

# Kakwa Marriage

## Custom and Practice



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## PREFACE

The Kakwa, like many other ethnic groups in sub – Saharan Africa, have relied on their oral traditions for centuries. Unfortunately, oral traditions are not an effective way of disseminating and preserving information over time and space especially during the current turbulent times in the region. Consequently, there is great danger that these oral traditions along with their cultures will become extinct in the not too distant future.

It is with a keen awareness of this reality that Rev. Samuel Mikaya was moved to do something about this state of affairs. He resolved to begin documenting one of the most important traditions, the institution of marriage, among the Kakwa people. He spent countless hours interviewing elders, clan leaders and other knowledgeable individuals for this project. The result of this effort is this booklet that will benefit all Kakwa people particularly the young many of whom are now scattered around the world far from Kakwa land. It will serve both as a historical document and as a guide to actual practice.

This pamphlet describes the traditional Kakwa marriage from the initiation of friendship all the way to the transfer of the bride to her husband's home. It is important to note that changes have occurred to the tradition over the past fifty to eighty years. Recent changes due to political instability and the accompanying civil wars are familiar. I only need to point out what may be considered an evolutionary change. Beginning about sixty years ago young people began asserting their right to voluntarily choose a mate based on love and compatibility. Hence, the initiation of friendship today involves a young man and a young woman of his interest. If the respective families and friends of the two individuals approve, they can then help nurture the relationship. Therefore, a Kakwa young person is no longer made to marry someone against his or her wishes.

Consider this an initial step in our quest to preserve our culture, knowledge and wisdom. Let us take pride in this work and be inspired to contribute to our own advancement.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Kakwa People Group

The Kakwa (Kakuwa) people or community is one of hundreds of indigenous ethnic groups of Africa who live south of the Sahara. They speak the Kakwa (Kakuwa) language. There are many highly educated Kakwas scattered around the globe who speak perfect English, French, Kiswahili, Lingala, Arabic and many other languages. The Kakwas are predominantly peasants or subsistence farmers. Nonetheless, a sizable proportion of them have advanced to become successful businessmen and women, civil servants, politicians, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, priests, artisans and so on. At the moment there are no scientific data available to determine overall literacy level among the Kakwa population.

The Kakwa people used to worship their Creator whom they called *Nguleso* (Duleso) in their own unique way until Christianity and Islam reached them. Their prayers to God involved the offering of animal sacrifices and food. They made supplications to God through the living-dead intermediaries, that is, the ancestral spirits. After many years of evangelization by missionaries from Europe, and later by their fellow brothers, most Kakwas converted to Christianity. Their enthusiasm for the Christian faith contributed to the promotion of Silvanus Wani, a Kakwa, to become the first Anglican Archbishop for Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Congo (formally Mboga Zaire). However, there still exists a small section of Kakwas who maintain their ancestral method of worship, although they tend to blend their beliefs with those of the Christian faith. An even smaller proportion of Kakwas practice Islam.

### 1.2 Location of Kakwa Homeland

The Kakwa homeland was originally one big territory. But today it stretches across three countries, namely: Sudan, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The question as to when, why and by whom their territory was divided is answered in the next subsection. Yei River District in Southern Sudan is revered by all Kakwa communities as their undisputed common ancestral

home.

Oral history informs that the great Kakwa ancestors migrated from the banks of the River Nile (*Supiri or Suburi*) from somewhere around the present day Juba area. From here they moved south east to Mount Koro'be, about 18 kms east of present day Yei town. After many years of living in the Koro'be area, the community expanded. With the increasing population there also arose the problem of dwindling amounts of grazing land, game meat and wild fruit. Consequently, the group split up, necessitating other factions to move away from their ancestral homestead at Mount Koro'be. These historic events occurred long before the arrival of foreign explorers, missionaries and slave traders.

Following the expansion of the community, major factions eventually decided to move farther south, southwest and west of the Mount Koro'be vicinity. Of the migrating families, one group went southwards and settled in Koboko (Ko'buko), about 80km away from Mount Koro'be. The second group headed southwest where it settled at Kumuro (Ingbokolo), situated about 90km, in present day DRC. The third group moved to Ambi Hill, approximately 63km west of Mount Koro'be. Later this group shifted from Ambi Hill to settle in Aba, just about 90km west of Mount Koro'be. To this day the Kakwa elders in Koboko acknowledge *Lolowe*, the geographical North direction at Mount Koro'be as the place of origin of their ancestors. Just like in the case of many other peoples of Africa, the Kakwa communities do not possess any fully documented history. What may be available as a written account of their history are some incomplete records that were kept by early European explorers, traders and missionaries. These records may possibly only be accessed from European archives.

### 1.3 Partitioning of the Kakwa Community

This is how the early unitary Kakwa community was partitioned. Between C18th and C19th the European colonial powers partitioned Africa for their possession. They unilaterally drew artificial boundaries all over the continent. They disregarded the existence of homogenous community units. As a result, these

communities found themselves in different political territories. Many communities in Africa, including the Kakwa people, were negatively affected in this way. The Kakwa nation, for example, was and still is divided into three sections: the Sudan, Uganda and DRC sections.

In his lifetime the former Kakwa paramount chief of Yei and magistrate, Charles Y. Baraba, urged the Kakuwa groups living in the three countries to uphold their unitary identity irrespective of where they lived. While preaching his message of Kakuwa unity, he coined the expression *Kakwa Salyamusala* to describe the three-nation status of the Kakwa people. *Salyamusala* is a combination of two Kakwa words (*salya, musala*), meaning: the three cooking stones on which the pot sits. Today you can still find the three traditional cooking stones in use in the kitchens and campfire places at any Kakwa village.

#### **1.4 Population of the Kakwa Community**

At present no one can tell for certain as to how many Kakwas are there in each of the three countries. No comprehensive census has been carried out ever since political instability broke out in the region fifty years ago. The population can be estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands but not millions. The Kakwa nation has been suffering from constant displacement by wars since the 1960s. Brutal battles that were fought at their doorsteps killed many Kakwas and drove tens of thousands to different countries as refugees. Many more remained behind as internally displaced persons (IDPs). These wars prevented any kind of meaningful development and, certainly, no census has been taken in the community. The Government of Uganda may have compiled some good records of the population of Kakwas in that country. However, Sudan and the DRC are unlikely to have any accurate records of population statistics given the long chaotic years of conflicts in both countries.

#### **1.5 Social Structure of the Kakwa Community**

The Kakwa community has its social foundation laid upon the extended family unit. The idea of a nucleus family as exists in

Europe or America is foreign to the Kakwas. A normal Kakwa family has between 10 - 20 members at one given time. Whether or not the extended family ideal offers the Kakwa people any socioeconomic advantages over the nucleus family is another topic.

A typical Kakwa family includes: the parents, children, grandchildren, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, in-laws, distant relatives and all other close friends. A brother of one's father is referred to as 'father' and a sister of one's mother is a 'mother'. A 'cousin' is a brother if male, and a sister if female. The term 'uncle' is reserved only for the brother of one's mother. The 'uncle' has a special position of power in the family because he is believed to have certain inherent authority. For instance, according to traditional belief, an uncle could pronounce a fatal curse upon his nephew or niece if he/she intentionally offended him. And in such a case it will only be he and him alone to forgive the offender. If he passes on, then his child can forgive the offender on his behalf. This is why a Kakuwa uncle is shown as much respect as one's own biological parents.

The next social unit above the family is the sub-clan (or *house*). The house could consist of one or several families depending on the ancestral lineage. Coming next above the sub-clan is the clan. There are probably 200 – 300 Kakwa clans that constitute the whole Kakwa community. There are various categories of leaders in the Kakwa society. Each sub-clan and full clan is led by a hereditary head known as *Kayo* (firstborn). The *Kayo*, by virtue of his birthright, is usually also the elder of the family or clan. The Kakwa community is divided into chiefdoms. The chiefdoms are presided over by hereditary chiefs.

## 2.0 KAKWA CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE

### 2.1 Overview

Kakwa customary marriage is an arranged marriage. It is the role of parents to find suitable marital partners for their children. There is no dating (courtship) opportunity allowed for the young people. A son or daughter has no say in matters of their marriage. The Kakwa marriage custom and practice are basically the same in all three countries, but they differ slightly from one Kakwa section to the other. For instance, the list of items accepted as full bride price by Kakwas in Sudan may not be the same as the list being used by those living in Uganda or DR Congo. Therefore, because of the apparent variations and also because the author is more familiar with the culture of Kakuwa of Yei, he has chosen to use the Yei Kakuwa marriage custom as a reference point throughout this work.

Marriage in Kakwa is a lifelong and procreation-centered relationship between a man and a woman of marital age. Marriage is allowed only for those who are fully mature physically, emotionally and mentally. The approximate minimum age at which a Kakwa youth is deemed ready for marriage is about 20 years of age. This age corresponds roughly to the time when a boy's voice deepens and he begins to grow beard. And for a girl, it is when she has normal monthly periods and develops full breasts.

I may describe a Kakuwa marriage as an 'extended marriage'. This is because it concerns not just the husband and wife, but the two clans from which the couple originates. Everyone from both sides has a stake in the marriage. Kakwas do not see marriage as a contract between two persons like it is understood by other cultures in the world. Hence, in Kakwa culture if the marriage prospers, all feel happy. But if it hits the rocks, all get disappointed. So everyone around the marriage will work hard to save it from falling apart. A broken marriage actually does lead to enmity between the clans. This is not, however, to say there are no malicious members who want to see a couple fall apart for their own reasons.

Procreation is central in Kakwa marriage relationship. Other

aspects of marriage such as companionship and mutual support are secondary. Because of the emphasis placed on procreation, a childless marriage cannot survive for long in Kakuwa traditional setting. Probably nine out of ten childless marriages end in divorce or polygamy. If it (childless marriage) survives at all, it could be because the couple is strong-willed enough to ignore complaints from the community. Otherwise, very few couples can withstand the challenge posed by a childless marriage. Entrenched popular Kakuwa belief insists that the woman is responsible for the problem of infertility. In other words, she is the one who is barren, not the man. It is hard, even now, for many Kakwas to accept that a man can fail to impregnate a woman. Thus, for them, a bride ought to conceive within the first twelve months of living with her bridegroom. Any delay to have a baby within the first two years will prompt the bride's relatives to meet their counterparts. They investigate any omissions and misdeeds relating to the marriage in order to clear them. The man's uncle contacts the man to find out if his manhood is vibrant. On the other hand the wife's aunt privately crosschecks with her niece to know if her husband performs his conjugal duties normally. If nothing abnormal is uncovered, the couple is left undisturbed. But if some serious problem exists, the two families can resolve them appropriately. When after three years the couple has no child, the relatives of the husband may ask him to 'test his virility' through an extramarital relationship. The longer they stay childless the greater the chance that he will be persuaded to try out the idea of virility testing. The wife has no such right culturally to test her fertility as her husband does.

Having sex or bearing a baby outside marriage is not only taboo but a jinx in Kakwa culture. A lady who commits fornication or adultery invites serious bodily harm (injury, illness or even death) to herself or upon any of her immediate family members. The injury or death comes as a direct consequence of *mönö*. The sin of extramarital sex committed by a girl or a woman is known as *mönö*. Healing comes only when she confesses her sin and the man involved pays a fine in addition to providing a ram or goat.

The animal is sacrificed and the meat eaten to cleanse the sin he committed.

To minimize the vice of sexual immorality in general and the effect of *mönö* in particular, Kakuwa parents devised ways to help them deal with it. For example, they decided that adolescent and mature girls must sleep in a common girls' house called *gbegbe*. Likewise, the young men also ought to sleep in their own *gbegbe*. Visitation must be in groups of five or more of the opposite sexes. No single girl is allowed to be alone in the company of a boyfriend under any circumstances. A girl who behaves contrary to these rules is considered a disgrace to her parents and can be punished for that. To a large extent these measures help minimize chances of rape, prostitution, teenage pregnancies, early marriage and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the community.

Polygamy was a common practice in Kakwa culture. The practice is as old as the Kakwa nation itself. Tradition says that a Kakuwa male has the right to marry as many wives as he desires so long as he can ably and equally meet their needs. Polygamy in Kakuwa is first and foremost a result of man's psycho-social desires which include, but are not limited to: the desire to have multiple sexual partners; desire to have a big family; desire to beget children in case the first wife does not bear children; desire to produce sons where the first wife has only girls and the desire for power within the community. Notably, Kakuwa chiefs and men of means are more likely to practice polygamy than the average community members. Traditionally, having many wives is one way of highlighting one's own perceived extraordinary capability and high socio-economic position in the community. The concept of polygamy explicitly assumes that a woman is the property of a man. The greater the social status of a man the more women he can own. Tradition dictates that it is only the man, and not the woman, who has the right to have multiple sexual partners. Fortunately, this deeply rooted belief about marriage is gradually fading away thanks to the teachings of the Church, formal education and the work of women's rights groups. God-fearing and many enlightened

Kakwas refrain from the habit of having multiple sexual partners.

The other reason necessitating polygamy in Kakwa community is the need to provide social security to the orphans and widow of a deceased brother. This happens when a brother or cousin of a deceased inherits his widow. Polygamy through wife inheritance ensures that the widow and her children continue to live within the same family circle, that is, home of the deceased husband. The widow publicly and ceremonially nominates as her new husband the most caring of her contending brothers -in-law. This is normally done after she completes two to three years of mourning called *tereke*. The conclusion of mourning ends with the shaving of her overgrown hair. Traditionally the hair of a widow or widower must not be shaven for the entire prescribed mourning or *tereke* period. In the event that she finds no suitable man among her brothers -in-law, she has the freedom to stay single or return to her birthplace.

Whereas the process of finding a first wife is entirely the responsibility of one's parents, it is different with the second or third wife. In this case the man has the freedom to choose whom to marry as his second wife if he wishes. This is allowed because the parents are satisfied that their son's marital standing has now been guaranteed by the presence of the first wife, a wife whom they carefully selected for him. Secondly, they know that the son has already gained enough experience of married life. This is the reason why elders ask newlywed men to wait at least three to five years before contemplating marrying a second wife. Because they know there must be a clear hierarchy of seniority between the first and second wife, second and third wife, and so on. This is necessary for maintenance of respect between the wives.

The Church in Africa, including the local church within the Kakwa nation, does not in any way condone polygamy. It also totally rejects the use of any type of traditional rituals, animal sacrifice, consumption of alcoholic beverages and smoking in marriage ceremonies. It accepts the giving of bride price as good and biblical. The Church, however, does not recognize the institution of customary marriage as fully binding on the couple.

As such the Church leadership is always keen to ensure that a Christian couple who marries customarily must also appear in church to take prescribed oaths of the sacrament of matrimony. The church registers and issues marriage certificates to those who undergo a church marriage. Since majority of Kakwas are adherents of the Christian faith, many have had their customary or civil marriages solemnized in church in this way. An ecclesiastical rule bars all members of a polygamous family with the exception of the first wife and the children from partaking of the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Communion. This rule has alienated many Kakwas who are trapped in polygamy or are Christians but decide to enter into polygamous relationships after baptism. The faith life of these groups is torn between two opposing interests, faith or family. They just wait in limbo.

## 2.2 Conduct of Kakwa Customary Marriage

Customary marriage arrangements are fairly easy to handle because they are simple and affordable. Generally, not many people take part in the marriage ceremony. The dowry is affordable to all categories of bridegrooms, rich or poor. The bride price is understood in terms of token of appreciation than a price in its real marketing sense. It is instituted to make the groom feel that he has contributed something and thus will value and respect his wife. Also it is meant to make him accountable to his wife's family. The most important thing is maintenance of a sound relationship and full care for the lady. Mutual respect has to prevail among the marital parties. Some men have meager amounts of money or livestock. Nonetheless, they can marry ladies from rich homes just because they have good personalities or are blessed with livelihood earning skills. This group includes craftsmen, musicians, tillers of the land and hunters. Customarily, the Kakwa marriage process includes the following six main stages:

- 1) *Moka na Tojuli* – initiation of friendship;
- 2) *Tiki na Ryeta (or Rabu)* – presentation of deposit;
- 3) *Nyopa na Yema* – delivery of bride price (*Toro'bo*);
- 4) *Nyöi na Lokore* – blessings feast;

- 5) *Nyöi na Ruke* – goodwill feast; and
- 6) *Nyömöji na Amulugo* – transference of bride.

### 2.2.1 Initiation of Friendship

**Moka na Tojuli:** Initiation and building of friendship is the first step in the process of customary marriage. This is the role of the parents. It is upon the father of the groom-to-be to initiate a friendship between his family and that of a potential bride. The two families must not have blood relations. They should be from different Kakwa clans because Kakwas do not marry relatives. In the absence of the father, his brother or the boy's mother, if she is bold enough, takes his role. The boy or girl is not consulted for their personal opinion on the issue of marriage. Their parents decide for each of them whom to marry. The parents want to ensure that the partner-to-be of their son or daughter is of the highest virtues and qualities. They will not, therefore, leave anything to chance. This explains why the parents of the man will closely monitor how he treats his wife. They intervene promptly if they sense trouble between the two. Parents-in-law often respectfully refer to their daughter-in-law as 'my wife', and not my daughter. The inter-family friendship usually starts when the children are approaching adulthood. However, a parent can initiate a friendship with the father of a potential bride even if the two children are yet in their teens.

The mature age at which one can be allowed to marry is from about 20 years and above. Teenage marriage does happen, but is not encouraged in Kakwa culture. Full maturity of the bride and bridegroom is important to avoid the dangers of teenage pregnancy and the inexperience of immature couples. Those who marry should be able to begin and run their own homes successfully without unduly burdening their parents or community .

Having a long period of a close friendship gives each family plenty of time to learn more about the other. This is a great opportunity for both families to know each other's character traits and those of their future children-in-law. Mutually they get to know every family member very well because they visit each other

regularly. To sustain the relationship, the families exchange gifts of foodstuff, meat, beer, kitchenware and other special gifts. If in the course of the friendship, a party discovers any serious flaw such as a history of epilepsy, leprosy, mental illness, laziness, practice of sorcery or unresolved bloody conflict between the two clans, then that party can decide to tactfully phase out the relationship without revealing their findings. If on the other hand they find no problems, they continue with the friendship. Eventually, the initiator proceeds to make a face to face request on behalf of his son for a marriage relationship. If there is no objection to his request, he and his friend then move on to implement stage number two, namely: presentation of *Ryeta* or deposit.

### 2.2.2 Presentation of Deposit

**Tiki na Ryeta (Rabu):** This comes after acceptance of the marriage proposal. The groom's father sends a delegation of two or three elders from his clan with a package of *Ryeta* to the bride's father. The *Ryeta* (some people call it *Ryata*) comprises goats (three or more including a male one) in addition to an amount of money if available. The *Ryeta* is a deposit provided by the groom's father as proof that he means what he says. Receipt of the *Ryeta* ratifies the agreement and effectively bars other potential suitors from eyeing the lady. The *Ryeta* is used for the same purpose as the engagement ring. The engagement ring is called *agbaya* in Kakwa. The name *ryeta* (plural *rye*) means anklet or bangle. In the olden days betrothed women wore a metal bangle or anklet. Married women wore a bunch of anklets. Single girls did not wear any anklets.

It is the responsibility of the respective parents, uncles and aunts to brief the bride and bridegroom about their new social status, and how they should conduct themselves before the community. If the bride is a *möjö* (i.e. born after her mother lost a baby or fetus), then an additional he-goat called *kupire* and a cock ought to be brought together with the *Ryeta* (deposit). If the *kupire* cannot be submitted at this time, then it can always be brought on a later date. The *kupire* is slaughtered and eaten in a ceremony to

signify that the bride is set free from *möjö-hood* to start a new life.

At the function of presentation of *Ryeta* the host family accommodates and feeds the delegation from the groom's home. The members of the delegation are given food and grain beer in such quantities and quality as befits special visitors. If the bridegroom's party comes from afar, they may stay overnight with the host family, otherwise, they can just return home the same day. Handing over of the *Ryeta* is witnessed by additional members apart from the bride's parents. This is necessary to safeguard against misunderstanding in later times. Documentation of marriages and other events only started quite recently when literacy skills reached Kakwa land. Otherwise, Kakwa people depended on personal attendance of occasions, and the testimonies of attending members to prove authenticity of any kind of agreement reached between parties.

### 2.2.3 Delivery of Bride Price

**Nyopa na Yema:** *Nyopa na Yema* is the ceremonial delivery of *Toro'bo* (bride price) to the bride's family. The word *yema* translates *marriage*. This is an occasion of jubilation and fun for participants. The date when to have the event is agreed upon in advance by the two families; usually at the time of the receipt of *Ryeta* or after. Early fixing of the date is necessary. The bride's family needs sufficient time to prepare and stock provisions such as flour, meat and homemade beer called *kpete* for the celebration. Often it is goat and chicken meat which is consumed during marriage feasts. However a bull can be slaughtered for meat if the family can afford one.

The groom's party comprises only of elderly men and women. Boys or girls have no part to take in *Nyopa na Yema*. The size of the party normally depends on how much bride price it brings; the smaller the bride price the smaller the party. It is a matter of common sense here. A big company that brings little bride price incurs unnecessary financial losses on the bride's family in terms of feeding and accommodation. Ideally, the size of the groom's delegation is kept small. It ranges between fifteen



to thirty persons. As a tradition, both the bride and bridegroom do not join the marriage company. They are not supposed to. There are no marital vows for them to take. The two family teams just agree to the marriage covenant on their behalf. The covenant is fully binding.

Thrilling ululation and shouts of joy by the women announce the arrival of the visitors. They are received with handshakes and invited to take seats under a pavilion erected in the compound for that purpose. In a short time a small group of senior elders is ushered into a house to have a taste of bubbling *kpete* drink. The session of *Nyopa na Yema* begins immediately at this juncture. The ritual is mainly marked by speeches and presentation of the bride price (*Toro'bo*). The procedure starts in a dramatic and humorous manner, in full view of everyone present.

Typically, the sitting arrangement is as follows: the host group and the visiting one sit separately but facing each other leaving enough room between them. Each party must have a spokesperson or negotiator. A negotiator should be a person who is an orator; someone full of impressive words and dramatic gestures. Should one of the families happen to have no such person among them, then it should invite one from its clan beforehand. Otherwise, they will be humiliated as socially unskilled. A marriage spokesperson is known as *kanyopani lo yema* (negotiator or respondent of marriage). The author's grandfather Alengbe Duku, for instance, was a renowned *kanyopani* in his village. It is reported that no function of *Nyopa na Yema* would proceed without him participating in it.

When performing his job the *kanyopani* wears a dignified set of attire, comprising a headgear adorned with colorful feathers and a spear fixed on a wooden rod. The groom's party is the one to set the conference on motion by taking the stage first. If their spokesman is very slow, the bridal spokesman comes on stage and usurps his position. If this happens, the visiting team suffers a fine for not being ready for an event which they initiated in the first place. They may be forgiven and not be required to pay the

fine as such, but this is part of the fun and the humiliation they should have expected. Therefore, the groom's party must always be alert; otherwise it can easily be outwitted by the bride's party and get humiliated needlessly.

The *kanyopani* walks to the stage. He paces up and down in the corridor that separates the two seated parties. He introduces himself and goes on to explain to his audience why they have gathered together. As he talks, and at appropriate intervals, he gestures and pierces the earth as he recounts historical facts to his listeners. There is ululation as he articulates his points. He addresses the host family using idioms and figurative language, sounding like: "...My dear friends, I want to inform you why I am in your home today. A member of my family has gone missing a few days ago. I have come looking for that precious member. By all account I strongly believe she has strayed to this home because I have spotted someone resembling her here. She is none other than..." The audience bursts into jubilation at the mention of the bride's name. To conclude, he says, "Now that I have found my lost child, I give the chance to my good friend *lobudugia* (bridal spokesman) to speak because I am only a *karurueni* (starter). He leaves the stage for *lobudugia* to respond.

*Lobudugia* takes over the stage. Normally he does not have to say much because his main task is to answer the request put forward by the *karurueni*. He thus addresses the gathering in a similar fashion with a spear in hand and by the use of idioms and proverbs like his counterpart. He must also prove that his party is well versed in the Kakwa culture. He declares acceptance of the marriage knot on behalf of the bride, the groom and their respective families. One must note that if there was ever any dissatisfaction on either side, the process of marriage could have been cancelled and not reach this stage. Now given the visible harmony prevailing, he concludes his speech by inviting the groom's party to present what they have come with as bride price.

The groom's party brings the animals and money forward and hand them over to the bridal elders to verify the amount

of each. The groom's representatives must submit quality animals because both the numbers and quality of the animals matter. If they bring thin goats as bride price, the aunts of the bride may disqualify them as invalid. They do this in a dramatic way. They grab the sickly goats by the leashes and run around with them until the animals collapse and lie helpless on the ground. This rare action treats the gathering to a bemused spectacle. It is a humiliating scene to those who presented the goats. They will bring replacements if the goats die. Once the bride price presented is accepted and received, lobudugia comes back on stage to clarify on what remains unfulfilled. He informs the groom's party of the unmet demands and the time when they expect those demands to be fulfilled. The meeting ends with clapping of hands and reception for the bridal party. The feasting may run overnight as everybody enjoys themselves. If the food offered is more than sufficient, the visitors can carry the balance for their families. Delivery of bride price is an occasion for merry making.

An average bridegroom may offer ten goats or £S2 as bride price. A well-to-do bridegroom can give a bride price of £S3 in cash or fifteen goats in lieu of cash. Someone who has no cash can present goats instead. Sixty years ago one Sudanese pound (£S1) could have had a monetary value equal to US\$ 1,000 today. Goats, sheep and chickens are the most available livestock in the community. Cattle are too rare to obtain as bride price, especially among Kakwas of Yei. To a limited degree, however, the Kakwa communities in Uganda and DR Congo have some cattle to use as bride price. The lack of cattle is largely a result of the prevalence of tsetse flies and cattle diseases in Kakwa homeland which for many years limits cattle rearing in the area. Since Kakwa people own no substantial herds of cattle, the word livestock in the context of bride price will only refer to goats, sheep and chickens.

A bride price package comprises a number of different items. Customarily, a package of bride price consists of:

- 1) Livestock: i.e. goats, sheep, cattle and chicken.
- 2) Money.

### 3) Traditional Tools.

And for you to understand fully here are details to each of the three main components of bride price package mentioned above:

1. LIVESTOCK (TORO'BO): The flock of goats required as bride price has three categories as follows:-
  - i. **Livestock Bride Price (Toro'bo Yemesi).** This ranges from 10 to 20 goats or sheep apart from the six gifts listed here below.
    - *Karito na Dote* – 1 female goat for bride's mother.
    - *Gbele lo Monye* – 1 male goat for bride's father.
    - *Wale lo Waso* – 1 female goat for bride's aunt.
    - *'Bikiti na Monye loTiko* – 1 male goat for bride's paternal uncle 1.
    - *'Bikiti na Monye loTiko* – 1 male goat for bride's paternal uncle 2.
    - *Seye na Köni* – 1 female goat for bride's general family benefit.
  - iii. **Meat Livestock (Lokore).** This can either be a she- goat or a bull if the groom can afford it. As a rule the meat animal (*lokore*) must be one that is fully matured and heaviest of all. In case of a big clan, a generous bridegroom may offer an additional goat and a cock to satisfy everybody. Those who for any reason do not eat goat meat can be served chicken meat.
2. MONEY (PARATA): A minimum of £S3 suffices. [Note: **Either** you present livestock as stated in 1(ii) above, or pay £S3, **not** both for the same marriage].
3. TRADITIONAL TOOLS (TORO'BO TI KÖNI): These are tools or pieces of equipment that artisans fabricate locally from iron or other materials. There are many types, but this list mentions only four of them:-
  - i. **Hoes (Kolya)** Singular *kole*. Hand hoes, 3 to 5 pieces in number.

- ii. **Anklets (Rye)** Singular *ryeta*. Silver anklets/bangles, 2 sets of 6 pieces.
- iii. **Spear (Gor)** Ordinary metallic spear plus its bottom piece called *kito*. The blade and *kito* are normally presented without the long wooden rod.
- iv. **Arrows (Leweya)** Singular *lewe*. These are made of iron and must be ten in number and should comprise:
  - 9 pieces of normal arrows called *bala eji* ( one is *bala e*); and
  - 1 piece of un-bladed arrow called *pitiki*.

In traditional bride price negotiations no unreasonable demands are tabled; and no quarrels are allowed to spoil the meeting. If a groom is unable to meet the entire bride price list at one go, there is a provision for a grace period during which time he can find and submit the balance, called *goba na yema*. Such bride price balance must be settled anyway. It must not be ignored. If the man dies or is unable to settle the balance, then his offspring must do so. According to Kakwa belief, failure to settle any outstanding *goba na yema*, will in the future cause recurrent misfortunes such as infertility, illnesses and premature deaths on the children in the groom's family. Therefore, everything that has been agreed upon must be settled, whether in lump sum or in installments. The consequences of failing to fulfill a promise are severe. This rule applies whether the agreement is written or verbal.

#### 2.2.4 Blessings Feast

**Nyöi na Lokore:** This is the feast in which the *meat animal* mentioned in 1(iii) above is eaten by elders of the bride. *Nyöi na Lokore* literally translates *eating of meat*. It is a feast of blessing for the bride. As a rule this feast should be celebrated before the bride moves to her marital home. On the appointed date a delegation of two or three men from the groom's family goes to the bride's home. They may arrive in the evening before if they live in a distant village. Their task is threefold: to slaughter the goat(s) and cook the meat for the elders; to present the six livestock gifts,

and cook the meat for the elders; to present the six livestock gifts, the hoes, the anklets, spear and the arrows at this function; and above all to be eye-witnesses to this very important occasion, the conferring of blessings on and releasing of the bride by the elders.

As the delegation cooks the meat the host family prepares the solid starchy stuff called '*dilo*'. Customarily the groom's delegation should not taste the meat they cook. If in doubt of a good palatability, they invite a member of the host family to taste the soup to ensure that it is tasty. The visitors eat chicken provided by their host. As part of culture, the visitors have to shoot the chicken (rooster) with an arrow. One of them aims with a bow and arrow to shoot the cock. To add fun to the occasion, a shrewd visiting cook decides to kill the biggest cock that comes across him in the compound instead of a small one. Why not, the owners, out of courtesy, do not complain.

Usually by early afternoon the meal is ready. The groom's delegation dines separately from the bride's elders. The bride's father or his representative supervises distribution of the meal in accordance with set custom rules. Sharing of the meat between the elders is based on the sub – clan's hierarchy and birthrights. The hind leg of the meat animal, for instance, must at all times be allocated to the most senior member in the most senior sub - clan. For this reason, the meat of farm animals or game meant for communal dinner should be cut in conformity with traditional rules. The rule is: do not chop the legs, cook them whole. You may chop the head, ribs and offal into pieces. The full hind leg is called *mujune* and the front one is *kewani*. Other parts such as the neck back, etc are as important as the legs when it comes to who receives what at dinner. It is the designated recipient of *mujune* or *kewani* to carve and redistribute it to members of his sub - clan at the table. A considerate elder does not eat all his meat at the feast. He takes some balance home for his family members to enjoy.

After dinner, all attendants sit down conveniently. The elders address the gathering. They express their gratitude, on behalf of the entire family, for the sincerity and for all that the

family has done in regards to the success of the marriage. They commend the cooks for a job well done. They review what has been accomplished and point out anything pending which should be fulfilled in the near future. The idea behind such scrutiny of affairs is to make sure nothing remains unresolved which could later impact negatively on the wellbeing of the bride. Everyone must go home satisfied and happy.

The feast ends with two activities: the distribution of the arrows and spear and the ritual of blessing. The elders divide the ten arrows and the spear among themselves. Those who miss to receive a gift of an arrow at this feast will get one in the next marriage. For as long as the sub - clan is endowed with girls, the feasts will never cease. Here is how the ritual of blessing is done: A bathing basin containing some water is placed before the elders. Lead elders call on God to pour blessings upon the bride. They pray for blessings of children and a happy long life. Each one who calls on God also puffs some droplets of saliva into the water. When the ritual ends, the water is given to the bride to use for bathing. Elders' saliva is regarded as a symbol and medium of blessings upon others. Kakwa grandparents bless their offspring by uttering words and puffs of saliva on the head of the one being blessed.

### 2.2.5 Goodwill Feast

**Nyöi na Ruke:** Normally this feast follows the one of blessings. But if conditions cannot allow, it can be celebrated after the bride has been moved to her new home. I describe it as goodwill feast because the goat (named *ruke*) which is eaten in this feast is supplied in a reciprocity gesture by the bride's family. It is given as a reply (*ruke*) for the one given by the groom as *lokore*. They reciprocate in this way to confirm first, that they have received their entitlements; and secondly, that the elders are happy and therefore have agreed to let go the bride to join her groom.

The Reciprocity Feast is a small event compared to the Feast of Blessing. No rituals are performed in this feast. No bridal representatives are invited either. The elders of the groom just

gather at his father's home upon invitation. The goat meat is cooked and set, together with *'dilo*, before them. The host informs the elders that he called them to enjoy the *ruke* meat. It is distributed as usual in line with the custom. They eat and say thanks before dispersing.

### 2.2.6 Transference of Bride

**Nyömöji na Amulugo:** This is the final stage in the marriage process. It is the transfer of the bride to her marital home. *Amulugo* means bride or the newlywed; *Nyömöji* refers to the event of accompanying or leading the *Amulugo* to her bridegroom. It is the bride who leaves her birthplace to join her husband, not the other way round. Transference of the bride (*Nyömöji na Amulugo*) opens the way for consummation of the marriage. As stated already elsewhere in the overview, sexual contact between the bride and groom is forbidden before transference takes place. Those who have sexual contact before marriage commit a grave sin (*mönö*).

Transference of bride is done by a small team: two seasoned aunts, a young girl and a couple of young boys. The accompanying team may have five to six members in all. No big group is essential. There is no big luggage to carry. The bride does not take her personal belongings or kitchen utensils with her at this time. She collects them much later. The bridegroom is expected to build and fully furnish his own house ahead of the arrival of his bride. He must prepare to exist out from the *gbegbe* early enough. If he does not, then he is not worth a husband.

Just before departure time, the bride takes a bath. After the bath she kneels in front of her aunt so that the two face each other. The aunt smears simsim oil in her own palms. She slides her open palms on the bride's body starting from her shoulders and descending them over the breasts down to the belly. Next she places her palms on the sides of the bride. Then from the sides she glides them inwards till they meet at the navel of the bride. This ritual is believed to enhance fertility and productivity in the lady. After the ritual the bride finishes her final preparations. The departure begins immediately.

The company arrives to a jubilant welcome. It is natural for the accompanying group to spend a day or two with the bride before returning home. The receiving home hosts the visitors to a luncheon. During this brief stay the aunt(s) give the bride final encouragements and tips on how to maintain a respectable character. When the rest of the group leaves, one young girl with the role of a personal assistant is assigned to remain behind. She stays on to assist the bride. Her proper title is *li'di*. A *li'di* provides company to the *amulugo* until she settles down into her new environment. Continued presence of one of her own relatives gives her courage to attain a smooth landing. The *Li'di* may stay for a month or longer if conditions allow.

Once in her new home, the bride avails herself to assisting her mother-in-law for the first two or three years. She works under her supervision until she gains full experience of running a home including caring for babies. At the end of two or three years she brings in her belongings that she kept at her father's home. Thereafter she starts to cook in her own kitchen independently.

### 2.2.7 Recent Changes

The Kakwa customary marriage has gone through many rapid changes in the last fifty years. The initiation and conduct of Kakwa customary marriage today is therefore different from what it used to be in the past. The changes are ongoing. This is because society is always dynamic and because a new socio-economic situation keeps emerging every time.

There are additional demands and charges which have been introduced on top of the original bride price (*Toro'bo*) over the years. This has been the work of the new generation. New fines and charges that have lately been added include: a refund for bride's school fees, homestead entry fee, conference table fee, foodstuff and beverage store access fee, engagement letter fee, ladies' fee, late arrival charge, and so on. Exorbitant fines are levied in case of any default by the groom or his party. Because of the ever increasing demand for hefty bride price, the Kakwa marriage has become more or less like marketing of the bride.

Ironically, it is often the honest groom who bears these inflated demands just because he comes through the door, i.e. he is sincere to present himself voluntarily. But the insincere one who stealthily comes through the back door, does not pay anything. He impregnates the girl and disappears. He gives the girl's parents nothing. It is hard to track him down. You may open a case against him but you will most probably end up attending unending court proceedings with him. If convicted, he may serve a prison term and not pay you a cent.

Elopement, cohabitation, prostitution, teenage pregnancy, induced abortion and death from HIV/AIDS, all of which were unheard of in traditional Kakwa community, are now in the increase. By and large, this is because the old traditional system of marriage has broken down while immorality continues to spread. One of the manifestations of a breakdown on the system today is the violent management of marriages. The Kakwa marriage feasts are now characterized by drunkenness, quarrels and fights that lead to spoilage of genuinely initiated marriages. This happens mainly because the bulk of the youth have been militarized through wars in the region. As a result they have pushed aside the elders from overseeing the conduct of marriages although it is a well known fact that most elders embody extensive wisdom and experience of life. But the youth, in the name of social liberation, have stopped them from participating in bride price negotiations.

Some of the main factors impacting on Kakwa customary marriage are: exposure of the community to foreign cultures and customs, especially those of communities with whom Kakwas have intermarried; influence of Christianity and Islam; acquisition of formal education that empowers the youth to decide their destiny independently of their parents; collapse of the family structure; displacement; acute poverty; militarization of the youth and breakdown of social order and rule of law largely as a direct result of effect of the recent wars; and the current general moral degeneration in society.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

The customary Kakwa marriage is a fascinating, interesting and solemn ritual as it progresses through its various stages. Despite the current challenges, marriage among the Kakwa maintains some of its traditional features. Besides being a covenant of love between a man and a woman, a Kakwa marriage is also a sacred relationship between two extended families or clans. The extended families traditionally have a stake in the success of the marriage. Therefore, part of their responsibility is to support the young couple both materially and emotionally. If there is any sign of trouble, an elder will immediately be dispatched to investigate the issue and counsel the couple. This support system is the reason for a long history of negligible divorce in traditional Kakwa society. It is hoped that our community will continue to exercise good judgment in selecting and preserving this and many other traditions that have served it well.

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