage enabled the couple to know the character of the family but not that of the individual partner to be.

In the second circumstance involving the boy's individual search and choice of a wife through his interactions, the final decision as to whether or not to go ahead with this process lay in the hands of the elders. Upon spotting a potential wife-to-be, the young man was required to inform his father or one of his uncles who would then take on the task of arranging for a meeting between the two families. Marriage was never between the two individuals but their families. It was abominable for the intending groom to initiate contact with the family of the 'trophy' girl but rather elders from his family. Marriage was therefore procured by elders because of the immense experience and authority to engage in such social contracts. Young men and women were taken as novices and therefore incapable of discernment. A clan leader of the Baise Igaga recounted recollections from his late grandfather about the way he married his first official wife as follows:

One day he was caught unawares when his father (great-grandfather of the respondent) sent for him. He was informed that they had realised he become of marriage age. A fellow elder a few villages away had three nubile maidens and they had pinpointed the eldest belle in their irrefutable discussion. He had

³⁷ Cohen, *The historical tradition of Busoga* ; Fallers, *Bantu Bureaucracy*.

³⁸ Interview with Clan Elder Baise Igaga (Busiki-Namutumba District), August 11, 2021.

never set eye on any of the three beauties nor was he given leave to make a choice. He was simply meant to organise himself to pave way for the commencement of the formal marriage processes.³⁹

The above recollections reaffirm the responsibility of search and selecting of a wife to have been that of the elders, and trusted acquaintances. According to one spokesperson, it was almost impossible for a son to decline the choice of a potential wife made by his elders.⁴⁰ The determination of a good marriage partner depended largely on the character of the entire family. Due to limited interactions between young adults of different kinships, little was known about the personal character of the prospective wife or husband although this would be determined by the general character of members of their families. However, making background checks and due diligence was a well-known practice before the agreement to proceed with marriage negotiations and preparation. Interviewed clan leaders emphasised the significance of background checks which were not restricted to the current members of the families but stretched to generations before. On one hand, a marriage proposal was made by the boy's family only after a positive and satisfactory background check about the girl's family. On the other hand, the girl's family undertook background checks after initial formal contact with the boy's family. Some of the traits and practices which would discontinue the initiation of marriage negotiations were witchcraft, theft, laziness, genetic disease history and or unacceptable degrees of relation. The concept of love was rare except for the situation when the intending groom had identified the bride by himself. Usually, girls were expected to develop a love for their husbands during the subsistence of the marriage.

Courtship and the Institutions of the 'Paternal Aunt' and 'Spokesperson'

The tradition of courtship (*okukobya*), followed a positive due diligence on the girl's family. Courtship was a sustained engagement between the elders from both families but not the intending couple. Interviewed clan leaders identified two institutions that were pivotal in courtship. These were the institution of the Spokesperson (*Omukwenda*) and that of the paternal Aunt (*Songa*). The *Omukwenda* was usually an elderly relative or a family friend to the boy who became the official spokesperson of the boy's family. The *Omukwenda* was to be a trusted individual with a high level of integrity. Therefore, a still surviving and strong grandfather and maternal or paternal uncles were suitable candidates for this role. According to one clan elder, unlike the institution of the *Songa*, the Basoga did not have defined rules as to who was supposed to be the *Omukwenda* as the choice of this person varied from clan to clan, family to family and specific circumstances at the time of search and initiation of courtship.⁴¹ On the girl's side, the institution of the *Songa* was paramount. Among the several paternal aunts, there was always that special one called "*Songa o'wensoga*"; who tutored her nieces on aspects of marriage, family life and sexuality. It was taboo for a daughter to discuss issues of marriage and sexuality with her father; making the paternal aunt important in this regard. The *Songa* took exception to determine the readiness of her niece for marriage. The *Songa* was therefore the first family member to formally get to know the intending husband of her niece. In the case of a boy's personal search and choice of a bride, the *Songa* remained critical to the realisation of the marriage. The *Songa* became a bridge between the young couple and the father of the girl. In this case, the girl's consent to marriage was determined by her decision to let her fiancé visit the *Songa*. On the advice of the girl, the boy and his *Omukwenda* and or father had to visit the *Songa* and declare his intentions to marry her niece. The boy's entourage carried gifts to the *Songa* in gratitude for her role of not only mentoring the wife-to-be but also initiating contact with the girl's family. The gifts were an indication of how responsible and caring the intending husband was.

³⁹ Interview with Clan Elder Baise Igaga (Busiki-Namutumba District), August 11, 2021.

⁴⁰ Bosco Kawanguzi (Spokesperson, Namutumba District), December 15, 2021.

⁴¹ Interview with Clan leader Baise Mehna (Bugweri chiefdom-Busembatia), February 22, 2022.

Public Introduction and the Institution of Bride price

The next two steps were critical towards the realisation of the marriage. These were a preliminary visit and a public introduction ceremony. The private preliminary visit to the girl's family was for select members of the boy's family steered by his father or the *Omukwenda*. Negotiation and determination of the bride price, also called *Omwandhu* was resolved at this time. The *Omwandhu* included an assortment of items including local beer, cattle, goats, sheep, chicken and other such precious items as consented upon between the two families. Neither the *Songa* nor the bride was integral in determining the amount of *omwandhu* and held no right to question it. It was required to keep the emerging relationship a secret between the two families, to avoid jealous people and formerly jilted lovers from spreading false propaganda against either party which would be detrimental to the continuity of the marriage arrangements.

However, due to the lack of modern communication technology in pre-colonial Busoga, it was usual for people to make visitations without appointments thereby reaching their host's residences unexpectedly. Letter writing was non-existent in a non-literate pre-colonial society yet interaction with strangers was suspiciously done. Clan leaders and Masters of ceremonies revealed a regular practice of turning away unexpected guests upon arrival until the host was satisfied that they were peaceful and well-meaning. Therefore, a meaningful first engagement with the father of the girl was always tricky and overly suspicious. Nonetheless, the intervention of the *Songa o'wensonga* swiftly fixed this debacle, as stated by one of the Masters of Ceremonies;

The guests' mention of their earlier interaction with *Songa o'wensonga* softened the hard stance of the father since they were now referring to close kin. The *Songa* then became critical in identifying the guests to her brother.⁴²

The concerned *Songa* was usually fetched at short notice by one of the adult nephews to identify the visitors since she was always a stone's throw away. On one hand, Busoga being prevalently a patriarchal society, the *Songa* never hesitated to appear before her brother. On the other hand, the father trusted his sister so much that whatever decision she made about her niece, was taken without disputation. On this account, the appearance of the *Songa* was always received with excitement from among the visiting entourage. Whereas this was to ensure the security of society, these processes helped to determine moral aspects of truthfulness, patience and humility among those intending to marry one's daughter.

The second step was a public introduction ceremony of the husband to be, to the wider family, kinship, and friends of the girl's family. This introduction event was known as *okwandhula* – literally meaning 'to introduce'. Unlike the initial visit, interaction during the introduction ceremony was usually jovial and harmonious. Indeed, the introduction ceremony was largely 'ceremonial and ritualistic' in its literal sense, as several would-be tricky issues would have been solved during the initial visit. This ceremony was an indication that the girl's family had consented to the marriage but wanted to make it a public event to celebrate the marriage. Speeches were spontaneous as requests were made through proverbs and wise sayings, which were well known to all the Basoga. The visiting entourage needed no rehearsals on expected conduct during the introduction ceremony. They needed not to be reminded about the greeting style or expression of appreciation through known gestures. The groom kept silent throughout this ceremony as it was his family and not himself who took control and decisions on the proceedings. To avoid scandalous conduct, the couple never came into close contact on the introduction day. The girl is kept in the company of the *Songa* and her sisters to curtail public display of affection which was a taboo especially amidst parents. The delivery of *omwandhu* varied from family to family. In some circumstances, the *omwandhu* was brought on the introduction day, while in other cases, a special day before the 'giveaway' ceremony was determined for this purpose.

Although the tradition of 'engagement' was absent in pre-colonial Busoga, it could have taken several days or weeks between the introduction ceremony and the climax of the marriage celebration, the giveaway of the bride. Nonetheless, the definite day for the 'giveaway' was agreed upon on the

⁴²Moses Waiswa (Spokesperson, Bubago-Namutumba district), April 08, 2021.

day the *omwandhu* was delivered. Receipt of the *omwandhu* also indicated consent to the marriage by the family of the girl. It was the responsibility of the brother(s) to the bride to secure her till the giveaway ceremony. For this reason, it was customary for the elder brother (*omukoirume omukulu*) of the bride to receive a cock from the introduced husband in appreciation of the security of the bride against other suitors. Indeed, brothers ordinarily safeguarded their sisters.

The tradition of gifting the family of the bride with local beer on their initial visit and introduction ceremony was a long-kept practice among the Basoga. The local beer, made from either fermenting banana juice and yeast or wheat and yeast was traditionally carried in a 'gourd' also called '*ekita*'. This special drink, therefore, became fondly referred to as *ekita ky'omwenge* – literally meaning 'a gourd of local beer'. The local beer helped to soften the would-be difficult in-laws to negotiate. The local beer was a prerequisite to negotiations with the parents of the girl, the reason it was at times called '*ekibumbula munwa*', literally meaning 'catalyst for opening the mouth'. Literally, even when the girl's parents harboured intentions to decline the marriage proposal, their acceptance to drink the beer, ordinarily propelled them to speak certain words in appreciation of the tasteful drink. This then, over a drink, sparked a spontaneous conversation between the girl's parents and the visitors. It provided an opportunity for the visiting entourage to let the girl's parents be aware of their intentions while they were in a jovial mood due to the influence of the cherished drink. Alcohol consumption is an ancient custom in many African communities and is part of many cultural, religious and social practices which provide perceived pleasure to many users. Such alcoholic beverages were a routine part of the Busoga social landscape as it was known to be socially useful and necessary. It was a culturally integral part not only in the celebration of rites of passage such as naming children, marriage, and funerals but also in judicial processes and legal contracts.⁴³ Its presence therefore at the celebration of traditional marriage signified the ultimate value of the event.

The 'give away' of the Bride into Marriage

The final event was occasioned by the official 'giveaway' of the woman in marriage. This ceremony was referred to as *okubayira*.⁴⁴ A few days before the ceremony, the *Songa* further tutored her niece on sexuality matters and responsible conduct as a wife. The bride is kept indoors and restrained from performing domestic chores. On the eve of the function, the family of the groom was required to offer a live goat used to perform the sacrificial ritual of *kasuze katya*, literally meaning 'How did the girl sleep? The sacrificial meal was shared by the family members of the bride. The bride further enjoyed ritual blessings from the father and her mother by sitting on their laps. A study done by the Jinja Cultural Research Center documented vivid recollections of the very final moments before the bride leaves her parents' home as follows: The girl sits on her mother's lap surrounded by elderly friends. This is when final instructions are extended to the girl as far as marriage is concerned. She is also given some tools to utilise in her marriage. These include a knife, a basket, a cooking pot and a winnowing tray. In addition to these, the *Songa* avails her two pieces of cloth to be used for cleaning her husband. The bride accompanied by her *Songa o'wensonga* and a few female close relatives and *omukoirume omukulu* was fetched by the groom's relatives.⁴⁵

Okubayira was used with reference to only women as a process of getting into marriage (*eiry*). The innovation in conceptualisations of the meaning and function of marriage (*eiry*) was derived from the word *rya*, which plainly meant 'eat'. *Eiry* (marriage) became a life stage in which a woman, controlled food production and preparation in the household. In so doing, she controlled the distribution of food and had a greater chance of ensuring that she had enough to eat. This was in contrast with being a daughter in her parents' household where her control over and access to food was

⁴³Joshua Ssebunnya, Caroline Kituyi, Justine Nabanoba, Juliet Nakku, Arvin Bhana and Fred, Kigozi. "Social Acceptance of Alcohol Use in Uganda". *BMC Psychiatry* 20 no.52, (2020): 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-2471-2>

⁴⁴ Cultural Research Center-Jinja. *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life among the Basoga* (Kisubi: Marianum Publishing Company Ltd, 2004).

⁴⁵ Cultural Research Center-Jinja. *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life among the Basoga*.

limited.⁴⁶ This brought the *Kisoga* saying that; *omukazi yenna yenna ayala mw'irya*, literally meaning 'each woman is only respectable in marriage', with opportunity and freedom to control the production and distribution of food. *Eirya* accorded married women power and status that the unmarried could not have. Around the sixteenth century, Busoga's continued interaction with the Baganda across the River Nile, made them adopt variant words to describe marriage. One of such words is the *Luganda* word *okufumbirwa*. *Okufumbirwa* comes from the verb *okufumba* meaning 'to cook'. A woman is expected to cook for her husband rather than eat and take control of food distribution. In the twentieth century, the Christian missionaries' *Luganda* translated bible which was employed in non-*Luganda* speaking societies, Busoga inclusive, had rendered the English word 'marriage' as *okufumbirwa*.⁴⁷ The word *okufumbirwa* became a household term among the Basoga especially those who had become Christians. Since then, the Basoga used the term *okufumbirwa* more often than *okubayira*. The change in terminology came with the change in roles and expectations in traditional marriage, especially for the wife. Whereas *okubayira* promoted women's agency in marriage; *okufumbirwa* downplayed it making the man the centre of woman's attention to be fed. These changes in perception of traditional marriage among the Basoga resonate with Linnekin's assertion that invented traditions could come from neighbouring societies whose traditions then get entrenched as though they were of their ancestors.⁴⁸

The Practice of Elopement

Turning to the practice of elopement as a mechanism of getting a wife though common was not an accepted custom among the Basoga.⁴⁹ Elopement also called *okwebaiza* in *Lusoga* referred to a practice where young adults decided to stay together as husband and wife in secrecy without the consent of their families. Contrary to arguments advanced by the Jinja Cultural Research Center-Jinja,⁵⁰ new evidence from interviewed clan elders suggests that *okwebaiza* had two consenting young adults to living together rather than the abduction of the girl and subsequent forced marriage to the boy. This view, however, may have been influenced by events preceding formal British colonialism of Uganda which greatly influenced some marriage traditions in Busoga. Buganda kingdom's imperialism into Busoga by force came along with the abduction of women and girls whom they then married, considerably being more beautiful than theirs.⁵¹ This practice was heightened with slave raiding to meet the increased demand for labour in the great lakes region.⁵² These two events could have influenced an evolving tradition of abduction as the process for choosing wives in the nineteenth century. However, using historical linguistic evidence, Stephens argues that it was the missionaries' erroneous description and understanding of elopement for abduction, providing an insinuation that abduction was part of the traditional mechanisms used by the Basoga to procure a wife. The proto-Bantu language from which *Lusoga* descends had two related words for the acts of eloping: these were *hambuka* for a woman and *hambula* for a man. Both words are derived from *hamba*, an original proto-Bantu verb meaning "seize." However, *hambuka* (the female form), specifically meant "seize oneself." Stephens concluded that more likely women and girls played active roles in thwarting the ambitions of their elders by "seizing themselves" into elopements rather than moving into arranged marriages.⁵³

Since elopement involved the consent of the girl, the Basoga then used an alternative term *okupaala* in reference to a girl vanishing away. Elopement was unacceptable and a socially rebukable act because of the absence of a marriage contract in form of *omwandhu* and the missed opportunity to create alliances and connections that were crucial to surviving uncertain times.⁵⁴ The Basoga equated

⁴⁶ Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 133.

⁴⁷ Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 132.

⁴⁸ Linnekin, *Defining Tradition*, 242.

⁴⁹ Isiko, *Gender Roles*, 65.

⁵⁰ Cultural Research Center-Jinja *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life*.

⁵¹ Cultural Research Center-Jinja, *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life*.

⁵² Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 133.

⁵³ Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 133.

⁵⁴ Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 136.

‘elopement’ to ‘theft’ since women and girls were considered as part of family property. According to one clan leader, the Basoga would describe the elopement as ‘stealing a girl into marriage’.⁵⁵ Elopement brought shame and disrespect to the girl’s family, especially her mother, who was accused of failing to tutor her daughter with good character. Since elopement was against tradition, it was by custom that the boy’s relatives hurriedly contacted the girl’s parents to discuss and formalise their children’s marriage.⁵⁶ Differently from the processes explained before, the process of formalising marriage out of elopement is referred to as *okwekoba*.⁵⁷

Literally, *okwekoba* means reporting oneself on account of having taken another’s personal property without permission. *Okwekoba* is a practice in which the family of the boy willingly came to report themselves about the eloped girl with their son. Until this ceremony, there would be an acrimonious relationship between the two families. The boy would never be recognised as the son-in-law (*omukoirume*) by the parents of the girl and he held no special privileges such as being afforded a special tent, food and reception whenever he visited during cultural functions like funerals. The girl would never be accommodated under her father’s roof as it was taboo for her engagement in lovemaking before undergoing the traditional marriage rituals since virginity was a virtue. It was believed that sleeping in her father’s house would inflict Parkinson’s disease on her close relatives, especially her parents.⁵⁸ The ceremony of *okwekoba* was one filled with mixed feelings of both fury and ecstasy. In the initial stages of the ceremony, it was bitter exchanges, especially from the father of the girl but corresponded with pleadings of guilt and lenience from the boy. In some cases, the boy’s family would be spurned in addition to the father of the girl pretentiously insisting on the lack of knowledge about the girl in question.⁵⁹ Ideally, in *okwekoba*, it wasn’t the bride price but rather a compensation and atonement which was paid even though the items were not any different from what was ordinarily regarded as *omwandhu*. In reality, the compensation and atonement under *okwekoba* were much higher than what the boy’s family would have ordinarily paid as *omwandhu*. There were also special rituals to be performed for transgressing traditions. There was also happiness because the ceremony had taken away the shame upon the girl’s family. The two families got reunited through this ceremony. Contrary to the dramatised introduction ceremonies in contemporary Busoga where all the above events are played out in a couple of minutes, the actual events described above took several weeks or months to seal the marriage.

INVENTED AND DRAMATISED MARRIAGE TRADITIONS

Traditions of customary marriage in Busoga have undergone several inventions and re-inventions with the dramatisation of ancient traditions at the core of the celebration of these marriages. On one hand, some of the inventions have emerged from within Busoga society as a need to redefine and contextualise marriage traditions to current circumstances. On the other hand, some have been invented and or recreated by Arabs, Indians and Europeans due to their long-standing interaction and influence in Busoga since colonial times. Still, some traditions have been adopted from influential African societies and adapted to those of Busoga. Buganda society and the Nigerian Nollywood industry have had an overwhelming influence on the invention of the customary marriage of Busoga in recent times.

It was established that the processes, practices, items, conduct and discourse of customary marriage described in the previous sections have become part of a dramatised event of contemporary customary marriage celebrations in Busoga. The adoption of dramatising tradition attests to postulations by the invention of tradition theorists that changes in tradition can have their genesis from within the same society.⁶⁰ Customary marriage processes that lasted between three to six months to realisation are wrapped up in a single ceremony which lasts hours. Ancient traditions of *okukobya*,

⁵⁵ Clan leader Baisengobi (Iganga District), February 08, 2022.

⁵⁶ Cultural Research Center-Jinja, *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life*.

⁵⁷ Mukwaya Daudi (Spokesperson, Jinja), June 01, 2021.

⁵⁸ Isiko, *Gender Roles*, 179.

⁵⁹ Cultural Research Center-Jinja, *Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life*.

⁶⁰ Ben-Amos, *The Seven Strands of Tradition*, 101.

determination and delivery of *omwandhu*, the institution of the *Songa* and *Omukwenda* as well as *okubayira* among others are dramatically played out in one ceremony, legally known as customary marriage but popularly called *Okwandhula* among the Basoga. *Okwandhula* is now presented as the exposition and climax of the customary marriage celebration in Busoga. The *okwandhula* venue is a drama stage at which the Masters of ceremonies (*Abogezi*) of the families of the bride and groom act as ‘directors’ and ‘chief actors’ of tradition. A witness stated;

Given the fact that few people prominently remember the original cultural requirements and tongue-twisting required at such ceremonies, many offer the service at a fee. The spokesman takes the role of the final emissary on the day of introduction and he has to pull a lot of antics learned from tradition and experience to engage or answer challenges from the other side’s spokesman. It is the amiable oral battle that makes it memorable and unique from any other ceremony.⁶¹

The above observation demonstrates the cultural gap between the present generation and the past. This is illustrated by the current dearth of knowledge of past traditions. The marriage discourse of the past cannot easily be comprehended by the current generation, especially in terms of relevance. The knowledge and demonstration of such past marriage traditions have become a ‘professional’ activity. It also reveals that some critical institutions which defined traditional marriage in Busoga have either evolved into fresher forms or been extinct. The institution of ‘spokespersons’, also called *Abogezi* for example acts as the emissaries for families as opposed to the institution of *Omukwenda* who performed this role in pre-contact Busoga. Through a spiced-up dramatising method, customary marriage celebrations have become avenues through which the Basoga are taught and reminded about ancient marriage traditions. Through this ceremony, the Basoga idealise and idolise past customary marriage traditions as though they still exist unadulterated in modern society.⁶² Observance of ancient customs at such a ceremony has become a technical exercise in which the groom’s entourage, comprising of friends and workmates, and with relatively fewer kinships are tutored by the ‘knowledgeable’ *Mwogezi*. They are tutored in a mostly gendered ancient greeting style, care for ceremonial attires, avoidance of mannerisms which contravene societal norms and traditional expression of gratitude through ululations. Therefore, those engaged in today’s customary celebrations are not accustomed to the required conduct, which isn’t theirs but that of ancient Busoga. They fail to acknowledge that in reality they have broken with that past and their mechanical adaptation to relay that past is simply superficial.

The Basoga have modified the customary marriage celebration venue from just being an ordinary home of the bride’s parents into a drama stage where hired spokespersons, unrelated to both families put up a show filled with humour and comedy to the amusement of those in attendance. The *Mwogezi* for the girl’s family acts as though is the real father of the bride and speaks with such authority that he can threaten to send the guests away if they fail to comply with certain expectations. The common bullying and sometimes humiliation of the guests through pretentious lack of knowledge of their visit and denial of entry by the girl’s family’s spokesperson is a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the past traditions of the Basoga in which the father wanted to ascertain the intentions of his guests since it was a common practice to have visitations without scheduled appointments since the means of communication was by word of mouth.

The institution of the *Songa* has undergone radical recreation from within Busoga, yet it is overly dramatised in contemporary settings in an attempt to portray the pre-colonial *Songa*. An example of such a dramatic event was reported as follows;

The spokesperson invited Annet’s *Songa* to greet the guests at an introduction ceremony. The guests held their breaths for the powerful woman that had groomed the day’s bride. To their surprise, a frumpy, elderly woman in a tattered *gomesi* with a stained blue wrap showed up. With a soiled sack flung over her shoulder and a hoe in her hands, she looked to be on her way from the garden and had only chanced these smart people at Kira Country Resort, a high end recreational center in Wakiso district. They were

⁶¹David Businge. “Traditional Marriages in Uganda: Marriages in Buganda- Kwanjula”. *Ugpulse*, April 22, 2006. www.ugpulse.com/heritage/traditional-marriages-in-uganda-marriages-in-buganda-kwanjula/378/ug.aspx.

⁶²Aylward Shorter. *East African Societies*. (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan, 1974).

even more confused when she sat down to greet them. Calm was only restored when they realised the host's spokesperson seemed to know her. She said she, indeed, knew them but would disclose how at a later stage. The groom's spokesperson handed her an envelope that contained 'transport' and she left, dancing to Irene Namatovu's *Okuzaala Kujagaana* song. Guests were still confused.⁶³

Firstly, the celebration of customary marriage in Busoga has been re-invented to be accomplished through drama and comedy. Drama and comedy even for the most serious activities of these ceremonies are being used to define and execute the tradition(s) of customary marriage in contemporary Busoga. Also, the 'role acting' of pre-colonial marriage traditions in contemporary settings reveals the flippancy with which spokespersons represent and exaggerate ancient traditions. Secondly, the celebration of traditional marriages in today's society bothers so much more to contemporary forms of entertainment than to a prized expression of one's culture to which they are heirs. Indeed, customary marriage ceremonies are fast becoming associated with comedy.⁶⁴ The character of the *Songa* who appeared in the ceremony described above is an attempt for contemporary Basoga purporting to be still in a pre-colonial environment with women whose basics of life were still minimal, living a rudimentary lifestyle. The confused state of those in attendance is a clear indication that this is not the type of *Songa* they were expecting at this function since they have a modern redefinition of a nice-looking *Songa* who should be adorned with modern fashionable clothing to feed their ego.

However, a notable point for reflection is the venue at which the customary marriage was celebrated – Kira Country Resort. Whereas ancient tradition required to have *Okwandhula* in the customary residential home of the parents of the bride, current demands of technologically produced record of the ceremony in terms of photography and videography requires the function to take place in an environment with a good ambience and scenery. For those *Okwandhula* which would be telecasted, the TV production should be of a soaring standard which the traditional residential setting of the bride's family rarely meets. Some in urban areas are financially incapacitated to set up and own houses. They opt to host social functions like *Okwandhula* in hotels like Kira Country Resort. Customary marriage ceremonies attract more people than those invited, for community folk will attend the function uninvited which requires one to have at least moderate facilities to host many visitors. For this sake, it is becoming acceptable to shift this ceremony from the homes of the actual parents of the bride to that of a neighbour or a relative with a palatial compound. It is now becoming a fast-rising tradition to have customary marriage ceremonies in hired palatial facilities and theatres, away from the actual homes of the families involved. It is such hired facilities that are stage-managed as customary residences for the bride's parents. This does not necessarily imply that customary marriages are only taking place outside the customary residences of the bride's parents but rather the flexibility with which Busoga society has adapted to redefine a home for such cultural functions speaks volumes about the evolution of marriage traditions in this society.

Nonetheless, a 'theatrical-like' display involving the two spokespersons, the *Songa*, select members of the bride's relatives, the groom and bride among others take place; as the groom's entourage, bride's kinship and members of the community in attendance spontaneously cheer and marvel to their delight. The ancient mediation role of the *Songa*, background checks to ascertain any prohibited degrees of relationship between the two families, the ceremonial introduction of the bride's close relatives to the guests, ritualistic determination of *Omwandhu*, as well as much use of traditional items like baskets and gourds for drinks is only ritualistic to remind people of the traditional items of carrying goods in pre-colonial Busoga as opposed to modern containers and jerrycans which are indeed used in reality. The Basoga have innovated a theatrical form of public recognition of the bride and groom during *okwandhula*. Indeed, the introduction ceremony has become quite a game, with the groom's family pretending to be looking for the bride among each round of women the bride's family

⁶³ Mirembe, "The Trendy Kwanjula."

⁶⁴ Diana Nabiruma. "Marrying at all costs". *The Observer* August 18, 2010. observer.ug.

presents, guessing which woman she is, and often the bride's family must look for the groom among his family members as if they are surprised to meet each other. The custom of gifting the bride's father with local beer has not eluded the dramatic version of the current generation. Whereas this special drink used to be carried by head, its weight strained the neck of whoever moved it. Expression of gratitude for the drink required the host to offload the container of local beer and then a simple massage to the neck of the carrier. It is not surprising that at today's introduction ceremonies where such beer is transported by vehicles and only ceremonially carried on the head a few meters towards the host, they dramatically role-play the massaging tradition. Such rehearsed gimmicks occupy a significant part of traditional marriage celebrations to make them more entertaining. Indeed, whereas *okwandhula* used to be nail-bitingly harsh occasions with the possibility of rejecting the groom, today's emphasis is more on entertainment and how spicy the ceremony should be.⁶⁵ The argument here is that the Basoga have not only modified several ancient marriage traditions to suit the modern times but also to indirectly keep up with the past, the dramatization of ancient traditions has innovatively been adopted.

Besides the dramatic behaviour, whose invention has come from within Busoga society, there exist several traditions of customary marriage in contemporary Busoga which have been invented and reinvented by other groups of people outside Busoga. These outsiders include the Baganda, British, Indians and Arabs. The Baganda are Busoga's most proximate neighbours in terms of both geography and culture. Buganda's imperialistic influence in Busoga was visible even in the pre-colonial era. Busoga was once a tributary state of Buganda which left an overwhelming political, social and cultural influence upon the Basoga. Later, the Baganda became British colonial agents in not only Busoga but also across colonial Uganda. The Arabs, to a lesser extent, through Islamic codes of dressing and marriage influenced some inventions in celebration of customary marriage in Busoga. The Indian coolies became traders after the construction of the railway line. The British, as colonial masters, had a profound influence on not only the political-economic but also the socio-cultural practices of the colonised. Busoga was one of the districts which made up the eastern colonial province of Uganda, with a provincial governor sitting in Mbale. Among the colonial influences on marriage, traditions included colonial administration and legislation, monetization, Christianity, education and its accompanying changes in work systems and urbanisation. The post-independence phase further proliferated events of the colonial phase merging with privatisation and commercialisation on one hand and westernisation and globalisation on the other.

The foreigners' much more visible influence is on the invention of the traditional dress code for Busoga. The traditional dress code for the Basoga which include the *Kanzu* tunic (with a jacket) and *gomesi* for men and women respectively was an invention by Arab Muslim traders and European missionaries. Whereas the *Kanzu* was introduced in 1844 by the Arab Muslim Traders, the first non-Africans in Uganda,⁶⁶ the addition of a jacket was an inspiration from the colonial British dress style between the 1930s and 1940s. Therefore, for about 100 years, Basoga men just like its innovators used to dress in a *kanzu* without a jacket. However, while the *kanzu* is of Arab origin, it has been modified with Ugandan influence with changes in design and preference to a hand-sewn embroidery around the collar, abdomen and sleeves.⁶⁷ The traditional dress code for women, the *gomesi*, was imported into Uganda, towards the end of the nineteenth century, by European missionaries. It was however redesigned in 1905 by Gomesi, an Indian tailor hence naming it after the said designer. Since then, the *gomesi* has undergone several transformations in terms of design from the original strapless to bra-size straps worn on introduction ceremonies today.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, the introduction of the *kanzu* and coat by the Arabs and British respectively as well as the introduction of the *gomesi* by Christian missionaries and its transformation by Indians enhanced Basoga's quest and realisation for modesty in

⁶⁵ Mirembe, "The Trendy Kwanjula."

⁶⁶Abdu Kasozi, "The Impact of Islam on Ganda Culture, 1844-1894". *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12 no. 2, (1981): 127-135. <https://www.jstor.org/stable.1580857>

⁶⁷Nicole Lawino. "How well do you know the history of the *kanzu*?" *Satisfashion Uganda*, September 02, 2019 [Satisfashion.com](https://www.satisfashion.com).

⁶⁸Daily Monitor 'The mystery of Gomesi Origin.' August 16, 2014. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/the-mystery-of-gomesi-origin-1581462>.

their everyday lives. These have since become the gracious ‘traditional’ dress code and remain an iconic symbol of culture in not only Busoga but in other Ugandan societies as well. Whereas the *Kanzu* and *gomesi* defined the everyday modest dress code of adult Basoga during the colonial era and immediately after independence, these have been reduced to just cultural functions and occasional visits to the in-laws. Those who attempt to wear any other form of dressing at such ceremonies are lampooned for disgracing tradition.

Colonialism came along with legislating Busoga’s customary marriage system. Whereas this marriage system had no written codes, orally transmitted norms and customs were in place to regulate it. These customs were learnt from childhood with much intensity at the early adulthood stage. The legality of marriage in precolonial Busoga had been determined by consent of the families of the bride and groom upon payment of *omwandhu*. However, the colonial state took exception to determine the legality of customary marriages away from the long-time traditions. The British recreated African customary marriage heritage and repackaged it into what they felt was its authentic form.⁶⁹ In 1917, a British judge, Robert Hamilton, dismissed not only the legality but also the existence of customary marriage arguing that it was merely a wife-purchase agreement. Felix Ombura quotes Justice Hamilton in his judgement of the case *R. v. AMKEYO*;⁷⁰

In my opinion, the use of the word ‘marriage’ to describe the relationship entered into by an African native with a woman of his tribe according to tribal custom is a misnomer which has led in the past to a considerable confusion of ideas. The elements of the so called marriage by native custom differ so materially from the ordinary accepted idea of what constitutes a civilised form of marriage that it is difficult to compare the two.

Customary marriage was consequently reinvented along western conceptions. However, in 1967, Uganda was able to undo British notions of customary marriage imposed on them through a landmark court ruling *Alai v Uganda* [1967] EA 596 by an African Judge, Sir Udo Udoma, who held that the judgement by Chief Justice Hamilton in *R v Amkeyo* [1917] was motivated by British’s misconceived and negative attitude towards African traditions of bridewealth and customary marriage.⁷¹ He provided a legal basis for bride price and any form of marriage recognised by the people of Uganda including marriages celebrated according to the custom of the people. The notion of registration of customary marriage by the state as well as the redefinition and regulation of *omwandhu* became part and parcel of the practices relating to customary marriage in Busoga for it to attain legality. By 1901, the British had made a law fixing the rate of bride price in Uganda.⁷² In 1973, the newly enacted marriage registration Act demanded that all customary marriages be registered by the independent state of Uganda. With such laws, the registrar of marriages overshadowed the parents in relation to a customary marriage. By this law, the celebration and legality of customary marriage was indicated by its registration with the registrar of marriages but not validated by payment of *omwandhu*. Indeed, the British ensured that traditions of customary marriage that were in antagony with western conceptions were either foiled or transformed by legislation. The legislation on traditional marriage meant that colonial influence was not restricted to the cultural invention but to governmental structures as well.⁷³ This is partly the basis upon which theorists of invention tradition argue that colonialism influenced institutional colonial power in determining the tradition of the colonized and that these colonial structures of the past continuously have a cultural impact on the present.⁷⁴

⁶⁹Zaina Nabirye Lubwama. *The meanings of heritage practices, spaces and sites in the Busoga kingdom, Uganda in the twenty first century*. (M.A thesis. South Africa: University of Western Cape, 2021).

⁷⁰ Felix Ombura. “Registration of Customary Marriages: 100 Years after R Vs Amkeyo” *The Deuteronomy* 6, no. 4 (2017).

⁷¹ Mifumi (U) LTD & ORS v. Attorney General & Kenneth Kakuru, Constitutional Appeal N0: 02 of 2014.

⁷²Karin Pallaver. “The African Native Has No Pocket”: Monetary Practices and Currency Transitions in Early Colonial Uganda. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48 no. 3, (2015): 471-499. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44723390>

⁷³Peter Pels. “The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality”. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, (1997): 163-183. Accessed <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2952519>.

⁷⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

In addition to legislation, monetisation of a previously cashless Ugandan society influenced the tradition of bride price. Monetisation caused many relationships that had before been fluid and reciprocal to be expressed in terms of set cash payments.⁷⁵ *Omwandhu*, the traditional concept for bride price evolved to be called *omutwalo*, a Luganda word, but which literally means ‘ten thousand’, in Lusoga. The evolution of *omwandhu* into *omutwalo* has a lot to do with both the Indian community and Buganda society’s influence upon Busoga, especially during the British colonial era. The Baganda not only enjoyed the close proximity to Basoga in terms of geography, culture, and language but were also agents of British colonial rule in the area. Luganda, the language of the Baganda, became a powerful tool in colonial Busoga as it was used in trade, Christian liturgy and administration. These could have played a part in the adoption of a newer concept among the Basoga.

The origin of the concept of *omutwalo* has to do with the introduction and use of Indian rupees as a currency in the exchange of goods during the colonial days in Uganda.⁷⁶ A study done by Michael W. Tuck on the ‘Rupee disease’ in colonial Uganda, established that the colonial imposition of taxes upon Ugandans to be paid in cash of rupees initiated waves of change that swept through society. For example, social relations such as bridal dowries were affected as well. Previously, dowry had been gifts to the bride’s family worked out in negotiation between the families but as a sequela of the rupee disease, they became codified to include a certain number of rupees.⁷⁷ By 1896, the British had institutionalised the use of rupees in British East Africa and by 1903, the payment of bride price had been legislated to be in rupees at least in Uganda.⁷⁸ The use of currency as opposed to a barter trade system became a fascinating feature in the socio-economic transactions of Uganda. The rupees or *empiiya* as fondly called by the Basoga became the official required bride price in addition to other gifts that the groom sought to deliver to his in-laws. Even with the phasing out of the rupees currency and the introduction of the East African shilling by the British from 1919 to 1966,⁷⁹ the bride price remained largely monetary. Studies on monetary practices and transitions in colonial East Africa demonstrate that the introduction of colonial currency, on one hand, was part of the European civilising process expected to spur an evolution away from traditional African commodity currencies and reinforce an entirely new identity promoted by imperial ideologies on the other hand.⁸⁰ Therefore, the invention of monetary cash for bride price was interpreted to be modern and civilised.

In post-independent Uganda, the tradition of bride price continued to change face as Busoga society gets highly globalised, modernised and industrialised. The economic war of the 1970s during the reign of President Idi Amin Dada led to the depreciation of the Ugandan shilling. Although the concept of bride price is long-lived, it evolved to include material items like Art pieces or portraits of one’s clan, sofa sets, fridges, television sets, water tanks and many other items. In reality, the bride price no longer exists but marriage gifts vary depending on the financial status of not just the groom but also his bride. Parents of the bride no longer demand specified items as bride price, but these are determined by the socio-economic needs of the father-in-law which calls for a discussion between the intending couple and their friends. However, since the revival of the *Kyabazingaship* in 1993,⁸¹ there has been the need to support the institution through fundraising avenues. It is now becoming a mandatory requirement for the visiting family to avail a Busoga Kingdom certificate in recognition of their financial contribution to the cultural institution. For some spokespersons, *Omwandhu* has come to be interpreted as that special and specific item that the father to the bride demands to be brought without exception. It is seen to be the most treasured item by the father of the bride. For example, due

⁷⁵Michael W.Tuck “The Rupee Disease: Taxation, Authority and Social Conditions in early colonial Uganda”. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 39 no. 2, (2006): 221-245. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40033859>

⁷⁶ Nantambi. *What ‘omutwalo’ really is?*

⁷⁷ Tuck, *The Rupee Disease*, 242-243.

⁷⁸ Pallaver, *The African Native Has No Pocket*, 492.

⁷⁹ Edgar Robert Batte, The Evolution of Ugandan Money. *Daily Monitor*, October 09, 2012. www.monitor.co.ug.

⁸⁰Wambui Mwangi. “Of Coins and Conquest: The East African Currency Board, the Rupee Crisis, and the Problem of Colonialism in the East African Protectorate”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 no.4, (2001): 763–787. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2696669>; Pallaver, *The African Native Has No Pocket*, 471.

⁸¹ Lubwama, *The meanings of heritage practices, spaces and sites*, 57.

to Christian and Islamic influence in society, the bible and Quran are becoming a common demand as *omwandhu* by Christian and Muslim families respectively. This illuminates foreign religious influence on the evolution of marriage traditions in Busoga. Some families make strange demands such as *omwandhu*, including obsolete rupee currency coins and traditional footwear (*enkalabandha*) used in pre-industrial Busoga. With no cultural significance to contemporary society, such demands are just an expression of nostalgia and more for spicing up the drama at the ceremony than an expression of attachment to tradition.

Marriage gifts taken during introduction ceremonies have now become a status issue and a show-off of financial ability for middle-income groups in society. The more financially advantaged the groom, the more marriage gifts will be brought during the ceremony. This has further been influenced by Nigerian Nollywood films, a popular scene in Uganda. The splashing of currency notes upon the bride at introduction ceremonies is a common occurrence in Busoga, reminiscent of Nigerian wedding films as a demonstration of a wealthy groom. Display of marriage gifts in the middle space of the introduction ceremony venue is now an acceptable norm for all to determine how worthy the groom values the bride. Contrary to past traditions when *omwandhu* was determined by elderly kinship, the bride today holds much influence upon her intending husband on the categories and amount of marriage gifts to be brought for her parents.

Colonialism was aided by foreign religions of Christianity and Islam, which rejected the authenticity of traditional marriages. Christianity required its converts to enter a marriage contract through a wedding in a church whereas Islam required Muslims to celebrate their marriages according to the Islamic rite of *Nikah*. Traditional marriages were denied as formalised marital arrangements as they were not equivalent to the Christian marriage ceremony.⁸² Polygyny, the most fundamental characteristic of traditional marriage, was denounced as sinful before the Christian God. Foreign religious influence made Basoga just like other Africans elsewhere feel guilty about practising their traditions in favour of the imported ones. Fulfilment of traditional marriage traditions simply became a step towards the realisation of a church marriage. The Basoga continued with those traditions to the extent that the church determined not to be contrary to Christian doctrine. For example, parental consent of the bride by way of a written letter or their physical presence was required for the wedding to take place in the church. Christian clergy and Imams became the officiating officials of the weddings rather than clan elders. Christian and Islamic religious cultures have reinvented traditional marriage ceremonies to the extent that spokespersons of either family draw their statements and wise sayings from the bible and Quran rather than appealing to African traditional discourse on marriage. The Bible and Quran are more commonly quoted during customary marriage ceremonies than the wise sayings of known African ancestors. Christianity and Islam along with an emerging industrial sector led to denunciation of the tradition of 'gifting the bride's parents with local beer, as it was taught to be against the will of the 'foreign gods'. To please the clergy and Imams, Basoga abandoned offering local beer as part of marriage gifts in favour of soft drinks manufactured by colonial-owned industries. In some cases, highly industrialised distilled beer and liquor were acceptable to those in the Roman Catholic church tradition. The gourd, a traditional symbol and tool for keeping the pleasurable local drink has been replaced by breakable glasses and crates made by the western industrial sector. Since the time between the traditional marriage ceremony and church wedding was usually much, the former came to be regarded as an 'engagement' or 'betrothal' ceremony, though more commonly accepted as an 'introduction ceremony', rather than 'customary marriage'. This came along with the exchange of engagement rings and public affection of love between the couple. Contemporary music and 'twerking' has become characteristic of introduction ceremonies, with the groom and bride being urged to dance in front of their parents and guests, a previously abominable practice in pre-colonial Busoga.

The above influences teamed up with emerging events of globalisation, westernisation and privatisation along with western forms of education and work which relegated some customary marriage traditions, yet adopted new ones which matched the current circumstances. The introduction of western education changed modes of communication from oral transmission to the written form of

⁸² Stephens, *Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out*, 144.

information. Literacy enabled Basoga to learn letter writing which characterised communication between intended in-laws. It then became a tradition for the boy's family to write a formal letter to the father of the girl with a request to grant them visitation. The influence of Buganda upon customary marriage in Busoga was again reflected in the written language. Until recently, Luganda was the language of instruction for literacy education in Busoga. However, with the introduction of Lusoga in Uganda's National Education Curriculum and subsequent translation of the Christian Bible into Lusoga, it is now a preferred requirement for this letter to be written in Lusoga. With very few locals able to write a letter flawlessly in their local language to the elders, letter writing for customary marriage purposes has become a lucrative service for those who can do so.⁸³

Furthermore, western forms of education and a modern industrial sector took children away from their traditional settings to schools and workplaces where they adopted new relations not matched with blood and kinship but by academic specialities and professional careers. This led to accelerated rates of occupational mobility with an increasing number of adult roles being learned in the context of modern educational and economic institutions, with a corresponding decrease in the significance of socialisation functions carried through familial units.⁸⁴ Education and work opened up public interaction between boys and girls with young adults procuring the liberty to choose their partners contrary to arranged marriages in pre-colonial society. The establishment of national schools and colleges led to unlimited interaction of Basoga with people from other ethnic tribes leading to not only cultural intermarriages but also making effective background checks by parents almost impossible. Traditional marriages were no longer a celebration of traditions of one ethnic society but a redefinition of traditions which catered for the interests of couples from different ethnic societies. The effect of education and increased mobility of economic rights on traditional marriages was evident in other Sub-Saharan African societies of Nigeria and Ivory Coast where noticed prospective, working and educated couples gradually arrogated to themselves the right to have an effective say in the choice of a mate.⁸⁵ This was in addition to educated brides and grooms beginning to assimilate western ideas of romantic love and courtship to the chagrin of their illiterate parents. The celebration of traditional marriages now became so much of a concern for old schoolmates and workmates rather than kinship. This came with the diminished role of the *Songa* in favour of experienced workmates and old schoolmates.

Privatisation of the economy, which emerged with the advance of the National Resistance Movement government in Uganda in 1986 along with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's pressure on developing economies to privatise had far-reaching consequences upon the celebration of traditional marriages in Busoga. Whereas the notion of privatisation targeted the government and its agencies, the rationale had a trickledown effect on socio-cultural transactions. The management and procurement of traditional marriage ceremonies shifted from the hands of kinship to hired private professionals. Three key institutions of the *Omukwenda*, *Songa* and communal-family management of the ceremony evolved. The institution of the *Omukwenda* evolved into that of '*Abogezi*'. '*Abogezi*' (Plural) or '*Omwogezi*' (singular) no longer have any kinship with the two families as their only time of contact begins and ends with the traditional marriage ceremony. The comical nature of the spokespersons is more cherished than the spontaneous speeches of the family heads which were punctuated with riddles, proverbs and wise sayings to relay their messages. The *Abogezi* have become 'masters' of tradition for clans they do not belong to. They take time to read and consult to replay the script in a dramatic form at the traditional marriage ceremony. The *Songa* is no longer the paternal aunt of the bride but a hired professional *Songa* who has specialised in marital counselling and the sale of traditional medicine connected to sexuality and reproduction. The organisation of traditional marriage ceremonies has been ceded to events management firms that find it convenient to shift the ceremonies from the bride's parental homes to hotels and entertainment places which are presented dramatically as the dwelling places of the girl's parents. Catering and the

⁸³ Mirembe, "The Trendy Kwanjula"

⁸⁴ Remi Clignet and Joyce Sween. "Social Change and Type of Marriage". *American Journal of Sociology* 75 no.1, (1969): 123-145. <https://doi.org/10.1086/224749>.

⁸⁵ Clignet and Sween. *Social Change and Type of Marriage*, 141.

preparation of traditional dishes expected at such traditional marriage celebrations are fast becoming a prized profession. This is contrary to the pre-colonial custom of food preparation by trusted members of the girl's family, especially the *Songa*, to avoid jealous people from contaminating the in-laws. Kinship has been replaced by friends and workmates taking centre stage in the whole organisation of the introduction ceremony. Under these circumstances, the parents of the couple are treated as guests at a ceremony where they traditionally ought to take charge. Indeed, the reinvention of traditions of marriage is inevitable, in the face of modernisation, as it is associated with a transfer of basic societal functions from familial institutions to specialized agencies.⁸⁶

The tradition of compensation and atonement for indecency and breach of taboos during visitations has been adulterated by modern trends. In pre-colonial times, the visiting in-laws were expected to keep high levels of decency in both speech and physical conduct as a sign of dignifying the in-laws. The relationship between in-laws was protected by an elaborate taboo system. In a much more historical context, taboo was a sacred term for cultural and religious prohibitions.⁸⁷ In several traditional African societies, much more attention was put on linguistic taboos which implied the avoidance of mentioning certain words or expressions which were abominable due to particular social values and beliefs.⁸⁸ The visiting in-laws were on tension to ensure that they do not break any taboo lest they would be required to pay hefty fines in compensation and atonement. The compensation was usually in form of cows, goats, sheep or chicken sacrifices which were determined by the visited in-laws without disputation. Atonement was a way of restoring relationships both with other humans and with transcendent beings. It aimed at cleansing ritual impurity and averting the consequences of abomination.⁸⁹ However, it was not always the case that whenever a celebration of traditional marriage took place, the groom's family broke any taboo necessitating compensation and atonement. In the actual sense, taboo violations were rare and accidental than deliberate acts of non-conformity to the prescribed social norms.⁹⁰ There is, however, vulgarisation of this pre-colonial tradition through dramatic scenes of spokespersons who repeatedly demand money from the visiting entourage upon any supposedly slight blunder they make during the ceremony. This tradition has evolved into a money-minting practice by spokespersons of the bride's family during the marriage ceremony. Spokespersons now demand monetary fines not for breaking any taboo but for responses that breach common sense and current affairs questions, riddles or temptations posed. One groom expressed his experience with the fines common at contemporary traditional marriage celebrations in the following words;

Of course, if you don't get a clever *Mwogezi*, one had to mobilise more money to clear fines for mishandled tasks to atone a supposed disrespect for the in-laws and elders gathered at the ceremony. Problems for our delegation started as soon as we were invited in to take up seats. The agreed number was 40 people. We were more than 50. Their spokesman teased us on this, though we survived a fine. I was told it is normally fined, and guests of the man's side normally do it intentionally to create avenues for fines and begging for clemency whose display is at the center of the introduction ceremony.⁹¹

The compensation and atonement result from delayed arrival for the ceremony, a number bigger than agreed, guests taking seats without authorisation, and not clapping among others. The tradition of compensation and atonement for breaking taboos has been turned into a comical display by both spokespersons to enlist excitement from those in attendance. It is part of the spicing theme at traditional marriage ceremonies in contemporary Busoga.

⁸⁶ Clignet and Sween, *Social Change and Type of Marriage*, 123.

⁸⁷ E. A. Essel, "The Role of Taboos in African Governance Systems". *Polgári Szemle*, 14 no.4-6, (2018): 372-386., DOI: 10.24307/psz.2018.1229

⁸⁸ Maweja Mbaya. "Linguistic taboo in African marriage: A study of the Oromo Laguu". *Journal of Humanities* 16, (2002): 55-67. DOI: 10.4314/jh.v16i1.6297

⁸⁹ Emmanuel H. Takyi. *A Comparative Study of the Concept of Atonement in the Aboakyer Festival of the Effutu Tribe in Ghana and the Yom Kippur Festival of the Old Testament: Implications for Adventist Mission Among the Effutu*. (PhD Dissertation. Andrews University, 2015). Doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/dissertations/1575>

⁹⁰ Mbaya, *Linguistic taboo in African marriage*, 2002.

⁹¹ Businge, *Traditional Marriages in Uganda*.

CONCLUSION

These findings can be generalised to several ethnic societies in Uganda because marriage, ceremony, love and dramatisation of life in African societies cannot be separated. Several other communities dramatise traditional marriage ceremonies, although differently. Although, the bride, groom and audience are real and not simply role-played, contemporary traditional marriage celebration is similar to a drama show which not only summarises but also encompasses several events and processes which in reality could have taken months and years for those in pre-colonial Busoga. It is a carefully choreographed event with 'directors of tradition' acting as spokespersons for each family. A common feature where the key actors have hired professionals rather than engaged with close relatives and kinsmen speaks volumes about the political economy of customary marriages in modern society. Customary marriage celebrations have become so superficial that apart from a demonstration of knowledge about pre-colonial marriage traditions, it best illustrates the current traditions of marriage in contemporary Uganda, with a dramatisation of pre-colonial practices of marriage at the forefront. The contestations by leaders of cultural institutions against transgressions during customary marriage ceremonies are explicit about the ceaseless changes that traditions anywhere in the world experience. Current trends in education, industrialisation, globalisation and modernisation demonstrate that traditional marriage customs will gradually pave the way to newer marriage systems. Some of the changes in sub-Saharan Africa will include a decrease in arranged unions in favour of a corresponding increase in freedom of courtship and partner choice.

These changes have been promoted by colonial law, foreign religious legacy and missionary education. Increasing exposure to western norms is a potential genesis of social change and there are indications that some mutations in marital behaviour are indeed prevalent. Contrary to the total abandonment of traditional marriage norms and convergence toward the western conjugal culture, there is evidence of an integration of traditional and western marriage modes, with contemporary African marriage life being neither purely traditional nor purely western. Such evolution of traditional marriages points to varying degrees of continuity, innovation and rupture of marriage traditions over centuries among the Basoga. These reveal the dynamism that enabled Basoga to negotiate to change social and political realities by adapting how they constituted marital relationships. Therefore, the intention and indeed practice of contemporary authors of traditions in Africa who purport to study marriage systems of "traditional Africans" is untenable because the pure "traditional African" hardly exists. His place has been taken by the contemporary African. What is neglected in such authors' investigations are the marriage traditions of this contemporary African whose marriage practices still owe a great deal to past traditions but simply modified to apply in the modern world.

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