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Evolution and Development of formalized Marriage Traditions in World Civilization: A Historical Experience from Sukumaland Marriage Traditions, Tanzania.

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Abstract

This paper delves into analyzing the evolution and development of formalized marriage traditions in World history. Specific objectives of the study were to: identify formalized marriage traditions in Sukumaland from 1500 A.D to date; analyze the historical aspects of formalized Sukumaland marriage traditions towards elevating society; and examine the challenges faced by indigenous marriage formalities in the contemporary Tanzanian society.

The study employed both Structural-functionalist and Social-Exchange Theories as an analytical tool to identify diverse formalized Sukuma marriage traditions in the micro-level of the couple families which describes marriage arrangements through courtship and forms of negotiations for a successful and prosperous Sukumaland marriage.

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Data was gathered from Sukuma Custodians of marriage traditions, Sukuma family/clan members involved in a formalized Sukumaland marriage, and Bujora Sukuma Cultural Museum Curator/Moderator. Documentary review sources such as Marriage history books, journal articles, research papers and online sources have been used to survice other sources.

Findings have revealed that for centuries people in Sukumaland have adhered to diverse socially formalized marriage traditions/forms such as Bulehiwa (elopment) and Bulunjiwa (socially formalized marriage) which have signified the people in Sukumaland as a civilized society. The study concludes that, married partners should adhere to their socially formalized and acceptable marriage traditions for a continous, sustainable, civilized and durable life marriages. The study recommends that, married couples should abstain from copying other peoples' marriage traditions which are characteristic of mere animals such as lesbians and same sex marriages that are meaningless among Africans.

Keywords: Evolution, Development, History, Marriage, Civilization, Traditions, Society, Sukumaland.

Introduction

The significant historical achievements made by Neolithic people during New or Late Stone Age such as: people's food supply became more reliable, the population increased, wealth accumulation and possession, and trade expanded. Settlements became larger, and some grew into cities. Along with the growth of cities came the beginnings of organized government and religion, evolution and development of formalized marriages, the development of specialized occupations and advanced technology and the use of written symbols to keep records- all these characterized early World human civilizations. (Perry, 1985).

Consequently, the changes brought by Neolithic Revolution necessitated an orderly arranged human marriages between two different blood related families or lineages done through bridewealth negotiations during Neolithic era to ensure constant family labour force, clan continuity, social order, legitimate wealth inheritance and a sign of a civilized and developed human society as opposed to hunter-gatherers (Paleolithic people) whose marriages were loosely and informally arranged due to the nature of their way of living depending on foraging, collection of wild fruits, nuts, honey, insects, and uprooting edible roots. Hunter-gatherers lived in hunting-bands -consisting of about fifteen to thirty people, slept in caves and relied on subsistence or hand-to-mouth economy. (Berger et al. 2023).

In Africa, strict cultural rules, norms and traditions obliged a person to marry outside the same clan or lineage. Marriage was typically accompanied by an exchange of bridewealth; the husband's payment of cattle, gifts, goods, services or money to his new wife's family. Bridewealth gave a husband certain domestic and customary rights to establish a homestead with his wife, to use his bride's labour in his household and fields and to attach their offsprings to his kinship group. (Shorter, 1973).

Odetola & Ademola (1985) defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman such that any child born within the union is regarded as the legitimate offspring of the two parents. It can be defined in a broader context as a means of forming both political and economic alliance between two unrelated lineages or groups. However, Odetola and Ademola (1985) point out that, marriage between two different sexes will necessarily create bonds of friendship and blood relationships between the people of the concerned couples.

In the Western world, marriage is assumed as a biological relationships which is identical with kinship and affinity as social phenomena. In Europe, bachelordom or spinsterhood is associated with the phenomenon of the domineering mother or father; in Africa, children receive specialized training in their lives and responsibilities of their sex from the parent of their respective sex or gender. (Shorter, 1973).

In precolonial indigenous African societies, marriage could be by prescription, or preference. Prescribed marriage is the situation whereby a man must marry a wife within his similar specific ethnic group or clan. In preferential marriage, the man may think it is desirable for him to marry from a particular group or lineage. Both forms of marriage were common in the traditional African societies. (Odetola & Ademola, 1985).

However, in traditional Africa, as opposed to the contemporary Africa, "*families played crucial role in decisions about marriage. Marriage was not merely an individual issue or enterprise between*

a bride and a groom, rather it was a union of two large social groups, such as families, clans or village men and women or community members". (ibid).

Literature Review

This study has been supported by relevant theories and empirical literature reviews pertaining to the historical evolution and development of formalized human marriage traditions towards forming a civilized society. From such literatures, the study specified key indigenous official go-between (people) involved in spouse selection. inquiring spouse's behaviours or actions, bridewealth/dowry arrangements and negotiations and the historical analysis on the sustainability of indigenous Sukuma marriage forms towards societal growth.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Structural-Functionalist Theory (SFT)

This study has employed both Structural-Functionalist and Social-Exchange Theories. Structural-Functionalist theory owes much to Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim as fathers of sociology in the 19th century. Auguste Comte pointed out for the need for social integration during a time of rapid change. Emile Durkheim on the other hand made a clear analysis on mechanical and organic solidarity within the society. (Giddens, 2001).

From the Structural-Functionalist perspective, the family is the backbone and foundation of the social order because it fulfills vital and core functions such as socialization; regulation of sexual activity; social placement; material things and emotional security. (Maconis & Linda, 2002).

Structural-Functionalists recognizes diverse marriage traditions such as polygamy and child betrothal in pre-industrial societies as ecological "adaptations" that enhance individual and social survival. In much the same way, Structural-Functionalists often describe the independent nuclear family as "well-adapted" to industrial society and the extended families as well-adapted to pre-industrial or communal societies (Thompson & Hickey, 1996).

The theory fits the study in that it recognizes Sukumaland diverse formalized marriage traditions and forms such as *Bulehi* (girl's elopement), polygamy (*Mhali*) and *Bulunji* (courtship marriage) and patriarchy and matriarchy forms practiced from 1500 A.D to date in Sukumaland.

Social-Exchange Theory (SET)

Social-Exchange analysis is one of the micro-level approach to family and so marriage, which describes courtship and marriage arrangements as forms of negotiation. In this respect, dating allows each person or side to assess the advantages and disadvantages of a potential spouse. In essence, exchange analysts suggest, people "shop around" for partners to make the best "deal" they can. On the other hand, Thompson & Hickey (1996) argue that "The Social-Exchange perspective uses the "Market-place" metaphor which sees people bargaining and negotiating to make the best deal they can in marriage and family relationships.

This approach suits this study in that formalized African marriage traditions including Sukumaland formalized marriages still adheres to the traditions, norms, customs and taboos of people concerned with marriage inquiring and researching each one's family and spouse side advantages and disadvantages of a potential fiancé or spouse during selection, courtship stage, bargaining and negotiating on matters pertaining to bridewealth to make the best

deal they can in ensuring marriage and new blood family relationships possible and a success.

Empirical Literatures Review

Marriage Traditions in Ancient Southwest Asia/Near East. Mesopotamia

During Paleolithic period, formalized and arranged marriages between a groom and a bride's families were almost non-existent due to the nature and way of living of the Paleolithic peoples. They lived a nomadic and foraging type of life throughout history. Thus, formalized and arranged human marriages were a result and achievement of the Neolithic Revolution. (Berger et al. 2023).

Sumerians

Sumerians -people who lived in Sumer along the Lower ancient Mesopotamian Civilization between Tigris-Euphrates River Valleys currently Iraq prior to 3,000 BCE, viewed marriage *as a social contract between two families and, as a result, the male heads of the two families arranged a couple's marriage.* Documents depict that both families contributed resources to seal the union or complete the marriage contract. The man's family gave gifts or money and hosted a feast or marriage ceremony, while the woman's family amassed a dowry or bridewealth. In Sumerian society, a woman did not automatically receive an inheritance upon the death of her father, she could expect (and use the court system to make sure she got) to receive a dowry, even if it came from her father's estate after his death. Divorce was possible but sometimes led to social ostracism or even punishment if there were accusations of misconduct, such consequences being especially the case for the woman. Records indicate that polygamy was not common among Sumerians, but wealthier men did keep slave-girls as concubines. Overall, Sumerians considered marriage an essential institution in that it brought families together and ensured the continuation and sustainability of the family lineage. (Berger, et al. 2023).

In most early Neolithic societies, 5,000 years BCE, *male heads of the two concerned families were the ones who arranged a couple's marriages.* Neolithic women carried an increased childbearing responsibility, women were also responsible for the actual domestication of feral babies, nursing and raising them. Men would shear sheep, help weave, market the textiles, and cultivate the food that was prepared in home. (*ibid*).

Babylonians

Some of the earliest recorded marriage laws date back 4,000 years ago to the Babylonians of the ancient Mesopotamia. During his forty-two years reign, from 1792 to 1750 B.C, King Hammurabi issued his code of 282 laws. The nature of these laws provides insight on how social order was held in the highest esteem. Babylonian marriages were a social contract between a man and women, often arranged. Marriage also reflected social and economic status; it determined how property and wealth was administered. (Whitefish, 2006).

According to the Hammurabi's code, marriage was not legal until the wife's bonds were paid. The husband had to purchase his wife, which was most often her dowry. Depending on her family's social status, the wife's price may have included a significant transfer of wealth and property. Although the husband gained new assets along with his wife, these possessions were legally set aside in order to provide support for the wife and her future children in the event of divorce or her husband's death. (*ibid*).

There are no mentions of same-sex unions in Hammurabi's code; it would not function within their patriarchal system. However, polygamy was permitted under certain circumstances. As previously stated, marriage during this time period reflected social and economic status; children were a significant factor in ancient Babylon. (*ibid*).

Consequently, if a wife could not provide children the husband could take on a concubine or maidservant. It was not uncommon for a man to acquire concubine or maidservants, even if his wife was fertile. In this case, the husband was not legally married to another wife, but practicing cohabitation instead. However, if a man's wife contracted a long-term sickness, he was permitted to marry an additional wife as long as his first wife remained in the house and was cared for during the rest of her life. (*ibid*).

While Hammurabi permitted polygyny in ancient Babylon, he made sure that husbands did not advantage of the legal system or society. The marriage contract was taken very seriously. As a result, adultery and incest were not accepted in society; they disrupted the social order. If a woman was accused of adultery she would face the courts, and if she was caught in adulterous acts she was drowned. If a mother and her son were caught in the act of incest, they would be burned together. Although these tactics seem harsh and against human rights law in a contemporary context, the purpose of these laws was to maintain social order and elevate society. Thus, the purpose of marriage, as practiced in accordance with ancient Babylonian law, was to elevate society and maintain social order. This philosophy of marriage in ancient times laid the foundation for later centuries of formalized African marriage traditions which this study attempts to address. (*ibid*).

Greece

Marriage in ancient Greece was similar to that of the Babylonians. They also viewed the union as a matter of social and public interest. The most important aspect of marriage was procreation. It was the responsibility of every citizen to raise up their children for the state. If a wife could not bear children, the husband was allowed to acquire another wife. According to the ancient Greek Herodotus' writings, King Anaxandridas II of Sparta had cohabitated with two wives, he practiced bigamy in order to preserve his family. It was crucial for citizens to bear children as the ancient Greeks believed that was the sole purpose for marriage. (Herodotus, Robert & Andrea, 2002).

Greek philosopher, Plato, took it a step further. In his popular work, *The Republic*, Plato argued for his vision of what the perfect republic should look like. Regarding marriage, Plato believed that the union was for childbearing, however, the state would have more control over the child rearing process. Plato suggested that children must be raised by society. He wanted to create superior citizens out of these children. The rulers of the *Republic* held marriage festivals in order to conduct temporary marriages. These marriages were carefully orchestrated by the priests and priestesses, matching individuals for eugenic breeding. The newborns of these marriages were taken from the parents and raised in anonymous nurseries. Plato believed that practicing marriage in this way provided the key to perfect social order. It was the only way to benefit society, creating the most powerful, good mannered and wisest citizens. (Plato, Grube & Reeve, 1992).

While Plato's vision was never actually carried out in society, some of his contemporaries argued that his republic would never work due to being more idealistic than realistic.

Plato's student, Aristotle did not share the same vision as of his teacher Plato on the role of the state to raising children. Aristotle argued that the state in Plato's Republic could not possibly love, care, or nurture for the children as well as the biological parents could; their love cannot be transferred to the state. He also resented the idea that families would become obsolete in Plato's state. Aristotle held to the view that the state was made up of families, and therefore private marriages was essential to political theory. He also believed that gender roles in marriage were crucial in order to maintain a healthy society. Aristotle continued arguing that the husband was the commander, while the wife was to obey. (Aristotle & Jowett, 2000).

Marriage in Early Western Christianity

The Early Church period was a collaboration of Jewish, Roman and Christian ideals. Much like the ancient Greek's view of the importance of marriage in society, the Romans believed that the purpose of marriage was to produce legitimate children who would become citizens of the state. However, the Romans differed from the Greeks on the practice of polygamy. (Campbell, 2003)

According to Scheidel's study on Roman society, Roman marriage was strictly monogamous; citizens were legally bound to one spouse at a time. Scheidel also mentioned that the Roman's idea of marriage was embraced by early Christianity. While both Romans and Christians practiced monogamy, polygamy was still observed by the Jewish population. According to the accounts of Romano-Jewish historian, Titus Fravius Josephus, polygamy was a recognized institution, observed by King Herod himself. Some Jewish also had concubines who were among the aristocracy.

Augustine's idea of marriage best summarizes the general view of the early Christians. He (Augustine) wrote, "The good purpose of marriage, however, is better promoted by one husband with one wife, than by a husband with several wives, is shown plainly enough by the very first union of a married pair, which was made by the Divine Being Himself. Although these early church leaders may have differed on their understanding of why the patriarchs practiced polygamy, they all believed that God's intention was one man and one woman. (Augustine & Schaff, 2007).

Hongliang Yan (2023) did a study on **The Evolution of Marriage Customs:** Focusing on Huangchuan (Guangzhou) in the Xinyang Region" and found out that in the period around the founding of the People's Republic of China, traditional and modern marriage customs were in a state of constant flux and change. The study explored the nature of the changes and the issues emerged out of them. The study utilized the fifteenth chapter, first section on marriage customs from "The Cultural Annals of Huangchuan County" compiled by the Cultural Bureau of Huangchuan County. It offers an overview of the marital customs in Huangchuan around the time of the nation's founding. A detailed and accurate interpretation of the text reveals that most of the Huangchuan's marriage procedures originated from the traditional 'Six Etiquette's', with many similarities to them. With the establishment of New China, local marriage customs in Huangchuan also began to simplify.

However, the study has revealed that, the simplifications and alterations of marriage customs and traditions done by new generation of Huangchuan people have given rise to extreme and undesirable practices such as high dowries, ostentation, extravagance, regular marriage break-ups and even arrangement of ghost marriages. The study recommends that, while practical

simplifications are welcomed, it is essential to eradicate and change negative new aspects brought by marriage simplifications and alterations.

Marriage Traditions in the 20th-21st Centuries Worldwide

Diane (2002) did a study on "Marriage Practices and Customs in Tibet, Zaire and in the United States". In Tibet, foreexample, the study revealed that a man and his father share the same wife. In Zaire, a woman shares her husband with her mother. The study showed that marriage traditions throughout human history and around the world meet a variety of fundamental needs. Marriage, according to Diane et al. is considered the best way to ensure orderly rising and controlling of children. Ideally, marriage offers and fosters intimacy, friendship, affection, sexual fulfillment and companionship. Marriage also provides and ensures division of labour within a consuming and working family and societal unit. The report by Diane et al. shows that, in the USA despite a rapid decline in the marriage rate today, marriages remains the lifestyles of the vast majority of adults and many whose first marriages fail remarry.

In all societies' arrangements exist for the social recognition of who may legitimately mate with whom, which is commonly known as marriage. (Nisbert, 1966).

Mair (1974) conducted an empirical study on the Yako Marriage Traditions of Eastern Nigeria and recognized double descent both patrilineal and matrilineal lineages. In his findings he observed that, Yako people recognize no rules providing senior kinsmen the right to dispose of girls in marriage and has far back as people chose their potential spouse or own marriage partner.

Girls of eleven or twelve are reported to have used to form gangs for leisure-time amusement. The report by Mair (1974) reveals that the girls would spend their evenings together and then sleep at the house of the mother of one or another where each girl could invite a lover. Boys would seek such invitations by making the girls small gifts. Under this theme of the report, courtships, therefore, began for girls even before first menstruation, though, of course, neither boy nor girl was committed by the first choice. But the eventual choice was made by the couple themselves, who then sought the approval of their elders, and it was the young man himself, accompanied by some of his age mates who presented himself to a girl's father.

The report for the Yako traditional marriage payment concluded that: "Yako should have been handed over the marriage payment at the conclusion of the marriage ritual as it was formally presented by the groom's age mates to those of the bride, the actual giver and receiver not being present. But if it was only promised and not paid till later, it would be given directly to the father-in law by the bridegroom or his father,"

Methodology

This paper employed Quasi-research design approach whereby the researcher has incorporated both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative aspect has been used on the analysis of evolution and development of formalized and arranged human marriage traditions towards civilized societies and suggestions on the suitable marriage formalities towards sustainable and civilized Tanzania society. Quantitative approach has been incorporated on specification of key family members/people/agents involved in formalized Sukumaland marriage arrangements. Quantitative data also have been useful when Sukumaland Custodians of formalized

marriage traditions, Bujora Sukuma Cultural Museum Curator and Four Life Experience's formalized Sukuma pairs of Marriage Documents were incorporated.

Primary sources include oral interviews or written evidence while secondary sources involved account descriptions of persons who some were eyewitnesses and some not. The process of asking questions was organized using constructed interview guide questions focused on specific objectives of the study. The type of the questions in the interview guide were open-ended questions. In case interviews contradicted each other and provided inconsistent explanations in different interview contexts, the researcher crosschecked information found in interviews with other published works, documents and oral interviews. This helped provide logical flow of historical facts.

With regard to secondary data, the researcher read different relevant scholarly works done by other scholars in the related study/topic to complement the primary data. The researcher visited Mwanza Regional Library, Bujora Sukuma Cultural Archive and Museum and more other online libraries. The materials and informations accessed by the researcher included, among others, dissertations, manuscripts, reputable journal articles, ethnographic research reports, family life documents and books which address the objectives of this study.

The collected information was analyzed through the content analysis approach. Based on this approach, data analysis involved three stages. First, the preliminary stage of data collection by which the researcher analyzed documentary data relevant to the study. This ensured the researcher of realization of the historical facts about the study. Secondly, data from various sources were carefully selected and categorized thematically depending on the objectives of the study. Secondary sources were used to establish a comparative analytical framework to avoid subjectivity and biases.

The researcher maintained historical objectivity through data collection selection tools, data collection, analysis, interpretation and data reporting. The carrying out of the interviews and recording of the information adhered the willingness of the interviewees. For interviewees who were skeptical to digital recording, the researcher used note book. This ensured respondents' confident and comfortable with the exercise.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussions of this study have been guided by three specific objectives as follows:

Identification of the formalized Sukumaland marriage traditions from 1500 A.D to date;

Historical analysis of formalized marriage traditions/forms in Sukumaland; and

Examination of the challenges faced by formalized Marriage traditions in 21st century.

The Profile of the Study Area

'Sukumaland' (*BuSukuma*) proper is located in the southeastern African Great Lakes region and consists of four districts namely Shinyanga, Maswa, Kwimba and Mwanza district (Abrahams 1967; Malcom 1953; Varkevisser 1973). It was made up out of 52 separate chiefdoms at the time of the study was being done in 2024. The peopling of these areas refer to themselves as *Basukuma*, meaning 'the people of the North', since sukuma is a directional term for North (Abrahams 1967; Wijsen & Tanner 2002).

Pre-colonial Sukuma history is a result of an interplay of factors, mostly been the Bantu migrations over centuries. Pre-colonial Sukuma history is viewed by some scholars as an amalgamation of immigrant clans from the Buganda, Banyankole and Tutsi kingdoms back in the 18th to 19th centuries respectively. (Gunderson 2010).

Sukumaland prior to formal annexation and colonization was not composed of compact entities or denoted by identifiable boundaries. The specific settlements that we refer to as chiefdoms did not see themselves as forming strictly homogenous identities (Corry 1951). It was when the British and German authorities arrived in the 20th century that they attempted to invent Sukuma 'tribes' (Gunderson 2010; Ranger 1993). When the British took over Sukumaland after World War I, they separated the area into 40 chiefdoms. Many of which were not administered by *Batemi* chosen by the people, but by *Batemi* that had been appointed by the Germans prior to the war. They were in need of predominantly large political units in order to centralize local authorities (Wijsen & Tanner 2002).

The Sukuma are a Bantu -speaking people who live in Tanzania. They are the largest ethnic group in Tanzania, making up about 16% of the country's population. Sukuma are primarily farmers, cultivating their fields during rain season. The popular tool is a handhoe. The Sukuma practice a mixed economy based on subsistence agriculture and cattle herding. The wide variety of cultivated food crops are such as sorghum, millet, maize, sweet potatoes and cassava. Cotton and tobacco are their main cash crops. Early Sukuma inhabitants depended on hunting wild games. Later on, Sukuma adapted animal keeping skills- mostly domesticating cows, sheep and goats. Traditional Sukuma homestead is characterized by cow -feased cemented floor and a grass- thatched roof. (Lupande 1995).

Sukuma are historically religious people. They believe in Supernatural being called '*Livelelo*', meaning the 'Universe'. Other synonymous names given to their supernatural being are such as *Lyuba*, *Likunze*, *Mulungu*, *Lingasa*, *Ndimi*, among others. Sukuma popular family-house building was commonly known as '*Ibindo*'-a two concentric walled-house with spaces for parents to sleep, women to cook food, women living space, grain-grinding stone space and boys and girls sleeping space. The *Ibindo* house ensured secret-keeping among family members and expressed gender roles and labour division at the family level. (Athanasys, et al., 2024).

Identification and historical Analysis of Formalized Marriage Traditions/Forms in Sukumaland from 1500 A.D to Date.

As in many other ancient recorded human societies' views on formalized marriage in the world; from Mesopotamia to Greece, Egypt to Babylon, so Sukuma people viewed and still view formalized marriage as a societal-based issue with public concerns and interests. In Sukumaland, marriage was, and is, taken seriously as a social contract and that, for a man and a woman to be respected and honored, he/she must be married and bear a number of children for societal and clan lineage continuity and wealth inheritance. (**My emphasis**).

Predominant and common formalized marriage traditions throughout Sukumaland history from 1500 A.D to date are mostly identified by key informants. Large part of Sukumaland from Unyamwezi, Ukimbu, Kahama, Unyantuzu, Ukonongo and Usukuma reported that, for centuries Sukumaland has sustained and maintained 'four' formalized marriage traditions namely;

Polygamous and Monogamous; Patriarchy and Matriarchy traditions practiced in either *Bulehiwa* marriage style and *Bulunji* marriage forms. Bulehiwa marriage form is a girl's elopement/girl's kidnapping by a boy prior to girl's parents' knowledge, negotiations, consent and arrangements or information. (Source: Interview).

Bulehi/Elopement/Non-bridewealth Marriage Tradition/Form

Bulehi/elopement/non-bridewealth Sukumaland marriage tradition/form was in most cases done/taking place late in the evening by a potential girl being kidnapped or taken by force by a boy intending to marry her at a time such a girl had gone either to fetch some water, grind grains or collecting firewood far away from her home place. The Wanyantuzu of Bariadi Shinyanga, Bana Ng'weli of Sengerema and Geita, Wazinza of Geita, Bagwe of Magu and Kwimba have been practising Bulehi marriage tradition/form. (Source: Interview).

Bulehi/elopement was common among boys' parents with insufficient wealth for bridewealth payments for potential girl's parents; girl's or her mother's bad manners, girl's or boy's laziness, girl's family being accused of witchcraft/socery or having family/clan inherited diseases like leprosy. (Source: Interview).

One of the Key formalized Sukumaland Marriage Custodian had this to speak:

"Bulehi/non-bridewealth marriage traditions evolved and developed by boys' families being poor in material things such as food, cattle, money or other gifts to give to a girl's/bride's family/clan; and thus, unable to make official and formal marriage arrangements as in 'Bulunji/Kulunja'. That is why Bulehi -*the act of a boy eloping or taking by force a girl*, was mostly done at late evening or night. After girl's elopement, the boy's parents had to submit themselves to a village headman and to a girl's parents/clan and were obliged to pay a goat as a fine or penalty for the act done by their son and paid a cattle for the inconveniences/disturbances caused to girl's parents/kinsmen after their daughter's elopement/disappearance." (Source: Interview).

Bulunji/ Bridewealth Marriage Tradition in Sukumaland

Bulunji (noun), *Kulunja* (a verb denoting the action/process of a potential boy/groom adhering to the systematic and formalized procedures to get a potential spouse/bride through bridewealth payments).

In this formalized Sukumaland bridewealth marriage tradition/form, majority of the respondents shared the views that '*Bulunji*' was the most preferable, respected, legalized and formalized Sukumaland marriage tradition/form ever throughout their history. It is also well-known among Sukuma people as 'the Bridewealth Marriage' or 'Winga wa Limi' (Daylight's Marriage) as opposed to 'Winga wa Bujiku/Bulehi' (Night's Marriage).

In *Bulunji/Bridewealth* marriage tradition/form, it is the boy's/groom's family who are responsible to pay the bridewealth (*Shikolo*) to a girl's/bride's family. The negotiations on the amount of the bridewealth to be paid, as it has been reported by most of the respondents, are usually done by two or three official respected chosen agents called *Bakombe*, from each side of the family/clan and normally these agents are close, morally good and neighbours with integrity to be the representatives of both groom's and bride's family parents/clan/village. (Source: Interview).

One of the interviewee revealed that:

"To marry with bridewealth in Sukumaland as opposed to marriage in general, is commonly known as '*Kulunja*'. The husband in this form of marriage has both customary and uxorial rights over his wife and the children of such marriage belong to their father's genealogy." (Source: Interview).

In Sukumaland, *Bulunji* is mostly popularly in areas of Bariadi, Kahama, Nzega, Uyui, Igunga, Busega, Magu, Geita, Buchosa, Sengerema, Kwimba and Misungwi districts. Respondents justified that these areas have good and large quantity cattle distribution patterns which made them possible for the bridewealth form of marriage in Sukumaland. (Source: Interview).

The researcher was informed by one of the Custodian of Sukumaland Marriage traditions in interview that:

"Getting a potential and good-mannered Sukuma wife material was, not an easy and an overnight event; it took a boy/young man in need of marrying to involve or engage his father or close relatives such as his uncle, aunt or grandfather on the right and hard-working partner to marry. The boy may first become interested in a girl because of hearsay, or because a close relative or friend deliberately draws his attention to her. In his own acquaintance, the boy may look for superficial qualities and skills that emphasize male superiority, obedience, smartness, free from rumours of a girl's family witchcraft, skills at cooking, good reputation, hard-working spirit, free from inherited diseases such as Tuberculosis and leprosy." (Source: Interview).

However, it has been reported by most of the Key informants that *Bulunji/bridewealth* formalized Sukumaland marriage tradition followed systematic social procedures, norms, customs and steps for its completion.

The first step/procedure is of a bridewealth formalized Sukumaland marriage is '*Kulunja*'-a formalized intent of a boy's family to initiate courtship proceedings to a girl's family. Courtship period involves a carefully step-by-step searching and selecting for a potential and prospective wife material partner amongst Sukuma families or lineages. Sukumaland formalized bridewealth marriage practices in most parts, as it was reported by most of the key informants, is exogamy pattern which insist more on taking or looking for a marriage partner from outside the same village or families. This procedure is accompanied by secret inquiries and researching on the good manners and reputation from both sides of the prospective couples and their parents/clans. Usually, in Sukumaland, the inquiry begins at the girl's family/clan without prior knowledge that they (girl's family) are being investigated; and is carefully and secretly done by either a boy's father or boy himself being accompanied by his age mates. The next inquiry with respect to similar criteria is done by the girl's father to boy's family/clan. After inquiries are over and each side is satisfied with each other's spouse, then, a day for further bridewealth payment amounts is arranged between two partner families. (Source: Interview)

Bukombe or the bridewealth- giving ceremony/feast at the girl's family is the second important formalized Sukumaland marriage procedure. Most interviewees shared narrations that "...once the amount of the bridewealth is agreed, the bride's father prepares a feast for the people on the groom's side, and arrangements are made about the collection of the bridewealth. A delegation from the girl's side visits the boy's father on the appointed day and the actual bridewealth cattle or other goods/gifts are chosen. Then, if the deal is done, the visitors are feasted and they return home with

the bridewealth. The actual day of the weeding is fixed by both sides. (Source: Interview).

Findings reveal that, *Bukwilima* -the weeding feast at the bride's home is conducted as the third formalized Sukumaland marriage tradition. This Bukwilima feast is done after the groom has already paid bridewealth to the bride's family. In most parts of Sukumaland such as Unyamwezi, Unyantuzu and Mwanza, Bukwilima takes place during cultivation season so that the groom with his fellows from his villages are obliged together to work hard at the bride's fields for some days before the groom's fellows return back home and leave the groom at the bride's home doing manual works such as building houses and farming activities. Bukwilima lasted in most cases for about three days. It is during Bukwilima day that the actual and practical sexual activity or consummation is done by a groom welcoming a bride in a house prepared for them at the bride's home/family ground. (Source: Interview).

Key informants added that, '*Winga*' -a feast at the groom's home/family is the fourth formalized Sukumaland marriage tradition predominant in most of Usukuma areas like Magu, Kwimba, Geita, Meatu, Bariadi, Nzega, Kahama and Kishapu. "It appears to have common in past for the newly married couples to spend as much as a year at the girl's home. Lastly, when the husband take his wife to his own home, she must be accompanied by a number of companions, both males and females, who delay the journey at regular intervals by stopping and demanding payments/gifts before they proceed. Once the procession reach the husband's homestead, the bride and some of her female friends/companions refuse to eat until a further payment/gift is given for her. This is commonly known as *Kugila* - a formal break-up of the bride's family social ties/bondage and attach to her husband's family bond. While the bride and her friends/companions are at her husband home/family, are given a number of domestic tasks to do such as fetching water and cooking, and they are to refuse doing such activities without little payments/gifts. The bride and some of her female friends/age mates do pay due respect to the husband's parents in turn, advancing towards them in a line on their knees and giving them food. This act is accompanied by an exchange of presents/gifts from husband's in-laws to a bride and her friends. (Source: Interview).

Bujora Sukuma Cultural Curator stressed that, the last and most important formalized Sukumaland marriage tradition and procedure is '*Kaya*'-as the newly official established permanent settlement or home of the weds after Bukwilima and *Winga* weeding ceremonies. The Curator emphasized that "the new husband has to stay for some years at his wife's home, working and helping his father-in-laws various tasks. Then, finally, the husband has to humbly request for permission from her father-in-law go and designate where they (him and his wife) can establish permanent settlement. He added that, Sukuma people prefer partilocality marriage tradition/norm-weds establishing residential settlement and living near the husband's family/lineage. It is also at this stage that '*Jabughabhu/Kughabhuka*'- Sukuma meaning for 'two cattle paid to the bride's father to give final permission to the groom move and go to establish their own residential place/homestead. (Source: Interview).

Challenges faced by formalized Marriage traditions in 21st century.

The ancient human 'traditional marriages' from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Chinese, India and Nubia to name a few

examples, marrying was essentially for procreation and social continuity. Contrary to the recent idea and perception of marrying is for 'love' affairs and 'romantic emotions'. Marriage today has shifted from being an institution to being 'an industry' where women and girls 'sell- out' their bodies for money gain. (Coontz, 2006).

The 21st century African formalized marriages are facing tremendous changes and challenges. In most cases, marriage is no longer concerned with society, rather with individual love and personal happiness and gains. Many 21st century thinkers and scholars have started thinking on whether or not formalized marriage is ever needed, while others want to instill Aristotelian ideals. Marriage is definitely a secular idea and not the sacred union that both the society and the church fervently practiced. This secularization of marriage has paved the way for the practice and acceptance of same-sex marriages and plural marriage for the 20th and 21st Centuries. (Spurgeon, 2013).

Majority of respondents interviewed on this specific objective disclosed that: "technological progress has created jobs which can be equally filled by men and women. As a result, employed women are becoming economically independent leading to voluntary marriage break ups and unnecessary divorce between couples, greater longevity of women, the ability of majority youths to lead a single life due to life-hardships and educational and economic opportunities in many African towns have been a great challenge to many formalized marriages in Africa". (Source: Interview).

Consequently, some Key informants shared their life-experiences on the challenges faced by formalized marriage traditions in the 21st Century that: "what is happening nowadays among couples is contrary to what happened in the past. In the past, either a boy or girl was not supposed to seduce or initiate romantic conversation which could lead to sexual relationships. In short, there is a paradigm shift in marriage traditions since marriages have nowadays shifted towards individual-centred rather than society or family-centred aspect". (Source: Interview).

"In studying social stratification, the industrial economy and a person's values of achievement today have influenced one's choice of spouse. Marriage today worldwide is greatly influenced by a person's achievements, his initial class position, and his ultimate economic status. The family, and marriage too, as a social institution is changing, and is in transition, and some of its earlier functions, such as education of the children, have been taken over by other institutions" (Scott, 2000).

Furthermore, Mair (1974) argues that: "family and marriage traditional systems in present African societies provide the starting-point for change. Christian missions and Islam have been among the influences at work. Colonial administrations, in introducing system of laws based on those of the European colonizing power, accordingly, had to take into account both the diverse customary systems of kinship and marriage and the fact that some Africans were pledged, through Christianity, to life-long monogamy. They also had to administer marriage laws appropriate to the non-African minorities, whether of their own Christian or Jewish countrymen. The present laws and systems of organized behaviours concerning the family, marriage and kinship in African countries are, in consequence, extremely confused".

Similarly, some Key informants informed the researcher that, "Colonialism and globalization have altogether played a major role towards disrupting and increasing African Marriage problems,

procedural shifts and misunderstandings. The establishment of colonial states disrupted completely the African social set-ups including marriage set-ups and traditions. Before colonialists, most African marriages were polygamous, but with the arrival of colonialists, African men converted to Christianity were prohibited from marrying more than one wife. Moreover, colonialists introduced education system which has totally disrupted African graduates' understanding of their social formations including marriage traditions. Educated young boys and girls initiate sexual relationships and sometimes fake and short-lived marriages while in schools, colleges or universities relying on partner's physical beauty, handsomeness and material things such as cash or car without their parents' knowledge, consent, prior information, permission, both systematic partners' inquiries, both partners' parents bridewealth negotiations and blessings as done in the past. The end result of such pseudo-marriage relationships is voluntary break-ups, divorce, marriage-partners' killings and an increase number of homeless children in towns". (Source: Interview).

"Colonial/Western-oriented type of education has for centuries since its inception in African continent been producing arrogant young African boys and girls who disrespect and ignore African ways of living including marriage traditions and customs. African marriage traditions are viewed and perceived by young African elites as backward, irrelevant and uncivilized ones. Thus, colonial education has completely blinded young African boys and girls on matters related to their cultural-rooted social formations. (My emphasis).

One of the Sukuma Custodian of Marriage traditions added that, "In 1960's and back, particularly in Usukuma areas such as Kwimba, Misungwi, Shinyanga and Kahama districts, Sukuma newlyweds lived with either one set of parents who could offer them with moral protection, support, advices, assistance and directives on matters related to marriage conflicts or challenges whenever the newlyweds encountered such things like disrespect and untrustworthy among themselves; contrary to contemporary newlyweds who in most cases do not prefer living with their parents or close relatives. Today's newlyweds generation live a more-selfish and Western-oriented life which is more of a nuclear family than of an extended family which is a typical of an African family". (Source: Interview).

Conclusion

The study concludes that, the evolution and development of formalized World Marriage traditions, particularly of Sukumaland, such as polygyny, monogyny, Bulehi and Bulunji; which have for centuries been practiced, inherited and embraced over time, depending on the historical material conditions prevalent, and that they ensured social order and continuity, are nowadays faced with challenges such as technological progress, globalization, individualistic tendency among married partners, selfishness, rampant partner killings, untrustworthy, divorce and so forth. However, despite contemporary marriage challenges worldwide caused mostly by rapid Industrial Revolution and Globalization, Sukuma people still practice and embrace formalized marriage traditions in areas such as Unyamwezi, Kahama, Meatu, Simiyu, Magu, Geita, Kwimba and Sengerema districts for their sustainable socio-economic developments.

Recommendations

The study recommends that, African socially- good agreed formalized marriage traditions should proceed been retained,

practiced, respected and handed-over generations for the social and economic welfare and continuity of Africans. Researchers must continue through theoretical and practical grounds specifying, examining, analyzing and suggesting proper African formalized marriage traditions which restore and brand African dignity and humanity. UNESCO and Ministry of Education and Culture are supposed to invest heavily in researching and exploring the fast dynamics and changes adaptable for marriage traditions for ensuring significant resilient strategies of overcoming contemporary marriage challenges leading to rampant marriage divorce, killings among married partners, increased homeless children, same-sex marriages and lesbians and an increased rate of single mother families in Africa which in the past was a shame practice but recently is a common issue especially among educated women. Custodians of African Marriage traditions and scholars should be recognized and given due respect and encouraged to disseminate the knowledge to the current generation in the education system for sustainable African society.

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Notes on Contributor.

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