

**‘I FEEL PROUD, HONORED AND VALUED’ - CHANGING TRENDS, EMPOWERING  
AND DISEMPOWERING ASPECTS OF BRIDE PRICE AMONG URBAN BASED  
BAGANDA OF CENTRAL UGANDA**



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Spring 2019

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

All thanks to the almighty God for granting me wisdom and knowledge that enabled me write this thesis. His mercies are new every morning.

My most profound gratitude goes to my supervisor Siri Lange for your valuable comments, suggestions and guidance all through from proposal writing to writing of the thesis. Working with you has been a pleasure and an honor. Thank you for trusting my academic abilities and respecting my opinions which gave me so much hope and confidence. Siri, you are the best supervisor I have ever had in my academic journey: thank you for always finding time to attend to me amidst your busy schedule. My sincere thanks also go to all lecturers at HEML who taught and guided me all through the two years of my master studies. Special thanks go to my course mates GLODE 2017 cohort for the support and constructive criticism and feedback during class presentation, group work and discussions. Your comments helped me improve not only academically, but also my interpersonal skills while in a multi-cultural environment: I learnt to appreciate and tolerate difference. Heartfelt gratitude goes to all participants in this study, without your willingness to share your experiences; this study would not have yielded. May God richly bless you.

Finally, special thanks go to my family especially my husband Simon Bogere, daughter Joanna, sons Joel and Joram, for all the love and emotional support rendered to me. Even the geographical distance would not break it. I love you dearly.

Sarah Musubika

May, 2019

Bergen Norway

Cover photo: A cross section of bride price items given by Emmanuel in 2014.

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## LIST OF ACROYNMS

URSB	-	Uganda Registration Service Bureau
CAO	-	Chief Administrative Office

## LIST OF TERMINOLOGIES

<i>Abazungu</i>	-	White people
<i>Amakula</i>	-	Bride price items wrapped in baskets
<i>Buganda</i>	-	Geographical area occupied by the Baganda people
<i>Bulemeezi &amp; Kyadondo-</i>		counties of Buganda
<i>Ebika</i>	-	Clans
<i>Ekisaaganda kyemuli</i>	-	A bundle of reeds
<i>Ekitta</i>	-	Gourd
<i>Emberera</i>	-	Virgin woman
<i>Emiteteme</i>	-	Banana stems
<i>Emperekeze</i>	-	Brides maid
<i>Enswa enaka</i>	-	White aunts
<i>Gomesi</i>	-	Traditional attire for women
<i>Jaja</i>	-	Grandfather/mother
<i>Kabaka</i>	-	King of Buganda
<i>Kabbokamuwala</i>	-	Gift basket to groom by the bride
<i>Kanzu</i>	-	Traditional attire for men
<i>Katikkiro</i>	-	Prime minister of Buganda
<i>Kawundo kakubye edirisa-</i>		elopement without payment of bride price
<i>Kisajjasajja</i>	-	Not man enough
<i>Kojja</i>	-	Maternal uncle to the groom
<i>Kwanjula</i>	-	Introduction/bride price payment ceremony
<i>Kyakulasajja</i>	-	A woman who behaves like a man (Tom-boy)
<i>Luganda</i>	-	Local dialect of Baganda people
<i>Muko</i>	-	In-law
<i>Nabagereka</i>	-	Queen of Buganda
<i>Nakati</i>	-	Local vegetable
<i>Okufumbirira omugole-</i>		Cooking for the bride in preparation for her marriage
<i>Okukyalira ensiko</i>	-	Visiting the bush (Labia elongation)
<i>Okutta ekyaama</i>	-	Sealing a secret
<i>Oluwombo</i>	-	Traditionally prepared meal wrapped in banana leaves
<i>Olweeza &amp; kayaayana-</i>		local herbs believed to invoke luck if mixed with water and bathed
<i>Omutwalo</i>	-	Special item that must be brought by groom
<i>Omuzigo</i>	-	Cow ghee
<i>Omuziro</i>	-	Totem
<i>Omwenge</i>	-	Alcohol
<i>Senga</i>	-	Paternal aunt to the bride
<i>Tonto</i>	-	Local wine

## ABSTRACT

Payment of bride price in Buganda has persisted through the waves of modernization despite predictions that such traditional practices tend to phase out in the face of modernity. Though it is a traditional practice invented to serve a traditional purpose, bride price payment still holds relevance even in contemporary times though not completely in its initial form. The bride price institution has been criticized for having a high correlation with domestic violence, violation of women's human rights and for being a tool through which women are commoditized; thus, women activists have advocated for reforms or even complete nullification of the tradition. Nevertheless, bride price payment still holds cultural importance and is widely practiced to-date.

The main objective of this study is to explore contemporary trends in bride price tradition among the urban Baganda of central Uganda, and their influence on gender relations and (dis)empowerment. The study explores bride price trends and processes in the past (pre-colonial and colonial times), as well as those during post-colonial trends to-date. The study also establishes inspirations and reasons for contemporary trends in bride price and how these changes influence dis(empowerment) and gender relations. Gendered opportunities and constraints that accrue from bride price are also explored in this study. In a qualitative ethnographic fieldwork in Kampala and Wakiso districts Uganda, data was collected from thirteen participants using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and written historical sources. Using Kabeer's and Mosdale's theoretical conceptualizations of gender relations and empowerment, findings were analysed through thematic network analysis.

Findings attest to many changes in the bride price institution, most notably the shift in choice of marriage partner and marital age. Decisions about whom and when to marry have largely shifted from the hands of parents and family elders into the hands of young men and women, though parental inputs are not completely ruled out. Findings also established that some processes surrounding the tradition have been abused and manipulated in contemporary times attracting unintended vices which downplay intended benefits. Notably: commercialization of the tradition constrains stakeholders especially the groom and gives impetus to materialism, opportunism, selfishness, and greed especially by brides and their parents. Factors like education, neo-liberalism, and influence of the media, decaying moral fabric and declining parental responsibility over children have been identified as some of the inspirations to contemporary trends in bride price. Gender roles in the bride price institution have also not remained the same; some previously male dominated spaces have been taken over by women while others have remained unchanged. Findings attest to increased active involvement of women in decision making, negotiations, resource allocation and general preparations of bride price in contemporary times compared to olden days. Overall, bride price was found to be a prestigious tradition among the Baganda that accrues respect, self-esteem, status, fulfillment, societal approval and recognition not only to the couple but also to their families.

Key words: Bride price, gender relations, marriage, (dis)empowerment.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 Introduction to the study

Payment of bride price is one of the highly cherished and strongly rooted practices not only in Uganda, but also in other African countries like Malawi, Rwanda, Nigeria, and Ghana among others. Hague, Thiara, and Turner (2011) refer to bride price as a practice used to validate customary marriage in communities where it is upheld. Among communities that value this tradition, it is required of every man who desires to marry, to pay bride price before he marries. It can be money and/or property given to a prospective bride's family by the prospective groom (Mifumi, 2004), but the form and quantity differs from society to society.

There are debates on the benefits and detriments of bride price not only upon women, but also family life. Women activists and scholars have portrayed this tradition as one having a high correlation with domestic violence, violation of women's human rights and a tool through which women are commoditized (Hague et al., 2011). In 2007, Mifumi, a women rights advocate project in Uganda challenged the custom in courts of law with claims that the bride price institution violates the principle of equality between men and women in marriage, it is discriminatory, and undermines the dignity of women contrary to what the constitution stipulates. They thus advocated for reforms in the practice and/or complete nullification of it (Mifumi, 2004). Resultantly, return of bride price was declared null and void by the constitutional court, but the tradition itself was not abolished (to be discussed more in literature review section). Nevertheless, the tradition still holds cultural importance and is widely practiced to-date.

However, contemporary trends in bride price differ from the ones in olden times. These trends and their inspirations formed the gist of this study. I aimed to explore the new trends, their inspirations (reasons influencing the change), examine gender relations and roles in the proceedings before, during and after the event. The study also explored gendered opportunities and constraints accruing from bride price.

## 1.2 Background to the study

### 1.2.1 A brief ethnography of the Baganda

Baganda are the largest ethnic group in Uganda. The kingdom is made up of twenty counties each headed by a county chief and the ‘*Kabaka*’<sup>1</sup> (king) as the royal head, deputized by prime minister (*kattikiro*). They occupy central Uganda and have their headquarters in Mengo Kampala, but also have regional offices at county and sub county levels. Baganda are made up of 52 clans (*ebika*), each represented by a totem (*omuziro*) and each totem has assigned names to those that belong to it.

Marriage (*obufumbo*) is one of the cardinal institutions upon which the kingdom is built and is hence held momentarily. In the traditional Baganda society, there is no place for single persons (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2009; Tamale, 2006), everybody that becomes of age (18 and above)<sup>2</sup> ought to find a partner, go through the traditional norms of marriage, and settle down to nurture his/her family. As such, the community often withholds respect and looks suspiciously at persons who delay or never marry at all. However, it is by norm in Buganda that members of the same clan totem do not marry each other, neither from ones’ mothers’ clan totem (Roscoe, 1901). It is either one marries from a different clan totem or outside Buganda. Either way, traditionally, the groom ought to pay bride price to the bride’s family after thorough ‘*customary investigations*’ of both families. These include a historical search of lineage, behavior, nurturing, or whether the family partakes in forbidden acts like cannibalism, witchcraft, sorcery among others.

Upon satisfactory investigations, the two families proceed to negotiate the bride price which entails mandatory and optional items. Mandatory items include: ‘*omwenge*’ (local brew) carried in a gourd ‘*ekita*’, ‘*gomesi*’ (traditional dress) for bride’s mother and paternal aunt, ‘*kanzu*’ (traditional attire for bride’s father and brother), ‘*nakati*’ (local vegetable), a cock, salt, sugar, paraffin, match box and meat. Each of these items carries symbolic significance, though the quantity is relative. A special item ‘*omutwalo*’ decided upon by the father/male guardian of the bride must be brought along with the above items, and failure to bring it is tantamount to denial

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<sup>1</sup> All Baganda are subordinate and ought to be loyal to the king. Both men and women refer to him as ‘*Bba ffe*’ (our husband) symbolically connoting to the overall powers vested upon him as the chief custodian of Kiganda culture, customs, and norms. Likewise, all land in Buganda and women unquestionably belong to him and the onus to protect and ensure his subjects’ wellbeing lays heavily upon his shoulders and the kingdom administration.

<sup>2</sup> Eighteen years is the age at which one becomes an adult as stated by the constitution of the Republic of Uganda (Uganda, 1995).

of the bride, irrespective of whether the afore mentioned items have been presented or not. Any additional items to this list are optional.

The above package is presented to the bride's family in a traditional ceremony known as '*kwanjula*' (introduction), done at the bride's ancestral home. This is preceded by thorough lessons of eroticism, sexuality, child care and general marriage etiquette to both bride and groom by their paternal aunt (*senga*) and maternal uncle (*kojja*) respectively (Tamale, 2006). Upon successful completion of the above, the couple is traditionally pronounced husband and wife. Thereafter, the couple starts their marital life and bear children. The groom by custom reserves the right over the children born. However, if the couple is religious, they could proceed to church/mosque for a religious marriage ceremony after payment of bride price. Meanwhile, a letter of consent and confirmation of receipt of bride price from the bride's parents is a prerequisite for the religious wedding to be performed.

### **1.3 Customary marriages in Uganda**

Under the 1973 Customary Marriage Registration Act, 'Customary Marriage' is a marriage celebrated according to the rites of an African community and one of the parties to which is a member of that community. However, parties to a customary marriage have to register it with the registrar of marriages at the Uganda Registration Service Bureau (URSB) or at district level with the office of the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) and a certificate attesting to the union is issued. This should be done within six months after completion of the marriage ceremony. Failure to meet this deadline attracts a late registration fee. The couple must present witnesses, letters of parental consent and passport photographs before a certificate can be issued. Failure to register implies that the marriage is not recognized by the state. As such holding a marriage certificate issued by the cultural institutions holds no evidential value until the marriage is registered by the state.

### **1.4 Problem statement**

In its literal context, bride price is/was a token of appreciation to the bride's family for giving out their daughter in marriage, a way of appreciating the bride's parents for their daughters' upbringing and nurturing, a symbol of union formed by the two families, and, a reward for a wife received (Asiimwe, 2013). Stipulated items in reasonable amounts were usually presented to the

bride's family at their ancestral home in an in-house event graced by a few close family members from both sides.

However, for some reasons today, the entire process from acquiring a partner, customary investigations, negotiation of the package and venue of the event have undergone a tremendous shift with additions, subtractions and perhaps exaggerations. There is noticeable change in the list and nature of items included, procedure, and roles of stakeholders; all characterized with flamboyance and splendor. The influence of the media is now more manifest and articulate with local television stations broadcasting special editions of *kwanjula*<sup>3</sup> ceremonies, often paid for by the respective couples. Moreover, incidences of marriage failure and break down seem to be on the increase despite the changes in the process that precedes these marriages. In that vein, this study ventures into the details and inspirations of contemporary trends in bride price, and how the changes impact gendered power relations before, during and after bride price payment. The study also explores gendered opportunities and constraints that accrue from bride price.

## **1.5 Research objectives**

### **Main objective**

The main objective of this study was/is to explore contemporary trends in bride price tradition among the Baganda and their influence on gender relations and (dis)empowerment. This was broken down into four sub-objectives; -

- a) To establish how the bride price institution has changed historically?
- b) Find out why/what inspires contemporary trends of bride price?
- c) Assess gender relations in contemporary trends of bride price
- d) Identify gendered opportunities and constraints to empowerment accruing from bride price

## **1.6 Purpose of the study**

This study explores how men and women position themselves and navigate the process of bride price especially in contemporary times where the tradition has taken on new forms. It further explores how men and women relate before, during and after payment of bride price and how each of them benefits or loses as an outcome of bride price. The generated knowledge serves to

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<sup>3</sup> Local term for bride price payment ceremony. *Kwanjula* is literally translated as 'introduction'

inform researchers, civil society, cultural institutions, and policy makers on how best to handle reforms and debates on gender relations and cultural practices of contemporary times basing on academically tested conclusions. Secondly, little is documented about the inspirations/motives for contemporary trends of bride price. An exploration of inspirations and reasons for the shift done in this study serves to cover up this missing gap.

### **1.7 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one is a description of the introduction to the topic and gives a general overview of the population and phenomenon under study, rationale and research objectives. Chapter two consists of a review of previous literature on bride price and the different perceptions through which scholars view the tradition. Chapter three is a presentation of theoretical and conceptual perspectives that facilitated the analysis of findings of this study. Chapter four is a detailed account of the manner in which the study was conducted, the tools used, recruitment mechanisms and how data was handled during and after fieldwork. This chapter also gives an account of the researcher-participant relation and the challenges encountered. The proceeding four chapters address the four sub-objectives of the study: Chapter five is a description of the changing trends in bride price from pre-colonial times to the present time, chapter six explores contemporary trends in the bride price institution and the factors that have influenced these changes, chapter seven discusses the relationship between bride price, gender relations and (dis)empowerment, while chapter eight is a discussion of the gendered opportunities and constraints related to the bride price institution. The last chapter, chapter nine, presents a summary and conclusion to the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 Empirical and theoretical literature on bride price**

Despite the heated debate and negative publicity by women activists and feminists on bride price, the custom still thrives in Uganda, though not completely in its original form. Much scholarly work focuses on whether the custom is legitimate or not, and the negative effects it bares especially upon women. Muthegheki, Crispus, and Abrahams (2012, p. 2), posit that ‘bride price, a historic custom is one of the most crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men’. Kaye, Mirembe, Johansson, Ekstrom, and Kyomuhendo (2005), argue that bride price payment is a gender issue that bares profound consequences on gender relations in different socio-cultural contexts, while Asiimwe (2013), argues that commercialization has changed the tradition and its original meaning has been eroded making it a constraining transaction. In support of Asiimwe, Kaye et al. (2005) and Bowman (2003), argue that the nature of bride price transactions in Africa breeds a fertile ground for wife abuse by partners, citing physical injury, death, mental disorders, depression, low self-esteem and curtailed involvement in economic development and politics. In the same vein, Wendo (2004), adds that bride price makes wives a property to their husbands, reducing their capacities to defend and control their bodies, which gives fertile ground to sexual violence. Asiimwe (2013), continues to argue that bride price could lead to gender inequality, turns women into commodities to be passed on from family to family, and gives impetus to male dominance.

However, Esen (2004), contends Wendo and Asiimwe’s arguments, he instead argues that bride price as a practice is not solely to blame for women’s weak negotiation capacities in marriage, but instead women’s lack of bargaining capacity should be blamed on low education levels. It should be noted though, that not all women trapped in weaker negotiation positions have low education levels.

Nevertheless, a few scholars have cited positive contributions of bride price. Esen (2004), argues that bride price demonstrates capability of the groom’s maturity and capacity to sustain his family. Hague et al. (2011), argue that the custom is equivalent to a ‘marriage certificate’<sup>4</sup>, allows exchange of wealth between families, compensates the brides’ family for expenses

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<sup>4</sup> Customary marriage is fully recognized by the law of the Republic of Uganda and payment of bride price is one of the customs that underpins this type of marriage.

incurred in child upbringing, and adds value onto women. However, although Hague et al. (2011, p. 550) acknowledge positive aspects of the bride price tradition, their main argument is that it has “mainly negative impacts on rural women and that in situations of domestic violence, bride price introduces additional ways through which men justify the abuse of women”. They thus recommend that bride price should be reformed.

The above positive and negative aspects were significant for this study since it was aimed at establishing femininity and masculinity opportunities and constraints to empowerment that come along with the custom. Questions like who decides, apportions and controls resources brought were examined. Hague et al. (2011), assert that bride price aids husbands to be recognized and respected by the in-laws. This conception informed my search for inspirations of contemporary trends of bride price.

## **2.2 Bride price in contemporary times**

Notably, scanty scholarly studies have been conducted on latest trends in the bride price institution. Asiimwe (2013), in a relatively recent thesis writes that, the tradition has strong approval in marriage procedures across Uganda. However, modernization and globalization have brought changes to it including huge financial sums making it appear commercial and expensive. Asiimwe continues to argue that this has generated obstacles associated with raising resources by the groom, but also endangered the bride’s negotiating positions in marital relationships. Moore (2013), backs up Asiimwe arguing that such show offs result into payment of astronomical amounts which could be financially straining to parties involved. Asiimwe however, argues that since culture is not static, traditions like bride price are bound to change with social and economic changes that come along with modernization, say; increase in cost of living. From Asiimwe’s discussion, an intersection of class and economic status are at play in contemporary trends of the tradition. For example, he says some families demand very expensive items to prove superiority and status, while others demand less or nothing for the same reason.

## **2.3 Modernization and the persistence of traditional values**

In the recent past, research and theory linking modernization and culture tended to emphasize the convergence of cultural values as a result of the over whelming economic and political forces of modernization (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Such schools of thought predict the decline of

traditional values and their replacement with modern ones. This school of thought seems to view under development as a direct consequence of a society's internal characteristics, traditional economies, traditional traits and institutions. It further assumes that the traditional values and traits of such societies ought to be mutated and thereafter replaced by modern values to enable such societies adopt the 'virtually inevitable' path of capitalist development (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). To them, this was the path through which the agents of modernization (rich developed nations) would stimulate modernization in the assumed to be 'backward' nations.

However, critiques of the above school of thought came up with an opposite school of thought that emphasizes the persistence of traditional values despite economic and political changes that come along with modernization. Inglehart and Baker (2000) posit that, the latter school assumes that cultural values are relatively independent of economic conditions and consequently, the prediction that convergence around some set of modern values is unlikely. Hence, traditional values continue to thrive and exert an independent influence on the cultural changes that come along with economic and political development.

Based on data from world value surveys including 65 societies (more than 75% of the world's population), to explore attitudes, values and beliefs around the world, Inglehart and Baker (2000), established that: in the face of modernization and industrial development, there is a high probability that cultural traditions change, but some of the traditions persist despite economic and political changes more so in conservative societies. Their study revealed a number of cultural attributes that were common among hunter-gatherers and preindustrial societies, but are presently absent/rejected among agrarian and postindustrial societies. However, findings of their study also revealed that in many of the staunch religious societies like the Roman Catholics, modernization has not had much impact on their long time positions on issues like parental authority, abortion, divorce and homosexuality. They still hold similar values as before.

Similarly, among the Baganda, it is evident that the tradition of bride price has undergone changes and modifications, but it is not phased out as predicted by modernists. It instead tends to have gained more prominence, though its basic form and significance have seemingly shifted. This study aimed to explore reasons why the bride price institution still stands strong despite modernity, and how such reasons have facilitated the current trends in the tradition.



## **2.4 Differing perceptions about bride price in Uganda**

Clashing perceptions and intensive debates about bride price have taken different pathways. In 2007, Mifumi, a women rights advocate project in Uganda challenged the custom in courts of law with claims that bride price violates the principle of equality between men and women in marriage, it is discriminatory, and undermines the dignity of women contrary to what the constitution stipulates<sup>5</sup>. However, Mifumi lost the case, though return of bride price in case of divorce was declared null and void<sup>6</sup>. The presiding judge Justice Bart Katurebe argued that court could not declare the custom unconstitutional because different ethnicities in Uganda held the custom profoundly, perceived, and practiced it differently with affordable marriage gifts, though some others demand a bigger package. As such, court could not outlaw the exchange of marriage gifts nor could it abolish the tradition. Katurebe also argued that there was no grounded evidence linking bride price and domestic violence.

The above reasons stipulated by the presiding judge in this case fascinated me and triggered my interest to venture deeper into the contemporary packages of bride price and the entire process. I wondered who between men and women influenced the bride price package, for what reasons and what happened there after, which I look into in the analysis chapters.

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<sup>5</sup> See: Law Advocacy for Women in Uganda V Attorney General (2007), Constitutional Petition Nos. 13/05/and 05/06 (2007) Case No. 5 April 2007

<sup>6</sup>Mifumi (U)Ltd & 12 others V Attorney General, Kenneth Kakuru' Constitutional Petition No. 12 of 2007, Uganda Legal Information Center.'

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVES**

Gender relations, culture and empowerment are often explained within a wide range of theoretical frameworks depending on the context and objectives of the study. Silverman (1999) argues that theories arrange sets of concepts to define and explain some phenomenon. In this chapter, I describe three conceptual perspectives used as theoretical lenses through which findings of this study were analyzed and discussed.

#### **3.1 Gender: A category of analysis**

In a bid to explain how social change occurs, Scott (1986); (Scott, 2007), suggests a conceptualization that scrutinizes methods of analysis and clarifies operative assumptions. She suggests looking at ‘gender’ as a category of analysis. Scott describes ‘gender’ as an analytical category: where women and men are defined in relation to one another and no understanding of either can be achieved by entirely studying them separately. It is thus paramount to perceive the world of men as part of the world of women, because experiences of one sex have something to do with the other and the social relations between them. Since it takes man and woman with an erotic bond for bride price to take place, I find Scott’s argument of studying them in relation to one another of great relevance to this study. Her argument is that looking at gender as a system of social/sexual relations was absent from the major bodies of social theory articulated between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, yet, it is a vital component of analysis. Scott however, emphasizes that we must often ask how things happened in the past in order to understand why and how they happen in the present. To Scott, gender is a relational notion that largely involves a range of theoretical positions and descriptive references to the relationship between the sexes. It is an analytical category inseparable from social relationships and gives meaning and perception to both historical and contemporary knowledge. Scott (1986, p. 1067) argues that a person’s place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things they do, but of the meaning their activities acquire through concrete social interaction. As such, to pursue meaning, we need to deal with the individual subjects as well as social organizations and to articulate the nature of their interrelationships, because both are crucial to understanding how gender works and how changes occur (ibid).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) support Scott's argument positing that; to understand social relations in a more detailed manner, there is need to go beyond sex roles and sex categories and dig deep into gender relations. They argue that gender is inherently relational with complex patterns and relationships of desire and power. As such, comprehending gender relations requires an understanding of gender practices and the ways the gender order defines, positions, (dis)empowers, and constrains men and women (ibid). To them, this approach addresses issues of power.

Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete symbolic organization of social life to the extent that these references establish distribution of power (differential access and control over resources) (Scott, 2007). Thus, gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself. It gives perspective to decode meaning and understanding of complex connections among various forms of human interaction. Scott argues that scholars should look out for ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, so as to develop insights into the reciprocal nature of gender and society, and the ways through which gender constructs politics and vice versa.

Scott (1986, pp. 1067-1068) divides her conceptualization into two interrelated parts, the core of it being an integral connection between two propositions: *(i) gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, (ii) gender is a primary way of signifying relationships and power.* Thus, changes in the organization of social relationships, always corresponds changes in representations of power, though the direction of change is not necessarily one way, argues Scott.

Scott's sketch of conceptualization above informed and aided my analysis of men and women's positions in bride price processes. Establishing who does what, how and why was of great importance to the study because it facilitated my understanding of power relations and decision making of men and women in the tradition. Moreover, establishing how bride price was paid in both past and present as advised by Scott, facilitated my analysis of the changes the tradition has undergone and establishing what factors inspire the changes.

### **3.2 Empowerment and gender relations**

Empowering women is one of the frequently cited goals in development interventions. However, there is no categorically agreed upon yardstick upon which empowerment can be measured or evaluated. It has been contextualized differently in differing perspectives.

According to Sarah Mosedale (2005 p.252), women's empowerment refers to 'a process through which women redefine and extend their possibilities in situations where they are restricted, relative to men, from being and doing'. On the contrary, Mosedale defines disempowerment 'as being disadvantaged by the way power relations shape wellbeing, choices and opportunities' (ibid). Drawing from Mosedale's conceptualization of empowerment, there is a presupposed gendered nature of disempowerment. If the yardstick of analysis of women's empowerment as a group is based on how power relations between men and women are constrained and maintained in both private and public spheres (Mosedale 2005), then (dis)empowerment is a gender issue.

Meanwhile, Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previous denied to them (Kabeer, 1999, p.437). By this definition Kabeer seemingly implies that only those previously denied the ability to make choices can be empowered. By strategic choices, Kabeer refers to choices that are critical for people to live the way they want such as whether or who to marry, choice of livelihood, as opposed to other second-hand, less consequential choices of life which could be important but do not constitute its defining parameters (Kabeer 1999 p,437). Naila continues to argue that exercising such choices requires three interrelated and indivisible elements; (i) resources (material, human and social resources which reflect rules and norms that govern distribution and exchange in different institutional areas) (Kabeer 1999 p.437), (ii) agency (ability to define ones goals and act upon them, usually thought of as decision making or power within). This includes bargaining/negotiation power, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance (Kabeer 1999 p.438) and (iii) achievements.

While Kabeer states three elements as stated above, Mosedale (2005 p.244) talks of four central elements of women empowerment. (i) to be empowered, an individual has to be previously disempowered, in most cases this is in relation to men. (ii) Those who are empowered must claim it, implying that empowerment is not bestowed onto an individual by a third party, but

perhaps third parties can only facilitate the empowerment process but cannot make it happen. (iii) Definitions of empowerment must include a sense of individual or collective decisions on important matters in people's lives and being able to carry them out. This includes reflections, analysis and actions taken. (iv) Empowerment is not an end product but rather an ongoing process. Mosedale continues to argue that one does not arrive at a stage of empowerment in some absolute sense, but rather, one is (dis)empowered relative to others or themselves at a previous time.

Though empowerment can be evaluated at an individual level, it can also be looked at collectively. Kabeer (1999) argues that the common denominator amongst women is that they are all constrained by 'the norms, beliefs, customs and values through which societies differentiate between women and men', varying between cultures and over time. It could be in terms of income, mobility, decision making, access and ownership of assets, survival rates, ethnicity, family position among other things. Assessing the level of empowerment using these contributory factors require an analysis of gender relations (the way power relations between sexes is constructed and maintained) (Mosedale 2005, p.244). However, such analysis must be contextualized since gender relations vary both geographically and over time

These conceptualizations were used as a yardstick upon which changes in bride price were evaluated to ascertain how men and women are empowered or disempowered through processes surrounding the tradition.

### **3.3 Masculinities/ Femininities**

Masculinities are the patterns/configuration of social practice associated with the position of men in any society's set of gender relations. They are often collective, socially constructed, internally complex, change with time, and may operate in global and not just local arenas (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These differ from society to society, but among the Baganda, men are expected to be strong, in control of their lives and family, breadwinners, intelligent and decision makers. Failure to be and exhibit such standards and behavior is tantamount to 'not being man-enough' (*kisajjasajja*)(Tamale, 2006). Likewise, femininity among the Baganda is attributed to tenderness, gentility, being exemporary and submissiveness especially to males. A woman who falls short of the above characteristics is referred to as *kyakulassajja*, (a woman who behaves like

a man) literally translated as 'Tom-boy' (ibid). Such social notions and demands influence how the Baganda are organized, how different practices are carried out, and stipulate who is responsible for what. These concepts facilitated my understanding of how Buganda society is set up and the social obligations and expectations of males and females.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I situate myself in the empirical world and elaborate upon the logical rigor through which the research questions of this study are linked to the data collected. This chapter also explores the researcher-participant relationship, the methodological approach through which participants were recruited, methods used to collect data, challenges encountered and how collected data was handled, analyzed and meaning drawn from it.

#### **4.1 Epistemological approach**

The study took an **interpretive approach** to social science. This philosophical approach involves a systematic analysis of socially meaningful actions through direct detailed observation of people in natural settings to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social world (Creswell, 2007; Neuman, 2014). Value relativism, personal choices, and construction of multiple realities of social life underpin this philosophical approach (ibid). In that vein, I devoted time to directly interact with participants, observed and noted details of their behavior, verbal, and non-verbal interactions. I also took part in two bride price payment ceremonies while in the field. Interpretive research appreciates differences between individuals and reflects different aspects of the issue under study since a multiplicity of methods of data collection are used under this approach.

#### **4.2 Research design**

Under the interpretive philosophy, the study took on a **phenomenological design**. Since marriage is a communal affair among the Baganda, studying a marriage rite such as bride price required a research design that could facilitate comprehension of several individual's shared experiences in order to develop a deeper understanding of the tradition. A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The researcher mainly dwells on the essence of 'what' participants experienced and 'how' they experienced it (ibid). This study hence focused on participants' experiences of the custom of bride price (what happened, how did it happen and why it happened the way it did), and the meanings participants ascribe to those experiences. Data was collected through individual in-depth, focus group and observation, and also from secondary sources as suggested by (Creswell, 2007) and Moustakas (1994). At the analysis stage,

transcribed information was reduced to significant statements (codes) that highlight an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon, a process Moustakas (1994) refers to as *horizontalization*. A cluster of codes formed basic themes, which were combined into organizing themes. Moustakas (1994) adds another step where researchers also write about their own experiences and the context that influenced their experiences. I however, preferred to write my personal experience with bride price under the reflexivity section.

However, phenomenology is not only descriptions of what participants experienced, but is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 26). Van Manen (1990, p. 4), refers to this process as ‘interpreting the texts of life’. In other words the researcher mediates between the different meanings of lived experiences. While making interpretations however, researchers are cautioned to set aside their own experiences as much as possible and take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under examination (Moustakas, 1994). Reaching this state is seldom perfectly achieved admits Moustakas. Researchers can perhaps suspend our understandings of the phenomena under study in a more reflexive move.

### **4.3 Study Area**

The study was carried out in Wakiso and Kampala districts of central Uganda. These are urban areas occupied largely by Baganda inhabitants, and where many trendy *Kwanjula*<sup>7</sup> ceremonies take place.

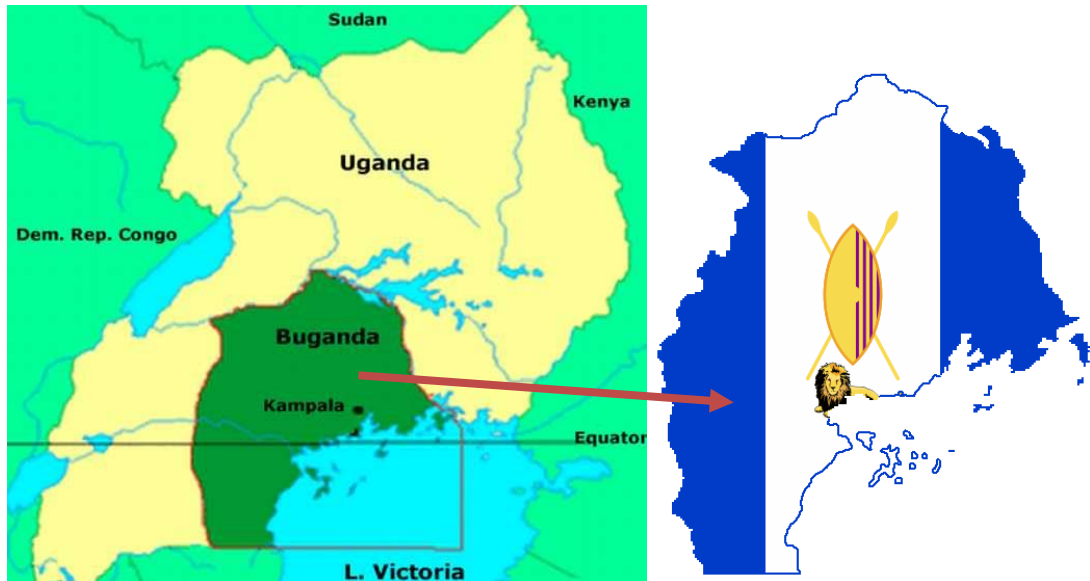
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<sup>7</sup> ‘*Kwanjula*’ literally means ‘introducing’. It is the Luganda terminology for the bride price payment ceremony. It connotes a gesture of a bride formally introducing her husband to family, friends and community. The gesture is sealed with bringing of gifts by the groom and acceptance of those gifts by the family of the bride and handing her over to her husband.



## Geographical location of study area

**Figure 1:** Map of Uganda showing an extract of Buganda kingdom



**Source:** Google maps

### 4.4 Recruitment of Participants

In total, there were thirteen (13) participants in this study, eight women and five men. Two of the participants were key informants: A woman elder called Samali, and a male *kwanjula* spokesperson (*omwogezi wo kumikolo*)<sup>8</sup> named Faisal. I met Samali a year ago through her daughter a friend of mine who lives in Britain. I had interacted with her twice and known her as a knowledgeable elder who loves and holds norms, traditions and customs of Buganda in high esteem. Likewise, Faisal was known to me from before. He was the spokesperson of my family at my *Kwanjula* ceremony six years ago and master of ceremony at my church wedding in January 2018. I would not refer to him as a family friend, but rather, a person I have interacted with in business related terms because for the two occasions, my family hired him for his services as an expert spokesperson/master of ceremony. He is founder of one of the events management companies specializing in offering master of ceremony services at *kwanjula* ceremonies. The background of these two individuals moved me to purposely recruit them as key informant since I was looking for information rich cases.

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<sup>8</sup> Is a specially trained spokesperson/ master of ceremony (strictly men), hired and assigned to both bride and grooms' side to lead both parties during the *kwanjula* ceremony. These take charge of the ceremony from start to end, leading the congregation from one activity to another. As such, they ought to be knowledgeable and accurate to detail of the norms, dos and don'ts as stipulated by the kiganda culture. It is a lucrative business of late.

Participants also included two couples (Ken & Angel, and Gerald & Jessica). I had interacted with Ken as his customer at a Forex Bureau shop, but I had never met his wife. It is him that I asked to be part of my study and delegated him with the task to convey my request to his wife, and both agreed to be part. As for Gerald and Jessica, they were my Facebook friends, but we had never met in person. I only met them for the first-time during fieldwork, but the request to be part of the study was done through Facebook.

For the other seven participants, recruitment was mainly through acquaintances and snowball sampling. Rose was my schoolmate at university with whom I kept contact. After my interview with her, she connected me to Harriet a customer of hers to whom she had offered decoration services at her *kwanjula* ceremony. Likewise, I go to the same church with Charles whom I asked to be part of my study. It is through him that I got to know Emmanuel. Through Samali, I recruited the other three ladies Prossy, Lilian and Favor. Below is a tabular summary of participant characteristics arranged by age from lowest to highest.

### Summary of participant list

**Table 1:** Key informant list

Name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Year of marriage	Education level
Faisal	Male	53	Married	1996	Secondary level
Samali	Female	74	Widowed	1964	Primary level

**Table 2:** Focus Group Discussion list

Name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Year of marriage	Education level
Jessica	Female	36	Married	1999	Secondary level
Pross	Female	36	Separated	2002	Primary level
Favor	Female	37	Divorced	1999	Secondary level
Samali	Female	74	Widowed	1964	Primary level

**Table 3:** Individual interview informant list

Name	Gender	Age	Marital status	Year of marriage	Education level
Angel	Female	25	Married	2017	University
Harriet	Female	25	Married	2017	University
Rose	Female	28	Married	2017	University
Ken	Male	29	Married	2017	University
Lilian	Female	35	Separated	2000	Primary level
Jessica	Female	36	Married	1999	Secondary level
Pross	Female	36	Separated	2002	Primary level
Favor	Female	37	Divorced	1999	Secondary level
Gerald	Male	42	Married	1999	Secondary level
Charles	Male	45	Married	2004	Primary level
Emmanuel	Male	50	Married	1990 & 2014	Primary level

It should be noted that four individuals took part in both individual interviews and focus group discussions.

#### **4.5 Methods of data collection**

The primary data for this study was collected from 27<sup>th</sup> August to 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018, and a second phase from 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2019. Four main methods were used to collect data: In-depths interviews, focus group discussion, observation and written historical sources. Bryman (2008) posits that the use of more than one method or source of data (triangulation) is useful in crosschecking findings in the study of social phenomena. In this study, triangulation aided collection of a wide range of data.

##### **4.5.1 In-depth interviews**

The main method of data collection in this study was in-depth interviews. This is a discovery-oriented and structure flexible method consisting of long duration face-to-face interviews conducted to extract detailed information and understanding of a concept (Brinkmann, 2013; Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). They are designed as focused engagements between researcher and participant which compress the participants' experiences into the space of an hour or two (Brinkmann, 2013). In this study I aimed to explore participants' experiences of the phenomenon of bride price and thus having face-to-face detailed interviews was deemed most appropriate as advised by Moustakas (1994). Being more effective and less structured, in-depth interviews are bound to uncover more detailed information useful for descriptive analysis (ibid). Interviews were carried out in two categories namely; key informant interviews and individual interviews.

Only 3 out of the 13 interviews were conducted in both Luganda and English. Being university graduates perhaps explains why the 3 participants felt comfortable mixing the two languages. Interview guides that indicated topics to be covered and the sequence of the questions were employed as advised by Kvale (1996) (see appendix I and II). The topic guides also structure the conversations and break down research questions into more concrete questions but simple to comprehend by participants (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015). My role was to guide the conversations and only probed where necessary, while allowing respondents time to thoroughly elucidate their perspectives on the topic. With consent of respondents, all interviews were recorded, and notes taken.

#### **(a) Key informant interviews**

These were conducted with two participants and lasted between one to two hours. Both participants had gone through the process of bride price but also knew more about the rite in broader terms within the confines of *kiganda* culture. Interviews were carried out in places decided upon and deemed fit by participants. I interviewed Samali at her residence, while Faisal was interviewed at a leisure park that he suggested. Being a native speaker, participants spontaneously spoke to me in Luganda which facilitated comfortability and articulation of expressions.

#### **(b) Individual interviews**

These were done with eleven participants and lasted between sixty to ninety minutes. Seven were conducted in participants' residences, two in my house, one at a place of worship and one at the workplace. The two couples also fall in this category; however, I interviewed them individually on different occasions. For one couple, both were interviewed on the same day while for the other, each individual was interviewed on a separate day.

#### **4.5.2 Focus group discussion**

While at the house of Samali, one of the key informants, I coincidentally met three other ladies who later become participants in this study. These had come to consult Samali on marriage related issues, but also to buy some locally made herbal concoctions specially prepared to help women in their marital and sex lives. One of the women was a granddaughter to Samali while the other two held no biological relations with her. The three ladies met me interviewing Samali and paid attention to what we discussed. After the interview, they seemed interested in the topic and

asked me more about what I was doing. Samali then told me that her customers (who she also referred to as daughters) would give me very good answers to my questions. There and then, the five of us started a group conversation that lasted two hours and yielded lots of information that could perhaps not have been collected in individual interviews alone. These ladies kept answering the questions I asked them but also discussed amongst themselves making comparisons of one another's bride price payment process and events. Discussions between these participants helped to de-center my position as a researcher and facilitated participants' ownership of the research process to some level. Jakobsen (2012) argues that group interaction tends to improve researcher-participant power relations because interaction is more focused on participant-participant interaction than researcher-participant, hence reducing on the exploitative potential of the researcher towards the participants. Moreover, as participants discuss, interpret and re-phrase posed questions, their own views, opinions and understanding emerge, thus becoming less of subjects of the researcher's imposition of meaning (ibid).

Though this meeting was coincidental and informal, I found my discussion with the three ladies very informative to my study. I later scheduled individual appointments and held individual interviews with each of them.

#### **4.5.3 Informal conversations and observations**

While in the field, I also had informal conversations with community members about the topic which yielded additional information. I also observed, watched, and scrutinized participants' behavior, speech, voice tone, gestures and other non-verbal modes of communication. For instance, the two couples I interviewed, I got the impression that things were going well with them at least from the atmosphere in their homes. In both cases, I could feel that there was no tension between the couple. In summation, feelings and mood of participants could be told through their expressions, voice tones and gestures. In addition, I went back to the field for the second time between 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018 and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2019. During this time, I attended two traditional marriage ceremonies where bride price was paid. One was of my younger sister, while the other was of close male friend. On the two functions, I closely observed and followed occurrences, actions, behavior and listened to what was said. For my sister's case, I also witnessed and followed the negotiation process. However, I did not attend these ceremonies as a 'researcher' per say, but rather as a family member and friend respectively. But since they

happened at an opportune time when I was researching about the custom, I took particular interest to observe and note all occurrences which supplemented the data I had already collected the first time I went to the field. Knowles (2000, p. 17), argues that, '*observation reveals the gap between practice and talk; between living and telling stories about life*'.

#### **4.5.4 Photo viewing and interpretation**

Apart from observing participants as they talked, they also offered me photos and videos of their *kwanjula* ceremonies to view. Some had hard copies printed out and arranged in photo albums and photo frames hanging on walls of their living rooms, while others had soft copies saved on electronic devices like phones and laptops. I however, concentrated more on photographs because I had no ample time to sit and watch videos which lasted over two hours. Photo viewing aided me to see what items were taken at the functions, the dressing code, decorations and many other things which facilitated comparisons of the bride price processes of different participants. Some of the participants allowed me to use their photographs for elaborations in this research while others were skeptical. (I only used photographs of participants that gave their permission and authorization). Van Manen (1990) posits that a phenomenological study can make use of other forms of data such as observations, art, and drama, accounts of vicarious experiences and events, as well as taped conversations.

#### **4.5.5 Secondary data sources**

In addition to primary sources, secondly data sources like written historical accounts, journal and newspaper articles, magazines and text books were used to gather data about the custom of bride price in a broader sense. Reading these facilitated my understanding of the bride price institution in historical terms and facilitated my understanding of what other researchers wrote about the phenomenon under study. It also helped me identify gaps within the existing literature.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics and reflections on the entire research process are integral parts of good science. This research was subjected to ethical approval and scrutiny by the Data protection official for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) before data collection. Key ethical principles such as informed consent and confidentiality were adhered to. Participants were informed prior to participation in both verbal and written form about the purpose of the study and the use of data collection devices like the audio recorder. Written information forms

stipulating voluntary participation, rights of participants and objectives of the research were prepared and availed to participants before any involvement in the study. All the thirteen participants granted oral consent and agreed to the use of their names in the study. However, for purposes of confidentiality, I chose to use only the first names of participants excluding other personal details. Upon consulting participants on issues of publishing the information they gave, twelve said it was ok, while one asked for parts of the information she had given to be withheld from publication for personal reasons, which I respected.

#### **4.7 Trustworthiness of Research**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is described through concepts of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Golafshani, 2003; L. W. Neuman, 2014).

*Credibility:* Steps taken to ensure scientific rigor (focus of the study, research context, choice of research participants and approach of data collection) (Golafshani, 2003). To ensure credibility, social factors of age, gender, marital status, and education background were considered while sampling. Ages of the 13 participants range between 25 to 74, there were 8 women and 5 men, inclusive of the married (9), separated (2), divorced (1), and widowed (1). The education background of respondents ranges from primary to university level. Also, four methods of data collection (In-depth interviews, Group/informal conversations, Observation and photo viewing) were used to increase accuracy and credibility of the research in addition to secondary data sources. Data was recorded and often referred to during the analysis process with illustrations of participants' own words drawn where necessary (see analysis chapters).

*Dependability:* (consistency in data collection) (ibid), a topic guide with broad questions was used to facilitate data collection process (see appendix....), and probing by the researcher facilitated the narrowing of the broad questions to specific insights. Voice recordings were made, and notes taken during fieldwork for reference during transcription and analysis processes. All through the translation, transcription and analysis, I kept in contact with participants (though not all of them) through messenger, watsapp and email. In cases where I was not sure if I clearly grasped what they meant, I often contacted them to seek clarity on certain responses they had given during the interviews to avoid misinterpretations. Additionally, when I went back to the field for the second time (14<sup>th</sup> December 2018 to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2019), I met with some

participants (one couple and the two key informants) and I asked them to clarify and expand certain issues which I felt needed more explanation.

*Transferability*: (extent to which results can be transferred to another group) (ibid). Though a multitude of ethnic groups in Uganda and Africa share some cultural norms and practices, it is important to note that peculiar practices apply to particular ethnic groups. Hence, there could be limitations for applicability of findings from one context to another. However, opportunities for transferability could suffice across wider cultural and social contexts since bride price is a cultural norm practiced in many societies across the globe.

## **4.8 Role of the Researcher, Reflexivity and challenges encountered**

### **4.8.1 My personal experience with bride price**

As earlier noted; phenomenological studies focus more on the descriptions of the experiences of participants and thus give less focus on the interpretations of the researcher. As such, researchers ought to bracket/set aside personal experiences as much as possible, and take on a fresh perspective towards the topic of study (Moustakas, 1994). In attempt to achieve this state of affairs, Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) advise that researchers should describe their own experiences with the phenomenon and bracket out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others. Here under, I describe my own experiences with bride price.

I met my husband in 2000 while both of us were secondary school students. We dated for four years and after started staying together. In 2012, we decided to make our relationship official and hence informed our parents about the development. Though my boyfriend was known to my parents, we had to follow the rightful procedure as tradition demands. I took him to visit my *senga*<sup>9</sup> who forwarded the issue to my parents, who also welcomed the idea and a date was set for the event. My boyfriend and I were fully involved in the process and negotiations of the bride price package. I negotiated for the removal of certain items from the list that my family had asked for, which yielded. Since I was staying with my boyfriend, I knew his financial muscle and certainly what he could and could not afford to bring. We planned, put resources together and

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<sup>9</sup> 'senga' is the bride's paternal aunt. She plays a central role in the life of her brothers' daughter right from child naming, nurturing and socialization. She is responsible for taking the girl through all rites of passage until she is due for marriage. She takes central role in searching for a suitor for the girl, thoroughly preparing her for the occasion of bride price payment and ensuring that her marriage blossoms. In case the groom finds fault with the bride in any way, she is held responsible. When the couple gets into disagreements, fights or difficulties in their marriage, she is the first person to be involved in the affair. It is only if she fails to settle issues that other parties get involved.



shopped together. The event took place at my ancestral home. It was an outdoor event, with rented tents and chairs, decorations, public address system and graced by many people (over 150). The in-laws (grooms' entourage) were fifty in number and carried along a cow, a goat, 30kg of meat, 2 bags of rice (50kg each), 2 bags of sugar (50kg each), 10 crates of soda, 5 boxes of soap, salt, traditional wears for all my brothers, father, uncles, mother, aunties and grandparents, and an assortment of groceries colorfully wrapped in 50 baskets. The special item asked by my mother was a Bible which my boyfriend brought along with the brides' suit case and certificates from Buganda kingdom. Thereafter, my elder brother, grandfather, father and mother signed on the official document that attested that we were now culturally married. After six years, we went to church for a religious wedding.

#### **4.8.2 Reflexivity**

Berger (2015, p. 220) defines reflexivity as; 'the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome'. As such, the researcher ought to check own situatedness within the research process and take responsibility of own actions and interpretations since they have weighty impact on the entire research process.

In this study, I was an insider in one aspect (a married *muganda* woman whose bride price has been paid). Occupying this position availed me easy entry and acceptance among participants with whom we shared many factors. But to those who were not aware of my marriage status, they would inquisitively look at my fingers to ascertain if I had a marriage ring. Some of them boldly asked about my marital status, family background and ancestral roots<sup>10</sup> as the norm is amongst Baganda. Through this process, I smoothly built rapport and was welcomed by majority of the participants regarding me as their own. However, much as ground breaking was not so difficult, participants required a thorough understanding of the study and its intended objectives. One of the couples requested to have a copy of my whole proposal before taking part in the study, which I emailed to them two months before I went to Uganda for fieldwork. I was astonished by their request because many people seem to have no time to read through proposals, they simply ask for oral explanations of what the study entails. This was so helpful to both of us

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<sup>10</sup> It's a norm and tradition for every *muganda* to correctly know and chronologically recite the history of their familial lineage, descendants, ancestral homes and titles they occupied. It is referred to as '*okutambula nga omuganda*'. Literally translated as 'walking like a muganda'

because when I met them, I did not have to explain a lot, they had familiarized themselves with the study and had prepared answers to the questions in the interview guide. I only probed for clarity on certain issues as we went along with the interviews, which was time saving and easy.

On the other hand, I was an outsider in another perspective because I travelled to Norway to pursue a Masters' degree and went back as 'a researcher' studying a cultural practice of my own people. This obviously placed me in quite a difficult position. Some participants refrained from giving certain information taking it for granted that I already knew these things since am part of the community. I often received responses like "*.....but you already know how things are done here, after all, you introduced your husband, didn't you?.....*". As such, some of them looked at me suspiciously wondering why I was asking questions about a custom they expected me to know well or else I had a hidden agenda. One of the participants jokingly made a comment that; going to Europe had turned me into a non-African who had come to collect information from them and sell it to the 'white man' (*abazungu*) to make money. To the participant, this was seemingly a joke, but to me as a researcher, it was certainly something to ponder over. The fact that I had left my community for a while and went to Europe, I could not freely identify with my people without any suspicions. I thus had a challenge of explaining repeatedly to the participants that this study was entirely for educational purposes and nothing more.

As I oscillated between insider and outsider positions, I encountered some ethical dilemmas as I navigated participant personalities. Some of them were soft spoken, reluctant to speak about certain issues and would give just specific answers in one or two sentences to the question asked. Even when I probed, I could feel that perhaps I was over-stepping boundaries, so I would just leave it at that. On the other side, some participants were too verbal that for one question, they would say many things that answer many other questions that would have come later on in the process. Unfortunately, this category would at times go off topic and bring in issues that were rather not connected to the discussion. Some would ask if white people also practiced this custom and what it takes to marry amongst them, while others would ask how I managed to go to Europe to study and other questions related to immigration. To some of these abrupt questions, I had no ready answers. As such, I had to be very alert, focused and attentive to keep the conversation on track. Moreover, I had to carefully choose my responses and use befitting language not to offend them, but also not to embarrass myself before my participants.

Being a stranger to some of the participants, conducting in-depth interviews called for extra care to curb the unwanted effects on the quality of data and power relations between researcher and participants. I had a task to ponder over who participants were and how they perceived me. I thus had to keenly observe certain moral codes governing the topical and cultural contexts in which I operated. Reflecting on such issues and according them due attention fostered ethical assurance and credibility to this study. In the same vein, interviewing key informants was a slippery journey. Being elderly people, key informants had a lot to tell and as a researcher, younger in age and seeking information from them, I could not just rush them even when not everything they said was directly important to the study. Moreover, in *Buganda* norms, it is not proper for younger people to interrupt the speech of the elderly. It is more appropriate to wait for them to make their submissions, and then you take your turn to speak, or else, you can mistakenly be misunderstood as being disrespectful to people older than you. It should be noted that in *Buganda*, wisdom and knowledge are affiliated to old age and seniority, so elders are regarded as epitomes of knowledge and wisdom and important resources of society who everybody ought to respect in line with the contextual moral codes of this society.

#### **4.8.3 Challenges encountered**

For some unknown reasons, three of the male participants that I took contact with while still in Norway and asked for their participation in the study, dropped out. At first, they had agreed to take part, but later declined to participate when I arrived in the field. This posed a setback in the recruitment process but I later established other contacts through the participants I started with.

Conducting majority of the interviews (8) in participants' houses was a challenge in some way. There was always interruption in the interview environment which prolonged the time I spent with participants but also interrupted recording. Participants' attention was sometimes divided between the interview and other things around their homes that needed attention. For example, children and other members in the house could come to ask of one thing or the other from the participants. This often-disrupted participants' attention and direction of our conversation. A case in example was a participant who had a little baby. We started the interview when the baby was asleep, but it woke up in the middle of the interview and started crying. We automatically had to pause the interview and attend to the baby, which took us over an hour to bath, feed and nurse the baby to calmness. I took to baby-sitting as the mother prepared the water and milk to

feed it. So, I always had to draw participants back to the point we were talking about before the interruption.

Also, some of the places where I met participants were very noisy and busy, which constrained the recording process and thus necessitated us to speak louder than we would otherwise have done.

This research was also constrained by insufficient finances yet transportation, communication, buying gadgets, stationary and other expenses required money. I also experienced technical challenges with the audio recorder. For example, during the very first interview, I switched it on and was sure it was recording, fifteen minutes into the interview, I checked on the recorder only to realize that it had not recorded anything. I explained to the participant and we had to redo the interview from the start, but this time round, I used both the audio recorder and the phone recorder. I adopted this technique with all the interviews I conducted later. After every interview, I went home and made notes, backed up my recordings on the computer and flash disk, listened through what I had recorded scrutinized questions and responses to ascertain if things were in place. This helped me to establish things missed out in one encounter such that I do not miss them in the next one.

However, to some participants, the presence and use of a recorder seemed to have caused some tension and nervousness. For instance, upon requisition to record our conversation, one surprised participant said: *'eeeh!, you mean you are going to record and put me in the news? tell me what you want me to say such that you do not record the wrong things..'* this participant thought that this was a journalistic venture, I explained that it was not, but instead a research study strictly for academic purposes and that whatever responses given were the correct ones.

Despite all the above challenges, the data collection process was successful. I am confident that I collected rich, valid and reliable data that shall contribute to new insights to the existing basket of knowledge on the bride price institution, how contemporary trends have reshaped it and the impact these changes have had on gender relations and women empowerment.

#### 4.9 Data management and analysis

Analysis and interpretation are infused in all stages of the research process right from processes meant to facilitate data generation like formulating research objectives, processing the information communicated by participants in the field, developing impressions, and making choices about interesting and relevant issues, (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015, p. 158). The analysis then graduates from thought processes, the argument of the research process takes shape, and new exciting insights begin to emerge through; re-organizing, condensing, categorizing, and indexing data to manageable pieces that carry meaning (ibid).

In that vein, raw data gathered from the field needed detailed and intensive examination to draw out meaningful interpretations that lay within and beyond the verbatim meanings. Audio recordings and notes were translated (the ones in vanacular) and transcribed into text-based format for easy management and storage as advised by Skovdal and Cornish (2015). Interviews done in English were transcribed directly into English, while those conducted in *Luganda*<sup>11</sup> were translated and transcribed into English simultaneously. Parts of longer interviews were condensed more so narrations that did not directly apply to the study were summarized. This was however done without distorting their original meanings.

A thorough familiarization of data was enhanced by repetitively listening to recorded voice notes of interviews and reading the transcripts several times. Thereafter, transcribed accounts were uploaded into *OpenCode*<sup>12</sup> for computerized analysis. Data was processed through *thematic network analysis* i.e. organize and reduce data into themes aiming at unpacking a story (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015, p. 164), moving from manifest (obvious) to latent (concealed) content pattern. This study adopted Attride-Stirling (2001) steps of thematic analysis. He argues that a thematic network is developed starting from the *Basic themes* and working inwards towards a *Global theme*. Once a collection of *Basic themes* has been derived, they are then classified according to the underlying story they are telling, and these become the *Organizing themes*. Organizing themes are then reinterpreted in light of their Basic themes and are brought together to illustrate a single conclusion or super-ordinate theme that becomes the *Global theme* (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). The research objectives stated in chapter one gave analytical guidance/focus to the coding and categorization of data. Predefined categories in accordance to set objectives were set,

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<sup>11</sup> The local dialect of the Baganda people

<sup>12</sup> A computerized data analysis software designed for analyzing qualitative data

but working within a qualitative approach that is exploratory, necessitated being open to emerging codes, categories and themes.

Having gathered and organized the data as stipulated above, the next four chapters explore the four research questions stipulated in chapter one.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**HISTORICAL CHANGES IN MARRIAGE AND BRIDE PRICE INSTITUTION**  
**AMONG THE BAGANDA**

**5.1 Introduction**

In her theory of using gender as a tool of historical analysis, Scott (2007), advises that in order to understand how social change occurs, we must explore how things happened in the past, because establishing the past facilitates our comprehension of how things happen in the present. This chapter explores both historical and contemporary characteristics of the bride price institution. The experiences of the past are presented in historical periods of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. However, most of the historical accounts are based on oral history and tales as told by key informants in this study; while others are drawn from the notes of Roscoe, a British reverend father (Anglican Church missionary society) who lived in Uganda between 1884 and 1909. Roscoe compiled his data from the oral tales of the ruling clique of Baganda chiefs among which was Sir Apolo Kagwa, the then Katikkiro (prime minister) of Buganda kingdom between 1890-1926, who aided and advised Roscoe while he carried out his ethnographic survey (Roscoe, 1901; Rowe, 1967) which he later published in 1901. Additional historical accounts are also drawn from the findings of Meier zu Selhausen (2014), whose sources of data were the handwritten Anglican marriage registers (1880-1945) of Namirembe diocese Kampala (central Uganda), and two rural parishes of Fort portal (St, John cathedral and Butiti) in western Uganda.

**5.2 A history of the marriage institution among the Baganda**

**5.2.1 Pre-colonial (before 1894) and colonial (1894-1962) periods**

Using data collected from handwritten Anglican marriage registers of Namirembe diocese Kampala, and two rural parishes of Fort portal (St, John cathedral and Butiti) (1880-1945), Meier zu Selhausen (2014), established that in pre-colonial Buganda, the marital age of girls was between 14-18 years. Marriage was arranged by parents while their children were relatively young (Meier zu Selhausen, 2014), typically after the onset of menarche (Bantebya-Kyomuhendo & McIntosh, 2006; Tamale, 2006). Roscoe (1901, pp. 122-123), established that in the pre-colonial era, boys and girls were matched for marriage and a messenger from the boys' family would be sent to sound the parents of the girl to see if they agreed to the match; if they consented, then the girl was asked. In some cases the girl was first consulted, but this was not the usual form. Once both parties agreed, a quantity of local beer would be sent to the parents (of the

bride) as a token of betrothal, and later the bride price would be discussed, and the amount settled by the parents and the relatives. Local beer was the most important part in the betrothal and legalized it; in the future, if any dispute arose and the legality of the marriage was questioned, it was sufficient to say, beer was given and accepted. For six days, the bride's body would be well oiled and the oil rubbed into the skin to make it soft and smooth. Oral tradition has it that, even in pre-colonial times, there was a special item known as *omutwalo* given by the groom to the parents of the bride. This was specially asked for by the father or most senior male member of the bride's family:

In Buganda, what is recognized as bride price is *omutwalo*. Even if the groom brought a thousand expensive items without that particular item asked for by the father of the bride, he cannot be allowed to take the bride home. That item is the actual bride price, the rest of the items are simply gifts. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

Faisal, who is currently a commercial *kwanjula* spokesperson, told me that between 1770-1800 *omutwalo* was dependent upon which Buganda County one fetched his bride from. Each county was represented by a particular item, and residents of that county took pride in it. As a sign of recognition and respect that one had found a wife in that county, the groom would bring that item as *omutwalo*. For instance, *Bulemeezi* county is represented by white ants known as '*enswa ennaka*' that is why they are called *abalya nnaka* (people who eat white ants). In that regard, any one marrying from *Bulemeezi* was to bring a package of white ants wrapped in banana leaves as *omutwalo*. Likewise, *Kyadondo* County is represented by a bundle of reeds (*ekisaaganda kyemuli*). This is because *Kyadondo* County houses most of the royal palaces of the kabaka and they are built with reeds. As such, to marry in *Kyadondo*, one would bring bundles of reeds and after the occasion, these would be taken to the palace to be used in building and maintaining kabaka's various palaces.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Buganda kingdom is made up of eighteen counties 'amasaza' namely; Buddu, Bugerere, Bulemeezi, Buluuli, Busiro, Busujju, Butambala, Buvuma, Buweekula, Gomba, Kabula, Kooki, Kyaddondo, Kyaggwe, Mawogola, Mawokota, Ssese, and Ssinga.

See also Roscoe (1901)



After payment of bride price to the satisfaction of the bride's family, relatives and a few friends would gather at her parents' house and send her off. Likewise, the groom's relatives would also gather at his parents' house to welcome the bride (Roscoe, 1901). The bride's brother would hand over his sister to the groom and in appreciation; the groom would give him a cock, and also promise that his sister will be well taken care of. Brides received nothing more than a present of bark-cloth (ibid) (different from the suit case given today).

**Photo 1:** Women dressed in bark cloth



**Source:** *Some African Highways: A Journey of Two American Women to Uganda and the Transvaal*. By Caroline Kirkland, 1865-1930.  
<https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/kirkland/highways/highways.html>

The bride would be accompanied by her paternal aunt; who stays for a few days. In future if there arose any unpleasantness in the marriage, the paternal aunt would be involved first before any other family member (Roscoe, 1901). After four days of seclusion from the public, the bride's relatives would bring her presents of food and fowls, which she cooks and they have a feast in honor of her coming out of her seclusion. The bride was expected to be pure and chaste with her virginity intact and only her husband would deflower her (ibid).

From his ethnographic survey, Roscoe (1901) also established that in pre-colonial times, traditional etiquette stipulating relations between in-laws were existent. No man would see his mother-in-law, or speak to her face to face. If he wanted to have any communication with her it

must be done by a third person or through a wall or closed door. If he broke this norm, it was believed he would acquire an illness which would make him shake his hands and general body. Speaking and interacting with one another face to face was seen as an equivalent of looking upon the mother-in-law's nakedness. Likewise, brides would speak to their father's in law at a distance but no handshakes or close interaction.

Polygamy was wide spread and seen as a mark of male prestige (Rowe, 1967). Marriage was seen more in terms of the clan than of the nuclear family and, the choice of girl's marriage partner was made largely by parents or other senior members (Hastings, 1973; Meier zu Selhausen, 2014), ensuring chastity, future bride wealth and labor power (Rowe, 1967). Meier zu Selhausen (2014), also discovered that men and women in Buganda were not allowed to marry a person of the same clan like themselves or even that of their parents. Being a patrilineal society, the couple resided with or near the husband's family, thus decision making powers in these families largely lay in the hands of the males and the elderly (Bantebya-Kyomuhendo & McIntosh, 2006; Hastings, 1973). Meier zu Selhausen (2014)'s findings also show that girls in Buganda during this period received indigenous education provided by their mothers preparing them for adulthood responsibilities, while boys were often sent to the court of the kabaka to receive training outside the home. Drawing from this finding, one could draw the impression that in comparison to men, women's socio-economic position in Buganda during the pre-colonial period was far from egalitarian. Meier argues that due to paucity of sources for the early periods however, little is known about African women's pre-colonial position. Nevertheless, drawing from the hand written data sources used in his study, it was established, that women occupied a subordinate position to men in central Uganda, and that cultural norms governing their societies constrained their mobility and appearance in public spaces (Meier zu Selhausen, 2014).

The narrations of the history of bride price by Faisal and Samali (key informants) are quite similar to those established in the written sources by Meier zu Selhausen (2014) and Roscoe (1901) though with some slight differences. Both made mention of parent's great involvement in the choice of marriage partners for their children and that girls were married off at an early age. Faisal mentioned five people who were directly concerned with this search;- grandfather and grandmother, the father, mother and paternal aunt. The boy's side would initiate the search and identify a suitable (virtuous and chaste) girl judging from her family background. A secret

background check to ascertain the family lineage, and whether the family did not engage in forbidden acts like witchcraft, cannibalism and sorcery, have no diseases like epilepsy, would be undertaken. Only upon satisfaction would they reach out to the parents of the girl. If interested, the parents of the girl would also carry out a similar background check on the family of the boy. Notably, Faisal mentions that all this would often be done without the involvement of the girl in question. Tradition has it that most times, during the first visit to the girls' family, the girl would deliberately be sent to run some errands so that she did not get to know what was happening. On the contrary, the boy would often know about his parent's mission because sometimes, boy initiated the process, and, he would be present during the first visit of the girl's family to his, but would not partake in the discussions since it was an arena of only the elders.

Right from childhood, children in Buganda would be socialized and nurtured to be responsible and virtuous people in preparation for adulthood responsibilities. Women played a key role in teaching children social-ethical and moral values which were part of cultural standards for evaluating 'proper' behavior: where much of the teaching was focused on regulating sexuality especially of the girl child (Suda, 1996). This teaching was done through proverbs and folktales by older women who stipulated and emphasized the adverse consequences of violating such moral codes (ibid). Sexual relations were restricted to marriage partners; as such, grandmothers and paternal aunties had the primary responsibility to ensure that their daughters maintained sexual purity (Suda, 1996; Tamale, 2006). Such advice was based on the moral premise that sexual morality in general and pre-marital virginity in particular were highly valued (Tamale, 2006). Therefore, when parents felt their children were due for marriage, a special edition of intensive preparations of both boy and girl would commence. The girl would be sent to her 'senga' (paternal aunt) for exclusive lessons on marriage and sexuality.

Faisal mentioned that, even at this point, it was kept a secret from the girl that someone had already asked to marry her. Her aunt would take her through a rite known as *okukyalira ensiko*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Labia minora elongation is a common traditional female genital modification practice among the Baganda usually done when girls reach pre-menarche. The rite is initiated by senga with the help of medicinal herbs available in their most immediate environment (Martínez Pérez, Namulondo, & Tomás Aznar, 2013; Muyinda, Nakuya, AG Whitworth, & Pool, 2004; Tamale, 2006). Alongside the initiation, girls are tutored in the art of erotic skills paraphernalia, which encompasses love potions, *obutiti* or (waist beads), lovemaking noises' and other tips on marital and sexual matters (Martínez Pérez et al., 2013). Once initiated, girls continue practicing regularly either at home or in the bush alone or assisted by their female peers in pairs; and their *sengas* regularly check to ascertain if

literally translated as ‘*visiting the bush*’ (Martínez Pérez et al., 2013; Muyinda et al., 2004; Namakula, 2009; Tamale, 2006). The boy on the other hand would also be sent to his maternal uncle ‘*kojja*’ to be coached on marital and sexual issues. Elder Samali a marital coach narrates that these preparations would be crowned in the last three to seven days before the *kwanjula*<sup>15</sup> event took place. The girl would be kept in a special room and given special attention by female members of her family especially her mother, *senga* and grandmother. This rite is known as *okufumbirira omugole* literally translated as ‘cooking for the bride’ as Samali narrates:

Prior to the long-awaited day, your people would cook for you special dishes, pamper you and apply cow ghee ‘*omuzigo*’ on the whole body at least for one week to make it softer and nice looking. They would mix local herbs like *olweeza* and *kayayana* in water for you to bath. These were meant to cause favor and luck to come your way as you went into your husbands’ house. You would be kept away from the eyes of the public and only a few females especially the elderly would have access to your special room. This is called *okufumbirira omugole*. It was an exclusive duty of women i.e. your aunt and mother plus her friends and well-wishers. They would all come to give you final lessons on how to handle your husband and marriage. (Samali 74, marital coach and elder)

Likewise, the boy would also be given final marital coaching by his maternal uncle ‘*kojja*’, father and grandfather. However, the boy would not be kept in a special room like the girl; he would go about with business as usual.

Unlike in pre-colonial times where the major item was local beer as stated by Roscoe (1901), Faisal narrates that as time went by, the list of bride price items grew longer to include sugar, meat, paraffin, match boxes, lantern, traditional attires (which was bark cloth by then) for parents and grandparents. However, local brew would still be brought along. There are oral tales as narrated by Faisal that after the presentation of *omutwalo* and other gifts, the bride would dress up and leave with her husband in the company of her *senga* and brother who stayed with her at least for three days at her marital home. While in the groom’s house, the *senga* of the bride would spend those three days sharing the bedroom with the couple. However, in his anthropological survey, Roscoe (1901), does not mention what the *senga* does during her stay in the house of the newlyweds, though he mentions that she (*senga* and a little girl (bridesmaid)

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the girls are succeeding in elongating up to the expected/desired length, which is between two and five centimeters (ibid).

<sup>15</sup> Bride price payment ceremony

known as *emperekeze*) follow the bride to her husband's house and stay with her at least during the few days of her seclusion. Faisal explains the role of *senga* during this period:

We are told that this was to ensure that the bride and groom ignited their sex life with ease and that the bride did not deny her husband his conjugal rights, being that brides of that time often married with their virginities intact. The *senga's* role was to calm down her niece (bride) and ensure that she did the right and required things on her marital bed in the desired manner. (...) She had to ensure the bride's sexual prowess because it was one of her cardinal roles and in case the bride failed in such duties, she (*senga*) was solely to blame for failure to adequately train the bride. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

In her article '*Eroticism, sexuality and women's secrets among the Baganda*' Sylvia Tamale (2006), elaborates on the role of the '*senga* institution' among the Baganda. Using data gathered through interviews with reknown *sengas* in Kampala, popular beliefs and oral tales, Tamale posits that Paternal aunts' (or surrogate versions thereof), role is to tutor young women in a range of sexual matters, including pre-menarche (i.e. before first menstruation) practices, pre-marriage preparation, erotics and reproduction. She echoes Faisal's narration about the *senga* being responsible in ensuring her niece's sexual prowess or else, she bares the blame if the bride fails in that area. Tamale however, notes that the *senga* institution facilitates and reinforces patriarchal power, but at the same time it subverts and parodies patriarchy (Tamale, 2006, p. 89). Tamale's observation points to the fact that gender is a daily, habitual, learned act or performance based on cultural norms of femininity and masculinity perpetuated by cultural institutions such as the *senga* institution.

Faisal narrates further that, after the three days of seclusion, the *senga* would carry the blood-stained bed sheets used by the couple back home as evidence that the bride was a virgin (since being a virgin at marriage was emphasized and accrued pride to both bride and her family). The family of the groom would offer her a live goat<sup>16</sup> and other gifts in appreciation for keeping the bride a virgin until marriage. However, Roscoe (1901) writes a different version of this, he says that in pre-colonial times, the family of the groom would slaughter a goat, '*wrap part of the meat in bark cloth with the blood from the girl which had flowed during her first connection with her husband and send it to the bride's family*' (Roscoe, 1901, p. 123). Perhaps the different versions happened in different time periods: nevertheless, evidence of virginity at first conjugal encounter

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<sup>16</sup> In Buganda, virginity is known as '*embuzi*' literally meaning 'a goat' and a virgin girl is known as '*embereera*'. So, offering a live goat to the bride's family by the groom would symbolize that the bride was a virgin. This was prestigious and highly valued.

in marriage was highly valued and prestigious (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Tamale, 2006). On the contrary, if the bride was not found a virgin at the time of marriage, it would bring so much shame and ridicule to her family. Popular belief has it that the process would be crowned with the family of the bride coming to the groom's house with food items and other gifts to thank him for having married their daughter and for turning her into a full-grown woman. This rite is referred to as *okkuza omuzigo*.

### **Kabaka Mutesa I regime 1856-1884 and Muteesa II 1939-1969**

Oral tradition has it that during the reign of Kabaka Mutesa I 1856-1884, there started to be amendments in *kwanjula* procedures and bride price packages. Faisal narrates that, this started with Kabaka Mutesa I when he wanted to take another wife. Because he was polygamous, his family was large and whenever he went to pick another wife, his family members went along with him. For such reasons the number of people attending *kwanjula* ceremonies increased and it became an outdoor event. People started making local tents out-doors made of banana stems (*emiteteme*) and decorating them with flowers plucked from the compound and nearby forests.

The event was no longer done in secret, food and drinks would be in plenty that even by-passers would come and enjoy, and traditional entertainment of drums and dances became popular.

It was also during Kabaka Mutesa I's regime, that Islam (around 1844) and Christianity (between 1862-1879) were introduced into Buganda by Arab traders and Christian missionaries respectively. These new religions also brought along some changes in the tradition of bride price. For instance, some items like local brew were substituted with bottled soda by religious fanatics whose religions did not allow consumption of alcohol (I shall come back to this in the next chapter).

### **5.2.2 Post-colonial era: 1962 to date**

Amidst all the above changes, Buganda kingdom went through a period of turmoil during the 1960s when Uganda got independence from Britain in 1962 and Kabaka Muteesa II was forced into exile due to political persecution by the then president Milton Obote. In 1967 Kingdoms were abolished in Uganda and observance of traditions, customs and norms would be done under cover. This was not only peculiar to Buganda kingdom but also all other monarchies elsewhere in Uganda. Nevertheless, Baganda kept hold onto their traditions until the reinstatement of

monarchies by president Museveni in the 1990s, which saw the current ruling king Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II take over kingship in 1993.

### **Bride price in contemporary times**

#### **Kabaka Mutebi's regime 1993-to date**

The coronation of a new king revamped many traditions, norms and customs of Buganda kingdom. *Kwanjula* events became popular with new styles and editions. People started calling out friends and family in preparatory meetings for *kwanjula* events. More items were added onto the list of items taken as bride price say; groceries, fruits, electronics, household items, automobiles etc. While juxtaposing bride price packages and editions in old and contemporary times, 74 year old Samali said:

Hahaha, my child, the items used to pay for bride price for one woman now would be used to pay for 50 brides during our time. It was easy to pay bride price long ago, but now things have changed so much. Now days, people bring so many baskets of items like over 50. They take sofa sets, land titles, cars, electronics, water tanks, solar panel hoooo!!! what haven't I seen? (*marvels while patting her thighs with both hands in astonishment*). During our times each of those baskets would be equivalent to bride price for one woman. For us, men would bring two baskets one containing sugar and the other containing meat, plus a guard of local brew. With those, payment would be complete. Our kind of marriage was a *kiganda* type though the white man's kind of marriage also existed. What was important was for the man to come visit your parents and for your family to know your husband and your where about (Samali, 74, whose pride price was paid in 1964).

Aside changes in the nature and quantity of items brought, the manner in which couples meet has also changed. Before, it was mostly parents that chose brides for their sons (Meier zu Selhausen, 2014; Roscoe, 1901). In other instances, the man could identify a girl of their desire and inform his parents, who would then reach out to the parents of the girl. But now, men and women make own choices of marriage partners (Ngubane, 2018; Parkin & Nyamwaya, 2018; Suda, 1996) and they meet by themselves often without involvement of parents. Working parents are too busy advancing careers and making ends meet (Obbo, 1987, p. 268) resulting into child neglect. Obbo argues that many young people get married without the knowledge or consent of their parents; some parents may get to know only after the marriage has taken place since they were so occupied elsewhere with career. From the finding of this study, only three out of the thirteen participants mentioned that meeting their spouses was influenced by relatives. The remaining ten mentioned that they met their spouses by themselves without involvement of third parties or even parents.

In the same vein, both bride and groom are now actively involved in the negotiation processes of bride price and arrangement of events (Ngubane, 2018; Parkin & Nyamwaya, 2018), unlike before when parents took the driving seat and made decisions on behalf of the couple. From what participants said, voices of the bride and groom currently seem to have gained some level of audience from the elders and parents. 28 year old Rose whose bride price was paid in 2017 narrates that:

(...) In most cases the father of the girl determines what he wants as bride price for her daughter. But in my case, when my husband asked what he should bring, my father said his daughter was not up for sale because she was not a commodity to be sold. He gave my husband chance to think of what to bring home as a thank you present. He never asked for anything in particular. So, all the items my husband brought home were his own choice. (Rose 28)

Asked how involved she was in the negotiation process, Rose recounts:

When my father said that he could not dictate what my husband should bring home as bride price, I thought he was unhappy with me for having stayed with a man who had not officially married me. You know, my father is pastor and he does not joke with things like these. So, I went and asked him if his failure to pronounce what should be brought as bride price was genuine. He said that he was not selling me off to my husband because if at one time my husband got fed up of me, he would have license to mistreat me just because he was made to bring forced items as bride price. (...) My husband, papa and I sat down and discussed the whole issue, but my father still insisted and left everything for my husband to decide. My husband then went home and decided on the items he would bring by himself. He only took me along to shop for the *gomesis* of my female family members. The rest of the items, I did not know. (Rose 28, whose bride price was paid in 2017)

Drawing meaning from the above extract, Rose engaged her father and actively took part in the negotiations and decision making of her bride price. However, the fears expressed by Rose's father in this extract highlight some of the detriments of bride price that some women activists have pointed out. For example; In a participatory action research done by Hague et al. (2011) in collaboration with Mifumi a (Non-Governmental organization in Uganda working on domestic violence and poverty alleviation and other stakeholders) where 257 interviews were conducted from 4 districts of rural Uganda, it was stated that because there is usually bargaining between the concerned parties, bride price is a basis for the claim that women are exchanged for goods as if they were commodities, making them objects of male dominance. The commoditization of wives leads to deleterious social impacts especially in terms of increased domestic violence and male power over women (Hague et al., 2011, p. 550). Additionally, Mifumi a women's rights



advocate initiative in Uganda, in their lawsuit in the constitutional court<sup>17</sup> seeking nullification of the tradition, they claimed that the bride price institution undermines women's dignity and welfare. Judging from Rose's narrative above, it is evident that the groom took a bigger share of the decision making than the bride although the bride took part in the negotiation.

Different from Rose, 25 year old Harriet whose bride price was equally paid in 2017, seemed more involved in the process and in decision making, it is emphasized in her narration as she uses the term "we" (referring to herself and spouse) as she narrates below:

I was involved in planning; we made the list of items together. My husband always consulted me on what to buy and we bought things together. However, I did not put in money because that was his role to play; I only contributed on buying one of my *gomesis*. My parents did not ask for anything specific apart from the *mutwalo* which was a water tank. The rest were decided upon by my husband and I. We took sofa set, TV set, solar panel, daddy's swinging chair, sugar, rice, *gomesi* for female relatives, *kanzu* for male relatives. We also took a cow and groceries in baskets. But we did not even take many things because we did not have money, but if you have, you take as many things as you want.

Furthermore, unlike in pre-colonial and colonial times where the grooms' parents sought and prepared the items for bride price (Meier zu Selhausen, 2014; Ngubane, 2018), today, many grooms take the lead in soliciting for the items. They organize and call friends and family to preparatory meetings where people pool resources to enable the groom pay the bride price of his bride. Meanwhile, brides too sometimes contribute to the items to be brought: three of the female participants confirmed to have contributed financially in buying the items that their husbands brought as bride price. For example, Favor whose bride price was paid in 1999 narrates that:

(...) I was 20 years old by then and I was working. I got involved in deciding some of the items especially the *gomesi* for my female relatives. He asked me how many female members had to be given and I gave him the list. He bought what he could afford, but I realized the *gomesi* were not enough, yet I wanted all the people on the list I had made to receive *gomesi*. So, I used my money and bought the extra ones but handed them over to him, such that he brings everything as one package. In fact, it is me who bought the wrapping materials they used to wrap the gifts he brought.

From the above extract, it is evident that women in contemporary times are not only contributing in decision making but also financially. While exploring the consequences for women of marriage payments in a society with patrilineal descent, Ngubane (2018) acknowledges that the

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<sup>17</sup> See: Law Advocacy for Women in Uganda V Attorney General (2007), Constitutional Petition Nos. 13/05/and 05/06 (2007) Case No. 5 April 2007

bride price institution is becoming more monetized in recent times. However, using examples from the Zulu of South Africa, Ngubane decries of the negative effect monetization of bride price has on women: monetization of bride price not only erodes a woman's economic position, but also destroys the support and legitimation that comes from non-monetary payments because the monetary effect destroys the direct economic gain in asset form (cattle) that would have been a source of security for women and their children (ibid). Contrary to my findings, Ngubane argues that the transformation in mode of bride-wealth from material items to cash, has not only made marriage a private affair, but also minimized the involvement of women in matrimonial arrangements and negotiations. Meanwhile, findings in my study attest to increased involvement of women (compared to the past) in matrimonial arrangements and negotiations despite increasing monetization of the bride price institution.

As already mentioned that many brides of olden days first met their husbands on the day of bride price payment since many marriage choices were done by parents, the situation seems opposite in contemporary times where couples meet on their own without direct parental inputs. This change does not go without consequences on the marriage institution. Faisal juxtaposes olden and contemporary situations and raises some concerns:

(...) It was often a shock for many girls, they many times went crying to their marital homes because it was abrupt, not like these days where brides dance and jubilate to the fullest during *kwanjula* events. You see, during those times, the bride and groom were strangers to each other but love between them grew as they stayed together in marriage. (...) Surprisingly my child, those marriages lasted longer than marriages of today. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

Drawing from the above extract, there seems to be differences in longevity of marriages in the past and those of today. It is however not clear whether other contributory factors were responsible for the lasting marriages or it was solely because parents of the couple made choices of spouses for their children. Obbo (1987); (Suda, 1996) agree that formerly, marriage negotiations took place before cohabitation but that, in more recent times, spouses have tended to live together in advance of bride wealth negotiations and payments. Obbo (1987) assesses the scenario and argues that; at first, this might seem to indicate that people are exercising more freedom in their choice of marriage partner. But in fact some degree of choice, provided it observed the exogamic and other guidelines, was never ruled out in earlier times. Arguing in agreement, Parkin and Nyamwaya (2018) state that even nowadays, such choices operate within

constraints, often being made with due regard to such new factors as the educational level of the bride and the socio-economic status of her family. Moreover, with increased social and economic empowerment of women, expectations of marriage are rapidly changing; More women are now looking for companionship and respect in their relationships with men than was the case in the past (Suda, 1996, p. 79). In contrast, many African men are still looking for wives who can bear children for them but whom they do not consider as their friends, equals or companions. As such, attitudes of some elite and economically independent women towards the marriage institution seem to have changed (ibid), and could possibly account for rampant failures of some marriages today.

However, there are some aspects of the tradition that have not had many modifications. Some of those are the social etiquette governing dressing and behavior while in the presence of in-laws. During a *kwanjula* ceremony, people on both sides have to be very careful of their behavior and language during the whole time they spend before their in-laws. They specially have to guard against the use of obscene language because it is an abomination to use such before in-laws. The mandatory dress code for both men and women; *kanzu* for all men and *gomesi* for all women. previously, these attires were made from bark cloth but now, factory made fabric is used to make them.

**Photo 2:** Photograph showing women dressed in ‘gomesi’ and men in ‘kanzu’ ready to enter the bride’s compound



**Source:** From Rose and Emmanuel’s *kwanjula* albums

Apart from dress code, the hosted in-laws ought to watch how they walk, sit, talk and behave. In olden times, women would sit down on mats and would kneel while greeting the in-laws to show

respect, while men sat on chairs and would humble themselves while greeting their in-laws. Today, both sit on chairs, but, women must kneel as a sign of respect when greeting elders of the host family. Men too humble themselves while greeting for the same reason. As it was before, the bride must not come in close contact with the father of the groom, as the groom must not also come into close contact with the mother of the bride, and so it remains even when the marriage is dissolved. The olden myth about the consequences of such contact still holds water to-date.

### **5.3 A closer look at changes in the bride price institution in contemporary times**

From the above findings, it is evident that the practice of bride price has not remained the same as time goes by. There are changes in how partners meet, how negotiations are made, what entails bride price packages and who decides on what, how resources are collected, the venue of the event, packaging and quantity of items as well as the number of people that grace the occasion. However, some things have remained constant for many years. One of such things are the mandatory items that are supposed to be presented by the groom. Drawing from responses of the thirteen participants in this study, all acknowledged to having mandatory items as part of the bride price package and these items were uniform for all of them, though with variations in quantity depending on each couple's choice and ability. These include; traditional wear (*kanzu* for males and *gomesi* for females); initially, these were meant for father, mother, grandparents, *senga* and *muko*. However, this list has now been expanded to include whoever the bride wants to receive such items. In addition to traditional wear, other mandatory items include; salt, meat, sugar, soap and a cock for the senior brother of the bride (*muko*). Local brew is another of the mandatory items; this has also not changed though it has been substituted for soft drinks in some instances for religious reasons.

The other important item is *omutwalo*; each of the thirteen participants in this study had this item. Tradition has it that neither the bride nor the groom decides what it should be. It is only the parents of the bride that pronounce what item they prefer as *omutwalo*. In olden days, this was strictly decided upon by the father of the bride or the most senior male in the bride's family in case of fathers' absence. However, this has also experienced some changes, two of the participants said that this item was decided upon by their mothers: an indicator that there is some change in decision making positions and probably an elevation of women's power position in the whole process. Asked why their mothers assumed that role during their bride price payment, the

two respondents had somewhat similar reasons; they claimed their mothers had taken central role in nurturing, caring, educating and raising them and as such, they had to enjoy the prestige of not only deciding that item (*omutwalo*), but also enjoying and owning it when the in-laws delivered it. Mosedale (2005 p.252), argues that women's empowerment refers to 'a process through which women redefine and extend their possibilities in situations where they are restricted, relative to men, from being and doing'. Going by this definition, the above shift of decision making powers from the hands of men who primarily held it, into the hands of some women is a pointer of disempowerment of men and empowerment of women to some extent. The fact that mothers and brides can make such important decisions is evidence that previously male dominated positions and spaces have been penetrated by women. Arguing in agreement with Mosedale is Kabeer (1999) who posits that once persons who were previously denied ability to make strategic life choices gain such ability, it can be deduced that such persons have been empowered.

In addition to the above mandatory items, couples add other items of their choice. The most mentioned items by participants include; electronics, cows, groceries, water tanks, solar panels, sofa sets and other household items. These are wrapped in modern packaging materials in-line with the theme colors of the event as illustrated below. The wrapped baskets containing the gifts are traditionally referred to as '*Amakula*'.

**Photo 3:** Photographs showing a cross section of bride price items



**Source:** From Rose's *kwanjula* album





**Source:** From Ken and Angel's *kwanjula* album

As noted earlier on in this chapter, bride price events in the past took place in-doors with a few family members present. As it is now, for some reasons that shall be discussed in the next chapter, the event is presently held outside with as many people as the concerned parties wish to invite. For some reasons as well, other people now days host the event in hotels in the city as opposed to ancestral homes where it ought to be held. In this study, two participants said they held their events in-doors, while eleven had theirs out-doors. Twelve participants held the event at their ancestral homes, while one held it at a residence of guardians who had housed her for some time and found a suitor for her. The implication of all the above changes is that there are costs involved, yet, many times such costs are supposed to be met by the concerned couple. Narratives of some participants portray how difficult it was for them to meet these expenses:

(...) Haa!, things were not easy because even the event itself was difficult for us to organize. At a certain point we even wanted to give up because of scarcity of resources, but the pastors got involved and mobilized a few resources. (...) he brought meat, vegetables, and few other items. Even the bride's suit case did not contain anything, it was just for formality. But they had tipped me off that there was nothing inside (*laughs shyly while covering her eyes with her palms*). So, I did not even allow my family members to get close to it because I did not want to get ashamed. In fact, my husband and his family went back with it on that very day. As for decoration, we just plucked a few flowers here and there and decorated the locally made tent. We then borrowed some chairs from village members because we could not afford the hired ones. (Pross 36, married in 2002 but now separated)

Judging from the items that people present as bride price today and the new styles in which the gifts are presented, it is evident that the financial element is key if one is to fulfill this custom. Charles who paid his wife's bride price fifteen years ago shows this concern, he argues that:

Today, everything is about money. People take cars, fridge, land tittles and many more as bride price items; it is more like showing how much money one has. If you don't have money you cannot pay bride price in today's world. In fact, now days, the groom must send money to the bride's family to facilitate the preparations according to the number of people he expects to come along with, unlike before when the brides' family took care of those things and the groom's family only prepared the items to be brought. (Charles 45, paid bride price in 2004).

From my observation of the two ceremonies I witnessed directly and from the pictures of participants, bride price occasions are now days graced by many people and lots of preparations that require money. Normally, the amount of money that the groom sends to the family of the bride depends on how many people he intends to come along with. It is more or less cost sharing of the expenses. Ironically, the bride's family sends nothing to the groom's family, yet they too have preparations to make and costs to meet in buying items and making necessary preparations. This finding is in agreement with conclusions drawn by Asiimwe (2013), whose findings are based on field work data collected through interviews, focus group discussions and direct observation of bride price payment ceremonies in western Uganda. Asiimwe argues that commercialization of bride price has changed the practice and its original meaning has been eroded making it a constraining transaction. Moreover, some young men face hurdles in trying to meet the demands of this practice especially those with inadequate resources, hence resorting to alternative ways of raising these amounts like selling off family property or getting bank loans (ibid).

Similarly, Emmanuel (who paid bride price twice in 1990 and 2014- for different wives) holds a view not so different from that of Charles. He cites some of the implications that come along with the new trends arguing that:

(...) *Kwanjula* of these days just leaves people with debts. People do it to show off; they bother others calling for meetings to solicit resources to help in the preparations which I find inappropriate. Those many demands are now scaring away young men from marrying because they cannot afford to meet the expenses. (Emmanuel 50, paid bride price twice 1990 & 2014)

Emmanuel's argument resonates with Scott (2007) who argues that contemporary relationships between men and women go beyond the functional utility of the kinship system which was previously an element of gender construction and a strong support of communal affairs such as marriage. As a result, to assume full position as a recognized married man among the Baganda, some people have resorted to calling friends and well-wishers to pool resources in addition to what their kinsmen can offer them. To Scott, such changes are brought about by changes in the economy and polity which are part of the elements that construct gender in contemporary times.

### **Conflicting participant views on the new trends in the bride price institution**

Participants in this study had differing views on the state of affairs as far as bride price trends are concerned. While Rose, Harriet, Lillian, Ken, Favor, Angel and Pross tend to see contemporary trends as expensive and full of unnecessary exaggerations, Gerald and Jessica hold different opinions:

Well, for me I have no problem with people taking as many things as they wish as bride price. For me I see it as an expression of love, somebody is simply showing how much he loves his wife. If you have made your money and you are comfortable, why not take whatever you want in whichever way you please as long as you are not coerced to do so? For me, these new trends are ok; after all, not everybody can afford to do *kwanjula*. People are simply showing that they are happy and lucky for having got a spouse. It is just a life style; some people have made their money and want to show it off. It is a dot com world where people are so exposed and entitled to do things as they wish. However, I do not agree with people who do *kwanjula* in hotels, it is a cultural event that should be done in the bride's ancestral home not anywhere else. (Gerald 42, paid bride price in 1999)

Gerald's submission above highlights a number of changes bride price tradition and the factors responsible. These shall however be explored extensively in the next chapter.

In all, the custom of bride price has undergone a series of changes to-date entailing new styles of payment, packaging and procedures. However, despite cultivating a mixture of interpretations and reactions as portrayed by participants, the tradition seems to have gained more popularity especially among young people (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Needless to mention, despite the persistence of this cultural tradition; its basic form, procedures and significance have significantly shifted. The next chapter explores the inspirations and reasons for the changes in the tradition. These perhaps shall provide answers to its continued persistence and popularity.



## CHAPTER SIX

### INSPIRATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN BRIDE PRICE

In this chapter, I explore the inspirations and reasons for modern day trends in bride price.

#### 6.1 The advent of event management companies

The reign of Kabaka Mutebi II has witnessed many mushrooming event management companies whose existence has brought along many changes in bride price tradition. Being profit oriented entities, these companies employ many tactics to entice customers: for example, they provide dance and entertainment troops, security brigades, trending decorations, cake styles, master of ceremony services among other things some of which compromise the ethics and protocol that ought to be followed at such traditional events. Seventy four year (74) elder Samali expresses her disappointment at these event management companies:

(...) I cannot understand why people have changed this custom so much. Every occasion I attend, I witness different things. Some new things are good, but others are disgusting. These hired spokes persons exaggerate and say things that are shaming and not supposed to be said at such functions. They are just after money, so they end up misleading the owners of the function and adding things which are not right. For example, those different age-groups that come out to greet the guests while dressed in uniform clothes, for us we did not have them. Where would one get all that money to waste on hiring uniform clothes? These things to me have made the whole function so expensive and I believe it has hindered many young men from taking wives. (Samali 74, female elder)

However, being a stakeholder in the events management business, Faisal defends his job, he argues that:

As spokes persons, our job is to lead either the bride or groom's side through the process in the right procedure the custom is supposed to be done. However, this is a job, and you know that in every business, the customer is king. Sometimes we guide our clients on the right procedures and things to do, but they won't listen. They keep insisting that it is their money and that they are the owners of the function and not us. At times they dictate things they have seen elsewhere maybe in another culture and they insist that they want us to include the same in their functions. To some extent, our hands are tied because we do not want to fall out of business, but rather give our clients services that are worthy their money. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

Faisal's argument resonates with some of the assumptions said to characterize modern, neo-liberal societies like; high drive for progress, innovativeness, capitalism and a high profit orientation with no tolerance to anti-profit and anti-modernity beliefs and practices (Inglehart & Baker, 2000) Faisal's response is evident of the high drive for innovativeness and profit

maximization by companies. On the other hand, it also points at the desire for new styles by the clients to the extent that they care less about keeping the *kiganda* tradition pure, but rather merge it with styles from other societies (local and international) just to get what they desire. Inglehart and Baker (2000, p. 20), argue that economic development has a systematic and, to some extent, predictable cultural and political consequences which are not iron laws of history per se, but rather probabilistic trends. Nevertheless, probability is high that certain changes in many spheres of life will occur (ibid).

## **6.2 Bureaucratization of the tradition**

Some changes in bride price have been brought about directly by Kabaka's government in abide to solicit funds to run kingdom affairs. For example, each couple must buy two certificates one in the name of the bride and the other in the name of the groom. The other certificate is the official document that shows that the two have married culturally which costs seventy thousand Uganda shillings (20USD or approximately 180 Norwegian kroner). Also, the map of Buganda is another document that grooms must present at *kwanjula* ceremonies: this is an attempt to educate people of the geographical boundaries of Buganda. Additionally, two portraits one of the Kabaka and the other of *Nabagereka* (queen) must also be presented. In the same way, to boost afforestation in Buganda, the groom must also present a tree seedling to the bride's family which must be planted at the bride's familial residence. The above items must be bought from the kingdom headquarters in Bulange Mengo. All the above directives are new components added into the bride price institution but were initially not part of it. Meanwhile, all these items cost money and have been declared mandatory implying an extra cost for the groom to meet if he must complete payment.

**Photo 4:** A photograph of in-laws displaying certificates/potraits from Buganda kingdom to the brides' family



**Source:** From Emmanuel's *kwanjula* album

### **6.3 Competition and Bandwagon Effect**

In today's world, there seems to be a big drive for people to do things like or even aim higher than what others did. Drawing from participant responses, the desire to show off and do it better than others is seemingly one of the greatest inspirations for new trends in bride price. People yearn to do things that ought to make them outstanding from the crowd. Emmanuel who has paid bride price twice (for different women) within a difference of fifteen years expressed his opinion in this way:

In my own view, I think the desire to show off and compete with others is the greatest cause of all this. Some people go to the extent of lying that they have brought cars and land tittles as bride price yet in actual sense it is not true. They just rent new cars from car bonds, show it to people at the ceremony, and later drive it back to car bond. I wonder why people do not want to live within their means! (Emmanuel 50)

Similarly, 36 year old Pross whose bride price was paid in 2002, shares a view in line with Emmanuel's. She argues that:

Women these days are so competitive. They aim to do more than what others did, and they end up exaggerating things. Can you imagine some women do not even host the events in their parents' homes but rather take them to hotels just because they do not want people to discover their humble backgrounds! Women even hire 'parents' and 'sengas' instead of their biological parents simply to display a higher social status than what they are in reality. It is unbelievable! (*exclaims in dismay*). Others send away eligible suitors simply because they are waiting for wealth men who can afford to bring many things, and before you know it, they are too old to attract serious men. They end up becoming single mothers. (Pross 36, separated)

The concerns of ‘hiring’ parents and *sengas* raised by Pross in the above extract are fascinating and attest to findings of Tamale Sylvia (2006). While exploring the *senga* institution in the past and present among the Baganda, Tamale (2006) attests to increased ‘surrogacy’ in traditional institution of marriage among the Baganda. Using data gathered through interviewing commercial *sengas* in the capital Kampala, coupled with tales of oral tradition and popular beliefs, Tamale (2006, p. 89) argues that the present *senga* institution comprises of both ‘conservative’ elements that will not bend from century-old practices and ‘progressive’ ones that go with the modern times. Tamale sights age, education, intermarriages and growing information technology as influential factors; with young and more educated individuals who have found a missing gap in the marriage institution and have decided to take it up for a pay. Tamale makes mention of the growing phenomenon of commercial *senga* services in the capital Kampala, where print and electronic media have adopted *senga* columns and call in programmes, a thing that has transformed the institution into a modern and capitalist economic practice within a liberalized market economy (Tamale, 2006, pp. 89-90). She however acknowledges that despite the changes, the ancient and modern norms coexist though in a delicate manner. Suda (1996), attributes the growth of ‘surrogate parentage’ to modernization and delocalization processes which have negatively impacted on child-rearing practices. Nowadays, there are many young people in Africa who are growing up or working in the urban areas away from the influence of their rural kin, particularly their mothers and grandmothers (Suda, 1996).

#### **6.4 Desperacy and desire for elevated social status and recognition**

While people strive to stand out from the crowd, they are also aiming at elevating their social status in family and society around them. Bride price payment being a communal affair that attracts attention from outsiders, many find it an ideal opportunity to prove to others of their worth, economic and social status. Faisal a commercial *kwanjula* spokesperson recounts one instance where both bride and her father were desperate for social status and impression:

(...) At one event I officiated, the father of the bride had two daughters. The younger daughter’s bride price was paid before her elder sister. So, the elder sister pressurized her boyfriend to come pay her bride price too, but the boyfriend seemed not to have sufficient resources. However, he succumbed to the pressure and agreed to do as his girlfriend desired. On the day of the event when all was set at the bride’s home, we waited for the groom and his people, but they kept saying they were on their way to the function. When we could not wait any longer, the father of the bride called the groom and went to meet them were they were stationed. On seeing the items the groom had managed to mobilize, he felt they

were not good enough to be presented as bride price in his home. He thus went to a supermarket and bought more items that he felt befitting to his status and added these to the ones the groom had already purchased. He then rushed home ready to receive his in-laws. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

Faisal's narration above echoes Erving Goffman's theory of impression. Goffman (1978) explains how individuals create, maintain, defend and enhance their social identities through 'acting out' the-would be reality. The goal is usually to gain an advantageous first impression before others (those watching). Goffman uses the metaphor of a 'stage' as a space where individuals act out their 'play'. The 'actor' creates desired impressions through socialization with the 'audience' and in reality the 'audience' transforms the performance of the 'actor' into reality.

In normal setting of tradition among the Baganda, a scenario such as one described by Faisal above is totally unacceptable and out of order. But because people are desperate to impress others and attract an assumed status in the community, they seem to make effort to paint a better picture to outsiders. Besides, the social benefits that accrue from the custom of bride price are also enormous and an envy of many. It is an open avenue for people to gain respect and recognition before others as expressed by 25 year old Angel whose bride price was paid in 2017:

(...)When my husband was shopping the items, I remember telling him that am ok with whatever he brought as long as he did not bring items that would shame me before my family and friends. Though what he brought was average, they were just enough to earn me respect among my people. (Angel 25, married in 2017)

Meanwhile, the yearning for benefits is not only on the bride's family but also on the groom's family. Harriet's narration reveals that the family of her suitor influenced the kind of items he presented as bride price on her head because they wanted to earn utmost respect before their in-laws:

(...) yes, they did, in fact they were the ones that advised him to bring sofa set. They said he should bring a big and recognizable item that would earn them respect before his wife's family. (Harriet 25, married 2017)

However, benefits accruing from bride price do not only favor women but men as well and could perhaps be one of the inspirations for new trends in the custom. There seems to be a unique importance attached to quantity of items and the glamour that comes with it as expressed by 50 year old Emmanuel:

Well, it earns me respect as a man and love from my in-laws. For example, after I paid bride price for my first wife, everywhere I passed in the community, people recognized me and would say; 'that is the man who brought a lot of items to marry

so and so' (*name of bride withheld*). I then realized that amongst all the in-laws who had married in that family, I was the one who brought the biggest quantity of items. I became popular and my wife recognized me more as her lawful husband. Any time I walked into my in-law's compound, I walked with confidence (*smiles widely with a sense of satisfaction*). (Emmanuel 50 paid bride price twice 1990 & 2014)

This seemingly implies that the bigger the quantity of items, the better the benefits to the groom which definitely impacts masculinities. However, the influence of bride price on masculinities shall be expounded extensively in chapter eight.

## **6.5 Influence of Religion**

As earlier mentioned in the previous chapter, the coming of Christianity and Islam did not leave bride price tradition the same. Introduced during Kabaka Mutesa I's regime, Islam (around 1844) and Christianity (between 1862-1879), the two religions started to gain followers through the efforts of Christian missionaries and Arab traders who aimed to achieve political ambitions by first gaining a firm grip on Buganda which was the most established monarchy of that time in Uganda (Taylor, 1958). Narratives of seven participants reveal that religious aspects and doctrines shaped their bride price processes and decisions. For example; Favor who met her husband by efforts of her relative and religious leaders at a worship house narrates that:

(...) My family did not ask for many things. We the Baganda just ask for *omutwalo*. The rest were just mandatory items and other items that my husband deemed befitting. But for us, instead of the gourd of local brew '*tonto*', they brought soda because we are Christians. (Favor 37, divorced)

The case was the same with Pross, Rose, Harriet, Angel, Charles and Emmanuel; local brew carried in a gourd was substituted with a crate of bottled soda on grounds of Christian values. Since *tonto* (local wine) is alcoholic, it is unacceptable under Christian norms to carry alcohol to the in-law's home let alone drink it or even encourage others to drink it. As established by Roscoe (1901, p. 122), acceptance of local wine by the bride's family was the most important gesture that legalized betrothal, and a sufficient symbol that could be referred to in future if any disputes arose concerning the legality of the marriage. There is a local saying in luganda (local dialect): '*omwenge gwegwagula nyabo*' translated as '*my mother was bought by alcohol*'. The literal meaning of this local saying is that; local wine was an equivalent to some form of currency by which a man 'bought' someone's mother from her parents. It is not established however, if the soft drinks like soda carry an equal significance (legal component) to the marriage

like the local wine did in olden days. In my interview with fifty year old Emmanuel, he mentioned that when he paid bride price for his first wife in 1999, he presented a full gourd of local wine. However, after her death, he joined the Pentecostal church where he met his new wife. This time round, he presented a crate of bottled soda in place of the local wine because his new found faith forbids drinking and/or encouraging others to drink alcohol. The two pictures below demonstrate the contrast.

**Photo 5:** Photographs showing one group carrying a crate of soda and another group carrying a gourd containing local brew



**Source:** From Angel & Ken, and Emmanuel's *Kwanjula* album

In the same vein, under the umbrella of religion, Pross held her bride price event at the home of the religious leaders in whose home she had stayed for some time, other than her biological parents' home where it ought to be held. She tells that:

(...) I was staying at a pastors' house, and the mother of that pastor realized that I was a well-behaved girl. She introduced me to the man; we talked and later agreed to marry. (...) I was under the care of good Samaritans who offered a roof over my head, that's where we held the function. The event itself was difficult for us to organize. At a certain point we even wanted to give up because of scarcity of resources, but the pastors got involved and mobilized a few resources. (Pross 36, separated)

From the above narration, it is evident that religion does not only affect the type of items in the bride price package, but also affects how and where people find marriage partners, and the decisions they make. It is also evident that through religion, people find social capital; people who care and support them, as well as help in the mobilization of resources to accomplish the marriage rite. This implies that apart from blood relations/kins where people previously sought

social support especially in matters like marriage, religious institutions have taken part of that responsibility in contemporary times.

In Scott's theory (2007), she posits that *gender is a primary way of signifying relationships and power*; thus, changes in the organization of social relationships always corresponds to changes in representations of power, though the direction of change is not necessarily one way. Scott (ibid) cites cultural symbols that evoke multiple but contradictory representations of men and women. These could be religious, educational, legal or political doctrines that carry along normative concepts that set forth interpretations which limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities. For example, in Christianity, Eve and Mary as symbols of women portray a mythical juxtaposing of darkness versus light, pollution versus purification, and corruption versus innocence (ibid). Asked of the Christian stand on payment of bride price, Charles a forty five year old Pentecostal pastor gives an Old Testament metaphor in the Bible:

Christianity supports bride price. You see, in the Old Testament, Laban worked for seven years rearing Laban's (father-in-law) flock as bride price to marry Leah. Even when he was duped and given Racheal in place of Leah, he worked another seven years in order to marry the woman of his desire. Even Isaac the son of Abraham paid lots of expensive items as bride price to marry Rebecca. (Charles 45, Pentecostal pastor, married since 2004)

Religious doctrines such as that stated by Charles reinforce the act of men working hard to pay bride price as a prerequisite to marry. To Scott (2007), such *normative concepts* invoke and reinforce symbolic representations by defining what is perceived to be an ideal male/female social position. Scott cautions that we should be aware of the contexts in which such representations are invoked. However, in this case (bride price payment), the Christian and cultural representations of men working hard to collect and pay bride price seems to be in harmony. They could, however, have disagreements in other dimensions. Meanwhile, in the Christian circles, a couple is considered officially married only when they are wedded in church. This means that even when bride price is fully paid, the couple is seen as 'not married' under Christian standards, though payment of bride price and approval of the bride's parents is a prerequisite for a church wedding to take place. As such, *kwanjula* events of today especially by Christian couples have in away turned into engagement events where grooms put engagement rings onto their brides and announce dates of church wedding, which was not the case before the coming of Christianity. It should be noted however, that under the traditional setting in Buganda, once bride price is paid, the couple is officially declared married. This kind of marriage is



regarded as *customary marriage* and is fully recognized by the 1995 constitution of the republic of Uganda.

However, Suda (1996), notes that even though religion demands that people wed in church for the marriage process to be complete, many young people today are reluctant to commit themselves to a life-long church marriage, and as such, many African Christians do not marry in church even though they are still considered to be ‘properly’ married. Suda attributes the hesitation to the strictness of the Christian doctrines of marriage where it is considered a covenant for life, a sacrament and an enduring relationship of love and fidelity: which virtues are becoming more difficult to uphold today in the context of delocalized moral values and increased marital problems (Suda, 1996). Moreover, the emergency of several options that are viewed as replacements for mutual commitment to marriage (Suda, 1996), has also fostered people’s hesitation to commit to church marriages. Though religion considers the notion of marriage as an indissoluble union, Suda (1996), argues that such notions are no-longer widely upheld and respected: implying that the moment things begin to go wrong in a marriage, despite the couple being wedded in church, the likelihood of partners quitting is big since the moral basis for people to stay in unhappy and violence riddled marriages is fast losing its grip.

## **6.6 Influence of the media on the marriage institution**

In many neo-liberal societies, there is likelihood for increased innovativeness and high influence of the media. The situation is not any different amongst the Baganda of Uganda. In the recent past, there has been a sprout of media houses particularly privately-owned television stations. Over the weekend, almost all of them broadcast editions of *kwanjula* events. These usually have sponsors, but the broadcasts are also paid for by the couples. The implication of such broadcasts is that people get exposed to a variety of what others did at their events which influences them to do the same or even better than the ones they see over the television. Pross expressed concern over the influence of such broadcasts:

(...) With these many television stations now days, people want to do what they see in the functions that are broadcasted. They aim to do more than what others did, and they end up exaggerating things. Can you imagine people even do not do the events in their parents’ homes but rather take them to hotels just because they do not want society to discover their humble backgrounds when the event is broadcasted over television? They prefer to film the event in a better-looking place like a hotel than in local environments of their ancestral homes. You know people watch television all over the country, so people who know the couple could be watching as well. (Pross 36, separated)

Further still, other social media platforms have influenced the way of life of many people which has brought about a number of changes. Rose points out some of the ways through which social media popularity and increased usage of the internet has affected the tradition:

You see, the world has changed, and people love trendy things. It is now fashionable for people to make those around them aware of the happenings in their lives by posting continuous updates of their status on social media platforms like Facebook, twitter, whatsapp, Instagram, snapchat etc. And as you know, everybody desires to post the best of themselves which forces people to invent new things on their functions that shall make them outstanding and attract lots of likes and comments when they post pictures. (Rose 28, married in 2017)

### **6.7 Materialism, opportunism and compromised parental responsibilities**

Responses from several participants also reveal that there is growing affection for material things by parents and their daughters. This could be one of the causes for the increase in the demands by parents to the suitors who wish to marry their daughters. For example, Pross observes that:

Parents have given up on their primary responsibilities. They have become rather too materialistic and disregarded the real gist of the matter. They just pressurize their daughters to bring wealthy men who will bring more things than the ones their neighbors' daughter brought. That is why these days, people end up with lots of debts and bank loans after *kwanjula* ceremonies because the demands are rather too many. Unlike parents of long ago whose concern was what family their child was marrying in and how virtuous people in that family were. Those days, that was the most important issue, not material things like we see today. (Pross 36, separated)

Harriet holds a similar view with that of Pross. However, Harriet argues that it is not only parents who are materialistic but even girls of these days have grown too fond of material things than it was before. She argues that:

(...) This situation is two sided; sometimes the parents are so demanding that they pressurize their daughters to find rich men who will bring many things. But also, sometimes the girls too are demanding. For example, I have a friend who comes from a humble background. When she was going to marry, she and her family asked her boyfriend to bring all household items as bride price. But the man could not afford to do that, and he refrained. Up to now, my friend is still unmarried. (Harriet 25, married 2017)

Meanwhile, Lillian attributes all such behavior to poverty and the ever-increasing financial challenges of today's world. She says that:

Poverty! (*says out emphatically*). You see, people are poor, and they think that they can get whatever they cannot afford to buy by asking their in-laws to bring it. For example, if the parents of the girl do not have television, sofa and fridge in their house, the moment their daughter brings a man home, they jump at that opportunity and put it upon the in-law to bring those items. (Lillian 35, separated)

However, this seems not synonymous with all parents; some of them do not pressurize the suitors of their daughters with many demands. Ken's response attests to that effect:

(...) we discussed things with my partner and her parents did not make life difficult for me. They told us to make a choice depending on our pocket, they never specified anything. (Ken 29, paid bride price in 2017)

### **6.8 Change in peoples' perceptions of love and marriage as an institution**

As the world changes, perceptions that people hold of certain things do not remain the same. Such changes come along with changes in perception, behavior, norms and institutional set ups. Jessica who has been married for the past twenty years, made an observation in that direction when asked about the changes in bride price:

(...) People no longer consider love as the basis for marriage. They just rush with whoever can afford to bring a lot of items to their parents because it is fashionable for ones' husband to bring many things. That is why marriages today are failing; people do not marry their friends but are only interested in what the other party has to offer. This has undermined the marriage institution a great deal because now days divorce is the order of the day. (Jessica 36, married since 1999)

Jessica's observation resonates with thirty seven year old Favor's regrets, who married in 1999 and got divorced in 2011 after twelve years of marriage. She laments that:

(...) For me I was unfortunate, my marriage was just arranged. I did not marry my friend, but rather a stranger who came in the name of wedding ring. Sometimes I am tempted to think that there wasn't true love between the both of us. (Favor 37, divorced)

The failure of Favor's marriage to work yet is was an arranged marriage contradicts Faisal's argument who earlier on in chapter five mentioned that such arranged marriages lasted longer than those of today where couples make own choices. It is therefore relative and rather not absolute that arranged marriages work out better.

### **6.9 Influence of formal education on the bride price tradition**

Before the invasion of colonial masters, education in Africa was perceived to be a way of preparing children for adulthood responsibilities, and was inseparable from other segments of life: because one did not only acquire education, but lived it on a daily basis (Boateng, 1983, p. 322). One was a student of life throughout one's life time on earth, learning different aspects of worldly reality as life unfolded (Wa Thiong'o, 1992). This form of learning was a way of sharpening ones' common sense in life and one never ceased to learn until death, because life itself was believed to be a lesson (ibid). The tools used to disseminate such learning included

fables, myths, fare tales, proverbs, parables, legends among others; which was done orally at home, around the fire place or even as people went about their daily business (Boateng, 1983). It was a continuous process throughout childhood, and largely dependent on one's memory because no notes were taken. Upon invasion of colonialists, there came a new form of education where children are entrusted to a professional teacher who teaches them a new language, new skills, how to read, write and new ways of relating to the world. The lessons are divided into subjects each tackling a specific aspect, there are well developed school curriculums, systematic plans, tool kits, text books and other teaching aids: which guide 'formal' education throughout the different stages of the child. Unlike the then existing native education, formal (colonial) education is completed at a certain standard and certificates are awarded on completion. People take different specialties and pursue specific careers in order to attain paid employment, for self-actualization and other personal reasons. Needless to mention is the fact that formal education influences those that undertake and embrace it in one way or the other, inclusive of perceptions about life, choices to make, when and how to do things, and generally how to relate with the world around them. Education promotes critical thinking which connects language, power and knowledge, transforms relationships and promotes more ethical actions because it encourages educators and learners to engage critically with multiple perspectives (de Andreotti, 2014). Due to the many demands and long periods children spend in acquiring formal education, parents incur enormous expenses in maintaining children in school, ensuring wellbeing and fruitful completion of the education ladder. In that vein, many parents tend to look at their educated children as 'social capital' through whom they stand to gain or harvest the effort and/or resources invested while educating and nurturing them. A similar notion protrudes in the narration of seventy four year old Samali:

...In this generation, child nurturing and education has become very expensive. Children of now days are so costly; parents forego many things and spend lots of money on their children. Educating a child to university level is so expensive. In our days, we used to dress our babies in nappies; you could buy two nappies and use them until the child makes 3 years. But now it is a generation of pampers, mothers no longer use nappies. So, if a man has the ability to bring plenty items, it is very ok and reasonable to bring them to compensate the parents for the effort invested in nurturing and caring for their daughter. (Samali 74, female elder)

From the above extract, it seems parents expect many returns out of the girl child. What fascinates me is that not one amongst the thirteen participants looked at the other side of the continuum. My concern is that; is it only the girl child that parents toil to nurture and educate?

Boys too are children whom parents equally strive to nurture into virtuous and educated beings. But at the time of marriage, more value seems to be placed on the educated woman and little concern for the man. It should be remembered however, that among the Baganda, bride price is the norm and not dowry. Perhaps, situations could be different in societies where women present dowry to groom's families in order to marry.

Furthermore, due to the long ladder of education levels, children spend more time in school which influences marital age, since many tend not to consider marriage before completion of higher education. However, Parkin and Nyamwaya (2018) argue that; much as such structural factors as rising educational levels among girls may indeed delay the age at which they marry, such factors do not operate equally throughout society. This implies that in some societies, not all girls enroll for higher education. Moreover, some others could be cohabiting with spouses while still in school. From my participant list, only one female mentioned that she was cohabiting while at university and later married officially.

**Table 4:** Showing the educational level and age of participants per gender at start of marriage

Level of education	No. of participants	No. per gender		Age at marriage per gender	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Primary</b>	5	2	3	Charles (30) Emmanuel (21)	Pross (19) Lillian (16) Samali (19)
<b>Secondary</b>	4	2	2	Gerald (22) Faisal (30)	Jessica (16) Favor (17)
<b>University</b>	4	1	3	Ken (27)	Angel (23) Harriet (23) Rose (26)
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>		

From the analysis above, it is evident that female participants married earlier than male participants regardless of educational level. On average, females married earliest at 16 and highest at 26, while for males; earliest was 21 and highest at 30. However, female participants with university education have a higher marital age (between 23-26), while their counterparts with primary and secondary education have a lower marital age (between 16-19). This implies that the more girls stay in school, the higher their marital age. On the side of males, it is quite different, while Ken a university graduate married at 27, Charles and Faisal with primary and secondary education respectively, married at 30. It is therefore possible that factors influencing

marital age could be different among men and women: while education level may be a pivotal factor among females, the case maybe different among males.

Education also has an influence on how and where people meet spouses. Under formal education, some schools in Uganda have boarding sections where children stay for long periods of time. As a result, many children spend much of their time away from home or in environments where the parents have little or no influence over what they do or learn. They are either in boarding schools or watching television when they return from school. This partly explains the lesser involvement of parents in choice of marriage partners for children.

### **6.10 Diminishing family ties and increasing individualism**

In the initial social set up of Buganda society, life was communal. People lived together sharing property, food, land and other resources as well as social support. As such, child nurturing, upbringing and socialization was a communal responsibility since children belonged to the whole community and not to individuals (Wa Thiong'o, 1992). Whenever somebody's child in the family was due for marriage, all family members and close relatives would be concerned and involved offering all the support that they could. But today, for several reasons like migration, urbanization and education (Suda, 1996), families live far apart and may not be in close contact to know what happens in other family members' house. Thus, young people end up hiring strangers (surrogate relatives) to take up very sensitive positions like that of '*senga*' and '*kojja*' during bride price payment (as discussed in chapter five). Moreover, some people spend their entire life in towns ignoring their ancestral homes in villages. At the time their daughters are due for marriage, it may be difficult for them to hold events in the long abandoned village residencies. They hence end up hiring hotels in case their town compounds are not big enough to accommodate their guests. Narrations of different respondents testify to this:

(...) today families are far apart unlike in old time where all people in a village would be blood relatives. In case of any function whether joy or sorrow, one would rely on the support of family members, they would be there in person, they would also contribute on the food, firewood, fetching water, cooking and building the tent. But today, everybody is on their own busy looking for money. They don't even have the time to attend such functions. (Emmanuel 50, paid bride price twice)

To Charles (a pastor), biological relations seem very important perhaps due to the biblical doctrines that hold respecting parents in high esteem.

(...) you see children of these days do not even know their relatives. They are born and raised in town and their parents do not find it important to take them to villages to spend time with other family members, how do you expect them to know their aunties, uncles and grandparents? That is why you see them hiring these town based *sengas* and *kojjas* because they have even never met their blood relatives who would take up such positions. For me as a pastor, I usually advise brides to make use of their blood relatives, but one told me that she had not met her biological *senga* before not even for once, so she couldn't allow her take up that position. (Charles 45, pastor married since 2004)

However, as earlier argued by (Tamale, 2006) that many money oriented individuals (surrogate relatives) have mushroomed especially in urban areas after identifying the missing gaps of blood relations it may be difficult to maintain the olden ways of doing things. Moreover, they (surrogates) could be playing the roles 'better' in a spiced up and enticing manner since to them, it is a business venture from which they earn money. Hence, the absolute significance of biological parents to them could be secondary and perceived as a non-profit tendency.

In her exploration of the centrality of women in the moral teachings in African Society, Suda (1996, pp. 77-78) established that; In contemporary Africa, factors such as missionary activities, urbanization, migration and distortions of African family traditions have conjointly produced a new system of moral order and family dynamics which have changed the meaning and character of certain social institutions such as marriage. The family is in transition as a result of urbanization, Christian teaching, formal education, and male labor migration, monetization of the economy, erosion of traditional family values, feminism and other modern social forces. Traditional ideas about proper behavior are frequently replaced by moral imperatives from 'outside'; economic decolonization has weakened the moral power of the clan. The tire down of the moral fabric of African traditional societies has undermined previously valued notions over things like virginity. As already seen in the previous chapter, virginity especially for brides was emphasized and was a source of prestige once one was found a virgin at her first sexual encounter with her husband: a reward awaited her parents as a token of appreciation for keeping her pure, while those found not to be virgins were ridiculed and perceived to be morally lose and lacking. Today, such emphasis has seemingly broken down since many people cohabit before official marriage.

The power of the extended family and other social groups with moral authority of parents over children has also weakened, whilst women's moral responsibilities in the family are also being re-defined. Obbo (1987, p. 268) notes that; modern trends of marriage are characterized by less respect for and involvement of elders and parents in the affairs of the children, which has weakened the traditional moral influence of the family on its members. Increased social and physical mobility has also led to a great deal of freedom for the youth and the weakening of the moral authority of parents and the elders. The result is seen not only in the generation gap but, in some instances, in the clash between the older and the younger generations (Ngubane, 2018). An example in case is mentioned by Faisal who laments over the declining loyalty of the young generation to the Kabaka and kingdom decrees:

(...) the generation of kabaka Mutebi's regime is quite rebellious. I remember there was a time when the *Katikiro* Charles Peter Mayiga (reigning prime minister of Buganda kingdom), got concerned over the way things were getting out of hand at *kwanjula* events, and made a declaration that people should go back to observing the right procedures of how the event is supposed to be done. However, people just paid a deaf ear and continued doing things as they pleased. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

It is therefore evident, that waves of change operational in contemporary times are beyond the kingdom traditional institution (the chief custodian of tradition), and have definitely not left traditional practices like bride price the same.

After a thorough exploration of inspirations to changes in bride price processes and procedures, the next chapter explores patterns of gender relations in bride price payment and how they influence dis (empowerment).



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BRIDE PRICE, GENDER RELATIONS AND (DIS) EMPOWERMENT

Findings from the previous two chapters have revealed so much about how the tradition of bride price payment, processes and events surrounding it, position men and women before, during and after payment. In this chapter, I attempt to analyze how gender relations in payment of bride price empower or disempower men and women.

#### 7.1 Choice, decision making and positionality

Drawing from the changes bride price has under gone, it is arguably true that historically, men had more power compared to women, especially in matters of choice and decision making. As presented in chapter five, choice of marriage partners was largely done by parents/elders and sometimes with a little involvement of boys. Girls only waited and prepared themselves for marriage, but the choice of who to marry was not theirs to make. At least some boys to some level would be involved in identifying a bride of their choice, and thereafter inform their parents about the girl they had spotted. They would also be actively involved in soliciting for bride price items from their blood relations. Brides on the contrary were not involved in the preliminary processes of suitor identification, family visits and negotiations of the bride price. In most cases, they would only get to know who their husband would be and what items he and his people brought, on the very day of the event. In chapter five, elder Faisal mentioned that lack of prior knowledge of their husbands and the new family they were to join was many times a shock to the young girls which made them sad and unhappy on the days they married. Many went to their marital homes crying.

However, as time went by, findings show that changes came in; the power of parents to choose marriage partners for their children has been reduced though not completely phased out. Factors like education, influence of mass media, globalization, migration and many more, have had a great impact not only on how young people met, but also how they perceive social and cultural institutions to which they belong. Suda (1996), notes the increasing moral decadence among many African societies resulting into distortion of African family traditions and moral order; a process she refers to as delocalization. Findings of this study show that many people meet and fall in love with men/women of their choice who they later introduce to their parents at least from what participants told. Testimonies from female participants like Rose, Harriet and Angel

indicate that they chose their spouses without coercion and were fully involved in the negotiation processes of the bride price package. The three are all university graduates with ages (at time of marriage) ranging between 23-26. If we go by Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment: '*a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability*' (Kabeer, 1999, p.437), it can be argued that women in recent times have to some level been empowered to make own choices of marriage partners and get involved in the negotiation processes. In agreement with Kabeer is Mosedale (2005, p.252), who defines women empowerment as '*a process through which women redefine and extend their possibilities in situations where they are restricted, relative to men, from being and doing*'. Findings in this study have shown that some women today in Buganda have redefined themselves by going over the restrictions upon them in olden times where they could not make own choices on cardinal life issues such as who and when to marry.

While defining empowerment, Kabeer (1999), argues that attaining empowerment requires three interrelated and indivisible elements. One of the three elements is *resources*: these could be material, human or social resources. Judging from the unifying factor of the three female participants mentioned above, they all possess the educational resource (attained university education). It is therefore possible that resources such as education foster empowerment of women. It is unfortunate however, that not all women/girls have a chance to go to school: even those that start school, may fail to attain higher levels for some reasons which could be institutional, social, cultural or even personal. Impediments on resources such as education could impair Kabeer's second element: *agency* (ability to define ones goals and act upon them, usually thought of as decision making or power within) (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). There is therefore a likelihood that women with less or no formal education possess less bargaining/negotiation/resistance powers concerning crucial choices in their lives compared to women with more education, which affects *achievement*: Kabeer's third element of empowerment. However, Bosak, Eagly, Diekman, and Sczesny (2018) in their study '*Women and men of the past, present, and future: Evidence of dynamic gender stereotypes in Ghana*', assert that although women's education has increased in the recent past, some traditional practices, customs and norms still limit women's options.

Although increased powers to exercise choice as elaborated above appears to be an empowering opportunity for women, elder Samali finds fault with young people choosing who to marry by themselves without the guidance of their parents or elders. Much as she and her husband met by themselves without influence of their parents as she mentions in the interview, she advises that parents ought to be involved in the choice of marriage partners for their children to avoid repercussions in the future that could bring shame by defying custom and tradition. Asked of what she thought of today's marriages and what she wished for her children in the future, Samali responded that:

We should go back to our roots and first investigate families from where one wants to pick a wife from. Men now days just pick girls from the streets and take them for wives. They are never bothered about their family backgrounds, yet it is a vital part in raising a successful marriage. (...) that is why you hear of many abominations today, young people just fall in love anyhow and by the time they realize, both of them belong to the same clan and totem, it is too late. Some girls just realize after marriage that the man they married is a cannibal or a sorcerer, you see! (Samali 74, widowed)

To Samali, making background checks about the person one wants to marry holds importance if the marriage is to flourish and last. However, Suda (1996), argues that due to moral decay (delocalization) in African societies, some young people no longer perceive marriage as a life union that cannot be dissolved. With such perceptions coming up, it is questionable if young people of today have the interest, time and abilities to carry out such 'conservative' background checks as emphasized by 74 year old Samali.

## **7.2 Access and control over resources**

In the two previous analysis chapters, findings reveal that in the past, deciding upon and sharing of the bride price package was mostly men's territory. It is men who decided what the groom should bring and they also apportioned the items to the different family and community members. For example the most important item in the bride price package (*omutwalo*) would be decided upon by the father or most senior male member of the family. From participant's expressions, there are traces of imbalances in property and resource allocation especially in the past though not so different in the present. Seventy four year Samali whose bride price was paid in 1964 recounts how her bride price items were shared:

The items were for parents to enjoy, so they 'ate' (consumed) them. (*comes closer to me in a whispering kind of gesture*), But let me tell you this, I wonder if it is important: from my point of view as a woman, I think our men were selfish

*(frowns her face)*. See! Men of those days were polygamous, during the occasion; wives to the father of the bride were not allowed to be seen outside or anywhere near the guests *(it was/is tradition)*. They could only come out after the in-laws had gone away. You know it is a norm in Buganda that the mother of the bride and the groom are not supposed to get into close contact. However, men of our times were so polygamous; one could have like five wives, and if they got to know the items the father of the bride had received from the in-law, there would be grumbling amongst the wives because each one would want to get an equal share of the items. So, because of men's greed, they did not want their wives to be present while the in-law presented the items. They would then apportion the items as they wished, and the wives would not question them since they would not be in position to know how much was brought. (Samali 74, female elder )

From Samali's narration, it is evident that some gendered norms in the past seemingly had some hidden agendas that selfishly favored one side at the expense of the other. This implies that resources were unequally shared amongst men and women. However, the case is not so different today though there are visible changes especially with changing familial set ups. With the increasing sprouting of single parent households, women have gotten an opportunity to take part or even spearhead pivotal decisions in their children's lives (Nalule, 2015). As already stated in chapter four (4.8.1 my personal experience with bride price), *omutwalo* that my husband brought was decided upon by my mother. It is not that my father was physically absent, but my mother took up that responsibility because of the more active role she played in my up-bringing. Among participants in this study, 25 year old Angel whose bride price was paid in 2017, made mention of how her mother took most of the crucial decisions in her bride price payment despite having elder brothers and other male family members around. However, in Angel's case, her father was already deceased, while in my case, my father was still alive.

There is a sharp contrast between how the bride price of 74 year Samali who married in 1964 and that of 25 year old Angel who married in 2017 were distributed. While Samali was never involved in how the items were distributed, Angel and her mother distributed the items:

As I said earlier, I was actively involved in everything concerning my function. Therefore, I and my mother distributed everything. My mother is my hero; she took care and educated me up to university, so she had to enjoy my bride price. (...) Actually, my dad died some time back so he could not be involved. I have two brothers but they weren't so involved in all this. (Angel 25, bride price paid in 2017)

Similarly, when I posed the same question to 28 year old Rose whose bride price was paid in 2017, she replied:

(...) Since my parents are separated, my husband and I labeled all the items brought especially the major ones. We separated what was to be taken by my father from what belonged to mum; each took what was meant for them. The rest were shared by other family members and the community. (Rose 28, bride price paid in 2017)

The question however lingers, have women actually been elevated from their previous position or their acquisition of such positions and authority is due to the absence/passive nature of fathers/males in families? There is a possibility that the increasing occupancy of previously male dominated spaces by females could be partly attributed to men's 'failure' to execute traditional family roles and responsibilities as expected by society and their passive roles in the lives of their children as they grow up. However, other factors like labor migration, growing awareness of women's rights and feminism, education among others could also be at play. Perhaps a follow up study on this matter would establish concrete answers to this puzzle.

It should be noted however, that despite the increased involvement of females in the negotiation and resource allocation, some men still take a bigger share of the items even in contemporary times as narrated by 25 year old Harriet whose bride price was paid in 2017:

Hmmm, my parents are separated, so we had to divide the items fairly. The sofa set was given to my mother, 25kg of rice and 25 of sugar, a bunch matooke and a few groceries. The cow was sold off and the money was shared, my brothers shared the cocks and the rest of the items were shared out to family members. My father took the bigger share, water tank, television, solar panel, the 50kg bag of rice, and 50kg bag of sugar among other items. (Harriet 25, bride price paid in 2017)

At the two bride price functions I attended while in the field, I witnessed that people are becoming more aware of the unequal distribution of the items between mothers and fathers to the bride especially in instances where the two are separated or divorced. At both occasions, most of the valuable items were labeled with the names of those that were meant to take them. It is becoming more difficult for children to decide where to hold the function and who between the separated parents should take the lead in the preparations. One participant Rose mentioned that her parents were separated and both went their way. When her then boyfriend was ready to come home, she informed both of them, and her father took up his responsibilities as demands

tradition. However, she decided to hold the function at her mothers' residence. She too had the items labeled with names of those she wanted to have them.

Meanwhile, what is outstanding in both past and contemporary times is that; brides have a particular share of the bride price package stipulated and clearly known by custom. Apart from this special package, the rest of the items are for parents of the bride, family and community members. In pre-colonial times, it was bark cloth (Roscoe, 1901) and in present times, it is a suitcase package with an assortment of items as pleases the groom. Asked what her share was in the bride price package, Rose replied:

There is a special suit case that is brought by the groom on that day. This and all its contents solely belong to the bride. It is usually, a *gomesi*, *kikooyi*, petticoat, and knickers that the bride wears as she goes off to her husband's place to commence her marriage. The groom can as well add other items as he pleases. But the rest of the items are for the parents to enjoy. (Rose 28, bride price paid in 2017)

**Photo 6:** A photograph of a bride receiving her special suitcase/gift



**Source:** From Angel and Ken's *kwanjula* album

However, contemporary trends of bride price have seen a twist in how men and women facilitate the payment event and processes. In the past, it was a duty of the groom and his family to solicit all resources and items needed for the occasion. The fact that payment events were smaller and held indoors, the family of the bride always took care of the preparatory expenses within the house. Today however, being that the event has turned big and flamboyant; brides have started adding in their own resources both financially and materially for different reasons. Harriet and

Favor confirmed having invested some financial and material resources in their bride price packages. Favor told that she bought some of the gomesi that were given to her female relatives, and the packing materials in which the gifts were wrapped. Harriet told that she bought one of her bridal gomesi which initially is supposed to be bought by the groom. Traditionally, the groom is supposed to facilitate the bridal attires of the bride on that day (*okwambaza omugole we*).

### **7. 3 Reciprocity and symbolism**

As mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, during data analysis, I allowed room for emerging themes. Two of such themes protruded throughout the process of bride price. These were reciprocity and symbolism and both rotate around gender relations. As men and women relate during the event of bride price payment, there are certain things that bride and groom plus their families expect from each other. For example, the groom is supposed to give a live cock to the brother of his bride symbolizing that they are now officially in-laws. This cock is a gift from the groom to thank the bride's brother for having accepted to give his sister to the groom for marriage. Traditionally, men in Buganda are believed to be custodians of women: so, the bride's brother in whose care the bride is believed to have been all along is given a cock and *kanzu* (traditional attire) by the groom to thank him for taking good care of his sister until another man (husband) takes over her care. Even when the bride has no immediate blood brother with whom they share the same parents, the family must find a male blood relation from among the sons of the bride's uncles to take up that position. In other words, that brother/male figure (*muko*) is a 'symbolic husband' to the bride until her real husband (groom) shows up. By placing women under the 'protective care' of men, tradition intrinsically fosters male power and dominion over women whether intentionally or unintentionally. By custom only one cock is mandatory, but from my observation, grooms now bring as many as they please and give one or more to each of the bride's brothers depending on their financial capabilities. On receiving the cock, the bride's brother hands over the bride to the groom and cautions him to take good care of her. Upon receiving the bride, the groom makes an oral commitment to take good care of the bride, and also pleads with the bride's brother (*muko*) not to receive any other cock from another man. In other words, the bride's brother ought to ensure that the bride remains wife to only this man who has given him a cock and *kanzu*; implying that fidelity of the bride to her husband is emphasized and has custodians that must ensure it. Notably, the groom's fidelity seems not emphasized at this

point. The picture below shows the bride's brother receiving the cock, while the groom asks him not to receive any from another man.

**Photo 7:** A photograph of a groom handing over a cock to the bride's brother



**Source:** From Angel and Ken's *kwanjula* album

In a similar event, once the groom presents the bride price items, the family of the bride must serve him and his entourage a special meal. Amongst the many dishes prepared, there must be a special meal called *óluwombo* purposely prepared for the groom. This must be a whole chicken traditionally spiced, wrapped in banana leaves (*endagala*) and steamed. It however must not contain any salt and is served to him by the bride and her *senga*. This symbolizes that he is officially an in-law in the family. Other members of the groom's entourage are also served with the same delicacy but not a whole chicken to each. Rather, they are served with smaller pieces of chicken, meat and groundnut paste each wrapped separately. Moreover, the groom and a few close family members must be served inside the house of the father to the bride because it is believed that once a man pays bride price for a woman, he becomes a 'child' in the bride's family. So, serving him the first meal as a son born into a new family must be done inside the house. The other members on the groom's entourage and all other guests are usually served out doors since everyone cannot be accommodated inside the house. However, before they are served with the main meal, the father to the bride serves them with coffee beans which symbolizes that the groom is now officially born into the bride's family. For many years, coffee was the main cash crop among the Baganda. It is therefore believed that coffee beans bridge



friendships and partnerships (*muzanganda*), hence it is paramount that the groom and family eat steamed/dried coffee beans in the family where they have found a wife, to seal the friendship and partnership between the families. After eating, he (groom) attaches some money onto the dishes within which he was served as a token of appreciation to the people who prepared the meal. If he does not attach the money onto the dishes, he and his entourage are regarded as uncouth and ungrateful people who do not appreciate those that treat them well.

**Photo 8:** Photographs showing men served with ‘oluwombo’ delicacy after payment of bride price



**Source:** From Emmanuel's *kwanjula* album

Secondary, there is a special package of groceries referred to as ‘*kabbokamuwala*’ literally translated as ‘girl’s basket’ which must be given to the groom as he leaves the bride’s compound. Traditionally, this package is a token of appreciation from bride to the groom thanking him for having fulfilled the *kwanjula* tradition. The package usually contains fruits, cake, drinks and other eatables as pleases the bride, beautifully wrapped in a basket. The bride usually carries it on her head from her father’s house and walks near the groom and kneels before him. The groom then carries the basket off her head and thereafter leaves the bride’s compound, marking the end of the occasion.

**Photo 9:** A photograph of a bride carrying ‘*kabbokamuwala*’ to be given to the groom



**Source:** From Angel and Ken’s *kwanjula* album

#### **7.4 Division of Labour in *Kwanjula***

In the tradition of bride price payment, particular duties are stipulated for men and women. Men largely spearhead decision making and negotiations like deciding ‘*omutwalo*’ and setting the dates of the event. The *Kojja* and grand father of the groom are responsible for coaching the groom and taking him through marital sessions on how to handle his wife and family and perform all marital duties. *Kojja* in particular coaches the groom on sexual prowess and performance. Men are also responsible for out-sourcing the bride price items and ensuring that all must-haves are in place and desirable quantities. It is also a duty of men to take up master of ceremony duties on both the bride and groom’s side; this is solely men’s territory and no woman does it.

On the other side of the continuum, women are charged with all things to do with food, cooking and decorating the venue. Those on the groom’s side are responsible for wrapping the items and putting them in place. The mother, grandmother and *senga* of the bride in particular are charged with coaching the bride in marital and family duties and all tactics of handling her marriage and husband. They must beautify and prepare the bride for her husband a rite known as *ókufumbirira omugole* (cooking for the bride). Just as *kojja* does with the groom, *senga* coaches the bride in sexual matters and takes her through the rites of passage like ‘*okukyalira ensiko*’ (labia elongation) ritual which is still a must do for all baganda girls. Meanwhile, during the event,

women that come along with the groom carry specified items especially the ones in baskets (which are lighter), while men lift the other items that are heavy and carrying these items must follow protocol.

**Photo 10:** Photographs showing men and women carrying bride price items into the bride's compound



**Source:** From Angel & Ken, and Emmanuel's *kwanjula* album

### 7.5 Scenarios of disempowerment

Findings of this study reveal that contemporary trends of bride price tend to put more pressure upon men especially in the financial sense. Drawing from participant responses, the tradition is becoming more and more expensive, exaggerated and modified and it is mostly men who feel the bigger pinch compared to women. This is because it is men who solicit and gather resources used to pay the bride price. Both female and male participants raised concern over this scenario and the possible results that could be detrimental and disempowering especially to women though to some extent, men too are affected if they fail to meet the set societal expectations. In cases where the brides's family asks for many items from the groom, they usually impose a lot of pressure on the girl to stay in the marriage against all odds for fear of returning the bride price to the groom in case the marriage fails. Women in this case become victims of circumstance and sacrificial lambs of their family's greed and materialism. The narration by Pross when asked how contemporary trends of bride price have affected marriages attests to this:

When families demand many items from the groom, they always remind their daughters to behave well and aim at seeing their marriages blossom. They always encourage their daughters to stay in their husbands' homes just by the fact that the man brought many items as bride price. Such families are afraid of the shame that could befall them if their daughters' marriage failed. And you know some men are tough, if the marriage fails, they go back and ask for refund of those items. But it

is hard to refund because the parents would already have consumed everything.  
(Pross 36, separated)

The above extract adds substance to the lawsuit (mentioned in chapter two) filed by Mifumi a women rights advocate project that campaigned for the nullification of refund of bride price incase the marriage failed. Though bride price was not banned, return of bride price in case of divorce was declared null and void. It is not certain however, if this declaration is respected by many, especially the conservative traditionalist. Moreover, many women could be ignorant of the declaration (change in law) and could fall victim in case their marriages failed. However, amongst participants in this study whose marriages no longer stand (2 separated and one divorced), none mentioned that the men demanded for a return of bride price. When asked if the failure of their marriages was in any way related to the bride price their men paid, the three said no. They rather mentioned reasons like poverty, infidelity and not being respected.

## **7.6 Feminization of tradition**

Among the patrilineal Baganda, authority over children belongs to the father's lineage, and the *senga* traditionally has responsibility for educating and guiding her brother's daughters on his behalf (Martínez Pérez et al., 2013; Tamale, 2006). The *senga* is like a female father and a traditional channel for socializing adolescent girls into sex and marriage (Muyinda et al., 2004). The *Senga* tutors girls on sex related issues and prepares them for marriage. The girls are shown and taught how to elongate the labia and to be 'good wives' to their husbands. Alongside the initiation, girls are tutored in the art erotic skills paraphernalia, which encompasses love potions, *obutiti* (waist beads), lovemaking noises' and other tips on marital and sexual matters (Martínez Pérez et al., 2013; Muyinda et al., 2004; Tamale, 2006). Ironically, preparation for adulthood, sex and marriage tended/tends to have more emphasis on the girl child than the boys. Namakula (2009, p. 18) while exploring adolescents' perceptions of sex education strategies in Uganda, attributes this gender imbalance on societal assumption and belief that girls' 'misbehavior' could bring a lot of shame to their parents, family and community. Hence, the *senga* institution that trains and socializes girls into 'well behaved' individuals is held momentarily among not only the Baganda, but across many cultures in Uganda. Even where this institution is not profound like it is among the Baganda, other community elders assume the responsibility of training and socializing girls into 'well-mannered and behaved' adults (wives).

Based on a 12-month mixed methods study carried out in central Uganda with the aim of evaluating *senga* activities and community acceptability of ‘modern’ *sengas*: Muyinda et al. (2004) acknowledge that the *senga* institution is becoming professionalized and incorporated into larger infrastructures concerned with sexuality. In agreement, Namakula (2009) while exploring adolescent perceptions of sex education strategies in Uganda; observes that the *senga* institution has been transformed into a ‘genderless’ commercial arena that no-longer targets only young girls but also sexually mature adults who desire advice and lessons on the art of eroticism, romance and sexual prowess. However, findings from Muyinda et al. (2004), highlight the gender divide in the consumption of the services of this traditional institution, emphasizing a more feminine bend in the tradition. It was revealed that within the one year of the study, a total of 247 individuals made 403 visits to the *sengas* (181 adolescent girls, 48 adolescent boys, 20 adult men and 154 adult women) (Muyinda et al., 2004, p. 72). The fascinating finding however is that: the clients were mostly females who repetitively sought assistance with labial elongation and modern health and sex education. The *sengas* thus provided a linkage between tradition and modernity. The boys who visited the *sengas* mostly did so to obtain condoms and nothing to do with tradition. Meanwhile, of the 123 girls who visited *sengas* as part of this study, 51 (42%) went for advice and assistance with elongating their labia and to seek orientation and training in various techniques and herbs that increase sexual enjoyment (ibid). To me, though the *senga* institution is largely bent on teaches women how to please men sexually, I find it beneficial to women since what they learn also facilitates women’s enjoyment of sex which is very positive.

While exploring the contribution of women to the moral health and uprightness of African society, Suda (1996), explores the centrality of women in nurturing, imparting and upholding societal norms and tradition. Suda argues that the care-giving role of African women has been taken for granted and regarded as a strategic position used to produce and nurture life, but also to instill and ensure sustainability of social values, morals and tradition. This includes teaching personal discipline, sexual morality, requirements of chastity, marital fidelity and family responsibilities (Suda, 1996). Culturally, women are socialized to be relationship-oriented and this process prepares them to be sensitive about the quality of relationships in marriages, families and communities (ibid p.72), thus in many societies in Africa, the survival and success of marriage and family, and the upbringing of young people largely depend on the female population.

The feminization of tradition and culture did not start yesterday; it has existed since time immemorial. Suda (1996) recounts that; Under the traditional family system, African women played a key role in teaching children social ethical and moral values which were part of cultural standards for evaluating 'proper' behavior: where much of the teaching was focused on regulating sexuality and family life in general. Suda further makes note of the gender power imbalance facilitated by the patriarchal system that places African women under more pressure than men to practice what they preach, thus societal expectation about their proper moral behavior pertaining sexuality is tighter compared to what is expected of men. Arguing in agreement, Obbo (1987), while exploring elite marriages in east Africa, adds that; African woman must prove their chastity beyond reproach and thus must remain faithful in their marriages (the emphasis on virginity for females as elaborated in chapter five). This implies that women must be 'good wives' and must socialize their children to be as such to ensure that the marriage institution blossoms.

The next chapter discusses in detail the gendered opportunities and constraints arising from bride price.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### GENDERED OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE BRIDE PRICE INSTITUTION

In this chapter I explore both opportunities and constraints that accrue from bride price to both men and women.

#### **8.1 Opportunities and constraints to men**

Like in any other society, the Baganda have set norms and values that govern their society. Such values are usually yardsticks upon which men and women gain or lose social status. They (norms) may not necessarily be written down, but rather, they are passed from generation to generation through socialization and oral tradition, hence, society has expectations in accordance to those set values. One of such values among the Baganda is that everybody ought to marry and tradition has it that it a man's responsibility to start a family with guidance from his people. However, he does not just swindle away some one's daughter, but rather must observe all due protocol, and one of the key things he must do is to pay bride price for that suitor he wishes to set a family with. Meanwhile, there are also values expected of women: in this regard, a woman must behave in a 'befitting' and 'responsible' manner in order to attract a befitting suitor such that she (woman) can gain the status of 'someone's wife' at some point in her life time. Such feminine and masculine attributes and expectations are portrayed in participants' responses such as that of 42 year old Gerald a singer in a music band who has been married for 20 years:

You cannot be man enough if you never went before the parents of your wife to be known officially. If you just take her *kawundo kakubye edirisa* (eloping), then you are a thief and a coward. Society respects you if you paid your wife's bride price. At least among us the Baganda that's how it is. For instance, my workmates in the band always looked at me as a joker and someone unserious with life. But when I paid my girlfriend's bride price, I took them by surprise; they then started to look at me as a serious man and accorded me due respect. It is something that separates men from boys. Not all men can do it. (Gerald 42, married since 1999)

Drawing from Gerald's point of view, it is arguably true that there are men among the Baganda who for some reasons may not be in position to pay bride price, yet society expects that 'all men' ought to have such capabilities and willingness. However, it is not established if such men are incapacitated due to the nature of bride price transaction or they are just not interested in honoring the norm or getting married. While doing a gender analysis on gender division of labour drawing examples from Asia, Jackson (1999), refers to men who fall short of societal



expectations in their set roles as ‘constrained masculinities’. However, to me constrained masculinities could be only those who are victims of circumstances that are beyond their control, but those who fail to conform as a result of their own choices could not necessarily be regarded as constrained. It is also evident that Kiganda culture regards all men and all women as homogenous groups who view life in a similar manner and that all individuals ought to do as tradition demands. In reality, life could be much more complex than different people view it in differing perspectives not necessarily as the society to which they belong dictates. Moreover, culture is not static: with external influence due to factors like globalization, it is possible that some men could have the capacity to pay bride price, but may opt out for personal reasons. Unfortunately, in tradition based societies, such men risk to be labeled deviant and defiant

It is fascinating however; that newly married Ken (2 years in marriage) has a similar perspective with that of Gerald (19 years in marriage) when asked how beneficial bride price is to him:

To me, it means that you man-up, instead of someone calling you by your name, you get a title ‘*mwami*’ (Mr.) There is a way society sees you in a different manner than before. (Ken 29, married in 2017)

Similarly, responses of some female participants also resonate with and accentuate those of men. Asked how she perceives her husband after payment of bride price, Rose who cohabited with her boyfriend for some time before payment of her bride price responded that:

In the first place, I used to address him as my boyfriend. But now, (*laughs*) he won an award, I now address him as my husband because he was bold enough to take up that step that most men cannot do. Payment of bride price is not something that all men can do. (Rose 28, married in 2017)

Narrations such as those above support arguments by Esen (2004), who asserts that bride price demonstrates capability of the groom’s maturity and capacity to sustain his family. It is arguable however, whether all men who paid bride price are able to sustain their families in the aftermath.

However, when critically analysed, the above conceptualization of using ability to pay bride price as a yardstick to measure who ‘real men’ are among the Baganda, seemingly places a certain group of men as ‘the other’, who are unable to live up to societal expectations. As those able to pay bride price enjoy societal approval and all benefits that accrue, the other (those unable to pay) suffer constraints to maintain the dominant expectations, resulting in two sets of men: one perceived more powerful than the other. Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), refer to these as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. This could come along with shame, low self-esteem,



humiliation, and bullying to the subordinate masculinities who fail to meet the set standards, which Jackson (1999), refers to as ‘constrained masculinities’. A number of responses from participants in this study depict some of such scenarios. When asked how society perceives a man who cohabits without payment of bride price, Harriet replied:

I think every man is supposed to have that ability; he must try and fulfill it. He can at least go and pay a courtesy visit to the parents of the girl and explain his situation, that maybe he is putting resources together but will come later to pay the bride price. (Harriet 25, married 2017)

It is seemingly possible that society places men under pressure to pay bride price to the extent of expecting them at least give reasons for their procrastination and ask for more time from the family of bride.

Asked the same question, Faisal said that:

That is unacceptable in Buganda only that people are not loyal to our customs. The family of the woman cannot respect such a man. Anything he does or tells his wife; her family keeps asking, what did he pay as bride price before he orders you around? Such men become victims of mockery by the public. They are more or less thieves who swindled someone’s daughter without permission. In fact, if the two stay together and have children without fulfilling this rite, the man is supposed to present a goat (s) as fine when he officially comes to pay the bride price because such an act is sacrilege among us. And in such cases, if another man picks interest in that same woman and pays her bride price before the one who was cohabiting with her without payment, the new man becomes the woman’s rightful husband and has no case to answer. And the cohabiting husband cannot seek justice from the parents of the women because culturally, he is not known as an in-law in the woman’s family. He just has to accept his fate and look for another woman. (Faisal 53, professional spokesperson)

However, some female participants like Rose showed concern over such men who cannot catch up with the societal pace and expectations especially in contemporary times where bride price has a more financial component attached to it. She argues that:

(...) These days bride price has changed a lot, some parents demand for lots of items but not all men can afford them. Yes! Bride price is good for us women because it adds value on us and also to our husbands, but it should not be exaggerated. I think men should not be forced to bring what they cannot afford because not all of them are of the same financial status. (Rose 28, married in 2017)

## **8.2 Opportunities and constraints to women**

On the feminine side of the continuum, payment of bride price comes along with social status related opportunities at both individual and group level. For example, when asked what bride price meant in a woman’s life, Rose replied:

I feel proud, honored and valued by my husband because the ultimate meaning of bride price in our culture as Baganda is value addition. The community looks at me as someone of great value, my husband is also respected by family and community members, and it also influences him to honor me. He looks at me as someone of great importance in his life. (Rose 28, married 2017)

Similarly, Favor prides in the social benefits of bride price:

As a woman, you gain value amongst your people and your husbands' people, it is a prestigious thing to leave your parents' house with respect and everybody holds you in high esteem. It also makes people to respect your family. See! If daughters in a man's compound marry with their bride price paid, that man walks in society with his head high. People honor him for raising his daughters well that is why responsible men came to marry them. He is considered lucky and favored among his kinsmen. For example, the heir to my father where we held the function had not held any such function in his compound. He had many daughters, but none of them had done this function, but me (*boastfully pats her chest while smiling*), a daughter to his younger brother, earned him the respect that comes along with *kwanjula*. (Favor 37, divorced)

This implies that the benefits could be individual, but could also be enjoyed by family members and kinsmen.

Newly married (2 years) Angel adds that:

It brings up a sense of ownership. There is that feeling of confidence that you own the marriage and obtain his surname. Everybody in the community recognizes you as his lawful wife. Secondly, it is prestigious to hook a man who is bold enough to officially visit your parents. See, at my work place, we are only two ladies that are legally married. The rest of my colleagues live with their men and even have children, but they have never attempted to pay their bride price. My colleagues say their men give them one excuse after another and keep procrastinating. They always say that they envy us whose men have done the right thing. (Angel 25, married in 2017)

Responses such as those above by female participants defy assertions made by some women rights activists like Mifumi who claim bride price is one of the causes of violence against women to the extent of filing a law suit to advocate for its abolition. Findings in this study attest to some positive aspects of bride price. For example the respect, recognition and approval by family and society, on top of husbands' improved sense of responsibility towards wives. With such testimonies, one can arguably say that bride price in itself may not necessarily breed violence against women, but perhaps the processes surrounding it perpetuate violence in the long run.

In a different perspective, Rose brings forth an equally important gain accruing from bride price:

My position in this marriage changed after payment of my bride price. You see, when a man has not paid your bride price, he tends to take you for granted. He says 'no one knows me in your family even if I marry another woman, I am not questionable'. But since my husband paid my bride price, there is a way he changed, his love and care towards me is not as it was initially. It has improved a great deal. I even asked him one time why the sudden change of attitude, and he said that, now if I mess up, am answerable not only to your parents but the community at large. He is now very mindful of what he does and how he treats me. I now carry his family name and all property we have has been registered in both our names. Surely, I feel confident that I am his legal wife. (Rose 28)

Judging from the response Rose's husband gave when she (Rose) asked him about the sudden change of attitude towards her after payment of bride price; it is a pointer that the said responsibility that Gerald and Ken talk about at the beginning of this chapter does not end with a man paying the bride price. Rather, it ought to be continuous or even bigger throughout the marriage since now the husband is 'officially' responsible for the wellbeing of the woman (wife) under his care, and he is not only answerable to her parents, but the community at large. It also corresponds with the change of responsibility between the male authority over the woman's life (from brother to husband) that I mentioned in 7.2 (reciprocity and symbolism). It could be deducted therefore, that the initial intentions of bride price could have been set for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence of husband and wife with each watching over the other. Unfortunately, unintended outcomes could have overshadowed the intended ones.

Analyzing all the above responses from the female participants, there is seemingly a sense of elevated position and social status of women whose bride price has been paid both in their households and the society. This is depicted through the claimed sense of ownership, recognition, respect and legal status of marriage. When Kabeer (1999 p.437) conceptualizes empowerment, she argues that an empowered individual must be able to make strategic life choices; and such *choices* must be facilitated by *resources* which could be material, human or social. The benefits accruing from bride price as mentioned above, could translate into social and institution resources that could facilitate women empowerment. It is very likely that a woman held in high esteem, respected and valued by her husband and community members is an empowered woman in some sense. There is likelihood that her bargaining/negotiation and resistance powers are reinforced by the material, human and social resources gained through elevated social status and position. More allover, assurance of legal status of marriage also

depicts an elevated status in terms of access and ownership of resources acquired while married. This however, may not necessarily apply to all women whose bride price has been paid; situations may differ in different contexts.

Despite the enormous benefits accruing from bride price on the feminine side, it also comes along with constraints. Drawing from participant responses, the constraints are mostly attributed to effects of contemporary trends where the custom has become a more financial affair but also with lots of material demands. In return, the men tend to regard women as property and mistreat them in revenge of the stress they went through in soliciting the enormous items demanded as bride price. Some of participants' responses below depict such scenarios. 36 year old Lillian who is separated from her husband (was married for 15 years) argues that:

(...) Yeah! After the bride price is paid, you enjoy the legality of your status as a married woman. However, some men mistreat their wives in revenge for the bride price they paid. (Lillian 35, separated)

She however, did not mention that her separation from her husband had anything related to the bride price he paid, though she mentioned mistreatment, infidelity and not being respected.

Another participant Harriet who is 2 years old in marriage expressed her concerns:

(...) Some men fight hard and get those items, but it is to the disadvantage of women, such men think that they actually bought the women and as such maltreat them. Even the family of the man can take advantage of the girl as kind of pay back for having demanded many items from them. She becomes like family property and all family members can treat her as they please because in many cases family members put together resources to enable the man pay bride price. If the woman is staying in an extended family setting, you find that they leave all household chores for her alone to do. She becomes like a prisoner in her husband's house. (Harriet 25)

From a different angle, to some women, payment of bride price is guarantee for them to stay in their husbands' houses even when things are not moving on well, but they feel an obligation to keep going or perhaps to prove a point. Asked what bride price meant for her, Jessica had this to say:

(...) I left my parents' house officially, I didn't elope. This gives me impetus to stay in my marriage profoundly because I came in formally and my parents ate the items my husband brought. So, whatever comes my way, I have to face it and keep my marriage in proper state. That is what marriage-material wives do, they stand firmly to ensure that their marriages work. (Jessica 36, married in 1999)

To Jessica, looks like she is not ready to leave her marriage even at a time things prove difficult. She seems to hold a personal obligation to ensure things work out and perhaps not ready to be ridiculed by family and society as a failed wife. Jessica seemingly holds dear the conservative notions of the traditional African society where marital relations were embedded in a system of moral obligations and anything less than expected, would be regarded as failure. Suda (1996), while discussing women as moral teachers in the African society, argues that culturally, women are socialized to be relationship-oriented and which prepares them to be sensitive about the quality of relationships in marriages. As one fights to keep the marriage going, she keeps her family at the back of her head because if the marriage fails, her family too suffers disgrace and contempt through her failed marriage.

While exploring transformations of marriage in Africa, Parkin and Nyamwaya (2018) argue that marriage payments may act as a grammar in defining male and female roles and relations between young people and elders. However, in Africa, if a man fails to obtain bride price and a wife, he becomes an object of ridicule and disgrace. Similarly, unmarried women do not escape the stigma. Nevertheless, (Parkin & Nyamwaya, 2018, p. 10) attest to the tenacity of the central significance of the Bride price institution throughout Africa in spite of the very many changes it is undergoing and the social implications it holds.

In conclusion, findings of this study show that there are many different views (both positive and negative) on the tradition of bride price. Even though this study has a relatively small sample of participants, the different views are represented.

## CHAPTER NINE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 9.1 Summary

The main objective of this study was to explore contemporary trends in bride price tradition among the urban Baganda and their influence on gender relations and (dis)empowerment. To achieve this objective, the study explored bride price trends and processes in the past (pre-colonial and colonial times), as well as those in the post-colonial period to-date. The study also established inspirations and reasons for contemporary trends in bride price and how these changes influence dis(empowerment) and gender relations. Lastly, the study explored gendered opportunities and constraints that accrue from bride price.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that different participants experienced bride price differently and in differing dimensions. Although each participant shared a unique account of their bride price experience, some experiences were commonly shared by all participants in the study. Since I worked under phenomenological research design (where participants in the research must have experienced the phenomenon under study), all the thirteen participants chosen had an experience with bride price before (either as brides or grooms as well as other positions in the bride price institution). Some of the common experiences shared by all participants include; payment of *omutwalo* and mandatory items (though in different quantities), observance of dress code, having master of ceremonies for both sides, special suit case for brides, bride price items shared by parents and community, outstanding roles executed by *kojja* and *senga*, bride being the center of attention, among other things. On the contrary, there were also peculiar experiences by some individuals for example: some brides held the occasion at other places other than their ancestral homes (where it ought to be held traditionally), some brides extended some financial support to their spouses, in some cases decision making on bride price items was left for bride and groom while in other circumstances it was pronounced by parents. Also some spaces and positions formerly occupied by men were taken over by women especially when mothers took over parenthood without 'active' involvement of fathers. Although many participants (11) made own choices of spouses, two of the participants had spouses who were chosen for them by other people. These two women (one married in 1999 and the other in 2000) were separated/divorced from their spouses by the time of the interview. However, reasons for the failure of their marriages appear not to be connected to bride price.

It was also discovered that modernization, urbanization, migration, increased educational levels, spread of religion and other developments going on around the world are some of the inspirations and reasons for new trends in the bride price tradition among the Baganda. Increased educational levels especially for the girl child have raised marital age, changed ways through which people met and mingle, as well as how people perceive life, marriage and traditions in societies to which they belong. There is increased awareness of rights and freedoms and invention of alternatives to 'conservative' perceptions of traditional norms and customs. The grip and influence of parents and elders upon children is gradually reducing hence weakening the traditional role of family and clan in influencing marriage of young people. Increased role of the media, growing individualism, financial hardships and poverty are all factors that have caused many changes in the bride price institution.

Findings also depict stipulated gender roles in the bride price institution although these are changing over time. Previously male dominated spaces and positions like decision on the bride price package and sharing of gifts are slowly shifting to women especially in cases of absentia of males in active parenting. Brides have also actively gotten involved both materially and financially in preparations which was previously men's space. There are however some gender roles that have not shifted for example the cardinal role of paternal aunties (*senga*) and maternal uncles (*kojja*). Rather, capitalist tendencies of profit maximization have penetrated the *senga* and *kojja* institution with increasing growth of surrogate versions of it, whose main interest is financial benefit.

It was also established that men and women receive substantial benefits from payment of bride price, although some constraints also arise in due course. The most popular benefits (as mentioned by participants) to both men and women are; respect, approval by society, esteem, recognition and value addition. For the men, bride price proves that the groom is man enough to take care of his future family, responsible and serious with life. For the women, bride price is a sign of being virtuous enough to attract a capable suitor, well raised and responsible woman. Males who fail to meet bride price expectations risk becoming victims of ridicule and shame by society members who may regard them failures or weaklings. Likewise, women who fail to attract suitors to pay their bride price are not respected in their societies. Unfortunately, in this study, I did not talk to men who have not been able to pay bride price due to economic or other

reasons. Perhaps their viewpoints might have added interesting information on how it feels not to be able to live up to the ideal societal expectations of a muganda man, or in other words, Buganda hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, I also did not talk to women whose bride price has not been paid. Gathering their viewpoints could also have added more interesting arguments that could be juxtaposed with views of women whose bride price had been paid. In general, bride price seals the marriage; it's a symbol of the union and friendship established not only between the couple but also between the two families.

## 9.2 Conclusion

Scott (2007) describes 'gender' as an analytical category, where women and men are defined in relation to one another and no understanding of either can be achieved by studying them separately. Analyzing bride and groom positions concurrently in the bride price processes especially in the past, there are pointers that the imbalance in decision making, choices and information was quite large between males and females. For example, while the groom was to some extent aware of the bride he was about to marry and the progress of events, the bride on the other side was kept behind curtains only to release that the guests in her fathers' house had come to marry her on the very day of the event. Secondly, virginity of the bride in the past was something important, to the extent that the *senga* who accompanied the bride to her marital house was expected to come back with some proof that indeed the bride was deflowered, and if true, a gift from the groom to show for it. Meanwhile, no such requirement of chastity and expectation was required of the groom at least from the literature I reviewed. However, compared to the past, the requirement and emphasis on virginity for brides at the time of marriage today seems to be dying out, since many people meet and cohabit for some time before they involve their parents and family members (as some female participants mentioned). Nevertheless, chastity, fidelity and loyalty are still emphasized as requirement for women to attract suitors with whom to start a marriage with in Buganda. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in their theory of gender relations, argue that: gender is inherently relational with complex patterns and relationships of desire and power. Practices and notions such as those above reveal how gender defines, positions and (dis)empowers men and women at individual, familial, societal and institutional levels. The imbalance in power and choice such as that mentioned above perpetuates dominance of males over females. It is absurd that the emphasis on virginity at marriage was/is traditionally binding to women and not to men. Like discussed in



chapter seven, some rites before and after bride price tend to feminize tradition: for instance, the pivotal role of the *senga* institution largely prepares girls and women to ‘impress and satisfy’ their men in various areas of life especially sexually. It is ironical however, that such power imbalance could be facilitated by women against fellow women. Much as women too benefit from the *senga* tutorials (facilitate their own sexual satisfaction), the primary goal is to ‘impress and satisfy’ their men sexually and ‘guard’ them from acquiring other women (keep one’s man to oneself by satisfying him sexually).

On the other side of the continuum, contemporary trends in bride price seem to have shifted positions of men and women in some way though not completely. The burden of responsibilities to meet especially the financial needs seems to be bending towards the men’s side rather than the women’s side according to findings in this study. Could this be empowerment to one gender and disempowerment to another? Probably yes and no, depending on the yardstick used. To men, it could be a burden, while women may look at it as an opportunity to enjoy, and to make their parents proud and happy. However, the aftermath of the hassle by men to meet the financial needs usually has a long term negative impact upon some women: women could be stuck in unfavorable marriages due to the societal imposed obligation of maintaining and ensuring that marriage works since bride price was paid (Hague et al., 2011).

Findings of this research depict changes in gender relations. It is evident that new social and cultural contexts have availed avenues where some gender roles have been challenged, while others have been negotiated resulting into both opportunities and constraints to (dis)empowerment. As such, conceptions of empowerment may differ in different cultural contexts. What is viewed as empowerment in one context may be viewed in a completely different perspective in another cultural setting. Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as ‘the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previous denied to them’ (Kabeer, 1999, p.437). By this definition, Kabeer seemingly implies that only those previously denied the ability to make choices can be empowered. Through this definition, and drawing from participant narratives, I can deduce that contemporary trends of bride price among the urban Baganda have to some level brought about an elevation in women’s empowerment since the choice of whether, who and when to marry has of late shifted from the hands of parents and family elders and now largely lays in the hands of the young girls. However, the shift in levels of empowerment could be a combination of other contributory

factors and may not single handedly be attributed to changes in the bride price institution. Moreover, being able to make strategic life choices alone, may not necessarily add up to empowerment in the real sense of it. Other factors surrounding the individual could be a hindrance to the enjoyment of such choices. An example in case is that: a woman may have the freedom and choice to choose her husband, but this alone may not necessarily position her in an empowered position. She could be battered by that same man she chose as husband, she could be denied access, control and ownership to family property, or could be undergoing sexual harassment by her same chosen husband. Such scenarios may limit women's options and abilities hence blocking their pathways to commendable levels of empowerment. Arguing in support is Mosedale (2005): she argues that empowerment is not an end product in itself, but rather an ongoing process. She continues to argue that one does not arrive at a stage of empowerment in some absolute sense, rather, one is (dis)empowered relative to others or themselves at a previous time. Using this as a point of reference, it can be argued that women in Buganda may not be empowered in an absolute sense when their bride price is paid, but by the fact that they are able to choose who and when to marry, take part in negotiation processes and be in position to influence certain decisions unlike before, it is arguably true that there is some level of empowerment in one sense. Moreover, findings of this study have shown that for many women, the benefits accruing from bride price are enormous including increased respect, approval and recognition by husbands, family and community.

None of the participants in this study mentioned that they personally experienced any form of violence from their spouses as a result of bride price. Even Favor, Lilian and Pross, who are now separated/divorced from their husbands, made no mention of such scenarios. The three stated that the reasons for their separation/divorce was due to other factors that have no direct relation with the bride price their husbands paid (a contributory factor uniform to all the three was unfaithfulness of husbands). This finding contrasts findings of a study that was conducted in rural Eastern Uganda in 2009 and 2010 (Hague et al., 2011). Based on 257 interviews, the main finding was that bride price was overwhelmingly seen to have negative impacts on the lives of rural women, and that it propelled male dominance over women since women were bargained over and 'exchanged' from one household to another. Their study also showed that bride price propelled gender inequality because women had little power in the negotiation process since it is mainly done by male family members (ibid p.555). On the contrary, my study established that

contemporary trends in the bride price tradition have seen many urban women actively involved in the negotiation process of bride price among the Baganda especially in cases where male figures take a passive role in parenting. It should be noted however, that the study by Hague et al. (2011) was conducted in rural eastern Uganda whose occupants belong to a different ethnic group (non-Baganda), contrary to my study which was conducted in central Uganda which is an urban area largely occupied by Baganda. It is very likely that rural based women have different bride price experiences from urban based women. The time factor (leading to changes in bride price trends and other socio-economic factors) and difference in ethnicity could also account for the differences in the two studies.

Traditionally in Buganda, the fact that a woman is able to attract an 'able' suitor who is capable of paying her bride price, is good enough to elevate her position in society. It portrays her as a worthy, well raised, virtuous and respectable woman. However, this may perhaps only apply to contextual boundaries of urban Buganda and not elsewhere. Conceptualizations of an empowered woman in Buganda may largely differ from who an empowered woman is in another cultural context. Dimensions of empowerment may differ from society to society depending on what that society chooses to focus on. Conceptualizations of empowerment in tradition-bound and family oriented societies like Buganda may largely differ from societies that have fewer binds with tradition and customs. That withstanding, there could be other societies in the world that may share similar conceptualizations of an empowered woman since bride price is not only peculiar to Buganda. However, in this study, Kabeer and Mosedale's conceptualizations and yardsticks of empowerment were used. This does not mean that other conceptualizations by other scholars are wrong or do not apply to the context of the study, but I definitely had to choose from the many so as to draw boundaries to the study.

Tamale (2008, pp. 50-53) while exploring the emancipatory potential of culture in enhancing the quality of women's lives in Africa using sexual rights as a case study; argues that theorists of African women's rights have on many occasions portrayed culture as being essentially hostile to women especially during the universalism/cultural relativist debate and human rights discourses of the 1980s and 1990s. Tamale argues that cultures are in many ways structured by and a reflection of the power structures and dynamics of a given society: they could be oppressive, colonized, submerged, exploitive, but can as well be empowering and liberating. There are many

norms and traditions in Africa that are rights-supportive, egalitarian and up-lifting thus promoting and reinforcing women's rights, though some aspects of the 'African culture' have been portrayed as having an impediment on women's rights and empowerment (Tamale, 2008). One of such traditions is bride price: Although some women have experienced bride price and processes surrounding it in a negative way; the new trends in the tradition including the empowering aspects of the tradition to women, cannot go unnoticed. Perhaps scholars and women's rights advocates need to rethink how we perceive and interpret other people's culture (cultural universality and cultural relativism). Tamale (2008) decries of how some 'first world' feminists have represented 'third world' women as helpless victims of culture and tradition devoid of any agency, which may not necessarily be true. Similarly, whilst some women rights activists portray bride price as an oppressive tradition that undermines women's empowerment, rights and wellbeing, the tradition could be perceived differently by those who embrace it (both men and women, though perceptions may vary by gender). For example, Hague et al. (2011, p. 555) write that: "*interviews with key theorists, religious and cultural leaders on the issue revealed that bride price had cemented families together in the pre-colonial period and had not been regarded in acquisitive terms as a 'price' for women, but as a custom to build and strengthen communities and families*". As such, conceptual/theoretical attempts to understand the impact of bride price upon women and development discourses today ought to take into account its ancient and intended usefulness which propagated social cohesiveness and harmony throughout remembered history. Moreover, as findings of this study depict, the tradition has both constraints and opportunities to empowerment to both men and women especially with the changes and twists that have come along with modernization and globalization. My sample of participants is relatively small, mostly from urban based middle class, and those who agreed to participate in the study are most probably those who are positive about the bride price institution, but my findings definitely portray some empowering aspect of the bride price tradition to urban based Baganda women. Many women in the urban Buganda context find the tradition empowering and an avenue through which societal approval, respect and self-actualization could be attained (though the degree of attainment may vary amongst individuals). I therefore conclude that: perhaps as scholars, we should take a fresh approach of integrating local understanding and perspectives of respective people's culture and tradition into international human rights and women empowerment discourses since culture is largely relative (and not universal), and viewed

differently from different angles. In my view, this could enhance a more objective understanding of people's tradition devoid of 'misreading', but rather in a similar manner as they perceive it themselves.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix i: Topic guide for in-depth interviews with couples

1. How did you meet your partner?
2. At what stage did you involve your families in the affair?
3. What was your bride price package like?
4. What influenced the package presented?
5. How involved were you in the negotiation process of the bride price package?
6. What happened to the items/money after the *kwanjula* event?
7. What does the fact that bride price is paid mean to you (meaning to feminine/masculine identities)
8. How has the *kwanjula* process influenced/impacted your marriage?
9. What would you wish for your children in future when they want to marry?

### Appendix ii: Topic guide for in-depth interviews with key informants

1. How were *kwanjula* ceremonies like in the past?
2. What changes have come up in the process in recent times?
3. What could be the reasons behind the changes?
4. What was/is the position of women in the entire process?
5. When did the changes you have mentioned take effect (change in items, venue, changes in Mengo) etc
6. How have the changes influenced marital relationships in current times?

### **Appendix iii: Consent form for research project**

**Topic:** *Contemporary trends in bride price among the Baganda of central Uganda: pathways to women empowerment or an adaptation to prevailing economic hardships?*

#### **Background and purpose**

I am a master's student pursuing *Master of Philosophy in Global Development-theory and practice* at university of Bergen Norway. In fulfillment of the requirements to earn this degree, I am doing a research project. The purpose of this project is to explore the shift in the custom of bride price and the implications of these changes on gendered power relations in marriage. I kindly request your participation in this study.

#### **Your participation and contribution**

Your participation shall consist of in-depth interviews and casual conversations lasting between one to two hours. Upon your approval, these interviews shall be recorded for further reference during the analysis stage of the thesis. You are free not to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable and/or discontinue participation in the study at your convenience. There is no penalty for withdrawal, neither are there risks for your participation. You are welcome to request for your personal details to be withheld if you so desire.

Participation in this study shall contribute information to the academy regarding changes in the custom of bride price and how this has affected the marriage institution. Such information could be useful to cultural leaders, policy makers, researchers, and the larger society in several ways, but shall also aid the writing and completion of my master thesis in order to acquire a master's degree.

#### **What happens to the information you give?**

The information collected will be transcribed and analyzed to answer the research questions of this study. ALL information given will be treated confidentially and only used for purposes of this project; and shall not be shared with anyone other than the project supervisor. For any

inquiries, please contact the researcher or supervisor at Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen Norway (Christies gate 13, 5015 Bergen).

Researcher: Sarah Musubika (sarahmusubika@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Siri Lange ([Siri.Lange@uib.no](mailto:Siri.Lange@uib.no))

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have understood the above information and thereby give my consent to be part of the study.

Signature..... Date...../...../.....